

Electoral Inclusion and Political Participation among Tribal Gujjar Bakarwal Women of Jammu and Kashmir.

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Abstract

This study focuses on the electoral inclusion and political participation of Gujjar Bakarwal women in Jammu and Kashmir. The Gujjar Bakarwal community is a nomadic tribal group that remains socially, economically, and politically marginalized. Although India's democratic system promotes equal participation, these women still face many challenges in taking part in politics. Their seasonal migration, lack of education, and strong patriarchal traditions limit their ability to participate fully in electoral processes. The main aim of this study is to understand how much these women participate in elections and what problems they face. The objectives are: to examine their awareness and involvement in elections, such as voting and contesting; to identify social, cultural, and economic barriers that affect their political participation; and to evaluate existing government policies and suggest ways to improve their political inclusion. The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research. Primary data is collected through surveys, interviews, and group discussions with Gujjar Bakarwal women in selected district of Jammu and Kashmir. Secondary data is taken from government reports, census data, research articles, and election records. A purposive sampling method is used to include women from both nomadic and semi-settled communities. The data is analyzed using simple statistical methods and thematic analysis to understand patterns of participation and exclusion. The study is expected to show that there is a gap between formal electoral rights and actual political empowerment. It highlights the need for better policies such as voter awareness programs, flexible voting arrangements for mobile communities, and gender-sensitive governance. This research contributes to the broader discussion on inclusive democracy and the empowerment of Tribal Women.

Keywords: Gujjar, Bakarwal, Inclusion, Political participation, Women, Electoral, Tribal, Marginalized

Introduction:

Gujjars and Bakerwals are the Jammu Kashmir largest tribes, with 9.8 lakh and 1.1 lakh, respectively. This town lacks in many aspects of life and has several problems, resulting in a low literacy rate, poor economic condition, educational standing, and a worse level of living when compared to other villages in the state. A BPL survey conducted in 2008 found that poverty in scheduled tribes is 42%, compared to 21% in the general population. The tribal population of Jammu and Kashmir has a low literacy rate of

50%, compared to 59% nationally in the 2011 census. This number is significantly lower for tribal women, at 41% in Jammu and Kashmir against 50% nationally. [Israr Ahmed,2019]

In the Indian Himalayan Mountains, Gujjars and Bakarwals occupied a wide swath that stretched from Pir Panjal to Zaskar. Most of these may be located in Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, two Indian union territory. The Indian government, following a thorough investigation, gave tribal status to the Gujjars, Bakarwals and Gaddis in Jammu and Kashmir in 1991. The Indian constitution stipulated that the Bakarwals were recorded in revenue records as a distinct tribal category. Inter-tribal marriages are common among the Bakarwals, who have the same ethnic heritage as the Gujjars. The Bakarwals are transhumant who raise sheep and goats and move between high and low altitudes in the Himalayan hills according to the seasons. From this, it is evident that the Bakarwals, who are found on the Upper Himalayan Range and extending down into the Lower Himalayan Range, mostly migrate across the foothills of the Himalayas. [Rahi,2012]

Gujjar, the most populous of the 12 scheduled tribes, has 7,63,806 members, or 69.1% of the total population of scheduled tribes. After Bakerwal (60,724) and Brokpa (51,957), Bot is the second largest tribe, with 96,698 members. Of the overall number of tribes, 88% are Gujjar and the other three tribes. A predominantly agricultural ethnic group, the Gurjar (also known as Gujjar, Gujar, and Gurjara) are split up internally into different clan groups and are primarily found in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. They comprised a sizable, diverse group and were traditionally engaged in pastoral, agricultural, and migratory occupations. Gurjars have had a very varied historical role in society. On the one hand, they have founded numerous kingdoms and dynasties, while on the other hand, some of them are still nomads with no land of their own. [Anita Sharma,2009].

Gujjar Bakarwal women: -

The Gujjar Bakarwal tribe of the Himalayas was mostly pastoral, but picturesque. Throughout the year, they travel in search of ideal pastures for their cattle to graze. They built their shelters, known as deras, out of surrounding grass, leaves, and wood. They dismantled or left these houses after changing grazing sites because they were just temporary. The indigenous Gujjar and Bakarwal women of Jammu and Kashmir suffered from poverty, illiteracy, early marriage, superstition, and a nomadic lifestyle. Gujjar women in Jammu and Kashmir face more challenges and suffering than any other lady from one of the state's 12 ethnic groupings. It is well known that the Gujjar Women were more hardworking than women from other tribes in Jammu and Kashmir. Unfortunately, superstitions and illiteracy continue to throw a pall over her life. The Gujjar women were being taken advantage of. They were expected to do all housework, including cooking, selling milk, and assisting their husbands with farming and cattle feeding. She becomes physically and emotionally fatigued as a result of her monotonous lifestyle and lengthy work hours that last from early morning to late at night. Furthermore, despite their heavy workload, nomad Gujjar women were the target of superstitions and did not hold the same respect or status in tribal community. Because they are mostly nomads, women and girls were expected to care for their herds throughout the day, and travel long distances with their youngsters and household stuff. During their temporary stay, they had to prepare meals, do washing, and pack again for their next destination. Finally, they don't have time to ponder their social status. [Irfan Ahmed Lone,2022]

Their vegetarian diet and hard work may contribute to their strong physique, health, and longevity. Although they overeat, their diet is healthful. It is made with ghee, milk, and corn. The numerous Gujjars also rear cattle and buffaloes. Bakarwals raise sheep and goats, as do their fellow valley nomads.

They gave milk and ghee for sale to the people. Gujjars have no work specialization, thus any adult can be engaged for any job, such as cattle rearing, milking, weaving, and selling products, among others. Every member of the family must share responsibility. [Din Azhar 2015]

Electoral Inclusion and Political participation: -

The political participation of the Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes have been very discouraging since from the beginning as they don't have good representative voice. Gujjar and Bakarwal women were heavily engaged in survival and pastoral economics, with little to know formal political representation. They relied on seasonal migration across the pir panjal range, which limited their interaction with formal electoral machinery.

Tribal Gujjar Bakarwal Women in Jammu and Kashmir Assembly

Year	Total Seats	Women candidate Of General	Women Candidate of tribal	Elected women	Runner Up
1962	75	01	00	00	00
1967	75	01	00	00	00
1972	75	06	00	04	00
1977	76	04	00	01	01
1983	76	07	00	00	01
1987	76	13	00	01	01
1996	87	15	00	02	03
2002	87	30	00	02	02
2008	87	67	00	03	04
2014	87	26	00	02	01
2024	90	13	00	03	02
Total		130	00	19	15

Source. Chief Electoral Officer Jammu and Kashmir.

The table shows the participation and electoral performance of women candidates in legislative elections in Jammu and Kashmir from 1962 to 2014 (with an additional 2024 entry). It includes total seats, number of women candidates (general and tribal), elected women, and runners-up.

Overall, women's participation has gradually increased over time, rising from just 1 candidate in 1962 and 1967 to a peak of 67 candidates in 2008, before declining again in later years (26 in 2014 and 13 in 2024). However, representation in terms of elected women remains very low, typically ranging between 0 to 3 winners per election, showing a gap between participation and success.

A striking feature is that no tribal women candidates are recorded across all years, indicating complete absence of tribal women in electoral contests during this period. The number of women finishing as runners-up is also limited, though it slightly improves in later elections (e.g., 4 in 2008). The total figures at the bottom (130 women candidates, 19 elected, 15 runners-up) further highlight that despite increased participation, electoral success for women remains minimal.

In summary, the table reflects low political representation of women, especially tribal women, despite gradual growth in candidature over time.

73rd Amendment act of Indian Constitution and Panchayati Raj Act of Jammu and Kashmir

The 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution, ratified in 1993, provided constitutional recognition to Panchayati Raj institutions and standardized the Panchayat system. It mandated a minimum reservation of one-third of Panchayat seats for women, acknowledging their role in village development and political involvement. However, the former state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) was excluded due to its constitutional autonomy, which limited Parliament's legislative authority there. J&K's Assembly passed its own Panchayat Raj Act in 1989, emphasizing democratic decentralization through grassroots power-sharing rather than mere delegation of authority. Unlike the 73rd Amendment, which reserved seats for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women through direct elections, J&K initially allowed only nomination of women and other groups to two seats. A 2004 amendment later introduced a 33% reservation for women in Panchayat seats. Despite this, women's participation in J&K Panchayats remained very low as of 2001. In the 2011 panchayat elections, women received 33% of the seats for the first time. The fact that women and SC/ST individuals were given reservations for panch seats for the first time made these elections very important. Women comprised 33.3% of elected panches due to reservations. However, women in Jammu and Kashmir were unable to break through the male-dominated political system of the former state when it came to sarpanch seats. The Panchayati Raj (Amendment) 1989 Act introduced a 33% reservation of seats for women in Sarpanch positions; as a result, 26.27% of women Sarpanches were elected in the 2018 panchayat elections.

The abrogation of Article 370 and the implementation of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019 marked a significant shift in the governance structure of Jammu and Kashmir. One of the most consequential reforms was the extension of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, which established a constitutional framework for Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). This reform introduced mandatory reservations for Scheduled Tribes (STs) and women under Article 243D, creating an unprecedented opportunity for the political inclusion of Gujjar and Bakarwal women, the largest Scheduled Tribe communities in Jammu and Kashmir.

Historically, Gujjar and Bakarwal women have remained on the margins of political decision-making due to low literacy, patriarchal social structures, seasonal migration, economic vulnerability, and limited access to public institutions. The constitutional reservation framework has therefore become an important instrument for enhancing their political participation and leadership at the grassroots level.

Following the extension of Part IX of the Constitution to Jammu and Kashmir, seats in Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis (Block Development Councils), and District Development Councils are reserved for Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their population. In addition, Article 243D mandates that not less than one-third of all directly elected seats be reserved for women. Importantly, within the seats reserved for Scheduled Tribes, not less than one-third are specifically reserved for Scheduled Tribe women.

For Gujjar and Bakarwal women, this constitutional guarantee represents more than numerical representation. It provides legal recognition of their right to participate in democratic governance and influence decisions affecting their communities. The reservation policy also extends to the offices of Chairpersons at different levels of Panchayati Raj Institutions, enabling tribal women to occupy leadership positions.

The reservation policy has opened new avenues for the political empowerment of Gujjar and Bakarwal women. For the first time, many women from these communities have entered elected institutions as Panchs, Sarpanches, Block Development Council members, and District Development Council

representatives. Their presence has contributed to greater visibility of tribal concerns in local governance.

Reservation of seats for Gujjar Bakarwal women in BDCs Elections

S.No	Name of Districts	No. of blocks	No. of seats for male [open]	No. of seats for female [open]	No. of seats for male [SC]	No. of seats for female [SC]	No. of seats for male [ST]	No. of seats for female [ST]
1	Anantnag	16	09	04	0	0	02	01
2	Bandipura	12	06	03	0	0	02	01
3	Baramulla	26	16	09	0	0	01	0
4	Budgam	16	11	05	0	0	0	0
5	Doda	17	07	06	02	0	01	01
6	Ganderbal	07	04	02	0	0	01	0
7	Jammu	20	07	05	06	01	0	01
8	Kathua	19	09	04	03	01	01	01
9	Kishtwar	13	06	04	01	0	01	01
10	Kulgam	07	04	02	0	0	0	01
11	Kupwara	24	15	07	0	0	01	01
12	Poonch	11	03	04	0	0	02	02
13	Pulwama	09	07	02	0	0	0	0
14	Rajouri	19	06	05	01	0	06	01
15	Ramban	11	05	04	01	0	01	0
16	Reasi	12	04	03	01	0	03	01
17	Samba	09	05	0	01	02	0	01
18	Shopian	08	05	02	0	0	01	0
19	Udhampur	17	07	03	02	03	02	0
20	Srinagar	02	01	01	0	0	0	0
Total	20	275	137	75	18	07	25	13

Source:- Chief Electoral Officer Jammu and Kashmir

The table presents district-wise distribution of Block Development Council (BDC) seats in Jammu and Kashmir, showing the number of blocks and the allocation of seats across open, Scheduled Caste (SC), and Scheduled Tribe (ST) categories, separately for men and women.

In total, there are 275 blocks across 20 districts. Of these, 137 seats are for men (open category) and 75 for women (open category), reflecting women's reservation in local governance. For reserved categories, SC seats are relatively few (18 for men and 7 for women), while ST seats are comparatively higher (25 for men and 13 for women), indicating the demographic presence of tribal populations in certain districts.

Districts like Baramulla (26 blocks) and Kupwara (24 blocks) have a larger number of blocks, whereas Srinagar has the least (2 blocks). ST representation is more visible in districts such as Rajouri and Poonch.

Overall, the table highlights structured reservation for women and marginalized groups at the grassroots level, though women's share especially in reserved categories remains comparatively limited.

Reservation of seats for Gujjar Bakarwal women in DDCs elections

S.No	Name of Districts	No. of seats for male [open]	No. of seats for female [open]	No. of seats for male [SC]	No. of seats for female [SC]	No. of seats for male [ST]	No. of seats for female [ST]	Total
1	Kupwara	8	5	0	0	1	0	14
2	Baramulla	8	5	0	0	1	0	14
3	Bandipura	7	4	0	0	2	1	14
4	Ganderbal	7	4	0	0	2	1	14
5	Srinagar	9	4	0	0	0	1	14
6	Budgam	9	5	0	0	0	0	14
7	Pulwama	9	4	0	0	0	1	14
8	Shopian	8	5	0	0	1	0	14
9	Kulgam	9	4	0	0	0	1	14
10	Anantnag	8	4	0	0	1	1	14
11	Doda	7	4	1	1	1	0	14
12	Kishtwar	7	4	1	0	1	1	14
13	Ramban	7	4	1	0	1	1	14
14	Reasi	5	3	1	1	3	1	14
15	Udhampur	5	3	3	1	1	1	14
16	Kathua	6	4	2	1	1	0	14
17	Samba	6	3	3	1	0	1	14
18	Jammu	6	2	3	2	0	1	14
19	Rajouri	5	3	1	0	3	2	14
20	Poonch	6	3	0	0	3	2	14
Total	20	142	77	16	7	22	16	280

Source:- Chief Electoral Officer Jammu and Kashmir.

The table presents district-wise distribution of seats in District Development Council (DDC) elections in Jammu and Kashmir. It shows the allocation of seats across open, Scheduled Caste (SC), and Scheduled Tribe (ST) categories, separately for men and women. Each of the 20 districts has 14 seats, making a total of 280 DDC seats. Out of these, 142 seats are allocated to men (open category) and 77 to women (open category), reflecting the implementation of women's reservation in local governance. Reserved categories include 16 seats for SC men and 7 for SC women, while 22 seats are for ST men and 16 for ST women, indicating representation of marginalized communities. Districts such as Kupwara, Baramulla, and Anantnag follow a uniform seat structure, though ST representation is more visible in

districts like Rajouri and Poonch. Overall, the table highlights a balanced but structured reservation system, ensuring participation of women and marginalized groups, though men still hold a larger share of seats compared to women.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the socio-economic and educational status of Gujjar-Bakarwal women in Jammu and Kashmir.
2. To assess the level of political awareness among Gujjar-Bakarwal women regarding Panchayati Raj Institutions and electoral rights.
3. To analyze the extent of electoral participation of Gujjar-Bakarwal women, including voting behaviour, election campaigning, and contesting elections.
4. To examine the level of association of Gujjar-Bakarwal women with political parties and their participation in political activities.
5. To identify the major social, economic, educational, and cultural factors affecting the political participation of Gujjar-Bakarwal women.
6. To assess the awareness of constitutional provisions, including the 73rd Constitutional Amendment and reservation policies for Scheduled Tribe women in Panchayati Raj Institutions.
7. To evaluate the impact of socio-economic and educational factors on the electoral inclusion and political participation of Gujjar-Bakarwal women.

To suggest policy measures for strengthening the political empowerment and electoral inclusion of Gujjar-Bakarwal women in Jammu and Kashmir.

Research Methodology: -

The present study adopted a descriptive and analytical research design. It aims to examine the socio-economic profile, political awareness, electoral participation, and the factors influencing the political inclusion of Gujjar-Bakarwal women in Jammu and Kashmir.

Nature of the Study

The study is quantitative in nature and is based on primary data collected through a structured interview schedule/questionnaire. Secondary data were collected from books, journals, government reports, Census publications, Election Commission reports, and research articles.

Study Area

The study was conducted in selected Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir with a significant Gujjar-Bakarwal population.

Population of the Study

The target population comprised Gujjar-Bakarwal women who were eligible voters (20 years and above) residing in the selected study areas.

Sample Size

A total of 300 respondents were selected for the study.

Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was used. Initially, district with a sizeable Gujjar-Bakarwal population was selected. Thereafter, villages/settlements were chosen purposively, and respondents were selected based on their eligibility and willingness to participate.

Sources of Data

Primary Data: Structured interview schedule/questionnaire administered to 300 respondents.

Secondary Data: Books, journals, Census of India, Election Commission of India reports, Ministry of Tribal Affairs publications, government documents, and relevant research studies.

Tools for Data Collection

A structured interview schedule containing closed-ended questions was used to collect information.

Data Analysis and discussion

1.Age

20-40	Above 40	Total
201	99	300
67%	33%	100%

2. Educational Qualification

Illiterate	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Higher secondary	Above	total
108	48	54	45	30	15	300
36%	16%	18%	15%	10%	5%	100%

3.Marital status

Married	Unmarried	Total
195	105	300
65%	35%	100%

4.Monthly income

Below 6000	6000-12000	12000-18000	18000-24000	Above 24000	Total
168	84	36	0	12	300
56%	28%	12%	0%	4%	100%

5.Occupation

Govt. service	Cattle rearing	Business	Student	Total
30	215	15	40	300
10%	71.5%	5%	13.5%	100%

6. Nomade or settled

Settled	Semi settled	Nomad	Total
55 18.5%	70 23.5%	175 58%	300 100%

7. Seasonal migration with live stock

Yes	No	Total
245 81.5%	55 18.5%	300 100%

Demographic, Socio-Economic and Educational Status of Gujjar-Bakarwal Women

The demographic profile indicates that 201 respondents (67%) belong to the 20–40 years age group, while 99 respondents (33%) are above 40 years. This shows that the majority of respondents are in their economically active and socially productive years.

The educational status reveals a low level of literacy among Gujjar-Bakarwal women. 108 respondents (36%) are illiterate, while only 15 respondents (5%) have attained education above the higher secondary level. Although 64% have received some formal education, most have studied only up to the primary, middle, or secondary level. This reflects limited access to higher education due to factors such as poverty, seasonal migration, remoteness, and traditional socio-cultural practices.

Regarding marital status, 195 respondents (65%) are married and 105 (35%) are unmarried. The predominance of married women suggests that many shoulder significant household, childcare, and livestock responsibilities, which may restrict their educational and economic opportunities.

The income profile demonstrates a weak economic condition. More than half of the respondents (56%) earn below ₹6,000 per month, while 28% earn between ₹6,000–12,000. Only 4% earn above ₹24,000, and none fall in the ₹18,000–24,000 category. This indicates widespread low household income and economic vulnerability.

Occupationally, 215 respondents (71.5%) are engaged in cattle rearing, highlighting livestock as the primary source of livelihood. Only 10% are employed in government services, 5% are engaged in business, and 13.5% are students. This reflects limited occupational diversification and dependence on traditional pastoral livelihoods.

The settlement pattern shows that 58% of the respondents are nomadic, 23.5% are semi-settled, and only 18.5% are permanently settled. This demonstrates that a majority continue to follow the traditional pastoral lifestyle.

Furthermore, 81.5% of respondents migrate seasonally with their livestock, while only 18.5% do not. Seasonal migration remains a defining characteristic of the Gujjar-Bakarwal community and significantly affects women's access to education, healthcare, employment opportunities, government welfare schemes, and political participation.

8. Source of drinking water

Well	Hand pump	Pipe supply	Total
180 60%	30 10%	90 30%	300 100%

9. Road and transport facility

Yes	No	Total
186 62%	114 38%	300 100%

10. Healthcare facilities

Rural Health Dispensary	Public Health Center	Community Health Center	Total
220 73.33%	50 16.66%	30 10%	300 100%

Awareness about Govt. Schemes

Yes	No	N.R	Total
35 11.5%	255 85%	10 3.5%	300 100%

11. Benefits from the Govt. Schemes

Yes	No	N.R	Total
45 15%	245 81.5%	10 3.5%	300 100%

Basic Facilities, Awareness, and Benefits of Government Schemes among Gujjar Bakarwal Women

The data reveal that Gujjar Bakarwal women continue to face significant challenges in accessing basic amenities and government welfare programmes. Although some improvements in infrastructure and public services are evident, substantial gaps remain.

With regard to basic facilities, a majority of the respondents (60%) rely on wells as their primary source of drinking water, while 30% have access to piped water supply and only 10% use hand pumps. This indicates that dependence on traditional water sources remains high, reflecting inadequate access to safe and reliable drinking water in many habitations.

In terms of road and transport facilities, 62% of the respondents reported having access to roads and transport, whereas 38% lacked such facilities. This suggests that a considerable proportion of Gujjar Bakarwal women continue to experience poor connectivity, which may restrict their access to education, healthcare, markets, and government services.

Regarding healthcare, 73.33% of the respondents depend on Rural Health Dispensaries, 16.66% access Primary Health Centers, and only 10% utilize Community Health Centers. The findings indicate that rural health dispensaries are the primary source of healthcare, while access to higher-level medical facilities remains limited.

The study also reveals a very low level of awareness about government welfare schemes. Only 11.5% of the respondents reported being aware of such schemes, while 85% were unaware and 3.5% did not respond. This lack of awareness suggests deficiencies in the dissemination of information and outreach efforts, particularly among tribal women living in remote and migratory areas.

Similarly, the benefits derived from government schemes remain limited. Only 15% of the respondents reported receiving benefits from government welfare programmes, whereas 81.5% had not benefited and 3.5% gave no response. The low level of utilization may be attributed to inadequate awareness, administrative hurdles, poor accessibility, low literacy, and the seasonal migration patterns of the Gujjar Bakarwal community.

12. Source of political information

Internet	Radio	TV	All	Total
150 50%	70 23.5%	30 10%	50 16.6%	300 100%

13. Kind of mobile phone

Smart phone	Simple phone	Do not have phone	Total
157 52.5%	110 36.5%	33 11%	300 100%

14. Internet connection

Yes	No	Total
157 52.5%	143 47.5%	300 100%

Sources of Political Information among Gujjar Bakarwal Women

The data indicate that Gujjar Bakarwal women access political information through a variety of communication channels, with digital media emerging as the most prominent source. Among the 300 respondents, 150 (50%) reported the Internet as their primary source of political information, making it the most widely used medium. This reflects the increasing penetration of digital technology and its growing role in enhancing political awareness among tribal women.

The findings further show that 70 (23.5%) respondents rely on the radio for political information. Radio continues to serve as an important medium, particularly in remote and migratory areas where internet connectivity and television access may be limited. In contrast, only 30 (10%) respondents identified television as their primary source of political information, indicating comparatively lower dependence on this medium.

Additionally, 50 (16.6%) respondents reported using multiple sources, including the Internet, radio, and television, to obtain political information. Access to diverse media sources may contribute to a broader understanding of political developments and electoral processes.

The pattern of media use is closely associated with mobile phone ownership and internet access. The study reveals that 157 (52.5%) respondents own smartphones, while 110 (36.5%) use simple mobile phones, and 33 (11%) do not own a mobile phone. Correspondingly, 157 (52.5%) respondents have access to an internet connection, whereas 143 (47.5%) do not. These findings explain why the Internet

has become the leading source of political information, while nearly half of the respondents remain digitally excluded due to the lack of smartphones or internet connectivity.

Overall, the data suggest that digital media is increasingly shaping political awareness among Gujjar Bakarwal women. However, the persistence of limited internet access and the continued reliance on traditional media such as radio highlight the existence of a digital divide. Expanding digital infrastructure, improving internet connectivity in remote tribal areas, and promoting digital literacy among Gujjar Bakarwal women would enhance their access to political information, strengthen political awareness, and encourage informed participation in democratic processes.

15. Association with Political parties.

Yes	no	Not responded	total
20 6.5%	210 70%	70 23.5%	300 100%

16. Interest to participate in election campaign.

Yes	no	Not responded	total
55 18.5%	150 50%	95 31.5%	300 100%

17. Interest to participate in the following activities

	Attended elections meetings/rallies	Participated in processions	Participated in door to door canvassing	Distributed election posters/leaflets	Contributed or collected money	Not interested	Total
	15 5%	8 2.5%	6 2%	15 5%	0 0%	256 85.5%	300 100%

18. Attitude on benefits of casting votes

Yes	No	Total
120 40%	180 60%	300 100%

19. Voting in recent elections

Yes	No	Total
295 98.5%	5 1.5%	300 100%

21. Own decision in casting vote

yes	No	Total
180	120	300
60%	40%	100%

22. Preference to cast vote

Clan and tribe of the candidate	Clan, education and political experience	Education and political experience	Social service	Total
150	70	30	50	300
50%	23.5%	10%	16.5%	100%

23. Contested in elections

Yes	No	Total
6	294	300
2%	98%	100%

24. Contested elections on which seats

Contested on reserved ST woman seat	Contested on open woman seat	Non contestant	Total
6	0	294	300
2%	0%	98%	100%

26. Contested in which election

Parliament election	Assembly election	District development council election	Block development council election
No	NO	yes	yes

27. Winner of the election

DDC winner	Runner up	BDC winner	Runner up	Total contestant
2	2	1	1	6

28. Awareness of 73rd constitutional amendment act.

Yes	No	Total
52	248	300
17.5%	82.5%	100%

Electoral Inclusion and Participation of Gujjar Bakarwal Women

The findings indicate that the electoral inclusion and participation of Gujjar Bakarwal women present a

mixed picture. While electoral participation in terms of voting is remarkably high, their involvement in political organizations, election campaigns, political awareness, and electoral leadership remains comparatively limited.

The study reveals that only 20 (6.5%) respondents reported being associated with a political party, whereas 210 (70%) stated that they had no political affiliation and 70 (23.5%) did not respond. This suggests that formal political party membership among Gujjar Bakarwal women is very low, reflecting limited integration into organized political structures.

Similarly, participation in election campaigns is relatively weak. Only 55 (18.5%) respondents expressed an interest in participating in election campaigns, while 150 (50%) were not interested and 95 (31.5%) did not respond. These findings indicate that active political engagement beyond voting remains limited among the respondents.

With regard to the perceived benefits of voting, only 120 (40%) respondents believed that casting a vote brings tangible benefits, whereas 180 (60%) felt that voting does not significantly improve their socio-economic or political conditions. This perception may reduce political motivation and confidence in democratic institutions.

Despite these limitations, voter turnout among Gujjar Bakarwal women is exceptionally high. The study found that 295 (98.5%) respondents cast their votes in the most recent election, while only 5 (1.5%) did not vote. This demonstrates a strong commitment to the democratic process and indicates that voting has become an accepted civic responsibility within the community.

The findings further reveal that 180 (60%) respondents exercised independent decision-making while casting their votes, whereas 120 (40%) relied on the influence of family members, community leaders, or others. This reflects a gradual increase in women's political autonomy, although social and familial influences continue to shape electoral choices for a substantial proportion. Regarding voting preferences, 150 (50%) respondents preferred candidates belonging to their own clan or tribe, highlighting the continuing influence of ethnic and kinship affiliations in electoral behaviour. In comparison, 70 (23.5%) considered a combination of clan affiliation, educational qualifications, and political experience, 30 (10%) prioritized education and political experience, and 50 (16.5%) based their choice primarily on the candidate's social service. These findings suggest that identity-based voting remains dominant, although merit-based considerations are gradually gaining importance.

The study also demonstrates that electoral contestation by Gujjar Bakarwal women remains extremely low. Only 6 (2%) respondents had contested elections, while 294 (98%) had never contested. All six contestants contested from reserved Scheduled Tribe (ST) women seats, whereas none contested from open women's seats. This indicates that political reservations have created opportunities for representation; however, participation in electoral competition beyond reserved seats remains negligible. Among the six contestants, participation was limited to District Development Council (DDC) and Block Development Council (BDC) elections. None of the respondents contested Parliamentary or Legislative Assembly elections, reflecting the limited political representation of Gujjar Bakarwal women at higher levels of governance.

The electoral performance of these contestants was encouraging. Out of the six candidates, two were elected as DDC members, one was elected as a BDC Chairperson, while two emerged as runners-up in DDC elections and one finished as a runner-up in the BDC election. These results demonstrate that Gujjar Bakarwal women can achieve electoral success when provided with opportunities through reservation and local democratic institutions.

The findings further reveal a low level of awareness regarding the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. Only 52 (17.5%) respondents were aware of the provisions of the Amendment, whereas 248 (82.5%) lacked such awareness. This limited knowledge may adversely affect women's understanding of their constitutional rights, political reservations, and opportunities for participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Major Findings

Overall, the study finds that the electoral inclusion of Gujjar Bakarwal women is characterized by very high voter participation but low political awareness, limited party affiliation, minimal involvement in election campaigns, and extremely low electoral contestation. The reservation of seats for Scheduled Tribe women under the Panchayati Raj system has provided important opportunities for political representation, as evidenced by the electoral success of several respondents in DDC and BDC elections. However, enhancing political awareness, strengthening civic education, improving knowledge of constitutional provisions such as the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, and encouraging leadership development are essential for transforming Gujjar Bakarwal women from active voters into influential political leaders and decision-makers.

The present study demonstrates that the electoral inclusion and participation of Gujjar Bakarwal women in Jammu and Kashmir have improved in certain aspects, particularly in electoral participation, but significant socio-economic, infrastructural, and political challenges continue to hinder their effective empowerment. The socio-economic profile of the respondents reflects inadequate access to basic amenities, limited awareness of government welfare programmes, and restricted opportunities for political advancement.

The findings reveal that a majority of the respondents continue to depend on traditional sources of drinking water, while a considerable proportion still lacks adequate road and transport connectivity. Rural Health Dispensaries remain the primary healthcare providers, indicating limited access to higher-level health institutions. These infrastructural deficiencies adversely affect the overall quality of life of Gujjar Bakarwal women and restrict their access to education, employment, healthcare, and political institutions.

The study reveals that the socio-economic, educational, and political status of Gujjar-Bakarwal women in Jammu and Kashmir is shaped by the community's traditional pastoral lifestyle, seasonal migration, and socio-economic marginalization. Although the majority of respondents are in the economically productive age group (20–40 years), their educational attainment remains low, with over one-third being illiterate and only a very small proportion receiving education beyond the higher secondary level. Poverty, remoteness, migratory patterns, and socio-cultural constraints continue to limit access to education and skill development.

Economically, most respondents depend on livestock rearing and have low household incomes, reflecting limited livelihood diversification and persistent economic vulnerability. The predominance of nomadic and semi-nomadic lifestyles further restricts access to education, healthcare, markets, financial services, and government welfare programmes.

The findings also indicate inadequate access to basic amenities, particularly safe drinking water, transport connectivity, and higher-level healthcare facilities. Despite the availability of government welfare schemes, awareness and utilization remain extremely low, highlighting weaknesses in outreach, administrative delivery, and inclusion of migratory tribal populations.

At the political level, the study presents a mixed picture. Gujjar-Bakarwal women demonstrate exceptionally high electoral participation, with almost universal voter turnout, reflecting their commitment to democratic processes. However, political participation beyond voting remains limited due to low awareness, minimal political party affiliation, weak involvement in election campaigns, and poor knowledge of constitutional provisions such as the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. Electoral reservations for Scheduled Tribe women have created opportunities for representation at the grassroots level, and the success of several respondents in DDC and BDC elections demonstrates their leadership potential. Nevertheless, representation at higher political levels remains negligible, indicating that structural barriers continue to hinder meaningful political empowerment.

Overall, the study concludes that Gujjar-Bakarwal women have made significant progress as active voters but continue to face substantial socio-economic, educational, and institutional challenges that restrict their transformation into informed citizens, effective political leaders, and equal participants in democratic governance.

Policy Suggestions

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed for policymakers:

1. **Strengthen Awareness Campaigns:** Government departments should conduct regular awareness programmes in Gujjar Bakarwal settlements and migratory routes to improve knowledge of welfare schemes, constitutional rights, electoral processes, and political reservations.
2. **Improve Access to Basic Infrastructure:** Greater investment is needed in safe drinking water, all-weather roads, transport facilities, electricity, digital connectivity, and healthcare infrastructure in tribal areas.
3. **Enhance Digital Inclusion:** Affordable internet services, smartphone accessibility, and digital literacy programmes should be expanded to ensure that Gujjar Bakarwal women can access political information, government services, and online welfare benefits.
4. **Increase Awareness of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment:** Special civic education initiatives should be launched to educate tribal women about Panchayati Raj Institutions, reservation policies, local governance, and their constitutional rights and responsibilities.
5. **Promote Political Leadership among Tribal Women:** Leadership development programmes, political training workshops, mentorship initiatives, and capacity-building activities should be organized to encourage Gujjar Bakarwal women to actively participate in elections and public decision-making.
6. **Strengthen Implementation of Welfare Schemes:** Government agencies should simplify application procedures, reduce bureaucratic barriers, ensure transparency, and establish mobile outreach teams to serve remote and migratory tribal populations.
7. **Support Women Contesting Elections:** Financial assistance, campaign management training, legal guidance, and leadership support should be provided to women candidates, enabling them to contest elections beyond reserved seats.
8. **Encourage Political Parties to Promote Tribal Women:** Political parties should actively recruit, train, and nominate Gujjar Bakarwal women for leadership positions and electoral contests at local, district, and state levels.

9. **Improve Education and Adult Literacy:** Expanding educational opportunities, adult literacy programmes, and civic education among tribal women will strengthen their socio-economic status and enhance informed political participation.
10. **Promote Inclusive Education:** Establish mobile schools, seasonal learning centres, residential hostels, and scholarship programmes specifically designed for nomadic Gujjar-Bakarwal girls to reduce educational exclusion.
11. **Strengthen Livelihood Opportunities:** Introduce skill development, vocational training, dairy development, entrepreneurship programmes, and financial assistance to diversify income sources beyond traditional livestock rearing.
12. **Enhance Awareness of Government Schemes:** Conduct regular awareness campaigns in local languages through tribal extension workers, mobile outreach teams, community leaders, and digital platforms to improve knowledge and utilization of welfare programmes.
13. **Ensure Inclusion of Migratory Communities:** Design flexible and portable service delivery mechanisms so that nomadic families can access education, healthcare, identity documents, pensions, and welfare benefits during seasonal migration.
14. **Strengthen Political Education:** Organize voter education, civic awareness, and constitutional literacy programmes focusing on the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, Panchayati Raj Institutions, and women's political rights.
15. **Develop Women's Leadership:** Provide leadership training, mentoring, exposure visits, and capacity-building programmes to encourage Gujjar-Bakarwal women to contest elections beyond reserved seats and participate in political decision-making.
16. **Promote Digital Inclusion:** Improve mobile and internet connectivity in tribal regions and provide digital literacy training so women can access political information, government services, online education, and financial resources.
17. **Strengthen Representation in Decision-Making:** Increase the participation of Gujjar-Bakarwal women in Panchayats, District Development Councils, cooperative societies, and tribal advisory bodies through targeted leadership support.
18. **Adopt Tribal-Sensitive Policies:** Policymakers should formulate development programmes that specifically address the unique socio-cultural and migratory characteristics of Gujjar-Bakarwal women, ensuring that development interventions are accessible, inclusive, and culturally appropriate.
19. **Strengthen Collaboration with Civil Society:** Non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, and tribal leaders should be actively involved in promoting political awareness, women's leadership, and access to government services.
20. **Establish Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms:** Periodic assessments should be undertaken to evaluate the effectiveness of welfare programmes, political reservation policies, and empowerment initiatives for Gujjar Bakarwal women, ensuring evidence-based improvements in policy implementation.

These measures would contribute to improving the socio-economic conditions, educational attainment, political awareness, and democratic participation of Gujjar-Bakarwal women, thereby promoting their inclusive empowerment and strengthening grassroots democracy in Jammu and Kashmir.

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