

Role of Tribal Development Programs in Socio-Economic Upliftment of Muslim Gujjars: A Study of Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract: *The Scheduled Tribes, mainly primitive tribes, have historically been in a disadvantaged position in India due to social isolation and exploitation. Though post-independence India initiated large-scale development planning based on the Directive Principles of State Policy, many tribal communities faced displacement and marginalization. In response, specialized tribal development programs were introduced. This study examines the execution and effectiveness of such programs among the Muslim Gujjar tribe in Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh. Using primary data from 293 respondents, this research analyzes awareness, participation, and impact of developmental schemes such as MGNREGA, PDS, ICDS, SSA, and others. Findings show high awareness and participation in development activities, suggesting a transformative role of these initiatives in improving the socio-economic conditions of the community.*

Key Words: Tribal Development, Muslim Gujjars, Himachal Pradesh, Socio-Economic Upliftment, Government Schemes, Chamba District.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Gujjar tribe represents one of the most substantial Scheduled Tribes in the Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh, numerically ranking second in prominence. Traditionally pastoral, the Gujjars are permanent inhabitants of the region and are primarily concentrated in the tehsils of Churah, Chamba, and Bhattiyat, as well as the Salooni sub-tehsil. Their livelihood revolves around rearing buffaloes, a practice that necessitates seasonal migration in search of grazing pastures—moving to high-altitude *dhars* during summer and descending to the plains during winter. Although some Gujjar families possess cultivated land, their primary source of wealth and sustenance remains their livestock, particularly buffaloes. They are widely recognized as the chief suppliers of milk and dairy products in the region (Bharti, 2001).

Culturally, the Gujjar community is divided along religious lines—Hindu and Muslim Gujjars—each with its distinct linguistic and cultural attributes. Hindu Gujjars, who trace their lineage to Yashoda, the foster mother of Lord Krishna, are primarily settled in Mandi, Kangra, Sirmaur, Solan, and Bilaspur districts. Muslim Gujjars are predominantly found in Chamba, Mandi, Bilaspur, Solan, and Sirmaur. While Hindu Gujjars communicate in local dialects using the Devanagari script, Muslim Gujjars converse in Gujjari—a dialect blending Gujarati, Urdu, and Dogri—and use the Perso-Arabic script. Distinctive in appearance and attire, Gujjar men are recognized by their turbans and beards, whereas Gujjari women, known for their height and grace, excel in traditional embroidery, dairy processing, and household decoration.

The Gujjar tribe, despite its rich cultural traditions and vital role in the region's agro-pastoral economy, has remained socially and economically disadvantaged, much like many other Scheduled Tribes across India. In response to these long-standing disparities, the Government of India initiated various Tribal Development Programs following the introduction of planned development in 1951. These initiatives are designed to promote inclusive growth by enhancing the economic status of tribal populations. The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Development Corporation plays a key role by facilitating self-employment, offering vocational training, and extending concessional financial aid under schemes such as Special Central Assistance (SCA). These efforts aim to bring tribal communities into the economic mainstream while simultaneously safeguarding their cultural heritage and traditional ways of life.

This research paper tries to find to critically examine the implementation, awareness, and impact of tribal development programs on the Muslim Gujjar tribe of Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh. By analyzing socio-economic indicators such as education, occupation, standard of living, and participation in government welfare schemes, the study aims to assess the effectiveness of developmental interventions and highlight the gaps that need policy attention for the holistic upliftment of this historically underserved community.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

The condition and development of tribal communities in India have been the subject of extensive academic inquiry and governmental attention. Over the years, scholars and institutions have critically examined the socio-economic transformations, challenges, and the impact of state-led tribal development programs.

Vidyarthi (1981) provides a foundational perspective on tribal development in India, asserting that although significant initiatives were undertaken through successive Five-Year Plans, the actual benefits reaching the tribal population remained minimal. He emphasizes that the failure of these development plans lies not only in their implementation but also in the formulation stage, where tribal-specific cultural and socio-economic contexts were often neglected. Vidyarthi critiques the top-down approach of development wherein tribal communities, the primary stakeholders, were largely excluded from decision-making processes. He argues that policies that overlook the indigenous cultural background tend to be resisted, thereby hampering the intended developmental outcomes.

Bhowmick (1993), through his comparative study of four tribal groups—Lodha, Santhal, Munda, and Mahali—analyzes the interplay between tribal identity and the forces of modernization. His research highlights the socio-economic changes brought about by enhanced education, access to media, industrial growth, and interactions with broader markets. Bhowmick emphasizes that modernization introduces both opportunities and constraints, and the success of tribal development depends on how well traditional values can adapt to or resist external socio-economic pressures.

Mahato (2001) underscores the historical marginalization of tribal communities, highlighting their socio-economic and educational backwardness despite being an integral part of Indian society. His idea that tribal groups have long been subjects of interest to administrators, anthropologists, and social reformers due to their diverse economic formations and unique cultural ethos. However, many among these communities, especially those identified as primitive tribal groups, continue to depend on traditional means of subsistence like hunting, food gathering, fishing, and shifting agriculture. This persistent reliance on primitive occupations indicates a developmental lag and the limited reach of modern welfare measures.

The Tribal Research and Cultural Foundation (2006) conducted a field-based study specifically concentrating on the Gujjar and Bakerwal tribes. The findings offer critical understandings into the socio-economic hardships faced by these groups. The survey revealed that a majority of the population lives below the poverty line, with over 50% of individuals unable to afford two meals a day. Alarmingly, 71% of the respondents were unaware of the various government schemes and welfare policies designed for their upliftment. The study also initiates that basic necessities such as healthcare, clean drinking water, education, road infrastructure, and electricity were largely absent in their habitations. The poor housing conditions and lack of sanitation contributed to high rates of disease, particularly among women and children. This research underscores the urgent necessity for more inclusive, accessible, and community-aware development programs for these marginalized groups.

Together, these studies collectively point to a critical gap between policy formulation and actual grassroots implementation in tribal development. While modernization and governmental initiatives have brought limited benefits, much of the tribal population, particularly communities like the Muslim Gujjars of Chamba, continue to face systemic barriers, poor awareness, and exclusion from mainstream developmental processes. These findings provide a strong rationale for the present research, which aims to evaluate the effectiveness, reach, and awareness of tribal development programs among the Muslim Gujjar tribe of Himachal Pradesh.

3. Research Gap:

Although a sum of studies has addressed tribal development and the ethnography of the Gujjars, there remains a significant lack of focused research on the Muslim Gujjar community of Chamba district, particularly from a sociological and empirical standpoint. Most existing literature tends to treat Gujjars as a homogenous group, often failing to differentiate between Hindu and Muslim sub-sections, thereby obscuring important intra-community disparities. Furthermore, while low literacy levels are frequently mentioned, there is a noticeable gap in understanding the connection between educational deprivation and livelihood patterns, especially how limited access to education hampers occupational diversification. The efficacy of tribal development schemes at the micro level, particularly in remote and marginalized regions like Chamba, has also acquired little scholarly attention. Another critical oversight is the lack of gender-sensitive analysis; existing studies rarely investigate how educational and occupational inequalities manifest differently for men and women within this tribal community.

4. Objectives:

- **To examine** the level of awareness among Muslim Gujjars regarding various tribal development programs implemented in the region.
- **To analyze** the extent and nature of participation of Muslim Gujjars in various Government welfare schemes such as MGNREGA, PDS, ICDS, SSA, and others.

5. Scope of Study:

This research is confined to examining tribal development programs among the Muslim Gujjar communities in Himachal Pradesh, with a certain focus on their awareness of and participation in various developmental initiatives. Given the constraints of time, resources, and the region's challenging geographical terrain, the study was limited to the Tissa block of Chamba district, where a sizeable population of Muslim Gujjars resides. The investigation centered on senior household members—both male and female—who were available at the time of the survey. Data were collected over a three-month period through household-level interviews and direct observation, encompassing a sample of 293 households selected from various panchayats. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the tribal community's interaction with development programs.

6. Material & Methods:

Himachal Pradesh covers a geographical expanse of 55,673 square kilometres and shares its boundaries with several neighbouring regions. To the north and northwest lies Jammu and Kashmir, while Tibet borders it on the east. The southeastern boundary adjoins Uttarakhand, Haryana lies to the south, and Punjab borders the state to the southwest and west. As per the 2011 Census, the state's population stands at 68.65 lakh, with 34.82 lakh males and 33.83 lakh females. The sex ratio is 972 females per 1,000 males, and the population density is 123 persons per square kilometre. Himachal Pradesh maintains a high literacy rate of 82.80%, with male literacy at 89.53% and female literacy at 75.93%. According to the Administrative Atlas (2020), the state comprises 12 districts, 73 subdivisions, 109 tehsils, and 63 sub-tehsils for administrative purposes (Economic Survey 2019–20, District Statistics Department, Government of Himachal Pradesh). Among these, Chamba district—once the capital of the princely state bearing its name—is located at an altitude of 996 metres above sea level. It sits on the banks of the Ravi River, near the confluence with the Sal River. Based on 2011 Census data, Chamba has a total population of 519,080, which includes 261,320 males and 257,760 females. The district has a population density of 80 persons per square kilometre and a sex ratio of 986 females per 1,000 males. Its overall literacy rate stands at 72.17% (Economic Survey 2019–20, District Statistics Department, Government of Himachal Pradesh).

From an administrative perspective, Chamba is divided into seven tehsils: Chamba, Bharmour, Churah, Bhattiyat, Salooni, Pangi, and Dalhousie. It also comprises seven development blocks—namely Chamba, Mehla, Bharmour, Tissa, Salooni, Chuwari, and Pangi. The present research focuses on the Tissa development block. As reported in the Economic Survey 2019–20 (District Statistics Department, Government of Himachal Pradesh), Tissa has a population of 78,988, with 40,152 males and 38,836 females, resulting in a sex ratio of 904 females per 1,000 males. The block includes 42gram panchayats, 312 villages, and 14,142 households.

Universe and Sample of the Study:

The study was carried out in the Tissa block of Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh, owing to its high population of the Muslim Gujjar community. A multistage sampling technique was employed for selecting the respondents. In the first stage, the district and block were identified, followed by the selection of specific panchayats. Finally, individual households and participants were chosen for data collection during the last stage of the sampling process.

Selection of the District and Block:

Himachal Pradesh is divided into twelve districts, with Chamba district having the largest population of Muslim Gujjars in the state. The region's rich forested pastures and abundant water sources have historically attracted Gujjars to settle there. Historical records from the colonial period, such as the Chamba Gazetteers and Forest Reports, reveal that Gujjars migrated to this area primarily for its grazing grounds, particularly in the Saal, Churah, and Lihal valleys. These documents also note that Gujjars took part in bidding for grazing rights and paid *trini* (a grazing tax) to the state for using these lands.

Chamba district is administratively organized into seven development blocks: Chamba, Mehla, Bharmour, Tissa, Salooni, Chuwari, and Pangi. The Tissa block was selected as the study site due to its substantial Muslim Gujjar population, who live there with their livestock—such as buffaloes, bulls, horses, and goats.

Selection of the Panchayats:

The Tissa development block consists of numerous panchayats, each comprising several villages. However, due to constraints of time and resources, it was not practical to cover the entire block for the current study. As a result, specific panchayats were selected to constitute the study sample. Official data indicates that Tissa block includes a total of forty-two panchayats. From these, four panchayats—Charda, Baghae, Dehra, and Dehrog—were purposively chosen, representing roughly 10% of the total. These particular panchayats were selected because they have a notably higher concentration of the Muslim Gujjar population compared to others in the block. Furthermore, they comprise a substantial number of villages and households. These considerations guided the purposeful selection of the four panchayats to ensure a representative and adequate sample of households/respondents for the study.

Selection of the Households/Respondents:

Following the selection of panchayats, the next step was to identify and select households/respondents from the villages within each chosen panchayat. The number of villages varied: Charda comprised 5 villages, Baghae 4, Dehra 4, and Dehrog 5. As these villages were widely scattered, it was decided to conduct household selection at the panchayat level, rather than by individual village.

Across the four selected panchayats, a total of 585 Muslim Gujjar households were identified, constituting the study universe. These households were distributed as follows: 235 in Charda, 148 in Baghae, 82 in Dehra, and 120 in Dehrog. Collectively, they accounted for a population of 3,480 individuals (1,954 males and 1,526 females). Using random sampling, 50% of the households from each panchayat were selected, resulting in a total sample of 293 households: 118 from Charda, 74 from Baghae, 41 from Dehra, and 60 from Dehrog. These 293 households comprised the final sample for the study.

Unit of Investigation:

In this study, the primary unit of investigation was the senior-most available member of the household at the time of the survey, irrespective of gender. As the eldest family member, this individual was generally more knowledgeable about the household, local environment, and community dynamics, and thus better positioned to provide reliable information. Moreover, such individuals often held decision-making authority within the family structure. To explore the socio-economic conditions of the Muslim Gujjar tribe in Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh, the study employed a combination of descriptive and explanatory research designs.

Tools and Techniques of Data Collection:

The study depicted upon both primary and secondary sources for data collection. Primary data were collected through an interview schedule specifically designed to evaluate the socio-economic conditions of the Muslim Gujjar tribes residing in the hilly terrains of Himachal Pradesh. This schedule was carefully structured to collect detailed information on the demographic, socio-cultural, and economic aspects of the respondents.

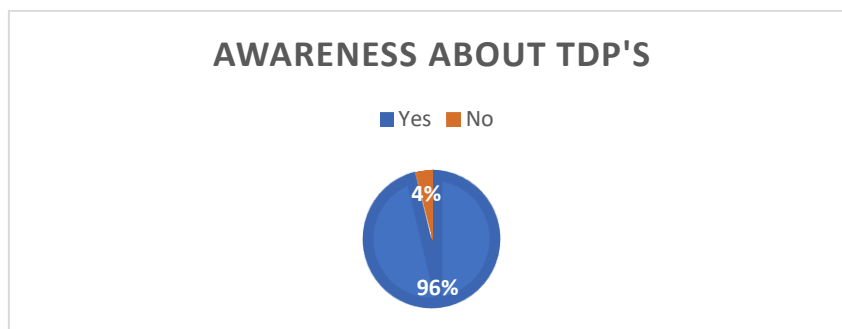
The interview schedule covered a broad spectrum of topics related to the participants' socio-economic lives, such as family composition, marital practices, kinship systems, caste and religious identities, education levels, occupations, income patterns, and local governance structures. It featured a combination of open-ended and close-ended questions to allow for both quantitative data and qualitative insights into the respondents lived experiences.

Before its full-scale deployment, the interview schedule was pre-tested, and essential modifications were made based on feedback to improve its clarity, relevance, and effectiveness. The researcher personally conducted face-to-face interviews with each respondent, ensuring consistency and enhancing the reliability of the data collected. Additionally, the observation method was employed to validate and deepen the understanding of the information obtained through interviews.

Secondary data were obtained from census documents, statistical reports, economic surveys, gazetteers, revenue records, and official documents available at the block development offices and panchayat institutions. Additional information was also obtained from scholarly books, research articles, academic journals, magazines, and reliable digital platforms to provide a broader context for the primary data.

7. Results & Discussion:

Awareness about Tribal Development Programs (TDP) of Muslim Gujjar Tribe



The above Pie chart presents data on the awareness level of respondents regarding tribal development programs in the Tissa block of Chamba district, Himachal Pradesh. Out of a total of 293 respondents surveyed, a significant majority—282 individuals (96.2%)—reported being aware of tribal development programs implemented in their area. Only 11 respondents (3.8%) indicated a lack of awareness about such initiatives.

This high level of awareness reflects a positive trend in the dissemination of information and outreach efforts by government agencies or local authorities. The results propose that the communication and awareness strategies adopted under tribal welfare schemes are largely successful in reaching the target population, at least in terms of informing them about the existence of such programs.

However, while awareness is high, it does not necessarily equate to active participation or benefit. Therefore, further analysis in the subsequent sections will focus on the extent of participation, utilization of services, and perceived effectiveness of these programs among the Muslim Gujjar community.

Developmental Schemes Running in Study Area



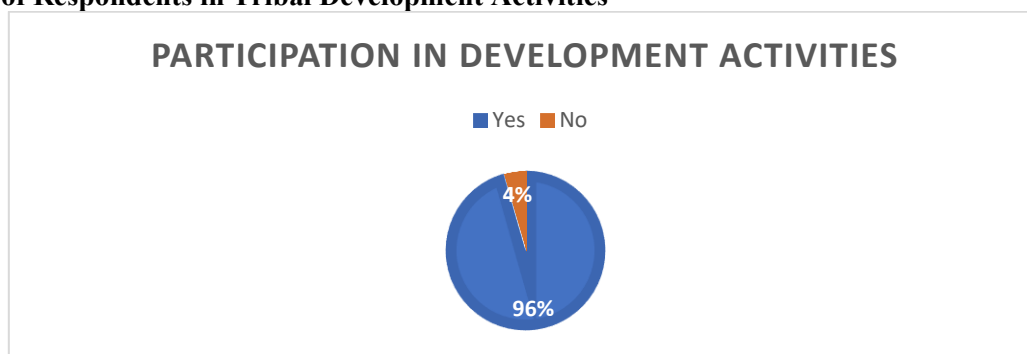
Note: The number of responses shown in the table are more than one hundred twenty as this was multiple choice question and one respondent gave more than one response.

The clustered column chart presents data on the various government developmental schemes known to or availed by the respondents in the study area. The Old Age Pension Scheme had the highest acknowledgment, with 280 responses (15.7%), indicating its significant presence and perceived importance, especially among elderly members of the Muslim Gujjar community. This was followed closely by MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) with 272 responses (15.2%), and the Public Distribution System (PDS) with 270 responses (15.1%). These findings highlight that schemes providing economic support and food security are widely utilized or known.

Other notable schemes include the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) at 252 responses (14.1%), and Indira Awas Yojana/Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana, a housing scheme, with 249 responses (13.9%). Serva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), focused on universal elementary education, accounted for 219 responses (12.2%), reflecting moderate engagement in educational schemes. Less engagement was observed with Ayushman Bharat/Himcare Yojna (124 responses or 6.9%) and Ujjwala Yojana, which provides free LPG connections (38 responses or 2.1%). The relatively low figures for health and clean energy schemes could point to accessibility issues, lack of documentation, or cultural constraints within the tribal population.

Overall, the data suggests that economic and subsistence-oriented schemes are more widely known and used, while healthcare and clean energy initiatives still face barriers in outreach and implementation among the Muslim Gujjar tribe in the region.

Participation of Respondents in Tribal Development Activities

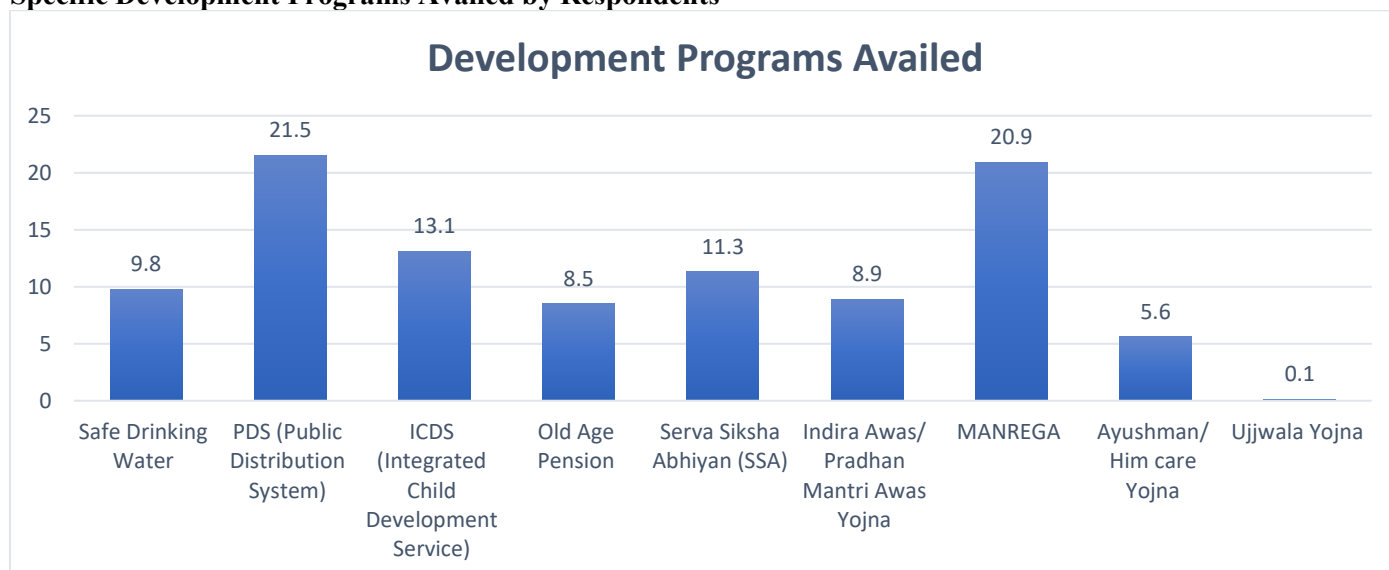


The Pie chart illustrates the level of participation by respondents in development activities initiated in the study area. Out of a total of 293 respondents, a significant 280 individuals (95.6%) reported active participation in one or more development-related activities. In contrast, only 13 respondents (4.4%) indicated that they had not participated in any such activities.

This high level of participation reflects positively on the implementation and outreach of developmental programs in the Tissa block of Chamba district. It suggests that a majority of the Muslim Gujjar community is not only aware of development initiatives but is also actively involved in them.

The data indicates an encouraging trend toward inclusivity and engagement, which is essential for the success of any tribal development effort. However, the small percentage of non-participating respondents may point to underlying issues such as lack of access, mobility constraints, inadequate information, or socio-cultural barriers, which should be explored further in the analysis.

Specific Development Programs Availied by Respondents



Note: The number of responses shown in the table are more than two hundred ninety-three as this was multiple choice question and one respondent gave more than one response.

The clustered column bar chart presents data on respondents' participation in various government development programs in the study area. The Public Distribution System (PDS) emerged as the most participated scheme, with 202 respondents (21.5%) reporting their involvement. This recommends that food security initiatives are both accessible and widely utilized by the Muslim Gujar population. MGNREGA (Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act) follows closely, with 196 respondents (20.9%), indicating a high level of engagement in rural wage employment schemes. The Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) and Serva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) also show notable levels of participation, with 123 (13.1%) and 106 (11.3%) respondents respectively, highlighting awareness and utilization of services aimed at maternal-child welfare and primary education. Participation in Safe Drinking Water schemes (92 respondents or 9.8%) and Indira Awas/Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (84 respondents or 8.9%) reflects a moderate uptake of basic infrastructure and housing programs. Meanwhile, only 80 respondents (8.5%) participated in the Old Age Pension Scheme, which, while significant, may point to age-eligibility limitations within the respondent group. In contrast, participation in Ayushman Bharat/Himcare Yojna was relatively low at 53 respondents (5.6%), and Ujjwala Yojna, which promotes clean cooking fuel, recorded participation from only 1 respondent (0.1%). This extremely low figure could be attributed to limited eligibility, lack of awareness, or cultural preferences related to traditional cooking methods.

The data clearly reveals that subsistence-oriented programs (food, wage employment, child development) see the highest engagement, while healthcare and clean energy schemes lag behind. This calls for targeted outreach efforts to ensure that health and environment-related schemes are better integrated into the tribal welfare landscape.

8. Conclusion:

The findings of this study underscore a relatively high level of awareness and participation among the Muslim Gujar community regarding tribal development programs in the Tissa block of Chamba district. With 96.2% of respondents aware of such initiatives and 95.6% actively participating in at least one development-related activity, it is evident that government outreach and dissemination efforts have been largely effective. The analysis reveals that economic support and food security programs such as the Old Age Pension Scheme, MGNREGA, and the Public Distribution System (PDS) are the most widely recognized and utilized. These schemes appear to address the immediate needs of the tribal population and thus attract greater engagement. Similarly, programs like ICDS and SSA reflect moderate success in promoting child welfare and education. However, healthcare and clean energy schemes, including Ayushman Bharat/Himcare Yojana and Ujjwala Yojana, remain underutilized, suggesting potential barriers related to accessibility, awareness, eligibility, and cultural practices. Despite high general awareness, the lower participation in these essential schemes indicates gaps in effective implementation and inclusion.

This shows that the Muslim Gujar tribe is generally aware of the various government programs and policies designed for their welfare. However, despite this awareness, only a small proportion of the community members are actually availing themselves of these benefits. This discrepancy suggests that while the initial socio-economic conditions of the tribe were quite poor, there has been a gradual improvement in their standard of living due to the implementation of developmental and upliftment initiatives. Nonetheless, the limited participation in these schemes points toward existing challenges—such as lack of access, bureaucratic hurdles, low literacy, or socio-cultural barriers—that may be preventing full utilization of available resources. Overall, while progress is evident, much work remains to ensure that these policies translate into widespread, tangible improvements for the entire community.

9. Recommendations:

1. Strengthen Outreach for Health and Clean Energy Schemes:

- Targeted awareness campaigns should be conducted to improve understanding and utilization of schemes like Ayushman Bharat/Him care and Ujjwala Yojana.
- Employ culturally sensitive strategies, including local language promotion, tribal intermediaries, and mobile health camps.

2. Enhance Documentation and Enrolment Support:

- Simplify enrolment processes for underutilized schemes and provide on-the-spot documentation assistance through local panchayats or NGOs.

3. Conduct Follow-up Assessments:

- Regular evaluations should be carried out to monitor the actual benefits received by the community members, beyond just awareness and registration.

4. Focus on Inclusive Participation:

- Investigate the socio-cultural and infrastructural barriers that hinder full participation, especially among women, elderly, and remote households.

5. Integrate Programs for Holistic Development:

- Synergize economic, educational, health, and environmental schemes to promote integrated development, ensuring that no dimension of welfare is overlooked.

6. Capacity Building of Local Institutions:

- Train local governance bodies and community leaders to act as facilitators and monitors for the implementation and feedback mechanisms of tribal development programs.

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