



Socio-Economic Dynamics of Jaad Bhotiya Tribal Women in Uttarkashi District, Uttarakhand, Western Himalaya

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Abstract: This study investigates the socio-economic status of Jaad Bhotiya tribal women in the Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand, focusing on key aspects such as family structures, education, healthcare access, and economic activities. The Jaad Bhotiya tribe, traditionally semi-nomadic, is rooted in pastoralism, wool processing, and small-scale trade, with strong cultural ties to the high-altitude Himalayan region. The research was conducted in Veerpur Dunda village, using a purposive sampling method to gather data from 100 respondents. The Finding reveals that 64% of the women live in nuclear families, while 50% are aged above 45 years, indicating a predominantly older population. In terms of marital status, 68% of the women are married. Healthcare preferences show a reliance on government hospitals (50%), with 20% still depending on traditional healers, reflecting the influence of cultural beliefs and limited healthcare resources. Educationally, the data highlights challenges, with 34% of the respondents being illiterate, though there is a rising trend in women achieving higher education, including 8% who have completed postgraduate studies. Occupationally, 56% of the women are self-employed, mainly engaged in small businesses and traditional crafts, reflecting the community's reliance on independent livelihoods. Animal husbandry remains significant, practiced by 10% of the women, while agriculture is minimal due to the region's challenging terrain. Formal employment opportunities are scarce, with only 2% working in government jobs and 4% in private employment. This study emphasizes the need for targeted interventions in education, healthcare, and economic development to empower Jaad Bhotiya women and ensure the preservation of their cultural identity amidst modern challenges.

Keywords: Socio-economic • Jaad Bhotiya • Tribal women • Uttarkashi • Western Himalayas

Introduction

The concept of socioeconomic status is multidimensional, involving a combination of social, demographic, and economic factors that collectively determine an individual's position within society. It reflects one's access to essential resources, including material goods, wealth, influence, social networks, healthcare, leisure, and educational opportunities (Oakes and Rossi 2003). This status is defined by the rank or position a person or family holds in relation to societal standards, considering cultural assets, income levels, material wealth, and community involvement (Chapin 1928). The socioeconomic status of women is shaped by various societal norms, benefits, and obligations, often positioning them as a

vulnerable segment compared to their male counterparts. Consequently, women frequently find themselves as the last recipients of opportunities brought by national development. The Jaunsari, Tharu, Raji, Buksa, and Bhotiya are the five main tribal groups that today reside in the western Himalayan state of Uttarakhand. More than eight high mountain valleys are home to the Bhotiya people, who are called for the valleys in which they live (Farswan 2017).

According to ancient literature from approximately 4,000 years ago, various tribes, including the Kunind, Kirata, Dagadh, and Khas, migrated to this region of the Himalayas from Central Asia via Tibet and began settling here permanently. Among these tribes, the



Kirata tribe is considered the ancestor of the Bhotiya tribe, as they still use Kirati words. In Uttarakhand, the Bhotiya tribe is known by different community names: in Chamoli district, they are called Tolchha, Marchha, and Rangpa, while in Uttarkashi district, they are known as Jaad. Their name comes from the Jaad Bhotiya, who live close to the Bhagirathi valley in the Indian state of Uttarakhand, which is part of the Jaad Ganga. Following the Indo-Sino war in 1962, the Jaad Bhotiya group established permanent homes in the Nelang and Jadhong valleys of Uttarakhand, India, until the borders were closed and the salt trade with Tibet, China, was stopped. They engaged in barter trade between India and Tibet, transporting goods using pack animals such as yaks, goats, and sheep, which aligned with their transhumant pastoral lifestyle. Consequently, their traditional economy was primarily based on sheep and goat herding supplemented by limited agriculture and trade (Roy et al 2017). The Jaad Bhotiya are a culturally rich community deeply connected to the Himalayan landscape. The women of the Jaad community play a vital role in preserving and maintaining their traditional way of life. This study aims to outline the current status of these women in the context of rapid socio-cultural and environmental changes and to provide a comprehensive understanding of the social and economic conditions affecting Jaad Bhotiya tribal women by analyzing factors such as access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.

Review of Literature

The status of tribal women in India is a complex interplay of socio-economic, cultural, and environmental factors, as explored in various studies. Saraogi (2013) identified multiple dimensions influencing women's status in tribal societies, including legal rights, social participation, treatment, and work nature. These factors operate independently, with their interconnections grounded in

empirical observations rather than theoretical models, reflecting the nuanced realities of tribal life.

Pandey (2011) examined the Gaddi community in Himachal Pradesh, highlighting how their transhumant lifestyle, driven by ecological factors, significantly impacts gender roles. Gaddi women hold considerable economic power and elevated social status, nearing parity with men. However, a duality exists, as men dominate public and community spheres while women exert significant influence within households. This balance demonstrates the intricate interaction between cultural traditions and gender dynamics.

Mishra (2009) emphasized regional variations in the challenges faced by tribal women, shaped by geographic and historical contexts. Key indicators such as demographics, education, health, economic activities, and social behavior underscore the disparities among tribal groups.

Das (2012) focused on autonomy and decision-making power, finding that tribal women generally enjoy household autonomy, particularly in social matters, and sometimes share economic rights with their husbands. Yet, low literacy and unemployment rates hinder their community participation, limiting their overall autonomy.

Kumar (2015) provided insights into the socio-economic conditions of the Jenukuruba tribe in Karnataka, describing them as one of the most marginalized tribal groups. The community faces significant challenges, including poverty, illiteracy, poor health, and food insecurity, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions.

Veen Bashi (2007) addressed the broader gender disparities in India, emphasizing the educational challenges tribal girls face. Factors such as financial difficulties, early marriages, and societal attitudes often deprive girls of educational opportunities, limiting their socio-economic advancement. Education, a key pathway to empowerment, is often



inaccessible to tribal girls, perpetuating cycles of deprivation.

Talmaki (2012) underscored the need for collective action to improve the socio-economic conditions of tribal women. He advocated for better education, vocational training, and participation in local governance. Addressing issues like domestic violence and alcohol abuse within tribal families was also highlighted as crucial for fostering empowerment and well-being.

In summary, these studies collectively reveal the multifaceted challenges and opportunities tribal women in India face. While ecological, cultural, and socio-economic factors shape their roles, significant disparities persist across regions and communities. Empowerment initiatives, including education, vocational training, health improvements, and greater participation in governance, are essential to addressing these challenges and enabling tribal women to achieve equitable socio-economic and cultural standing.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this paper are -

- To find out the socio-economic status of Jaad Bhotiya tribal Women in the study area.
- To examine the primary occupational patterns of Jaad Bhotiya tribal women in the study area

Research Methodology

The present study was conducted in Veerpur Dunda village in the district Uttarkashi in the western Himalayan state of Uttarakhand. Primary data was collected from 100 sample respondents from Veerpur Dunda Village following the purposive sampling method. A schedule is used to collect the demographic, social, and economic status of the Jaad Bhotiya tribal women.

Study Area: The Uttarkashi district is located in the northwestern part of Uttarakhand, between latitudes 30°43' N and 30°73' N and

longitudes 78°28' E and 78°45' E. Covering an area of 8,016 square kilometers, it shares an international border with Tibet (China) to the north and an interstate border with Himachal Pradesh to the north and northwest (Fig 1). The Dehradun district lies to its southwest, Tehri district to the south, and Rudraprayag and Chamoli districts to the east. In winter the Jaad (Bhotiya) people live at Veerpur Dunda and during the summer they move to higher places Bagori and Harsil. Veerpur Dunda is a village in Dunda Block in Uttarkashi District of Uttarakhand. It is located 10 km west of District headquarters Uttarkashi. The total geographical area of village is 269.24 hectares. Dunda village has a Total population of 1,088 people, out of which male population is 515 while female population is 573.

Result and Discussion

In this study, the author investigated a number of facets of the respondents' social and economic circumstances. Family composition, education composition, marital status, occupation, and respondents' family history are the primary socioeconomic characteristics of the profile. These factors are essential for understanding the socio-economic status of tribal women in the study area examined in the paper.

The family is the basic unit of society, giving each person their social status, roles, and responsibilities. It plays a key role in shaping values over time, and a person's behavior and attitude are influenced by the family they come from. Whether a family is joint, nuclear, or extended affects the status and role of tribal women as well. Table 1 shows the respondent's family structure. The majority, 64%, belong to nuclear families, reflecting a modern trend of smaller, more independent family units. Meanwhile, 30% of respondents are part of joint families, where extended relatives live together, a nod to traditional values of shared responsibility and communal living. A smaller



group, 6%, live in extended families, which may include multiple generations under one roof, indicating a deep-rooted connection to

their familial heritage. Overall, the table highlights the diversity in family dynamics within the Jaad Bhotiya community.

LOCATION MAP

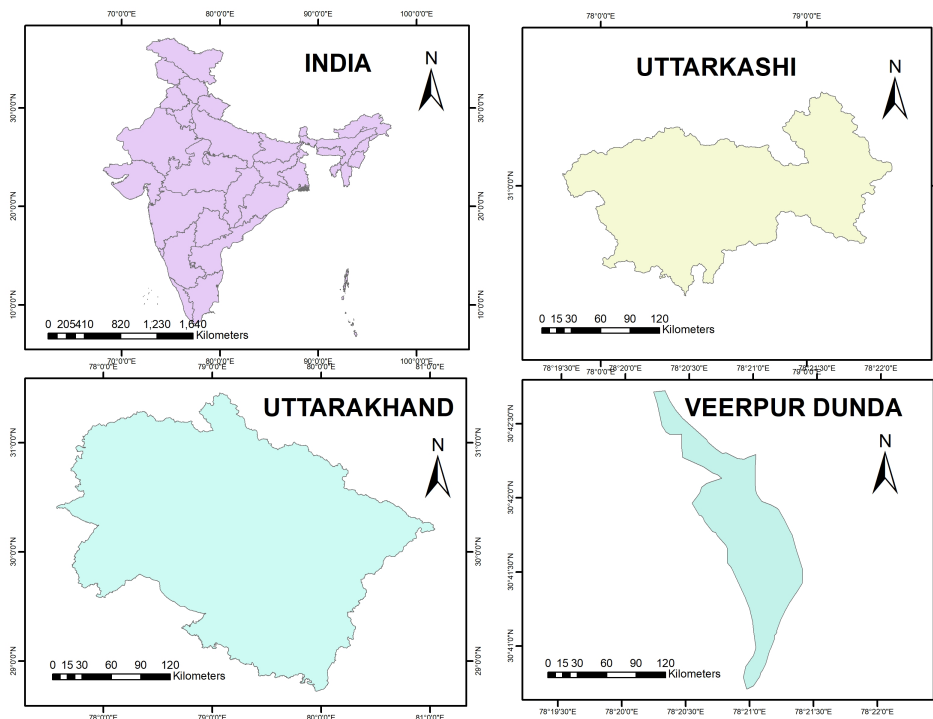


Fig 1. Geographical Location of the study area

Table No: 1 Distribution of the Respondents on their Family Type

Type of Family	Frequency	Percentage
Nuclear family	64	64%
Join family	30	30%
Extended family	16	6%
Total	100	100

Table 2: Distribution of the Respondents Based on Their Age

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
15-25 years	18	18%
26-35 years	16	16%
36-45 years	16	16%
Above 45 years	50	50%
Total	100	100

Table 2 provides insight into the age distribution among the respondents. The largest group, 50%, consists of individuals aged above 45 years, indicating that a significant portion of the population is in the older age bracket. The 15-25 years age group accounts for 18% of the respondents,

reflecting the presence of a younger generation but at a relatively lower proportion. The 26-35 years and 36-45 years age groups each represent 16% of the respondents, representing a balanced middle-aged population. Overall, this table shows that the Jaad Bhotiya community has more older people than



younger ones. This could impact the workforce, traditional practices, and community leadership, as older individuals often hold important roles. The smaller

number of younger people might affect the future of the community, including the continuation of cultural traditions and having enough workers.

Table 3. Marital Status of Respondents

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	68	68%
Unmarried	18	18 %
Others	14	14%
Total	100	100

Marital status is also a social indicator for understanding the socio-economic status of women. The marital status of the respondent is shown in Table 3 out of 100 respondent 68%, of them are found to be married, 18% are Unmarried, and 14% categorized as Others might represent widows, widowers, or

separated/divorced individuals, showing that a notable part of the population has experienced a change in marital status. Now Previously, there was no prejudice in this community, but married and widowed/divorced women are treated differently by society. In this community, remarriage is acceptable

Table 4. Distribution of the Respondents based on their age at the time of Marriage

Age at the time of marriage	Frequency	Percentage
Below 18 Age	44	44%
Above 18 Age	56	56 %
Total	100	100

The data reveals the age distribution of Jaad Bhotiya women at the time of marriage, 44% of the women were married before reaching 18 years of age, indicating early marriages in this portion of the community (Table 4). 56% of the women were married after the age of 18, suggesting a majority of the respondents

married at a later, more mature age. This highlights a trend where early marriage is still common, but the majority of Jaad Bhotiya women are marrying above the age of 18, reflecting a shift towards later marriages in this community.

Table 5. Preferred Place of Treatment by Respondent

Place of treatment	Frequency	Percentage
Govt Hospital	50	50%
Private Hospital	30	30%
Local Vaidya (Traditional healers)	20	20%
Total	100	100

One such significant socioeconomic indicator is health status. Even in this day and age, many people, even tribes, still adhere to superstitious beliefs and favour the local Vaidya (traditional healers). The responding women's chosen treatment location is shown in Table 5. As can be seen from the above table, 50% of respondents choose government hospitals for treatment, 30% prefer private hospitals or clinics, and 20% rely on traditional healers. This is because of poor

economic position, outdated beliefs about superstition, and a lack of information. Jaad Bhotiya women play an important role in all religious rituals. However, during their menstruation cycle, they do not participate in religious activities, and according to respondents, women are to some extent treated as untouchable during this time. They face social restrictions surrounding menstruation, including limited access to water and taboos



related to cooking or participating in religious practices during their periods.

Education is a basic right that offers opportunities for social and economic advancement. In India, several factors

Table 6. Educational Status of Respondents

Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage
Illiterate	34	34%
Primary	12	12%
Secondary	22	22%
Higher Secondary	14	14%
Graduate	10	10%
Post Graduate	8	8%
Total	100	100

Table 6 displaying the respondents' educational level shows that 34% of the respondents are illiterate, meaning that over one-third of the women have never finished formal schooling. This could reflect challenges like lack of access to educational resources or cultural factors that may limit women's education within the community. 12% of respondents were observed to be secondary followed by Secondary 22%, Higher Secondary 14%, Graduate 10, and Postgraduate 8%. This shows that while there is some presence of higher-educated women, the overall proportion is low, which may reflect socioeconomic challenges or cultural barriers to women advancing in formal

Table 7. Distribution of Respondents based on their Occupation

Type of Occupation	Frequency	Percentage
Agriculture	4	4%
Animal Husbandry	10	10%
Self - employee	56	56%
Business	2	2%
Labor	6	6%
Government Employee	2	2%
Private Employee	4	4%
Housewife	16	16%
Total	100	100

Women in the Bhotiya society were skilled in knitting and weaving, which are aspects of processing and creating final products, while males were traders and shepherds, in charge of obtaining raw materials and traders. Women

contribute to the lack of education for girls, including financial difficulties, early marriages, traditional roles of submission, motherhood, and parental views on how education influences women's perspectives

education. The data highlights that while a significant portion of Jaad Bhotiya women are uneducated or have lower educational levels, there is also a growing group that is attaining higher levels of education. Improving access to education could empower more women in the community and enhance their participation in various aspects of social and economic life. Historically, the Jaad Bhotiyas were a semi-nomadic group that took up several jobs in the wool processing industry. Goats and sheep were once regarded as valuable possessions. Herding sheep, shearing, cleaning, carding, spinning, and weaving were the community's primary occupations. (Table 7).

used to perform a lot of the processing of wool since males were in control and went with the sheep to graze. They still do this now. The occupational distribution of the Jaad Bhotiya community reveals that 56% are self-



employed, primarily in small-scale businesses or handloom crafts, reflecting a strong reliance on independent livelihoods due to limited formal job opportunities in the remote Himalayan region. Animal husbandry, practiced by 10%, remains an important traditional activity, while agriculture is minimal at 4% due to the challenging terrain.

Labor work accounts for 6%, and 16% are housewives, highlighting a gendered division of labor. Formal employment is scarce, with only 2% in government and 4% in private jobs. Overall, the community's occupations are shaped by their environment, with self-employment and pastoralism being key livelihoods.



Fig 2. (A). woman drying sheared and washed wool in her courtyard (B). Elderly Jaad Bhotiya woman scouring, combing, and cleaning the wool before the carding process (C). Women spinning thread (D). Weaving (E). Storing forest wood for Cooking (F). Interaction with Jaad women during a field visit.

Conclusion

The socio-economic status of Jaad Bhotiya tribal women in Uttarkashi district reflects both traditional and evolving dynamics. While the community has maintained strong cultural ties through self-



employment in crafts and animal husbandry, modern challenges like limited education and healthcare access hinder further progress. The predominance of nuclear families and the aging population highlight shifts in family structures, while the persistence of traditional healing practices underscores the need for improved healthcare awareness. Despite some women attaining higher education, illiteracy remains a significant barrier to their empowerment. To ensure the socio-economic upliftment of Jaad Bhotiya women, there is an urgent need for targeted interventions in education, healthcare, and formal employment opportunities. These efforts will not only enhance their quality of life but also help preserve their unique cultural heritage in a rapidly changing world.

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