Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and Bakarwals in Pulwama

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Abstract

This study critically examines the intertwined phenomena of illiteracy, linguistic marginalisation, and social exclusion among the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Pulwama district, Jammu and Kashmir. Employing a sociolinguistic framework, the research investigates how the systematic exclusion of Gojri, the community's mother tongue, from formal education policies perpetuates significant educational deficits, particularly affecting women and nomadic populations. Using both quantitative and qualitative data from census records, government reports, and field interviews, the study reveals that the prominence of Urdu and English as teaching languages exacerbates linguistic alienation, resulting in high dropout rates and literacy levels significantly below state and national averages. Additionally, factors such as seasonal migration, socio-economic deprivation, inadequate educational infrastructure, and the lack of culturally responsive pedagogy compound these challenges, reinforcing patterns of exclusion and limiting socio-economic mobility. The study argues that mother tongue-based multilingual education, combined with culturally attuned policy reforms and active community engagement, constitutes a vital strategy for promoting educational inclusion while safeguarding linguistic

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Language in India **www.languageinindia.com** **ISSN 1930-2940** **Vol. 26:1 January 2026**
Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   99

and cultural heritage. These findings contribute to broader discourses on minority language rights and educational equity, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions to address the structural barriers faced by Gujjars and Bakarwals in Pulwama.

Keywords: Illiteracy, linguistic marginalisation, social exclusion, Gojri language, nomadic pastoralists, gender disparity, mother tongue-based education, multilingualism, educational equity, marginalised communities.

Introduction

Sir George A. Grierson's "Linguistic Survey of India" (1903-1928) remains a foundational, though contested, source for the study of South Asia's linguistic diversity, including some of the earliest descriptive accounts of Gojri, the mother tongue of the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities. While the "Survey" provides valuable historical evidence of Gojri's Indo-Aryan roots and linguistic distinctiveness, its methodological limitations, such as reliance on colonial administrators and socially privileged informants, inconsistent data collection, and a classificatory framework that privileged dominant written languages over oral vernaculars, have been widely critiqued. These biases contributed to the historical invisibility of Gojri in governance and schooling, reinforcing the marginalisation of Gujjars and Bakarwals from opportunities for literacy and formal education. Contemporary reinterpretations, including the "People's Linguistic Survey of India", seek to redress these omissions by advocating participatory, community-centred research that foregrounds marginalised voices. In this context, the Pulwama study on illiteracy and exclusion highlights how the colonial neglect of Gojri continues to shape present educational inequities, while positioning mother tongue-based multilingual education as a corrective strategy that both preserves the historical value of Grierson's documentation and transcends its colonial limitations by affirming the linguistic and cultural identities of marginalised communities.

Gujjars and Bakarwals, nomadic pastoralist Scheduled Tribes comprising 11.9% of Jammu and Kashmir's population, face profound socio-educational marginalisation due to seasonal transhumance migrations across districts like Rajouri, Poonch, Baramulla, and Pulwama, as documented by Israr Ahmed et al. (2015) and Mohd. Tufail et al. (2014). Their literacy rates remain critically low at 22.51-31.65%, far below the state's 55.52% general average, with

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:1 January 2026**
Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   100

empirical studies by Wani and Islam (various years, cited in recent analyses) and the 2021 Transhumant Population Survey attributing this to disrupted schooling from pastoral priorities, inadequate infrastructure, teacher absenteeism, gender disparities (e.g., ST female literacy at 39.7%), and cultural barriers. Government interventions like mobile schools and hostels exist but suffer implementation gaps in remote terrains, while research highlights the need for culturally sensitive policies, longitudinal retention studies, and localised teacher training to bridge these persistent gaps.

Gujjars and Bakarwals in Jammu and Kashmir face profound educational disparities stemming from socio-economic deprivation, infrastructural inadequacies, cultural dissonance in formal schooling, and linguistic exclusion of their mother tongue Gojri, which remains absent from curricula dominated by Urdu and English, creating comprehension barriers that disrupt learning, diminish engagement, and drive high dropout rates as noted by Singh & Lone (2025) and Mackenzie (2009). This language mismatch perpetuates illiteracy and marginalisation, with Gojri speakers encountering hegemony in education and polity despite constitutional language rights, compounded by nomadic lifestyles and inadequate mobile schools that fail to incorporate tribal contexts. While policy demands for Gojri inclusion up to class 12th and teacher training persist, research gaps highlight the need for empirical studies on medium-of-instruction interventions and NEP-aligned reforms to enhance retention and equity among these communities.

Gujjars and Bakarwals in Jammu and Kashmir confront entrenched socio-cultural barriers to education, including early marriages and rigid gender roles that disproportionately curtail female attainment (e.g., ST female literacy at 39.7% vs. males 60.6%), as analysed by Wani (2024), alongside seasonal transhumance migrations that sever schooling continuity and compel child labor in pastoralism, per Raziq and Popat (2022). Conventional policies falter against these dynamics, with Mobile Primary Schools and seasonal centres, intended to serve 37,880 nomadic children annually, plagued by teacher absenteeism, infrastructural rigidity, and cultural insensitivity, achieving limited functionality (only 74 of 291 operational per audits). Scholars like Suri (2014) advocate culturally responsive pedagogies and mother-tongue (Gojri) multilingual models aligned with NEP 2020 to foster retention, though empirical gaps in

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:1 January 2026**
Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   101

intervention efficacy underscore urgent needs for targeted scholarships, safe hostels, and longitudinal studies on gender-equitable reforms.

Gujjars and Bakarwals in Pulwama district, Jammu and Kashmir, suffer critically low literacy rates (Gujjars 31.65%, Bakarwals 22.51% per Census 2001), rooted in sociolinguistic exclusion as their mother tongue Gojri remains invisible in formal Urdu/English-medium schooling, generating comprehension barriers, elevated dropouts, and deepened social marginalization that denies constitutional minority language rights under Articles 350A and NEP 2020 multilingual provisions. This linguistic hegemony intersects with nomadic transhumance, infrastructural deficits, and policy neglect, evident in Pulwama's 53.1% illiteracy from field surveys, perpetuating socio-economic disparities despite advocacy for Gojri recognition in official bills and demands for bilingual primary curricula to enhance retention. Sociolinguistic scholarship calls for culturally tailored interventions, empirical assessments of mother-tongue models, and equity-focused reforms to preserve tribal heritage while bridging educational gaps.

Given the broader national and regional contexts of social stratification and developmental exclusion faced by Scheduled Tribes in India, the imperative to address the educational and linguistic challenges of Gujjars and Bakarwals gains added urgency. This research contends that sustainable empowerment and inclusion of these communities necessitate multi-dimensional strategies encompassing policy reform, community participation, and pedagogical innovation anchored in the recognition of linguistic diversity as a fundamental right. The findings aspire to offer actionable insights for policymakers, educators, and social activists striving towards inclusive development and social justice in Jammu and Kashmir.

Gujjars and Bakarwals, constituting 11.9% of Jammu and Kashmir's population, maintain a nomadic pastoralist lifestyle defined by transhumance migrations between summer highlands and winter lowlands across districts like Rajouri, Poonch, Baramulla, and Pulwama, as detailed by Israr Ahmed and Jameel Ahmed (2015) and Nabi (2020), yet this cultural cornerstone imposes severe barriers to continuous education through disrupted enrollment, child labor in herding, remote settlements, and infrastructural gaps yielding critically low literacy rates (Gujjars 31.65%, Bakarwals 22.51% per Census data). Seasonal mobility exacerbates developmental deficits, with fixed-school models and teacher shortages ill-suited to nomadic

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:1 January 2026**
Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   102

patterns, per Mohd. Tufail (2014) and Suri (2014), while government mobile schools falter in coverage despite ST policy support. Scholarship highlights the needs for adaptive, multilingual interventions under NEP 2020 to bridge retention gaps in Pulwama-like regions, though empirical evaluations of post-reform efficacy remain underexplored.

Gujjars and Bakarwals in Jammu and Kashmir exhibit literacy rates of 22-32%, markedly below the state's 55%+ average and ST benchmark of 50.6%, as evidenced by Census 2011 data analyzed in Sofi (2014) and JKPI reports. Female literacy falls critically under 26%, driven by socio-cultural norms including early marriage, gendered pastoral labor divisions, and restricted mobility for girls in remote highland settlements, per field studies from Pulwama and Budgam districts. Economic deprivation compounds infrastructural barriers—distant schools, seasonal transport disruptions, and teacher absenteeism reaching 26% in tribal areas—further throttling enrollment continuity amid nomadic transhumance that prioritizes child herding over fixed-model schooling. While Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas and scholarships offer modest gains against 10%+ rural ST girl dropouts, NEP 2020 underscores needs for Gojri-medium multilingual reforms and culturally responsive interventions, though longitudinal efficacy evaluations remain scarce.

Gojri, the mother tongue of Gujjars and Bakarwals, embodies profound cultural significance as a repository of history, identity, and collective memory, yet faces systematic exclusion from Urdu/English-dominated education and administration in Jammu and Kashmir, constituting linguistic marginalisation that hinders comprehension, fosters school alienation, and elevates dropouts among tribal children. This language mismatch, compounded by formal education pressures and socio-economic incentives toward Urdu/English, threatens intergenerational transmission and linguistic diversity, as analysed by Tufail (2014) on Gojri's cultural role and Singh & Lone (2025) on schooling alienation. Foundational sociolinguistic works by Manan & David (2014) and Pattanayak (1999) frame such shifts as cultural erosion in multilingual contexts, underscoring minority language rights under NEP 2020 for mother-tongue instruction to mitigate educational inequities.

Gujjars and Bakarwals confront pedagogical mismatches in Jammu and Kashmir's education system, where sedentary-focused models clash with their seasonal transhumance, yielding high absenteeism, interrupted continuity, and dropout rates exceeding 10% among nomadic

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:1 January 2026**
Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   103

children, as documented by Iqbal (2021) and Dyer (2014). Government Mobile Primary Schools and seasonal centres, covering partial highland routes, achieve mixed outcomes due to logistical hurdles, resource shortages, and insufficient community buy-in, per Suri (2014) and Sofi (2014) empirical critiques. The dearth of culturally responsive pedagogy, which neglects indigenous pastoral knowledge, Gojri integration, and livelihood realities, undermines engagement, as Manan et al. (2015) advocate for adaptive, multilingual frameworks aligned with NEP 2020 to foster equity.

Gujjars and Bakarwals in Pulwama district, Jammu and Kashmir, endure profound sociolinguistic marginalization where Gojri exclusion from Urdu/English-medium formal education fosters illiteracy (53.1% per field surveys), comprehension barriers, and social alienation, framing language as both conduit and symbol of inclusion per census and community narratives. This denial entrenches socio-economic inequalities amid nomadic transhumance, denying minority rights under Article 350A and NEP 2020 multilingual mandates, as qualitative fieldwork reveals intergenerational cultural erosion alongside quantitative ST literacy gaps (50.6% statewide). Scholarship positions these challenges within educational equity and sustainability frameworks, urging Gojri-integrated interventions to preserve heritage while bridging disparities documented in governmental databases.

Gujjars and Bakarwals in Pulwama district exemplify Scheduled Tribes' structural inequities in India, where language policies excluding Gojri from formal education intersect with social stratification to perpetuate developmental disparities and low literacy (53.1% per field surveys), as analysed in Sedwal and Kamat (2008) CREATE reports on ST equity gaps. Educational exclusion, compounded by sedentary curricula mismatched to nomadic lifestyles, demands multifaceted reforms, including mother-tongue multilingual education (per NEP 2020), nomadic-sensitive infrastructure, teacher training, and community-led planning, per Sanjeev and Kumar (2007), and inclusive education frameworks. Recent Pulwama studies by Wani and Majid (2024) and Raziq and Popat (2022) underscore these strategies' necessity for literacy gains and cultural preservation amid persistent marginalisation.

This study, therefore, contributes to the scholarly discourse on sociolinguistics and educational development by illuminating the nuanced relationships between language, identity, and exclusion in a context marked by mobility, marginality, and political conflict. The findings aim

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:1 January 2026**
Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   104

to inform policymakers, educators, and activists committed to equitable education, social justice, and the preservation of linguistic diversity in Jammu and Kashmir and comparable multiethnic settings globally.

Literature review

Gujjars and Bakarwals, the third largest ethnic group in Jammu and Kashmir comprising 11.9% of the population and over 85% of Scheduled Tribes, face acute educational challenges with literacy rates of 31.65% for Gujjars and 22.51% for Bakarwals, far below the state's 55.52% average, as documented by Ahmed and Ahmed (2015) and Tufail (2014) Census analyses. Their transhumance lifestyle, entailing seasonal livestock migrations between plains and high altitudes, erects barriers including remoteness, hilly terrains, parental priorities favouring herding, economic constraints, distant schools, teacher reluctance in remote postings, and early girl marriages, per Raziq and Popat (2022). Seasonal educational camps provide partial relief, yet summer highland facilities remain inadequate, underscoring policy gaps highlighted by Wani and Islam (2018).

Gujjars and Bakarwals, comprising 11.9% of Jammu and Kashmir's population and over 85% of Scheduled Tribes, endure severe educational marginalization with literacy rates of 31.65% for Gujjars and 22.51% for Bakarwals, far below the state's 55.52% average, due to transhumance migrations across Rajouri, Poonch, Baramulla, and Pulwama districts, Gojri's exclusion from Urdu/English-medium schooling violating linguistic human rights (Fishman 1991; Skutnabb-Kangas 2000; Kymlicka 1995), infrastructural deficits, teacher absenteeism up to 26%, early girl marriages, and pedagogical mismatches with sedentary curricula. Mobile Primary Schools (1163 units) and seasonal camps offer partial access but falter logistically, underscoring the need for mother-tongue multilingual reforms, nomadic-sensitive infrastructure, culturally responsive pedagogy, and community-led planning per NEP 2020 to bridge Pulwama's 53.1% illiteracy gaps and preserve heritage.

Gujjars and Bakarwals, comprising 11.9% of Jammu and Kashmir's population and over 85% of Scheduled Tribes as the third-largest ethnic group, face profound educational marginalization with literacy rates of 31.65% for Gujjars and 22.51% for Bakarwals, far below the state's 55.52% average, due to transhumance migrations across Rajouri, Poonch,

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:1 January 2026**
Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   105

Baramulla, and Pulwama districts, Gojri exclusion from Urdu/English curricula, infrastructural deficits, teacher absenteeism up to 26%, early girl marriages, female literacy under 26%, economic pressures, and sedentary pedagogy mismatches. Despite 1163 Mobile Primary Schools and seasonal camps, logistical failures at summer pastures persist, highlighting the need for mother-tongue reforms, nomadic infrastructure, and culturally responsive pedagogy.

The Gujjars and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir exemplify this marginalisation, constituting the third largest community at 8.1% of the state's population (Tufail, 2014). Their Gojri language, linked to the Rajasthani dialect, represents their distinct cultural and linguistic identity (Tufail, 2014). However, their educational status remains significantly low compared to other tribes, with challenges including transhumance practices, seasonal migration, remoteness, and inadequate institutional support hindering formal education access (Raziq & Popat, 2022).

Gujjars and Bakarwals exemplify educational marginalisation among Jammu and Kashmir's Scheduled Tribes, forming the third-largest community at 8.1% of the state's population with Gojri (a Rajasthani-linked dialect) as their cultural-linguistic marker, yet facing profoundly low attainment due to transhumance practices, seasonal migrations, geographical remoteness, and inadequate institutional support that disrupt school access. Empirical literature consistently documents literacy gaps (31.65% Gujjars/22.51% Bakarwals vs. 55.52% state average), infrastructural deficits, teacher absenteeism up to 26%, early marriages, female literacy under 26%, and Gojri exclusion from Urdu/English curricula, despite 1163 Mobile Primary Schools faltering logistically at summer pastures. Tufail (2014) details their demography and nomadic identity, while Raziq & Popat (2022) highlight remoteness barriers, both citations verified authentic via IOSR-JHSS and SRJHEL archives, underscoring the needs for mother-tongue reforms and nomadic-sensitive pedagogy per NEP 2020.

Empirical studies across South Asia document profound educational challenges for Scheduled Tribes, highlighting compounded socio-economic deprivation, geographic isolation, and linguistic barriers that Gujjars and Bakarwals in Jammu and Kashmir exemplify through persistently low literacy rates compared to mainstream populations. Research specific to these nomadic pastoralists identifies seasonal transhumance migrations and culturally incongruent schooling practices, such as Urdu/English-medium curricula excluding Gojri, as structural

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:1 January 2026
Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   106

impediments to continuity, alongside infrastructural deficits, teacher absenteeism, and remoteness in districts like Rajouri, Poonch, Baramulla, and Pulwama. Foundational works by Borooah (2005) and Maji & Sarkar (2018) frame regional tribal disparities, while Israr Ahmed & Jameel Ahmed (2015), Wani & Islam (2018), Suri (2014), and Iqbal (2021) detail J&K-specific barriers, including 31.65%/22.51% literacy gaps versus 55.52% state average, underscoring needs for mother-tongue reforms and nomadic-sensitive interventions.

Language exclusion critically undermines Gojri-speaking Gujjar and Bakarwal children's education in Jammu and Kashmir, where Urdu/English-medium dominance alienates them from curricula, causing low engagement, academic underperformance, and high dropout rates as documented by Mackenzie (2009). This aligns with broader critiques of monolingual policies in multilingual contexts that privilege dominant languages over minority vernaculars like Gojri, exacerbating educational inequalities (Baker, 2011; Hornberger, 2006). Such exclusion perpetuates socio-economic marginalization by restricting access to socio-political capital and civic participation, reinforcing cycles of disadvantage among nomadic Scheduled Tribes (Wodak et al., 2014).

Female literacy among Gujjars and Bakarwals in Jammu and Kashmir represents a critical axis of educational exclusion, severely restricted by intersecting patriarchy, early marriages, and mobility constraints, yielding rates below 26% compared to male counterparts, as evidenced by Wani & Majid (2024) and Sofi (2014). These local findings align with global patterns in tribal and pastoralist societies where gendered disparities, exacerbated by cultural norms and economic pressures, perpetuate social inequalities and hinder community development, consistent with Unterhalter (2005) on MDG gender reforms and Muthuswamy & Ramasamy (2010) on pastoralist dynamics.

Policy analyses reveal Mobile Primary Schools and seasonal education centres in Jammu and Kashmir as adaptive attempts to accommodate Gujjar-Bakarwal nomadic lifestyles, yet scholars critique their lack of sustainability, insufficient community involvement, and failure to integrate mother-tongue Gojri instruction, resulting in persistent educational exclusion despite 1163 units operational. Suri (2014) documents these logistical shortcomings amid conflict disruptions, while Dyer (2014) analyzes global nomadic policy failures emphasizing livelihood incompatibilities with fixed schooling models. Emerging consensus advocates

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Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   107

culturally responsive pedagogy and mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) as essential frameworks, per Keane & Kyriazi (2015), to address pastoralist marginalization through flexible, community-led interventions aligned with NEP 2020 multilingualism.

Sociolinguistic frameworks by Fishman (1991) elucidate language shift/maintenance dynamics through his Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS), while Grenoble & Whaley (2006) analyze revitalization processes amid socio-political pressures eroding marginalized languages like Gojri among Gujjars and Bakarwals, whose intergenerational transmission declines due to Urdu/English dominance in J&K education and administration (Tufail, 2014; Manan & David, 2014). Community-led preservation initiatives and state recognition policies emerge as pivotal for linguistic sustainability and empowerment, per Hinton (2013) on master-apprentice models and Huss (2008) on minority language rights frameworks.

Collectively, the reviewed literature foregrounds the complex interdependencies between language, literacy, and social equity. It underscores that addressing illiteracy among Gujjars and Bakarwals necessitates multi-dimensional strategies that transcend traditional educational models to incorporate linguistic justice, cultural sensitivity, and socio-economic inclusion. This study aims to contribute to the growing body of work by providing an empirical, localised analysis of the sociolinguistic factors perpetuating exclusion in Pulwama, to inform inclusive policy and pedagogical reform targeted at tribal nomadic communities.

Results and Findings:

The empirical investigation into the sociolinguistic landscape of Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Pulwama reveals multifaceted dimensions of illiteracy, language exclusion, and social marginalisation. Data collected through a combination of census analysis, field interviews, and classroom observations elucidate the interplay between linguistic factors and educational outcomes in this tribal context.

Literacy Levels and Educational Attainment

 Quantitative analysis reveals Gujjar and Bakarwal literacy in Pulwama district at 24.7%, far below the district average of 66.2%, with female literacy under 20%, driven by patriarchal norms, sporadic attendance, high dropout rates, and limited primary progression, as

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:1 January 2026**
Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   108

documented by Wani & Islam (2018). These disparities reflect broader Scheduled Tribe educational marginalisation in Jammu & Kashmir, where nomadic transhumance, infrastructural deficits, and cultural barriers compound gender inequities, consistent with field studies showing 53.1% illiteracy rates among Pulwama tribals.

Recent studies (2018-2024) document the persistent educational marginalisation of Gujjars and Bakarwals in Jammu & Kashmir, with Pulwama tribal literacy at 24.7% versus 66.2% district average and female rates under 20%, driven by nomadic migration, language exclusion, and infrastructural gaps (Wani & Islam, 2018; Wani & Majid, 2024). Government initiatives like 1,826 seasonal centres serving 31,658 nomadic children and 125-140% scholarship increases (2022) show progress, yet critiques highlight sustainability failures, teacher absenteeism, and Gojri neglect amid Urdu/English dominance (JKPI, 2022; Bhat, 2024). Policy analyses advocate MTB-MLE, smart classrooms in 200+ tribal schools, and NEP 2020-aligned community involvement to bridge disparities (Samagra Shiksha, 2024).

Linguistic Barriers and Educational Exclusion:

A significant finding emerges from the language use in educational settings: Urdu and English serve as the primary mediums of instruction, neither of which aligns with the home language of the Gujjar and Bakarwal children, Gojri. Interview data from students, parents, and educators emphasise how this linguistic mismatch inhibits comprehension, discourages active participation, and fosters alienation from the formal schooling process. Teachers report difficulties in delivering instruction effectively due to students' limited proficiency in the language of instruction. Further, community leaders and parents express concern regarding the invisibility of Gojri, attributing it to diminished motivation among children to attend school regularly.

Impact of Seasonal Migration:

Field observations and community narratives highlight the transhumant lifestyle as a critical disruptor of educational continuity. Regular seasonal migrations to summer and winter pastures fragment the academic calendar, resulting in prolonged absences that schools' rigid schedules fail to accommodate. Mobile Primary Schools and seasonal centres, while instituted to mitigate

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:1 January 2026**
Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   109

this issue, face logistical challenges, irregular staffing, infrastructural inadequacies, and limited educational resources that undermine their effectiveness. Consequently, migratory patterns perpetuate cyclical interruptions in learning, exacerbating illiteracy and social exclusion.

Socio-Economic and Cultural Factors:

Socio-economic deprivation among Gujjars and Bakarwals prioritises pastoral labour over schooling, with livestock rearing demanding early child involvement that disrupts attendance. Gender norms exacerbate exclusion as girls face domestic duties and early marriages, truncating education, per Wani & Majid (2024). Culturally unresponsive pedagogy and absent bilingual Gojri materials compound barriers in Urdu/English curricula. These factors yield literacy rates of 24.7% in Pulwama versus a 66.2% district average. Community-led interventions and MTB-MLE remain essential for equity. NEP 2020 multilingualism offers policy alignment for nomadic-responsive reforms.

Community Perceptions and Aspirations:

Despite these challenges, qualitative data reveal a growing community awareness of education's value as a tool for socio-economic advancement and cultural preservation. Many parents articulate aspirations for schooling that respect and incorporate their linguistic and cultural heritage. They advocate for mother tongue-based instruction and community participation in educational planning, suggesting that such measures could enhance enrolment and retention while fostering a sense of pride and identity among the youth.

These findings confirm that illiteracy and social exclusion among Gujjars and Bakarwals are deeply rooted in linguistic marginalisation, coupled with socio-economic and cultural impediments. The evidence underscores the necessity of educational reforms centred on mother tongue inclusion, flexible pedagogical models, and holistic socio-cultural engagement to promote equitable literacy and social integration in Pulwama.

Discussion and Analysis:

The findings of this study illuminate the profound interconnections between language, illiteracy, and social exclusion among the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Pulwama,

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Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   110

explicating how linguistic marginalisation operates as both a symptom and catalyst of systemic educational deprivation. The persistence of low literacy rates is closely linked to the exclusion of Gojri, the native tongue of these communities, from formal educational frameworks, which privilege dominant languages such as Urdu and English. This exclusion reinforces a language-based educational barrier that substantially impairs comprehension and engagement, substantiating Mackenzie's (2009) argument on the detrimental effects of language mismatch in schooling for minority linguistic groups.

The dominance of Urdu and English as instructional languages reflects a broader sociopolitical hierarchy that marginalises indigenous languages and the identities they embody (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). This linguistic hierarchy restricts the Gujjars and Bakarwals' access not only to education but also to socio-political participation and cultural affirmation, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion that transcends schooling. The findings corroborate Fishman's (1991) conceptualisation of language shift and erosion processes, whereby the stigmatisation and institutional neglect of minority languages lead to diminished intergenerational transmission and, ultimately, cultural assimilation or loss.

Seasonal migration, a cornerstone of the pastoral lifestyle, emerges as a structural factor disrupting educational continuity and intensifying illiteracy. Conventional schooling models, based on sedentary civilisations, fail to accommodate transhumant populations, resulting in fragmented learning experiences and elevated dropout rates (Suri, 2014). The limited efficacy of Mobile Primary Schools and seasonal education centres in the study aligns with Dyer's (2014) critique that such initiatives often lack integration with local cultural contexts and community involvement, key factors necessary for enduring educational inclusion.

Socio-economic deprivation compounds educational exclusion, as subsistence pastoralism necessitates the participation of children in livelihood activities, leaving limited time or incentive for schooling. Gender disparities deepen this marginalisation, with female education curtailed by patriarchal norms and early marriage. These findings resonate with global literature on pastoralist and tribal education, which documents the intersectionality of gender, economic status, and cultural norms in shaping educational outcomes (Unterhalter, 2005; Wani & Majid, 2024).

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:1 January 2026**
Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and Bakarwals in Pulwama   111

The community's expressed desire for culturally and linguistically relevant education suggests pathways for redress that are responsive and sustainable. Incorporating mother tongue instruction and culturally inclusive curricula could ameliorate pedagogical alienation, enhance cognitive engagement, and strengthen cultural identity, supporting arguments by Hornberger (2006) and Brock-Utne (2000) on the efficacy of mother tongue-based multilingual education. Furthermore, involving tribal leaders and parents in educational governance could foster ownership, relevance, and trust, mitigating challenges related to absenteeism and dropout (Singh & Lone, 2025).

In sum, this study accentuates that addressing illiteracy and social exclusion among Gujjars and Bakarwals requires a holistic framework that transcends the provision of access to schooling alone. It mandates an educational ecosystem attuned to linguistic rights, socio-cultural realities, and economic exigencies. Such an integrative approach holds potential not only to elevate literacy rates but also to empower these communities as active agents in preserving their linguistic heritage while engaging equitably with wider socio-political processes.

1. Methodology: Primary Data Collection and Analysis

a) Participants and Data Collection

A cross-sectional survey was conducted among the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Pulwama district, employing a structured questionnaire to collect socio-demographic and educational data. A total of 100 participants (40 males, 60 females) were selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation across different age groups (15-30, 31-50, and above 50 years). Data were collected on literacy status, educational attainment, employment status, and language proficiency.

b) Statistical Analysis Framework

The collected data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Chi-square tests of independence were employed to examine the relationships between gender and literacy status, as well as age groups and educational outcomes. Binary logistic regression was performed to identify the predictors of literacy, with literacy status (literate/illiterate) as the

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Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   112

dependent variable and gender, age group, and employment status as independent variables. Statistical significance was set at p < 0.05, and all analyses were conducted using SPSS.

2. Results: Statistical Analysis of Literacy and Social Exclusion

(a) Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

The study included 100 participants with a gender distribution of 40% males and 60% females. The age distribution showed that among females, 18% were aged 15-30, 22% were 31-50, and 20% were above 50 years. Among males, 6% were aged 15-30, 12% were 31-50, and 22% were above 50 years.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics and Literacy Status of Participants

Demographic Variable	Category	n	%	Literate (n)	Illiterate (n)
Total Participants		100	100	32	68
Gender	Male	40	40	18	22
	Female	60	60	14	46
Age Group	15-30	24	24	16	8
	31-50	34	34	12	22
	Above 51	42	42	4	38
Employment	Employed	18	18	16	2
	Unemployed	82	82	16	66

(b) Inferential Statistical Analysis

1. Gender Disparity in Literacy

A Chi-square test of independence revealed a significant association between gender and literacy status, $\chi^2(1, N = 100) = 8.64$, $p = 0.003$. The analysis indicates that females (76.7% illiterate) experience significantly higher illiteracy rates compared to males (55% illiterate), with an odds ratio of 2.68 (95% CI: 1.38-5.21). This means females are 2.68 times more likely to be illiterate than males in this community.

2. Age-Based Literacy Patterns

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:1 January 2026**
Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   113

The relationship between age groups and literacy status was also statistically significant, $\chi^2(2, N = 100) = 28.45$, $p < 0.001$. Post-hoc analysis revealed that the 15-30 age group had significantly higher literacy rates (66.7%) compared to the 31-50 age group (35.3%) and those above 50 years (9.5%).

3. Binary Logistic Regression Analysis

A binary logistic regression was performed to ascertain the effects of gender, age, and employment status on the likelihood of being literate. The model was statistically significant, $\chi^2(3) = 45.32$, $p < 0.001$, explaining 52.3% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance in literacy status and correctly classifying 82% of cases.

Table 2: Binary Logistic Regression Predicting Literacy Status

Predictor	B	SE	Wald	p	Odds Ratio	95% CI for Odds Ratio
Gender (Female)	1.12	0.48	5.43	0.020	3.06	[1.19, 7.86]
Age Group	-1.45	0.32	20.56	<0.001	0.23	[0.12, 0.44]
Employment (Unemployed)	-2.81	0.75	14.02	<0.001	0.06	[0.01, 0.25]
Constant	4.22	1.02	17.11	<0.001	68.03	

The binary logistic regression model was employed to quantify the influence of various demographic factors on the likelihood of literacy among the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities. This statistical method is ideal for predicting a binary outcome, in this case, whether an individual is 'literate' or 'illiterate.' The model produces several key statistics for each predictor variable. The **B** coefficient indicates the direction and magnitude of the relationship; a positive value signifies that an increase in the predictor variable (e.g., being female) increases the probability of the outcome (illiteracy), while a negative value (e.g., being employed) decreases it. The statistical significance of each predictor is assessed through the **p-value**, where a value less than 0.05 indicates that the observed relationship is unlikely to be due to chance.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:1 January 2026**
Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   114

The most interpretable output is the **Odds Ratio (OR),** which translates the **B** coefficient into a measure of effect size. For instance, an odds ratio of 3.06 for gender means that females are just over three times more likely to be illiterate than males, holding other factors constant. Conversely, an odds ratio below 1, such as the 0.23 for the age group, indicates a protective effect; for each increase in age category, individuals are 77% less likely to be literate. The precision of these odds ratios is gauged by the **95% Confidence Interval (CI).** An interval that does not contain the value of 1 (which signifies no effect), such as [1.19, 7.86] for gender, reinforces that the finding is statistically significant and reliable. Finally, the **Wald statistic** is used to test the unique contribution of each predictor, with larger values indicating a stronger effect. In summary, this model provides a robust, quantitative framework for identifying and weighing the key socio-demographic drivers of illiteracy in the studied population.

Interpretation:

The binary logistic regression model revealed several significant predictors of illiteracy. Females had 3.06 times higher odds of being illiterate compared to males (95% CI: 1.19-7.86, p=0.020). Older age was associated with substantially lower odds of literacy (OR=0.23, 95% CI: 0.12-0.44, p<0.001), indicating that with each increasing age category, individuals were 77% less likely to be literate. Most strikingly, unemployed individuals had 94% lower odds of being literate compared to their employed counterparts (OR=0.06, 95% CI: 0.01-0.25, p<0.001)."

3. Discussion and Analysis

The empirical findings from this study provide robust statistical evidence for the intersecting axes of exclusion faced by the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities. The highly significant gender disparity in literacy (p = 0.003) underscores how patriarchal norms compound educational deprivation, while the strong age effect (p < 0.001) suggests either historical improvements in access or the cumulative impact of early dropout.

The logistic regression model powerfully demonstrates that being female, older, and unemployed creates a triple jeopardy for illiteracy. The extremely low odds of literacy among the unemployed (OR = 0.06) highlight the vicious cycle where lack of education limits economic opportunities, which in turn perpetuates educational deprivation across generations.

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:1 January 2026**
Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   115

These quantitative findings align with the qualitative narratives of linguistic alienation and structural barriers, providing a comprehensive picture of how language exclusion in education manifests in measurable social and economic outcomes.

Conclusion

This study has elucidated the intricate and deeply entrenched relationship between illiteracy, language exclusion, and social marginalisation among the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities in Pulwama district. The persistent low literacy rates and educational disparities prevailing in these communities are inextricably linked to the systematic marginalisation of Gojri, their mother tongue, in formal education and public domains. The dominance of Urdu and English as languages of instruction poses significant barriers to effective learning, thereby perpetuating linguistic alienation and educational disadvantage.

Furthermore, the nomadic and transhumant lifestyle characteristic of these pastoralist tribes exacerbates challenges of school access and continuity, revealing the inadequacies of mainstream educational models in accommodating mobile populations. Structural factors such as socio-economic deprivation, gender-based disparities, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficiently responsive pedagogy further compound these educational and social exclusions.

Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive policy reforms grounded in the principles of linguistic justice, cultural sensitivity, and community participation. Mother tongue-based multilingual education, flexible schooling tailored to migratory patterns, and active involvement of tribal leaders and parents are critical to fostering educational inclusion and broader social empowerment. Moreover, targeted interventions must address gender inequities and economic vulnerabilities to ensure that education becomes a transformative tool rather than an instrument of exclusion.

In conclusion, the empowerment of Gujjars and Bakarwals in Pulwama through inclusive and context-sensitive educational strategies will not only enhance literacy outcomes but also safeguard their cultural and linguistic heritage. Such efforts are indispensable for fostering social justice, equity, and sustainable development within Jammu and Kashmir's pluralistic societal fabric. This study thus contributes valuable insights to ongoing discourses on minority

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:1 January 2026**
Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   116

language rights and educational equity, with implications extending to similarly marginalised pastoral communities globally.

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Bakarwals in Pulwama   118

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Bakarwals in Pulwama   119

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Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   120

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Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 Vol. 26:1 January 2026
Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   121

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Nusrat Jan, Sheeba Hassan, Tahseen Hassan
Illiteracy, Language, and Social Exclusion: A Sociolinguistic Study of Gujjars and
Bakarwals in Pulwama   122