

A study on Socio-Educational Problems and Academic Achievement of Gujjar Community in Kupwara District

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ABSTRACT

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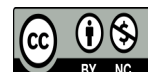
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The present paper deals with the various socio-educational problems faced by the Gujjar secondary school students of Kupwara District and their direct impact on academic achievement. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and data was collected from $N = 240$ secondary school students (130 male, 110 female; 120 nomadic/semi-migratory, 120 settled) studying in government secondary and higher secondary schools in four educational zones (Kupwara, Karnah, Trehgam and Sogam/Lolab) using a multi-stage stratified random sampling strategy. Data were collected with the Socio-Educational Problems Inventory (SEPI). Academic achievement scores were compiled from students' official Class promotional examination records, concurrently. Inferential analyzes revealed significant gender differences, with female students reporting significantly greater levels of domestic labor and household responsibilities ($t = -5.87, p < .001$). For all 4 dimensions, nomadic students were significantly more structurally, economically, and institutionally disadvantaged than their settled counterparts ($t = 11.23, p < .001$). There was a strong and statistically significant inverse correlation between the total socio-educational problems and academic achievement ($r = -.584, p < .001$). Multiple regression analysis indicated that socio-educational problems accounted for 38.6% of the variance in academic achievement ($R^2 = .386, F = 36.94, p < .001$). Domestic demands and infrastructural isolation were the strongest negative predictors. The findings call for targeted educational reforms including localized seasonal school calendars, enhanced residential schooling and culturally responsive bilingual bridge pedagogy.

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1. INTRODUCTION:

The tribal communities of the Indian subcontinent have traditionally evolved through a varied socio-political and developmental sphere. The Gujjars and Bakarwals, declared Scheduled Tribes in 1991, constitute the third largest ethnic group in Jammu and Kashmir, possessing a distinct Gojri linguistic identity and pastoral traditions. While a segment

has settled, large numbers remain transhumant, migrating every season between the settlements of the foothills and high-altitude alpine pastures (dhoks). These pastoral livelihoods confront severe environmental obstacles in Kupwara District, at the far northwestern Himalayan frontier. Formal schooling systems that require fixed schedules and standard language proficiency (Urdu and English) are at risk with household dependencies on seasonal migration, herding, fuel gathering, and child domestic labour in remote border tehsils like Karnah, Keran, Machil, and the upper reaches of Lolab Valley. Despite targeted welfare interventions like the Right to Education (RTE) Act, Samagra Shiksha and Tribal Sub-Plan initiatives, secondary educational attainment among Gujjar youth in border belts remains severely deteriorating in comparison to non-tribal equivalents. The shift to secondary classes (Grades IX and X) is a crucial obstacle where rising academic demands meet systemic deprived conditions. Economic distress, lack of school infrastructure, linguistic alienation and household labour burdens cause lower cognitive and standardised academic performance. It is important to understand the relative influence of these interlinked socio-educational constraints for developing context sensitive educational policies for promoting retention and academic achievement among tribal learners in frontier regions.

Need and Importance of the Study

The macro-demographic trends of Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir have been given in detail in extensive studies but empirical studies on the border geography of Kupwara District are still lagging behind. Previous field assessments have primarily concentrated on southern Pir Panjal districts such as Rajouri and Poonch or have looked at settlements adjacent to urban centers in the Valley. Kupwara has its own geo-climatic realities: harsh winters, repeated road blockages, cross-border security tensions and persistent physical isolation disrupt continuity in schooling.

Mainstream policy discourse also homogenizes tribal learners, overlooking internal divides based on gender roles and household mobility patterns. Boys as adolescents are also often expected to engage early in animal husbandry and wage labor. Female students balance heavy domestic responsibilities with strict community restrictions.

To fill this gap, standardized measurement instruments will provide the empirical baseline. Local educational administrators, planning authorities of Kupwara and the Department of Tribal Affairs need accurate data on how specific structural impediments predict academic performance. This evidence base guides targeted resource allocation, responsive school calendars, and localized curriculum design.

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To find the overall level of socio-educational problems experienced by secondary school students belonging to the Gujjar community in Kupwara District.
2. To find significant differences in perceived socio-educational problems among Gujjar students based on gender.
3. To find significant differences in socio-educational problems between nomadic/semi-migratory and settled Gujjar students.
4. To compare the academic achievement of Gujjar secondary school students across gender and migratory patterns.
5. To find the nature and magnitude of the relationship between socio-educational problem dimensions and academic achievement among Gujjar students.
6. To find the relative contribution of distinct socio-educational problem dimensions in predicting variance in students' academic achievement.

3. Hypotheses of the Study

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between male and female Gujjar secondary school students in their perceived socio-educational problems.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between nomadic/semi-migratory and settled Gujjar secondary school students in their perceived socio-educational problems.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference in the academic achievement of Gujjar secondary school students based on gender and migratory pattern, nor is there a significant interaction effect between them.

H₀₄: There is no significant correlation between socio-educational problems (composite and dimensional) and academic achievement among Gujjar secondary school students.

H₀₅: The sub-dimensions of socio-educational problems (Financial & Subsistence Burden, Infrastructural & Transport Deficit, Linguistic & Curricular Alienation, Domestic Labor & Seasonal Demands) do not significantly predict the academic achievement of Gujjar secondary school students.

4. Review of Related Literature

Sharma (1988) studied socialization and informal education among Jammu and Kashmir tribes and found that pastoral kinship demands led elders to view formal schooling as a disruption to grazing and dairy labor, resulting in high dropout rates and the near-total exclusion of girls. Wani (1992) studied the educational problems of Gujjars in Breng Valley, South Kashmir, and found that geographic dispersion, transhumance, poverty, and an Urdu/English curriculum lacking Gojri linguistic context triggered severe student attrition.

Baba (1992) studied the academic achievement and social awareness of Gujjar and Bakarwal boys of Srinagar and found the performance of the hostellers much better than the non-hostellers as the residential facilities saved them from home labor and pasture duties.

Ananda (1995) examined educational wastage and stagnation among tribal children in Jammu and Kashmir and found that the highest dropouts were observed during the transition from primary to upper-primary levels, which was attributed to seasonal migration, irregular mobile schooling, and teacher absenteeism. Dar (2017) studied the school infrastructure facilities for Gujjar and Bakarwal learners in Kashmir and found that more than 65% of the schools did not have drinking water, girl friendly toilets, heating and proper seating, which resulted in high absenteeism and winter dropouts. Ganie (2018) examined the educational status of Gujjar children in South Kashmir and found huge literacy gaps because of poverty, illiteracy, and dependence on child labor. Girls had the highest dropouts due to their roles at home and unsafe travel to forests. Saxena and Kumar (2018) studied the socio-educational problems of Gujjar students in northern India and found that the boys faced economic anxieties and pressure to earn while the girls were constrained by household chores, limited mobility and early marriage expectations.

5. Methodology of the Study

5.1 Research Design

A quantitative, ex-post-facto descriptive survey design was used in the present study. The socio-educational conditions and academic achievement levels are naturally occurring in the lived context of the Gujjar community, hence an ex-post-facto correlational and differential framework was selected to observe and analyze the existing variables without experimental manipulation.

5.2 Population and Sample Size

The study population included all the enrolled secondary school students (Grade IX and X) belonging to the Gujjar Scheduled Tribe community and studying in the government secondary schools of Kupwara District. A multistage stratified random sampling method was adopted to ensure that the sample was geographically, gender-wise and migratory-wise balanced.

In the first phase, four educational zones of Kupwara District were selected to capture the geographic and ecological heterogeneity: Kupwara (central plains/foothills), Karnah (remote border valley across Sadhna Pass), Trehgam (semi-plain border belt) and Sogam/Lolab (forest peripheral belt). The second stage was the random selection of 12 government secondary schools, three from each zone, with high Gujjar student enrollments. The last stage consisted of the total sample $N = 240$ Gujjar students. The sample was proportionally stratified into 130 male (54.2%) and 110 female (45.8%) students and was evenly divided into 120 nomadic/semi-migratory students (50.0%) and 120 settled students (50.0%).

5.3 Tools Used for the Study

1. Socio-Educational Problems Inventory (SEPI): SEPI has been developed and standardized for secondary tribal learners of high-altitude environments. SEPI has 40 items distributed in four discrete sub-dimensions: (a) Financial & Subsistence Burden (FSB, 10 items); (b) Infrastructural & Transport Deficit (ITD, 10 items); (c) Linguistic & Curricular Alienation (LCA, 10 items); and (d) Domestic Labor & Seasonal Demands (DLM, 10 items). Items were rated on a 5-point Likert Scale from 1 ('Strongly Disagree') to 5 ('Strongly Agree'). The instrument demonstrated good internal consistency, with an overall Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = .89$ and sub-scale reliabilities ranging between $\alpha = .81$ and $\alpha = .87$. Content and construct validity were established by a panel of five experts in tribal education, educational psychology, and sociology.

2. Academic Achievement Metric Academic achievement was measured as the percentage of cumulative aggregate obtained by students in the standardized Class IX terminal promotional board examinations conducted by the Jammu and Kashmir Board of School Education (JKBOSE). The achievement was verified through official school administrative registers.

5.4 Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected through direct visits to the selected schools in the four zones. School heads, parents and students who participated gave their informed consent. The questionnaires were conducted in a quiet classroom environment, and explanations were given in both Gojri and Urdu when clarification was required. Participants' data was kept strictly confidential and anonymous.

5.5 Statistical Technique Used

The empirical data were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics: (a) Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) for baseline profiling; (b) Independent samples t-tests to examine demographic and migratory mean differences; (c) Two-way Analysis of Variance (2x2 ANOVA) to find main and interaction effects on academic achievement; (d) Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) to assess bivariate associations; and (e) Multiple linear regression analysis to estimate the predictive power of socio-educational dimensions on academic achievement. All tests were evaluated at the .05 and .01 levels of statistical significance.

6. Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Gender-Wise Comparison of Socio-Educational Problems

Dimension / Variable	Gender	N	M	SD	t-value	p-value	Significance
Financial & Subsistence Burden	Male	130	38.45	6.12	2.14	.033	p < .05
	Female	110	36.68	6.74			
Infrastructural & Transport Deficit	Male	130	37.10	7.04	0.81	.419	Not Significant
	Female	110	36.32	7.82			

Linguistic & Curricular Alienation	Male	130	34.50	6.80	-0.65	.516	Not
	Female	110	35.12	7.75			Significant
Domestic Labor & Seasonal Demands	Male	130	32.18	6.95	-5.87	< .001	p < .001
	Female	110	37.84	7.91			
Composite Socio-Educational Score	Male	130	142.23	19.34	-2.18	.030	p < .05
	Female	110	147.96	21.40			

Table 1 shows that female Gujar secondary school students had a significantly higher composite socio-educational problem score ($M = 147.96$, $SD = 21.40$) than male students ($M = 142.23$, $SD = 19.34$). The resultant t-value of -2.18 is statistically significant at the .05 level ($p = .030$). Analysis of specific sub-dimensions shows clear gender differences, with male students experiencing significantly greater financial and subsistence burdens ($M = 38.45$ vs. 36.68 ; $t = 2.14$, $p = .033$), largely due to early livelihood demands and animal husbandry labor. By contrast, female students reported significantly greater domestic labor and household demands ($M = 37.84$ vs. 32.18 ; $t = -5.87$, $p < .001$), including activities such as cooking, sibling care, and cattle tending. There were no significant differences by gender in perceptions of infrastructural deficits ($t = 0.81$, $p = .419$) or linguistic alienation ($t = -0.65$, $p = .516$). The difference in composite socio-educational problem scores between male and female students is statistically significant ($t = -2.18$, $p = .030$), and as such, the null hypothesis H01 is rejected. Thus, though both genders face educational challenges, female Gujar adolescents in Kupwara face higher cumulative socio-educational distress, especially in relation to household domestic responsibilities.

Table 2: Comparison of Socio-Educational Problems Based on Migratory Status

Dimension / Variable	Type	N	M	SD	t-value	p-value	Significance
Financial & Subsistence Burden	Nomadic	120	40.12	5.45	6.64	< .001	p < .001
	Settled	120	35.15	6.30			
Infrastructural & Transport Deficit	Nomadic	120	40.85	5.80	9.77	< .001	p < .001
	Settled	120	32.62	7.14			
Linguistic & Curricular Alienation	Nomadic	120	36.92	6.42	4.67	< .001	p < .001
	Settled	120	32.65	7.51			
Domestic Labor & Seasonal Demands	Nomadic	120	39.54	6.22	10.96	< .001	p < .001
	Settled	120	29.98	7.15			
Composite Socio-Educational Score	Nomadic	120	157.43	16.24	11.23	< .001	p < .001
	Settled	120	130.40	20.31			

There are large and highly significant differences between nomadic and settled Gujar students on all four dimensions studied as shown in Table 2. The nomadic and semi-migratory students scored significantly higher in the composite problem score ($M = 157.43$, $SD = 16.24$) than settled students ($M = 130.40$, $SD = 20.31$), $t = 11.23$ ($p < .001$, extreme). Nomadic students report significantly higher demands in the areas of domestic and seasonal labor ($M=39.54$ versus 29.98 ; $t=10.96$, $p<.001$), infrastructural deficits ($M=40.85$ versus 32.62 ; $t=9.77$, $p<.001$), financial distress ($M=40.12$ versus 35.15 ; $t=6.64$, $p<.001$), and linguistic/curricular alienation ($M=36.92$ versus 32.65 ; $t=4.67$, $p<.001$) as measured by dimensional sub-scores. The null hypothesis H02 is rejected as the differences between nomadic and settled Gujar students are statistically significant on composite and sub-scale measures ($p < .001$). Compared to settled community

settings, empirical evidence suggests that transhumance, geographical mobility and seasonal pastoral displacement are serious structural obstacles.

Table 3: Academic Achievement Across Gender and Migratory Pattern (Two-Way ANOVA)

Source of Variation	Type III SS	df	Mean Square (MS)	F-ratio	p-value	Partial η^2
Gender (A)	486.20	1	486.20	4.92	.028	.020
Migratory Status (B)	6214.55	1	6214.55	62.91	< .001	.210
Interaction (A × B)	182.40	1	182.40	1.85	.175	.008
Error (Residual)	23310.85	236	98.77	—	—	—

Table 3 shows the two-way ANOVA results for academic achievement across gender and migratory status. The main effect of migratory status is statistically significant with a substantial effect size ($F(1, 236) = 62.91$, $p < .001$, Partial $\eta^2 = .210$). Settled students achieved substantially higher mean academic percentages (Male Settled: $M = 59.8\%$, $SD = 9.7$; Female Settled: $M = 58.9\%$, $SD = 9.9$) than nomadic students (Male Nomadic: $M = 48.6\%$, $SD = 9.8$; Female Nomadic: $M = 45.4\%$, $SD = 10.4$). The main effect of gender was also statistically significant ($F(1, 236) = 4.92$, $p = .028$, Partial $\eta^2 = .020$), indicating slightly higher aggregate marks for male students. However, the interaction effect between gender and migratory status (Gender × Migratory Status) did not attain statistical significance ($F(1, 236) = 1.85$, $p = .175$, Partial $\eta^2 = .008$). Since the main effects of migratory status ($p < .001$) and gender ($p = .028$) are statistically significant, the null hypothesis H03 is rejected with respect to the main demographic factors. The lack of a significant interaction effect indicates that the academic disadvantage linked to transhumance affects male and female students in a comparable manner.

Table 4: Correlation Matrix Between Socio-Educational Problems and Academic Achievement

Variables	FSB (1)	ITD (2)	LCA (3)	DLM (4)	Composite SEPI (5)	Academic Ach. (6)
1. Financial Burden (FSB)	1.000	—	—	—	—	—
2. Infrastructural Deficit (ITD)	.412**	1.000	—	—	—	—
3. Linguistic Alienation (LCA)	.328**	.448**	1.000	—	—	—
4. Domestic Labor/Demands (DLM)	.465**	.512**	.390**	1.000	—	—
5. Composite SEPI Score	.724**	.801**	.710**	.815**	1.000	—
6. Academic Achievement	-.418**	-.482**	-.365**	-.526**	-.584**	1.000

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), $N = 240$.

Table 4 shows a statistically significant inverse correlation between socio-educational problems and academic achievement across all measured dimensions. The composite SEPI score demonstrates a strong negative correlation with academic achievement ($r = -.584$, $p < .001$). Examining individual sub-scales, domestic labor and seasonal demands exhibited the strongest negative association with performance ($r = -.526$, $p < .001$), followed by infrastructural deficits ($r = -.482$, $p < .001$), financial burdens ($r = -.418$, $p < .001$), and linguistic alienation ($r = -.365$, $p < .001$). The positive inter-correlations among the SEPI sub-scales (ranging from $r = .328$ to $.512$) indicate that these socio-educational difficulties reinforce one another in remote tribal environments. Since the correlation coefficients between composite and dimensional socio-educational problems and academic achievement are statistically significant ($p < .001$), the null hypothesis H04 is rejected. Higher levels of perceived socio-educational adversity consistently associate with depressed academic performance among Gujjar secondary school students.

Table 5: Multiple Linear Regression Model Predicting Academic Achievement

Predictor Variables	B	SE	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	VIF
(Constant)	91.242	3.518	—	25.93	< .001	—
Financial Burden (FSB)	-0.224	0.092	-.148	-2.43	.016	1.34
Infrastructural Deficit (ITD)	-0.345	0.084	-.262	-4.11	< .001	1.48
Linguistic Alienation (LCA)	-0.182	0.078	-.135	-2.33	.021	1.22
Domestic Labor/Demands (DLM)	-0.448	0.081	-.338	-5.53	< .001	1.51

Model Parameters: $R = .621$; $R^2 = .386$; Adjusted $R^2 = .375$; $F(4, 235) = 36.94$, $p < .001$; Durbin-Watson = 1.88.

Table 5 shows that the four socio-educational problem dimensions jointly account for 38.6% of the variance in students' academic achievement ($R^2 = .386$, Adjusted $R^2 = .375$). The overall regression model is statistically significant ($F(4, 235) = 36.94$, $p < .001$). Each of the four predictors contributed significantly and negatively to the regression equation: Domestic Labor and Migration Demands proved the strongest individual predictor ($\beta = -.338$, $t = -5.53$, $p < .001$), followed by Infrastructural and Transport Deficit ($\beta = -.262$, $t = -4.11$, $p < .001$), Financial Burden ($\beta = -.148$, $t = -2.43$, $p = .016$), and Linguistic Alienation ($\beta = -.135$, $t = -2.33$, $p = .021$). All Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) remained well below 2.0, ruling out multicollinearity. Since the overall regression model is statistically significant ($F = 36.94$, $p < .001$) and all four sub-dimensions contribute significantly to the prediction of academic achievement ($p < .05$), the null hypothesis H_{05} is rejected. Heavy household labor obligations and infrastructural deficits represent the primary structural drivers suppressing academic achievement among Gujjar adolescents in Kupwara District.

7. Key Findings of the Study

The nomadic students suffer substantial loss of learning and their performance is poor when compared with settled students because of the long interruptions of school during seasonal migrations to alpine pastures. Educational adversity is highly gendered. Boys are pressured to generate income and engage in subsistence work. Girls are burdened with heavy domestic chores, leaving little time to study. The difficult terrain, inadequate public transport facilities, unheated winter classrooms and poor sanitation in border tehsils aggravate chronic absenteeism and academic decline. Linguistic alienation hinders student learning and achievement because students who are native Gojri speakers are taught and tested only in two languages, Urdu and English, with no bilingual bridge support. • Socio-educational factors explain more than a third of the variation in academic achievement, with the strongest suppressors being domestic labor demands and infrastructural deficits.

8. Discussion

Empirical evidence suggests that transhumance is not just a cultural pattern but an institutional fault line in the border ecology of Kupwara District. The clear performance gap between the nomadic and settled groups validates the above assessments (Ananda, 1995; Ganie, 2018) and justifies that the available mobile school mechanisms are not enough to counter seasonal learning loss. Cognitive and curricular regressions are cumulative, and are preceded by collapse of educational delivery when pastoral families migrate to alpine pastures (dhoks) from May to October. This institutional disjuncture punishes students for their seasonal livelihood, ensnaring transhumance as a structural bottleneck, not a framework of accommodation.

These structural challenges cut squarely across traditional gender roles and fragment academic trajectories of Gujjar adolescents along different lines. Economically, male students are increasingly burdened with wages and animal husbandry, while female students are confronted with ubiquitous domestic expectations. The sharp difference in home

based labor is in line with the observations of Sharma (1988) and Saxena and Kumar (2018). In patriarchal family systems, adolescent girls are responsible for domestic work which systematically denies them time for study and revision. As a consequence, there are high rates of secondary-school dropout among female Gujjars.

This domestic pressure is compounded by the geographical and infrastructural marginalization of the border zones such as Karnah, Trehgam and Sogam. Echoing Dar's (2017) territorial analyzes, schools situated in these high-altitude border ecological zones suffer from harsh weather, lack of transport, missing winter heating and sanitation facilities. The harsh physical environment makes the daily school commute a physically demanding task, discouraging continued attendance and increasing absenteeism.

At the pedagogical level, linguistic alienation is an invisible barrier to learning. The negative correlation confirms Wani's (1992) criticism of the linguistic discontinuity in the Kashmir region. There is also a language barrier for Gojri speaking Gujjar children as soon as they enter the classroom as the instructional delivery and state evaluation mechanisms are entirely based on Urdu and English. In the absence of scaffolding in the mother-tongue or targeted bilingual bridge programs, foundational literacy and conceptual acquisition are severely compromised, resulting in acute failure rates in standardized secondary examinations.

The regression model reveals home labor demands and infrastructural deficits as the leading drivers of depressed learning outcomes, explaining nearly 39% of academic variation. These findings support the policy prescriptions put forward by Baba (1992) that incremental curriculum modifications cannot substitute for basic material and domestic constraints. Meaningful interventions include well-resourced, fully residential tribal hostels to shield Gujjar youth from home labor demands and geographic hazards, as well as context-responsive mobile schooling models tailored to the pastoral calendar.

9. Conclusion

This empirical study provides strong evidence that it is the external socio-structural realities and not the innate learning differences that are the main constraints on academic achievement in Gujjar secondary school students of Kupwara District. Seasonal transhumance, the burden of domestic duties, the difficult border geography and linguistic discontinuities are among the reasons for the considerable educational disadvantage of these students. Addressing these persistent gaps requires a move away from one-size-fits-all policies to context-specific models of tribal education.

10. Educational Implications

- **Contextualized Academic Calendars:** The Education Department of Jammu and Kashmir should prepare localized school calendars for transhumant pastoral belts in Kupwara. To avoid learning disruptions, it is best to plan major school breaks in line with seasonal migration phases, and to schedule promotional assessments when families have settled in foothill villages.
- **Expansion of Free Residential Tribal Hostels:** As household duties and responsibilities have a great impact on academic performance, it is important to expand free residential schools (Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas and dedicated Gujjar Hostels) in border tehsils like Karnah, Keran, Machil and Sogam. Safe residential choices are offered to provide a continuous study environment for male and female students.
- **Bilingual Bridge Pedagogical Frameworks:** In line with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recommendations on mother-tongue education, educational directorates shall prepare bilingual supplementary readers in Gojri for transition stages of middle and secondary schools to bridge the gap to standard Urdu and English curricula.

- Special Winter Infrastructure and Transport Support: Government schools in high-altitude areas need dedicated winter heating, updated sanitation facilities and secure public bus transport along difficult mountain routes to cut absenteeism due to weather and travel issues.

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