A Sociological Study of Educational and Occupational Attainment Among Muslim Gujjars in Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract—**Tribal communities often remain on the fringes of mainstream society. Tribal communities often live in ecologically sensitive regions. Muslim Gujjars are a pastoral-nomadic tribe deeply engaged in cattle rearing, seasonal migration, and forest-based livelihoods in Himachal Pradesh, India. Their migratory lifestyle and remote location have traditionally limited their access to formal education and modern employment. This paper presents a comprehensive sociological analysis of the status of the Muslism Gujjar tribe inhabiting the Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh, India. This holds significance for two reasons: first, it enables the government to assess the effectiveness of policies aimed at uplifting tribal communities and identify further steps needed. Second, there has been a lack of research specifically on the educational and occupational profile of the Muslim Gujjar tribe in Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh. By integrating both historical and contemporary lenses, the paper traces the socio-economic changes based on education and occupation. The study is conducted in Tissa block, Chamba district, where most Muslim Gujjars reside. It uses a descriptive-explanatory approach with primary data from 293 respondents through interviews, questionnaires and field observations. The analysis shows a slight increase in education and unemployment rates compared to earlier studies, indicating that the policies for tribal upliftment are not functioning effectively. In present times, the occupation of the Muslim Gujjar tribe primarily revolves around cattle rearing, seasonal migration, and milk production. Although a few development policies have been implemented for their upliftment, a significant portion of the community remains uneducated and continues to follow their traditional occupations.**

Index Terms—**Muslim Gujjar Tribe, Educational Deprivation, Occupational Patterns, Tribal Community, Nomadic Lifestyle, Migration.**

I. INTRODUCTION

India is multicultural and multi-ethnic state and a home of various tribal communities. The tribal community occupies a significant position in an Indian population with this India has the 2nd largest tribal population, in the World, constituting nearly 8.6 percent of the country's population (Census Report, 2011). In the past, the tribal people had been the most backward, desperately poor, and generally uneducated. Tribal-inhabited regions constitute a substantial portion of the underdeveloped areas in the country. The majority of tribal populations continue to reside in remote villages and scattered hamlets. However, a small segment has transitioned to more permanent settlements, including established villages and urban centers (Census Report, 2011).

In 1950, the Constitution of India, under Article 342, officially recognized 212 tribal communities as Scheduled Tribes (STs) across various states and Union Territories. Over time, this number has seen a steady rise. According to the Census Report of 2011, the count of Scheduled Tribes increased from 664 to 705 during the previous decade (Basu, 1985: 17).

Acknowledging the socio-economic challenges and developmental disadvantages faced by these communities—particularly due to their habitation in geographically isolated and difficult terrains—the Constitution has incorporated specific provisions for their upliftment. These safeguards focus on advancing their educational and economic well-being while safeguarding them against social injustice and various forms of exploitation. Key constitutional protections include:

- Article 14: Ensures equality before the law and equal protection of laws.
- Article 15: Prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth.
- Article 15(4): Allows the state to implement special measures for the upliftment of Scheduled Tribes.
- Article 16(3): Allows states to provide reservations in appointments and posts for STs.
- Article 46: Obligates the state to promote the educational and economic welfare of Scheduled Tribes while safeguarding them against social injustice and exploitation.
- Article 275(1): Provides for grant-in-aid to states for promoting the welfare of STs.
- Articles 330, 332, and 335: Deal with reservation of seats in Parliament and State Assemblies for STs and considerations for their claims in public appointments.
- Articles 339 and 340: Confer powers on the Union to oversee the welfare of STs and investigate related matters.

Several legislations have also been enacted to strengthen social protections for Scheduled Tribes. These include the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), and the National Forest Policy of 1988, among others (Mala, 2010).

Despite these legal safeguards, the geographical remoteness of tribal regions such as Lahaul, Spiti, Kinnaur, and Chamba in Himachal Pradesh severely restricts access to public services. This is reflected in substandard health and education infrastructure and relatively low human development indicators. In 2011, the literacy rate in these regions stood at approximately 82%, with male literacy at 89% and female literacy at 75%. Among Scheduled Tribes, literacy improved from 65.5% in 2001 to 73.64% in 2011. However, gender disparities remained evident: male literacy among STs reached 83.17%, while female literacy lagged at 64.20%, significantly below the state average and far behind their male counterparts.

The term tribe has been derived from Roman word Tribus which mean a political unit, and was used to refer to social group defined by the territory they occupied. The initial definition of the term tribe came from the evolutionary school. Maine, in 1861, conceptualized the tribe as a distinct social group, a view further elaborated by D.N. Majumdar (1958), who defined a tribe as a social unit with territorial affiliation that is endogamous, lacks functional specialization, is governed by tribal leaders—whether hereditary or otherwise—and is bound together by a common language or dialect while maintaining social distance from other tribes or castes.

The term *'Gujjar'* is derived from the Sanskrit word *'Gurjara'*, which originally referred to a region in Western India where the Gujjars once established a powerful and widespread kingdom known as *Gurjaradesa* during the medieval period. Historically, the Gujjars were not nomadic by origin; rather, they belonged to settled communities with thriving socio-political structures. The presence of names such as Gujranwala, Gujarat, and Gurjarkhan in various parts of India today reflects the historical spread and settlements of this group. These place names trace the migration and establishment of the Gujjars as they moved from the North-Western Frontier of India towards the Kathiawar Peninsula. Wherever they settled, the name *Gurjara* remained associated with them, signifying their roots in the Gurjaradesa region (Munshi, 1954).

Although the Muslim Gujjars tribe of Himachal Pradesh are constitutionally recognized as a Scheduled Tribe (ST), the intended benefits of this status have not rendered into substantial socio-economic upliftment for the community. Historically marginalized and geographically isolated, Muslim Gujjars have remained at the periphery of mainstream development initiatives. A review of past tribal development reports, socio-economic surveys, and governmental policy documents reveals a consistent pattern of neglect, especially in the domains of education, healthcare, and formal employment opportunities.

In comparison to other tribal and non-tribal groups in the region, Muslim Gujjars exhibit lower literacy rates, higher school dropout rates, and limited access to quality health services. The situation is particularly

dire among women and girls, where traditional roles of gender, premature marriage, and lack of female-oriented educational infrastructure contribute to an even greater educational divide. Gender disparities are evident not only in school enrolment and completion rates but also in participation in skill development and employment schemes.

Cultural conservatism, rooted in tribal identity and religious practices, further limits the community's engagement with modern institutions. Conservative social norms often discourage female mobility and visibility in public spaces, including schools and workplaces. This creates a vicious cycle of disadvantage, where limited human capital development among women hinders the broader advancement of the community.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review should reflect the understanding of the relevant theoretical and empirical background of the problem. Focus should be more on the logical presentation of the empirical evolution of conceptual and methodological issues related to the research problem. In order to have an idea about the socio-economic status of Muslim Gujjar tribe, a few relevant studies are reviewed as follows.

Sharma (2001) critically analyzed tribal development in India and emphasized that most government schemes fail to incorporate the unique cultural and geographical challenges of hill tribes, leading to inadequate implementation and impact. His work underscores the structural disconnect between policy design and ground realities in tribal regions.

The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (2021) pointed out the "double marginalization" of Muslim tribal communities — a phenomenon where tribal Muslims face exclusion on both religious and ethnic grounds. This dual marginality translates into poor socio-economic outcomes, including lower literacy, lack of political representation, and weak access to institutional benefits.

Data from the Census of India (2011) corroborate the findings of other research, indicating that Muslim Gujjars in Himachal Pradesh have extremely low literacy levels and limited occupational mobility. This

is further supported by regional tribal development reports, which consistently show poor education infrastructure and employment support in tribal-dominated blocks of Chamba district.

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

III. OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the study are as follows.
- To describe the current educational status of the Muslim Gujjar Tribal community, including literacy levels and access to higher education.
- To study the existing occupational structure within the community and assess the persistence of traditional means of livelihood, including dairy farming and seasonal labor.

Scope of the Study:
This study focused on the socio-economic status of tribal communities in Himachal Pradesh, with particular emphasis on their educational and occupational patterns. It aimed to assess the level of educational attainment and recent occupational changes among tribal populations. Due to resource limitations and the state's diverse geographical conditions, the study was confined to the Tissa block

of Chamba district, where a significant population of Muslim Gujjars resided. The unit of investigation was any senior member of the household—either male or female—who was available at the time of the survey. Data were assembled over a period of three months through household interviews and observation, using a sample of 293 households selected at the panchayat level. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative methods.

IV. MATERIAL &METHODS

Himachal Pradesh covers a geographical area of 55,673 square kilometres and it shares its boundaries with several neighbouring regions: Jammu and Kashmir to the north and northwest, Tibet to the east, Uttarakhand to the southeast, Haryana to the south, and Punjab to the southwest and west. According to the Census of 2011, the state's total population stands at 68.65 lakh, comprising 34.82 lakh males and 33.83 lakh females. The state records a sex ratio of 972 females per 1,000 males and a population density of 123 persons per square kilometre. Himachal Pradesh has a relatively high literacy rate of 82.80%, with male literacy at 89.53% and female literacy at 75.93%. As per the Administrative Atlas 2020, the state is divided into 12 districts, 73 subdivisions, 109 tehsils, and 63 sub-tehsils for administrative purposes (Economic Survey 2019–20 (District Statistics Department, Government of Himachal Pradesh).

Among these districts, Chamba, formerly the capital of the princely state bearing the same name, is situated at an elevation of 996 meters above sea level. It lies along the Ravi River, near its merge with the Sal River. As per the 2011 Census, the district has a total population of 519,080, including 261,320 males and 257,760 females. The population density of Chamba is relatively low, at 80 persons per square kilometre, and the sex ratio is 986 females per 1,000 males. The district reports a literacy rate of 72.17% (Economic Survey 2019–20 (District Statistics Department, Government of Himachal Pradesh).

Administratively, Chamba is divided into seven tehsils: Chamba, Bharmour, Churah, Bhattiyat, Salooni, Pangi, and Dalhousie. It also includes seven development blocks—namely Chamba, Mehla, Bharmour, Tissa, Salooni, Chuwari, and Pangi. The present study concentrates on the Tissa development block, which, according to the Economic Survey 2019–20 (District Statistics Department, Government of Himachal Pradesh), has a population of 78,988. Of this, 40,152 are males and 38,836 are females, resulting in a sex ratio of 904 females per 1,000 males. The Tissa block encompasses 42 panchayats, 312 villages, and 14,142 households.

Universe and Sample of the Study:
The majority of the Muslim Gujjar tribe is concentrated in the Tissa block of Chamba district; hence, the study was carried out in this specific block of Himachal Pradesh. A multistage sampling technique was employed for selecting the sample. In the first stage, the district and block were identified; in the second stage, specific panchayats were selected; and in the final stage, individual households and respondents were chosen for data collection.

Selection of the District and Block:
Himachal Pradesh comprises twelve districts, with Chamba district having the highest concentration of Muslim Gujjar population in the state. The abundance of forested grazing lands and ample water resources in Chamba has historically drawn Gujjars to settle in the region. Colonial-era documents, including the Chamba Gazetteers and Forest Reports, indicate that Gujjars migrated to Chamba primarily due to the availability of pastures, especially in the Saal, Churah, and Lihal valleys. These records show that Gujjars participated in auctions for grazing rights and paid *trini* (grazing tax) to the state for using these pastures.

Administratively, Chamba district is divided into seven development blocks: Chamba, Mehla, Bharmour, Tissa, Salooni, Chuwari, and Pangi. Among these, Tissa block has been chosen as the study area because it has a significant population of Muslim Gujjar tribes who reside there along with their livestock, including buffaloes, bulls, horses, and goats.

Selection of the Panchayats:
The Tissa development block comprised several panchayats, each encompassing multiple villages. For the aim of the present study, it was decided to select specific panchayats. Given the limitations of time and available resources, it was not feasible to cover the entire Tissa block. Therefore, a selection of panchayats

was made to form the study sample. According to official records, the Tissa block had a total of forty-two panchayats. Out of these, four panchayats—approximately 10% of the total—were purposively selected for the study. These included Charda, Baghae, Dehra, and Dehrog, which were chosen mainly because they had a significantly higher concentration of Muslim Gujjar population compared to the other panchayats in the block. Additionally, these panchayats contained a considerable number of villages and households. Considering these factors, these panchayats were deliberately selected to ensure the inclusion of an adequate number of households/respondents in the study sample.

Selection of the Households/Respondents:
After selecting the panchayats, the next step involved selecting households/respondents from the villages within those chosen panchayats. The number of villages varied across the selected panchayats—Charda had 5 villages, Baghae had 4, Dehra had 4, and Dehrog had 5. Since these villages were dispersed over distant areas, it was decided to select households at the panchayat level, regardless of the number of villages in each.

A total of 585 Muslim Gujjar households were identified across the four selected panchayats, forming the universe for the present study. These households were distributed as follows: Charda had 235, Baghae 148, Dehra 82, and Dehrog 120, collectively representing a population of 3,480 individuals (1,954 males and 1,526 females). From each of the selected panchayats, 50% of the households were chosen using random sampling, culminating in a total sample of 293 households—comprising 118 from Charda, 74 from Baghae, 41 from Dehra, and 60 from Dehrog. This sample of 293 households formed the actual study sample.

Unit of Investigation:
 The unit of investigation in the present study will be any senior member of the family who is available in the house at the time of survey, household either be a male or female. He/she being the eldest member of the family is well informed and acquainted with the area, people and the whole family affairs rather than any other family member. Further he/she is also responsible for taking decisions on behalf of the family members. Further, in the present study the descriptive and explanatory research design will be used so as to analyse the socio- economic status of the Muslim Gujjar tribes in Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh.

Tools and Techniques of Data Collection:
The present study utilized both primary and secondary sources for data collection. The primary data were collected using an interview schedule, which was meticulously designed to assess the socio-economic conditions of the Muslim Gujjar tribes inhabiting the hilly regions of Himachal Pradesh. The schedule aimed to elicit detailed information regarding the demographic, socio-cultural, and economic profiles of the respondents.

The interview schedule encompassed a wide array of themes related to the participants' socio-economic lives, including family structure, marriage customs, kinship relations, caste and religious affiliations, educational status, occupational patterns, income levels, and local power structures. It combined both open-ended and close-ended questions to facilitate an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the respondent's lived experiences.

Prior to its final implementation, the schedule was pre-tested, and revisions were made based on the insights gained during this trial phase to enhance clarity, relevance, and effectiveness. The researcher personally conducted face-to-face interviews with each participant, which ensured a consistent approach and improved the reliability of the collected data. In addition, the observation method was employed to corroborate and enrich the information obtained through interviews.

Secondary data were collected from a variety of sources, including census records, statistical handbooks, economic surveys, gazetteers, revenue documents, and official records available at the block development and panchayat offices. In addition, scholarly materials including books, research papers, academic journals, magazines, and credible online sources were consulted to supplement and contextualize the primary data.

V. RESULTS &DISCUSSION

Educational Status of the Muslim Gujjars:

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by their Educational Status

EDUCATIONAL STATUS
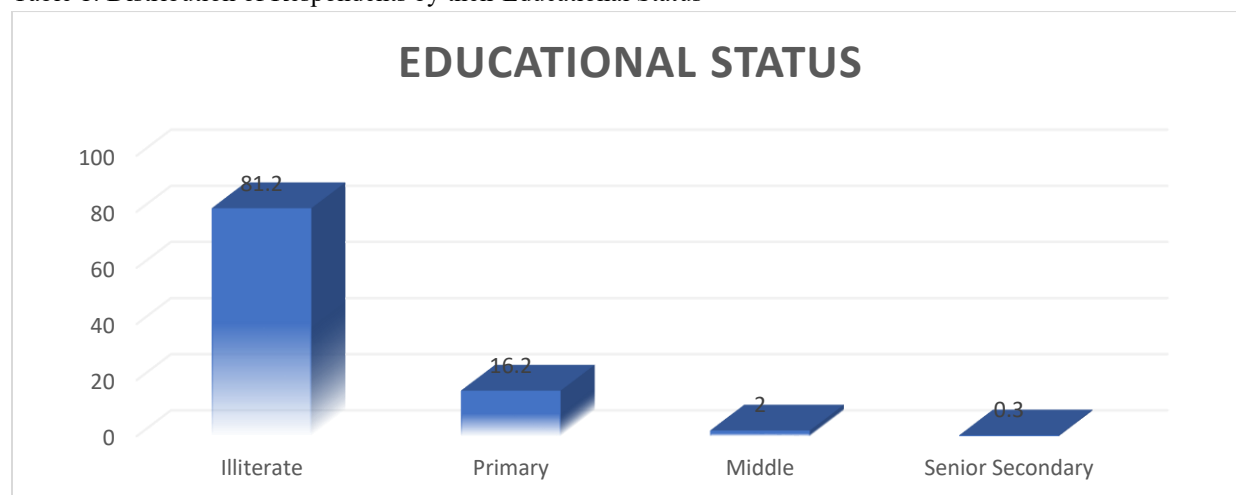
Explanation:

- Illiterate: Respondents unable to read or write in any language. This large share (81.2%) indicates severe foundational deprivation.
- Primary Education: Respondents who have completed up to Class Vth. Mostly dropouts or those unable to continue due to economic pressure.
- Middle: Completion of Class VI–VIII, indicating minimal literacy enhancement.
- Senior Secondary & Graduation: Negligible presence (0.6% combined), revealing a serious gap in higher education access.

Analysis:

The high illiteracy rate shows entrenched barriers to educational access. Contributing factors include:

- Geographical isolation: Tribal hamlets often lack proximate schools.
- Economic limitations: Children are required for household and pastoral duties.
- Cultural inertia: Formal education is not viewed as beneficial to traditional livelihood.
- Institutional failure: Lack of schools, dropout rates, and underqualified teachers in tribal areas.

Occupational Status of the Muslim Gujjars:

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents in Various Occupational Categories

OCCUPATIONAL STATUS
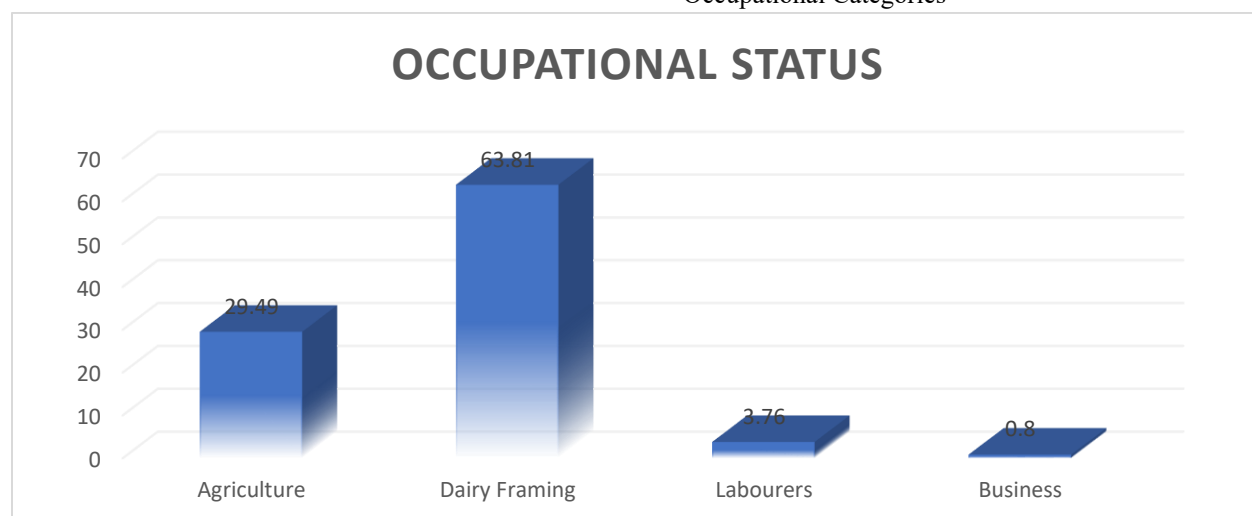
Note: The total number of responses presented in the table exceeds 293 because the question was of a multiple-choice nature, allowing each respondent to select more than one option.

Explanation:
- Agriculture: Out of the total respondents, 110 (29.49%) of the respondents indicated involvement in agricultural activities. This reflects the tribe's continuing reliance on traditional land-based livelihoods.
- Dairy Farming: This was the most common occupation, with 238 respondents, accounting for 63.81%. It suggests that dairy farming plays a central role in the community's economic activities and may be a primary or supplementary source of income for most households.
- Labourers: A small segment, 14 respondents (3.76%), reported working as labourers, which indicates a minor engagement in unskilled or manual labour, possibly for additional income.
- Business: Only 3 respondents (0.8%) were recorded for business activities, indicating that entrepreneurship or commercial ventures are quite limited among the respondents.
- Government Service: 8 respondents (2.14%) indicated employment in government jobs. This low percentage may reflect limited access to formal employment opportunities, possibly due to educational or structural barriers.

Analysis:
- Predominance of Dairy Farming: Dairy farming remains the primary and most sustainable livelihood for the Muslim Gujjar tribe. This preference is likely due to their traditional association with pastoralism, availability of natural resources like grazing land in hilly areas, and a lack of diversification in livelihood options.
- Agriculture: The signifies considerable portion of the population still relies on subsistence farming, although the nature of landholdings, seasonal migration, and terrain may limit productivity. It complements dairy activities and serves as a secondary source of income.
- Labourers: Smaller portion are engaged as labourers, indicating low wage-labour participation. This could be due to lack of construction activities in remote areas or social preference to remain within traditional occupations. However, those without land or cattle may resort to this as a survival strategy.
- Government Service: Low percentage of employed in government service highlights the educational and systemic barriers that prevent members of the community from accessing secure and formal employment. It may also reflect a lack of awareness or support regarding government job opportunities and reservation benefits.
- Business: Only 3 respondents (0.8%) are involved in business activities, showing a very low level of entrepreneurial engagement. This could be attributed to lack of capital, business training, and market connectivity in remote tribal areas.

VI. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study clearly establish that the Muslim Gujjar community of Chamba district remains deeply marginalized in terms of both educational attainment and occupational advancement. Despite being recognized as a Scheduled Tribe and thus constitutionally eligible for various affirmative action programs, the community continues to face structural and systemic barriers that hinder its progress. The extremely high rate of illiteracy, combined with a negligible presence in higher education, reflects a long-standing pattern of educational neglect. This educational backwardness is directly linked to occupational stagnation, with the majority of respondents still dependent on traditional dairy farming and low-paying, unskilled labor. Limited access to modern employment opportunities and the near absence of entrepreneurship or government service among respondents highlight a severe gap in capacity-building and institutional outreach. Geographical isolation, socio-cultural conservatism, and ineffective implementation of development schemes further compound their marginalization. Addressing these issues requires a holistic, multi-pronged strategy that not only improves educational infrastructure and access but also promotes skill development, gender inclusion, and greater integration of the community into the mainstream economy.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Education:
o Implement mobile schools and mid-day meal incentives.
o Special scholarships for tribal Muslim girls.
o Community-based adult literacy drives.
2. Livelihood and Employment:

- o Introduce tribal-specific vocational training.
- o Encourage cooperative-based dairy modernization.
- o Facilitate micro-financing for tribal entrepreneurship.
3. Policy and Governance:
- o Improve monitoring of tribal schemes at block and panchayat levels.
- o Appoint tribal coordinators within local administrative setups.
- o Develop awareness campaigns using vernacular languages and folk media.

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