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RESEARCH ARTICLE

CLIMATE CHANGE AND TRIBALS: A STUDY OF CHALLENGES FACED BY THE GUJJAR AND BAKARWAL COMMUNITY IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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Abstract

Climate change is emerging as the most concerning global issue which has impacted the social, economic and environmental aspects of life worldwide. Indigenous groups, especially tribal people, are frequently the most susceptible to its effects because of their intimate ties to the environment and reliance on natural resources. The present research aims to explore the impact on the Gujjars and Bakarwals (the two significant tribal groups) in Jammu & Kashmir Union Territory. Due to climate changes such as unpredictable rainfall, increasing temperatures, less snowfall and melting of glaciers, these historically pastoral and nomadic people are observing major changes in their lifestyle and have encountered numerous challenges. Using secondary sources, this research investigates both the direct and indirect effects that climate change has on these two indigenous communities including diminished access to the forest resources, altered traditional migration routes, loss of pastures, social and cultural upheavals, etc. The paper emphasizes the necessity of government programs and policies that can alleviate these challenges and safeguard the traditional livelihoods of these indigenous people.

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Introduction:-

Climate Change ranks among the most pressing global environmental challenges of the present century, which also poses an unavoidable challenge to economic growth and human rights. In simple terms, it refers to the erratic weather patterns, increasing sea levels and other disastrous occurrences that can be linked to anthropogenic activities and greenhouse gases which have contributed to the increase of global temperatures. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) defines Climate Change as "a change in the state of the climate that can be identified by changes in the mean temperature and the variability of its properties, and that persists for an extended period, typically decades or longer" (IPCC, 2007). Although it is largely viewed as a scientific issue, climate change poses significant challenges for social justice and gender equality and is a social, environmental, economic, and political concern.

Being a global concern, Climate change impacts every individual in unique ways. Its possible reactions have caused issues for developed nations like the US, but they have caused far more problems for developing nations like China, India, and Brazil, where rapid industrialization is causing carbon emissions per person to rise exponentially. Although they are least responsible for climate change, the developing countries will be most negatively impacted.

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These nations are particularly open to climatic unpredictability due to the various pressures and inadequate adaptive capacity. Numerous social and environmental problems are already plaguing these nations. The losses brought on by the climate change are massive and demand a lot of resources (IFPRI, 2010).

The average surface temperature of the Earth has risen by roughly 0.6 degree Celcius throughout the 20th century due to climate change (IPCC, 2001). The rise in anthropogenic greenhouse gas levels is primarily responsible for the rise in the Earth's temperature. The various aspects of biodiversity and human life will be impacted by the overt and covert effects of climate change. These effects include decreased crop yields leading to food insecurity, floods, frequent and protracted droughts, floods, and glacier melting. It also causes a rise in the diseases and illnesses transmitted by Vectors like malaria and water-borne illnesses like typhoid, a decline in fresh and pure water supplies, elevation in the sea levels that forces people to relocate, and an upsurge in pests and diseases affecting crops, animals, and wildlife. The warming of the terrestrial surface will cause variations to average temperatures and precipitation patterns (UNHDR, 2007).

Undoubtedly, the majority of those impacted by climate change will most likely be impoverished and marginalized sections (Krikbride, 2008). Climate change-related environmental deterioration can exacerbate tensions between different communities and lead to greater poverty. This may result in a shortage of resources and force the communities to leave their ancestral grounds. Various communities, such as tribals, that are entirely reliant on traditional and inherited lands for their fundamental needs, means of subsistence, and cultural existence may suffer negative effects from this kind of displacement.

Gujjars and Bakarwals of Jammu and Kashmir

The Jammu & Kashmir UT has a substantial number of nomadic tribal groups, including the Gujar-Bakarwal community which is mostly involved in pastoral activities. After the Kashmiris and Dogras, this community constitutes the third largest ethnic group within the Indian Union Territory. As per the 2011 census data, 11.9% of the erstwhile state's population is comprised of Gujjars and Bakarwals. By virtue of the 1991 Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Act, these two tribal communities in Jammu & Kashmir were given the status of Scheduled Tribe. The majority of their population is highly concentrated in Jammu, with a significant presence in the Kashmir valley as well. They are tribal people who raise cattle, goats and sheep and engage in transhumance. They relocate frequently in pursuit of better pastures for their livestock. During the summer season, these tribal communities migrate towards the upper reaches with their families and cattle and during winters, they return to the plain areas.

The Gujjars migrated from Gujarat and North Western Frontier Province (NWFP) to the state of Jammu and Kashmir via Rajasthan. They most likely left Gujarat in the 5th and 6th century A.D. due to the severe droughts and crossed Rajasthan and Punjab to reach the verdant Shiwaliks and Himalayas. There is uncertainty regarding the dispersion and growth of Gujjars in the Jammu & Kashmir region. In response to inquiries regarding their origin, they only say that their ancestors came from Gujarat and Rajasthan. Archaeological evidence indicates that Rajasthan and Gujarat had a period of drought in the sixth and seventh centuries, which caused these people to migrate. They brought their livestock with them into the Sub-Himalayan and Shiwalik meadows (Tufail, 2014). Rajouri and Poonch Districts are home to a large concentration of Gujjars, accounting for around 20% of the entire Gujar populace of the UT. The Gujjars are primarily divided into three main categories:

- Settled Gujjars: the Gujjars belonging to this category are settled in one location, live in villages and engage in agricultural activities.
- Half-Settled Gujjars: they reside in villages and work in agriculture but they travel to the Pir-Panjal region for the six months of the summer with their cattle, where they can graze on the pastures.
- Homeless Gujjars: they are further sub-divided into two categories; Dodhi Gujjars and Bakarwals. Dodhi Gujjars also known as Banjara Gujjars are nomads who rear buffaloes and sell milk and ghee for their livelihood (Sawhney, 2022).

On the other hand, the Bakarwals are the homeless tribes who keep large herds of goats and sheep for their sustenance. The word "Bakarwal" is an occupational phrase that comes from the Gojri language terms 'Bakara' which means 'goat or sheep' and 'wal' referring to 'one who takes care of, or has the possession' (Sheikh, 2022). These people reside in Reasi, Udhampur, Jammu and the lower regions of Kathua during the winters and when summer arrives, they begin to move to the Himalayan highlands where there is enough green grass for their livestock (Warikoo, 2000).

Objectives:-

- The first objective of this study is to explore the effects of Climate change on the Gujjar-Bakarwal community in Jammu & Kashmir
- The second objective is to provide recommendations for Policy Interventions and support systems for adaptation to changing climate.

Methodology:-

The present research utilizes a qualitative research approach to explore how the Gujjar-Bakarwal communities in Jammu & Kashmir are affected by the Climate change. This descriptive research made use of secondary data and sources to extract information from gathered literature. This process involved examining various research articles, journals and academic publications to derive insights.

Findings and Analysis:-

The J&K region is vulnerable to ecological risks due to its topography and extreme climatic conditions. In recent years, the area has experienced frequent avalanches and landslides, destructive earthquakes, and enormous floods. Climate change has a significant effect on the livelihood and security of the pastoralists (Gumel, 2022). In addition to causing irreparable damage like land collapse, fatalities, and the disconnecting of higher reaches from channels, extreme weather events can also cause temporary harm like livestock losses and delayed migration (Sareen, 2022). The Gujjars and Bakrwals of Jammu and Kashmir are also severely impacted by the extreme climatic conditions.

- **Impact on the Seasonal Migration:** The cycle of seasonal migration of these tribals depend entirely on the extensive pasture land. While the mountains in the Northern areas are covered with snow, the southern regions have pastures throughout the winters. However, by mid-April, the winter grazing areas are depleted, and the northern snowmelt creates lush green pastures. But, during recent years, the climate change (extreme heatwaves, delayed monsoons and snowfall) has made it challenging for the herders to organize their seasonal movement. Herders have occasionally been compelled to postpone or modify their migration schedules, which has caused a discrepancy between the demands of the animals and the availability of grazing.
- **Loss of Grasslands:** In the summer season, the livestock of the herders depend on the mountain or north pastures, but these pastures are shrinking. These pastures have become less abundant and of lower quality due to the melting of glaciers and erratic rainfall. Reduced water supply (due to droughts) and overgrowth of shrubs have also rendered some pastures unfit for grazing.
- **Alterations in Traditional Migration Routes:** Increasingly frequent extreme weather events like avalanches and floods have made conventional migration routes dangerous. Numerous herders have been compelled to look for new, uncharted grazing areas at lower elevations, which might not be as resource-rich or appropriate for their animals.
- **Livelihood Disruption:** The traditional means of subsistence of both the tribal communities are severely threatened. Reduced cattle productivity and health are the results of pasture degradation, water scarcity, and the loss of grazing grounds. The production of milk, wool, and meat has decreased as a result of the increasing difficulty in locating appropriate grazing areas for sheep and cattle. The decline in the cattle productivity results into economic hardships because the families find it difficult to meet their basic necessities. Nowadays, a lot of herders are compelled to look for additional revenue streams, including farming or work in neighboring towns. These alternate sources of income, nevertheless, frequently fall short of the revenue generated by raising animals.
- **Health Implications:** Increase in the temperatures has resulted in heat stress, which has raised mortality rates among animals, especially goats and cattle, who are extremely heat-sensitive. Additionally, there is now a greater chance of dehydration and waterborne illnesses due to the reduced water supply. The pollution of water sources by unpredictable rainfall and flooding also puts the Gujjars and Bakarwals at danger of catching infections.
- **Erosion of Traditional Culture:** In addition to providing a means of subsistence, the pastoral lifestyle is an essential component of the social cohesion and cultural identity of these communities. As climatic circumstances become more uncertain and the associated economic challenges worsen, the younger generations are less likely to follow in the footsteps of their elders. Traditional migration routes and behaviors are being disrupted, which is causing cultural loss.

Recommendations:-

- **Diversification of Livelihood Practices:** These communities can benefit from training in sustainable agricultural techniques, such as small-scale horticulture, organic farming, and the production of drought-resistant crops, so as to better adjust to the problems posed by climate change. Additional revenue streams will be produced by fostering opportunities in non-farming industries like handicrafts, ecotourism, and local trade.
- **Climate-Adaptive Animal Care:** Animals can be shielded from severe weather by receiving training on how to handle heat stress and enhancing shelter quality. The development of disease management initiatives and the availability of mobile veterinary services will also contribute to the preservation of livestock productivity and health.
- **Water Harvesting Measures:** Water harvesting and conservation measures such as check dams, ponds and rainfall collection structures must be put in place. During dry seasons, these methods will ensure a consistent supply of water for the tribals as well as for the animals.
- **Awareness Programs:** The first step in developing resilience is sensitizing and raising awareness of the effects of weather change and adaptation techniques. The provision of workshops and training courses on sustainable grazing, water management, and climate-smart agriculture will enable the communities to adjust.
- **Policy Support:** Government and non-governmental organizations should concentrate on developing laws that offer disaster relief, livestock insurance, and financial aid in order to lessen the effects of climate-related calamities. To guarantee long-term sustainable solutions, cooperation between local communities, governmental entities, and NGOs is required.

Conclusion:-

Climate change poses serious problems for the tribal communities of Jammu and Kashmir UT especially the Gujjars and Bakarwals. They are susceptible to the continuous changes in their surroundings, which can lead to health hazards, sociocultural degradation, and disturbances in grazing systems. In order to ensure the future of these communities, it is imperative that the government and non-governmental groups offer assistance that is customized to meet their unique requirements, including enhancing water management, diversifying sources of income, and preserving their traditions. Only by working together these communities can lessen the consequences of climate change and preserve their pastoralist customs for next generations.

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