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## **The Quest for Self-identity and Rights: A Case Study of Pahari Community in Jammu and Kashmir**

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### **Abstract:**

The Pahari speaking community in Jammu and Kashmir is primarily located in isolated border regions and experiences significant economic struggles, as evident from their social and economic backwardness. Due to limited resources, they are unable to compete with the affluent members of society who have access to better education and healthcare. Additionally, their children are unable to take advantage of state or central policies due to their remote mountainous location, which lacks proper roads and other amenities. As a result, they are unable to receive the minimum education required to benefit from government or non-governmental organizations.

**Keywords: Paharies, Socio-economic backwardness, Economic distress, Mountainous, Non-governmental organization.**

### **Introduction**

The term Pahari originates from Pahar, meaning mountain. It is an adjective in Urdu, Hindi, and Punjabi, signifying “of the mountain” and when used linguistically, it refers to the “Language of the Mountain People.” This term encompasses various languages and dialects spoken throughout the Himalayan region, rather than being limited to a specific area within the subcontinent. Pahari is typically written in Nastalique script (Persio-Arabic) in Jammu and Kashmir and POK, while other regions of India use different scripts such as the ‘Tankri script’ in Himachal Pradesh. Despite being primarily a spoken language, Pahari has a rich literary tradition that showcases its potential for growth and success.



## Historical Background

Language, like any other living being, is constantly changing and evolving. It absorbs new elements, sheds old ones, and grows and develops over time. The Pahari language has been enriched and evolved over many years, contributing to our literature and poetry. It is part of the northern zone languages, a group of Indo-Aryan languages or dialects spoken in the lower ranges from Nepal to the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. These languages can be divided into three groups: eastern, which includes various dialects of Nepali (also known as Gorkhali, Gurkhali, Khaskura or Parbatiya); central, spoken mainly in the Uttarakhand state and including Garwahi in Gharwal and Kumaoni in Kumaon as well as some areas in Nepal; and western, spoken in Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and POK (Pakistan-occupied Kashmir)

The various ethnic groups of Pahari people in the state of Jammu and Kashmir speak different dialects. For instance, the Gujjars speak Gojri, while the Bakkarwars speak Bakkerwali. Other dialects include Bhaerwahi, Kishtwari, Sarazi, Padderi, Wattali, Bhalessi, Marwi, Bulandpuri, Pogali, Pothohari, Chibbali, Mirpuri, Punchhi, Karnahi, Kaghani and Chitrali. The main dialect spoken by Pahari people is Pahari and many Gujjars use it as a link language. These dialects vary from one place to another within a small distance of 15-20 kilometers. This is common with most regional. Interestingly, there are similarities in nouns and verbs between Pahari and Gojri languages. Pahari is primarily spoken in Rajouri, Poonch, Baramullah, Kupwara and Kulgam regions. Due to the partition of India in 1947, a large number of Pahari speakers ended up in the Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK) regions such as Mirpur, Muzaffarabad, Rawalkote and Bagh. The dialects spoken there are similar to the Pahari language used in Jammu and Kashmir.

The largest concentration of Pahari speakers in Jammu and Kashmir can be found in Rajouri, where 80% of the population speaks the language. Following closely is Poonch, with 70% of its inhabitants speaking Pahari. The Pahari-speaking regions are primarily located in the valley, specifically in Baramulla, Kulgam, and Kupwara. These areas are home to a predominantly impoverished population that has long been denied their social, political, and economic rights. In Jammu and Kashmir, Pahari is written using the nastalique script, which is derived from Perso-Arabic. Despite being primarily used as a spoken language, Pahari boasts a rich literature and poetry tradition that demonstrates its potential for growth and prosperity. The ethnic makeup of



the region is heavily influenced by various groups such as the Dards in the north-west, Ladakhies in the north-east, Gujjars and Rajputs in the south, and Paharis in the south-east.

### **Similarities Between Gujjars and Paharis**

Pahari-speaking individuals are a distinct cultural group, similar to the Gujjar community. The Gujjars are identified as a cultural group based on specific criteria and circumstances. Both groups domesticate various animals such as buffaloes, cows, horses, sheep, and goats, although in smaller numbers. They also share the practice of migrating to high altitude pastures for grazing their livestock from April to October. The traditional method of grinding maize into flour is still prevalent among the Gujjars and Paharis through the use of water-mills or 'Gharats', as it is known locally. Similarly, both communities reside in mud-huts called 'Kothas' and 'Dharas' during their seasonal migrations. While the Gujjars speak different dialects like Haryanavi and Rajasthani across the country, Paharis are similarly scattered throughout India. In Jammu and Kashmir Union Territory, Pahari speakers can be found living in hilly regions and border areas where they use a common dialect with minor variations regional and grammatical differences. The customs and rituals of both groups are strikingly similar from birth to death, with very little differences between them.

### **Important Works and Their Writers**

Some of the notable literary works in Pahari language are Saif-ul-Malook by Mian Muhamad Baksh, which is a masnavi that explores the concept of "Safar-ul-Ishq" or journey of love, about the philosophy of love firstly published in 1906. Another significant work is Siraj-ul-Qasas, a poetic commentary on the 14th chapter of the Holy Quran called Saura-e-Yousaf, written by Syed Habib-Ullah-Shah Bukhari. This work consists of 7120 stanzas. Additionally, Sain Faqar Din has written two Pahari Masnavis titled Zia-ul-Qammar and Ramooz-Ul Ganj. Some prominent classical writers in Pahari language include Sain Qadar Baksh, Hakam Shah, Mian Zaman Chand, Qammar Shah, Syed Haider Ali Shah, Sain Wallidad and Syed Muhamad. Contemporary writers such as Mohd. Bashir Qureshi, Iftkhar Kayani, Ali Adalat, Nisar Rahi, Iqbal Nazash, Iqbal Shawl, Mirza Abdul Rashid, Shahbaz Rajourvi, Zaffar Iqbal Manhas, Khalil Khan Johar and Dr Mirza M R Qureshi have also made significant contributions to the language.



## Major Organizations

The J&K Pahari Advisory board, focused on the development of Pahari-speaking people, is collaborating with the J&K Academy of Art, Culture, and Languages to publish various books. A separate department for Pahari language has been set up by the Academy, which is actively involved in publishing, translating, and releasing numerous books, monthly and annual journals as well. Some of the noteworthy publications by the academy include:

- Chitti Chadar Payar Ni - A novel by Zeenat Firdous Zeenat
- Neela Ashman -A novel by Ali Adalat
- Farah Ni Tee (under publishing) A novel by Malak Ram Anand

In addition to these publications, the academy's Pahari language department is also involved in a project to translate important classical works. Furthermore, a Pahari language dictionary is being developed by the department and is expected to be released soon.

The key government organization is the Jammu and Kashmir Advisory Board For Pahari Speaking People's Welfare, founded in 1989. The Chief Minister serves as the chairman, while the Vice Chairman is chosen by the CM from the Pahari speaking community.

The Pahari Cultural and Welfare Forum, an NGO, is dedicated to preserving Pahari culture and supporting the welfare of the Pahari community. Other Pahari organizations include the All Pahari Employees Federation and The Pahari Students Welfare Forum. The Jammu and Kashmir Pahari Culture and Welfare Forum, a non-governmental organization established post-1975, aims to promote Pahari language and literature. The Pahari movement has spread to various regions within the valley, such as Karnah, Malangam, Bandipora, Laar, Wliwar, Dara, Liri, Doora, Uri Zoorah Manloo, Shopian, and Kandi illaqs of Anantnag like Saliya, Badhar, and Drawa. Forum members have taken poets and singers to villages in Rajouri and Poonch districts to engage Pahari people and inspire the creation of Pahari literature. In 1992, Governor G.C.Saxena established the Pahari Advisory Board with around 25 members, the majority being non-official members. Media outlets like Radio and Television, as well as cultural organizations and the Literary and Cultural Academy, are also actively involved in promoting and expanding the reach of Pahari literature.



Pahari identity has been largely shaped by the Pahari language. Gujjars and Paharis often inhabit the same areas and are the main rival ethnic groups in Rajouri and Poonch districts, as well as in the outskirts of the Kashmir valley. In the state, all Gujjars are Muslim, and a large majority of Paharis are also Muslims. From an anthropological perspective, Gujjars are divided into two sections - Gujjars and Bakarwals - who speak Gojri, while Paharis are a linguistic group encompassing all non-Gojri speaking individuals, including Muslims and Hindus who speak the Pahari language.

### **Struggle of Paharies**

Throughout history, the Pahari community has enjoyed a higher economic, social, and educational status when compared to the Gujjar community. However, there are few noticeable differences between the two groups besides their language and ethnicity. Despite this, both groups view each other as competitors. The process of establishing and promoting these two identities began in the 1970s when the state government introduced welfare measures for the Gujjars. This led to the Paharis also asserting their demands and receiving similar benefits. In 1978, the cultural academy opened sections for both Gojri and Pahari languages in an effort to develop them into standardized languages. Through this initiative, the academy has also supported and encouraged literature in these languages, serving as a foundation for these distinct identities.

The central government's decision in 1991 to grant the Gujjar community Scheduled Tribe status, during a time of heightened militancy and under the rule of a governor, caused discontent among the Pahari people. We see this as the government's favoritism towards the Gujjars in terms of educational and employment opportunities, which will greatly improve their social standing. Without ST status, the Paharis fear they will be overshadowed by the Gujjars in various aspects of life in the future. Despite objections from the Paharis, they are only granted reservation based on their population in education and employment, but not in terms of political representation through reserved seats in the assembly and parliament.

Since 1990, the Pahari community has been struggling towards being officially recognized as a Scheduled Tribe. This demand has been publicly supported by all major political parties in the state. While the state assembly has passed a resolution on this issue, the central government has



yet to recognize the Paharis as a Scheduled Tribe. As a result, Pahari leaders have shifted their focus from the state to the central government in their ongoing struggle for ST status.

The leaders of the Gujjar community openly reject the Pahari's request for ST status. They discourage both the state and central leadership from granting ST status to the Paharis, causing a divide between the two groups. This divide has spread to all aspects of society, including social, cultural, religious, economic, political and educational institutions, due to their narrow-mindedness. In Rajouri and Poonch districts, both groups prioritize and support individuals from their own ethnicity over those from other ethnicities.

The Paharis do not possess the status of ST, which poses a challenge for them to obtain due to their diverse composition of Muslims and Hindus from various castes. The possibility of being granted this status lies in the hands of administrative and political authorities, rather than anthropological considerations. It should be noted that not all tribes in India have been classified as ST due to the political nature of the decision-making process.

The Pahari people receive advantages of reservation in the Resident of Backward Area (RBA) classification. This is typically due to their rural background, as their villages have been designated as underdeveloped areas due to their isolated location and limited resources, granting them reservation benefits for education and job opportunities.

The state government's decision to elevate certain dialects to the status of standard language and promote their use as a way to strengthen ethnic identity has resulted in unhealthy competition and animosity among these groups, causing division within the state. By prioritizing dominant regional languages over official languages, the government's policy will only further divide the state as those who speak lesser-spoken mother tongues become aware of their marginalization. It is inevitable that these marginalized groups will eventually mobilize for their rights as a middle class emerges within them. The lack of vocalization from these smaller linguistic groups can be attributed to their lower levels of education and social disadvantage. Compared to other states, Jammu and Kashmir ranks low in literacy rates, trailing only above Bihar and Jharkhand.

## **Conclusion**

Thus, we can say that the Pahari language, similar to Gojri, spans across various districts and regions. The Pahari community is mostly impoverished and has been historically marginalized



from their social, political, and economic rights. As a result, the educated middle class of Pahari speakers is now advocating for ST (Schedule Tribe) status for their people.

The Pahari community is calling for an increase in the duration of Pahari programs and the inclusion of news bulletins in their native languages such as Dogri and Urdu. They also seek to improve the social status of their people and their main request is to be recognized as a Scheduled Tribe, along with the inclusion of Pahari language in the 8th schedule and Sahitya Academy. Additionally, they are demanding for a separate region to be designated for their community, as well as representation in civil services, universities, and schools.

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