

## **REGIONAL INEQUALITY IN A MOUNTAINOUS LANDSCAPE: SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISPARITIES ACROSS THE TEHSILS OF DODA DISTRICT, JAMMU AND KASHMIR, INDIA**

**Danish Sharma**

Research Scholar

Institute of Mountain Environment, Department of Earth Sciences, Bhaderwah Campus, University of Jammu, J & K, India.

**Ankush Babu**

Research Scholar

Institute of Mountain Environment, Department of Earth Sciences, Bhaderwah Campus, University of Jammu, J & K, India.

**Chhering Tandup**

Assistant Professor

Institute of Mountain Environment, Department of Earth Sciences, Bhaderwah Campus, University of Jammu, J & K, India.

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### **ABSTRACT**

Doda district, situated in the Chenab Valley of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, is characterized by rugged mountain topography, dispersed settlements, and marked geographical isolation, conditions that are widely understood to compound social and economic disadvantage in Himalayan regions. This study examines the spatial pattern of socio-economic inequality across the seventeen tehsils of Doda district using secondary data drawn from the Census of India (2011) and the District Census Handbook of Doda. Twelve demographic and socio-economic indicators encompassing total, General, Scheduled Caste (SC), and Scheduled Tribe (ST) population; sex ratio; literacy rate; main-worker employment rate; and the inter-group (General versus SC+ST) gaps in literacy, sex ratio, and employment were compiled tehsil-wise, mapped, and combined into a composite index of social inequality through a standardised ranking procedure. The results show a pronounced core-periphery pattern: Bhaderwah, Gundna, Assar, and Bhalla emerge as the least unequal, better-performing tehsils (composite scores between 1.33 and 5.25), while Bharath Bagla, Bhalessa (Gandoh), Kahara, Bhella, Mohalla, and, most acutely, Phigsoo (composite score 14.42) constitute a cluster of highly disadvantaged, peripheral tehsils. Literacy and employment gaps between the General and SC+ST populations are widest in and around Bhaderwah and Doda tehsils, while sex-ratio disparities peak in Thathri. The findings indicate that remoteness, terrain, and distance from the district headquarters interact with caste-based and gender-based disadvantage to reproduce durable, tehsil-level inequality. The paper concludes with a set of spatially targeted policy recommendations aimed at economic empowerment, educational access, healthcare delivery, gender equity, and inclusive infrastructure planning in the most disadvantaged tehsils.

**Keywords:** Social inequality; composite index; tehsil-level disparity; Doda district; Jammu and Kashmir; Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe; sex ratio; literacy; mountain regions; regional development.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Social inequality refers to the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and privileges within a society, or between different social groups occupying that society (UNU-WIDER, 2015). It is a multidimensional phenomenon that extends beyond income to encompass access to education, healthcare, employment, political voice, and public infrastructure, and it is reproduced through structural conditions, ideological supports, and the social reforms that contest them. Two broad lenses are commonly used to study it: inequality of conditions, meaning unequal distribution of income, wealth, housing, and material goods; and inequality of opportunities, meaning unequal life chances as reflected in educational attainment, health status, and treatment before the law and the state. In practice, the two reinforce one another — communities that begin with fewer material resources also tend to receive fewer of the opportunities that would allow them to close the gap, so that disadvantage compounds across generations rather than dissipating.

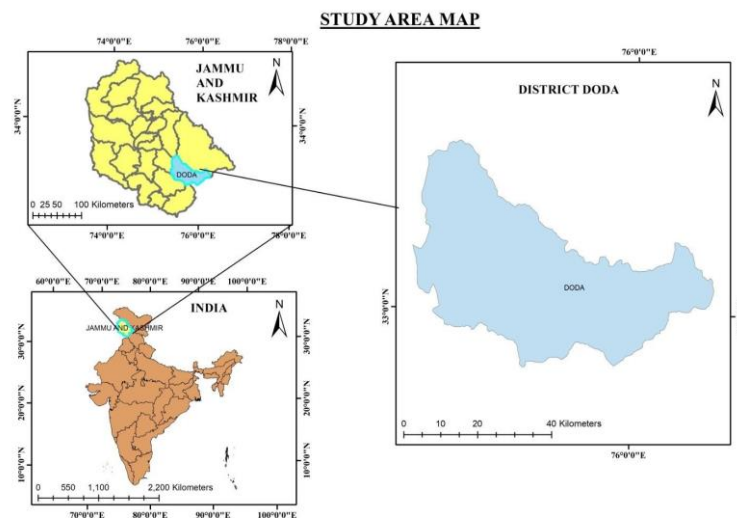
When these disparities are mapped onto physical space, the resulting pattern is described as spatial or regional inequality the unequal distribution of resources and services such as healthcare, education, welfare, income, and infrastructure across different locations (Chotia & Rao, 2015; Khan, 2015). Spatial analysis of inequality is valuable precisely because it identifies not just how much inequality exists, but where it is concentrated and why, allowing planners to target the areas and the population groups in greatest need rather than treating a district as a homogeneous unit.

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. To analyse the tehsil-wise demographic distribution of Doda district, including total, General, Scheduled Caste (SC), and Scheduled Tribe (ST) population.
2. To examine disparities in sex ratio, literacy, and main-worker employment among the General, SC, and ST communities across tehsils.
3. To evaluate overall regional (tehsil-level) inequality in Doda district through a composite index constructed from twelve socio-economic indicators, and to classify tehsils by their relative level of social inequality.

## **STUDY AREA**

Doda district lies in the Jammu region of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, in the outer Himalayan range, between approximately 32°53' and 34°21' North latitude and 75°01' and 76°47' East longitude. Doda town, after which the district is named, is situated at an altitude of about 5,000 feet (1,524 m) above sea level, at coordinates approximately 33°13'N, 75°57'E. Doda is the largest district by area in the Jammu region, sharing borders with Anantnag and Kishtwar districts to the east and north-east, Ramban to the north-west, Udhampur to the south-west, and Kishtwar and Kathua further afield. The terrain is dominated by high mountain ridges, deep river valleys, most notably that of the Chenab river and numerous glacier-fed streams, producing a highly dissected, compartmentalised landscape in which many tehsils are separated from the district headquarters and from one another by difficult, landslide-prone terrain.



**Map 1. Location of Doda district, Jammu and Kashmir, India**

**Source: Prepared from Survey of India base layers and Census of India tehsil boundaries, 2011**

The climate of Doda district is not uniform, owing to the wide variation in altitude across the district; it ranges from temperate to sub-tropical. Tehsils such as Assar, Thathri, and Doda are comparatively warm, while the higher-altitude tracts of Bhalessa, Kahara, Bhaderwah, Chiralla, and Gundna remain snowbound for extended periods each winter. This altitudinal gradient in climate directly shapes the length of the agricultural season, road accessibility, and the difficulty of service delivery, and is therefore treated as a structural backdrop to the socio-economic disparities analysed later in the paper.

Agriculture in Doda district is shaped by mountainous terrain, varying altitude, and climate, and remains predominantly subsistence-based, with limited irrigated land, fragmented landholdings, and heavy reliance on rain-fed (barani) cultivation practised on terraced slopes. Maize is the principal Kharif staple, wheat the main Rabi crop, and rice is cultivated only in limited valley tracts such as the Bhaderwah valley; pulses including rajma (kidney beans) and lentils are also widely grown. According to the 2011 Census, Doda district had a total population of 409,936, ranking 518th among India's 640 districts, with a population density of 46 persons per square kilometer across an area of 8,912 sq. km substantially lower than the corresponding state average, reflecting the district's rugged terrain and dispersed settlement pattern. Urdu and English are the principal media of instruction, while the main native languages spoken are Pahari-Bhaderwahi, Sarazi, and Kashmiri; Pahari (Gaddi) is spoken mainly by the Malik community and by Gaddi and Bakerwal pastoral tribes who practise seasonal transhumance across the district's alpine pastures. Male and female literacy stood at 78.41 per cent and 49.69 per cent respectively at the 2011 Census, compared with 64.0 per cent and 29.9 per cent at the 2001 Census an improvement in absolute terms. Bhaderwah, popularly termed "Mini Kashmir" for its scenic valleys and pleasant climate, is the district's principal tourist destination; other notable sites include the high-altitude Padri Pass, the forested Jai Valley, the alpine Seoj Meadow, Chinta Valley etc. Transport in Doda district is limited and challenging on account of its mountainous terrain, deep valleys, and harsh winter conditions. Road transport is the dominant, and in most tehsils the only, mode of connectivity: the district is served principally by National Highway 244, which links Doda with Jammu, Kishtwar, and the wider Chenab Valley, but interior roads are narrow, winding, and prone to landslides, with many remote villages reachable only by link roads or kutchra (unmetalled) tracks that are frequently blocked during winter and monsoon. Public transport consists mainly of buses and shared taxis, with markedly reduced frequency in interior and hill tracts. There is

no railway line or airport within the district; the nearest railhead is Jammu Tawi and the nearest airport is at Jammu, so that all rail and air connectivity is mediated by road travel first. Ongoing road-widening, bridge, and tunnel projects under various government schemes are gradually improving connectivity, but the uneven pace of these improvements across tehsils is itself a plausible structural driver of the socio-economic disparities examined in this study, since transport access shapes the reach of education, healthcare, and market opportunity.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Database**

This study is based entirely on secondary data drawn from three sources: (i) the Census of India, 2011, which provides detailed tehsil-wise demographic, literacy, workforce, and caste-wise population data; (ii) the District Census Handbook of Doda, used for supplementary tehsil-wise statistical information and regional characteristics; and (iii) administrative and district-level socio-economic records relating to population and development indicators. Doda district was selected as the study area because its mountainous terrain, dispersed settlement pattern, and varying degrees of accessibility make it a representative case for examining how physical geography interacts with social structure to produce regional inequality in the Himalayan foothills.

### **Selection of Indicators**

To assess social inequality comprehensively, twelve demographic and socio-economic indicators were selected because they directly capture educational attainment, employment participation, demographic composition, and gender balance and because they permit disaggregation by social category (General versus Scheduled Caste/Scheduled Tribe). The indicators are: total population; General population; Scheduled Caste (SC) population; Scheduled Tribe (ST) population; literacy rate; sex ratio; main-worker employment rate; and the differences between the General and SC+ST populations in literacy, sex ratio, and main-worker employment. Indicators such as household income, health expenditure, land ownership, and migration were excluded owing to the absence of reliable tehsil-level secondary data for Doda district.

### **Methodology**

This study adopts a descriptive, comparative, and quantitative methodology. All data were compiled in Microsoft Excel, cross-checked against the source documents, and organised into tehsil-wise tables before being presented in textual, tabular, and cartographic form. The analytical procedure comprised the following stages.

## **DATA PROCESSING AND CLASSIFICATION**

After compilation, the tehsil-wise data were cleaned and tabulated to ensure internal consistency and comparability across all seventeen tehsils of the district.

### **Comparative Analysis**

A comparative method was used to examine socio-economic differences among tehsils, focusing on literacy disparities, employment differences between General and SC/ST communities, variation in demographic composition, gender disparities as reflected in sex ratio, and regional inequalities between accessible, lower-altitude tehsils and remote, high-altitude tehsils. This comparative lens allowed the identification of both the magnitude and the direction of imbalance across the district.

## COMPOSITE INDEX CONSTRUCTION

To obtain a single, overall picture of social inequality for each tehsil, a composite index was constructed by integrating the twelve selected indicators through a standardised ranking procedure, following the widely used approach of combining multiple normalised indicators into one summary score (cf. Rao & Rao, 2015; Haldar, 2009). The steps were as follows:

- Step 1 — Standardisation: each of the twelve indicators, measured in different units and ranges, was ranked separately across the seventeen tehsils so that values became comparable (rank 1 = best-performing tehsil on that indicator).
- Step 2 — Aggregation: for each tehsil, the ranks across nine positive indicators (literacy, sex ratio, and main-worker participation, each measured for the Total, General, and SC+ST population) and three negative/gap indicators (the General–SC+ST differences in literacy, sex ratio, and main-worker employment) were summed to obtain a Total Rank Score.
- Step 3 — Composite scoring: the Average Composite Score for each tehsil was obtained by dividing its Total Rank Score by the twelve indicators used, giving a single comparable value in which a lower score denotes better socio-economic performance (lower overall inequality) and a higher score denotes greater disadvantage.
- Step 4 — Classification: tehsils were classified into Low, Moderate, and High social-inequality zones on the basis of their Average Composite Score, using natural breaks in the score distribution.

$$\text{Average Composite Score} = \text{Total Rank Score} \div 12$$

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the tehsil-wise pattern of each socio-economic indicator in turn, before combining them into the composite index of social inequality. Seventeen tehsils are compared throughout: Assar, Bhaderwah, Bhagwah, Bhalessa (Gandoh), Bhalla, Bharath Bagla, Bhella, Chilly Pingal, Chiralla, Doda, Gundna, Kahara, Kashtigarh, Marmat, Mohalla, Phigsoo, and Thatthri.

## DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE

### Total Population

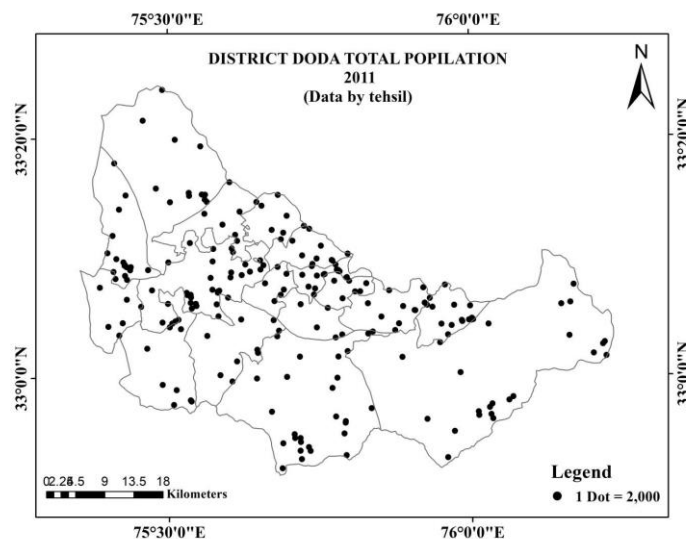
Doda tehsil records the highest total population (68,632), followed by Bhaderwah (54,770) and Bhalessa (Gandoh) (45,719), reflecting their status as the district's principal urban and semi-urban centres. Chiralla (9,949), Phigsoo (11,548), and Bhella (12,035) are the least populous tehsils, consistent with their remote, high-altitude location.

**Table 2. Total population of tehsils of Doda district, 2011**

| S. No. | Tehsil            | Total Population |
|--------|-------------------|------------------|
| 1      | Assar             | 14,599           |
| 2      | Bhaderwah         | 54,770           |
| 3      | Bhagwah           | 26,078           |
| 4      | Bhalessa (Gandoh) | 45,719           |
| 5      | Bhalla            | 20,606           |
| 6      | Bharath Bagla     | 13,726           |
| 7      | Bhella            | 12,035           |
| 8      | Chilly Pingal     | 26,170           |
| 9      | Chiralla          | 9,949            |
| 10     | Doda              | 68,632           |
| 11     | Gundna            | 14,962           |

|    |            |        |
|----|------------|--------|
| 12 | Kahara     | 23,421 |
| 13 | Kashtigarh | 32,097 |
| 14 | Marmat     | 15,289 |
| 15 | Mohalla    | 17,333 |
| 16 | Phigsoo    | 11,548 |
| 17 | Thathri    | 30,002 |

**Source: Census of India, 2011, and District Census Handbook of Doda**



**Map 2. Total population of tehsils of Doda district (1 dot = 2,000 persons)**

**Source: Author's computation from Census of India, 2011**

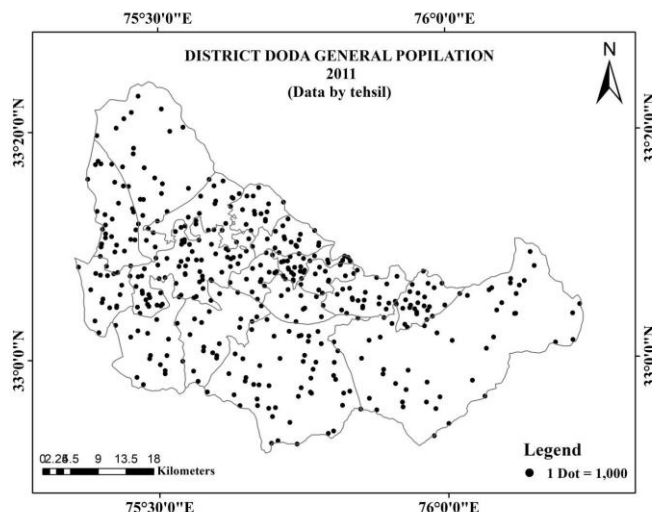
## GENERAL POPULATION

The General-category population follows the same broad spatial pattern as total population, with Doda (56,500) and Bhaderwah (40,900) again the largest, and Chiralla (7,700) and Phigsoo (8,900) the smallest.

### General-category population of tehsils of Doda district, 2011

| S.No. | Tehsil            | General Population |
|-------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1     | Assar             | 11,210             |
| 2     | Bhaderwah         | 40,900             |
| 3     | Bhagwah           | 20,400             |
| 4     | Bhalessa (Gandoh) | 35,200             |
| 5     | Bhalla            | 16,000             |
| 6     | Bharath Bagla     | 10,600             |
| 7     | Bhella            | 9,300              |
| 8     | Chilly Pingal     | 20,300             |
| 9     | Chiralla          | 7,700              |
| 10    | Doda              | 56,500             |
| 11    | Gundna            | 11,500             |
| 12    | Kahara            | 18,200             |
| 13    | Kashtigarh        | 25,000             |
| 14    | Marmat            | 11,800             |
| 15    | Mohalla           | 13,400             |
| 16    | Phigsoo           | 8,900              |
| 17    | Thathri           | 23,400             |

**Source: Census of India, 2011, and District Census Handbook of Doda**



**Map 3. General-category population of tehsils of Doda district (1 dot = 1,000 persons)**  
**Source: Author's computation from Census of India, 2011**

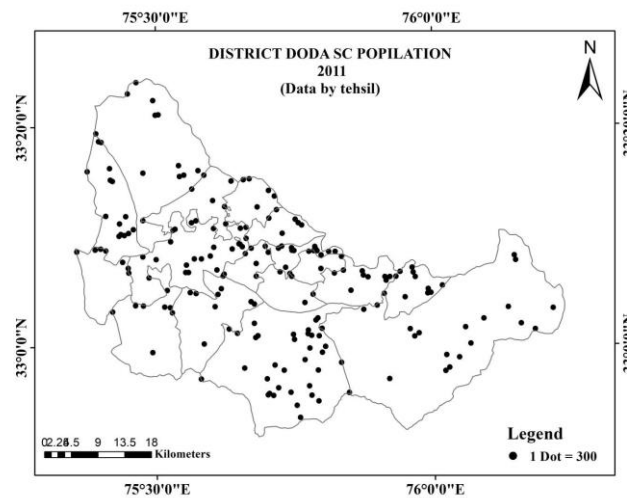
### SCHEDULED CASTE (SC) POPULATION

The SC population is distributed across all tehsils but is concentrated most heavily in Bhaderwah (10,570) and Doda (7,520); Chiralla (1,290) and Bhella (1,560) record the smallest SC populations. The uneven distribution of the SC population is important context for the disparity analysis in Section 4.2, since tehsils with a larger SC population base are also, in several cases, those recording the widest absolute General–SC+ST gaps.

**Table 4. Scheduled Caste (SC) population of tehsils of Doda district, 2011**

| S.No. | Tehsil            | SC Population |
|-------|-------------------|---------------|
| 1     | Assar             | 1,898         |
| 2     | Bhaderwah         | 10,570        |
| 3     | Bhagwah           | 3,390         |
| 4     | Bhalessa (Gandoh) | 5,940         |
| 5     | Bhalla            | 2,680         |
| 6     | Bharath Bagla     | 1,780         |
| 7     | Bhella            | 1,560         |
| 8     | Chilly Pingal     | 3,400         |
| 9     | Chiralla          | 1,290         |
| 10    | Doda              | 7,520         |
| 11    | Gundna            | 1,940         |
| 12    | Kahara            | 3,040         |
| 13    | Kashtigarh        | 4,170         |
| 14    | Marmat            | 1,990         |
| 15    | Mohalla           | 2,250         |
| 16    | Phigsoo           | 1,500         |
| 17    | Thathri           | 3,900         |

**Source: Census of India, 2011, and District Census Handbook of Doda**



**Map 4. Scheduled Caste (SC) population of tehsils of Doda district (1 dot = 300 persons)**  
**Source: Author's computation from Census of India, 2011**

#### SCHEDULED TRIBE (ST) POPULATION

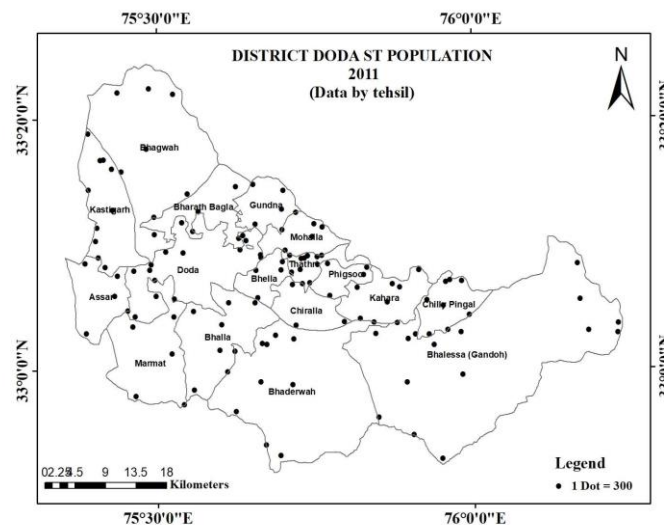
The ST population is spatially uneven and concentrated mainly in the central and eastern tehsils of the district, with Doda (4,600) and Bharderwah (3,300) recording the highest counts, while western and peripheral tehsils such as Chiralla (950) and Bhella (1,150) show comparatively small ST populations.

**Table 5. Scheduled Tribe (ST) population of tehsils of Doda district, 2011**

| S. No. | Tehsil            | ST Population |
|--------|-------------------|---------------|
| 1      | Assar             | 1,401         |
| 2      | Bharderwah        | 3,300         |
| 3      | Bhagwah           | 2,500         |
| 4      | Bhalessa (Gandoh) | 4,380         |
| 5      | Bhalla            | 1,980         |
| 6      | Bharath Bagla     | 1,320         |
| 7      | Bhella            | 1,150         |
| 8      | Chilly Pingal     | 2,510         |
| 9      | Chiralla          | 950           |
| 10     | Doda              | 4,600         |
| 11     | Gundna            | 1,430         |
| 12     | Kahara            | 2,240         |
| 13     | Kashtigarh        | 3,080         |
| 14     | Marmat            | 1,470         |
| 15     | Mohalla           | 1,660         |
| 16     | Phigsoo           | 1,100         |
| 17     | Thathri           | 2,880         |

**Source: Census of India, 2011, and District Census Handbook of Doda**





**Map 5. Scheduled Tribe (ST) population of tehsils of Doda district (1 dot = 300 persons)**  
**Source: Author's computation from Census of India, 2011**

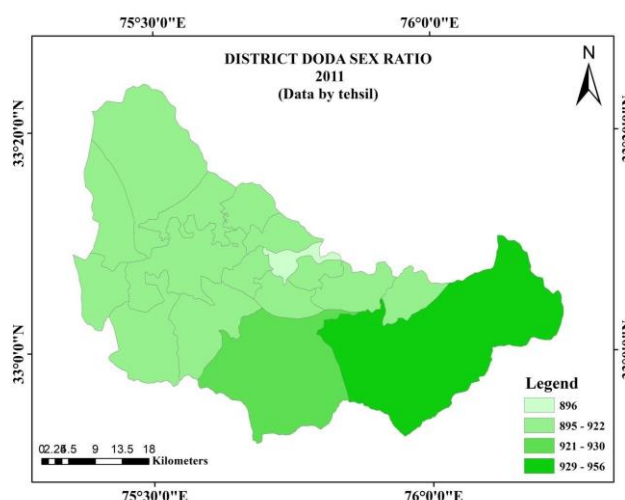
## 4.2 Sex Ratio

Sex ratio, defined as the number of females per 1,000 males, is a widely used indicator of gender balance and, indirectly, of the social value accorded to female life within a population. Bhalessa (Gandoh) records the highest sex ratio in the district (956), followed by Bhella (922) and Gundna (921); Thathri records the lowest (896), followed by Doda (909) and Kahara (915). The generally favourable sex ratios in the district's more remote, less economically developed tehsils, set against comparatively lower ratios in the more urbanised tehsils of Doda and Thathri, is consistent with literature suggesting that market integration and son-preference practices linked to inheritance and dowry can, in some contexts, depress sex ratios in more commercially developed areas relative to subsistence-oriented ones.

**Table 6. Sex ratio of tehsils of Doda district, 2011**

| S.No. | Tehsil            | Sex Ratio (females/1,000 males) |
|-------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1     | Assar             | 919                             |
| 2     | Bhaderwah         | 930                             |
| 3     | Bhagwah           | 918                             |
| 4     | Bhalessa (Gandoh) | 956                             |
| 5     | Bhalla            | 920                             |
| 6     | Bharath Bagla     | 918                             |
| 7     | Bhella            | 922                             |
| 8     | Chilly Pingal     | 918                             |
| 9     | Chiralla          | 917                             |
| 10    | Doda              | 909                             |
| 11    | Gundna            | 921                             |
| 12    | Kahara            | 915                             |
| 13    | Kashtigarh        | 918                             |
| 14    | Marmat            | 920                             |
| 15    | Mohalla           | 918                             |
| 16    | Phigsoo           | 916                             |
| 17    | Thathri           | 896                             |

**Source: Census of India, 2011, and District Census Handbook of Doda**



**Map 6. Sex ratio of tehsils of Doda district (darker shading indicates a higher sex ratio)**  
**Source: Author's computation from Census of India, 2011**

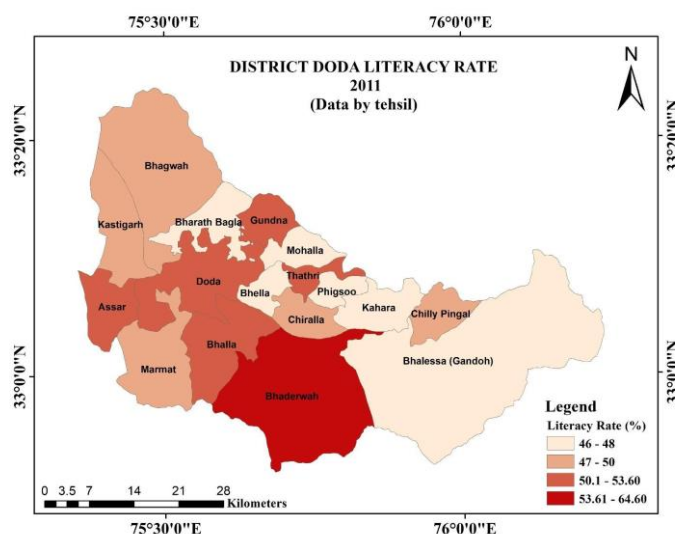
## LITERACY RATE

Literacy the ability to read and write with understanding, per the Census of India definition applied to persons aged seven years and above is one of the strongest predictors of subsequent socio-economic mobility. Thathri (53.6%) and Bhaderwah (64.6%, based on supplementary handbook figures) record the highest literacy rates in the district, while Bhalessa (Gandoh) (46%) and Bhella (47%) record the lowest. The roughly 15–18 percentage-point spread in literacy across tehsils is among the widest of all the indicators examined, underscoring persistent, spatially concentrated gaps in educational access.

**Table 7. Literacy rate of tehsils of Doda district, 2011**

| S.No. | Tehsil            | Literacy Rate (%) |
|-------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1     | Assar             | 53.0              |
| 2     | Bhaderwah         | 64.6              |
| 3     | Bhagwah           | 50.0              |
| 4     | Bhalessa (Gandoh) | 46.0              |
| 5     | Bhalla            | 52.0              |
| 6     | Bharath Bagla     | 48.0              |
| 7     | Bhella            | 47.0              |
| 8     | Chilly Pingal     | 49.0              |
| 9     | Chiralla          | 50.0              |
| 10    | Doda              | 51.8              |
| 11    | Gundna            | 52.0              |
| 12    | Kahara            | 48.0              |
| 13    | Kashtigarh        | 50.0              |
| 14    | Marmat            | 49.0              |
| 15    | Mohalla           | 48.0              |
| 16    | Phigsoo           | 47.0              |
| 17    | Thathri           | 53.6              |

**Source: Census of India, 2011, and District Census Handbook of Doda**



**Map 7. Literacy rate of tehsils of Doda district (darker shading indicates higher literacy)**

**Source: Author's computation from Census of India, 2011**

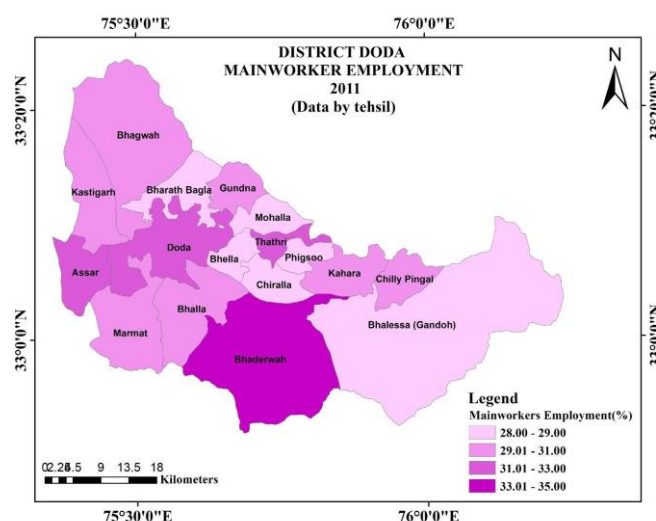
## MAIN-WORKER EMPLOYMENT RATE

The main-worker employment rate captures the proportion of the population engaged in economically remunerative work for the major part of the year. Bhaderwah (35%) and Doda (33%) record the highest main-worker employment rates, reflecting their larger service and tourism-linked economies, while Bhella and Phigsoo (28% each) and Bhalessa (Gandoh) (28%) record the lowest, consistent with their more subsistence-oriented, remote agrarian economies.

**Table 8. Main-worker employment rate of tehsils of Doda district, 2011**

| S.No. | Tehsil            | Main-Worker Employment Rate (%) |
|-------|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1     | Assar             | 32                              |
| 2     | Bhaderwah         | 35                              |
| 3     | Bhagwah           | 30                              |
| 4     | Bhalessa (Gandoh) | 28                              |
| 5     | Bhalla            | 30                              |
| 6     | Bharath Bagla     | 29                              |
| 7     | Bhella            | 28                              |
| 8     | Chilly Pingal     | 30                              |
| 9     | Chiralla          | 29                              |
| 10    | Doda              | 33                              |
| 11    | Gundna            | 31                              |
| 12    | Kahara            | 30                              |
| 13    | Kashtigarh        | 31                              |
| 14    | Marmat            | 30                              |
| 15    | Mohalla           | 29                              |
| 16    | Phigsoo           | 28                              |
| 17    | Thathri           | 32                              |

**Source: Census of India, 2011, and District Census Handbook of Doda**



**Map 8. Main-worker employment rate of tehsils of Doda district**  
**Source: Author's computation from Census of India, 2011**

## INTER-GROUP DISPARITIES: GENERAL VERSUS SCHEDULED CASTE AND SCHEDULED TRIBE POPULATION

Beyond describing each indicator separately for the district as a whole, this study explicitly examines the gap between the General population and the combined SC+ST population on each of the three key indicators — literacy, sex ratio, and main-worker employment — since it is this gap, rather than the absolute indicator value, that most directly measures social inequality between groups within each tehsil.

### DISPARITY IN LITERACY

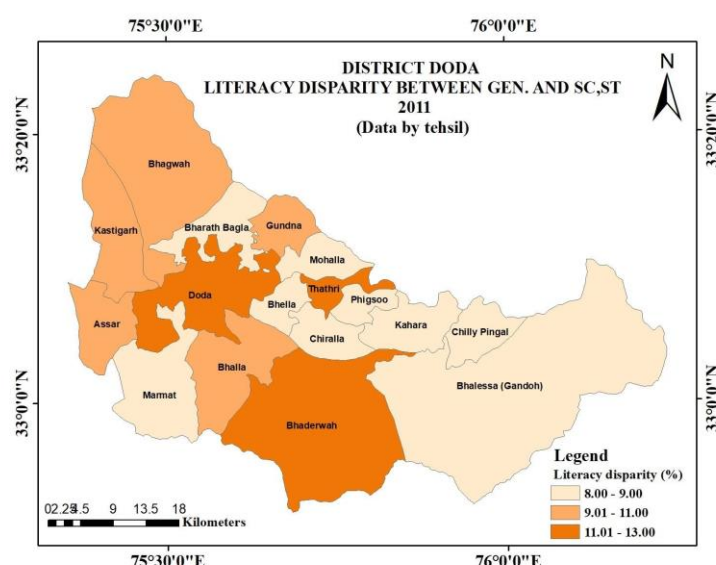
Bhaderwah tehsil records the highest General–SC+ST literacy gap in the district (13 percentage points), followed by Thathri (11.5) and Doda (12.5), while Bhella and Phigsoo record the lowest gaps (8 points each). The pattern is instructive: it is precisely the tehsils with the best overall literacy performance (Bhaderwah, Doda, Thathri) that also show the widest gap between General and SC+ST literacy, suggesting that improvements in average educational access in these more developed tehsils have disproportionately benefited the General population, while SC/ST literacy has lagged behind. Several inter-related factors help explain this: a historical legacy of exclusion that has left SC/ST communities starting from a lower educational base; continuing economic disadvantage that raises the opportunity cost of schooling for SC/ST households; the generally lower quality of educational infrastructure serving marginalised settlements; persistent social stigma and discrimination within educational institutions; and gender-compounded barriers — such as early marriage and household responsibility — that fall particularly heavily on SC/ST girls.

**Table 9. Disparity between General and SC+ST population in literacy, by tehsil**

| S.No. | Tehsil            | General – SC+ST Literacy Gap (percentage points) |
|-------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | Assar             | 11.0                                             |
| 2     | Bhaderwah         | 13.0                                             |
| 3     | Bhagwah           | 10.0                                             |
| 4     | Bhalessa (Gandoh) | 9.0                                              |
| 5     | Bhalla            | 10.0                                             |

|    |               |      |
|----|---------------|------|
| 6  | Bharath Bagla | 9.0  |
| 7  | Bhella        | 8.0  |
| 8  | Chilly Pingal | 9.0  |
| 9  | Chiralla      | 9.0  |
| 10 | Doda          | 12.5 |
| 11 | Gundna        | 10.0 |
| 12 | Kahara        | 9.0  |
| 13 | Kashtigarh    | 10.0 |
| 14 | Marmat        | 9.0  |
| 15 | Mohalla       | 9.0  |
| 16 | Phigsoo       | 8.0  |
| 17 | Thathri       | 11.5 |

**Source: Author's computation from Census of India, 2011, and District Census Handbook of Doda**



**Map 9. General-SC+ST literacy disparity across tehsils of Doda district**  
**Source: Author's computation from Census of India, 2011**

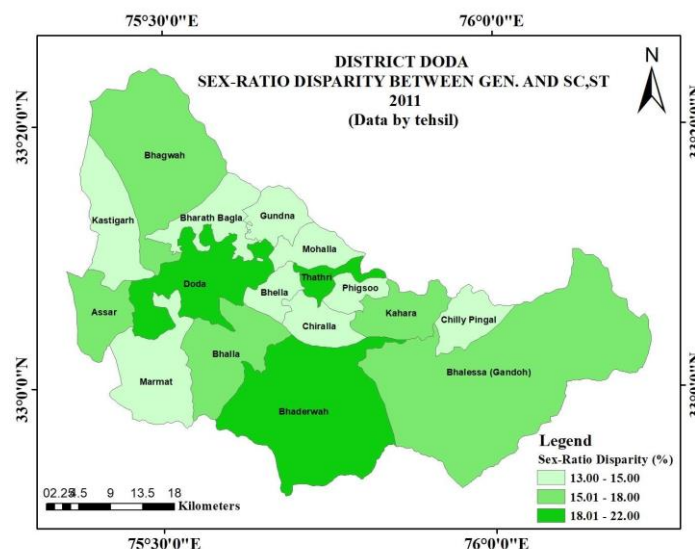
## DISPARITY IN SEX RATIO

Thathri records the highest General-SC+ST sex-ratio gap (22 points), followed by Bhaderwah (21) and Doda (20), broadly because the General population is comparatively large relative to the SC+ST population in these tehsils, which mechanically widens the absolute gap even where SC+ST sex ratios are not markedly worse in relative terms. Bhella, Bharath Bagla, and Mohalla record the smallest gaps (13 points each). Beyond this compositional effect, the sex-ratio disparity is driven by deep-rooted patriarchal preferences for male children, historically reinforced by inheritance and property norms; unequal access to healthcare, which can elevate female infant and child mortality in underserved areas; and, in some cases, incomplete enforcement of legal safeguards against sex-selective practices. Addressing this disparity requires sustained awareness and educational interventions targeted at both SC/ST populations and the wider community, together with strengthened enforcement of existing legal protections.

**Table 10. Disparity between General and SC+ST population in sex ratio, by tehsil**

| S.No. | Tehsil            | General – SC+ST Sex-Ratio Gap (points) |
|-------|-------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 1     | Assar             | 17                                     |
| 2     | Bhaderwah         | 21                                     |
| 3     | Bhagwah           | 16                                     |
| 4     | Bhalessa (Gandoh) | 18                                     |
| 5     | Bhalla            | 16                                     |
| 6     | Bharath Bagla     | 13                                     |
| 7     | Bhella            | 13                                     |
| 8     | Chilly Pingal     | 14                                     |
| 9     | Chiralla          | 13                                     |
| 10    | Doda              | 20                                     |
| 11    | Gundna            | 15                                     |
| 12    | Kahara            | 18                                     |
| 13    | Kashtigarh        | 15                                     |
| 14    | Marmat            | 15                                     |
| 15    | Mohalla           | 13                                     |
| 16    | Phigsoo           | 15                                     |
| 17    | Thathri           | 22                                     |

*Source: Author's computation from Census of India, 2011*



**Map 9(b). General–SC+ST sex-ratio disparity across tehsils of Doda district**

*Source: Author's computation from Census of India, 2011*

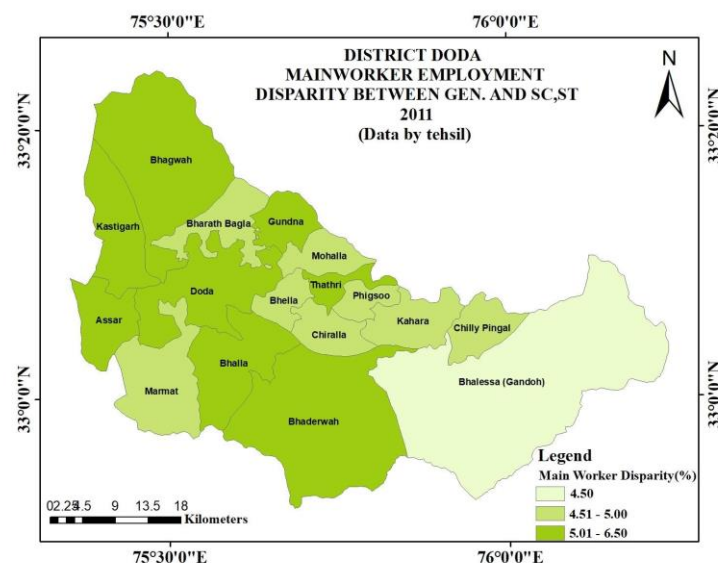
## DISPARITY IN MAIN-WORKER EMPLOYMENT

Bhaderwah again records the widest General–SC+ST gap in main-worker employment (6.5 percentage points), while Bhalessa (Gandoh) records the narrowest (4.5 points). The pattern of employment disparity reflects a complex interplay of factors: differential access to skill development and vocational training; the concentration of salaried and service-sector opportunities — disproportionately accessed by the General population — in and around Bhaderwah and Doda; and continuing occupational segregation that channels SC/ST workers toward lower-return agricultural and informal-sector work.

**Table 11. Disparity between General and SC+ST population in main-worker employment, by tehsil**

| S.No. | Tehsil            | General – SC+ST Main-Worker Gap<br>(percentage points) |
|-------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| 1     | Assar             | 5.5                                                    |
| 2     | Bhaderwah         | 6.5                                                    |
| 3     | Bhagwah           | 5.5                                                    |
| 4     | Bhalessa (Gandoh) | 4.5                                                    |
| 5     | Bhalla            | 5.5                                                    |
| 6     | Bharath Bagla     | 5.0                                                    |
| 7     | Bhella            | 5.0                                                    |
| 8     | Chilly Pingal     | 5.0                                                    |
| 9     | Chiralla          | 5.0                                                    |
| 10    | Doda              | 5.5                                                    |
| 11    | Gundna            | 5.5                                                    |
| 12    | Kahara            | 5.0                                                    |
| 13    | Kashtigarh        | 5.5                                                    |
| 14    | Marmat            | 5.0                                                    |
| 15    | Mohalla           | 5.0                                                    |
| 16    | Phigsoo           | 5.0                                                    |
| 17    | Thathri           | 5.5                                                    |

**Source:** Author's computation from Census of India, 2011, and District Census Handbook of Doda



**Map 10. General–SC+ST main-worker employment disparity across tehsils of Doda district**  
**Source:** Author's computation from Census of India, 2011

## COMPOSITE INDEX OF SOCIAL INEQUALITY

To move from indicator-by-indicator description to an overall assessment, a composite index combining all twelve indicators was constructed for each tehsil following the ranking procedure described in Section 3.3.3. Table 12 presents the tehsil-wise ranks on each of the twelve component indicators together with the resulting Total Rank Score, while Table 13 presents the derived Average Composite Score and the corresponding overall rank of each tehsil.

**Table 12. Tehsil-wise ranking on twelve socio-economic indicators, Doda district**

| Tehsil | Gen . | SC+ ST | Tot al | Tot al | Gen . | SC+ ST | Tot al | Gen . | SC+ ST | Lit. Diff | Sex-rati | M W | Total Rank |
|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------|--------|-----------|----------|-----|------------|
|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|-------|--------|-----------|----------|-----|------------|



|                   | Lit. | Lit. | Lit. | Sex R. | Sex R. | Sex R. | M W | M W | M W | .  | o Diff . | Diff . | Score |
|-------------------|------|------|------|--------|--------|--------|-----|-----|-----|----|----------|--------|-------|
| Assar             | 4    | 4    | 3    | 7      | 7      | 12     | 3   | 3   | 3   | 4  | 6        | 2      | 58    |
| Bhaderwah         | 1    | 1    | 1    | 2      | 2      | 2      | 1   | 1   | 1   | 1  | 2        | 1      | 16    |
| Bhagwah           | 7    | 8    | 7    | 8      | 9      | 12     | 7   | 6   | 7   | 5  | 7        | 2      | 85    |
| Bhalessa (Gandoh) | 16   | 17   | 17   | 1      | 1      | 1      | 15  | 14  | 14  | 9  | 4        | 17     | 126   |
| Bhalla            | 5    | 4    | 4    | 5      | 5      | 6      | 7   | 6   | 7   | 5  | 7        | 2      | 63    |
| Bharath Bagla     | 12   | 12   | 12   | 8      | 11     | 6      | 12  | 10  | 10  | 9  | 14       | 9      | 125   |
| Bhella            | 15   | 12   | 15   | 3      | 3      | 3      | 15  | 14  | 15  | 16 | 14       | 9      | 134   |
| Chilly Pingal     | 10   | 8    | 10   | 8      | 9      | 6      | 7   | 6   | 6   | 9  | 13       | 9      | 101   |
| Chiralla          | 7    | 7    | 7    | 13     | 11     | 6      | 12  | 10  | 10  | 9  | 14       | 9      | 115   |
| Doda              | 2    | 2    | 6    | 16     | 16     | 16     | 2   | 2   | 2   | 2  | 3        | 2      | 71    |
| Gundna            | 5    | 4    | 4    | 4      | 3      | 4      | 5   | 3   | 3   | 5  | 9        | 2      | 51    |
| Kahara            | 12   | 12   | 12   | 15     | 14     | 15     | 7   | 10  | 10  | 9  | 4        | 9      | 129   |
| Kastigarh         | 7    | 8    | 7    | 8      | 7      | 6      | 5   | 6   | 7   | 5  | 9        | 2      | 77    |
| Marmat            | 10   | 8    | 10   | 5      | 5      | 5      | 7   | 10  | 10  | 9  | 9        | 9      | 97    |
| Mohalla           | 12   | 12   | 12   | 8      | 11     | 6      | 12  | 14  | 15  | 9  | 14       | 9      | 134   |
| Phigsoo           | 16   | 16   | 15   | 14     | 15     | 14     | 15  | 17  | 17  | 16 | 9        | 9      | 173   |
| Thathri           | 3    | 2    | 2    | 17     | 17     | 17     | 3   | 3   | 3   | 3  | 1        | 2      | 73    |

**Source:** Author's computation from Census of India, 2011, and District Census Handbook of Doda  
**Note:** Lower rank/score = better relative performance on that indicator; ranks range from 1 (best) to 17 (weakest) across tehsils

Interpretation of the rank table shows a clear four-tier structure among the district's seventeen tehsils. Bhaderwah secures the lowest, and therefore best, Total Rank Score (16), making it the strongest-performing tehsil on virtually every indicator — literacy, sex ratio, and workforce participation alike — and confirming its role as the district's core of relative advantage. Gundna (51), Assar (58), and Bhalla (63) form a second tier of comparatively well-performing tehsils. Doda (71), Thathri (73), Kastigarh (77), and Bhagwah (85) occupy an intermediate, moderately developed position — notably, Doda town's status as the district headquarters does not translate into the very best composite performance, since its wide General–SC+ST gaps in literacy and sex ratio pull its overall score down relative to smaller, more homogeneous tehsils such as Gundna and Assar. Marmat (97), Chilly Pingal (101), and Chiralla (115) show comparatively weaker socio-economic conditions. Finally, Bharath Bagla (125), Bhalessa (Gandoh) (126), Kahara (129), Bhella and Mohalla (134 each), and, most markedly, Phigsoo (173) constitute the most disadvantaged cluster of tehsils in the district, each combining low literacy and employment ranks with, in several cases, wide inter-group gaps.

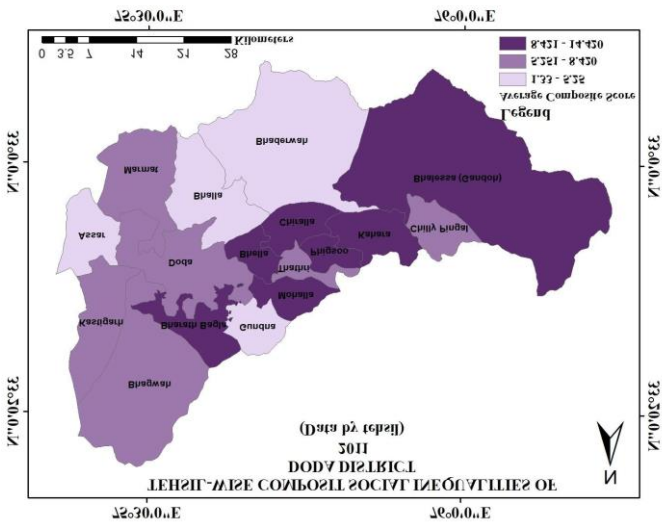
**Table 13. Overall Rank and Average Composite Score of Tehsils, Doda District**

| Overall Rank | Tehsil    | Total Rank Score | Average Composite Score |
|--------------|-----------|------------------|-------------------------|
| 1            | Bhaderwah | 16               | 1.33                    |
| 2            | Gundna    | 51               | 4.25                    |
| 3            | Assar     | 58               | 4.83                    |
| 4            | Bhalla    | 63               | 5.25                    |
| 5            | Doda      | 71               | 5.92                    |
| 6            | Thathri   | 73               | 6.08                    |
| 7            | Kastigarh | 77               | 6.42                    |
| 8            | Bhagwah   | 85               | 7.08                    |



|    |                   |     |       |
|----|-------------------|-----|-------|
| 9  | Marmat            | 97  | 8.08  |
| 10 | Chilly Pingal     | 101 | 8.42  |
| 11 | Chiralla          | 115 | 9.58  |
| 12 | Bharath Bagla     | 125 | 10.42 |
| 13 | Bhalessa (Gandoh) | 126 | 10.50 |
| 14 | Kahara            | 129 | 10.75 |
| 15 | Bhella            | 134 | 11.17 |
| 15 | Mohalla           | 134 | 11.17 |
| 17 | Phigsoo           | 173 | 14.42 |

Source: Author's computation, based on Table 12



Map 11. Composite social inequality across the tehsils of Doda district, 2011 (based on Average Composite Score)

Source: Author's computation from Census of India, 2011

The spatial classification of tehsils into three inequality zones on the basis of the Average Composite Score is presented below.

**LOW SOCIAL-INEQUALITY ZONE (AVERAGE COMPOSITE SCORE 1.33–5.25)**

Bhaderwah, Gundna, Assar, and Bhalla fall into this category. These tehsils exhibit comparatively balanced literacy levels, favourable sex ratios, and higher workforce participation, together with narrower gaps between the General and SC+ST populations, indicating a relatively equitable distribution of socio-economic opportunity.

**MODERATE SOCIAL-INEQUALITY ZONE (AVERAGE COMPOSITE SCORE 5.25–8.42)**

Doda, Thathri, Kastigarh, Bhagwah, Marmat, and Chilly Pingal fall under this intermediate category. These tehsils show mixed performance — some indicators (such as overall literacy in Doda and Thathri) are relatively strong, but this is offset by wider inter-group gaps or lower employment participation, producing a moderate overall level of inequality.

**HIGH SOCIAL-INEQUALITY ZONE (AVERAGE COMPOSITE SCORE 8.42–14.42)**

Chiralla, Bharath Bagla, Bhalessa (Gandoh), Kahara, Bhella, Mohalla, and Phigsoo constitute the highest inequality category. These tehsils are characterised by higher disparities in literacy, sex ratio,

and main-worker employment, alongside generally low absolute levels of literacy and workforce participation, reflecting compounded disadvantage linked to remoteness, terrain, and limited service infrastructure.

## DISCUSSION

The tehsil-wise evidence assembled in Section 4 converges on a consistent, spatially patterned form of inequality in Doda district that runs along four interlocking dimensions.

First, an economic dimension: tehsils that combine higher literacy, more favourable sex ratios, and greater workforce participation principally Bhaderwah, Gundna, Assar, and Bhalla — are also those best connected by road, closest to markets and administrative centres, and most integrated into the district's tourism and horticultural economy. This is consistent with the broader literature linking infrastructure access to reduced regional inequality (Servén & Calderón, 2004; Natarajan & Chidambaram, 2017; Rajeev & Vani, 2015).

Second, an educational dimension: despite the government's efforts to promote inclusive education, deep-rooted literacy disparities persist between the General and SC/ST populations, and counter-intuitively these disparities are often widest in the district's more literate tehsils (Bhaderwah, Doda, Thathri), implying that average improvements in education have not been evenly shared. This pattern echoes findings from the wider literature on the historical legacy of caste-based exclusion in Indian education (Kapoor, 1995; Reay, 2017).

Third, a healthcare and gender dimension: access to healthcare, especially in remote and marginalised tehsils, remains inadequate, and this is reflected indirectly in the sex-ratio patterns documented above, with women and children continuing to bear a disproportionate share of the resulting disadvantage. The persistence of patriarchal norms and unequal access to healthcare identified in this study is consistent with the broader gender-inequality literature (Ridgeway, 2011; Lorber, 2012; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009).

Fourth, a spatial dimension proper: tehsils in remote and hilly tracts face greater infrastructural challenges than those closer to the district headquarters, a pattern that closely parallels the findings of comparable geospatial work on basic-service accessibility in the neighbouring Samba district, where police, healthcare, banking, and fire-emergency facilities were similarly found to be concentrated around urban and highway-corridor settlements, leaving peripheral and hill tracts underserved (Babu, Sharma, & Tandup, 2023). Read together, the two studies suggest that the core-periphery logic of service and infrastructure distribution in the Jammu region is not confined to Doda district but reflects a more general geography of disadvantage across the Himalayan foothill and mountain tehsils of Jammu and Kashmir.

Two limitations of the present analysis should be noted. First, the study relies entirely on 2011 Census data; more recent tehsil-level information, where it becomes available, may show some narrowing or widening of the gaps identified here, particularly given ongoing road, tunnel, and bridge construction in the Chenab Valley since 2011. Second, the composite index used here is a rank-based aggregation of twelve indicators and does not incorporate income, health-expenditure, or migration data, which were unavailable at tehsil level; the resulting index should therefore be read as an index of demographic and socio-economic inequality specifically, rather than of welfare or living standards in the fullest sense.

## CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to analyse the spatial pattern of social inequality across the seventeen tehsils of Doda district using tehsil-wise demographic and socio-economic data from the 2011 Census. The findings reveal a complex tapestry of inequality spanning economic, educational, healthcare, and gender-based domains, which together constitute clear and consistent spatial disparities across the district.

Educational inequality remains deep-rooted: despite education's role as a fundamental pillar of development, literacy gaps between the General and SC/ST populations persist across the district and are, notably, widest in some of the most literate tehsils. Healthcare disparities compound this picture, with inadequate facilities in remote and marginalised tehsils placing a disproportionate burden on vulnerable populations, particularly women and children. Gender-based inequality remains deeply embedded in the social fabric of the district's tehsils, evident in both the sex-ratio patterns documented here and in the wider literature on gender and social structure. Caste and ethnic disparities continue to shape access to education and employment, notwithstanding constitutional and policy safeguards, while spatial disparities the central concern of this paper which shows that tehsils in remote and hilly regions face substantially greater developmental challenges than those in more accessible parts of the district.

Addressing these overlapping inequalities in Doda district's tehsils is not merely a matter of academic inquiry but a moral imperative and a collective responsibility for district planners, state government, and civil-society actors. On the basis of the evidence presented above, the following spatially targeted measures are recommended:

- **Economic Empowerment:** Prioritise job creation, skill development, and financial-inclusion initiatives in the high-inequality tehsils identified in Section 4.6 — Phigsoo, Bhella, Mohalla, Kahara, Bhalessa (Gandoh), and Bharath Bagla — to uplift marginalised communities economically.
- **Quality Education:** Improve educational infrastructure and teacher availability in rural and remote tehsils, with particular attention to narrowing the General–SC+ST literacy gap in Bhaderwah, Doda, and Thathri, and to promoting girl-child education district-wide.
- **Accessible Healthcare:** Strengthen healthcare infrastructure in remote, high-altitude tehsils, promote preventive healthcare outreach, and specifically address maternal and child health disparities linked to the sex-ratio patterns documented in Section 4.5.2.
- **Gender Equality:** Implement gender-sensitive policies, support women's economic empowerment, and strengthen enforcement of legal safeguards against sex-selective practices, with priority attention to Thathri, Bhaderwah, and Doda, where General–SC+ST sex-ratio gaps are widest.
- **Caste and Ethnic Inclusivity:** Expand initiatives to reduce discrimination, protect the rights of SC/ST communities, and preserve indigenous cultural practices, particularly in tehsils with both large SC/ST populations and wide inter-group gaps.
- **Spatial Equity in Infrastructure:** Ensure that road connectivity, digital infrastructure, and public-service delivery are extended on a priority basis to the seven tehsils classified in the high social-inequality zone, so that infrastructure investment actively narrows rather than reinforces existing disparities.

Future research building on this study would benefit from incorporating post-2011 tehsil-level data as it becomes available, extending the composite index to include income, health-expenditure, and

migration indicators, and combining the demographic approach used here with the geo-tagged facility-mapping and buffer-analysis methods applied in comparable studies of service accessibility in the Jammu region (Babu, Sharma, & Tandup, 2023), so as to link socio-economic outcomes more directly to the physical distribution of public services across Doda district's mountainous terrain.

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