

TRIBES OF UTTARAKHAND: A GEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Uttarakhand, located in the central Himalayan region of India, is home to diverse tribal communities that have adapted to the mountainous environment for centuries. These tribes maintain unique cultural traditions, livelihood systems, and ecological knowledge that reflect a close relationship with nature. The major tribes of Uttarakhand include the Bhotiya, Tharu, Buksa, Raji, and Van Gujjar communities. This research paper examines the geographical distribution, socio-economic characteristics, cultural practices, and environmental adaptations of these tribal groups. The study highlights the importance of understanding tribal lifestyles within the framework of physical geography and sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

Geography studies the relationship between humans and their environment. In mountainous regions like Uttarakhand, this relationship becomes particularly important because natural conditions strongly influence settlement patterns, occupations, and cultural practices. Uttarakhand became the 27th state of India in 2000 and is divided into two main regions: Garhwal and Kumaon. The state is characterized by high mountains, deep valleys, dense forests, rivers, and alpine pastures. Due to this diverse physical environment, several indigenous tribal communities have developed unique lifestyles that help them survive and thrive in the Himalayan ecosystem.

Tribal communities play a significant role in preserving biodiversity, traditional knowledge, and cultural heritage. Understanding their geographical distribution and lifestyle patterns helps in planning sustainable development and environmental conservation.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the major tribal communities of Uttarakhand.
2. To examine the geographical distribution of these tribes.
3. To study their socio-economic conditions and cultural practices.
4. To analyze their adaptation to the Himalayan environment.

METHODOLOGY

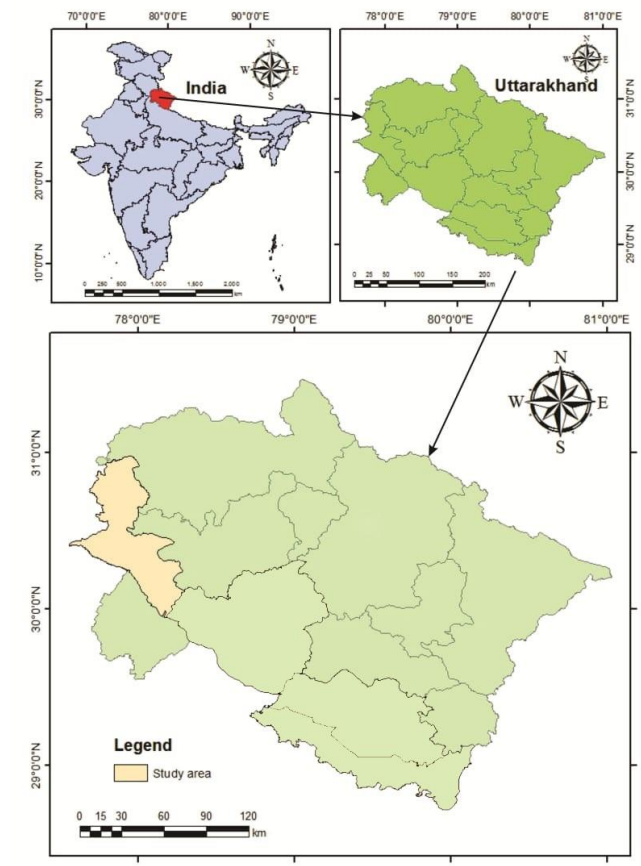
The study is based on secondary sources of data, derived from the Census of India, 2011, and the socio-economic statistical magazine of Uttarakhand. The special pattern of sex ratio and literacy in

Uttarakhand is representing through the maps and graphs. Arc GIS software used for preparing the map various statistical techniques we used with the help of M.S Excel.

Study Area

Hilly region of Uttar Pradesh state was carved out on 9th November 2000 as a new state Uttarakhand. The Uttarakhand is a state with 13 districts, 110 tehsils, 95 blocks, and 16674 villages. The state is a heavily forested and extremely hilly region in the Central Himalayan zone. It is located between latitudes 28° 43' – 31° 27' N and longitudes 77° 34' – 81° 02' E covering a geographical area of 53,483 km². This state has different kinds of geographical conditions and vast bio-diversity ranging from the snow peaks of the Himalayas to the sub-tropical Terai region. Tons River separates it from Himachal Pradesh in the northwest; Kali River separates the region from Nepal in the east, snow-capped peaks of the Himadri, marking the Indo-Tibetan boundary. Terai region separates it from Uttar Pradesh in the south-west and a short border with Haryana in the west. The Population of this state according to the census of 2011 is 10,086,292. Out of these, the males represent 5,137,773 and females comprise 4,948,519. The state had a growth rate of 18.81% over the last census. The sex ratio in Uttarakhand is 963, and the population density is 189 per sq. km.

Location Map of Uttarakhand Districts



Major Tribes of Uttarakhand

The Government of India has recognized several tribal communities in Uttarakhand. The most prominent among them include Bhotiya, Tharu, Buksa, Raji, and Van Gujjar.

Table 1: Tribal Groups in Uttarakhand

S.No.	Name of the Tribes	Districts
1	Tharu	Udham Singh Nagar, Nainital
2	Jaunsari	Dehradun, Uttarkashi
3	Buksa	Dehradun, UdhamSinghNagar, Nainital, Haridwar, Pauri
4	Bhotia	Almora, Chamoli, Pithoragarh, Bageshwar, Uttarkashi
5	Razi	Pithoragarh, Champawat

Source: Census of India 2011

Table 2: Tribal Population in Uttarakhand, 2011

S.No.	Name of the Tribes	Total Population of the Tribes	Percentage of the Tribal Population	Rural	Urban
1	Tharu	91,342	31.3	95.2	4.8
2	Jaunsari	88,664	30.4	93.2	6.8
3	Buksa	54,037	18.5	97.9	2.1
4	Bhotia	39,106	13.4	72.2	27.8
5	Razi	690	0.2	87.8	12.2
6	Unclassified	18,064	6.2	74.6	25.4
	Total	291903	100	90.7	9.3

Source: Census of India 2011

Bhotiya Tribe

The Bhotiya tribe lives mainly in the high-altitude districts of Pithoragarh, Chamoli, and Uttarkashi. Historically, they were involved in trade between India and Tibet. After the closure of the Indo-Tibetan border trade routes, their economic activities shifted to agriculture, animal husbandry, and tourism. Bhotiya communities practice seasonal migration known as transhumance. During winters they move to lower valleys, while in summers they live in high Himalayan villages. Their houses are traditionally built with stone and wood to withstand cold climatic conditions.

Tharu Tribe

The Tharu tribe primarily inhabits the Terai region of Uttarakhand, especially in Udham Singh Nagar and Nainital districts. They are known for their agricultural skills and knowledge of forest ecosystems. Tharu society has a rich cultural heritage including folk dances, festivals, and traditional houses made from bamboo and mud. Agriculture, fishing, and forest resource collection are the main sources of livelihood for this tribe.

Buksa Tribe

The Buksa tribe is found mainly in Dehradun, Nainital, and Pauri Garhwal districts. Traditionally they depended on forest resources for survival. Over time, many Buksa families shifted to agriculture and wage labor. Buksa communities maintain strong social traditions and family structures. Their settlements are generally located near forested areas and river valleys.

Raji Tribe

The Raji tribe is one of the Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTG) in India. They are mainly found in the Pithoragarh and Champawat districts near the Nepal border. Historically, the Rajis were hunter-gatherers and forest dwellers. Today many of them have adopted settled lifestyles with

government support programs. Despite modernization, they continue to preserve traditional knowledge of forests and medicinal plants.

Van Gujjar Community

The Van Gujjars are a nomadic pastoral community known for buffalo rearing. They migrate seasonally between Himalayan pastures and the plains of Uttarakhand. Their livelihood depends mainly on milk production and livestock management. The Van Gujjars have extensive knowledge of forest routes, grazing lands, and seasonal climate patterns.

Geographical Adaptation

The tribes of Uttarakhand have adapted their lifestyle according to the harsh Himalayan environment. Key forms of adaptation include:

- Transhumance or seasonal migration
- Use of local materials for house construction
- Dependence on forest products and medicinal plants
- Terrace farming in mountainous terrain
- Community-based resource management

These adaptations demonstrate a strong relationship between tribal communities and their natural environment.

Socio-Economic Conditions

Despite their rich cultural heritage, many tribal communities face socio-economic challenges such as:

- Low literacy rates
- Limited access to healthcare and education
- Economic marginalization
- Restrictions on forest resource use
- Migration of youth to urban areas

Government programs like tribal welfare schemes, education initiatives, and rural development projects aim to improve the living standards of these communities.

Importance of Tribal Knowledge

Tribal communities possess valuable traditional ecological knowledge. Their understanding of forest management, medicinal plants, wildlife behavior, and climate patterns contributes significantly to environmental conservation. Integrating this knowledge into modern development strategies can promote sustainable development in the Himalayan region.

CONCLUSION

The tribes of Uttarakhand represent an important component of the Himalayan cultural and ecological landscape. Their lifestyles reflect centuries of adaptation to the challenging mountain environment. However, modernization, environmental changes, and economic pressures are gradually transforming their traditional systems. A balanced approach that respects tribal culture while promoting education, healthcare, and economic development is essential for their sustainable future.

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