

Between Mountains and Borders: The Chronicle of Poonch and Rajouri

Major Project Report
Semester – I
Four-Year Undergraduate Program (**Design Your Degree**)

Submitted To
University of Jammu, Jammu



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Submitted on: **3 February, 2025**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We are profoundly grateful to our university for providing us with the platform and resources to undertake this meaningful project, *"Between Mountains and Borders: The Chronicle of Poonch and Rajouri."*

We extend our sincere thanks to our respected mentors, whose expert guidance and constructive feedback have been instrumental in shaping the direction of our research. Their encouragement inspired us to strive for excellence.

This project would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of our team:

- **Aditya Gupta**
- **Anil**
- **Mohd Shahid**
- **Muneeb Ajmer**
- **Peehar Singh Charak**
- **Sharib Ayaz**

We deeply appreciate the support and collaboration of every team member in overcoming challenges and achieving our goals.

Finally, we thank our families and friends for their unwavering support and encouragement, which motivated us throughout this project successfully.

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the major project titled "**Between Mountains and Borders: The chronicle of Poonch and Rajouri.**" has been successfully completed by the following students as part of their academic requirements for **Semester 1st** of their **Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (Design Your Degree)**:

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This project was carried out under the valuable guidance of **Dr. Sandeep Singh and Dr. Shallu Sehgal Sharma**, who provided consistent mentorship and valuable insights throughout the course of this study.

The project reflects the team's commitment, research, and dedication to understanding and analysing the socio-economic conditions of Rajouri and Poonch. It has been completed as per the guidelines and requirements set forth by **University of Jammu**.

Date: 3 February, 2025

Signature of Mentors

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ABSTRACT

The project titled "**Between Mountains and Borders: The chronicle of Poonch and Rajouri.**" aims to explore the intricate interplay between cultural traditions, economic activities, and social structures in the districts of Rajouri and Poonch. These regions, known for their rich heritage and diverse communities, present a unique socio-economic landscape that reflects both historical depth and modern challenges.

The study focuses on key aspects such as local livelihoods, access to healthcare, education, infrastructure, and agriculture.

Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, including field interviews, and secondary sources, the project seeks to uncover the challenges faced by the local population and identify opportunities for sustainable development.

Special attention is given to understanding the impact of government policies, the role of cultural practices in shaping economic behaviors, and the accessibility of essential resources like health and education.

The findings of this research aim to provide actionable insights that can contribute to addressing socio-economic disparities and fostering growth and resilience in these regions. By bridging tradition and progress, this project aspires to illuminate pathways toward a brighter future for Rajouri and Poonch.

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INTRODUCTION

Two stunning districts of the Jammu region in Jammu and Kashmir, Poonch and Rajouri, exude incredible charm, profound historical background, and deep-rooted cultural significance. The beauty here surrounds such high mountains as the towering Pir Panjal Mountain range, diverse community of life, and a heritage telling tales of centuries gone. Be it a lush meager or gurgling river, or the scenic land masses - all of these is enough to leave an individual's heart with a striking impact.

These districts were not always distinct entities. The administrative region of Poonch and Rajouri used to be a single region when Dogra rule was there in Jammu and Kashmir. They were administratively treated as one region since both were geographically adjacent to each other and were sharing similar socio-economic conditions. They were divided into two distinct districts to serve the special needs of the populations there. Although they are administratively separated, Poonch and Rajouri are still bound together by common history, cultural practices, and similar challenges.

A Historical Perspective

Poonch and Rajouri districts have been part of the history journey of Jammu and Kashmir. Both districts played important roles in the historical narratives of Jammu and Kashmir. They were important trade routes that connected India to Central Asia during ancient times. Such an importance gave them a cultural melting pot of languages and traditions, with the influence of traders, travellers, and rulers, whose impressions can still be found there.

Poonch, often referred to as the "Mini Kashmir," has a history dating back to the Mahabharata era. It is said that Draupadi, the queen of the Pandavas, once visited this land, which adds a mythical charm to its identity. Rajouri, on the other hand, has its roots in the Mughal period. The name "Rajouri" itself is derived from "Rajapuri," meaning the land of kings. Each region was covered by the Maurya's, Kushans, and Mughals; they leave behind huge contributions to the wealth of the culture and heritage of the region.

This living history still lingers in the remnants of ancient forts, temples, and mosques. The famous Poonch Fort, built by Raja Baldev Singh, is a symbol of architectural brilliance at that time, while Mughal Road in Rajouri reminds one of its importance during the Mughal era.

Culture and Social Tapestry

The most beautiful thing about Poonch and Rajouri is its people. The districts are made up of various communities such as Gujjars, Pahari's, Dogra's, and many more. Each community has its own unique traditions, languages, and ways of life, but they all live in perfect harmony, which is the true meaning of unity in diversity.

The cultural richness of these districts can be seen in their festivals, music, and art. The festivals such as Eid, Diwali, and Lori are held here with great zeal and fervour. Local fairs such as the Buddha Amarnath Yatra in Poonch and Baisakhi celebrations in Rajouri, in itself, are not merely a religious affair but are actually bonding moments for people across communities. Traditional folk songs of Pahari and Dogri, typically narrated to the accompaniment of rabab and dhol, speak of love, bravery, and devotion.

Another high point of the region is the language diversity. The people commonly speak Pahari, Gojri, Dogri, and Kashmiri, which reflects the deep cultural blend of the people. These languages, though different, often borrow from one another, thus further strengthening the bonds between communities.

Economic Foundations and Challenges

The economy of Poonch and Rajouri is highly integrated with their natural surroundings. The backbone of this region has been agriculture; crops such as maize, wheat, and rice dominate the main produce. Another main occupation of the region has been rearing livestock, especially in the case of the Gujjar and Bakar Wal communities that rely on their herds for subsistence.

Tourism in this region has gained more prominence in recent years, and most tourists are attracted by its scenic beauty and cultural significance. The Mughal Road, which connects the districts of Poonch and Rajouri, is presently a favorite tourist route over the Pir Panjal. Small industries, especially small-scale handicrafts, wool-based products, among others, have also emerged within the district.

The issues, however, are more and more common in these regions. Limited infrastructure, unemployment, and lack of up-to-date facilities in both education and healthcare are considered great challenges. Roads, which were improved, still need improvement so they would connect to remote areas efficiently. Talents and potential among the young crowd mean that job opportunities are too few, and most migrants move to other regions of this country in search of life.

Objective of The Research

This report explores Poonch and Rajouri's past and present in a step towards understanding its future potential. It will not only go deep into all the social, economic, and cultural aspects but would also paint a complete picture of what makes these districts so unique. Our goal will be to point out what they do well, but also to identify areas they need to improve upon.

Poonch and Rajouri are more than just names on a map; they are living stories of resilience, heritage, and hope. This project is our attempt to bring those stories to life, to celebrate the beauty of these districts, and to envision a future where their potential is fully real

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Research Objectives*

Historical Analysis: To explore the historical evolution of Poonch and Rajouri, including their political, cultural, and socio-economic development.

Case Study: To investigate a specific event, issue, or phenomenon in the region (e.g., conflict, migration, development projects, or cultural heritage).

2. Research Design

Qualitative Research: Focus on historical narratives, oral histories, and archival data.

Case Study Approach: In-depth analysis of a specific case related to Poonch and Rajouri.

3. Data Collection Methods

a. Primary Sources

Oral Histories: Conduct interviews with local elders to gather information.

Government Records: Collect online data from official government websites, census data, and official reports.

b. Secondary Sources

Literature Review: Study books, journal articles, and research papers on the history of Poonch and Rajouri.

Media Reports: Analyze newspaper articles, documentaries, and digital media related to the region.

Online Databases: Use digital archives and repositories for historical and contemporary data.

4. Data Analysis

Historical Analysis: Chronologically map the historical events and their impact on the region.

Thematic Analysis: Identify key themes such as political changes, cultural exchanges, and socio-economic transformations.

Case Study Analysis: Use qualitative methods to analyze the selected case, focusing on causes, effects, and implications.

5. Case Report Structure

a. Introduction

Background of Poonch and Rajouri.

Significance of the case study.

b. Historical Context

Overview of the region's history.

Key events and turning points.

c. Case Study Details

Description of the specific event or issue.

Data and evidence supporting the case.

d. Analysis

Interpretation of the case in the context of historical and contemporary factors.

Identification of patterns or trends.

e. Conclusion

Summary of findings.

Implications for the region's future.

6. Ethical Considerations

Ensure informed consent for interviews and oral histories.

Respect cultural sensitivities and local traditions.

Acknowledge sources and avoid plagiarism.

7. Limitations

Potential lack of access to certain archives or records.

Bias in oral histories and secondary sources.

Limited availability of recent data due to geopolitical issues.

8. Expected Outcomes

A comprehensive historical account of Poonch and Rajouri.

Insights into the selected case study and its relevance to the region.

Recommendations for further research or policy interventions.

EXPLORE POONCH DISTRICT

Exploring Poonch in Brief



“The City of seven Lakes”

Poonch has had known history since epic age. The natives believe that Lord Rama and the Pandavas had visited this area. According to a popular legend, Poonch got its name from Maharishi Pulastya, grandfather of Ravana. It is said that in ancient times Pulastya worshipped here for a long time. After him the area came to be known as Pulast Nagar, which, with the passage of time, got distorted from Pulast to Printus, Printus to Prooms and then ultimately to the present name of Poonch.

According to Rajatarangini, Raja Trilochan Pal of Poonch gave a tough fight to Mahmood Ghaznavi who invaded this area in 1020 A.D. The Dogra dynasty ruled Poonch State from 1850 to 1947 till the traumatic events of partition of the country.

Poonch district is one of the small 22 districts of Jammu and Kashmir state. It falls between 33°-35°, to 34°-01°, north latitude and 73°-58° to 74°-35°, east longitude. Poonch is flanked by the district of Baramulla and Palwama of Kashmir valley in the north-east, illegally occupied areas of the state by Pakistan in the north-West and by the Rajouri in the South.

Poonch has witnessed many historical eras . Around 326 BC when Alexander the great invanded the lower Jhelum belt to fight with Porus, this region was known as Dravabhisar. In the 6th Century AD, the famous Chinese traveller Huien T Sang passed through this area. Around 850 AD Poonch became a Sovereign state ruled by Raja Nar, who was basically a horse trader.

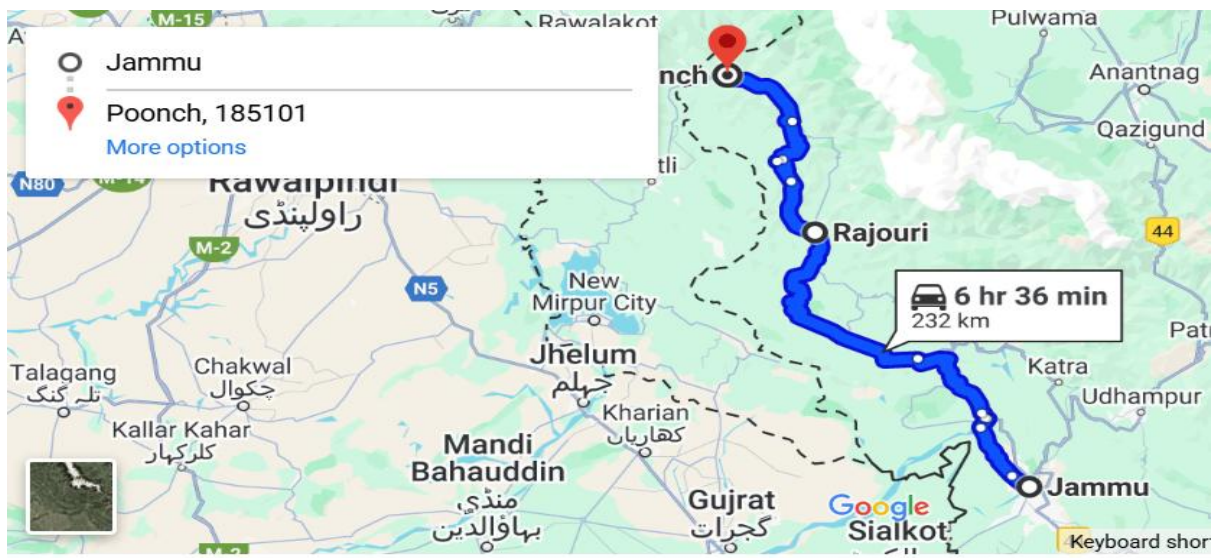
In 1596, The Mughal Emperor Jahangir made Raja Siral-ud-Din Rathore, The descendant of Rao Jodha and Rao Suraj Singh, the new ruler of Poonch. Siraj-ud-Din and his descendant Raja Shahbaz Khan Rathore, Raja Abdul Razak Rathore, Raja Rustam Rathore and Raja

Bahadur Rathore ruled this area up to 1798 AD. From 1819 A.D- 1850 A.D Poonch remained a part of Khalsa Darbar, and it remained under the occupation of the Sikh Empire until 1850. In 1850 A.D Dogra Raja Moti Singh laid foundation of Dogra Raj in Poonch. Moti Singh who served as the Prime Minister to Sikh Emperor Ranjit Singh was gifted Poonch as Jagir by the Sikh Emperor. Poonch remained a Jangir which had its own jagirdar under the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir from 1850 until the 1940s.

It is located on the southern slope, Valley and Glens of the Pir Panchal range which divides Kashmir Valley from Jammu Province in the southern and south-western side.

The most beautiful natural spots like Sawajian, Loran, Valley of Seven Lakes, Snow Caped Peaks, Meadows, Dhoks with colorful Tribal life are situated in the southern slopes of Poonch. These places are connected with each other through important passes like Noor Pur Pass, Jamia Pass, Choti Gali Pass and Pir Gali Pass. There is a tremendous scope of Adventure Tourism in District Poonch and it is expected that Poonch District shall become the Paradise for the Trekkers, Hikers and Expeditions in future.

Getting There



Travel Routes to Poonch City

NH 144A: - one can reach the city by the National Highway NH 144A which connect Jammu with Poonch thorough Rajouri.

Mughal Road: - Mughal Road connects Kashmir valley which passes from Buliaz in Poonch to Shopian in Kashmir.

The Spirit of Poonch: Where Every Corner Tells a Story of Culture, Peace, and Exhilaration.

Poonch, often referred to as the "Mini Kashmir," is a district in Jammu and Kashmir known for its unparalleled natural beauty and cultural diversity. This region is a hidden gem for tourists, offering a mix of spiritual sanctuaries, historical heritage, scenic landscapes, and adventurous sites. Each aspect of Poonch has its own charm, making it a must-visit destination for those seeking peace, exploration, and thrill. The shrines here reflect the spiritual richness of the area, while the heritage sites narrate stories of its glorious past. The leisure spots offer tranquility, and the adventure sites provide opportunities to explore the rugged terrains and test one's limits.

SHARINES OF POONCH

1. Dashnami Akhara Temple



It had remained centre of power when Poonch was principality of local Dogra Rajas between 1852-1947 AD. As per the past tradition the new Rajas of Poonch would be coroneted in Dashnami Akhara temple and then they were taken in procession to Poonch Fort for taking oath as Raja of Poonch. The Mahant of Akhara was known as Raj Guru. As per legend the temple was got constructed by a Muslim Raja Rustam Khan Rathore of Poonch between 1760 to 1787 AD. In the 19th century the Dogra Raja of Poonch had started the pilgrimage of Chari Mubarak from Poonch to Sh. Buddha Amarnath Temple Mandi.

2. Ram Kund Temple

(Kund means Pond of water) it is about 68 Kms from Poonch and 11 Km from Mendhar. According to legend, Shri Ram who halted with his family at Ram Kund during their exile while en-route to Kashmir personally got this temple and three natural water springs constructed i.e Ram Kund, Laxman Kund & Sita Kund for bathing. The king Lalitaditya of Kashmir got it renovated in the 7th century AD. A grand Fair is held in the month of April (Chaitra) Chaitra-choudhi where thousands of devotees offer prayers after bath in these Kunds.



3. Gurudwara Dheri Sahib near ChaKan-Da-Bagh



Dheri Mean Small temple. This Sikh shrine was established by Sant Bhai Bhadur Singh Ji, the nephew of Sant Bhai Rocha Singh Ji of Gurudwara Dera Sahib Rawlakote. Gurudwara Dheri Sahib is about 8 kms away from Poonch town, on the western side of Poonch in the village khari Dharamsal near the LOC on Poonch Rawlakote road near Trade Centre Chanka-Da-Bagh. The original name of this Hindu dominated village was Khari. In 18th century AD, Sant Bhai Rocha Singh Ji deputed his nephew Sant Bhai Bhadur Singh Ji to this village for spread of Sikhism. Now a big Gurudwara building has been constructed by the co-operation of the sangat and one month Samagam is held here every year in the month of June.

4. Ziyarat Sain Miran Sahib

It is the most popular and frequented Muslim shrine, located in the village Guntrian, on the LOC, at a distance of about 15 Kms from Poonch. This is Ziarat of a Great Spiritual Saint Sain Miran Sahib who originally belonged to a village Rankri in POK. After the Turmoil of 1947, Sain Sahib had migrated to village Guntrian in 1954. A grand Urs Sharief of Sain Miran Sahib is celebrated on 26th of August every year where thousands of pilgrims from all over the state and abroad assemble to pay the obeisance.



5. Ziarat Than Pir



It is situated in Tehsil Mandi at a distance of 43 kms in the north-east of Poonch town, on the tributary of Doda Range of Mountains. From this commanding place, the overlooking view of Suran Valley, Mandi, Poonch right up to Toli Pir in POK is marvelous. There is a beautiful green pasture around the shrine. Apart from religious importance, this is one of the most beautiful scenic spot of Poonch District which can be developed for tourism purpose. A grand annual Urs is celebrated in the month of November by the civil society Poonch in collaboration with Army.

HERITAGE TOURISM

1. Poonch Fort



It is a symbol of the heritage of Poonch District which is about 255 years old. It remained the main attraction to the tourists in the district. This fort spreads across an area of 7535 sqm and is located on a hill top which adds glory to the historical testament of Poonch city. The foundation of this splendid Fort was laid down by Raja Abdul Razak Khan in 1701 AD and was later on built by Raja Rustam Khan in 1779 A.D after whose name Poonch was also known as “Rustam Nagar”. This Fort has witnessed the golden period rule of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, Raja Moti Singh and Raja Baldev Singh.

2. Ruins of Pandav's Mahal

These are located in the village Sakhi Median in Mendhar Tehsil. It is believed that when Pandava's were staying there during their exile period, their mother Kunti had desired to see her native city Hastinapur. At that time Bhima had constructed a very high tower in the center of this Mahal from where he showed Hastinapur to his mother. It is also believed that later on a discourse had taken place between Greek King Menedhara of Punjab and a Buddhist Monk in second century AD at this very place. After that King Menedhara had embraced Buddhism and named this area after his name as Menedhara. With passage of time it changed from Menedhara to Mendhar.



SCENIC/LEISURE SPOTS

Poonch is located at the base of the Pir Panchal range, surrounded by beautiful mountains, snow-covered peaks, and thick forests of fir, deodar, and pine. The area is full of valleys, clear lakes, streams, and green meadows with colorful flowers.

Popular spots like Beharamgala, Sawajian, Loran, Buffliaz, Noorichamb, Surankote, and Mandi have great potential for tourism.

The views from places like Bimber Gali, Dera-Ki-Gali, Tota Wali Gali, Dana Shah Star Top, Krishna Ghati, Jabi Toti, and Than Pir are amazing. With the opening of Mughal Road and the Poonch-Rawlakote road, more tourists are visiting these areas. In the future, these places are expected to become popular tourist spots for both locals and foreigners.

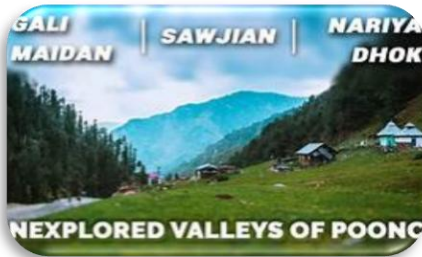
1. LOC Trade Center at Ranger Nallah



It is located on 46 kms long cross LOC Poonch-Rawlakote road at a distance of about 8kms in south of Poonch Town. The loaded trucks from POK arrive on Monday to Friday every week and unloaded for onward transportation. Similarly, the loaded trucks of Jammu and Poonch are also reporting at the Trade Centre and then cross the LOC for unloading on the other side of

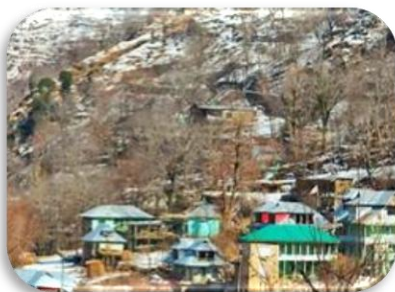
the LOC. Apart from this passenger of divided families who cross the LOC from the either side are also halted at this place for security checkup.

2. Sawjian Valley



It is lying in the extreme north of Mandi valley in the foot hill of Chore Panchal Pass along LOC, exactly on the opposite side of Gulmarg. Therefore the terrain, vegetation and landscape of this glen resemble with that of Gulmarg. This place is 43 kms away from Poonch. The attractive valley is surrounded by forest belt of Devdar and Fir trees. The important routes leading towards Gulmarg and Tangmarg start from this place. The scenic view of Gali Maidan is marvelous and ideal for converting it into tourist resort.

3. Loran Valley



It is an important scenic spot of Poonch District which is located on renowned Tosh Maidan Road which leads towards Kashmir Valley. In the ancient time Loran was known as the gate way of Kashmir and it had the honour of being the capital of Poonch Principality upto 12th century A.D. The valley is surrounded by thick forest belt of Devdar trees, Green pastures and unique tribal life. This area is known for Nandichool waterfall, Ziarat Sain Ellahi Bakhsh Batalkote and beautiful Dhokes located on the mountains surrounding Loran. It is linked with Yousmarg & Tangmarg to Gulmarg with bridal paths via Noor poor pass and Jamia Gali pass.

4. Pir Ki Gali



Pir ki Gali is an attractive natural place located at 1140fts. Above the sea level exactly on the boundary of Poonch and Shopian. Pir marg (meadow) surrounded with snow clad peaks, cool breeze and tribal life satyle starts from pir gali which is known as the crown of 240km log Pir panchal range the 84km long Mughal road passes through the heart of Pir Panchal via Pir gali which is 43km away from Buffliaz Poonch and 41km from Shopian with the opening of Mughal road great hustle bustle starts at Pir gali and simultaneously the surrounding natural resort and beautiful valley of seven lakes, Panj tarnimeadow, Girjan Doke, Tata kutti, peak, Chatta pani, Glacier come into lime light which are ideal for scenic and adventure Tourism.

Adventure Sites

Poonch is a dream destination for adventure enthusiasts, offering thrilling experiences amidst its breathtaking natural beauty. With towering mountains, deep forests, and gushing rivers, it's perfect for trekking, hiking, rock climbing, camping, and river rafting. The region's unique terrain and peaceful surroundings provide the perfect escape for those seeking excitement and a connection with nature.

1. Nandi Chool



It is about 13 Km form Loran valley 2 -3 Km motorable road and the rest is on foot. It is surrounded with dense lush green forest of deodar trees, beautiful meadows and snow caped mountains . The Gulmarg is on the other side of the same mountain range and it is one of the important and attractive destinations for the treckkers .

2. Girjin Dhok



It is about 10 to 14 Kms on foot from Peer ki Gali and about 15-18 kms from Chandi Marh, along the South East of present Mughal road. This is fabled valley of seven Mountain lakes, including the Neel Sar, Katora sar, Nandan Sar, Chandan sar, Gum sar, Bagh sar and Akal Dakshani. It is treckers paradise because of variety of tracks lead to the valley of Seven lakes. The favourable time for trekking towards this valley is June to August.

3. Seven Lakes

The oval-shaped **Sat Sars (Seven Lakes)** lie on the Poonch-Shopian border of the Pir Panchal range, about 70 km from the Poonch district headquarters, at an altitude of 3,500 meters. These include **Nandan Sar** (the largest and most beautiful), **Gum Sar** (Hidden Lake), **Kal Dachni** (Dark Water Lake), **Sukh Sar** (Dried Lake), **Neel Sar** (Blue Lake), **Katori Sar** (Bowl Lake), and **Katanan Sar** (Blocked Lake).

The lakes are located in the **Girjan Valley**, named after "elf's thunder" due to frequent thunderstorms. Nearby, southeast of these lakes, lies a group of five more lakes, including **Handu Sar** (Ram Lake), **Kag Alna** (Crow's Nest), and **Janj Sar** (Marriage Lake). To the north of Nandan Sar are two additional lakes. While most of these lakes fall within Poonch, parts of Nandan Sar extend into Shopian.

The Poonch is famous by the name of valley of seven Lakes which are:-

a. NANDAN SAR



Nandan Sar Lake is one of the biggest lakes in the Rajouri District. This lake is oval shaped and measures over 1 km in length. Nandan Sar Lake is situated at a height of 3500 m above sea level. Upon reaching the site, tourists would discover that the water of this lake is deep blue in colour. The water of Nandar Sar runs from the Jadi Marg Nullah and flows down into the Kashmir Valley. Travellers planning to visit the Nandar Sar Lake have to first climb up the slope of Akal Darshini and then descend to the Kashmir watershed.

b. SUKH SAR



Sukh Sar is an important lake of this destination, which lies at an elevation of 3000 m above sea level. It is a small oval-shaped lake that is the first of the lakes of the Pir Panjal range that one comes across when approaching from the northern side.

c. BAGH SAR

One of the lakes in Rawiwali Marg is Bagh Sar, which lies at an altitude greater than 3,300 meters to the west of Katoria Sar. It has great natural beauty and calm environment surrounds; therefore it is an excellent place for camping and trekking. The lake surrounds lush green meadows and one can see even the Pir Panjal range also.

Its calm waters and the lush greenery surrounding it make this a hidden gem for nature lovers and adventure seekers. Bagh Sar, like Kokar Sar and Neel Sar, are part of the pristine

landscape of lakes that can provide an experience for travelers to seek solitude in the heart of the Himalayas.

d. KATORA SAR



Known as "Bowl Lake,"

Katora Sar has developed its popularity because of the uniqueness it offers due to its bowl-like shape. Located amidst the seven great lakes, this valley in Girjan stands majestically with fabulous landscapes, fresh meadows, and natural serene beauty. Its crystal-clear water and peaceful ambiance attract visitors seeking solace and a connection with nature. Katora Sar is a real gem of the Pir Panjal range, offering a breathtaking experience for all who visit.

e. NEEL SAR



Neel Sar, located southeast of Sukh Sar, is a beautiful lake with crystal-clear blue waters and serene surroundings. The lake, as its name suggests, reflects the vibrant blue of the sky, making it a breathtaking view. It is nestled in the lap of nature, offering a peaceful and refreshing experience to the visitors. Among the seven famous lakes of the region, Neel Sar stands out as one of the most beautiful and captivating spots.

f. GUM SAR

Gum Sar is also known as the "Hidden Lake," an oval-shaped lake near Nandan Sar in the Pir Panjal range. It is one of the seven famous lakes in the region. Gum Sar is accessible by crossing the Nandan Pass, located to the south of Nandan Sar.

The surroundings with lush meadows and rugged mountain terrains create a peaceful serene atmosphere. The lake is a place with untouched beauty, hence, a paradise for the nature lovers and adventure seekers to explore the scenic wonders of Poonch.

g. AKAL DACHHNI

Akal Dachhni or "Dark Water Lake" is a lesser-known yet beautiful lake, and it happens to be at Poonch. The name reflects the deep dark color of water in it, adding mystery to its charm. Located in the scenic Pir Panjal range, it surrounded with lush meadows and mountain ranges, making it ideal for trekkers and nature enthusiasts.

This lake is situated close to the celebrated Sukh Sar and is a part of the beautiful series of seven lakes. Many tourists see Akal Dachhni while visiting this beautiful chain of alpine lakes, each providing an opportunity to experience something different in nature. Its quiet surroundings make it a peaceful abode for anyone looking for isolation and beauty in nature.

Economy of Poonch District

The economic situation in Poonch district is highly challenging. The area lacks industrial infrastructure and has minimal commercial activity, which hampers its overall economic growth. The local economy is based on agriculture, with most residents owning small plots of land for cultivation. However, the limited land resources and low agricultural productivity have kept many residents trapped in poverty, thereby restricting their purchasing power. This makes the population highly susceptible to the consumer market's fluctuations.

Besides agriculture, the economy of the district is also marred by an acute lack of industrialization. There is hardly any industrial development and minimal significant commercial or service sector activity. Thus, the people of the area have very limited economic alternatives besides agriculture, and most of the people cannot be shifted to alternative livelihoods.

The problem of unemployment is the most acute problem in the district. Both skilled and unskilled laborers face severe shortages of jobs. A major portion of the youth population of Poonch is unemployed, and this problem is more acute as compared to other districts in the state. Public sector remains the main avenue of employment, wherein people actively compete for government jobs. However, the private sector in Poonch is underdeveloped, offering only limited job opportunities for those seeking work.

To address these economic challenges, the state and district administrations have been implementing a variety of employment generation schemes aimed at providing job opportunities and improving livelihoods. These initiatives include:

PMRY (Prime Minister's Rozgar Yojana): A scheme focused on providing self-employment opportunities for unemployed youth through financial assistance for setting up small businesses.

SSES (Swarnajayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojana): Urban employment scheme meant for the benefit of the urban poor.

SGSY (Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana): Self-employment scheme of rural people; it provides financing and training facilities to the poor to start income generation activities.

MNREGA: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, flagship rural employment guarantee scheme in which at least 100 days of wage employment is provided in a year.

Despite all these initiatives, the Poonch district is still battling massive economic challenges. A weak industrial base and high unemployed people, mainly the youth, are major impediments to the economic development of the district. However, if the government continues to work and locals join actively, the gradually improving economic condition can be foreseen in the district of Poonch.

Culture of Poonch District

The culture of Poonch district is a vibrant tapestry woven from the various traditions, customs, and influences from different eras, reflecting a unique blend of ethnicities and history. This district, located in the Jammu region, has managed to preserve its cultural heritage, while also embracing new influences over the years. The people of Poonch are known for their strong sense of pride in their cultural legacy, and they continue to celebrate their age-old customs and traditions with great enthusiasm and respect.

Festivals of Poonch

The people of Poonch celebrate a wide range of festivals, both religious and cultural, which are integral to their way of life. Some of the major festivals celebrated in the region include:

Baisakhi:



Celebrated in April, Baisakhi marks the beginning of the harvest season and is a major agricultural festival. It is celebrated with great zeal, especially in rural areas, and symbolizes the harvest of crops like wheat and barley. It is also a significant festival for Sikhs, as it marks the formation of the Khalsa in 1699.

Lohri:



A festival celebrated in January, Lohri marks the end of winter and the beginning of the harvest season. The festival is known for its bonfires, dancing, and singing traditional folk songs. People gather around the fire, throw sesame seeds, and offer prayers for a good harvest.

Bahu Mela:

Held in the Bahu Fort region, this mela (fair) is dedicated to the worship of Goddess Mahakali. It is an important religious festival, attracting large numbers of devotees from various parts of the district. The fair is an excellent display of Poonch's rich religious and cultural heritage.

These festivals are celebrated with a great deal of fervor, bringing together people from different backgrounds and communities. The festivals not only serve as a way to honor the agricultural roots of the region but also highlight the unity and harmony among its people.

Traditional Clothing and Identity

The traditional attire of the people of Poonch reflects their deep connection to their culture and their distinct identity. In rural areas, the traditional clothing is often made of woolen fabrics due to the region's cool climate, especially in the mountainous areas. The Pahari people, the majority ethnic group, often wear phiran (a long, loose robe) and chadar (a traditional cloth worn over the shoulders). Men typically wear woolen caps and turbans, while women wear intricately embroidered dupattas and salwar kameez. These clothes are not only functional for the region's climate but also serve as symbols of cultural pride and heritage.

Music & Dance Traditions

The music and dance of Poonch are an integral part of its cultural life. The district's traditional art forms are a source of great joy and celebration for the community. Some of the most notable forms include:

Rouf:

Rouf is a traditional dance form predominantly performed by women during festivals and weddings. This folk dance involves graceful hand movements and foot tapping, symbolizing the harvest season and the joy of community gathering. The performers wear traditional dresses and perform in a synchronized manner to the rhythm of folk songs.

Chakri:

Chakri is a popular group dance performed during various celebrations, especially during Baisakhi and Lohri. It is characterized by a fast-paced rhythm and requires coordination among the dancers. The dance involves clapping, jumping, and intricate footwork, often accompanied by live music from traditional instruments like the dhol and shehnai.

Bhakh:

Bhakh is another folk dance form that is performed in a circle, and the dancers typically use sticks as part of the performance. The dance is energetic and requires a high level of skill and coordination. The music is fast-paced, and the movements are synchronized, often telling stories of love, war, and daily life.

The music in Poonch is generally folk-based, using instruments such as dhol, flute, sitar, and shehnai, and the songs reflect the district's agricultural lifestyle, folk legends, and religious beliefs.

Community and Social Life

One of the most remarkable aspects of Poonch's culture is the warmth and hospitality of its people. Regardless of their religious or cultural backgrounds, the people of Poonch are known for their communal spirit and kindness towards guests. Traditional values such as respect for elders, hospitality, and the close-knit family structure play an essential role in the social life of the district. In times of celebration, whether for weddings or festivals, large community gatherings are common, and hospitality is extended to everyone, regardless of their background.

In conclusion, Poonch district's culture is a vibrant blend of ancient traditions, agricultural practices, and artistic expressions. The people continue to celebrate their heritage through festivals, music, dance, and clothing, and the unity among diverse communities remains a key characteristic of their identity. Despite modern changes, the cultural legacy of Poonch continues to thrive, making it a unique and cherished part of Jammu and Kashmir's heritage.

AGRICULTURE OF DISTRICT POONCH



The Director Agriculture visited different Panchayats of Haveli constituency identified to be developed as model for integrated farming. He also inspected the various programmes launched by the department for the welfare of the farmers.

Poonch District is 240 km from Jammu and 184 km from Srinagar, located on the southern slopes of the Pir Panjal range at 3,300 ft above sea level. Established in 1967, it covers 1,674 sq. km and has a population of 4.76 lakh (2011 census). The district has 6 tehsils, 11 blocks, and 173 villages, with most of the land being rain-fed (only 11.9% has irrigation).

The climate varies from subtropical to temperate, while the annual rainfall ranges from 1,200 to 1,400 mm. Temperatures vary from 5°C in winter to 39°C in summer. Maize, wheat, and paddy are the major crops, but maize is the largest crop with 24,000 hectares under cultivation. Specialty crops like rajmash, garlic, chilies, and potatoes are also grown.

Small-scale farming is the norm, with an average landholding of 0.24 hectares per family. The district has focused on modern farming tools and techniques like irrigation pumps, maize shellers, and bore wells to improve efficiency and productivity. Poonch also promotes apiculture and mushroom farming for diversification and employment opportunities.

Agricultural SWOT Analysis of Poonch District

Strengths

- Diverse climate supports a variety of crops.
- Fertile soils suitable for intensive farming.
- Access to potential markets.
- Skilled agricultural workforce available.

- Farmers are open to adopting modern techniques.
- High demand for vegetables and food crops.
- Rajmash and garlic are profitable cash crops, encouraging expansion.
- Development of maize varieties suited to local conditions.

Weaknesses

- Mono-cropping in areas like Buffliaz, Chandimarh, and Mandi.
- Many farmers are economically weak.
- Large areas of cultivable land remain unused.
- Small and scattered landholdings (average size 0.2 ha).
- Uneven terrain limits mechanization and water retention.

Opportunities

- Huge potential for organic farming.
- Scope for diversifying crops and introducing livestock farming.
- Use of lightweight power tillers in suitable areas.

Threats

- Frequent natural disasters like hailstorms, floods, and droughts.
 - Farmers' limited ability to invest in agriculture.
 - Rising issues of pests and diseases.
 - Shrinking and fragmented landholdings.
-

Health Sector of District Poonch

District Hospital Poonch:

The District Hospital Poonch is a major healthcare facility in the region with a capacity of 200 beds. It provides inpatient and outpatient services to thousands of patients each month. On average, around 70,000 patients are treated in the outpatient department, and approximately 15,000 patients are admitted for various medical conditions every month. Equipped with essential medical infrastructure and supported by a dedicated team of specialists, doctors, paramedical staff, and administrators, the hospital plays a vital role in delivering quality healthcare to the residents of Poonch district.



Health Sector Poonch comprising of three Block Mandi, Mendhar and Surankote catering to a population of 5.68 lacs and two of its Block Mandi and Mendhar are with LOC. There are total of 186 Health Institutions across the District.

Sr. No.	Name of Facility	Quantity
01	District Hospital	01
02	District Tuberculosis Centre	01
03	Community Health Centres	03
04	Primary Health Centres	17
05	New Type Public Health Centre	27
06	Sub Centre	127
07	Medical Aid Centre	07
08	Mobile Medical Aid Centre	03

Health Infrastructure of District Poonch

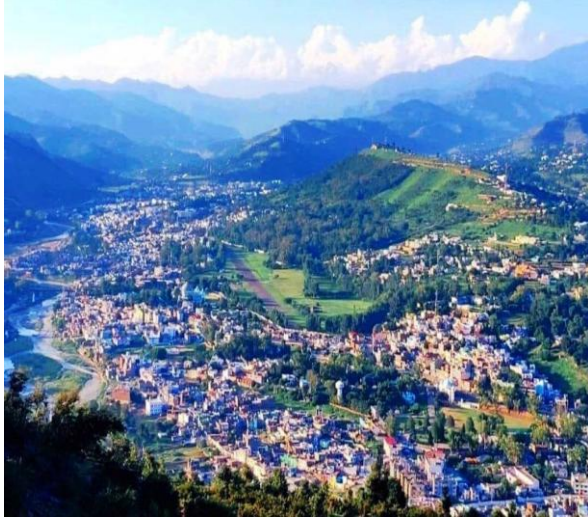
District Poonch is well-prepared to offer healthcare services for its population. In total, 60 ambulances have been provided including one advanced life support ambulance that would ensure proper and timely transportation of patients in the referral mode. The total employees working at health institutions within the district include specialists, doctors, paramedical staff, and administrative personnel-1,283 in number.

The inpatient capacity of the District Hospital in Poonch is 200 beds. Each CHC has an inpatient capacity of 30 beds, while each PHC provides 5 beds. It caters to around 70,000 OPD patients, while around 15,000 patients are admitted every month in the health facilities. Such a massive structure supports the area by providing good health care to its people.

Infant Mortality rate	12/1000 live birth
Maternal Mortality rate	57/lacs live birth
Total Fertility Rate	1.9
Below one year sex ratio	945/1000 male
Institution deliveries	85%
Immunization	85%

EXPLORE RAJOURI DISTRICT

A Quick Look at Rajouri



"The Land of Kings"

Rajouri district is located in the Jammu Province flanked by the Poonch district in the north, Jammu district in the south, Reasi district in the east and POK (Pakistan occupied Kashmir, Mirpur) in the West Rajouri. Rajouri area has great importance in ancient times. In Mahabharata there was a Kingdom known as Panchal Desa.

The King of this state was Panchal Naresh whose daughter Dropadi was married to Pandavas. The historians identify Panchal Desa as the Panchal range of mountains. Rajouri was also a part of this kingdom of Panchal Naresh.

In historical perspective, Rajouri town is believed to have evolved from 'Rajouri' literally meaning the land of kings. One finds its mention in the travelogues of Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang who visited the town in 632 A.D and described it as part of Kashmir. Still earlier, in the Buddhist period it formed a part of Gandhar territory (Afghanistan, Gandhar and Tashkent). Those days Loharakote in Poonch district and Rajouri had emerged as two powerful states of the area.

Early records show that in 4th century B.C, there existed in the north-west of India a federal type of political setup in which Abhisar with its capital at Rajouri was existing. At the time of Alexander's invasion, Rajouri was at the height of its glory. In Maurayan Period the town of Rajouri was a great trade centre.

Similarly Albaurani is recorded to have visited Rajouri with Sultan Masud (Son of Sultan Mehmood) in 1036. Referred to in Kalhans Rajtirangini as Rajour, this name slowly changed into Rajouri . Number of forts, sarais and baradaris were constructed in this beautiful town with the help of Mughal rulers. The remnants of fortified Mughal inns at Nadhpur, Chingus,

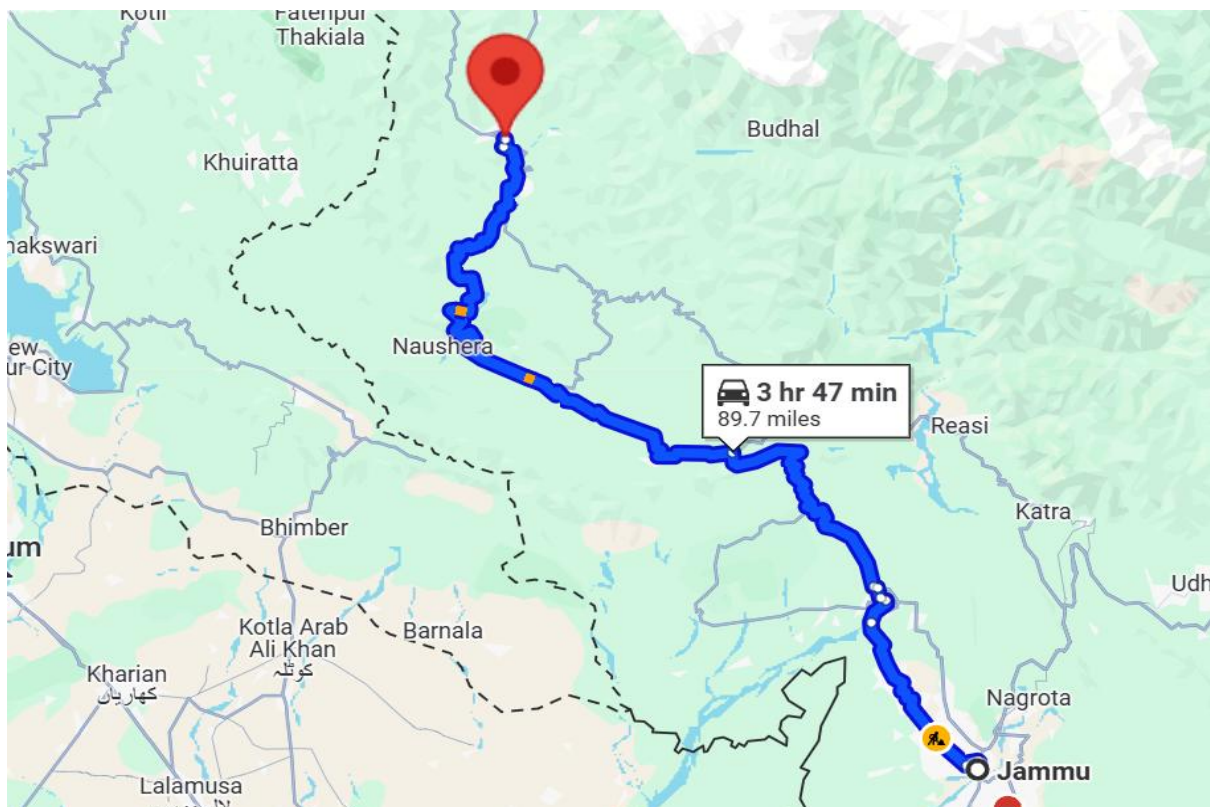
Rajouri, Fatehpur and Thanamandi are a pleasant reflection of the glorious days of the Royal Mughal entourage proceeding towards Kashmir Valley.

Rajouri town remained the favourite haunt of Mughal rulers on their way to Kashmir. After 1846 Rajouri became a part of the kingdom of Maharaja Gulab singh that consisted of undivided state of Jammu and Kashmir including Ladakh. Rajouri Fort at Dhannidhar near Rajouri town still stands in its ruins as proud relic of the rich historical part of this town.

Travel Routes to Poonch City

One can reach the city by road, National Highway 144A runs through Rajouri district connecting Jammu with District Poonch.

Famous Mughal Road connecting Jammu Division with Kashmir valley also passes through the Rajouri.



Rajouri: A Land Where Every Corner Whispers Stories of Heritage, Harmony, and Adventure.

Rajouri a charming land - a district located in the heart of Jammu and Kashmir, where history, culture, and nature appear as silken threads stitched together. Famous for its picturesque landscapes and rich traditions, Rajouri is a destination in the language of the soul. Whether it's about the legacy of olden times, sanctity of the soul, or thrilling adventures, each turn within this land speaks a unique story. From sacred shrines to serene meadows, Rajouri offers an unforgettable journey for those seeking peace, cultural exploration, and a touch of excitement. Let's explore the multifaceted charm of Rajouri through its shrines, heritage tourism, and health/recreational tourism.

SHRINES OF RAJOURI

1. Shahdra Sharief Shrine



One of the most famous Muslim shrines in Jammu, Shahdra-Sharif is located in the Rajouri district and is about 177 kilometers from Jammu. The shrine dedicates itself to Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah and dates back to the 19th century. Standing atop a beautiful hillock in Thanna Mandi area, 29 km from Rajouri town, Shahdra Sharif has quite a story attached to it.

It is said that this shrine was built by Gulab Singh, who was once the army general of Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab.

According to the historical records, in 1820 AD, Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab sent his army General, Gulab Singh, to defeat an adversary. But the general lost most of the soldiers and remained with 25 odd ones. He was camping at Thanna-Mandi; he got acquainted with Baba Ghulam Shah 'Badshah'. He went

to meet the Baba. The Baba, who lived in the nearby locality of Shahdra, looked at him and smiled. On being asked the reason for his smile, he said that he was smiling at the prosperous future of Gulab Singh.

Then the Baba asked him to climb on top of the mountain and look around. He further added that all the places that he can see with his naked eyes today, would be a part of his territory someday. Gulab Singh climbed and saw Jammu, Kashmir, Kishtwar and Tibet. Delighted, Gulab Singh asked Baba to take some Jagir (land) from him. He was asked by Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah only for the land of Shahdra Sharief in Jammu. The land was transferred in the name of Baba. After some time, the prophecy of Baba Ghulam Shah became true, and Gulab Singh became the Maharaja of the State of Jammu and Kashmir. Gulab Singh, after achieving victory, once again went to visit Baba Ghulam Shah to thank him. However, by that time, the Baba had left for the holy abode. As a mark of his gratitude towards the saint, Gulab Singh got the shrine of Jammu Shahdra Sharif constructed. Even today, devotees of each and every faith visit this shrine to pay respect to the holy saint.

2. Mangla Mata

Mangla Mata Dev Asthan is located about 70kms from Rajouri in village Bhawani of Tehsil Nowshera. It was originally located in Hamirpur as Mangal Mai (now in Pakistan). A dam has been constructed by Pakistan under the name of Mangla Dam and it is believed that when the work of Mangla Dam in 1965 AD, in Hamirpur was started by Pakistan and the Dev astan of Mangal Mai came inside the dam, a Brahman of Bhawani village namely Late Pandit Nihal Chand had a dream in which Mangla Mata had given him darshan and asked that She has shifted her asthan from Hamirpur to the forests of Bhawani. After some days, the Brahman came to this place and found the pindies (a shape of Goddess made by natural rock) of Mangal Mai in the cave. Every year congregation is held on the Navratras in which large number of pilgrims pay their obeisance.



3. Ziarat Sain Ganji Qadri



Also known as the shrine of Sain Ganji Sahib Qadri, is situated 10 km away from the town of Rajouri and overlooks the Darhal Nala of Jammu and Kashmir. This shrine is dedicated to Sain Ganji Sahib, who was born in a Gujjar family at Fatehpur. Below it is famous Shifa Pani for curing skin diseases.

Panjnara (Ancient Temple Complex):- Panjnara a small village in Tehsil Kalakote (Rajouri), is famous for a magnificent temple locally known as 'Pandu Kund'. It is one of the best preserved temples of Kashmiri architectural style in Jammu province away from the valley. Built in grand dimension, the temple dates back to 9th-10th century A.D and is very similar to Buniyar templend Deltha Mandir in Baramula district. It consists of main shrine, a rectangular peristyle with 55 cells facing to the courtyard and double chambered gateway in the middle of eastern wall.

HERITAGE TOURISM

1. Dhani Dhar Fort



In 1819 Maharaja Ranjit Singh while concurring Kashmir captured Rajouri, he appointed Mirza Reheem Ullah Khan as Raja of Rajouri in place of Raja Agar Khan. Raja Raheem Ullah Khan remained governing Rajouri principality up to 1846 under the control of Khalsa Darbar Lahore. On 15th March, 1846, Jammu and Kashmir and Ladhakh was sold by the Britishers to Raja Gulab Singh of Jammu and Kashmir. By this way, the Rajouri principality also came under the jurisdiction of Maharaja Gulab Singh. Since Maharaja was not having good relation with Raja Raheem Ullah Khan of Rajouri, therefore, he directed him to step down. But Raja Raheem Ullah Khan refused to do so.

In these circumstances, Maharaja Gulab Singh alongwith his forces reached Rajouri and dismissed Raja Raheem Ullah Khan and his administration and on 26th of October, 1846, Raja Raheem Ullah Khan was compelled to leave principality alongwith his family and relatives. Then Maharaja Gulab Singh appointed Mian Hathu the Governor of Rajouri. Mian Hathu governed Rajouri from 1846-1856 AD. In this very period, he started the construction of Dhannidhar Fort. He used the stones and material in the construction of Fort of those buildings which were belonging to Jaral Rajas and destroyed during the invasion of Maharaja Ranjit Singh on Kashmir. The Fort was completed in 1855 AD. The main intention for the construction of the Fort was to keep Dogra Forces in this safer place because from this place, the whole Valley of Rajouri could be viewed. Apart from this during the Dogra regime, the revenue was collected from the farmers in the shape of grains and this grain was dumped in this Fort which was sold later on. This Fort has been used by the defense in the past.

2. Chingus Fort



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3. Hall of Fame

The foundation stone of Hall of Fame was laid down by Lt. Gen S.P Malhotra, PVSM, the then GOC-in-C North command in commemoration of the heroic sacrifice of soldiers during war of 1947 A.D, 1965 A.D, and 1971 A.D. It is a living monument of bravery and sacrifice. A beautiful replica of Indian Soldiers fixing Indian tri-color on enemy's post is a major attraction fir Tourists.

RECREATIONAL TOURISM

1. Darhal

In the northeast of Rajouri town, at a distance of 25 kms. Darhal, a bowl shaped valley surrounded by gentle sloping mountains on all sides, is situated. Nature seems to have carved a stadium for the prospective sport lovers, who could be attracted here in thousands, if sport facilities were created. Enroute to Darhal is the Khanghah of Sain Ganj Baba, which accords religious importance to this area. The perennial flow of limpid water in Darhal Tawi adds more charm to its beauty.

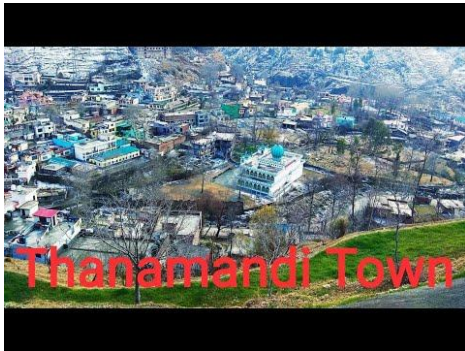


2. Tatapani



Tatapani is famous for Hot-water sulphur spring which has medicinal property to cure bone, joint and skin ailment. It is located about 35km away from Rajouri town and about 110 km from Jammu. A tourist Dormitory is also available here for stay of visitors.

3. Thanamandi



This is an important historical place right from the time of Mughals, who used to stay there during their journey from Delhi to Kashmir and vice-versa. An old Mughal Sarai still exists there which speaks of its glorious time. The climate of this place is very charming and in fact is a health resort. It is also famous for its artistic wooden products. The famous Shrine of Shahdara Sharief is just 6-7 kms from this place.

Culture & Heritage of the District

The district is home to a rich cultural mosaic, with people from various faiths, castes, and creeds coexisting peacefully in a cordial environment. The major ethnic groups in the district include Gujjars, Bakerwals, Paharis, Punjabis, Kashmiris, and Dogras, all of whom contribute to the district's unique cultural heritage.

Gujjars:

Gujjars primarily reside on the mountain slopes of the district. They typically own small pieces of land used for cultivation, and their homes are usually kachha (temporary) structures. Cattle play an essential role in their economy, providing an additional source of income. Unfortunately, a majority of Gujjars live below the poverty line. They make up approximately 35% of the district's total population.

Bakerwals:

The Bakerwals are an offshoot of the Gujjars and share linguistic, cultural, and religious similarities with them. However, unlike the settled Gujjars, the Bakerwals are nomadic, migrating from one location to another in search of suitable pastures for their flocks of sheep and goats. They are spread across the district, with their seasonal migrations being an integral part of their way of life.

Paharis:

The Paharis are the largest group in the district, inhabiting most villages and excluding certain town areas (NACs). Despite their name, "Paharis" which means "mountaineers," the term refers to people whose mother tongue is the Pahari dialect. The Paharis are a mix of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, and their shared language and cultural practices foster unity. Their secular outlook, shaped by centuries of coexistence, remains a hallmark of their community.

Other Groups (Dogras & Kashmiris):

There are also smaller communities of Dogri-speaking people in areas such as Sunderbani, Kalakote, and Nowshera, while Kashmiri families are found in

Thannamandi, Behrote, and the upper reaches of Budhal. Over time, these groups have largely integrated into the larger Pahari cultural sphere, losing much of their distinct cultural identities but still contributing to the district's diversity.

Economy of Rajouri District: Kalakote Coal Mine & Mineral Resources

The economic condition of Rajouri district, particularly in the Kalakote area, is significantly influenced by its mineral resources. Kalakote is home to an important coal mine, which has historically contributed to the local economy. Kalakote, a mountainous region between Koteranka and Sunderbani, comprises 68 villages with a population of 0.75 lakh as per the DISNIC Survey of 1995. The primary livelihood of the residents revolves around agriculture and allied activities.

In the early 1950s, a Thermal Power Station was established at Kalakote to utilize the local coal resources. However, it was later shut down because the coal extracted from the site was found unsuitable for power generation. Despite the closure of the power station, coal remains a vital resource for the region and continues to be exported outside the district.

The region's economic potential lies not just in coal but also in a variety of other mineral resources that are essential for industrial development. These minerals include:

Coal:

The coal found in Kalakote, Methka, Moghla, and Chokkar areas is semi-anthracite, with a fixed carbon percentage ranging from 79 to 80%. While tectonic movements have restricted the economic extraction of these coal fields, they continue to supply local consumption needs and contribute to the industrial development of the Jammu region.

Limestone:

Limestone is an important raw material for various industries such as cement manufacturing, glass production, chemical industries, and sugar refining. In the Kalakote, Methka, and Thannamandi areas of Rajouri district, extensive limestone deposits are present, but their industrial use is contingent upon detailed geological investigation.

Bauxite:

Bauxite is a key source of aluminum and is used in the extraction of aluminum metal, as well as for refractory purposes. It is found in blanket deposits in Kalakote, Methka, Moghla, and Chakkar areas, with a distinct gray to cream color and diasporic varieties. Additionally, it can be utilized in the extraction of gallium, a rare metal used in electronics.

Iron Ore:

Rajouri district does not have significant iron ore deposits. However, a small occurrence of iron ore is found in the Gagrot-Khandli Devi area, where it exists in a lenticular band associated with carbonaceous and ferruginous shale and slate. This occurrence is relatively limited in scale.

Bentonite:

Bentonitic clay, found near Budhal, is used in various industries such as oil well drilling, oil refining, paints, and sealing in reservoirs. It is also used in agricultural sprays for insecticides. The deposits in Rajouri district are thick and play an important role in local economic activity.

Panjal Trap:

The Panjal Trap, a massive volcanic rock formation, is another important resource in the Rajouri district. It is primarily used for construction purposes. With the growing demand for stone in the building industry, polished slabs of Panjal Trap can be manufactured after analyzing their physical and mineralogical properties.

Murree Formation and Hydrocarbon Exploration:

The Murree Formation in the region is believed to be a potential source of hydrocarbon deposits. While attempts to explore oil and natural gas in the Saruinsar area have not been successful due to technical challenges, efforts are ongoing to locate petroleum reserves in the future. The region holds promise for future energy exploration.

AGRICULTURE OF DISTRICT RAJOURI



Rajouri district in Jammu & Kashmir is located between 32°98' to 32°52' North latitude and 74°01' to 74°23' East longitude. It shares its borders with Poonch, Pulwama, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK) in the west, and Jammu in the south.

The district includes 160 Gram Panchayats, 385 villages, and four main towns: Rajouri, Thanamandi, Nowshera, and Sunderbani. Covering 8.81% of the state's total geographical area, the district is administratively divided into seven tehsils: Rajouri, Thanamandi, Nowshera, Sunderbani, Budhal (Koternanka), and Darhal.

Agricultural SWOT Analysis of Rajouri District

Strengths

There are varied agro-climatic conditions that make provision for cropping various crops.

Soil conditions are amenable for intensive cultivation.

Market is already established for the district's main crop.

Farmers are receptive to adopting new farming technologies

Well-developed technical skilled man power

Weaknesses

Lack of reliable irrigation facilities.

Small-sized farms.

Lesser awareness of conservation technologies

The terrain is undulating in nature; hence, mechanized farming is not feasible.

Farmyard manure (FYM) and other organic manures are scarce.

Opportunities

Crop production can be enhanced in the district.

Crop diversification and implementation of non-crop husbandry is also feasible.

Lightweight power tillers are being adopted in some areas.

Threats

Frequent natural calamities like floods and storms.

Soil erosion.

Farmers find it increasingly difficult to invest in farming systems.

Pest and disease problems are increasing and affecting crops.

Health Sector of Rajouri District

Health Sector in Rajouri District: A Detailed Analysis

Rajouri district in Jammu and Kashmir has a well-planned health care setup with an aim to deliver quality medical care to its residents. The district administration has been striving to upgrade health facilities and provide health care to the population scattered over the urban and rural areas. Given below is a detailed outline of the health sector in the district:

1. Health Infrastructure

The healthcare infrastructure in Rajouri is structured into various tiers to ensure effective service delivery to the population:

District Hospital Rajouri:



The district hospital is the main referral center, which offers inpatient and outpatient services. It is equipped with modern medical equipment, specialized departments, and an adequate bed capacity to manage patient care.

Medical Blocks:

The district is divided into 6 medical blocks, each responsible for overseeing the health services within its jurisdiction.

Sub-District Hospitals (SDHs):

There are 4 Sub-District Hospitals to cater to semi-urban and rural populations with secondary-level healthcare services.

Community Health Centres (CHCs):

The district has 3 CHCs, each equipped with 30-bed facilities and providing essential healthcare, including maternity services, minor surgeries, and diagnostic facilities.

Primary Health Centres (PHCs):

There are 22 PHCs, each offering outpatient care, minor treatments, and preventive services. These are crucial for delivering healthcare in rural areas.

New-Type PHCs (NTPHCs):

About 33 NTPHCs are providing an upgraded variant of PHCs with more manpower and better infrastructures.

Sub-Centres (SCs):

203 Sub-Centres are the first contact points in remote villages and focus on maternal and child health and immunization services.

Specialized Units:

1. UHU caters to the urban population.

1. Tuberculosis Centre deals with TB patients and provides diagnostic and treatment facilities.

2. Human Resources

The health sector in Rajouri is employing a huge number of professionals, such as:

Specialists

Doctors

Paramedical Staff

Administrative Staff

The vacancies are being filled regularly, and skill development training is also being provided to enhance the quality of services.

3. Patient Services

The health facilities of the district handle a huge number of patients:

Thousands of outpatients visit the health institutions every month for consultation.

A huge number of admissions are done in hospitals and CHCs.

Specialized services like maternity care, emergency care, and diagnostic services are available in most health institutions.

4. Mobile and Emergency Services

Ambulances: The district maintains an ambulance fleet with advanced life support vehicles for quick referral and transport of patients to more advanced health facilities.

5. Challenges

The district is also facing some challenges despite its well-laid infrastructure:

Shortage of medical specialists in remote areas.

Limited access to healthcare facilities in some hard-to-reach villages.

Frequent natural calamities, such as landslides and floods, hinder access to health services.

CASE STUDIES

Case Study 1: Shahdara Sharief Shrine

Introduction

Shahdra Sharif, a famous Muslim shrine in Rajouri district, Jammu, is dedicated to Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah. Located 29 km from Rajouri town, it was built in the 19th century by Gulab Singh, a general under Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

History says that in 1820 AD, Gulab Singh, with only 25 soldiers left, visited Baba Ghulam Shah, who predicted his prosperous future. The Baba asked him to climb a mountain and see his future territory, which included Jammu, Kashmir, Kishtwar, and Tibet. Baba only requested the land of Shahdra Sharif as a gift.

Later, Gulab Singh became the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir, fulfilling Baba's prophecy. After Baba's passing, Gulab Singh built the shrine as a tribute. Today, people of all faiths visit this sacred place to honor the saint.



Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah (R.A): A Brief Overview

□ **Introduction**

Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah (R.A), a revered Sufi saint, belonged to the Mashadi lineage from Mashad, Iran. His family settled in Sayedan Kasrawan, Pakistan, to spread Islam. His father and grandfather's shrines remain significant in Chakwal district.

□ **Spiritual Guidance and Early Life**

- Baba's spiritual guide was Imam Barry Paak (Peer Sayed Latief Hussain Shah R.A).
- At 8, Baba trained under his Murshid in Rawalpindi, who foresaw his destiny as a great Sufi saint.
- He was destined to transform Sein-Dara into Shahdara Sharief.

□ **Journey to Shahdara Sharief**

- Baba spent 22 years traveling from Sayedan Kasrawan to Shahdara Sharief, guided by divine dreams.
- He performed miracles and helped communities along the way.
- He reached Shahdara Sharief in 1765 AD at the age of 32.

□ **Establishment of Shahdara Sharief**

- Following divine guidance, Baba chose Sein-Dara for his mission, symbolized by a lion circling a goat.
- He cleared the forest, set up a Langar (community kitchen), and spread spiritual teachings.

□ **Legacy and Death**

- Baba lived in Shahdara Sharief for 41 years, meditating and serving humanity.
- He passed away in 1806 AD at 73.
- Baba himself designed his tomb, completed in 1804 AD.

□ **Key Contributions**

- He turned Shahdara Sharief into a center of spirituality.
- His life was marked by miracles and unity across faiths.
- His shrine continues to attract thousands, symbolizing devotion and harmony.

The Legendary Evergreen Tree (Sada Phal)

1. *The Origin of the Evergreen Tree*

The evergreen tree at Shahdara Sharief is linked to a miracle by Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah (R.A).

The Incident: While sitting near a fire, Baba noticed a piece of wood that wouldn't burn. Frustrated, he threw it aside, saying, *"If you cannot burn, then keep on bearing fruit."*

The Miracle: The lifeless wood turned into an evergreen tree that bears fruit and leaves throughout the year, defying seasonal changes.



2. *Unique Characteristics of the Tree*

Fruits and Leaves:

- The tree bears vibrant orange, yellow, and green fruits year-round, symbolizing vitality and divine blessings.
- Fruits are sacred; only naturally fallen ones are picked.

Spiritual Belief:

- The tree reflects Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah's (R.A) spiritual power and is deeply revered.
- Associated with the saying:
"In a saint's gaze lies the power to change countless destinies."

Significance Today:

The tree remains a key part of Shahdara Sharief's heritage, drawing pilgrims who seek blessings and inspiration.

Architectural Features

The shrine's architecture is a harmonious blend of Islamic and regional styles, symbolizing both spirituality and cultural heritage. Key features include:

- **Dome and Minarets:** The dome serves as a spiritual centerpiece, complemented by beautifully designed minarets.
- **Calligraphy:** Intricate Quranic inscriptions adorn the walls, enhancing the sanctity of the shrine.
- **Courtyard:** A spacious area for gatherings, prayers, and communal activities.
- **Natural Surroundings:** Nestled amidst lush green hills, the serene environment enhances the spiritual experience for visitors.



Religious and Cultural Significance

1. A Spiritual Hub

Shahdara Sharief is not merely a religious site but a beacon of peace and spirituality. Devotees from diverse backgrounds visit the shrine to seek blessings, offer prayers, and find solace. Many believe that prayers at the shrine can fulfill their wishes and bring prosperity.

2. *Fostering Communal Harmony*

The shrine is a testament to India's pluralistic traditions, welcoming people of all faiths—Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, and others. Events such as the **annual Urs festival** unite communities in celebration, reinforcing the ideals of harmony and coexistence.

3. *Cultural Activities*

The Urs festival is a highlight of the shrine's cultural calendar. Celebrated with devotion and enthusiasm, it includes:

- **Special Prayers:** Devotees recite verses from the Quran and offer collective prayers.
- **Sufi Music:** Performances of qawwalis and Sufi poetry create a vibrant spiritual atmosphere.
- **Charitable Meals:** Langar (community meals) is served to thousands, symbolizing equality and generosity.

Challenges and Preservation Efforts

Challenges and Preservation Efforts

Challenges:

1. **Infrastructure Issues:**
 - Poor road connectivity and parking facilities.
 - Limited accommodation, especially during peak seasons.
2. **Environmental Impact:**
 - Overcrowding during festivals causes waste and pollution.
 - Threatens the area's natural beauty.
3. **Maintenance Problems:**
 - Historic structure needs regular upkeep.
 - Funding delays affect repairs and improvements.

Preservation Efforts:

1. **Government Support:**
 - Better roads and visitor facilities by J&K government.
 - Financial aid for restoration and upkeep.
2. **Community Role:**
 - Local volunteers help with cleanliness drives.
 - Devotees' contributions fund maintenance.
3. **Sustainability:**
 - Waste management systems introduced.
 - Eco-tourism promoted to balance tourism and ecology.



Key Findings

1. **Spiritual Significance:** The shrine is a beacon of faith, attracting devotees seeking blessings and spiritual solace.
 2. **Cultural Importance:** It preserves and promotes Sufi traditions, fostering cultural richness and diversity.
 3. **Economic Contribution:** Tourism driven by the shrine generates employment and supports local businesses.
 4. **Social Impact:** The shrine serves as a unifying force, promoting communal harmony and social welfare.
 5. **Challenges:** Infrastructure and environmental concerns need to be addressed to sustain its legacy.
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Case Study 2: Education Migration in Poonch and Rajouri

Case Study: Education Migration in Poonch and Rajouri

Introduction

Location: Poonch and Rajouri districts in Jammu and Kashmir.

Focus: Analysing the causes, impacts, and potential remedies for education migration in these districts.

Poonch and Rajouri, known for their scenic beauty and cultural diversity, face significant challenges in education. The lack of quality higher education institutions, infrastructure deficits, and socio-economic factors compel students to migrate to other regions for better opportunities. This study explores the dynamics of education migration in these areas.

Historical Context

Poonch and Rajouri have long grappled with educational challenges due to their remote location and historical neglect. The region saw slow development of schools and colleges, leaving many students without access to quality education. Political instability and conflicts further hampered educational progress.

Lesser Known but Important Aspects

1. Impact of Cross-Border Communities:

- Many families in border villages lack stable access to education due to frequent cross-border shelling.
- Temporary displacement of students during conflicts disrupts academic continuity.

2. Gender Disparities:

- Girls from rural areas face additional challenges, including societal norms that prioritize early marriage over education.
- Limited availability of all-girls' schools and colleges restrict educational aspirations.

3. Role of Informal Education:

- Community-led initiatives, such as evening schools and volunteer-based teaching programs, fill some educational gaps but lack scalability.
- Religious institutions often serve as supplemental education providers but focus on specific curricula.

4. Linguistic Challenges:

- Many students face difficulties transitioning from regional languages (Gojri, Pahari) to state or national languages used in formal education.
- Lack of bilingual resources hinders comprehension and academic performance.

5. Unrecognized Local Talent:

- Despite limited resources, students from Poonch and Rajouri often excel in state-level and national-level competitions.
- Success stories remain underreported, reducing their motivational impact on the community.

Push Factors

1. Infrastructure Deficiencies:

- Limited availability of higher secondary schools and colleges.
- Poor road connectivity to existing institutions.
- Lack of modern facilities like libraries, labs, and internet access.

2. Quality of Education:

- Shortage of qualified teachers and specialized staff.
- Outdated curricula and teaching methods.

3. Economic Constraints:

- Families in rural areas often prioritize work over education.
- Limited awareness of scholarship opportunities.

4. Conflict and Political Instability:

- Frequent cross-border tensions disrupt schooling.
- Migration becomes a necessity for uninterrupted education.

Pull Factors

1. Opportunities in Urban Areas:

- Access to reputed institutions in Jammu, Srinagar, or national cities like Delhi and Chandigarh.
- Exposure to diverse fields of study and extracurricular activities.

2. Government Policies and Reservations:

- Scholarships for Scheduled Tribes (ST) and marginalized communities.
- Reserved seats in national institutions for students from border areas.

3. Community Networks:

- Established migrant communities in cities help new students settle and adapt.

Impacts

1. Social Impacts:

- **Brain Drain:** Talented youth leave, weakening local development.
- **Cultural Shift:** Migration alters traditional family structures and values.

2. Economic Impacts:

- Families face financial strain due to migration costs.
- Local economy loses potential skilled professionals.

3. Educational Disparities:

- Rural students struggle to compete with urban counterparts.
- Unequal access perpetuates socio-economic inequalities.

Case Study Insights

Student Migration Trends:

- High school graduates predominantly migrate for:
 - Engineering and medical studies.
 - Vocational and technical education.
 - Specialized courses unavailable locally.

Destinations:

- Within Jammu & Kashmir: Jammu, Srinagar.
- Outside the state: Delhi, Chandigarh, Punjab, Maharashtra.

Personal Narratives:

- Stories of families sacrificing savings for their children's future.
- Students excelling in urban institutions despite initial struggles.

Proposed Remedies

1. Infrastructure Development:

- Establish higher education centers in Poonch and Rajouri.
- Improve school infrastructure with modern amenities.

2. Teacher Training and Recruitment:

- Focus on hiring qualified teachers.
- Provide regular training and incentives for rural postings.

3. Scholarships and Financial Support:

- Expand awareness of existing scholarships.
- Introduce local scholarships targeting underprivileged students.

4. Collaboration with NGOs:

- Partner with NGOs for educational campaigns and capacity building.
- Set up mentorship programs to guide students.

5. Digital Education Initiatives:

- Implement e-learning platforms for remote students.
- Provide affordable internet access and devices.

Case Study 3: Language and Politics of Poonch and Rajouri

Language and Political Identity in Poonch and Rajouri

Language in Poonch and Rajouri serves as a symbol of both cultural pride and political assertion. The primary languages spoken in these areas—Pahari, Gojri, and Dogri—carry significant political weight, often used to mobilize communities and assert distinct regional or ethnic identities.

Historical and Socio-Political Background

Poonch and Rajouri have experienced significant historical shifts, especially after the partition of India in 1947. These regions have been affected by the larger Kashmir conflict, with the influx of refugees, political movements, and insurgencies affecting local life. The districts are home to a mixture of communities: predominantly Muslim populations (including Sunni and Shia), Hindus (notably Pundits), and Sikhs. The linguistic diversity includes Pahari, Gojri, Dogri, and Urdu, each with its own cultural and political connotations.

Language, in this context, becomes a powerful marker of identity. Political parties, both local and national, have used language as a tool to engage with these different communities, with distinct linguistic identities often influencing political allegiance and community cohesion.

Pahari and Gojri as Identity Markers

The Gojri language, widely spoken by the Gujjar and Bakerwal communities, is a key example of how language influences political identity. The Gujjars, a Muslim ethnic group with a primarily nomadic lifestyle, have long used Gojri to assert their distinct identity, especially in relation to the more dominant Dogri-speaking Hindu populations. The call for Gojri's inclusion in the list of scheduled languages of India has been a significant political

movement in the region, with local politicians using it to garner support from the Gujjar community. This language-related issue has not only affected local elections but also created a distinct political discourse around linguistic and ethnic identity.

Pahari, another prominent language, is spoken in both Poonch and Rajouri and holds a similar political importance. Pahari-speaking communities, who are primarily Muslims, have often emphasized their linguistic heritage in opposition to the larger Dogri-speaking population, thus contributing to the region's complex political landscape. The demand for a separate Pahari-speaking region or greater political representation based on linguistic lines is a reflection of the political potential embedded in these languages.

Role of Urdu in Regional Politics

Urdu has also played a significant role in the politics of Poonch and Rajouri, serving as a common language for communication among different religious communities. Its role as a language of religious discourse, particularly among Muslims, has further emphasized its importance in shaping the political narratives of the region. Urdu is frequently used by local leaders to address their constituencies and engage with voters, symbolizing unity across linguistic divides. Its use in political rhetoric highlights the interconnection between language and religious identity in these regions.

Language and Political Movements

The Politics of Autonomy and Language Recognition

In the context of the broader political landscape of Jammu and Kashmir, language plays a key role in the debate over regional autonomy. Political movements that call for greater autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir have often utilized language to assert regional identity. For instance, the demand for recognition of Pahari and Gojri as official languages of Jammu and Kashmir ties into larger calls for political representation of Poonch and Rajouri's local communities.

Political parties, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir, have frequently used language to strengthen their political bases. Regional parties like the National Conference (NC) and People's Democratic Party (PDP) have leveraged local languages to foster unity and regional identity. For example, the assertion of Pahari and Gojri as separate cultural markers is often used to differentiate the political needs of the people of Poonch and Rajouri from those of other regions like Jammu and Kashmir Valley.

The Impact of Nationalist Politics

National political parties, including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Indian National Congress (INC), have also recognized the significance of language in the political campaigns of Poonch and Rajouri. Their rhetoric often adapts to the linguistic preferences of different

communities. During elections, candidates often use Urdu, Gojri, or Pahari to communicate with local populations, thereby utilizing language as a tool to consolidate votes and strengthen political messages.

Language has become an essential tool for both local and national leaders seeking to build support in a region with such complex political and ethnic affiliations.

Challenges in Language Politics

The multilingual nature of Poonch and Rajouri creates a unique set of challenges in the political sphere. Language politics can often deepen ethnic and religious divides, with competing groups using linguistic identity as a tool to assert political power. For example, the demand for the official recognition of Gojri and Pahari as languages of instruction in schools and administration sometimes leads to tensions between different linguistic groups, further complicating the political relationships in the region.

Moreover, the status of Dogri, often seen as the language of Jammu, contrasts with the status of Pahari and Gojri, languages more closely associated with the Muslim majority in Poonch and Rajouri. This creates an ongoing debate over language rights and political representation, with some communities feeling marginalized or underrepresented in the larger political process.

Case Study 4: Line of Control (LoC) and Cross-Border Relationships in Poonch District

Introduction

Poonch district, located in the Pir Panjal region of Jammu and Kashmir, India, lies along the Line of Control (LoC) that separates India and Pakistan. This strategically significant area has a unique socio-political dynamic due to its geographical position and shared cultural and familial ties with communities across the border. This case study explores the impact of the LoC on the lives of the people in Poonch, focusing on the historical, socio-economic, and emotional aspects of cross-border relationships.

Historical Background

1. Partition of 1947:

- The partition of British India led to the division of Poonch into two parts, one on the Indian side and the other on the Pakistani side, creating the LoC as a de facto border. This split families and communities who had lived together for generations.

2. 1947-48 War:

- The first Indo-Pak war further entrenched the division, with significant portions of Poonch falling under Pakistani control (now part of Pakistan-administered Kashmir).

3. Subsequent Wars (1965, 1971, and Kargil in 1999):

- These conflicts deepened mistrust and solidified the LoC as a heavily militarized and tense zone.

Cross-Border Ties

Despite the geopolitical tensions, strong cultural, linguistic, and familial bonds persist across the LoC:

1. Familial Connections:

- Many families in Poonch have relatives on both sides of the LoC, leading to a deep emotional connection. Separation due to political boundaries remains a source of anguish.

2. Cultural Overlap:

- Shared languages like Pahari and Gojri, as well as similar traditions and cuisines, highlight the historical unity of the region.

3. Marriage and Social Ties:

- Before partition, intermarriages between communities on both sides were common. While such practices have reduced, memories and emotional ties remain strong.

Impact of the LoC

1. Militarization and Security Concerns:

- Poonch is heavily militarized, with frequent skirmishes and shelling affecting civilian life. Villages near the LoC often face destruction of property, loss of lives, and displacement.

2. Restricted Movement:

- The LoC acts as a physical and psychological barrier, preventing free movement and interaction between divided families and communities.

3. Cross-LoC Trade and Travel Initiatives:

- In 2005, the launch of the Poonch-Rawalakot Bus Service allowed divided families to reconnect, symbolizing a thaw in relations.
- The Cross-LoC Trade initiative, started in 2008, enabled barter-based trade of goods like carpets, fruits, and handicrafts. While it improved livelihoods, it has been intermittently suspended due to security concerns.

4. Human Cost of Conflict:

- Civilians often become collateral damage in cross-border hostilities, facing trauma, displacement, and economic hardships.
- The presence of unexploded landmines and heavy troop deployment adds to the daily challenges of those living near the LoC.

Economic and Social Challenges

1. Economic Stagnation:

- Frequent cross-border shelling disrupts agriculture, trade, and infrastructure development.

2. Displacement and Rehabilitation:

- Many residents have been forced to migrate due to shelling and border tensions. Rehabilitation efforts are often inadequate, leaving displaced families in limbo.

3. Education and Healthcare:

- Schools and healthcare facilities near the LoC are often disrupted during periods of tension, impacting children's education and access to medical care.

Opportunities for Cross-Border Cooperation

1. Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs):

- Expanding initiatives like cross-LoC trade and bus services could foster goodwill and reduce hostility.

2. Cultural Exchange:

- Organizing cultural and educational exchange programs could help rebuild trust and highlight shared heritage.

3. Development Projects:

- Investing in border infrastructure, education, and healthcare can improve the quality of life for LoC residents and reduce their vulnerability.

4. Local Voices in Peacebuilding:

- Empowering local communities to participate in peacebuilding efforts could create grassroots pressure for sustainable solutions.

Challenges in Cross-Border Relations

1. Geopolitical Tensions:

- The broader India-Pakistan conflict often derails local initiatives, making sustainable peace elusive.

2. Trust Deficit:

- Incidents like cross-border terrorism and ceasefire violations erode trust, leading to the suspension of CBMs.

3. Policy Instability:

- Frequent changes in cross-border policies disrupt trade and travel, causing frustration among affected communities.

Case Study 5: Inter-Community Marriages in Rajouri and Poonch

Introduction

- **Inter-community marriages** in Rajouri and Poonch are influenced by cultural traditions and societal norms.
- Predominantly inhabited by **Gujjar and Bakerwal communities**, these areas show a strong preference for marrying within the same community.
- Recent **government initiatives** aim to promote social integration through financial incentives for inter-caste marriages.
- Despite these efforts, traditional resistance remains a significant barrier to inter-community unions.

Key context

- **Inter-community marriages**
- **Gujjar and Bakerwal communities**
- **Cultural norms**
- **Government initiatives**

- **Social integration**

Cultural Context

1. Community Preferences:

- The Gujjar and Bakerwal communities exhibit a strong preference for intra-community marriages. Studies show that only around **2.25%** of families accept inter-community marriages, while a significant majority (**76.75%**) oppose them due to cultural and social reasons.
- Traditional beliefs, concerns about social status, and migratory lifestyles are key factors discouraging inter-community unions.

2. Marriage Practices:

- Marriages are typically arranged by families, with fathers playing a decisive role in selecting spouses.
- The average marriage age for women is around **17.1 years**, especially among the illiterate population, while educated individuals marry at a later age.
- Ceremonies are simple, adhering to Islamic traditions, with families spending modest amounts on celebrations.

Government Initiatives

The Jammu & Kashmir government has introduced financial incentives to promote inter-caste marriages involving Dalits. This initiative seeks to encourage social harmony and support marginalized communities.

• Key Features of the Scheme:

- A financial incentive of **Rs 2.5 lakh** is provided for eligible inter-caste marriages.
- At least one spouse must belong to a Scheduled Caste (SC), while the other must be a non-Scheduled Caste Hindu.
- The marriage must be legally registered under the Hindu Marriage Act of 1955.

Challenges and Issues

1. Resistance from Local Communities:

- Inter-community marriages face significant resistance from traditional communities in Rajouri and Poonch due to cultural rigidity.

2. Concerns Over Scheduled Tribe (ST) Benefits:

- There is an ongoing debate about extending ST benefits to non-ST women who marry into ST families, highlighting issues of equity and recognition.

Impact of Inter-Community Marriages on Social Relationships in Rajouri and Poonch

Inter-community marriages in the Rajouri and Poonch districts significantly influence social relationships, reflecting both the challenges and opportunities for integration among diverse communities. Below are the key impacts observed:-

Cultural Adjustments

- **Social Integration:** Non-Scheduled Tribe (ST) women marrying into ST families face cultural adjustments and often lack access to the benefits available to their ST spouses. This situation creates a social divide, as these women may feel marginalized within their new families and communities
- **Loss of Status:** ST women who marry outside their community typically lose their ST status and associated benefits, leading to potential discrimination. This can create a sense of alienation from both their natal and marital families

Community Dynamics

- **Resistance to Change:** The Gujjar and Bakerwal communities exhibit a strong preference for endogamy, with studies indicating that only about **2.25%** of families accept inter-community marriages. This resistance is rooted in cultural norms, low social status perceptions, and migratory lifestyles

Impact on Relationships: Families often play a significant role in marriage decisions, with fathers having substantial influence. This patriarchal structure can lead to strained relationships between couples who choose to marry outside their community, as they may face disapproval or ostracism from family members

Social Justice Initiatives

- **Government Support:** Recent proposals have been made to extend ST benefits to women married into ST families and allow ST women to retain their status after

marrying non-ST men. These measures aim to promote social justice and equality, addressing some of the inequities faced by inter-community couples

Awareness Programs: Residents have advocated for awareness programs to educate women about their rights and available resources, which could help improve social integration and support for inter-community marriages

CONCLUSION

Exploring Poonch and Rajouri: Challenges and Opportunities

Poonch and Rajouri, nestled in the Pir Panjal range, are rich in culture, history, and natural beauty. Despite this, they face challenges like poor connectivity, lack of infrastructure, and socio-economic issues. However, these challenges also present opportunities for growth and development.

Key Insights

1. Geography and Connectivity

Rugged terrain and seasonal disruptions make travel difficult but offer potential for eco-tourism and adventure tourism.

2. Infrastructure Gaps

Poor transport, education, and healthcare systems deepen inequalities. Improving these can transform lives.

3. Cultural Richness

The region's diverse traditions and crafts can boost cultural tourism and handicraft industries.

4. Economic Potential

Moving beyond traditional farming to modern agro-industries and horticulture can create jobs and reduce migration.

5. Governance Needs

Better policies for rural roads, digital access, and local collaboration can drive sustainable growth.

Opportunities for Growth

- **Tourism Development:** Focus on eco-tourism and cultural tourism.
- **Infrastructure Improvement:** Build better roads, schools, and healthcare facilities.
- **Economic Diversification:** Promote modern farming, agro-industries, and handicrafts.
- **Digital Inclusion:** Expand internet access and use technology in education, healthcare, and farming.
- **Skill Development:** Train locals in crafts, technology, and entrepreneurship.

Vision for the Future

With the right investments and community involvement, Poonch and Rajouri can overcome their challenges and become models of sustainable growth. By prioritizing connectivity, education, tourism, and governance, these districts can thrive as symbols of cultural pride and economic strength in Jammu and Kashmir.

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