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In the Shadows of Beauty: Bhalessa's Fight for Progress and Prosperity

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ABSTRACT:

Bhalessa, a celestial place embraced by the towering mountains and pristine fields, is enriched with picturesque spots and the pure air. Despite the fact that this place is marvelled by natural scenic beauty, yet the people in this incredible place have been dealing with unavoidable challenges in their daily lives. The people in Bhalessa persevere severe infrastructural challenges like dilapidated and narrow roads which at times prove suicidal and escalate their turmoil by alienating this place from achieving modern prospects in terms of healthcare, transportation and education. The predicament is exacerbated by the unequipped schooling, medical insufficiency, and general overlook of its developmental issues. On economic fronts, the poverty and impecuniness is eating up the lives of the poor people with only few numbers of people have been able to survive the throttling impoverishment. Even discrimination on social and gender level is remarkably apparent, which further adds to the marginalisation of women and the poor alike. The situation is compounded by the limited access and exposure to technology that hinders the academic progress of the students in the area. Further, the social vibrancy of the area has been weakened by the increasing isolation and individualism which is manifested in the actions and behavioural patterns of the youth who are shunning the native place for better opportunities. Although, the people in Bhalessa have been battling with dejection and disappointment, yet the optimism for a better prosperous future in terms of infrastructure and development remains there.

Keywords: Bhalessa, infrastructure challenges, technology access, academic alienation, rural development,

Discussion:

Bhalessa is a beautiful place adorned with big mountains, lush green fields, and fragrant fresh air. It's serene ambience, pristine climate and peaceful life accentuates its unrivalled magnificence. Although, the place is laced with nature marvels, but the people here affront many problems in their daily lives. For example, the roads are in a very dilapidated condition, especially the Thathri-Kilhotran road, which has been ignored for ages and continue to remain in pitiable condition. The predicament has been rightly depicted in a local proverb which says "*Raav nay bani, turaa kyazi chaliwan*?" It roughly translates as (If the road is not built, how will the feet move?) Because of this, people feel cut off from the rest of the world that too in an age that shrugs and boasts of its technological advancement. It has become oddly difficult to travel for work, studies, or even get medical help.

Education and healthcare are also big problems. Many children do not even receive proper education, and for medical treatment, people have to traverse the suicidal roads to reach cities to get medical treatment. Poor families are the victims of the disparity as they battle the ordeals and do not have means to address their concerns. The sentiment is more vocally put in local dialect which says, "*Gareebi chu na gos, na waazwan*" which roughly translates as "Poverty spares neither body nor feast." For years, poverty and lack of awareness have made life hard for the people living in Bhalessa.

Psychological changes are also happening. People feel more stress and tension these days. Earlier people used to sit together, talk, and share their worries. Now, everyone is busy, and people do not spare time for each other which has paved way for isolation and alienation which has been rightly put as "*Aadmi chu pagah thok- mok*" (A person is always lost in tomorrow). Many young people are leaving Bhalessa for jobs, and the old ones are left behind. This makes many people feel lonely and sad.

Social life has also changed a lot. Earlier, neighbours were like family. People used to help each other in farming, housework, and even in small celebrations. As time passed things took new jumps and different endings. Mobile phones and social media have made people distant. Many old traditions have gradually vanished as people have been indulging in self-defeating endeavours. The notion in societal good and community welfare is slowly decelerating and selfishness has started to gather momentum. This belief is aptly underscored in the lines that follow "*Garr chu bar khosh, andar afsos*" (The house looks happy from outside, but inside, there is sorrow). Such sentiments have debilitating impact on the overall well-being of the area as a place only prospers when people from all creed, faith and colour unite and fight for the good of that place. The hope of the better Bhalessa is the youth who are enthusiastically hopeful of the good future of their land. They hope that one day, good roads will be built, schools and hospitals will improve, and life will become easier. Until then, they persevere challenges with patience and courage.

Inequality in Bhalessa is a significant issue that affects different aspects of people's life, including economic opportunities, education, healthcare, gender roles, and social status. Due to geographical isolation, lack of infrastructure, and traditional societal structures, disparities exist among various groups, creating challenges for development and social harmony. This inequality manifests in different ways, affecting both individuals and the community as a whole.

1. Economic Inequality:

Bhalessa's economy is primarily dependent on agriculture, livestock, and small businesses. However, due to limited land ownership and resources, wealth is unevenly distributed. Some families own large farmlands or businesses, while others struggle with small, less productive lands. Additionally, job opportunities are scarce, forcing many young men to migrate to cities for work, further widening the economic gap between those who have external income sources and those who rely solely on local means.

2. Educational Disparities:

Education in Bhalessa is unevenly distributed, with rural areas having fewer schools and limited access to quality education. Many children, especially girls, drop out due to financial constraints, lack of schools nearby, or cultural expectations that prioritize household work over formal education. Students who can afford to study in cities gain better opportunities, while others remain at a disadvantage due to poor educational infrastructure and resources.

3. Gender Inequality:

Women in Bhalessa often face restrictions due to traditional gender roles. They are expected to focus on household duties, while men engage in labour and decision-making roles. Opportunities for higher education and employment for women are limited, leading to financial dependence on male family members. Although awareness is slowly increasing, deep-rooted societal norms still create barriers to gender equality.

4. Healthcare Inequality:

Access to healthcare services is another major concern in Bhalessa. The region has a shortage of medical facilities, doctors, and pharmacies. Wealthier individuals can afford to travel to cities for medical treatment, while poorer families often struggle with basic healthcare needs. Women and children are particularly affected, as maternal healthcare services are limited, and emergency medical cases often face delays due to poor road connectivity.

5. Social and Caste-Based Discrimination:

Although social unity exists, some communities in Bhalessa experience discrimination based on caste and social hierarchy. Certain groups have more access to resources, leadership positions, and financial benefits, while others face exclusion or limited participation in decision-making. This discrimination affects access to education, jobs, and social mobility, making it difficult for marginalized groups to progress.

6. Infrastructure and Connectivity Divide:

Some parts of Bhalessa have better road access and facilities, while others remain underdeveloped. Villages located in remote areas face difficulties in transportation, making it harder for residents to access markets, schools, and hospitals. Those living in better-connected areas enjoy more opportunities, creating a gap between different regions within Bhalessa.

7. Digital and Technological Gap:

With the rise of digital technology, access to information and communication has become crucial. However, many people in Bhalessa lack access to smartphones, internet services, and digital literacy. Students and job seekers with access to the internet can explore better opportunities, while those without it remain unaware of educational and employment prospects, increasing

Bhalessa also faces significant education challenges due to limited access to technology and learning materials. Some key challenges include:

1. Lack of Digital Infrastructure:

Poor internet connectivity makes online learning difficult, though a few students have access to smartphones, Laptops or Computers. In Bhalessa, students struggle with poor internet connectivity, lack of digital resources, inadequate library facilities, smartphones, laptops and digital educational resources. Many students are unable to attend online classes even if there is mobile data, it is expensive and many families cannot afford it. Frequent cuts of electricity further limit use of digital resources.

2. Shortage of learning material for students:

Students in Bhalessa confront ordeals in obtaining quality learning resources. Limited availability of textbooks, quality education and exposure force students to rely on outdated content. The absence of libraries and student centres or resource centres create major hurdles and without major access to these facilities they struggle to find quality learning material or motivating environment and academic guidance. Many students rely only on school textbooks as they do not have access to reference books, competitive exam guides or research material. Many students do not have a peaceful place to study at home due to small learning space and household distractions. In urban areas, student can study in libraries and public study halls, but in Bhalessa such spaces are a dream only. The students preparing for competitive exam do not have proper coaching centre or access to high quality teachers and proper guidance.

3. Poor educational infrastructures:

A weak educational system further escalates struggle for students. Many schools lack trained teachers, especially for specialized subjects thereby affecting the quality of education. Even the students have limited subject choices as some subjects are not taught due to a lack of faculty and further restricting students' career option. Even the basic facilities are missing as many schools lack of laboratories, proper classrooms and sport facilities.

4. Financial constraints:

Financial instability is one of the biggest obstacle preventing students in Bhalessa from accessing quality education and learning material. Due to poverty, the children even struggle to afford basic educational resources which affect their academic performance and future opportunities. Even if a student has access to a device, it is often shared among multiple siblings which eventually reduce their study times. Further to aggravate their misery, many students cannot afford data packs to watch online lectures or download study material. Since reference books, competitive exam guides and academic journals are costly, therefore, out of the reach of poor students. To add to their agony, the education institutions are often established far from villages and the students cannot afford daily transport cost to attend regular classes in schools. Private tuitions and coaching institutions are almost non-existent as the learned/degree holders prefer to work outside their native place to earn higher income. Even if some decide to serve in villages, they charge high fees that inevitably isolates the students from poor background to pursue quality education. Rural schools often lack quality teachings and without coaching, the students struggle to compete in entrance exam. As stated earlier, the financial constraints incarnate as a major barrier for students to pursue education in Bhalessa as the students are intercepted by unavoidable circumstances in accessing digital tools, quality books, unavailability of coaching centres and no access to government scholarships or any community efforts. Many students do not even know that scholarship exists for them as schools and colleges do not timely inform students about available Government and private scholarships.

A 12th grade science student who qualifies for a merit-based scholarship fails to apply because he/she is never informed by his/her teachers or school administration. Even if students hear about scholarships, they do not know how to apply or what documents are required. Many students miss deadlines because they are unaware of the application timelines.

5. No access to digital learning resources:

Modern education depends on ebooks, online lectures, and research databases, but rural students lack access to these due to poor internet connectivity and existing digital barriers.

6. Lack of guidance and academic sport:

Libraries and study centres in cities often have mentors, teachers and experts to guide students, but rural students lack this support. Self-study becomes difficult when students have no one to clarify doubts or provide career counselling.

The absence of computer labs or e-Learning centres in most schools hinder students' access to educational app, e-books, and online research platform. A student aspiring to learn coding or IT skills is left disappointed, because there are no computer facilities in school. To aggravate their misery, the frequent power cuts keep them and their future in abysmal dark.

7. Lack of awareness and training:

Most students and even some teachers are incompetent in using digital tools effectively. The teachers teaching in Higher secondary schools wanting to teach on power point or generate online quizzes cannot do so due to lack of training.

Science labs or computer labs are either missing or poorly maintained. A biology student aspiring to do practical experiments for exams cannot do so because there are no proper labs in school and are inadequate for performing subject-related experiments.

8. Lack of interest by government in NGOs:

The government has not invested in improving digital education in rural areas like Bhalessa. NGOs that provide digital learning resources are not actually working in the region. At some places, NGO setup complete centres for students, but in Bhalessa such facilities are missing. Like many other hilly areas of country, this part of the District Doda has been blatantly ignored. Bhalessa is very backward so far as digital services are considered. The government should consider applying the schemes like Digital India on grass-root level so that people living in such remote areas may get access to digital services and proper internet services be made available for this region. E-offices should be opened, and online teaching methodologies should be commenced at the earliest in the region. So that the students of these areas may compete with the rest of students of these district.

9. Limitation of digital resources in Higher Secondary schools in Bhalessa:

Weak internet connectivity, lack of government funding, limited teachers training and unavailability of teaching material has left the students in lurch. Sports and physical activities are essential for over all development of students, but in Bhalessa student face multiple challenges that prevent them from participating in games. The lack of proper infrastructure, awareness and training in sports from school makes it difficult for students to engage in physical activities.

1. Lack of playgrounds in schools:

Most of the schools in Bhalessa do not have proper playgrounds for students. Some schools have small open areas and lack proper sport facilities. Most schools have only a small pitch of land making it impossible for students to play football, cricket or any athletics.

2. No proper sports equipments:

Schools lack basic sport equipments like football, volleyball, badminton rackets etc. Even some schools with playground do not have goalposts, nets or running tracks.

3. No physical education teacher:

Many schools do not have physical education teachers to guide students in sports. Students who want to participate in district level sports event has no teacher to train them.

4. Lack of awareness about importance of sports:

Parents and teachers focus only on academics and do not encourage students to play games & sports and often see it as a waste of time, rather than an important part of education.

5. Low community support:

Limited encouragement from parents and community for sports engagement.

6. Minimal exposure:

Few local tournaments and events result in less awareness of organized sport.

People in Bhalessa face many struggles—lack of jobs, mental health problems, political uncertainty, and concomitant social issues. To improve life, there is a need for better jobs, more awareness about mental health, and a stable political and social system.

Conclusion:

Bhalessa remains renowned and popular for its scenic beauty, but it affronts challenges on developmental and infrastructural grounds that impedes its growth and enlarges misery for the people. The people have been encountering problems such as lack of educational resources, faulty healthcare system, dilapidated road networks and despairingly sluggish progress trend. The economic divide, gender and social disparity is aggravating the already dwindling prospects for the people. The lack of the students to digital resources, impaired educational facility and redundant infrastructure add adversity to their lives making harder for the people to assail in the modern world. Besides, having a rich cultural heritage and spirit of commitment for community, the lack of modern amenities and sincere government support is weakening the prospect for the people. The people are hopeful for a better enduring future that will subvert the stagnation and push for a better affluent and prosperous future. It is vitally significant for government and the local communities to cooperate and commit for its development on different pedestal. The dreams could become reality only if the collective efforts are put to bridge the gaps to materialize the aspirations of the people.

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