

Challenges in Education of Tribal Children in Poonch district of Jammu and Kashmir

Kavita Suri

Associate Professor

Department of Lifelong Learning

(Formerly, Centre for Adult, Continuing Education & Extension)

University of Jammu, Jammu and Kashmir

Abstract: The twin border districts of Poonch and Rajouri in Jammu province in the Himalayan state of Jammu and Kashmir have a significant population of Scheduled Tribes. Poonch district has 36.9 % population of Gujjar and Bakkarwal scheduled tribes both of which are nomadic in character. A majority of the Scheduled Tribe population of Poonch district migrates to higher reaches in summer with their cattle, sheep, goat and buffalos in search of better pastures for their herds due to which their children are deprived of education. Each year, over 20,000 people migrate to the summer pastures as part of their annual seasonal migratory practices, from the twin border districts of Poonch and Rajouri to the Pir Panjal ranges and further. The present paper seeks to understand the challenges of elementary education among scheduled tribes of Poonch district. It would also explore the initiatives taken by the government for the education of STs in Poonch and would suggest some measures for improving educational levels of the tribes in Poonch.

Keywords: Nomads, Scheduled Tribes, Kashmir, Mobile Schools, Seasonal camps, Elementary education

Introduction

Poonch, one of the border districts of the Jammu and Kashmir state, is located on the Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan. It is surrounded by Kashmir valley (Baramulla, Budgam, Shopian and Kulgam Districts) in the northeast, Rajouri district in the south and Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir (PoK) in the west. Pir Panjal range of mountains separates Poonch from Kashmir valley. It is a hilly and mountainous district barring few low lying valleys. The population of the district, as per Census 2011 is 476835 including male population of 251899 and female population of 224936. The district comprises of four tehsils of Haveli, Surankote, Mendhar and Mandi. It has 178 villages of which 168 are inhabited and 10 uninhabited, 191 Panchayats and a Municipal Committee. The population of Poonch district comprises of Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Paharis, Gujjar and Bakkarwal tribes and other backward communities. Of these, Gujjars and Bakkarwals are the two scheduled tribes that reside in this district (Lidhoo 1992). The population of Gujjar Bakkarwal Schedule tribe of Poonch district is 1, 76, 101 (Census 2011) while it was 1,49,018 in Census 2001. The percentage of ST population in the district is 36.9 %.

Poonch is considered as one of the backward districts of Jammu and Kashmir. Impact of hilly terrain, dense forest areas, high rainfall and non-connectivity through roads, poor implementation of the schemes etc is clearly visible on the educational scenario of the district in the rural areas. This situation as such leads to low literacy rates in the

district especially among the women, Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities.

Besides, this border district has also been hit by the armed insurgency which erupted in the state some 25 years ago. In the past two decades of conflict in Jammu and Kashmir, maximum rural areas of Poonch district have been affected impacted by militancy (Tufail 2012). Situated close to the Line of Control, the district also witnessed heavy infiltration of terrorists from across the Line of Control besides killings of its innocent civilians, massacres, gutting or damaging of its schools and hospitals by the militants.

Table 1: Zone Wise Scheduled Tribe Population of Poonch District

S No	Name of Zone	Scheduled Tribes			%age of total population
		M	F	T	
01	Bafiaz	10942	10106	21048	34.92%
02	Balakote	4934	4684	9618	31.74%
03	Harni	5732	5390	11122	34.87%
04	Kanoyan	7932	7263	15195	54.08%
05	Mandi	4348	3880	8228	19.63%
06	Mankote	9734	8972	18706	55.04%
07	Mendhar	10528	10484	21012	46.65%
08	Nangali	8185	7297	15482	56.68%
09	Poonch	6240	6399	12639	30.19%
10	Sathra	5175	4759	9934	39.69%
11	Surankote	19758	18698	38456	52.51%
	Total	93508	87932	181440	41.33%

(Source: Child Census 2006 projected 2011)

The two scheduled tribe communities of Poonch district - Gujjars and Bakkarwals - are nomadic in character. (Bhardwaj 1994). Every year with the onset of summers, these tribes go to the higher reaches of Pir Panjal mountains and even further with their cattle, sheep, goat and buffalos (Khatana 1992). While Gujjars are semi-sedentarized and go to the lower or middle mountain reaches, the Bakkarwals are mainly nomads who traverse long journeys with their cattle and these are two distinct nomadic communities (Rao & Casimir 1982).

About 56 villages adjoining the forest areas of Poonch out of its 168 inhabited villages witness migration of the ST families during summer along with their children to the higher reaches where they spend 3-6 months in Pir Panjal mountains. Families do migrate from all over the district. (Zutshi 2001). A very small number moves outside the district and maximum families migrate within the district. There are five passes to cross over to Kashmir Valley from Poonch district. The migratory families crossing over to Kashmir Valley have to take the route of Mandi Sawjian or Loran or Bafliaz-Chandimarh and their cattle/sheep take the forest route.

Education at a glance

Poonch is divided in eleven educational zones of Bafliaz, Balakote, Harni, Kanoiyan, Mandi, Mankote, Mendhar, Nangali, Poonch, Sathra and Surankote. The four educational zones of Mandi, Bafliaz, Sathra and Surankote are winter zones while the other seven zones are summer zones as they observe hot climate during summer. In winter zones, migration takes place during summer as the families migrate to upper reaches of the district along with their children and cattle.

The literacy rate of Poonch district is as per Census 2011 is 66.7 per cent while in 2001 it was 51.19 per cent. The male literacy in Poonch is 78.84 per cent (Census 2011) in comparison to 65.04 % in 2001. The female literacy in Census 2011 in Poonch is 53.19 while in Census 2001 it was 35.96 per cent. The statistics for women, especially belonging to SC and ST community are not satisfactory. The lowest literacy rate is for educational zone Mandi which has only 17% ST population. The female literacy rate of Mandi educational zone is lowest at 14.09%.

Table 2: District-wise number of Government Schools in Poonch district

S. No.	EDUCATIONAL ZONES	Primary	Primary with Upper primary	Primary with Upper primary & sec/Higher secondary	Upper primary only	Upper primary with sec/higher sec	Total
1	Bafliaz	104	42	6	1	2	155
2	Balakote	82	27	6	0	0	115
3	Harni	59	22	4	0	0	85
4	Kuniyian	64	19	2	0	1	86
5	Mandi	86	50	2	1	1	140
6	Mankote	85	32	4	0	1	122
7	Mendhar	106	42	4	1	0	153
8	Nangali	57	35	4	0	0	96
9	Poonch	58	26	4	0	1	89
10	Sathra	51	28	3	0	1	83
11	Surankote	168	62	6	1	1	238
	Total	920	385	45	4	8	1362

Source: Office of Chief Education Officer (CEO) Poonch, 2012

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to understand and explore the challenges in the education of scheduled tribes in Poonch district. The study also aims to suggest few measures that can better the lives of the ST communities education-wise.

Methodology

The research is based on both primary as well as secondary sources. The researcher travelled to Poonch and interviewed many members of the Gujjar Bakkarwal nomadic tribes and their children for the study. A detailed questionnaire was used for

primary sources who were contacted in the field for the present research paper. Besides, the secondary sources including various government documents, reports, books, research papers in journals, J&K economic surveys, magazines and periodicals have been consulted thoroughly for the present study.

Results and Discussion

A majority of the Scheduled Tribe population of Poonch district migrates to higher reaches in summer due to which their children are deprived of education. Each year, over 20,000 people migrate to the summer pastures as part of their annual seasonal migratory practices from the twin border

districts of Poonch and Rajouri to the Pir Panjal ranges and further.

To cater to the educational needs of the nomadic population, the Jammu and Kashmir government had opened mobile schools in 1970. Poonch district had a total of 36 Mobile Primary Schools (MPS) which were opened to provide the schooling facility to the children of migratory population. However, due to militancy, all of these Mobile Primary Schools were made stationary and none of these schools now moves with the nomadic population during the summer.

Though militancy was an excuse for these mobile schools to be converted into stationary schools as none of the teachers were ready to move with the tribes for fear of terrorists, however, the mobile schools, even before militancy in the normal times, could not do justice with the education of the nomadic ST children. The mobile schools were opened at a winter habitation but when the Scheduled Tribes of that particular habitation would move to higher reaches during summer, they would move to different locations. Thus the students of a MPS of a winter location would be scattered in various directions in the higher reaches during summers. Thus it was not possible for such school to function in different locations as its students were not located at one place. Again a small number of children were possible to be benefited through mobile schooling facility.

However, the J&K government adopted a recent strategy under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyaan under which education is being provided to the children of nomadic ST communities by setting up of educational facility in the form of "Seasonal schooling camps" in the upper reaches of the Pir Panjal range of mountains. Seasonal Camps are the educational camps at such locations where a good number of children are available during summer irrespective of their village, zone and district and educational facility is provided by engaging the Educational Volunteers (EVs) of the same summer location and same community on short term contract. The EVs are engaged for a period of four months of summer only and are given Rs 4000 a

month. When the nomads return to their winter locations in October-November, these teachers are disengaged.

Opened under SSA, the government provided this kind of educational support to the migratory children during the year 2005 by setting up three seasonal camps in three locations on experimental basis. During the summer of 2006, the programme was further extended to 84 locations and academic support was provided to 4490 children including 2503 boys and 1987 girls. This enrolment includes 789 never-enrolled children including 379 boys and 410 girls for the first time out of which 132 children were streamlined in regular schools during 2006-07. A total of 2402 children of ST community were also among the children provided academic support in these seasonal locations.

Table 3: A comparison of Mobile Schools & Seasonal Camps in Poonch in 2009

Activity Unit	Schools	Beneficiaries (Enrollment)	Teachers/EV
Mobile (PS) MPS	36	1442	87 Teachers
Seasonal Camps	187	8339	251 EVs

A total of 165 seasonal schooling camps were made operational during 2007 and this facility was extended to 187 locations during 2008 and 2009 summer and provided accommodation by arranging the tents in collaboration with the NGOs. During 2009, seasonal camps covered 8339 children. The Seasonal Camps were not made operational in 2010.

Education of ST girls

For the education of girls belong to ST community in Poonch, residential schools with boarding and lodging facility under the banner of Kasturbha Gandhi Balika Vidhyalya (KGBV) were opened at Surankote, Mandi, Poonch, Mendhar and Balakote blocks.

Table 4: Status of KGBVs in Poonch as on February 2011

S. No	CD Block	Year of sanction	Operational	Enrolment of Girls				Minority	Total Girls enrollment
				SC	ST	OBC	BPL	Muslims	
1	Surankote	2005-06	1	0	42	02	15	59	59
2	Mandi	2006-07	1	0	20	14	16	50	50
3	Poonch	2006-07	1	0	21	12	12	45	45
4	Mendhar	2006-07	1	0	19	17	14	50	50
5	Balakote	2010-11	0	0	0	0		0	0
Total				0	102	45	57	204	204

Source: CEO Office Poonch

These interventions like the KGBVs are aiming at bringing those girls from ST, SC or BPL categories who are not able to avail the benefits of education into educational mainstream. Residential schools in Poonch are opened in educationally backward blocks. As the above mentioned table suggests, most of the beneficiaries of such residential schools are girls from ST communities.

Issues and challenges

There are many challenges in improving literacy levels among the scheduled tribe communities in Poonch district. Because of the remoteness of the district and its difficult geographical and highly inaccessible terrain, there is lack of awareness among the people especially STs regarding the importance of education. The STs do not see tangible gains accruing from education and thus prefer to withdraw their children from the schools.

The schools which are stationary also lack proper infrastructure. Teacher absenteeism is quite common especially in rural areas. Most of the schools have no subject teachers at elementary level due to which the teacher present in the school is not in a position to improve the quality of education in the particular subject. Teachers need training and retraining periodically so that they can maintain their professional competence. Girls in flung areas are not enrolled in schools at proper age. At primary level they attain maturity even at primary level and leave the schools. The dropout rate is quite high among girls.

In the residential KGBV schools which have been opened up in educationally backward blocks,

the government teachers do not agree to devote extra time for providing remedial teaching to the low achiever girls of ST and other communities which are lagging behind and need remedial coaching. There is also no provision for female security force in areas where KGBVs have been established.

References

- Bhardwaj, A.N. (1994), History and Culture of Himalayan Gujjars, J. K. Book House, Jammu
- Khatana, R.P. (1992). *Tribal Migration in Himalayan Frontiers- study of Bakkarwal Transhumance economy*, Vintage Books. Gurgaon
- Lidhoo, M.L (1992). *Kashmir Tribes*, Minakshi Publication, Srinagar
- Rao, A. and Casimir, M. J. (1982). *Mobile pastoralists of J&K -- a preliminary report on tribal people*, Journal of Nomadic People
- Tufail, Mohd (2012), *Impact of the Unrest on the Livelihoods of the Gujjars and Bakkarwals of Jammu and Kashmir*, International Journal of Social Science Tomorrow Vol. 1 No. 4, ISSN: 2277-6168
- Zutshi, Bhupinder (2001). *Gujjars and Bakkarwals of Rajouri District*, in K. Warikoo (ed.), Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir, IGRS, Bhopal

Conclusions and recommendations

The objectives and goals of UEE cannot be imagined until the Scheduled Tribe community as a whole is fully involved in the development of the educational system. There is lack of awareness among the Gujjar Bakkarwal communities regarding the education of their children. Thus, strategies need to be adopted through various awareness programmes so that they can send their children to the school and can themselves become partner in the management of education and teaching learning processes. Awareness campaigns need to be launched among ST population regarding the importance of elementary education. These campaigns need to be vigorously followed in those areas where such population is putting up for enrollment of all out of school ST children.

The majority of the population in this belt is poor and thus engages their children in household work. The parents consider the schooling only wastage of time. Drop out is the major problem that hinders the progress of tribal education. This requires serious attention as several factors such as social, cultural, economic, educational, linguistic regional, administrative are responsible for this state of affairs.

Absenteeism of teachers is responsible for low performance of government teachers as compared to private school teachers. Strict actions need to be taken against those teachers who do not go to their place of postings and get themselves attached with other educational offices.

Remedial teaching is yet another area of thrust for upgrading the achievement levels of ST students. Besides, Mid-day meals and other incentives like scholarships etc should be provided to the seasonal schooling camps.