

Teaching the nomads in the wild: An analysis of seasonal educational schools for nomadic populations in Jammu and Kashmir

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ABSTRACT: Gujjar and Bakkarwal tribes are the scheduled tribes found in all the three regions of the state of Jammu and Kashmir, one of the border states of India. Out of the total twelve Scheduled Tribes of J&K, Gujjar and Bakkarwal tribes form 69.1 percent of the total ST population. These twin tribes which also form the third largest community in Jammu and Kashmir, are mostly nomadic who move to the lower and middle mountain areas of Pir Panjal in search of better pastures in the summer with their cattle and come back to the plains in the winters.

The literacy rate of Gujjar and Bakkarwals is quite low. There are a number of educational provisions for migratory Gujjar-Bakkarwal populations in the form of stationary and permanent government schools at different places all over the state. But at the summer locations where the good numbers of nomadic children are available who move there with their parents, the educational facilities are again very less. For the education of the children of the nomadic populations of Gujjar and Bakkarwals, 'Seasonal Educational Schools' have been set up where the teachers do not accompany the nomadic children but continue to remain at the temporary camps of the nomads and provide education to those children who are at the higher reaches with their families and cattle for better pastures.

The present paper aims to understand the role played by seasonal education camps in the education of nomadic children in J&K. It also seeks to explore the attempts made by the Jammu and Kashmir government to provide education to nomads during their seasonal migratory practices. The paper would also suggest few measures for providing better education to pastoral nomads.

Keywords: Gujjars, Bakkarwals, seasonal schools, nomads, SSA, Kashmir

INTRODUCTION

Jammu and Kashmir is one of the border states of India having a population of 1,25,41302 including male population of 66,40662 and female population of 59,00640. The 12 Scheduled Tribes in J&K have a population of 14,93,299 which account for 11.9 per cent of the total population of the State (Census 2011). As per Census 2001, out of twelve Scheduled Tribes, Gujjar and Bakkarwal tribes form 69.1 percent of the total ST population. These twin tribes also form the third largest community in Jammu and Kashmir

Gujjars and Bakkarwals are found in all the three regions of the state of Jammu and Kashmir including Jammu (comprising districts of Jammu, Kathua, Udhampur, Poonch, and Rajouri Districts), Kashmir Valley (comprising the districts of Srinagar, Baramulla, Kupwara, Pulwama, Budgam and Anantnag etc.) and Ladakh (comprising Leh and Kargil). The Gujjar tribe has the highest concentration in Poonch and Rajouri districts followed by Anantnag, Udhampur and Doda districts. In Poonch, the population of STs is 1,

76,101 while in Rajouri it is 2, 32, 815 which is 36.9 % and 36.2 % of the total population of the two border districts respectively (Census 2011).

Gujjars and Bakkarwals are mostly nomadic tribes of Jammu and Kashmir but since past many years, a majority of the Gujjar population has become sedentarized (Zutshi 2001). Gujjars which were primarily a nomadic community, have now settled to a large extent and have become sedentarized or settled in permanent villages in the plains bordering the foot hills and have taken to cultivation of land as their primary occupation (Bhardwaj 1994). Besides, there are semi-settled or sedentary transhumant Gujjars who combine the cultivation of land with nomadism (Kango & Dhar 1981). They move to the lower and middle mountain areas and Pir Panjal pastures in the summer with their flock of buffalos where they engage in cultivation and come back to the plains in the winters (Khatana 1992).

Bakkarwals are the goat (Bakri) breeders who go to the high-altitudes of Himalayas and spend their winter in plains and foot hills of Shivaliks. During

their journeys to the higher reaches of the mountains during summer when the snows melt and the passes open, the Bakkarwals trek through the remotest areas of the mountains to reach the higher pastures of the Pir Panjal range where they rest in temporary hutments in the picturesque valley and graze their herd of sheep (Rao & Casimir 1982).

Education of nomadic populations in Jammu and Kashmir

The literacy rate in Jammu and Kashmir is 68.74 per cent as per census 2011. While the male literacy is 78.26 per cent, the female literacy is 58.01 per cent. As per census 2001 the literacy rate of tribal population in J&K is 37.5 per cent which is far lower than the average literacy 47.1 per cent of tribal at national level. The literacy rate of male of tribals of J&K (48.2 percent) is much lower than the tribals at national level (59.2 per cent). Also the literacy rate of female tribals (25.5 per cent) of J&K is low in comparison to female tribals at national level (34.8 per cent). (Andrabi 2013)

There is schooling facility available for all migratory populations during winter in the form of stationary and permanent government schools at different places all over the state. But at the summer locations where the good numbers of nomadic children are available who move there with their parents, the educational facilities are less. With the objective to provide educational facilities to the children of nomadic Gujjars and Bakkarwals Scheduled Tribes (STs), the Jammu and Kashmir government had started a novel concept of Mobile Primary Schools (MPS) commonly known as mobile schools in 1970s. The mobile schools which were a single teacher primary schools provided education facilities to the children of the nomads at various places especially in upper reaches of Pir Panjal mountains however could not continue for long after the onset of militancy in the state.

However, keeping in view the fact that the education of nomadic communities in J&K including that of Gujjars and Bakkarwals assumes significance in the changing world order, during the tenure of Mufti Mohammad Sayeed as the chief minister of the state, the J&K Government revived the concept of mobile schools but with a difference. Under this, 'Seasonal Educational Schools' were set up for the education of the children of the nomadic populations which are also known as 'Seasonal centres' or 'seasonal camps'. The teachers at these seasonal schools do not accompany the nomadic children but continue to remain at the temporary camps of the nomads and provide education to those children who come to the higher reaches with their families and cattle for better pastures.

The idea was that when in summer, thousands of Gujjars and Bakkarwals move to the pastures in the

higher reaches of Pir Panjal with their families, children and livestock, the nomadic children who have no access to education, should have seasonal schools which can teach them in those temporary hutments. The schools are generally started at a location where the nomadic population stays during the summer season and a good number of children are available who are given continuous academic support by the teachers. This concept came into existence for the first time in Poonch in 2005. The students are given free text books besides Rs 100 per child for Teaching Learning Method (TLM). The teachers engaged for teaching in seasonal schools are not permanent teachers but are Educational Volunteers (EVs) who are generally from the same community. They are engaged for a period of four months in summer when the nomadic populations are in their summer locations in higher reaches. Presently they are being paid Rs 4000 every month and they are disengaged after October every year as the population shifts back to their parent districts.

The seasonal schools operate under the Zonal Education Offices of J&K Education department. The schools are provided with tents, blackboards, stationary, trunks, and chalks etc. These schools provide education up to primary level only up to class 5th. After the winter migration is over, from the month of October the students attend the normal government run schools in their respective villages.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To understand the role played by seasonal education camps in the education of nomadic children in J&K
2. To explore the attempts made by the Jammu and Kashmiri government to provide education to nomads during their seasonal migratory practices.
3. To identify problems related to the nomad children's accessibility to education during summer migration.
4. To recommend strategies through which best education could be provided to pastoral nomads by the governmental agencies.

METHODOLOGY

The research is based on both primary as well as secondary sources. The researcher travelled to the twin border districts of Poonch and Rajouri and interviewed many Gujjar Bakkarwals nomadic tribes 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 DISCUSSIONS

With the objective to provide education to the nomad children in the upper reaches during their seasonal summer migration, the Jammu and Kashmir is presently running a total of 1163 mobile seasonal schools across in Jammu region and Kashmir province where children from nomadic population study. According to the official statistics, Poonch district has the highest number of 242 seasonal education centres presently functional while in districts like Kathua, Leh, Kargil, Rajouri, Srinagar, there is no seasonal center of education. No mid day meal is given to the children in the seasonal schools.

The move to provide continuous educational support to these migratory children was taken during the year 2005 for the first time in Poonch district of Jammu by setting three seasonal camps in three locations on experimental basis. The data provided by the Office of Chief Education Officer (CEO), Poonch, J&K government, shows that during 2006 summer under innovation in education programme of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, 84 seasonal schools were opened in which academic support was provided to 4490 children which includes 2503 boys and 1987 girls. This enrollment included 789 never enrolled children. A total of 379 boys and 410 girls got enrolled for the first time out of which 132 children were streamlined in regular schools during 2006-07. Another 2402 children of ST community were also among the children who were provided academic support in these seasonal locations.

Establishment of Seasonal centres during 2006-07 in Poonch district

S.No.	Year	Seasonal centres	EVs engaged
01	2005-06	3	4 *
02	2006-07	84	127
03	2007-08	165	243
04	2008-09	187	278
05	2009-10	187	251
06	2010-11	187	2

Source: Office of Chief Education Officer (CEO) J&K government, J&K

The establishment of seasonal camps was a novel experience for the Jammu and Kashmir government to cover the children of migratory population consisting of Gujjar and Bakkarwal at very high altitudes in meadows where they put-up during summer to rear their flocks of cattle. The government arranged such classes by providing tents in convergence with few NGOs. As per the initial plans of J&K government plan, these seasonal centres had to include vocational training programmes for a duration of three months each at cluster level or at school level where at least 50 girls or boys would have been available at the seasonal schooling camps during the summer

migration period. Besides remedial teaching was also to be provided to the low achiever and zero periods were to be included during morning hours for such children of ST category as have very low achievement levels.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Inadequate infrastructure

The condition of seasonal schools meant for the tribal nomadic children of Jammu and Kashmir is pathetic. There is no adequate infrastructure to run these schools. While the government claims that tents have been given to the seasonal centres besides blackboards, chairs and chalks etc., a visit to such seasonal centres in the higher pastures in Poonch area depicted that there was no adequate infrastructure available to run these schools. The tents are supposed to be provided to each seasonal school but there were no tents and the ones which were provided initially in the beginning of the schools in 2005 have never been replaced till date and thus are in tatters. The teachers take the classes of the children under open sky and when there is rainfall etc, such schools are either shut or else the students have to take shelter under trees. No blackboards and no other stationary is with the schools in majority of such schools in the entire state.

No Mid-Day Meals

While mid day meals are given to the students in government schools, no Mid-Day Meals are given to the children of seasonal schools. The Mid Day meals can attract more number of students to such schools but these do not provide mid day meals.

No teaching-learning (TLM) material

None of such schools have teaching learning materials available with them which can aid them in teaching-learning processes. A local newspaper reported in October 2013 said that over 2400 nomad students of around 82 seasonal schools of Mandi zone in Poonch were suffering due to non-availability of learning and teaching material. Though the government directions were to issue teaching and learning material to the tune of Rs 2500 per seasonal centre, yet the authorities were giving learning and teaching material to the schools worth less than half of the sanctioned amount. A total of 26 seasonal schools got learning and teaching material worth Rs 1200 just few days before the closure of the schools by October 2013.

Corruption in seasonal schools

The Education Volunteers (EVs) who teach at such seasonal centre are usually engaged for four months at a salary or stipend of Rs 4000 per month. Most of the EVs told this researcher that the clerks in the ZEO offices take Rs 1000 per month as their commission thus leaving them with a stipend Rs

3000 per month. This meagre amount too is made available to them after months of the closure of the seasonal centres. The issue of corruption is rampant in the seasonal schools run by J&K government. The clerks in ZEO offices also issue sub-standard material to EVs and many a times supply half of the material sanctioned for a seasonal schools. Even a newspaper report said that in October 2013 the EVs were asked to sign on a blank stock register resulting which the police had to intervene and direct the corrupt officials of ZEO office Mandi to stop distribution of teaching and learning material.

Irregular classes

Due to inadequate infrastructure and lack of other facilities, the classes of such seasonal centres are not organized regularly. The EVs also do not take regular classes in these seasonal schools. There is no proper schedule also in these classes.

Absence of proper schooling environment

In the seasonal centres, there is also an absence of proper school environment. Students belonging to different classes are made to sit tighter and one single teacher teaches them their respective subjects which is not proper. The conduct of the classes in the open sky is also a hindrance to regular proper classes. The students who are in the higher reaches with their families have to attend to their scattered grazing cattle than attend the classes and thus even while sitting in the classes, their attention is toward their animals grazing in the nearby open areas. Hence less concentration which makes schools dull and boring to them.

Irrelevant Curriculum

The seasonal schools set up for the nomadic children have no proper curriculum. Each seasonal school is handled by one Educational Volunteer (EV) each who takes a class of all the children of that particular location irrespective of their age, class, subject etc. All the children are made to sit together and given some work which makes it quite incoherent for them. One such school functional in the Dubjan area taught English, Hindi, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies to all the children of different classes at the same time. This haphazard method of learning wherein only one teacher has to teach all subjects to different age groups within 5-6 hours of teaching is further compounded by the teacher's lack of motivation due to a frustratingly low salary.

Lack of motivation among EVs

Most of the Education Volunteers lack interest in teaching learning process. They also lack devotion and dedication due to various factors like low salary, temporary job, inadequate infrastructure, harsh work conditions etc. The EVs thus also don't take interest in enriching themselves with knowledge. This weakness of teachers directly affects the quality of teaching. Since 2005, there is no revision in their monthly salary (stipend) of Rs 4000. The EVs have been demanding an increase in it.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The seasonal schools are in a bad condition and lack proper infrastructure. The government needs to strengthen the infrastructure of these schools. For example these seasonal schools had been provided tents by the Education department seven years back but all those are totally damaged now and the teachers are forced to take classes under open sky. The stationery which includes books, notebooks etc. is not provided at the right time when the classes start. The mid-day meal facility which is provided to all the government schools is also not available to the seasonal school children. The stipend of the EVs also needs to be increased so that they are motivated enough to take the classes. In fact, so as to have proper classroom activity in proper classroom environment, the number of EVs per seasonal schools can be increased to three or four persons who can then divide the students of different age groups and classes in different groups and accordingly teach subjects to them instead of the haphazard teaching they do.

Besides, there is a need to check corruption at the ZEO level failing which the schools will continue to suffer for lack of teaching-learning material etc. There has to be monitoring and supervision of such schools so as to ensure that quality education is being provided to the students. Monitoring and supervision has to play major role in proper functioning of any system but incidentally this system is not working properly and needs immediate reorganization of the system at zonal level.

There is also need to make serious efforts by government and non-profit organizations and other agencies to augment the pace of development in education of the Scheduled Tribes of Jammu and Kashmir.

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