ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN EDUCATION OF TRIBAL GUJJARS STUDENTS IN RAJOURI DISTRICT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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ABSTRACT
Gujjar Scheduled Tribe is the indigenous pastoralist community which is geographically and socially isolated, educationally backward and economically marginalized. Since independence, many policies and programmes have been initiated by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir for their development. However, despite several efforts, they are lagging behind. The education of Gujjar Tribal Children is intrinsically linked to their own social, cultural, vocational, economical and geographical conditions which do not allow them to attend the traditional normal schools regularly. Keeping in view these constraints, the Government established “Mobile Schools” and “Seasonal Schools” apart from the traditional school system in Jammu and Kashmir. However, these mobile schools and seasonal schools are also facing many challenges in their administration and management. The problem of physical infrastructure, plight of seasonal migration and temporary arrangements create challenges in their functioning. Keeping in view their social, cultural and geographical context the schooling is a major challenge for education of the Gujjar tribe children. The issue of the Physical access, Medium of instruction, Pedagogy, Teachers training, Teachers attitude, Cultural Context are some of the various concerns which create hurdles for the education of Gujjar tribe. Apart from these aspects pastoral nature of their society and least participation in the education of their children are another unsettled areas which need to be meticulously analysed and addressed for making education sustainable and joyful. The present paper explores the issues and challenges in Education of Tribal Gujjars Students in Rajouri District of Jammu and Kashmir.

Keywords: Tribal Education, Challenges, Issues, Gujjars, Pastoralists

INTRODUCTION
Education is the most important instrument for the development of different Pastoral tribes in Jammu and Kashmir. Education in Jammu and Kashmir plays an important role in shaping the outlook of the young minds which leads towards their participation in the developmental process. The most powerful tool that brings changes in the society is only education but the Pastoral tribes are still lagging behind due to lack of educational aspiration, educational awareness, illiteracy, geographical conditions, cultural influences and livelihood conditions. Tribal communities, especially Pastoral tribes are mostly segregated and isolated section of the society since immemorial time period. The life style, culture and traditions of these tribal communities are totally different from other social groups of the society. Gujjars community is one of them which are presently residing in northwest India mostly in Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Western Utter Pradesh and Rajasthan. It is the third largest community of Jammu and Kashmir after Kashmiri and Ladakhi community. Gujjars constitute 69.1% of total population of schedule tribe of Jammu and Kashmir and 8.1% of total population of Jammu and Kashmir. (Census 2011) Kashmiri, Dogras, Gujjars and Bakerwals, Dards, Baltis, Gaddis, Ladakhis, and other ethnic groups make up the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Gujjars are mostly pastoralists (Ganie, Ishaq 2018).

Education is an input for financial growth of tribes and also for internal force of the tribal communities (Saxena & Kumar, 2016). Education for nomadic peoples is a very difficult, contentious, and emotional matter (Chatty, Dawn. 2006). Nomadic peoples have been educating their children for generations by passing down the socio-cultural and economic information, necessary to engage in their customary vocations from one generation to the next. The manner of life of nomadic peoples has changed dramatically in the past several decades, sometimes as a result of global development patterns that are insensitive to the needs of geographically mobile populations. Due to lack of infrastructure, instructors’ absence, and kids' attitude towards schooling, poverty in the home, seasonal movement, a lack of interest in school and a lack of parent motivation in tribal communities, there are numerous educational issues in these places.
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE
Ananda (1995) examined the “dropout in primary education among tribal children” and found that absence rates reduced in the second to fifth grades and were greatest in the first grade. Class Ist's mean stagnation rate was greater than that of all other classes. Dropout rates were greater in lower grades and lower in upper classes. Mitra (2008) studied the conditions of India's scheduled tribe women and found that tribal women had lower level of education than their male counterparts, and gender equality is a difficult concept to grasp in a tribal context. Dubey (2009) examined the scheduled tribes and found that poverty and starvation are problems for scheduled tribes, and that they must be given attention. Rahi, (2011) revealed the origin, tribal identity, and history of the Gujjars in a methodical manner. He had also analysed the political empowerment of Gujjars in J&K. Suri (2014) in his study entitled "The seasonal educational schools for nomadic population of Jammu and Kashmir," explored that the seasonal schools are in poor condition, they have lack of proper infrastructure, stationeries are not provided on time, and mid-day meal facilities are also not available to seasonal school children. This research found a correlation between indigenous children's poverty and academic success (Gujjar and Bakkarwal in Jammu and Kashmir).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY
- To assess the issues and challenges faced by tribal gujjars students in Education in Rajouri District of Jammu and Kashmir.
- To give some suggestions for the development of education of tribal gujjars students in Rajouri District of Jammu and Kashmir.

METHODOLOGY
This paper is based on both primary and secondary data sources. The focused group discussion, interview and interaction with the teachers, children, parents and community members have been done to collect the primary data and the secondary data have been obtained from the relevant books, journals, government offices, statistical digest of J&K, census of India reports 2001 and 2011. The study is analysed from the experiential perspective to assess and explore the issues and challenges of Gujjar community in Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir.

Scheduled Tribes in Jammu and Kashmir
In Jammu and Kashmir total twelve tribes were given the status of Scheduled Tribes (ST). Initially, there were 8 communities namely Balti, Beda, Changpa, Garra, Mon Bot, Brookpa and Purigpa, were given the Scheduled Tribe status in 1989. After that, in 1991, four more tribes Gujjars, Bakarwals, Gaddis and Sippis were notified as the ST’s, vide the constitution (Scheduled Tribes) order (Amendment) Act,1991. First time, all these 12 scheduled tribes were tallied officially in the census 2001 and their total population were 1,105,979. According to the 2011 census, the state's Scheduled Tribes population was 1,493,299 people, constituting around 11.9 % of the state's overall population and approximately 1.5 % of the country's total tribal population. The state's Ladakh region is home to the majority of these tribes.

Issues and Challenges in Education of Tribal Gujjars Students in Rajouri District of Jammu and Kashmir
The education of tribal Children is intrinsically linked to their social, cultural, economic and geographical conditions. Based on Empirical evidence, group discussions, interactions, interviews and my personal observations the following issues and challenges are faced by these tribal Gujjars children at elementary level of schooling:
1. **Schooling Related issues**: The researcher observed and found in due course of the interviews from the students, teachers and parents belonging to the tribal community that the Tribal Gujjars’ social, cultural, economic and geographical conditions do not allow them to attend the traditional schools. It was found that mobile schools run by the Jammu and Kashmir government is very good initiative for education of Tribal Gujjars who are basically pastoralists, keeping in view their above mentioned constraints. However, these mobile schools are also facing many challenges. During the seasonal migration of the tribal people, when these mobile schools move with them from one place to another place, students studying as well as teachers working in these schools face many challenges to continue their education. The problem of proper shelters, seating arrangements, classroom arrangements, infrastructural issues create hurdle in the smooth functioning of these mobile schools.

2. **Language of Instruction**: Children from tribal communities have little exposure to the state language, thus they prefer to converse in their own dialect. Tribal children of Rajouri District of Jammu and Kashmir have reported language problem as their mother tongue is Gojjari but to educate and communicate, government schools rely on the state language, which tribal children aren’t acquainted with until they reach up to the primary grades. Because of this, they are unable to develop their conceptual understanding and interest in the subjects they are being taught. Incorporating the state language into the children’s education may help the students to reach up to their full potential at schools. The stakeholders of education of Tribal Gujjars suggested that if we provide education in their own native language the children will be more involved and the learning will be more joyful and easy. They suggested incorporating the Tribal Gujjars’ cultural aspects in their curriculum to make a good connect with the educational system.

3. **Pedagogy and Teachers Training**: The government of Jammu and Kashmir started Mobile schools for Tribal Children in which the teachers are appointed from the Tribal community. Being member of the same community, though officially the medium of instruction is not local dialect, they use local dialect as a medium of instruction along with their state language to make a good connect with the students and to make the contents easy to grasp. This linguistic blending makes the pedagogy more involving and attracting. The presence of tribal instructors, particularly from the same community, has shown and enhanced tribal children's school attendance, since these teachers have a stronger understanding and respect for the culture (As shared by parents). However, proper training of teachers is required to make the curriculum more cultural and context oriented, develop positive attitude towards the pastoralist children.

4. **Participation of Tribal Community**: Tribal gujjars are actively involved in educating their children about their community’s cultural legacy and customary vocations which they have received from their ancestors. These traditional cultural vocations are transmitted from one generation to another but the parental involvement is very less in formal education process. They are not an active partner in formal educational process. It has been found that there is less involvement of Gujjars society in their formal education which may be strengthened by tribal educators and teachers involved formally in the process of education. These tribal educators and teachers may work together inside and outside the classroom and they may play their role as role model. They may bridge the gap between the Tribal gujjjars
community and formal education process. Thus, the indigenous community must be empowered as real partners. New and comprehensive methods of engaging communities and soliciting their involvement must be continually developed to make education more sustainable and joyful. Keeping in mind the community's evolving demands, the following are key elements for effective community participation which is suggested by the majority of the stakeholders:

- Acquire trust of local stakeholders, Educate and help tribal gujar community leaders to foster their own potential.
- Insure connection between the educators and local tribal people through Community participation, Planning and School building programmes.
- Inculcate sense of responsibility among tribal gujar students and their parents.
- Empower the Tribal Communities through proper awareness and education.
- Provide quality education services through comprehensive strategies.

5. **Physical Access:** Geographic factors, distance of the tribal hamlet, or tribal migratory patterns make it difficult for children in the tribal highland region of Rajouri district to go to the normal schools. Because of this problem many students leave their schools before completing their education. Though the government has taken many initiatives, the problem of access to normal school system is still a challenge despite the mobile schools and seasonal schools established to overcome the barrier of access.

6. **Seasonal Migration:** Seasonal relocation of tribal Gujar communities is another significant hurdle on the path of their education. It has been found that migrating populations are mostly tribal in origin, consisting primarily of landless poor with little other possessions, skills, or education. Education for migratory children in tribal communities becomes a major obstacle, as a significant number of impoverished rural families are compelled to move out of their villages for several months each year with their livestock in search of pastures for grazing in order to survive. During interview it has been revealed by the most of the stakeholders that the poor economic conditions of the tribal Gujar communities do not allow them to send their children for formal education as they are one of the main earning members of the family, engaged in the management of their livestock. It has also been found that tribal girls have very less participation in the formal education in comparison to boys due to their domestic involvement. Keeping in view the problem of seasonal migration, the government of Jammu and Kashmir has launched the scheme of mobile schools and seasonal school facilities for these children, though that is not up to the mark in some hilly areas of Rajouri district. Government should provide proper infrastructure to these schools so that the quality education can be provided to these communities which are suffering due to seasonal migration.

**CONCLUSION**

Education particularly at elementary stage is considered to be utmost importance for the development of Gujjar tribal community. Education is very essential means by which we can bring the tribal communities from downward to upward and it helps to overcome the barriers for the well being of such tribal community. In the context of education of scheduled tribe students especially in district Rajouri of Jammu and Kashmir lacks behind as compare to others as for as the participation of community members especially participation of parents is concerned. There is need of proper planning strategy to attract and aware the community members for their active involvement in the education process. It is the duty of the government to assure the availability of proper infrastructure, hostel facilities, support, and proper residential schools for these tribal communities so that the quality education should be available. The support within the education system may include:

i. Organizing awareness programme.
ii. Providing relevant learning materials
iii. Introducing various welfare schemes like school building programmes etc.
iv. Addressing health and nutrition issues of native children
v. Training tribal school teachers and youth educators that will improve community engagement.
vi. Establishing seasonal dormitories and residential schools for the children of migrant workers
Thus, with the help of such support systems, and proper planning and execution strategies, the Gujjar tribal community may be mainstreamed in the education process.

REFERENCES


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