



Bridging Educational Gaps: Addressing the Challenges of Migratory Tribal Students in Rajouri District, Jammu and Kashmir

*Mr. Ajay Dev Singh, M.Ed. Student, Department of Educational Studies, Central University of Jammu,

Email id- ajaydevsingh908686@gmail.com

**Meenakshi Research Scholar, Department of Educational Studies, Central University of Jammu, Email

id- meenakshi132020@gmail.com

***Prof. Ritu Bakshi, Department of Educational Studies, Central University of Jammu, E-mail id:

ritubakshi.hp@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental human right, yet for many tribal communities in India, especially those with nomadic lifestyles, access to quality education remains a distant goal. This paper investigates the multifaceted educational challenges faced by migratory tribal students, with a specific focus on the Gujjars and Bakarwals of Rajouri district in Jammu and Kashmir. Using a mixed-methods approach involving purposive and random sampling across ten government schools, data was gathered through interviews and focus group discussions with principals, students, and parents. The findings reveal a range of systemic obstacles including geographical isolation, economic hardship, inadequate infrastructure, linguistic and cultural mismatches, gender disparities, and administrative shortcomings. Seasonal migration significantly disrupts academic continuity, enrollment, and emotional well-being of tribal students. Despite governmental efforts under schemes like NEP 2020, implementation gaps persist. The study proposes actionable strategies such as the development of culturally sensitive curricula, mobile and seasonal schools, infrastructure enhancement, community awareness programs, and stronger policy execution to bridge these educational divides. This research underscores the need for inclusive and context-specific educational models that empower tribal children and integrate them into the broader framework of national development.

Keywords: *tribal students, tribal communities, educational challenges, Gujjars and Bakarwals, Rajouri district*

INTRODUCTION

Education is a human right for every child, but it is foreclosed through array of barriers that tribal students confront when trying to get access to quality education. These obstacles grow out of historical, cultural, socio-economic and infrastructure factors that particularly affects tribal communities (UNESCO, 2019). This paper outlines the different educational challenges faced by tribal students and suggests possible solutions to enhance their educational outcomes.

Traditionally marginalized and isolated tribal communities, the term for which is often used tribal or indigenous or aboriginal peoples. China, for example, has more than 700 tribes, of which more than 700 live in rural or remote areas (UNDESA, 2021). These communities have their own languages, culture and traditions which separate them from the mainstream of east, which prevents them from even identifying and succeeding in education.

The level of education of tribal students has been always low with low literacy rate, high dropout rate and

S.no.	Year	Literacy rate	Dropout rate (In general)	Dropout rate (In tribals)	low
1	2020	74.4%	17.6%	20.91	
2	2021	72.1%	12.6%	16.62%	
3	2022	71.6	12.6%	16.62%	
4	2023	71.6%	10.9%	14.1%	

enrolment in higher education. Despite numerous government and non-governmental efforts, tribal students still face numerous barriers to educational success (WORLD BANK, 2020).

Table 1. showing the literacy and drop-out rate in India (General vs Tribal)

Source: UDISE reports and Press bureau Information report.

In the context of Jammu and Kashmir, the status of tribals is lower than the national average. The educational status of tribals in Jammu and Kashmir remains a concern due to various socio-economic and geographical challenges (Ahmed, 2018). Major tribal groups like the Gujjars and Bakarwals face low literacy rates, with the 2011 Census reporting only 50.6% literacy among Scheduled Tribes, and even lower among females at 37.2% (Census of India, 2011). Factors such as nomadic lifestyles, remote living conditions, poverty, lack of infrastructure, and gender disparities hinder access to consistent and quality education (Sharma, 2019).

Coming towards Rajouri district, migration greatly affects the educational development of tribal communities, especially among the Gujjars and Bakarwals. These communities migrate seasonally, moving to higher altitudes in summer and returning in winter, which interrupts their children's education (Khan, 2020). The absence of well-equipped mobile schools, shortage of qualified teachers, and limited educational access during migration contribute to high dropout rates and low academic achievement (Lone, 2021). Although efforts like seasonal learning centres and tribal hostels have been introduced, they often do not fully address the unique challenges faced by these nomadic groups, making migration a significant obstacle to consistent and quality education (Mir, 2022).

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The educational challenges faced by tribal children in India have been critically examined by different scholars from time to time. **Ottaplackal (2022)** argues that while policy efforts have made some strides in bridging educational gaps, tribal children continue to struggle due to geographical remoteness, which limits their physical access to schools, and due to socio-economic disadvantages, that compel many to prioritize labour over learning. He emphasizes that educational infrastructure alone cannot resolve these challenges unless there is a deeper engagement with the lived realities of tribal communities. Similarly, **Vinu (2021)** underscores the role of cultural insensitivity within the education system. He points out that mainstream curricula often ignore tribal languages, traditions, and knowledge systems, leading to alienation and disengagement among tribal students. Vinu advocates for a more inclusive educational approach that incorporates indigenous perspectives, ensuring that tribal children not only attend school but also feel valued within the learning environment. **Behara (2015)** provides a foundational understanding by tracing the historical marginalization of tribal communities in India. He explains that colonial and post-colonial development models often excluded tribal voices, resulting in systemic barriers that persist in education even today. Behara calls for transformative educational reforms that go beyond infrastructure and enrolment figures to address deeper issues of identity, representation, and justice. **Bhat (2021)** carried out a study on school education of tribal children of Jammu and Kashmir. Data was analysed and presented using descriptive statistics and graphical representation. The study showed that school growth increased over those years. It also revealed a decrease in enrolment of tribal children at the primary and upper primary levels, but an improvement was noted in enrolment at the secondary and senior secondary stages. **Suri (2016)** reported that the literacy levels among the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities were considerably below the state average, with Gujjars showing a literacy rate of 31.65% and Bakarwals at 22.51%, based on data from the 2001 census. The study links this educational gap to challenges such as their migratory way of life, economic hardship, and poor educational infrastructure.

In nutshell these studies highlight that addressing the educational marginalization of tribal children requires more than superficial policy measures. It demands a holistic and sustained approach that considers cultural inclusion, social equity, and the dismantling of historical prejudices ensuring that education becomes a true force for liberation, equality, and justice for all tribal communities.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Addressing the issues faced by tribal students is closely aligned with the broader goal of building an inclusive and egalitarian society one in which every child feels a sense of belonging and ownership in the nation. The aim is to empower all children to recognize their worth and believe that this country is theirs, by equipping them with the education necessary to thrive and contribute meaningfully to society. Despite the Indian Constitution's vision of universal education, the tribal population comprising approximately 104 million people continues to face significant barriers such as geographical isolation, cultural and linguistic

diversity, socio-economic hardships, and systemic exclusion. These challenges deprive tribal children of academic opportunities and prevent them from leveraging education as a pathway to improved socio-economic status, often trapping them in a cycle of poverty and marginalization. Raising awareness and actively addressing these barriers not only empowers tribal communities but also integrates them into the nation's development journey. Ensuring education that is inclusive of tribal identity one that values and promotes their cultural beliefs and traditions can bridge existing gaps, foster social unity, and help realize the goal of equality. Ultimately, this issue is of critical importance for protecting the rights of tribal children and advancing the overall socio-economic progress of the country.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 outlines a forward-looking approach to enhance the educational opportunities for tribal communities across India, including Jammu and Kashmir. It advocates for early education in students' native languages to make learning more accessible and culturally meaningful. The policy also recommends the creation of Special Education Zones (SEZs) in tribal areas, better digital connectivity, and the recruitment of local tribal teachers to promote relatable and continuous education. Furthermore, NEP 2020 ensures financial support through scholarships and introduces focused measures to close the educational gap. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these initiatives hinges on their on-ground execution, community participation, and regular assessment.

Keeping this in mind and undergoing through the conditions and status of tribal students in Rajouri, the study intends to examine the socio-economic, cultural, and infrastructural challenges that affect the educational outcomes of tribal students, with a focus on identifying the primary obstacles preventing access to quality education.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To examine the impact of geographical isolation and inadequate infrastructure on the access to and quality of education for tribal students.
2. To Explore the Impact of Socio-Economic and Cultural Factors on the Educational Outcomes of Tribal Students.
3. To Propose Effective Strategies and Interventions for Improving Educational Access and Quality for Tribal Students

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the present study, a mixed sampling approach was employed. The districts and zones were selected using purposive sampling based on specific criteria, such as migration trends and a high concentration of Scheduled Tribes. Within the Khawas Zone, ten elementary schools were randomly selected. Students who were present in the classroom during the visits were included in the sample. Additionally, parents were randomly chosen from the communities where these schools are situated.

Table 2: Sample Distribution of Respondents

S.no	Name of school	Principal	Number of Students	Number of Parents
1.	Govt. Middle School Kote Gali	01	04	05
2.	Govt. High School Marhuta	01	04	04
3.	Govt. High School Kanthol	01	03	07
4.	Govt. Middle School Bissi	01	04	04
5.	Govt. Middle School Mashloor	01	06	04
6.	Govt. High school Bai Numble	01	04	04
7.	Govt. High School Sadda	01	05	02
8.	Govt. Middle School Kha	01	06	04
9.	Govt. Middle school Badhal	01	05	05
10.	Govt. Middle School Dalehri	01	04	06
	Total	10	45	45
Grand Total		100 sample		

DATA COLLECTION

In the present study, data has been collected from both primary and Secondary sources.

- **Primary sources** include information gained through the respondents using interview schedules and FGDs.
- **Secondary Sources** include the information gathered from various research articles, journals and through Govt. websites and reports

After getting the in-depth information from respondents through Interviews schedule and Focus group discussions, following key challenges have been identified that are being faced by migratory tribal students in Rajouri district.

KEY CHALLENGES FACED BY TRIBAL STUDENTS IN RAJOURI DISTRICT

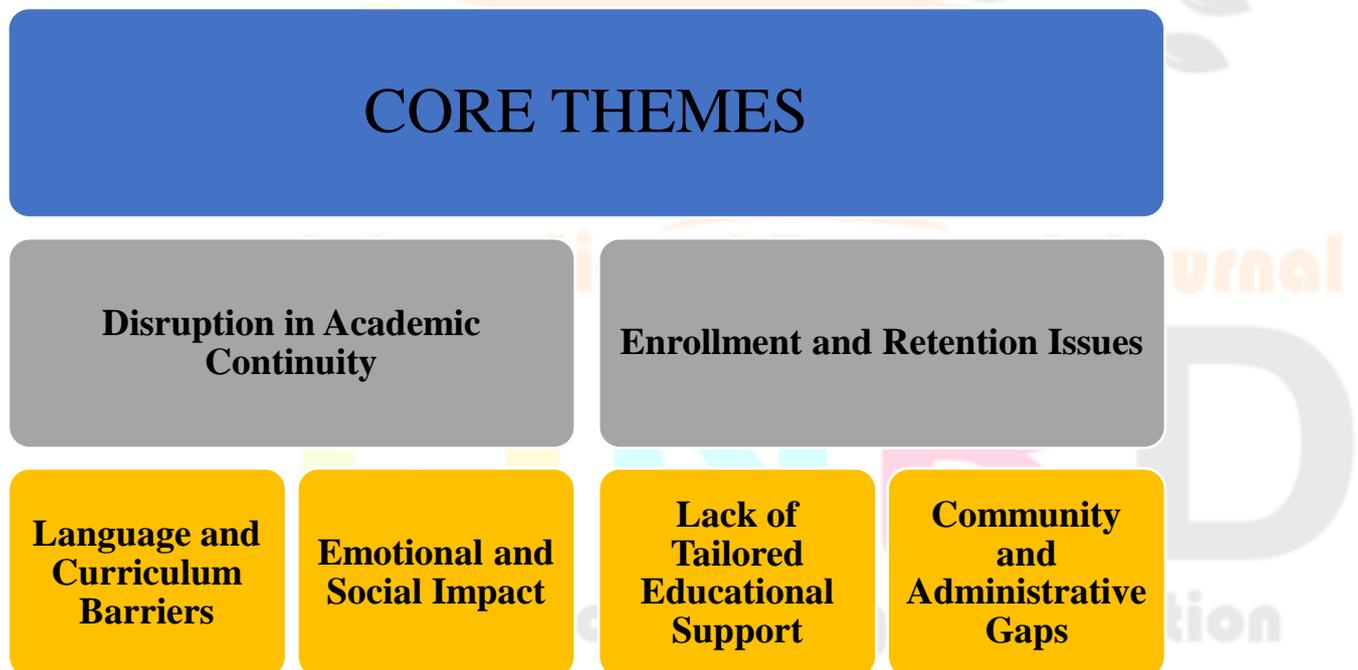
- 1. Geographical Isolation-** Tribal communities are often settled in remote, hilly, or densely forested areas, making physical access to educational institutions extremely difficult. The lack of nearby schools and poor transportation facilities create a major barrier to regular attendance. Younger children and girls, in particular, are disproportionately affected, as the long and sometimes unsafe journeys to school deter many families from sending them at all.
- 2. Nomadic Lifestyle-** Certain tribal groups, such as the Bakarwals, maintain a nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life, migrating with their livestock according to seasonal patterns. This constant movement leads to frequent disruptions in children's education, making it difficult to maintain continuity in learning. The absence of portable, flexible educational solutions that cater to such lifestyles further hampers the academic growth of children from these communities.
- 3. Economic Constraints-** A significant portion of tribal populations live below the poverty line, where survival takes precedence over education. Children are often required to work either in the fields, as labourer's, or within the household to supplement family income. The pressure of economic hardship leaves little room for education, resulting in high dropout rates and low academic achievement.
- 4. Inadequate Infrastructure-** Educational facilities in tribal regions often suffer from a lack of basic amenities. Schools may operate without sufficient classrooms, furniture, sanitation facilities, electricity, or access to clean drinking water. Hostels and residential schools, which could serve as crucial support systems, are either limited in number or suffer from poor maintenance, making them unattractive or unsafe options for students.
- 5. Language and Cultural Barriers-** Education in tribal areas is usually imparted in the official or state languages, which are often unfamiliar to tribal children who speak indigenous dialects at home. This language gap creates difficulties in comprehension and learning. Furthermore, the curriculum is rarely adapted to reflect tribal history, culture, or values, leading to feelings of alienation and a lack of engagement among students.
- 6. Low Awareness and Motivation-** Awareness regarding the long-term benefits of education remains low among many tribal families. Illiteracy among parents and guardians contributes to a lack of emphasis on schooling for the next generation. Additionally, information about government schemes, scholarships, and educational programs often does not reach the intended beneficiaries, resulting in missed opportunities for support.
- 7. Gender Disparities-** Tribal girls face a unique set of challenges that hinder their educational attainment. Early marriages, societal expectations around domestic roles, concerns about safety while traveling long distances, and a general undervaluing of girls' education contribute to higher

dropout rates among girls compared to boys. These gender-based hurdles significantly limit the educational prospects of tribal girls.

8. **Lack of Qualified Teachers**-Tribal and remote regions often experience an acute shortage of qualified, trained, and motivated teachers. Teachers who are posted in these areas sometimes exhibit irregular attendance and a lack of dedication due to challenging living conditions. Moreover, many teachers lack cultural sensitivity towards tribal traditions and languages, which creates a disconnect between them and the students, negatively impacting learning outcomes.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In the present study, thematic analysis was employed to investigate the educational challenges and experiences faced by migratory students affected by seasonal migration in district Rajouri. Data was collected through focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with principals, students, and parents from 10 government schools. Thematic analysis enabled the identification of recurring themes and patterns in the participants' responses. Based on the collected data, the following core themes were identified:



These Identified core themes highlighted the challenging areas and obstacles faced by tribal students during seasonal migration in district Rajouri. These core themes in the form of challenges are explained as under:

1. Disruption in Academic Continuity

- **Principals:** Reported that frequent seasonal migration leads to interruptions in attendance and academic progress. Teachers often need to repeat lessons or adjust the teaching pace to accommodate migratory students.
- **Students:** Expressed frustration about leaving mid-term, missing lessons, and the challenges of adjusting to new schools or rejoining after migration.

- **Parents:** Acknowledged the disruption but explained that migration was often economically necessary, leaving them with few alternatives.

2. Enrollment and Retention Issues

- **Principals:** Noted irregular enrollment patterns, with students attending school for only part of the year. Retention rates drop significantly during migration seasons.
- **Students:** Shared experiences of being enrolled in multiple schools across districts or states, leading to confusion and a lack of academic continuity.
- **Parents:** Struggled with re-enrollment during migration, often facing difficulties due to missing documents or language barriers.

3. Language and Curriculum Barriers

- **Principals:** Highlighted that migration to different states with varying languages and curricula creates significant learning challenges.
- **Students:** Reported difficulty in understanding lessons when moving to regions where instruction is in a different language.
- **Parents:** Expressed concern that these language and curriculum barriers hinder learning and affect their children's motivation to attend school during migration.

4. Emotional and Social Impact

- **Principals:** Observed signs of emotional stress, low self-confidence, and detachment among migratory students due to frequent transitions.
- **Students:** Described feelings of alienation when joining new schools and challenges in forming friendships or maintaining stability.
- **Parents:** Felt guilt but also helpless, recognizing the emotional and social toll migration has on their children's well-being.

5. Lack of Tailored Educational Support

- **Principals:** Pointed out the absence of bridge courses, remedial support, or flexible schooling options for migratory students.
- **Students:** Expressed the need for learning support to catch up after returning from migration.
- **Parents:** Suggested the introduction of evening classes, mobile schools, or seasonal hostels to ensure educational continuity.

6. Community and Administrative Gaps

- **Principals:** Noted the lack of coordination between sending and receiving states or schools, making it difficult to track migratory students.
- **Students:** Reported that some schools either denied admission or were unaware of policies tailored for migratory students.
- **Parents:** Emphasized the need for migrant-friendly education policies, awareness campaigns, and transport assistance to ensure smooth transitions for their children.

STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME THE ABOVE CHALLENGES FACED BY TRIBAL STUDENTS

1. **Improving School Infrastructure:** Proposals for enhancing educational facilities in tribal areas, such as building schools in closer proximity to communities, ensuring reliable transportation, and providing basic amenities like electricity, sanitation, and clean drinking water. Nomadic tribes like the Gujjars and Bakarwals migrate seasonally, which disrupts formal education. Mobile schools (carried or relocated along with the migrating communities) and seasonal learning centers (functional only during migration seasons) help maintain academic continuity.
2. **Cultural Sensitivity in Curriculum and Teaching:** Developing culturally relevant curricula that respect tribal languages, traditions, and worldviews, and training teachers to use inclusive teaching practices that cater to the diverse needs of tribal students.
3. **Community Involvement and Awareness Campaigns:** Engaging tribal communities in the educational process, raising awareness about the importance of education, and addressing socio-cultural barriers that may deter education, especially for girls.
4. **Government and NGO Support Programs:** Strengthening policies like scholarships, free textbooks, and midday meal schemes, as well as collaborating with non-governmental organizations to provide additional educational resources and support in tribal regions. In addition, Government or NGOs can set up tent schools, appoint mobile teachers, or establish digital/remote learning stations powered by solar energy in remote areas.

CONCLUSION

Last but not least, implementing these strategies will not only improve enrollment and retention rates but also contribute to a more inclusive educational system that respects tribal identities, promotes gender equality, and fosters socio-economic mobility.

Ultimately, addressing the educational needs of tribal students is vital for bridging the gap between marginalized communities and the broader national development agenda. It is essential to view education

as a tool for empowerment and social equity, ensuring that all children, regardless of their background, have the opportunity to thrive and contribute meaningfully to society. The educational problems of tribal children in India are complex and deeply embedded in historical, social, and economic inequalities. The Government programs have had some success but significant gaps persist regarding universal education for tribal population. Remedial actions to overcome the obstacles of geographical isolation, socio-economic disadvantage, cultural insensitivity, and discrimination will be crucial in taking the initiative of universal, compulsory education for all children forward.

REFERENCES

- Akhter, S., & Hussain, M. (2023). Education access and affordability in higher education: A study of nomadic tribes of J&K. *International Journal of Political Science and Governance*, 5(2), 16–18. <https://doi.org/10.33545/26646021.2023.v5.i2a.251>
- Ali, S. (2023). Educational status and challenges of tribal community in J&K. *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, 10(1), 894–906. E-ISSN 2348-1269, P-ISSN 2349-5138
- Bhat, A., & Khan, A. (2021). School education and tribal children of Jammu and Kashmir: Analysing trends in enrolment, gender parity and dropout rate. *Vidyabharati International Interdisciplinary Research Journal*, 657–671. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9720-0935>
- Dikshit, K. R., & Dikshit, J. K. (2014). *North-East India: Land, people and economy*. Advances in Asian Human-Environmental Research. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-7055-3>
- Hakla, A. (2021). Low literacy rate among tribals of J&K. *Daily Excelsior*. <https://www.dailyexcelsior.com>
- Ottaplackal, J. (2022). Issues and challenges of school education faced by tribal students in India: A critical review. *International Journal of Arts, Science and Humanities*, 9(4), 25–30. <https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v9i4.4823>
- Vinu. (2021). Tribal education and quality of life: Issues and challenges. *The International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 9(1), 603–610. <https://doi.org/10.25215/0901.060>