

Tribal Schools: A Failed Experiment or a Master Stroke

Dr. Bilal Ahmad Bhat¹ and Duhita Thapa²

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, Guru Kashi University, Talwandi Sabo, Punjab, India¹

Ph.D Research Scholar, Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh, Assam, India²

drbilalahmad172289@gku.ac.in¹ and duhitathapa57@gmail.com²

ORCID ID: 0000-0003-0957-6084¹ and ORCID ID: 0009-0008-3305-6170²

Abstract: Tribal education in India has been evaluated in a very definitive way: either it is a welfare measure undertaken successfully or a failure. This review claims that both statements are not justifiable if no specification is given for the model, the setting and the outcome that is being discussed. On the basis of the policy documents, official reports, national evidence related to learning, published and author-supplied studies of mobile schools in Kashmir, the paper critically looks at the tribal, Ashram, Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS), seasonal and mobile/migratory schools. The review adopts a qualitative, narrative-critical approach: the sources were selected for their direct links to education, pastoral mobility, school provision, teaching, retention and learning among members of the STs, and analysed thematically and in consideration of the scope and evidentiary limitations of each source. There are clear achievements in formal access, residential services, public recognition and institutional investment. However, the number of students enrolled cannot be used as a measure of educational justice. Migration calendars, inadequate infrastructure, deployment of teachers, discontinuous learning records, and curricula that are not sufficiently related to the language and pastoral world of learners can hinder participation and learning in mobile-school contexts in the Kashmir region, where nomadic Gujjar and Bakarwal groups are served. The provided Kashmir studies yield valuable local evidence, although the descriptive designs and limited samples of these studies preclude the interpretation of their findings as causal estimates of all tribal schooling. NEP 2020 provides a more positive normative set with commitments to inclusion, home language support, foundational learning, flexibility and community involvement – and these need to be translated to portable entitlements and accountable local capacity. In conclusion, the paper presents a view of tribal schools as a not-quite-done social justice project: a stroke of genius in the planning and in some circumstances, a stroke of good fortune, but a failure of imagination when provision is fixed and children's lives are mobile. It suggests solutions such as mobility responsive planning, culturally sustaining pedagogy, teacher pipelines in the area, interoperable student records, gender responsive support, and outcome-focused public monitoring. (Received date: 28/03/2026, Date of Publication: 25/04/2026)

Keywords: Tribal Education; Mobile Schools; Migratory Pastoralists; Gujjar and Bakarwal; Kashmir; Eklavya Model Residential Schools; NEP 2020; Educational Equity.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is commonly referred to as the most enduring public path that can expand the options of historically marginalized populations. Access, however, has never been the central educational problem for the Scheduled Tribe (ST) communities in India. Whether or not a school can be reached, whether attendance will be maintained, and whether instruction will be meaningful will be determined by distance, difficult terrain, seasonal movement, poverty, language, discrimination, care work, and uneven state capacity. The issue at hand is not just whether the child is enrolled or not, but whether the mode of schooling provided can accompany, acknowledge and extend the child's life.

Institutional responses have been developed in India such as general government schools in tribal areas, Ashram and other residential schools, Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS), hostels and scholarships, seasonal centres and mobile or migratory schools. These are not mutually replaceable. Residential provision can minimise travel and offer meal provision, residence and peer support. The purpose of a seasonal or mobile school is to provide schooling for people that are moving from one place to another. A neighbourhood school has a fairly stable catchment. To label such arrangements as a unified “tribal schools” obscures their distinct characteristics as well as their different opportunities and threats.

The discussion is particularly intense in Jammu and Kashmir where Gujjar and Bakarwal pastoralists can shift their wintering and summering grounds with their herds. Stability of a village can lead to a structural mismatch if attendance is seen as an individual decision, despite the mobility being a component of households' livelihood strategy. Schools on wheels are a way to bridge the gap. Their importance is not just that they are novel but that their real meaning must be that the public educational system must change to suit children and not children must change to suit the public educational system.

The original title of this paper, a failed experiment or a master stroke, is preserved because it reveals a policy dilemma that must be faced. It is a stroke of genius when it turns legal equality into attainable provision, it is there to assist first generation learners, to ensure continuity and to value indigenous knowledge. When the word mobile is used for a system with no durable infrastructure, no trained teachers, and no access to learning; when learning is interrupted by migration; when identity is rhetorically praised, language and knowledge are not included in classroom practice — then it is a failed experiment. The following review supports this argument by analyzing the evidence and policy in a differentiated way.

II. OBJECTIVES AND REVIEW QUESTIONS

Objectives:

- To explore the logic, forms and processes of policy development of tribal schooling in India
- To collate evidence related to access, retention, learning, culture, infrastructure and teachers
- To focus specifically on mobile and migratory schooling in Kashmir
- To examine the conditions that make tribal schooling a master stroke or a failed experiment from a social justice perspective

Review Questions:

- What problems are different tribal-school models trying to solve?
- What is the evidence for claims of increased access and opportunity and what is the evidence that makes those claims qualify?
- How do the concepts of migration, infrastructure, teachers, enrolment, retention and learning relate in Kashmir's mobile schools?
- Last but not least, what would have to happen to make implementation of commitments constitutional and NEP 2020?

III. METHODOLOGY: A QUALITATIVE CRITICAL REVIEW

This paper is a qualitative narrative-critical review of literature and not a systematic review or a meta analysis. It compiles policy documents, official reports, national learning evidence, underlying educational theory and research that is directly applicable to tribal and mobile schooling. The key sources are the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 and its 1992 Programme of Action; the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020; evidence from ASER; evidence from scholarship studies by the author on the mobile schools of Kashmir; Ministry of Tribal Affairs reports. These are the infrastructure assessment conducted by Bhat and Jan (2024a), issues faced by teachers in Anantnag (Bhat, 2024), the migration and academic performance study conducted by Bhat and Jan (2024b) and the evaluative presentation made by Bhat and Jan

(2025) along with the Shodhganga record provided by the author. The repository record is cited as a source trail but not as an author, title or empirical discovery.

There were three stages of review. The first step was to classify the sources based on model and level: general tribal education, residential provision, and mobile/seasonal provision. Sources were first grouped by model and level: general tribal education, residential provision, and mobile/seasonal provision. Second, their claims were coded according to the following categories: access and enrolment, continuity and retention, learning, teachers, infrastructure, language and culture, governance, and gender. Third, the competing interpretations were contrasted. Official documents were read as policy and investment statements, not as stand-alone evidence of impact of the learning. Small descriptive studies were read as evidence, sampling, measures and geographical reach were not magnified. However, the findings from the national ASER did not generate model-specific causal claims but rather added background to the wider rural learning and transition environment, in Kashmir.

There are some drawbacks to this approach. No narrative review can determine the average effect of any school model. Several studies supplied in the Kashmir have been used purposive sampling, information blanks, checklists, percentages, and descriptive comparisons but the Kashmir evidence is a valuable one, as it is near to the setting. These types of designs could not only highlight salient issues and trends, but they cannot alone control for factors that are responsible for lower achievement levels that are not related to migration, nor do they tell us that a pattern of performance extends to all districts and years. These are substantive findings and in themselves are needed to make administrative information more transparent, follow children over time and use independent learning assessment methods suitable for mobile child populations in the field.

IV. CONCEPTUAL AND POLICY BACKGROUND

The rights-based approach starts with the Constitution's equality and education promises, and the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009. The NPE 1986 acknowledged the educational disadvantage that tribal communities faced and recommended incentives, environment, and curriculum that were culturally and linguistically responsive to tribal communities. The 1992 Programme of Action reiterated the importance of context sensitive strategies. The provisions were significant in that they shifted tribal education from a purely charitable perspective. But such policy does not necessarily change the day to day structures of schools.

NEP 2020 gives a more robust vocabulary for the modern times. It recognises Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups, establishes Special Education Zones, as appropriate, and prioritises foundational literacy and numeracy, supports the use of home language or mother tongue in the early years where appropriate, and promotes flexible and inclusive pathways. These principles outline for tribal learners the use of bilingual materials, local resource persons, flexible calendars, safe hostels (where desired), and ongoing academic support. They are no justification for a uniform residential solution. A policy of school inclusion should question what it means to be included in school: being there, being included, learning, having a voice, cultural dignity, and continuing to learn in school while maintaining their community connections.

The growth of EMRS is an example of policy ambition and the need to be careful about interpretation. The ministry of Tribal Affairs reports on significant institutional growth and public spending on an annual basis. These are requirements to be met, particularly in remote areas where day schooling is not possible. However, building approval and actual construction capacity, and budget expenditure, do not necessarily equal educational effectiveness. Residential schools may have a protective learning environment for the child, but if the pedagogy is assimilative, the child may be separated from both family languages and pastoral knowledge. The point is, however, not whether EMRS should be replaced by mobile schools, or vice versa, but rather, how a locally accountable system can offer multiple and connected pathways.

V. THEMATIC REVIEW OF TRIBAL SCHOOLING IN INDIA

5.1 Access, visibility, and first-generation opportunity

The best argument for tribal schooling is that it puts into practice a public commitment. The long arduous walk to school, especially in remote areas, unsafe homes and conditions can make it extremely difficult to access education that is supposed to be free of cost. Those costs can be lower at residential schools or in hostels, when using transport, when using scholarships, and at local provision. They also hold the state accountable for children that were previously under served. A properly-managed residential school can provide a child with regular meal times, study time, sports, secondary education, and mentorship that are not otherwise provided at home for some first generation learners. Even though results are not as yet even, they should not be ignored, nor should they be denied for that reason.

Meanwhile, there are only partial access indicators. Enrolments may increase where attendance is poor or where learners are over age for grade or where they are unable to read age appropriate text. It's important to note that even though ASER 2023 does not specifically focus on tribal schools, it does warn against the enrolment-only narrative: being enrolled into an institution does not eliminate differences in basic skills, access to digital tools, the financial situation, or family responsibilities of rural youth aged 14-18. Its survey design also warns not to rely on national rural data to represent mobile-school performance. The policy message is simple: inputs and enrolment do not necessarily lead to outcomes.

5.2 Learning, curriculum, and the language of recognition

Dewey (1938) stated that learning is created through experience and Freire (1970) condemned pedagogies that view learners as passive receivers. Both ideas shed light on tribal schooling. If the curriculum is not tied to the land, to the seasons, to the histories of the land, to the stock, to the forest knowledge, to the oral traditions, and to the home language of children, then it may send the message that "true" knowledge is somewhere else. This does not preclude the access of tribal students to broad concepts and content of Science, English or digital skills, or their access to the wider knowledge of their disciplines. In other words, they should be accessed in addition to the original resources and experience.

Language is central. A child who enters into school in an unknown language, will have to learn the routines of the school, the decoding procedures, and a new linguistic code, all at once. The burden can be lowered by using multilingual teaching, community-written stories, and teachers with an understanding of the local speech. The home-language orientation of NEP 2020 is in sync with this direction; however, this needs to be supported with materials and teacher training, not a literal translation of the language. Culturally sustaining pedagogy also contributes to increased retention rates by "making attendance more meaningful to families rather than seeing school as an institution that works against community."

5.3 Teachers as the mediating institution

Teacher availability is more than just a staffing factor. In remote regions, delay in posting, transfers, accommodation, transport, multigrade classes, and inadequate academic support are factors that can make or break a school. If a teacher doesn't know a route or can't talk to the carers, they may think that the child isn't interested when they only come in short spells. A teacher who is well rooted in the community and well supported, on the other hand, can allow flexibility when it comes to running classroom routines, and continue to keep high expectations.

The Kashmir teacher study provided by the author is descriptive as it classifies the domains / areas of concern: Mobile schools, Infrastructure, Teaching and learning, administrator views, teacher problems, feasibility, and Curriculum (Bhat, 2024). It is not a causal contribution. It does not suggest that all teachers have the same barriers, but it encourages a move away from faulting teachers to a consideration of the conditions under which teachers work, teacher professional development, teacher supervision, and teacher recruitment. But local recruitment is not enough, local teachers require secure appointments, materials, mentoring and career development as well.

5.4 Infrastructure, care, and the material conditions of learning

In a mobile context, infrastructure doesn't just come down to an input checklist, it's also a matter of dignity and continuity. Presence of shelter, weather protection, availability of drinking water, toilets, seating, teaching materials, power, storage

and communication directly affect attendance and teaching time. According to the assessment conducted by Bhat and Jan (2024a) none of the mobile schools in their sample in Kashmir had well furnished with benches and desks, while 39.43% had concrete buildings and 34.61% of mobile schools had toilets. These findings are not necessarily reflective of all mobile schools or any given year. However, they are alarming local indicators of potentially fragile basic provision where pupils' access is also precarious.

The right answer is not just to call for permanent structures where communities move out and in. To establish minimum service standards appropriate to mobile provision; weatherproof modular classrooms, safe sanitation solutions, mobile learning kits, provision of power where possible, storage and communication devices and an auditable provision maintenance budget. Students with a disability who are mobile are not entitled to less than the standard of provision.

5.5 Gender, household work, and the distribution of opportunity

Tribal education is not a gender blind endeavor. Girls can encounter further care duties, security issues, pressures on ending up being wed early, shortage of female teachers, and costs of travelling away from home for residential study. Physical accessibility doesn't necessarily mean social or financial accessibility. The review evidence demonstrates the need for multiple patterns for different communities, but there is support for monitoring attendance, transition, hostel conditions, scholarships, and learning by disaggregating by gender. Women teachers, safe transport or accommodation, menstruation support, and regular communication with caregivers are not ancillary, but are educational interventions.

VI. DISTINGUISHING INSTITUTIONAL MODELS

Tribal education is a broad concept encompassing a variety of models which should be assessed based on the problem that each model addresses. Where it is not possible to go to school every day, ashram schools and other residential schools are useful where boarders live in the school. They are good on continuity, meals, accommodation and extended learning time. Separation from family, cultural distancing, weak safeguarding, and one size fits all delivery are risks associated with their deployment. While EMRS can provide better resourced secondary level opportunities and aspiration, the national expansion programme needs to be measured and assessed on the basis of staffing, learning, student well-being, language inclusion and equitable access, and not just on the number of schools sanctioned.

Where movement is predictable and related to a calendar, seasonal schools or seasonal centres are appropriate. They have good features because of how aligned they are to a known migration time; their limitations occur in having a short window to operate in which they may squeeze in the curriculum and diminish continuity. Mobile or mobile schools that move with the learner are more responsive when the learner moves. These may be tent structures, mobile or tied into a tracking and transfer system. Most promising of all, their best hope is that mobility should not be seen as dropout. The biggest risk is administrative confusion: If a child's learning record is not owned by any agency from school to school, then the mobile school may be a low-resource parallel school.

There is no model that is 'inevitably emancipatory'. The determining factor is that it provides similar learning rights, cultural recognition, and safe care, along with a pathway to future learning. Models can be adapted to a coherent local system, such as a mobile early grade classroom in migration, a settled school with a flexible re-entry plan, optional hostel for older students and portable records that enable continuity. This is a more challenging proposition than erecting just one school, but is more attuned to the diversity of tribal livelihoods.

VII. MOBILE SCHOOLS IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR: EVIDENCE AND INTERPRETATION

Mobile schooling in Kashmir can not be understood without a perspective of pastoral mobility instead of the deficit perspective on nomadic life. Seasonal movement of gujjars and bakarwals is possible with the herds. Movement may also result in loss of terms, loss of interaction with a teacher, repeated admissions, and problems transporting books or a steady study area for children. It can lead to uncertain location, short teaching periods, staffing challenges and restricted infrastructure for schools. So a model that is geared towards a settled, permanent and stable way of living will in turn generate apparent "irregularity," even in the presence of children and families' aspirations for education. The present study

by Bhat and Jan (2024b) related to the achievement of Class 5 mobile-school students in the towns of Anantnag and Budgam and compared the achievement of the students in two examinations by applying percentage statistics. It concluded that migration has an impact on the performance of students. This is a significant and plausible finding, but the review needs to maintain its method. The study cannot measure the independent causal effect of migration without a matched comparison group, controls for prior achievement or prior attendance measures, or longitudinal design. It does provide empirical support, however, for a common sense mechanism which is that when there is a discontinuity in time, material, instruction, and assessment, performance is depressed. A policy response should, therefore, monitor migration learning, not be based on a loss at the end of the year.

The second mechanism is indicated by the infrastructure assessment's figures of concrete building and sanitation. It is not appropriate to ask children to learn in an environment that is not just basic and decent. Likewise, the teacher-oriented study shows that the problem cannot be broken down into one input. School identification, feasibility of teaching arrangements, curriculum, administrator support and teacher problems should be considered as a system. Bhat and Jan's (2025) evaluative presentation holds the teacher problems, the enrolment and the retention of teachers together, and that is analytically sound, but one that does not include the method and findings can hardly be used as evidence beyond its stated focus.

Careful distinction should be made between enrolment and retention. A child can be registered at a home base school, on a mobile-school register and experience gaps in their daily participation and/or delayed progression. However, a child can move out of a local register for a short period of time without losing the chance to learn elsewhere. A good administration should be able to detect these courses. It should include a learner identifier, a migration-aware attendance code, protocols for school-to-school transfer and progress records that accompany the child. Such measures limit the chances of migration turning into "statistical disappearance."

The method of assessing the results must also be redesigned. Fixed tests at fixed dates favour regular attendance. Preliminary, en route and post-return short diagnostic assessments can identify specific learning gaps. Bridge modules should aim to work on those gaps not repeat a year or just move a child forward by age. Learning materials are light, multilingual (if necessary), offline. There is a technology revolution that can help via downloadable programs, solar charging, and portable devices but it can't replace teachers, shelters, or relationships. This is further underscored by the fact that ASER 2023 focused on inequities in digital access to youth in rural areas.

The Kashmir evidence leads to a general conclusion. A mobile school is not a tent with a register, it is an institutional system for continuity of movement. Its minimum components include a mapped-out migration pathway, a staffed and trained teaching team, predictable funding, safe learning space, an easily transferable curriculum, real-time records, academic support, and community governance. Mobile schooling may be an innovative way to publicize where these components are found. If they do not it could form a second class school for children who are already vulnerable because of their mobility.

VIII. BETWEEN SUCCESS AND FAILURE: A CRITICAL LENS

The thesis of the master-stroke is convincing. Tribal schooling has introduced access, representation and social justice onto the policy agenda, has developed spaces which are not part of the mainstream and has created a residential provision which allows many learners to access education beyond their parents' circumstances. The commitment of government funds to EMRS and related schemes is an admission that neutral uniform provision has not been sufficient.

The failed-experiment thesis is also strong. A programme is a failure in practice if it includes a child but does not educate her, when it builds a building but fails to fill it, when it requires a fixed place of residence from a nomadic family, or when it includes a child at the cost of cultural ignorance. Both celebratory and dismissive accounts have the danger of masking variation. The statement "tribal schools work" has been reduced to an empty platitude, as is the statement "tribal schools fail." A model in a setting is the unit of judgment, which is assessed in terms of access, continuity, learning, dignity and transition.

This results in a relational notion of success. Success isn't just taking over a norm from outside; it's not just preserving culture, it's also gaining access to powerful knowledge. It is the growth and development of skills: reading, thinking, speaking between languages, thinking critically about new technologies, socializing in society and selecting future pathways. Such a view is supported by Dewey's focus on meaningful experience, and Freire's emphasis on dialogue. The critical lens then dismisses any compromise between identity and achievement. It challenges whether or not it is a challenge to educational institutions to make them mutually reinforcing.

8.1 How Success Should Be Judged

It is important that a credible evaluation framework be based on a balance of indicators. Access indicators include avoided distance or travel burden, enrolment, attendance during settled and migration periods and successful transfer between location. Continuity indicators are: percentage of learners with complete portable records, lost time at transition, re-entry after migration, and unnecessary grade repetition. Age Appropriate foundational learning, Multi-lingual understanding, participation, feedback and teaching time availability are all examples of quality indicators. Dignity indicators are water, sanitation, safety, seating, nutrition (if applicable), disability inclusion and learners' self-reported sense of belonging. Lastly, transition indicators involve moving to upper primary, secondary, vocational or further education.

These indicators are not an extension of the bureaucracy. They don't cause any predictable distortions. An incomplete programme report can overlook the issue of teacher absences, an incomplete programme report can overlook the issue of interrupted learning, and an incomplete programme report can overlook the issue of exclusion or language barriers. Disaggregation by gender, age, disability, location, and migration status should also be included in the evaluation, and small cells should be avoided to prevent identification of children. The purpose of this is not to rank communities. It is to discover what public responsibility is not being fulfilled and who should be provided a new support.

Evaluation is a dialogic process as well as an administrative process. Seasonal requirements can be explained, children can feed back on whether they can understand classroom language and feel safe, and teachers will be able to find out about logistical issues that registers may not be reporting on. These accounts should be used in conjunction with, and not instead of, accounts gathered independently. Participation is here an ethical obligation and a practical means of improved policy design.

8.2 The Risk of False Alternatives

The vocabulary of failure and success itself is misleading. The failure of an under-resourced mobile school must not be blamed on the mobile learner, that he or she should have only needed a traditional boarding school. Nor should evidence of culturally relevant local provision be used as justification to lower expectations for facilities, assessment, or qualified teaching. Both responses confuse a design issue with a characteristic of children or communities. The comparison is between an appropriately supported, mobility-responsive educational pathway and the realistic alternatives to the pathway that the child has, rather than between an ideal fixed school and a neglected mobile school.

This is also a statement on the role of families. Pastoral migration is not a refusal of the education of the parents. Families have to make choices when livelihoods, weather, animal care, income security and the presence or absence of credible schools are all a concern. Any policy that requires families to make a choice between education or livelihood, but doesn't lower the price of that choice will inevitably let some kids fall through the cracks. Planned policies which are based on seasonal requirements and familiar routes can turn a potential blockage into a planning tool. The ethical benchmark is shared responsibility: the communities are partners to be present and to learn, and the state is responsible for providing an education of a similar quality.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS AND WAY FORWARD

First, state and district plans should identify migration routes, length of migration, student population, and service locations with communities prior to the beginning of each academic year. The mapping should be participatory and

safeguard against exclusion on the grounds of mobility. It should initiate an approved deployment, materials, transportation and record plan.

Second, enforceable minimum standards are needed in the case of mobile schools. These should include learning space that is suitable for the weather, and water and sanitary provisions, seating or appropriate floor surfaces, blackboards or suitable learning surfaces, teaching kits and first aid, power or charging facilities if available, communication and maintenance. The results presented by Bhat and Jan (2024a) clearly highlight the need for such standards. A public dashboard should be reporting compliance and repairs without making it a "checkbox exercise".

Third, develop a state teacher talent pipeline. Hire qualified teachers from tribal communities when feasible; offer language and culturally sustaining pedagogy training; provide for hardship support; housing or travel; mentor; reliable supervision. Training should cover multigrade teaching, foundation learning, migration sensitive assessment, safeguarding, and working with community knowledge holders. It is not the responsibility of teachers to fill structural gaps alone.

Fourth, make continuity mobile. Each child should have a unique learner record, attendance should follow using an attendance record that is migration-aware, transfer arrangements should be simple and competency-based progress portfolios should follow every child. Prior to, during, and after moving, assessments should focus on specific learning needs. Small gaps in learning can be temporary if used to take bridge courses, get tutoring, or use flexible instructional calendars.

Fifthly, build the NEP 2020 as a local design principle. Home-language/bilingual materials should be created with the support of the speakers and educators, and the local ecology, oral history, animal care, craft, and livelihoods knowledge can serve as appropriate points of entry to disciplinary learning. This should be coupled with good learning in Hindi/Urdu/English and mathematical skills, so that the children have an identity and choices as well.

Sixth, create gender-responsive supports. Disaggregated information about enrollment, attendance, retention, grade progression, learning, scholarships, and safety should be published on district monitoring. The needs of girls do not get lost in the aggregate ST numbers unless the participation of female teachers and counsellors, safe accommodation (when needed), menstrual health provision and sustained family engagement are taken into account.

Last but not least, enhance evidence and accountability. Independent evaluations should take into consideration administrative data, classroom observations, learner evaluations, caregiver interviews and follow-up over migration cycles. Evaluation questions should carefully differentiate the impact of poverty, language, season, teacher availability and previous learning experiences. Plans and grievances should be formally reviewed by community councils, parent groups and learners. Accountability is greatest when it is public and locally comprehensible.

9.1 A Phased Implementation Agenda

These recommendations can become a reality through a phased agenda. Prior to the migration season, district teams need to check learners' lists with families, review routes and service points, distribute portable learning packs, review teacher assignments and complete a brief baseline assessment. Teachers should have scheduled academic support, communication with home-base school, safe teaching space and a monthly progress and learning review during migration rather than just an annual inspection. Each child should be given a short-term, targeted bridge support and a documented transition of progress on return. Districts should provide an annual learning and continuity review, which will include gaps identified that have not been resolved and the budget allocated to fill those gaps.

This is the funding cycle that has to be followed. Construction grants for one time only are not adequate to cover transportation, communication, replacement materials, teacher travel, local facilitators, repairs or assessment. Budget division should be between capital requirements, current operating requirements, and budgets must be prepared in time for seasonality planning. Locally appropriate materials should be provided for procurement with quality and safety. In remote regions, when it comes to releasing, it's not just an administrative inconvenience, it can be a whole period of instruction that's lost.

Implementation needs to start with pilot clusters which are chosen transparently for various migration situations, and broadened only after independent review. Pilots should never be the cause for a delay of rights. They are meant to test: route mapping, record portability, bilingual materials, teacher support, and minimum service standards in a clear way with criteria for adaptation and scale-up.

X. IMPLICATIONS

The key take-away for policy makers is that equity does not demand lower expectations, but rather the provision of something unique. A school calendar that is uniform across the entire community and the school location that remains fixed can be fair for settled communities but unfair for pastoralist communities. The message to school leaders is that mobility should be a planning tool and not an attendance issue. It is for teachers to bridge the gap between what the curriculum teaches and what students know, in order to teach all the curricular competencies. The focus for researchers is to find and utilize more causal and longitudinal evidence, but not to eliminate the voices of children, families, and teachers from the qualitative research. Community participation is not limited to enrolment drives, but also should include curriculum, calendar, safety, and monitoring.

The paper will also have implications for scholarly language. The term 'tribal education' should not be interpreted as a collective noun for one population, one institution or one educational need. Tribal communities of India are diverse as are their languages, livelihoods, settlements and aspirations. The more concrete language which identifies a model, the location, the age group, and the outcome being discussed the more accurate the policy analysis.

XI. CONCLUSION

It is not accurate to call the tribal schools a failure nor a complete success. They are a tentative experiment in substantive equality. The results of their efforts are genuine: they've increased public accountability, made a way for first-generation students, and developed institutional structures that reach places that traditional schools would not. Their failures are equally authentic, when infrastructure is lacking, teacher support is scanty, when mobility disrupts learning, and when cultural recognition is ceremonial.

Mobile schooling in Kashmir is most likely to be effective if it treats migration as a means of livelihood as opposed to the absence of schooling. From the available local studies, infrastructure, teacher conditions, migrations, enrolment and retention are all interlinked concerns. They should call for action and further research, not sweeping claims based on their descriptive evidence. NEP 2020 provides a useful direction, but it will need to be put to the test in the day-to-day management of staffing, bilingual resources, mobile files, secure facilities, evaluation, and community leadership.

So the answer to the question in the title is, thus, provisional. The brilliance of tribal schools is that they offer a high quality, culturally sustaining, continuous education that is delivered on terms that honor students' lives. Once the state simply moves a version of mainstream education to tribal communities that is regarded as low resource, they become a failed experiment. It is not about either access or identity, mobility or learning, or tradition or modernity. It is to create accountable institutions where all of these can serve to support each other.

REFERENCES

1. Annual Status of Education Report Centre. (2024). Annual status of education report (rural) 2023: Beyond basics. <https://asercentre.org/aser-2023-beyond-basics/>
2. Bhat, B. A. (2024). Problems and issues of teachers working in mobile schools in Anantnag district of Kashmir Division. In Migration: Global and local perspective (pp. 176–188). Dilpreet Publishing House.
3. Bhat, B. A., & Jan, T. (2024a). A study on the assessment of infrastructural facilities of mobile schools in Kashmir Division. ResearchGate. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379257376>
4. Bhat, B. A., & Jan, T. (2024b). A study on the effect of migration on the academic performance of mobile school students in Anantnag and Budgam districts of Kashmir Division. International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Technology, 4(7). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.10836491>

5. Bhat, B. A., & Jan, T. (2025). An evaluative study of mobile schools in Kashmir with reference to the problems of teachers, enrolment and retention of students [Conference presentation]. Ph.D. viva-voce. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/394422448>
6. Dar, W. A., & Najjar, I. A. (2017). Educational system in the tribal areas of Kashmir valley: A case study of zone Khansahib of District Budgam. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Education and Research*, 2(5), 45–49.
7. Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. Macmillan.
8. Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Continuum.
9. Government of India. (1986). National policy on education, 1986. Ministry of Human Resource Development.
10. Government of India. (1992). National policy on education, 1986: Programme of action, 1992. Ministry of Human Resource Development.
11. Government of India. (2009). The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009.
12. Ministry of Education, Government of India. (2020). National education policy 2020. <https://www.education.gov.in/nep-2020-english.pdf>
13. Ministry of Tribal Affairs, Government of India. (2024). Annual report 2023–24. <https://tribal.nic.in/downloads/Statistics/AnnualReport/AREnglish2324.pdf>
14. Shodhganga. (n.d.). Repository record 10603/586095 [Thesis record]. INFLIBNET Centre. <https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/handle/10603/586095>