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Nomadic Gujjars and Bakherwals

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## **25 Mobile Schools to Migrate with Kashmir's Nomadic Gujjars and Bakherwals**

For these kids in Kashmir, education is often hampered due to migration.

Every year, the nomadic Gujjar and Bakherwal communities migrate to the upper reaches of the Kashmir valley in summer. The two ethnic groups rear flocks of sheep and goat, between high and low altitudes, in the Western Himalayas. Now, since summers are well underway, these people have started their migration from the hotter areas of Jammu, to the colder, mountainous regions of Kashmir.

These tribal folks observe a nomadic lifestyle and follow the custom of annual migrations and keep travelling year after year. Due to this, their children are deprived of a proper education.



For the Bakherwal community in Kashmir, migration is a way of life. Representative image only. Image Courtesy: Wikimedia Commons.

Well, this is set to change, as authorities in the Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir have made arrangements for around two dozen schools to move with the nomadic tribes and ensure that the children can learn, even while on the move.

According to the plan, 25 schools, with a roll-strength of 801 students, will move with the migrants. Each school will be provided with

45 teachers for running it, and the initiative will be beneficial even when the migration reaches the high-altitude areas in Kashmir. There are another 41 schools for tribal populations that remain stationary. These cater to around 1,451 students, of which 802 are boys, and 651 are girls. According to an official J&K spokesperson, quoted in IndiaTimes, around 95 teachers have been posted for this purpose.

According to an official spokesperson, Shahid Iqbal Choudhary, who is the District Development Commissioner of Rajouri, finalised the plan for these mobile schools, in a meeting with senior officers from various departments, and heads and staff of migratory schools.

**The meeting saw several decisions taken:-**

1) The department will provide sports equipment and first aid kits to each migratory school.

- 2) A comprehensive plan for self-defence training was discussed and finalised.
- 3) The Chief Education Officer will regularly oversee attendance in migratory schools.
- 4) The heads of schools will hold mandatory parent-teacher meetings, twice a month, during the migratory period.
- 5) The students will be provided with a scholarship by the Tribal Affairs Department.
- 6) Records and pictures of meetings and classes will be shared online.

For the Bakherwal and Gujjar community, a mobile school might just be the solution to overcome logistical issues in education, which has been a long-standing problem.



The children of Kashmir's Bakherwal community, will not miss out on learning.

Nomadic communities cannot commit to staying in one place for too long, and while it is important for them to educate their children, it will also be dicey for them to leave their children behind and then travel hundreds of kilometres.

The children complete the arduous migration along with their elders, camping at forest sites they have used for centuries. The initiative of mobile schools will ensure that no matter where these nomadic tribal folks

have camped, their children will never be too far away from an educational environment!

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