

Survival Strategies of *Bakarwal* Pastorals in Jammu & Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

The Bakarwal tribe is known for rearing goat and sheep in parts of Jammu and Kashmir. They traverse the Himalayan ranges in search of pastures for their herds and this has resulted into the age-old tradition of transhumance in the region which includes the migration of the Bakarwal tribe from the winter plains in Jammu to the high altitude summer pastures of Kashmir valley. Nonetheless, surviving in present-day world with their traditional ways seems difficult for the tribe and thus, they have been adopting several survival strategies to cope with the changing world around them. This article attempts through a discussion of the research findings to present a documentation of such strategies.

Keywords: Bakarwals, Himalayas, Jammu and Kashmir, Migration; Sedentarization.

INTRODUCTION

South Asia is home to the majority of the world's nomadic communities, however there is little scientific interest in nomadism in this region (Rao and Casimir, 2003). Kashmir's boat-shaped valley, which is part of the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir, is surrounded by the Pir Panjal ranges and the Himalayan ranges from the south and north, respectively, and is home to a few pastoral groups that traverse the enormous hills with their herds of animals. These pastoral communities roam between regions of varying heights and places in the

spring and fall of each year. The most significant of all pastoral populations is the Bakarwal tribe. The community resides in the Pir Panjal range of the inner Himalayas and migrates annually with their flocks of sheep and goat from the plains to the high-altitude meadows of Kashmir valley.

The name *Bakarwal* is a combination of two words: *Bakra*, which means goat, and *wal*, which means caretaker. Therefore, the etymological meaning of Bakarwal is one who tends to sheep or goats. This name is justified by their predominant sheep and goat husbandry (Casimir, 1991). In order to reach the summer pastures in the northern section of the valley of Kashmir, they must travel hundreds of kilometres with their cattle over the course of a month or two, beginning in April when the southern plains begin to suffer scorching weather. Although at the beginning of a migration, the paths are often straightforward, obstacles occur when entering the valley over several passes in the Pir Panjal hills and broader Himalaya. Every year, the groups cover altitudes ranging from 2,940 to 4,291 meters (Khatana, 1992).

In addition to their cattle, the group's annual travels allow them to interact with a variety of state residents, who in turn offer them with a variety of means of subsistence. The Bakarwals' decades-long sedentarization has resulted in the loss of this long-standing legacy of transhumance and is reducing the

tribe's ability to make a living. This population is supported by forward and reverse migrations to and from the alpine and semi-alpine zones of the north and north-eastern regions of Kashmir. It is not a simple undertaking to traverse the snow-covered glaciers, snow-covered summits, and dense forests. In order to preserve their culture and earn a living, the tribe is confronted with grave and perhaps fatal health risks. Bakarwals have practised this custom for generations and have struggled for survival against nature and the mainstream. Time and experience have taught them the tactics necessary to compete with the harsh realities of nature and the people around them and to continue surviving against all obstacles. The link between the survival methods employed by this tribe and their means of subsistence and longstanding traditions is a relatively understudied issue that requires discussion. This study will thus utilise ethnographic data and archival information to explore the survival and continuation of the Bakarwals' traditional nomadism.

MATERIALS AND METHOD

This study was conducted in the districts of Baramulla and Bandipora of Jammu and Kashmir. Data for this study has been collected from both primary as well as secondary sources. Primary data sources include the interviews and group discussions with some Bakarwal families and books, journals, articles, census reports, etc., form the secondary sources of this research.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The importance of theoretical comprehensibility and the clarity of the theoretical framework employed at the outset is emphasised so that the study's scope is maintained. Important as well are reviews of earlier studies, since they can shed light on areas of interest by giving lessons or revealing gaps (Sofi, 2013). This section seeks to define the important and recurrent themes, terminology, and concepts

that serve as the conceptual foundation for this study. It also offers the empirical studies undertaken by national and international academics on several themes pertaining to the subsistence practises of tribal tribes.

There are several definitions of livelihood accessible in the scientific community. Chambers and Conway (1992, p. 9) describe livelihoods as "the talents, assets (including both material and social resources), and activities necessary for subsistence." Ireland (2004, p. 12) defines livelihoods as "the method in which individuals combine their abilities, skills, and knowledge with the resources at their disposal to develop activities that provide a means of subsistence." According to Parrot et al. (2006), a person's means of subsistence include individuals, their resources, and what they do with those resources, which cannot be separated from questions of access and changing conditions. Additionally, they assert that it is about developing and seizing new chances.

Hogger (2004, p. 35) defines livelihood as the way of life and the numerous physical and non-physical methods of sustaining oneself. According to Franken Berger et al. (2002, p. 5) and Chambers and Conway (1992), livelihoods are comprised of a variety of on-farm and off-farm activities that provide diverse food and cash acquisition strategies. These techniques include the household's assets and other resources, as well as the use of human capital and access to social capital in times of need.

Franken Berger et al. (2002, p. 5) define a subsistence system in terms of subsistence techniques, assets, and resources that create possibilities for subsistence strategies (Cahn 2006, p. 244). According to Bastidas (2001, p. 1), a livelihood system consists of farming, socio-cultural, and socio-organizational factors that impact households, as well as the diverse livelihood strategies villagers pursue for daily sustenance, including the various assets that are essential inputs for livelihood strategies;

the decision environment and their aspirations for engaging in livelihood strategies; and the structures, processes, policies, and institutions that affect them and their livelihood strategies. A livelihood system, according to Hogger (2004, p. 37), encompasses not only the economic circumstances for physical survival, but also all the aspects that offer material continuity and cultural significance to the existence of a family or community.

People's tactics for earning a living might be either sustainable or unsustainable (LaFlamme 2007, p. 292). There are a variety of classifications and livelihood plans. Parrott et al. (2006) classify techniques for sustaining one's livelihood as productive, reproductive, consumptive, and trade activities. Relevant literature identifies several factors and causes of diversity. They include inter-zone and inter-household determinants (Reardon et al., 2000, p. 4); push and pull factors (Barett et al., 2001, p. 316; Reardon et al., 2000, p. 8); seasonality, risk strategy, labour markets, credit market failures and asset strategies (Ellis, 2000, p. 293); spreading risk, coping with insufficiency, seasonality (Parrott, et al. 2006). Diversification is performed by both the poor and the wealthy, the needy for survival and the wealthy for growth of money and status (Parrott, et al. 2006).

Tufail (2014) undertook research in which an attempt was made to investigate the Gujjar and Bakarwal economies. Gujjar and Bakarwal families are generally reliant on trees for one or another necessity. They enter forests to gather fuel food, leaves for their animals, and wild fruits for domestic consumption and market sale. Gujjars and Bakarwals are dependent on woods in some capacity. This is evident from the field investigation. During interactions with nomads, it was noticed that if their animals are lost due to unseasonable snowfall, hail, or rains, etc., the forest is their sole refuge. The survey indicates that their primary source of income has switched from cattle to land resources, labour employment, tourism, commerce, and government

positions, among others. In conclusion, the analysis indicates that the Gujjar and Bakarwal economies have switched from cattle to jobs in recent years. The study demonstrates that climate change is an undeniable fact for the Gujjar and Bakarwal communities of Kashmir, which are impacted by climatic change in terms of their livestock's seasonal migration cycle, which has been disrupted over the past several years. Umer (2013) states that the nomadic lifestyle and economy is increasingly under stress from contemporary socio-political and ecological changes throughout the globe. On the one hand, they are facing various socio-economic and political pressures, including state policies and interventions, population growth, land-use change and integration into a market economy; and on the other hand, they are exposed to climate change and its impact on their environment and life.

Now, however, these nomadic Bakarwals, who previously lived a solitary and difficult existence in the high-altitude meadows of the Himalayas and the Pir-Panjal, are progressively settling down permanently in Plain areas. This community is in a state of crisis due to the shifting employment and subsistence pattern. On the one side, they are abandoning their ancient vocation of cattle raising, which was not only their primary source of income but also their whole way of life. Now that they have altered their work routines, their entire way of life has changed. Their family structure has evolved as a result of the shifting economic structure, as have marriage and kinship institutions.

As a matter of fact, every change has both good and bad repercussions. Similarly shift in lifestyle pattern and economic structure of the Bakarwal tribals has also brought both things with it. Their children are now able to attend school, they have access to medical facilities and other health care measures, and their social mobility has been much enhanced by the shifting occupational pattern.

SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

This study demonstrates that the predominant pastoral livelihood methods utilised by nomadic Bakarwals in the Kashmir valley include the selling of livestock products, the sale of animals, and oxen rental. It is obvious from the results that the majority of respondents sell livestock products in order to meet their primary subsistence needs, that some respondents sell livestock to meet their primary subsistence needs, and that a few rent out their oxen to sedentary people.

The study reveals that nomadic Bakarwals employ non-pastoral tactics to augment their subsistence income, including wage labour, gathering wild herbs and timber from forests to sell on the market, and the selling of handcrafted goods. The majority of nomads derive their non-pastoral income from the sale of traditional handicrafts, followed by wage labour and the collection of wild herbs and timber from forests, according to the report.

In terms of livestock raising activities, the study reveals that the average livestock rearing activities of respondents' families vary. The nomadic Bakarwal tribes engage in a variety of animal husbandry tasks, including shepherding, shearing, breeding, milking, feeding, care, and killing. Male members and hired labourers do physically demanding tasks such as shepherding, breeding, and slaughtering, whilst women are responsible for feeding and milking the livestock, cleaning the shelters, and even administering traditional remedies. Especially in this nomadic tribe, women play a significant role in cattle production. The study demonstrates that women provide assurance and care for animals not just at home but also on grazing pastures. Most livestock-related tasks cannot be completed without the aid of women. Unfortunately, they have never been compensated for their efforts. As the majority of this labour is

unpaid, it is frequently not reflected in official accounting.

Since ancient times, the Bakarwals have taken their livestock up the highlands, above the tree line, to graze in the lush meadows, according to the research. Throughout the summer, they migrate from one meadow to the next. This community is in a state of crisis due to the shifting employment and subsistence pattern. On the one hand, they are abandoning their ancient occupation of cattle-rearing, which was not only their means of subsistence but also their whole way of life. Now, after altering their employment routines, their entire way of life has changed. Their family structure has evolved as a result of the shifting economic structure, as have marriage and kinship institutions.

MIGRATION

The research indicates that the Bakarwals' migration is strictly seasonal in nature. In the winter, they move from Kashmir province to Jammu province, and in the summer, they travel in the other direction. Regarding the availability of pastures for their animals, they migrate continuously throughout the year. According to study, there are four primary reasons for their migration: poor earnings, a lack of work possibilities, the availability of only seasonal employment in their temporary dwelling places, and climate change.

Regarding the duration of migration among the three groups of respondents, it was shown that the majority of poor respondents migrate to other provinces for a period of four to six months. It was also discovered that the majority of respondents from the middle class migrate to other provinces for a period of 4-6 months. It was shown that the majority of wealthy respondents migrate to other regions for a duration of 6-7 months. This trend shows the amount of time that can be spent easily at other regions thereby avoiding harsh climates.



Figure 1: Bakarwals on the Move towards Winter Pastures

SEDENTARIZATION

Since the previous few decades, the Bakarwal community has been experiencing a severe dilemma, notably with the management of their grasslands and animals. In general, their occupation, which dates back centuries, is facing extinction. Although the reasons of the problem are several, those connected to the loss of grazing fields as a result of encroachment

and the government's fencing of pastures, limitations on travel by the security forces, and a lack of basic facilities are the most significant (Sofi, 2013).

Nearly half of all respondents in the research region cited the loss of pastures due to government closure and forest land encroachment as the primary reason for their sedentarization and shift in traditional occupation.



Figure 2: Settled Bakarwals in the Kashmir Valley

As a result of the armed conflict situation in Jammu and Kashmir, various pastures in close proximity to the Line of Control and the international border with Pakistan, as well as other areas, have been marked "prohibited" by the army and other security forces since 1990, when the insurgency

began. The security forces in Jammu and Kashmir have barred the admission of transhumant Bakarwals in a few *dhokas* (grazing ground) and pastures located along the border-line in the districts of Poonch, Rajouri, Jammu, Kathua, Baramulla, Kupwara, Bandipur, Kargil, and Leh due to

cross-border violence and terrorism. Due to these constraints, the transhumant Bakarwals' way of life, economics, and tribal tradition have suffered tremendously (Tufail, 2012).

Many transhumants have relocated their summer pastures during the previous two decades. Throughout the previous two decades of militancy in the state, a considerable number of Gujjars and Bakarwals relocated their dhokas. Since the presence of terrorists affects the majority of their customary pastures, they choose to move their livestock to safer, less impacted places (Javid, 2011). Militants and security personnel force tribals to carry their weapons and rations from one pasture to another in exchange for food and beggar labour. They also steal the livestock from the destitute nomads. In the 1990s, the exploitation of these transhumant societies reached its pinnacle (since the beginning of hostility in the state).

Many may view the displacement of the Gujjars and Bakarwals as collateral harm. It is one of the inescapable facts of the instability in Jammu and Kashmir. Multiple kinds of displacement (Kashmiri Pandits, Gujjars, Bakarwals, and other residents) have emerged in the state of Jammu and Kashmir as a result of the violence in the region. Either India-Pakistan animosity or continuing deadly terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir has displaced these individuals. The most noticeable category, however, is the Gujjar and Bakarwal abandonment of their centuries-old transhumance habit (Sharma, 2009).

The Indo-Pakistan ceasefire line traverses huge grazing grounds, preventing the movement of mobile herds to the south and east. The wars of 1965 and 1971 between India and Pakistan, as well as its regular military skirmishes, have deprived many more Bakarwals of their homes and pastures near this boundary. The 1999 Kargil war and the ongoing armed conflict in Jammu and Kashmir have aggravated the situation and deprived the transhumant Bakarwals of their pastures in Zanskar and the Suru valley

(Tufail, 2012). In addition, access to traditional pastures has been restricted by choices made for environmental reasons by the local state forest, soil conservation, and wildlife agencies.

The respondents also identified a lack of education and other amenities as a major influence in their decision to embrace a settled way of life. Parents want to send their children to school so that they can enjoy a higher level of life and stable economic standing. Similarly, the lack of essential requirements, such as health care, at higher elevations forces nomadic tribal groups to settle down.

CONCLUSION

This paper intended to examine the diverse survival strategies utilised by the Jammu and Kashmir Bakarwal tribe. The research was done in the Kashmir valley's intermediate pastures. Due of the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic, summer and winter pastures could not be reached for an extended period of time. Bakarwals have many tactics for making a living, with three being the most prevalent: selling livestock products, selling livestock, and renting out animals. Their principal source of income is the sale of animal by-products like milk, ghee, cheese, meat, wool, etc. Due to a variety of external and internal circumstances, Bakarwals are embracing alternative methods of subsistence besides pastoralism, such as wage work, the collection of forest resources for sale on local markets, and the selling of home-made handicrafts. The occupations of the Bakarwal include herding, shearing, breeding, feeding, caring for, and milking their cattle. There is a clear division of labour in the livestock industry, with men primarily engaged in tasks like as sheep herding, breeding, and slaughtering, while women are responsible for milking and caring for sheep and goats.

The Bakarwals are a transhumant people with a seasonal pattern of migration. In the spring, they migrate with their families and herds from the plains of Jammu to the

higher reaches of the Kashmir Himalayas, and in the fall, they begin their return journey, spending at least four months in migration, four months in winter pastures, and four months in summer pastures annually. Their herds are unable to weather the severe summers of the winter pastures from April to September, followed by the hard winters of the Kashmir Himalayas, hence the migration. They divide their activities into four distinct seasons: winter, spring, summer, and fall. They arrange their actions in the outer hills (winter pastures) along migration corridors and dokhs (summer pastures). From the final part of April to the first week of July, Bakarwals move with their herds to the alpine pastures of the Greater Himalayas. During this period, they migrate over several topographical zones. They graze their herds from June to September from a permanent site in the alpine meadows of the Greater Himalayas, and the transhumance is governed by both time and geography. Using the same migration pattern, the tribe begins its return journey in October and reaches the outer hill zones by November. The cycle is repeated annually.

Jammu and Kashmir's Bakarwals' way of life has changed as a result of causes such as globalisation and the continuing strife in the Kashmir valley. These causes have set the way for the imminent demise of pastoralism in the Himalayas of Kashmir. In order to counteract these issues, Bakarwals are employing a variety of tactics that allow them to adapt to fast change while maintaining their age-old heritage of pastoralism. Strategies include paid labour, assimilation into local markets, and settlement in close proximity to local communities, among others. This research sought to comprehend the many cultural features of the Bakarwal tribe before shifting its emphasis to the survival methods employed by the tribe in this quickly changing world.

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