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Conflict, displacement, and its impact on the livelihood of Gujjar and Bakerwal community of Jammu Region

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Abstract

The Gujjar and Bakerwal are two Scheduled Tribes communities of Jammu and Kashmir, which practice transhumance activity. The recent developments in the state have imposed some restrictions on their mobility. The practice of transhumance has become very difficult for them as the areas available to them for grazing have been captured by the security forces of the state. This paper attempts to analyze the impact of conflict and displacement on their livelihood. It will also explore the form of displacement from 1947 onwards because of armed conflict, internal strife and rise of nationalist forces in the region.

Keywords: Conflict, displacement, livelihood, Gujjar, and Bakerwal

Introduction

The status of Jammu and Kashmir has been disputed since the creation of sovereign states of India and Pakistan in 1947. The two countries have fought three wars over the issue. Both India and Pakistan claimed in full their control over Kashmir. On the other hand, china is also administering some part of the region. The clash of interest of these three sovereign and atomic nations causes anxiety in the region. Since 1989, the insurgency in Indian-administered Kashmir has cost so many lives. Turmoil in the region sabotages the peace process and has made the life of residents miserable. Reports of different news channel like *BBC* present the area as the largest militarized region in the world. Presences of huge number of armed forces on the line of control and other strategic points occupy lot of land. Mostly they prefer to settle on those parts of land, which are important for them from the security point of view. So, most of the residents of Jammu and Kashmir lost their residential land. A very large section of the people who are living near LOC and those who are living on upper reaches witnessed a diminishing of their cultivated land at the hands of armed forces. Most of the Gujjar and Bakerwal community are facing this type of problem because most of their pastures land has been occupied by security forces.

The Gujjar and Bakerwal are two Scheduled Tribes communities of Jammu and Kashmir, which have practiced transhumance activities throughout the ages. Nevertheless, the recent developments in the state have imposed some restrictions on their mobility. The practice of transhumance has become very difficult for them as the areas available to them for grazing have been captured by the security forces of the state. Moreover, continuous border shelling has also made their life difficult and has forced them into displacement which has had an adverse impact on their source of livelihood.

Who are Gujjar and Bakerwal

Gujjar and Bakerwal constitute third largest ethnic group in Jammu and Kashmir after Kashmiri and Dogra. They constitute more than 11.9% population of the UT (census 2011). They have their highest concentration in Jammu region followed by the valley of Kashmir. It is believed that Gujjars and Bakerwals migrated to Jammu and Kashmir from Gujarat via Rajasthan and Hazara district of northwestern frontier province. Most of the research done of them suggests that they reached Jammu in Kashmir during 5th and 6th centuries due to the occurrence of some serious droughts in Gujarat and other states of India. After crossing

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Rajasthan and Punjab, they entered the Himalayas and green pastures of Shivaliks. Nevertheless, there is no authentic historical record of their migration to Jammu and Kashmir. Majority of Gujjar and Bakerwal believe that their ancestors migrated from Gujarat and Rajasthan ^[1].

Agamani Saha in his paper argues that Gujjar are a pastoral agriculture ethnic group in India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. They can speak the language of the country where they live, but they have their own language, which is known as Gojri. Anthropologists from India have defined Gujjars as of fair complexion, with tall height, long nose and wide forehead. They variously follow Islam, Sikhism and Hinduism. They are classified in some states of India as OBC, but in Jammu and Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh they are categorized as Scheduled Tribes ^[2].

The Main difference among Gujjar and Bakerwal of Jammu and Kashmir is that those who adopt goat and sheep rearing as the main occupation of earning a of livelihood are known as Bakerwals and those who depend on agriculture and rear buffaloes and others animals like cows are known as Gujjar. People from Bakerwal community are known for bravery, courage and hospitality. Most of them follow the practice of transhumance. They move from one place to another by loading their belongings on horseback and migrate along with their herds of goats and sheep in search of better pastures for their animals ^[3].

Gujjar and Bakerwal of Jammu and Kashmir are Muslim by faith. They are very much attached with their religious belief. Most of them believe that disobedience of custom means an offence against their faith. They have their own language, culture and tradition, which they have preserved and maintained throughout the ages. They speak Gojri language and wear their traditional dress. It is their traditional dress which gives them a unique identity among others. Mostly they wear Shalwar Qameez, a turban on head (Pag or Lungi) and Vaskat ^[4].

The Gojri language spoken by Gujjar and Bakerwal community of Jammu and Kashmir is akin to Rajasthani dialect. They have developed fluency in other languages too like Punjabi, Urdu, Pahari and Dogri. But the most appreciable thing is that they interact amongst themselves through their own language, Gojri. That is why it is still remains a vibrant language in the region. Gojri speakers constitute the third largest group in Jammu and Kashmir after Kashmiri and Dogri speakers. Keeping in view the very rich heritage of their language they are now demanding the inclusion of Gujari language in the 8th Scheduled of the Indian constitution. An editorial report of Awaz-e-Gujjar mentioned by Shahbaz in his paper reveals that Gojri language is broadcasted from ten radio and television stations of India and Pakistan. Because of its popularity, it deserves to be included in the 8th Scheduled of Indian constitution ^[5].

In the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, these pastoral nomadic tribes can be divided into three subgroups.

1. Gujjars
2. Bakerwals.
3. Dodhi Gujjars.

The main difference among them is based on their occupation and which animal a group usually keeps. It is generally believed that Bakerwals keep goats and sheep, Gujjar keep buffaloes, and they have their own land. Dodhi Gujjars also depends on buffaloes but they hardly possess

any agriculture land like Bakerwals. They move from one place to another in search of better pastures land for their animals. During their seasonal migration, all of these tribal groups move towards upper reaches along with their cattle and families twice a year. In winter season, they return to plain areas. Usually they leave an old member of their family back at home to keep a watch on crops and dry grass, which they store for the winter season (Sharma 2014). Umer Jan Sofi in his paper argues that after the end of 20th century the transhumant Gujjar and Bakerwal of Jammu and Kashmir gradually adopted the process of sedentarization.

Tufail, quoting Anita Sharma in his paper, argues that from so many years Gujjar and Bakerwal living in secluded conditions is reflected in their pattern of living, food habits, dietary practices and various aspects of their life. He states that the changing pattern in agriculture system and in the cropping pattern brought a change in food pattern of so many communities and it was also noticed in the Gujjar and Bakerwal community too. Surveys have been able to establish that maize is the staple of the mountainous peoples particularly of the Gujjar and Bakerwal. It is a tropical crop of mountainous region and is grown in large quantities in this region. Because other crops like rice and wheat need lot of irrigation, which is not readily available in the hilly regions of Jammu and Kashmir. That being the reason they opt to cultivate maize only. The Gujjar and Bakerwal of Jammu and Kashmir are vegetarian and non-vegetarian too. Their favourite dishes are Makki ki Roti, Ghanar, Sarsoon Ka Sag, Khalari and Lassi, Noon Cha and goat milk ^[6].

At the community level, the Gujjars and Bakerwals of Jammu and Kashmir have divided themselves in three major groups of Kinships: Dera, Dada-Potre and Gotra (clan). The basic part of their clan is Dera (household) which consists of husband, wife, children and old parents. The group of Dada-Potre consists of patrilineal related kinsmen tracing their ancestor up to seven generations. The Gotra is a set based on belief amongst Gujjar regarding their Hindu ancestry. The names of clans are common among the Hindu, Sikh and Muslim Gujjars in the Indian subcontinent. A few prominent Gotra (clan) among Gujjars are Bajjar, Kohli, Goursi, Khatana, Kasana, Bajran, Chauhan, Bhatti, Bhadana and Chechi. The main function of Gotras is to regulate marriage and other traditional work of the community. The Gotra exogamy is maintained by Gujjars much alike Hindus. They have also developed a traditional judicial system known as Jirga (Panchayat) which adjudicates on the disputes within the communities ^[7].

Displacement of Gujjar and Bakerwal in Military and Militancy affected area

The Displacement of Gujjar and Bakerwal community can be traced back from the Jammu massacre of 1947. The first form of displacement faced by them was communal violence-induced displacement. The most affected area was Jammu city and level of destruction was very high in Muslims dominated areas. The main concentration of Muslims was in Ustad Mohalla, Pathana Mohalla and Khalka Mohalla. Mid-September 1947 witnessed massive destruction in these Muslim localities. Hundreds of Gujjars were killed in Ram Nagar. Village Raipur within Jammu Cantonment area was also burnt down by Hindu mob⁸. The political dimension of this conflict has received significant attention from scholars and statesman alike, but the impact

of this conflict on these nomadic tribes has largely been ignored.

Iffat Rashid in her article reveals that that partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 became a site of exclusion in Kashmir. The Muslim majority state's resistance against the invasion of Pakistani tribes was constructed by Indian nationalist discourse as the victory of secular India over Pakistani Muslim nationalism. Consequently, it excluded the 1947 massacre of Muslims in Jammu from most of the historical records. The untold and unwritten history of Jammu massacre burned the miserability and suffering of these peoples which they faced during communal riots and displacement from Jammu to other places. This paper attempts to draw attention towards the displacement of Gujjar and Bakerwal during pre- and post-1947 periods.

Dodhi Gujjar of Jammu lost many lives in the massacre of 1947. It was their routine work to come early in the city and supply milk in the market and go back. Even today it is their main source of livelihood. Some historical records reveal that many Gujjar men and women who used to sell milk in city from the surroundings villages were reportedly massacred en route. It is said that Ramnagar reserve in Jammu was littered with the dead bodies of Gujjar men, women and Children. There was a mass killing of Gujjars in and around Jammu city^[9]. Those who by some means managed to escape the wrath of killers fled to Pakistan and nearby states of India

Javed while quoting PG Rasool, the author of a book "The Historical Reality of Kashmir Dispute," argues that the Muslims who constituted more than 60% population of the Jammu were reduced to a minority after large-scale killings and displacement. There is no official record about the number of Muslims killed in the massacre, so he took help from Horace Alexander's article of 16th January 1948, which was published in "The Spectator" in which he mentioned that 200,000.

Muslims were killed in Jammu area in 1947. Another report published in the "Times of London" on 10 August 1948, bluntly stated that 237,000 Muslims were systematically exterminated in the massacre^[10]

Rifat Fareed expressed her views on the issue on Al-Jazeera in the programme titled "The Forgotten massacre that ignited the Kashmir dispute". She said in that interview that Khurram Parvez, a noted human right defender from Kashmir told Al Jazeera, that the unending conflict in the Jammu and Kashmir has its roots in the massacre of 1947. Khurram Parvez argues that the massacre has been forgotten deliberately. Actually, the violence of the massacre of 1947 continues.

Those who were forced to migrate to Pakistan have never been allowed to return. Rifat Fareed further said that the insurgency in the region was actually born in 1947 which led to three wars between the two countries, India and Pakistan. Approximately 70,000 people have been killed in the aggression in the past three decades since the armed rebellion against Indian rule burst out in the state in 1989^[11]

The perpetual and seemingly unending insurgency in the state has impacted the livelihood of Gujjar and Bakerwal of Jammu and Kashmir. At the first hand, they faced enormous loss of life and property in massacre of 1947. Then the two Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971 resulted in heavy shelling and firing from across the border which again resulted in huge loss for the Gujjar and Bakerwal community. Maximum Gujjar families have crossed the border and

migrated to Pakistan-administered Kashmir in 1947, leaning their blood relation in the Indian state. They lost many lives and their sources of income as well. Those who managed to fled to Pakistan and other states of India faced many problems because of them being unskilled labour. They were very much dependent on traditional works. Most of educated Gujjar and Bakerwal families and leaders also migrated to Pakistan. This rendered them a leaderless community in the state. All of these circumstances made their life miserable and made them the most backward community in the state because of their illiteracy and poor economic condition.

The members of Gujjar and Bakerwal community who remained in Indian-administrated Kashmir preferred to settle on upper reaches because of their way of life. Some of them also settled close to the LOC because of which they are continuously becoming the victims of border skirmishes between India and Pakistan. Perpetual Border tension forced them to relocate at safer places which again impacted their source of livelihood.

Mudassar Ahmed wrote in his column in *The Wire* on 28 January 2018 about how a border Jammu village got caught in the Cross-LoC firing. His story covered the incident of Jora Farm, a Small village from R.S Pura Sector of Jammu region, consisted of 261 Gujjars households. This small village is just 300 meters away from the International Border. The residents of village are no stranger to violence and they have faced the brunt of hostilities between India and Pakistan several times. But, the level of cross border shelling/firing was very high this time such they had never faced before. It continued for at least three days. Every Gujjar family of this village had a livestock of around 20 to 30 buffalos. They used to supply milk to Jammu city and have been trading in the commodity since 1951 when the farm was set up there. It is the only source of their income. The village head (Lumberdar) of the village lamented that in 2015 they lost 10 buffalos because of firing from the Pakistani side. Another resident of the same village, 75-year-old Shah Din, said that he lost his son and a grandson because of intense firing from Pakistani side many years ago while they were eating their dinner. He said that he saw this catastrophe very closely. The gloom of death hangs over this village round the year. When situation improves on the border, they prefer to return to their villages. Mudassar, in his coverage of the ordeal faced by Zareefa Bano and her daughter Zeenat, states that when they came back to their villages they cried aloud after seeing what was left of their home: only a heap of debris. Zeenat searched for her books and certificates with her bare hands but everything had been turned to ashes. Approximately 20 families lost their homes and livestock in this tragedy. Husain a resident of village said that 31 huts had been totally lost in the shelling. Many houses suffered partial damage. Moreover, 67 buffalos and 35 goats were killed and some other animals got serious injuries^[12].

The people who are living near LOC in Rajouri and Poonch districts also face many problems due to intense border shelling between Indian and Pakistan. Villages situated close to the LoC have witnessed heavy loss of life over the years. It has also forced them to leave their houses and fertile land rendering their life miserable. Apart from this people from the Gujjar and Bakerwal community also suffered a lot due to the insurgency in the region. Rajouri and Poonch districts have large number of scheduled Tribes

population. But turmoil in the expanse made their traditional life very tough. According to a survey conducted by Tribal Research Cultural Foundation, 39% of Gujjar and Bakerwal left their migratory tradition in Jammu and Kashmir. Javed Rahi, National Secretary of TRCF, said that the 23 years of turmoil in the region forced Gujjar and Bakerwal community to relinquish their nomadic lifestyle. Findings of the survey reveal that the main reason of the decline of migratory tradition is the killing of number of nomadic Bakerwals and Gujjars on higher reaches during the insurgency. The other reason for the decline of their migratory movement is the restrictions from the security agencies on their transhumance activities in border and strategic areas. Closure of their pasturelands forced them to relinquish the nomadic lifestyle and turned them into migratory laborers. Similarly, killings of hundreds of Gujjar and Bakerwals in the upper reaches during turmoil is yet another reason for the decline of tribal movement.

Kavita Suri has also expressed her views on Kashmir turmoil and its impact on Gujjars and Bakerwals of Jammu and Kashmir. She pointed out that because of insurgency in the region these two tribal communities got stuck between the two fighting forces (the security forces and militants). When they move towards upper reaches in search of better pastures for their animals, on the way they are often trapped in the hands of militants who force them to share their food and make them carry their equipment from one place to another. They also compel them to give them shelter among themselves and provide them access to the urban areas without being noticed by security forces... People from Gujjars and Bakerwals community have lost their loved ones because of militancy in the state. Majority of them leave their house due to the torture they face at the hands of insurgents. They (militants) pick youth from Gujjars and Bakerwal tribes with them and forced them to carry weapons against security forces. As the member of this community once considered as the most loyal community in India got recruited in different militant originations because of their backwardness, poverty and political non-representation. They not only faced torture at the hand of militants, security forces also interrogated them at daytime and punish them for giving food and shelter to militants. Security forces also indulge in forcing Gujjar and Bakerwal people to carry their arms and equipment from one place and to another. On the other hand, at night militants again knock the door of their houses and ask for food at gunpoint. They also label Gujjars and Bakerwals community as you are mukhbirs (informers). If unfortunately, any encounter happens in their area the finger of suspension always fall on Gujjar family of the area. A lot of target killings happened in the past three decades against Gujjar and Bakerwal. It forced them to relocate to urban areas without any economic security. Due to this displacement, they suffered a lot and lost their source of livelihood as well. They adopt the process of sedentarization instead of their old tradition of migration, which was a lonely source of the economy from centuries. TRCF gives another reason for the difficulties endured by Gujjar and Bakerwal which they face during their migration. It is the lack of disaster management training. They said that due to lack of training for tribes in the northern states of India, the community suffered heavy loss of lives and livestock due to hail storm, snow, and landslide and forest fire. Because of these natural disasters the percentage of the pastro-nomadic community constantly

goes down. Gujjar and Bakerwal who lead a tough life in upper reaches of Himalaya and Pir Panjal, are gradually settling down in plain areas^[13].

Gujjars and Bakerwals of Jammu and Kashmir faced displacement not only because of turmoil in the region, but they also faced the problem of displacement under the guise of development and retrieval of encroached state land. Recently many family of Gujjar community evacuated from their native land with the construction of All India Institute of Medical Science (AIIMS) on that place. The proposed AIIMS in the Vijapur district of Jammu region threatens to evict many families of Gujjar there. Government forced them to evacuate their houses without giving them any prior notice and without putting in place some rehabilitation policy. The demolition drive rendered many families homeless residents of the region. In 2016 a youth (Yaqub) from the Gujjar community was killed during the clash between an anti-encroachment squad of Jammu Development Authority (JDA) and the encroachers in Sarore area of Samba district. In this forceful evocation 22 huts of Gujjar community were also razed. Apart from this they also faced torture from the Gaurakshaks. In April 2017, people from Gujjar and Bakerwal were attacked in Reasi district of Jammu region by the so called Gaurakshaks while they were moving towards upper reaches with their cattle. Gaurakshaks beat them over the allegation of bovine smuggling. But the main goal was to halt their movement and create a fear among them. The rape and murder of Bakerwal girl in Kathua district was also a part of this larger plot. The investigation of Crime Branch also reveals that that the rape and murder of Bakerwal girl in Rasana was also aimed to force the Bakerwal community to leave the area. The matter of fact is that in the aftermath of the PDP-BJP alliance in the state, Gujjar and Bakerwal community felt to be at the margins of community in the Hindu dominated area.

Selected anti-encroachment drive of state administration also forced them into displacement. Many Muslims ogansiasation of Jammu also condemned this selective drive of government. They said they are not against the anti-encroachment but its selective character. Gujjar and Bakerwal of Jammu faced the arbitrariness of state administration by every passing day. On 28 November 2018 the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir repealed the Roshni Act which brought more misery for the Gujjar and Bakerwal community. It created an anxiety among the nomadic tribe of the state, who have traditionally led a nomadic life and largely depended on this law which protected their land rights. But the people from BJP claimed that this Act was made by Farooq Abdullah to change the demography of Jammu region by giving the land rights to a particular community. They said that with the help of Roshni Act many Muslims settled in the Hindu dominated area. They faced discrimination at the hands of local police too.

Conclusion

From the above discussion it can be concluded that Gujjar and Bakerwal of Jammu and Kashmir suffered a lot from 1947 onwards and still they are living a very miserable life. Now it is the duty of administration to make some corrective measures for the betterment of Gujjar and Bakerwal. As most of them (Gujjar and Bakerwal) are not capable to deal with the new circumstances, which has been formed by recent development in the area. Majority of them are totally

dependent on their livestock and could not do without them, it is the only source of their livelihood. Some of them hardly possess a permanent house and immovable property. There is an immense need to understand their difficulties and provide them education and vocational training at the local level, so they can earn by doing some other works. Emancipation and upliftment of any section of the society is possible only with the help of education. So, for their rehabilitation and resettlement, the administration needs to work in a real sense not only on paper as it's evident from other tribal areas of India.

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