

Partnering For Rights and Entitlements of Jammu and Kashmir's Bakkarwal Tribal Pastoralists

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Background and Purpose

The economic and social empowerment and educational upliftment of socially disadvantaged groups and of society's marginalized sections is an indicator of their development and inclusion. With 10.43 crore tribal people (or 8.6 per cent of the total population), India leads the list of 21 countries with a substantial tribal population (Census 2011). India's tribal groups are very diverse and heterogeneous - some are still in the food gathering stage, others practice shifting cultivation, many more pursue primitive forms of agriculture, some are nomadic, and yet there are pastoralists too.

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) is very rich in the variety of cultures that represent all stages of human progress. Sustainable livelihood approaches help to analyse opportunities and constraints of the tribal poor. They build a better understanding of multiple perspectives, while also helping to identify options with a potential to reduce poverty, coupled with the enabling of conditions, policies, and incentives needed for the poor to increase their range of better livelihood possibilities. Several tribal groups dot J&K's population. These include: Bakkarwal, Balti, Beda, Bot (also Boto), Brokpa, Changpa, Chopan, Dard, Drokpa, Gaddi, Garra, Gujjar, Mon, Purigpa, Shin, and Sippi.

Sustainable livelihood approaches enable the government's various development departments and partners outside of the government machinery, and other civil society engines, to work to improve the design and implementation of poverty alleviation efforts in 'tribal areas.' But all this has the potential to get tweaked to the disadvantage of the tribal population when such tribal areas cease to be a definable geography with logistical possibilities. For instance,

pastoralists cannot be confined to any tribal areas. In J&K, the pastoralists are constantly on the move, traversing across districts and political divisions; across geographical regions, rivers, and even mountain ranges.

A study on the sustainable livelihoods of pastoral tribal communities of J&K will help inform the design of appropriate and suitable programmes to create and provide sustainable livelihood options to tribal pastoralists.

Rationale

Pastoralists depend on common pool resources, mobility, primary income from livestock, existence of traditional knowledge systems, and association with specific breeds of animals. They are a vulnerable people world-over, laying bare at the kindness and especially at the destruction that mother nature has to offer. Hemmed in by intensive agricultural and, of late, industrial activity, pastoralists have always been ever-increasingly constrained for room to carry on their activities. Although importantly enough, these herders have a key role to play not only in the rehabilitation and sustainable management of fragile ecosystems, but also in the participation towards the economy.

Pastoralism is not an official category in India. Neither is there any official definition of pastoralists. And though the government and its officials are aware of its existence, it is not yet recognised as a distinct management system. Pastoralism, however, is a highly complex activity, hinging on a fine balance between human population, animal population, and natural resources. Though it maintains a reputation as the most complex, formidable, and arduous of

all agricultural and natural resource development tasks, pastoralists tend to be amongst the least educated and least empowered of non-urban populations. Pastoralism is at odds with rural agricultural and urban development priorities, and pastoralists remain largely outside of post-colonial power equations.

Although, there has been some focus on pastoralists, especially within the purview of the Schedule Tribe and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA) in the recent years. Section 3 of the FRA specifies community forest rights of uses or entitlements such as fish and other elements in water bodies, grazing (both settled or transhumant), and traditional seasonal resource access of nomadic or pastoralist communities. According to FRA rules, pastoralists need to have a written proof of animal grazing in a particular patch of forest land for the last 75 years. However, it is nearly impossible for them to obtain the same due to the absence of written permissions, which they may have never had to begin with. This system of life has existed even before the forest department was instituted. The pastoralist system was anyway discouraged by the British in the days and years before independence. The forest department has been reluctant to give them rights under FRA. This is the case everywhere, and it might be more pronounced in J&K, even though here many pastoralists do have permits for grazing.

Traditional pastoral institutions are being increasingly threatened with mass displacement because of intense competition from agriculture, population growth, herd dispossession, and droughts. Pastoralism, as a production system and way of life, appears to be fighting a losing battle. Says Sikander Azam Choudhary, a retired District and Sessions Judge, “Their access to forests is considered illegal - or they are made to feel that it is illegal so that they can be fleeced

and exploited. The Forest Rights Act is projected in a way that is detrimental to their interests. Bribes work in the deep forests.” A tribal in the forest is a very poor person. And a vulnerable one too. He faces multiple atrocities, the former judge says.

Statistics - How are the Numbers Stacked?

India meets 53 per cent of its milk and 74 per cent of its meat requirements from animals reared by pastoralists. And while there is not much data on the community, a 2020 report estimates that there are 13 million such people in the country - or nearly 1 per cent of the entire population. These pastoralists manage a livestock population of more than 50 million. These figures have been extrapolated by the global non-profit, the League for Pastoral Peoples and Endogenous Livestock Development (LPP). The organisation has based its estimates on a data analysis from the National Sample Survey (NSS) office, individual surveys, as well as livestock population numbers. Ilse Köhler-Rollefson, a co-author of the report’s section on India, has been quoted in the media as saying, “Our data shows the importance of pastoralism for the Indian livestock economy. India’s phenomenally productive livestock is sustained majorly on common pool resources, including forests and *gochars*, which are not wastelands but are treated as such.”

According to the NSS, only 1 per cent of the land owned by farmers is used for livestock. This suggests that pastoralists face competition for grazing animals from farmers who maintain dairy animals. The livestock sector contributes 4.5 per cent to the GDP; the pastoralist sector amounts to around 3 per cent of that share. The report also put a monetary value on the manure distributed by animals in the fields. “Manure is the main source of income for some herders.

Some farmers compensate pastoralists for their service in cash or in kind,” it stated. Moreover, it added that the value of this manure as a source of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium has been estimated at \$45 billion a year, and that it is a major source of nutrients for crops as well as for the land.

But to understand the landscape, the situation is not very different for the 12 tribal pastoral communities that have been notified as Scheduled Tribes in the erstwhile state of J&K. While 8 communities were granted tribal status in 1989, the Gujjars, Bakkarwals, Gaddis, and Sippis were only included by a Constitutional Amendment in 1991. All 12 Scheduled Tribes were enumerated officially for the first time during the 2001 census, recording a population of 11,05,979 - but again, this number was disputed at the time as many went uncounted, particularly due to their nomadic lifestyle.

The Gujjars and the Bakkarwals are the two main pastoral communities of J&K. The population of both tribal communities together was put at 14,93,299 in the 2011 census. The projected figure for 2021 is 18,21,824. Over 84 per cent of the population is noticed to settle in the two districts of Poonch and Rajouri, also the primary areas where KYARI conducted its fieldwork.

A Migratory Tribal's Survey (MTS) conducted by the district administration of Rajouri in 2021 provides pointers to how many migratory tribal people would at all be exercising their franchise. In Kotranka, for example, only 30 had election photo identity cards (or voter identity cards), while 4,111 had Aadhar cards. The survey put Kotranka's migratory tribal population at 15,438 people. Likewise, in Manjakote only 4 out of 1,452 migratory tribal people surveyed had voter identity cards, while 934 had Aadhar cards. 3 of 432 people surveyed in Siot had

voter identity cards and 162 had Aadhar cards. And, in Sunderbani, 483 of 1,419 migratory tribal people surveyed had Aadhar cards, but none had election photo identity cards.

The MTS report from Rajouri has a few other grim pointers, some of which are as follows: The gender ratio amongst tribal people in Rajouri was found to be troublesome with just 777 females for every 1,000 males. The sex ratio of migratory tribal people in the Manjakote Tehsil was a mere 571 females for every 1,000 males. Likewise, in Khawas and Thannamandi, there were 702 and 703 females per 1000 males, respectively. The female to male sex ratio among the migratory tribal communities is also worrying - with an average child sex ratio of 867 female children per 1000 male children, much lower than both the national and UT averages.

Life at the Crossroads

India's pastoralists are as diverse as the span of land that they move across. There are the fully mobile pastoralists, the transhumant pastoralists (who engage in seasonal movement of livestock between fixed summer and winter pastures), and then the sedentary ones too. While most pastoralists in India belong to the traditional castes, other groups - the non-traditional pastoralists - have also been taking up mobile herding.

The anomaly of 'pastoralists without legal access to grazing land' has become a common reality. Once at the helm of a stable production system, the pastoralists now are constantly searching for new resources from which to make a living, adjusting to new migratory routes and finding alternative markets for their livestock. For instance, Junaid, a lawyer by profession and also

one belonging to the Bakkarwal community, said that, "Years ago we could sell the wool from our sheep and make good money, however, for some reason now we are unable to find any interest for that wool, which has significantly dented our income stream."

Besides these problems, a major difficulty that the pastoralists have faced is the misconceived development projects intended for them. There has been a view that the best option for pastoralists now is to settle down, but most projects based on this premise have failed. A reason for this failure, pastoralist groups and leaders say, is the non-participatory way in which these projects have been devised. We need to understand that just because we are accustomed to settlement life, does not make it any more civic or desired than that of our pastoralist and nomadic counterparts. We need to provide development projects that are based on the needs of a nomadic lifestyle, as opposed to settlement lifestyle. During our research, however, we noticed that the Tribal Affairs department of J&K has recently begun working on a multitude of solutions such as shed building, mobile school improvements, geo-tracking routes, and the like, to devise effective schemes more efficiently for our pastoral tribal population.

And while settling down might seem like a good option for the government, it is unlikely to work out, once again for the government, because the pastoral livelihoods provide essential needs for the populace as a whole. Bridging such a gap in needs, in case the pastoralists are made to settle down, will be an expensive affair with various ramifications (more on this below).

Even though pastoralists might find themselves at crossroads, this does not mean that they are at an impasse. They are fighting for their survival and can draw on important internal assets to

guide them along. The challenge for government planners and development professionals is to ensure that existing paths remain open rather than closed, and that new ones be cleared. This will demand new terms of partnerships between governmental agencies, voluntary organisations, and local populations.

This study centres on the Bakkarwals, who are among the most backward of the region's pastoral communities and are extremely neglected. Bakkarwals are very poor and Gujjars claim that the Bakkarwals are one of them - merely a sub-tribe who rear sheep and goats, and only slightly different from the Gujjars who rear buffaloes. The Gujjars say that they too take their buffaloes to graze in the meadows in the higher reaches, just as the Bakkarwals take their cattle.

The Bakkarwals, however, claim that they are significantly distinct from the Gujjars. For one, they are discriminated against. They also claim that their lifestyles are very different, revolving around their herd of goats and sheep. The grazing patterns too are different as their sheep and goats can climb the treacherous mountains to much higher altitudes, when compared to that of the buffaloes. Besides this, the Bakkarwals are known to rear horses that they need to carry their meagre belongings on and also their dogs - features that are not part of Gujjar lifestyles. Funnily enough, there is a famous saying, that a Bakkarwal might give up his family, but he will never part with his dog! The Gujjars do not tread beyond the mountain pass, and a tourist destination called 'Peer Ki Gali' in the Pir Panjal range, because their buffaloes cannot go further up the mountains. The Bakkarwals, on the other hand, graze their animals in the much higher reaches of Kargil, Ganesh, and the Pir Panjal.

Moreover, instances of marriages between Gujjars and Bakkarwals are few, as the latter say, pointing to the near endogamous nature of the two groups to emphasise their tribal distinctions. The rare instances of such marriages, Bakkarwal leaders say, are limited to Gujjar families accepting a Bakkarwal's daughter - but seldom of a Gujjar's daughter being married to a Bakkarwal's boy.

Shokat Choudhary, a Bakkarwal leader who has now settled (meaning that he does not take his sheep and goats to graze in the mountains any longer), is also the Sarpanch of his village Salwah, as well as the President of the District Sarpanch Association. He says that even a mid-level boarding school for Gujjar children run by a community charitable trust does not take in Bakkarwal children. "We are untouchables for the other communities in the region. We are considered dirty - our occupation means that we live among goats and sheep, and we smell," he adds for emphasis. The Gujjars and Bakkarwals, however, do share certain linguistic, religious, and cultural similarities.

The political necessity for the Gujjars to emphasise their oneness with the Bakkarwals cannot be missed. The tribal status provides them with a ticket out of backwardness that they benefit from educationally, socially, economically, and politically. They dominate the turf for job reservations and are apprehensive of sharing this turf with other caste groups, mainly upper castes and mercantile communities who too are clamouring for a tribal status, especially to achieve political aspirations.

From the above, this case study by KYARI attempts to explore the following two broad issues:

1. How are Jammu and Kashmir's Bakkarwals posited with respect to the rights and entitlements due to them?
2. What can civil society groups do to improve the quality of life of the Bakkarwals of Jammu and Kashmir?

Geography Begets Apathy

J&K's pastoralists live in the harshest, most unreachable, and difficult parts of the region. From Surankote to Mendhar to Thannamandi to Sawjian, the litany is common: a dearth of schools, colleges, health centres, electricity, and water. Neither do disabled people get any allowances, nor do elderly people benefit from the government's old-age pension schemes. In short, the people are largely left to fend for themselves, owing predominantly to the unwelcoming terrain, unpredictable weather, and India-Pakistan border.

To begin with, there are just a few drivable roads and so, communication is difficult. There is very poor mobile and internet connectivity, of which a lot has to do with the security concerns due to the region being a border area. The Pir Panjal range, for example, doesn't have a spread of mobile towers. That is the case with most of the land the cowherds and shepherds pass through, thus there is no incentive for them to own a mobile. The lack of communications, however, also means that government officials rarely visit these parts, and therefore that impacts regulating or monitoring government projects and schemes in the region, community leaders say - but this is a generalisation because they do also offer few instances of harassment by forest authorities and policemen. A relevant anecdote we encountered during our fieldwork was, that a senior official was surprised to hear of our visit to one of the aforementioned remote

areas as he himself has never been there during his tenure - owing to the poor connectivity and sinking road problems, literally.

Schooling is a casualty too as there are very few schools, and many of the assigned teachers play truant because they consider such postings as a punishment. For example, a school in Murrah village, amongst the most far-flung of Surankote block in Poonch district, is being clubbed with another distant school because the three teachers assigned to the school were reluctant to go that far. “The teachers never came to the school and so the parents enrolled their children in other, expensive private schools,” says Zakir Hussain, a local Nambardaar. “Why should children suffer for teachers' unwillingness to get posted here?” he asks, adding that the school has been around since the 1960s and the teaching staff has always been unwilling to reach there. He says work for a model school undertaken in 2021 is nowhere near completion.

Murrah village has a population of over 8,000 people, but there is no 'Anganwadi' or any childcare centre, there isn't a health centre in the village, and there are practically no roads. Surankote has just 1 college since 2012. Students from distant villages cannot come to the college because of the distance and lack of transport. Gujjars and Bakkarwals of Poonch say that even a senior Gujjar leader G.M. Mir, a former member of parliament, could not get a metaled road to connect his own village of Chella Dhangri in the Mandi Tehsil of Poonch district. The village is a mere 6 kilometres from Mandi and the construction has only inched forward over years, covering about 5 kilometres till June 2022. Even government schemes like MGNREGA have not reached the communities - largely because of a lack of awareness and since most of them are on the move, the community leaders say.

The difficult terrain also means that there is hardly ever any serious effort to accurately count the tribal people. Census' happen when the tribal people are on the move. Moreover, tribal families without a house of their own are not covered in any survey - these being the most marginalised among the tribal population. The 1981 census put their numbers at 1.5 lakhs, considered by many as a vast under-count. It is assumed and hoped for that the new census will throw up proper data on the socio-economic lives of the Bakkarwal population - and, possibly, convey in reality how many of them live on which side of the poverty line or how many of them are entitled to receiving government rations for families living below the poverty line or under the government's much publicised 'Antyodaya' schemes.

At present, there is a provision to provide Bakkarwals with rationed food grains, sugar, and kerosene oil as 'priority households' by the Department of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs. But this is hugely hampered because of their migratory lifestyle and because they rarely have a place that they can call home. While there are provisions to reach them with rations, there are also widespread allegations of pilferage. The Food and Civil Supplies Department requires Bakkarwals to register with the office of the Assistant Director for availing their entitled rations. Most Bakkarwals cannot avail this because they are uneducated and do not know the ways of the government machinery, and are also often suspicious of it. Besides, their migratory and arduous lifestyle does not provide them with an opportunity to go to the departments. But, most importantly, they do not know of the provisions that the government has made for them.

The lives of the Bakkarwals are a commentary on how logistical challenges hamper the reach of government services and impact the delivery of entitlements. Their poignant lives are best summed up in the most common refrain of the Bakkarwal people that goes something like this:

'We have nothing but for the animals, the clothes we wear and some utensils. We have no house. We have no identity. We bury our dead wherever they die. Such is our fate.'

Rendezvous with the Mountains

The Bakkarwals are spread throughout the northern part of the Himalayan Range. They are found in all three regions - Ladakh, Kashmir, and Jammu. While some of them own land and have settled down, the larger lot of the Bakkarwals are landless and are often described as *'khanabadosh.'* Their migratory movement is on foot to find pastures for their cattle, and the only aid they have in their movement comes from their horses. Recently, the Tribal Affairs Department started plying tempo-traveller trucks to assist these nomadic communities to travel with their livestock. Their migratory path is from the foothills and the lower hills to the higher reaches in summer, and a reverse migration before the peak winter sets in. The summer migration takes them to the lush Himalayan meadows, well above the treeline across the Great Himalayan Ranges in Matayen, Mushkoh, Drass regions and beyond to Sonamarg, Pir Panjal range, Kishtwar range, etc.

Before the onset of winter, beginning sometime in October, Bakkarwal families walk from Kashmir to the Jammu region, crossing the mighty Pir Panjal range. They travel with their flock

of sheep and goats for more than 300 kilometres for over 2 months before they reach the lower hills of the Jammu region (mainly Poonch, Rajouri, Udhampur, and Jammu) where they stay till April. They have spaces marked out for them by the government at the foothills, but these are usually inadequate and they often hire more spaces from the local community.

The paths they take are treacherous as their routes pass through stone and landslide prone areas, often resulting in the deaths of man and animal. They are forced to bury their dead right where the incidents occur. The lack of communications, particularly telecommunications, means that there are no means at hand to contact the outside world in times of an emergency. The deaths of their animals in the landslides, and such, are seldom compensated. There is no initiative to implement a group insurance scheme for people or their livestock, primarily due to a lack of awareness amongst the Bakkarwal, and even Gujjar, populace.

The Bakkarwals pay a tax for their herd crossing the Pir Panjal; the quantum of the tax being a function of the number of heads in the herd. But they barely get any services from the authorities. There are no veterinary services for their livestock and the treatments they provide to the animals come from their own knowledge of traditional medicine. For instance, sheep and goats often ingest weeds and fall ill, although the Bakkarwals know some indigenous treatment for these.

Lack of awareness amongst the community and also being left to the elements is a double whammy for the Bakkarwals. For instance, untimely snowfall in late-May and early-June 2022 caused huge losses to the herds. Similarly, there have been numerous deaths in the events of lightening at the heights they reach. Later, in the months of June and July in 2022 itself, many

animals fell ill and died. Even when they face no natural calamity, however, the Bakkarwals say that they have lost sheep and goats to road accidents as speeding trucks run over the animals. They have to take to these roads because the paths they could otherwise traverse, like in Jamia Gali or Nurpur Gali that lead into Kashmir, are severely underdeveloped. Yet, for all the loss that they face, the Bakkarwals rarely receive any compensation - which is, in any case, way too little. Neither has there been any survey to establish the extent of their losses.

Although, one conundrum of a reason for the poor compensation they receive is also an attenuated documentation of the herd count while applying for the seasonal permit or '*rahadari parcha*' at the tehsil office, which they need to cross the mountain range to enter Kashmir for their cattle to graze. The *rahadari parcha* is a self-declared account of the number of sheep and goats they are permitted to carry. The purposefully entered lower count of animals is to avoid paying the fee for the permit - the larger the herd, the more the fee which they would rather avoid because of their poor monetary status. But, in case of a loss of herd, they receive a very small compensation because the number of animals they declare beforehand is vastly attenuated - poverty begets poverty.

Bakkarwal leaders say that many legislations brought in over the past few decades have not factored in their particularly nomadic way of life. For instance, the FRA erases the forest rights that the community traditionally enjoyed since the time of Maharaja Gulab Singh, who gave them rights to the grazing of lands and forests. Shokat Choudhary says, "We have to fight for grazing our flock with local people who do not let us graze our sheep. Bakkarwals have not benefitted from the Forest Rights Act - people have been given land cut out of the forests, but now they do not allow *khanabadosh* nomads to graze their animals." Bakkarwal leaders like

Choudhary say that they are kept out of the Forest Rights Committee (FRC), insulating them from the benefits they would otherwise accrue from the law. The FRCs are supposed to be inclusive, but by nature of the way they are constituted, they do not include the nomads.

The benefits they should get from the Scheduled Tribes Act do not percolate down to the Bakkarwals. Even though they are said to belong to various parts of Jammu, Kathua, Udhampur, Riasi, Naushehra, Sunderbani, Kalakot, Mendher, etc., they are always on the move spending the summer months in the mountains and the winters in the lower hills. The wealth of the Bakkarwals is their sheep and goats that they rear for sale to middlemen. They have an important role in the region's food economy, but their role is often overlooked or taken for granted. J&K is home to over 20 lakh sheep and goats owned by the Bakkarwal tribal people.

Life in the *Dhokes*

The *Dhokes* are dwelling hutments in the upper reaches in the mountains. These are places that the Bakkarwals live in when they take their herd of sheep and goats to the higher reaches of the Himalayas. Families have used the *Dhokes* for generations and have a hereditary title, that does not necessarily figure on paper. But life is less than basic - there are no water and sanitation facilities, the only source of water in these upper reaches being the perennial springs and water streams. The children do not get proper education while on the move. The MTS of Rajouri district points to a low literacy rate of 40.82 per cent among migratory tribal people. This is much less than the national, UT, and even district level averages. The prominent reason for the low literacy rate among migratory tribals of Rajouri is their transitory lifestyle and non-availability of sufficient mobile schools.

There are only 25 mobile primary schools available for Rajouri's 49,753 migratory tribal people. 6 of Rajouri's blocks or tehsils are without mobile primary schools which is also a factor for the low literacy rate among migratory tribal people. Access to primary schools for migratory tribals is a prerequisite for improving their literacy rates. Where there are mobile schools, there are no teachers, or worse, the teachers play truant. Tribal parents point out that the teachers come from outside their regions and do not identify with the tribal ethos and lifestyle; and have often also demanded that the assignment to accompany the children on the migratory trek for their schooling must be entrusted to some of the educated Bakkarwal youths.

Similarly, there are only 2 mobile health centres for the district's migratory tribal population - 1 each in Naushera and Thannamandi, the MTS shows. The low average family size of migratory tribal people depicts the poor health among them. The *Dhokes* have no proper facilities for the animals and there are many deaths because the sheep and goats are left open to the elements. As mentioned earlier, untimely summer snowfall in 2022 resulted in the deaths of many animals. The MTS points out that there are only 8 special mobile veterinary centres in the district for a total of 4,57,446 livestock. This is way too little considering the count of animals as well as the geographical spread of the region that forms the hinterland of their migratory route. The health of women is a particularly worrisome aspect of their lives as well - many women die at childbirth as there is no skilled person to attend to the delivery of babies when a woman goes into labour.

The Pastoralists' Economic Challenges

“In physical appearance they are tall, well built, and quite beautiful but have a revengeful disposition.”

- description of Bakkarwals in a 2017 background in a policy document of the Department of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs, Government of Jammu and Kashmir.

The Bakkarwals are seen as tribal people. They are regarded as having a revengeful disposition. They are also referred to as *khanabadosh*. But rarely are they seen as producers, even through their own eyes. As producers, the Bakkarwals provide meat, an important part of the Kashmiri diet. This section briefly deals with the question of the rights of the Bakkarwals as producers.

Sheep rearing is a painstaking job. In the environment they rear the sheep, the Bakkarwals do so at great risk to their lives. Many men and women have died in the hostile conditions. Herds have vanished. Yet, the Bakkarwals live lives of penury. For all their hard work, the Bakkarwals get very little returns. Rearing sheep and goats is not very remunerative and this is one reason why their young do not want to continue in the family profession. Instead, many youths leave for petty jobs in the Gulf countries.

The supply of meat in J&K is viewed from a consumer's lens. The price for a live goat or sheep is fixed as an essential commodity and in consumer affairs parlance - it is meant to suit the consumer. The market equations, therefore, are vastly tilted against their favour. Bakkarwals say that the price they get is way too less and assume that it is market forces that deprive them of their dues. In reality, however, the regulatory authority here is consumer affairs and the calculus of the price settlement is heavily tilted in favour of the consumer. For instance, the price of a live goat or sheep was fixed at Rs. 240 per kilo in Poonch district in July 2022. Bakkarwals say that the price is way too less. A very robust animal in their conditions weighs about 30 kilograms and fetches no more than Rs. 7,200.

Some of this could change if they were to be seen as producers, just as farmers are. But the Bakkarwals are not organised, nor are there any advocacy groups taking up their case before consumer bodies of the government. As producers, they are never consulted in the process of deciding the rates. Since this price is fixed with the consumer in mind, the Bakkarwal producer gets much less than their deserved price - there is a chain of middlemen, each securing their pound of flesh, literally.

The Case of Mohamed Yakoob

Take the case of Mohamed Yakoob of Kosslian village in Poonch. He is a Bakkarwal with 25 goats and 25 sheep - 50 animals in all. The best price he gets for a goat is Rs. 5,000 around the time of Qurbani, or Eid. In the marketplace, that sheep is sold for no less than Rs. 10,000, Yakoob says. Yakoob is aware that the economic equation works against him and others of his ilk. The risks are high. "I am not sure how many of my 50 animals will return from the mountains. Life there is tough for both, man and animal. At 14,000 feet, the goats start panting for breath and die of heart-attacks."

Over 6 months, Yakoob says he spends about Rs. 25,000 on the 50 animals that he has given to a neighbour to graze because he could not make it to the mountain because of his old age. In winter he has to buy maize and leaves. Maize costs him Rs. 1,800 for a quintal and he needs 18 quintals for the feed of 6 months when they are back home. With transport costs, the maize alone costs him Rs. 35,000. Local farmers lease him trees for the goats to pick the leaves from at Rs. 2,000 per tree and he needs at least 15 trees for his 50 goats - Rs. 30,000 gone there.

Veterinary medicine costs him Rs. 5,000 for 50 animals, if there is no outbreak of diseases. But in case an infection like the Foot and Mouth disease breaks out, Yakoob has to spend another Rs. 5,000 on the vaccination - it costs about Rs. 3,000 to buy the vaccines and another Rs. 2,000 to give to the veterinarian or livestock compounder or stockman who comes to vaccinate the animal (never mind if these are people in government employment, as they demand this price to reach the herd too). In fact, when the animals fall ill, usually in an epidemic situation, the expenses go well above Rs. 10,000 for the 50 animals.

These are just some bare, and very minimal, expenses that Yakoob has no option but to bear. He pays Rs. 1,000 for the permit to cross the Pir Panjal range. Yakoob also estimates that policemen take 1 goat from among some 300 goats that flock together either way. Some goats are lost to snakebites, Yakoob says, and some perish from consuming poisonous grass. Then, there are hailstorm, snowfall, and lightening incidents that are becoming much too common with each passing year.

Female sheep and goats reproduce each year providing him 1 replacement, and he should have lady-luck smiling upon him to be able to sell 30 animals in a year - obtaining about Rs. 1.5 lakhs. (In reality, his average sale of animals is about 20 heads). Buying and transporting food and fuel in the mountains is expensive he says, and Yakoob is left with very little in a year.

With a 50-strong herd, Yakoob is an average Bakkarwal. He says that in a good year, he saves about Rs. 70,000. But even this income comes in trickles, and he has to pay huge interest on

the loans he accrues from others in the animal husbandry ecosystem. The shop selling him veterinary medicines, for instance, gives the medicines to him on credit-basis because Yakoob doesn't have the money to pay him upfront. The interest on the loaned sum is Rs. 3 for every Rs. 100 loaned for each passing month - or simply, 36 per cent per annum.

Given that many animals die and in instances when the Bakkarwals are left with nothing due to an act of God, there is little that the Bakkarwals can bank upon. Till a decade ago, Yakoob would shave wool off his sheep and sell it to middlemen arriving at his doorstep. But with the changes in wool procurement and with no help from the Central Wool Development Board, there are no takers for his wool. In such a situation, the only help they could possibly get is from the market - and that, as we all know, is a cruel system to leave the vulnerable Bakkarwal to!

Tribal Sub-Plan - No Planning. No Participation

Of the step-motherly treatment meted out to the Gujjar and Bakkarwal tribes, Zakir Hussain says, "*Hum pe Jammu bhi zulam karta hei; Kashmir bhi zulam karta hei. Hum pathar bhi nahi maarte hein!*" (Both, Jammu and Kashmir torment us - while we don't even pelt stones!).

The sub-plan for scheduled tribes (Tribal Sub-Plan or TSP) is hardly seen in action. Community leaders say that there has never been any participation in planning for any governance activity. Shahnawaz Choudhary, a District Development Council (DDC) member in Surankote, says that TSP money is used for rural development, usually where tribal families are few in number,

and not spent exclusively on the tribal families. This way, the TSP money benefits non-tribal people. Likewise, Choudhary says, special projects like the cluster model remain incomplete for lack of money.

In almost every district, the TSP has thus far been clubbed with the rural development budget. Many tribal leaders complain that money from the TSP is tactfully diverted to villages with very little tribal population so that it benefits the dominant non-tribal residents as well. In Mendhar, Gujjar tribal leaders spoke of water points in villages being installed closer to the residences of non-tribal families, though these have been constructed with funding from the TSP. Imran Zaffar, a member of the DDC of Mendhar's Block Mankote, says that the disbursement of funds and allocations of budgets has been disproportionate. "Areas with a small fraction of tribal population have got the same funds as an area with a handful of tribal households. As a result, the gains from the tribal sub plan have also accrued to non-tribal population and even to the upper castes."

There is a clear case for district administrations to be sensitised with regard to the framework for planning and monitoring of projects under the TSP. Evaluation and reporting of expenditures against the sub-plans must also adhere to the guidelines in spirit.

Conclusion

"If a person from Balnoi village in Mankote were to rise out of his grave after a hundred years, he would see no difference - the place has seen no development." Imran Zaffar paints a

forbidding picture. His words are not harsh, but they are telling of the abject lives of the Bakkarwal tribal people. This perhaps sums up the state of development in the region and for its tribal populace.

Around 96.23 per cent of migratory tribal families migrate with their livestock, where they reside for 4 to 6 months and return to their permanent places of residence before the advent of the winter season.

Of the total population of 49,753 surveyed in Rajouri, only 19,362 people had an Aadhar card. Worse yet, only 1,427 people had an election photo identity card. An Aadhar Card is essential for obtaining their entitlements like rations. The low coverage of voter identity cards is a comment on the prevalence (or lack of it) of universal adulthood franchise.

Tribal people want the youth from among them to be recruited to teach their children in the mobile schools. They also want mobile Anganwadi centres where their children can be nourished - and want one of their own to handle such a centre. This will improve accountability and help address child malnutrition. This is one of the foremost demands put across by tribal people and their leaders in every tribal community that the study took the KYARI team to. Similarly, they say that a mobile ASHA worker from the community itself will ensure the good health of the migratory tribal populace. With a little skill training, the mobile ASHA can double up as a midwife.

E-governance tools can help reduce (better still, eliminate) corruption by lower-level government officials like policemen and forest guards. The unavailability of Aadhar cards need not be an impediment here. This will mean providing mobile coverage to the Bakkarwals along their migratory routes and also provide the families with a mobile phone. Very possibly, a smartphone will help the children in their education too.

Housing in the *Dhokes* is an insult to citizens of a 21st century democratic country. It is important to extend the provision of government housing scheme like the PMAGY to tribal families. A survey was done by the Integrated Village Development Scheme of the J&K administration in 2022 and approved funds for 535 settlements. These settlements could do with better facilities propelled by solar equipment.

A Market Regime for their Produce and Animal Husbandry Practices

Likewise, for the health of their livestock and their production and management, it is important to have a mobile veterinary assistant or compounder or stockman for ensuring the health of livestock during the transition.

To improve their socio-economic lives, government interventions must make remunerations for the Bakkarwals more attractive, if not handsome. The Bakkarwals are not a potent political force, but they have often done more for securing the country's borders than any other single community in the country. Yet, unlike food-grain producers, they do not have access to a minimum support price regime for their produce. A market regulatory body that the Bakkarwal community can participate with and obtain a more remunerative price for their produce will be

a big help. There are advanced technologies to produce dairy products with goat and sheep milk and these should be explored. Simultaneously, an intervention to procure sheep wool at the best and most competitive rates can be undertaken. This will provide the Bakkarwals with the much-needed support.

Earlier studies have pointed to a prevalence of fair to good degrees of experiential knowledge on sheep and goat rearing amongst the Bakkarwals. The animal husbandry department can undertake mobile education camps for the herders to provide them with better knowledge on livestock production and management; and provide them with minimal skills to handle livestock. For instance, there is no practice of isolating diseased sheep and goats or of intermediary individuals quarantining themselves to prevent entire herds from perishing in the event of a disease.

Helping them to identify and handle disease among goat and sheep herds will have an overarching influence on the community's welfare, considering that the Bakkarwals are entirely dependent on these for a living. A lot can and should be done to developmentally improve the quality of life of our nomadic pastoralists, keeping in mind their necessity, history, and most importantly, lifestyle.

ENDS

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