

# Pastoralist communities as invisible migrants and their policy exclusion.

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## 1. Introduction:

Diversity in India has led to coexistence of a lot of communities or social groups which at lot of times are either represented to a majoritarian extent or to a middle ground where you have enough population which can raise awareness for the communities and alas at last you have communities whose existence is even considered a bane.

Pastoralist community in India, “members of caste or ethnic groups with a strong traditional association with livestock-keeping, where a substantial proportion of the group derive over 50% of household consumption from livestock products or their sale, and where over 90% of animal consumption is from natural pasture or browse and where households are responsible for the full cycle of livestock breeding.” (1)

in this policy article we will be trying to understand how has this community survived despite all the exclusion and exploitation they have faced.

## 2. Background of the community

### a) Pre-colonialism:

Before the colonial intervention, the pastoral communities had the agency to regulate their laws, rights and relationships. These movements were not seen as unsystematic by the settled communities and that’s why pastoralism was functioning effectively as a source of livelihood for a long time.

India was connected to Afghanistan through an incredible migratory flow between the two regions, this was before the nineteenth century. A Pathan tribe called the Powindahs migrated annually to Punjab and the plains of India from Central Asia (around Ghazni, Kandahar, Bokhara). These tribes where not nomadic or herders they also carried livestock and goods for trade and of course their families. They carried out a well planned and cyclical movement by grazing in India in winters and returning to uplands in summers, however were not fixed by the calendar making it difficult to regulate for the officials later on.

Some of the things that were brought into the Indian market by them were grapes, almonds and salt from hills or mines. Within the broad group of the community firstly you had rich traders who bought families with a fixed camping areas called *kirris*. Secondly, laborers and poorer pastoralists who moved without families. The travel through these passes was not safe, as attacks on massive caravans or *kafilas* was common they often carried arms, shields and trained men who could protect them.

Access to the pasture lands in area like the Himalayan low hills (Kangra) was accessible to all the group however, divided into a grazing circuit called a *ban*, shared among several families. Each of these *bans* were claimed by a specific *Gaddi* family as a form *warisi*, a title which originated from a *pattah* (local *raja* bestows a grazing area to a Gaddi family to graze in a specific run).

*Warisi* was recognized not as a landlord imposing rent rather than that of a leader who formed the course of migration and grazing. He even acted as a diplomat if conflicts arose between the fellow pastoralists and ensured safety in areas where accidents or attacks might happen. Even though he had all these powers he still did not have exclusive rights on the land, pastures were still used collectively, the incentive of this was exploitation and hierarchy was avoided making the system more functional. (2)

b) Colonialism:

The annexation of Punjab by the Britishers, gave an incentive to the imperialist by opening up the trade routes to Punjab and hence, pastoral groups like the *Powindah* were encouraged. They thought that these routes might become an entry point into the Central Asian market and replace the Russian assertion.

As of the lack of local knowledge the British interfered with the basics of *Powindah* groups, leading to tribal feuds and banditry, hence destabilizing the pastoral routes and safety. *Tirni* or the grazing taxes were firstly imposed and then raised tremendously high in the 1870s and 1920s, adding economical pressure on the groups. The imposing forces had even distributed land to the loyal tribal groups, which further disputed with collective tribal rights.

The groups obviously travelled with well-armed protection however as of the disarmament policies on the colonial border, left camps vulnerable to raids. Despite of these the community tried to adapt, they avoided patrol post, resisted taxation by even forcefully taking back the livestock taken by the British and biggest of all they even accepted new transport like railways and lorries for efficiency in trade. With the advent on 19<sup>th</sup> century the pressure further increased which was increasingly felt by groups like *Bhattis*, *Joiyas*, *Wattus* and *Bodlas*. However, the co-existence of pastoralism and agriculture was accepted through clearing of forests and ploughing the soil by Sikh Jats in north, Bagri Jats in south, and Muslim Jats and Rajputs (Sutlej). Nevertheless, pastoralism was still their primary activity. We can see a pattern of interdependence between the two, as you see in agricultural plains bullocks outnumbered cows as they were needed for irrigation, however for pastoral plain we see the reverse, 90% of bullocks were sold at these fairs.

Central Punjab had agency because of consistent drainage and irrigation derived from the availability of fertile and alluvial soil which were being crossed by many rivers like the Sutlej, Beas and Ravi. As the Jamuna mainly deposited sand rather than loam in the south, the rivers became scarce and the soil less fertile and sandier. Even the rainfall was less in south-east with 10-20 inches, surely 10 inches behind Hissar and Ferozepur. This left south-east vulnerable to droughts. With 15 famines and two major famines in the nineteenth century led to a disturbing period. In areas like Sirsa, out of six, five harvests failed between 1919-1921, while Gurgaon, Rohtak and Hissar between 1928-1935 there was widespread crop failure.

Fortunes of these communities specifically the *Powindah's* seemed to have hurt more by the constraints of overcharging in India and deteriorated trade of Central Asia than the difficulties in grazing. Active trade tribes like the *Lohanis* and *Suleiman Khels* stopped coming to India by the 1940s And the primary tribes of India like *Dawtanu* and *Tarkai* continued their annual migration. However, after 1947 all was set and done all the routes fell through and India lost a lot of pastoralists communities. (2)

c) Current:

As we have seen pastoralism can be a great contributor to your economy, however because of the inefficient policies this community has been sidelined time and time again. Even when we talk about documentation the more visible communities in western India, such as *Rebari/Raika* and *Bharwad*, as well as some of the Himalayan region like *Gaddis*, *Gujjaes* and *Kinnauras* get more recognition where as some are non-existent and may never be even reported.

Now about the basic patterns that the Indian pastoralist communities follow are horizontal and vertical practices in drylands and mountainous areas, respectively. For example, *Bakarwals* move to Jammu and Punjab in winter and Kishtwar and others higher alpine areas of Kashmir Himalayas in summer months.

Now, posing the current scenario, we have the community is increasingly being displaced from protected areas, hence their livelihood is directly impacted the government does not recognize their land rights or allows continued access to pastures. (1) The system has become increasingly unattractive for them as they became encroachers as the government took the ownership of the forest area. (3)

3. Policy exclusion and consequences

a) Social protection exclusion:

i. National Commissions for De-notified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribe (NCDNT):

For the longest time this community was notified as 'born criminal' during the British regime, who even passed a law called Criminal Tribes Act of 1871. However, after independence you would think that these might have finally given the recognition they deserved but all fell out of the drain. Commission were made even the criminal law was abolished, nevertheless these were still subjected to high handed treatment and exploited by the system in power and the society.

NCDNT constituted in 2006 launched the welfare of the DNTs. These tribes were deprived of constitutional support unlike the scheduled tribe and scheduled caste, despite having an estimated population of 10.74 crore (census 2011). In February of 2014 in order to form a state-wise list a commission was formed and the final report came by 2018.

Even though we see that the government did eventually get somewhere, however what of the system failure that this community has faced that too

at three levels, firstly at the hands of imperialism, secondly the government who is supposed to protect them and thirdly by the stigmatization of the community (3). If this is not social exclusion, then what is?

ii. Sikkim Forests Cattle Trespass Rule (1998):

The state of Sikkim, implemented a ban on grazing from the protected area in 1998. This saw a major eviction from 2000-2002, of people how generations have been herding yaks, cattle and sheep from these areas. This resulted in a major exclusion of locals and especially herders from Khangchendzonga National Park (KNP). The herders were told about sensitization and their views of grazing and the impact on biodiversity were never sought out for.

Let's look at the aftermath of this firstly, ecological effects include a decline in vegetation in the high-altitude summer pastures, meaning non-native species is introduced. Secondly, plantation and fencing were done in Khasmal and Gaucharans previous grazing grounds, department planted fruit bearing tree like again altered the local biodiversity. Thirdly, the whispers of eco-tourism, this at the expense of a whole community its livelihood is irreparable, as only some pastoralist got the benefit at a very scare scale. Majority of the stake was claimed by local elites and external tourism operators (4).

iii. Forest Right Act (FRA) 2006:

The idea behind this was to give agency to the pastoral community, meaning you have right to make decisions about the place you are living in and derive your livelihood hood.

How did this backfire. Incomplete recognition of Community Forest Right's (CFRs), this in impending because of the forest bureaucracy's resistance of the local powers. Often the groups become open to voluntary rehabilitation as of which forests are compromised for the construction of dams or mining without the consent of the group.

The community's literacy rate is already low and implementation of digital processes, like the VanMitra software in Madhya Pradesh future makes the system inaccessible.

For a policy that was introduced for the well-functioning of the community has further deprived the community of its status in the society (5).

4. Climate change

As we currently see the impacts of the climate change on a non-pastoralist level, then the effects of the same on someone who derives their food from the nature around them would be adversely affected.

Livelihood resilience is something that needs to be advocated for these people. Public policy focusing on information access, environmental awareness and conservation, which could actually lead to some development for this community.

At this point even these communities see the need of resilience, they can already feel the change as of temperature shifts and pasture shifts. The government should try to build institution through this like education and health, which would generate more human resources for the overall benefit of the community, by primarily consulting the community in itself. This can only happen when the system stops looking at them as a part of problem rather a way to strengthen the marginalized (6).

## 5. Conclusion

Growing up in a place where *Gujjar* is considered a curse, I never considered my father's roots 130km away from Srinagar, important. However, as you get to know about the struggles and damage this community has faced and despite that fights for rights and representation you are genuinely surprised. Through this I have hoped to show the representation of community who has lost everything except for its roots. These communities even when they try to adapt through modern transportation or agricultural commercialization the essence of what this community still remains.

This is actually catastrophic when a community which could have been used for the betterment for the biodiversity and society, is ignored at such a large scale. In the future we hope that these policies are ignored and actual representation is taken into consideration.