



# COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND BAKARWAL PASTORALISTS ISSUES

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper studied the condition of Bakarwal pastoral nomads at the time of COVID-19 pandemic and how it gives birth to different kinds of issues and caused poverty and hunger like conditions among the Bakarwal pastoralists. The results of the study conclude that marginal people suffered a lot in comparison to salaried people. The economic activities has been halted which put economic burden on this marginal community.*

## INTRODUCTION

Globally COVID-19 pandemic brought unprecedented challenges for human society. Nearly ten millions people are at risk of falling into the extreme poverty. Nearly half of the world's workforces are at risk of losing their livelihoods. Non-salaried workers are vulnerable because of the lack of social protection and access to quality health care. "No income means No food" or less nutritious food during lockdowns (WHO 2021). This chapter talks about how the COVID-19 pandemic condition and lockdown add to more poverty among the pastoralists who are already comes under the category of economically marginal community. Pastoralists do not have permanent land, they move from one place to another. Thus the resources endowment and entitlement during COVID-19 pandemic time has declined and stopped, which again raise the poverty among pastoralists. Worldwide pastoralism is an occupation for nearly 20 million households; it produces ten percent of the meat and covers about 25 per cent of world land area (Blench 2001). It is one of the most viable economic systems in the areas where cultivation is not possible. Pastoralism provides employment, income, and controlling the national boundaries. Pastoralism has some direct and indirect benefits such as the sale of milk, wool, hides and skin, meat and some of the unmeasured economic benefits like transport, manures, employment, and environment management (Davies and Hatfield 2007).

Most of the research reports stated that COVID-19 pandemic condition brought livelihood challenges for the marginal community such as

pastoral nomads that depends upon traditional economic activities with simple technology. Globally COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown brought poverty and hunger among the marginal communities. Pastoral nomads are among the marginal community who earn their livelihood from nomadic life. Huge dependency of world population on this livelihood strategy besides, posses a large number of characteristics, it is important to study what challenges faced by them during lockdown period. This study takes Bakarwal pastoral nomad community of Jammu and Kashmir as a case to study the challenges faced by pastoralist community in the Western Himalayan region at the time of lockdown.

**Who are Bakarwal:** Bakarwal, a pastoral nomadic community is found in Jammu and Kashmir State of India (Casmier and Rao 1985) and Kunhar valleys of Northern Pakistan. Bakarwal in Jammu and Kashmir has got the status of 'Schedule Tribe (ST)' under the Constitution Amendment Act 1991, No.36 of 1991 (Government of India 1991). According to Census of India, the absolute population of Bakarwal in Jammu and Kashmir is 1,13,198 persons that constitute about 7.5 per cent of tribal population of the state. Pastoral nomadic Bakarwals spend their winter in the Jammu Shiwaliks and summer in the alpine pastures up to Drass of Kargil district.

The winter camps of the nomadic Bakarwals are situated between 400-1200 meters above mean sea level in Rajouri, Poonch, Udhampur, Reasi, Samba, Kathua and Jammu districts. These camps are found in the dun valleys and narrow valleys of middle mountains that has an uneven topography and subtropical vegetation. The area experiences hot summer in May and June and cold winter season in January and February; it receives monsoon rainfall



during July and August and western disturbances bring rainfall during the months of December and January. The summer pastures are located at 3500-4500 meters above mean sea level.

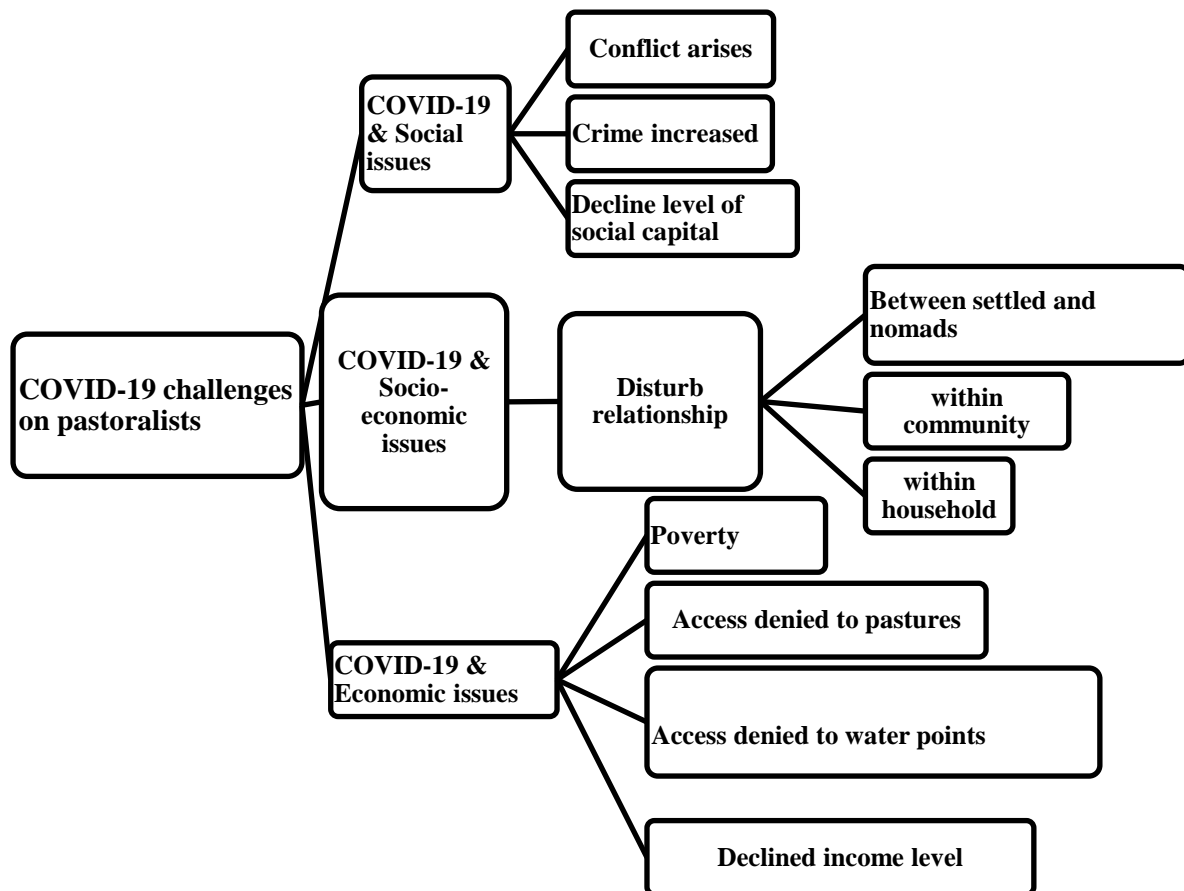
The summer camps of Bakarwals are located in Matayan in Kargil, Pahalgam, Maru, Gurez, Wardwan valley, Kishtwar, and Drass. During autumn and spring season Bakarwal migrate and cross seven different altitude zones; Pir Panjal pass route and Banihal pass route are two main routes used for seasonal migration (Khatana 1985).

Bakarwal historically belongs to pastoral nomadic community of Jammu and Kashmir but due to social change, cultural pressure and political instability their tradition of nomadic pastoralism has been disturbed and some Bakarwal have settled permanently. Bakarwal today classify themselves as fully nomadic, semi-pastoral, and agriculturalist. Some pastoral nomads have left their traditional lifestyle and settled, but many are still practicing it in original form. The economy of Bakarwal pastoral nomads depend on the products obtained from their

livestock. They obtain products for self-consumption as well as for market (Khatana 1985). During the summer season they sell aged livestock in the Kashmir valley, some pastoral nomads also do other primary economic activities with livestock keeping such as hunting, fishing collection and sale of medicinal herbs.

**Livelihood assets:** Livelihood assets are the means of production offered to a given community that can be used in their livelihood activities. In general, the larger and more diverse the asset base the higher and more durable the level of sustainability and security of livelihood. DFID (1999) provides five types of capital for a sustainable livelihood. These are natural, physical, human, financial and social. It is proved that the five capitals working together provide protective cover to livelihood. During lockdown the entitlement and endowment to these resources declined which raise the level of poverty among pastoralists.

**COVID-19 Pandemic and Increase in Pastoralists Issues**



**Figure 1. COVID-19 Pandemic and Increase in Pastoralists Issues**



**Access denied to pastures:** In the winter and transit habitat Bakarwal pastoralists share the common pastures. The pastures in winter camps are locally called as *Sardiyon-ki-Charagah*. Geographically these are located on Siwalik range of Himalaya. The pastures are characterized by an abundance of bushes, fodder plants, moderate water supply and sometimes water scarcity in the months of April to July. The transit pastures are located at an altitude of 2400 m above MSL. Pastures like Ratan Pir Panjal, Ladha Dhar, Dudu Basant Garh, Sanasar. The same pastures are also utilized by the Doddhi Gujjar at the time of June when there is scorching heat in the plains of adjoining Punjab and Jammu. Here, Bakarwal spent their 10-25 days or depending upon the availability of pastures or circumstances. At the time of lockdown Bakarwal were targeted by the settled community in charge of spreading virus and carrying virus from one place to another place. Nomads those make their tent in the vicinity of village, they were targeted by the villagers especially in the winter and transit camps. During this time pastoralists are even restricted to walk on the road in the susceptibility of carrier and spreader of COVID-19 virus.

**Access denied to water points:** Bakarwal shared the common water points such as *Baoli* (spring). There is no regular treated water supply for the nomadic people. *Baoli* (spring) is the source of drinking water for the community in winter camps. *Baoli* (spring) can be seen in hilly parts of Jammu and Kashmir. It is square in shape; average size is 4x4 square feet. Small size *Baoli* is called "*Baan*" and the large size is called "*Naun*" (Singh, 2014). In the beginning of COVID-19 virus the pastoralists were restricted to draw water from the common sources from where the villagers draw water during that time pastoralists were forced to drink water from the unhygienic sources.

**Decline level of social capital:** Social capital is a set of social relationships upon which people draw in pursuit of their livelihood that is important for the operation of livelihood activities. Social capital implicates social resources, including informal networks, membership of formalized groups and relationships of trust that facilitate co-operation (Sayer and Campbell 2004). For example networks, group membership, access to institutions, relationship, trust etc. Among Bakarwal this can be determined in terms of access to various services which are important for a livelihood like access to government services, market, credit etc. Social capital plays an important role among the pastoralists livelihood. Networks and connectedness, either vertical (patron/client) or horizontal (between individuals with shared interests) that increase trust

and ability to work together and expand their access to wider institutions, such as political or civic bodies, membership of more formalized groups which often entails adherence to mutually-agreed or commonly accepted rules, norms and sanctions; and relationships of trust, reciprocity and exchanges that facilitate co-operation, reduce transaction costs and may provide the basis for informal safety nets amongst the poor (DFID 1999). Nature of Social capital is frequently determined by the social class of stakeholders such as caste/class, sex and age. High local value of social capital clearly derives its capacity of compensating calamities. During the lockdown period the level of social capital declined and the relationships between settled community and nomads disturbed.

**Disturb relationship between settled and nomads:** villagers sell cereals such as maize and wheat. From the market or town they purchase tea, raw salt, spices and oil. They also purchase tools, tent fixtures. For their cattle, they purchase fodder, stubble and hay. Settled people those who have enough land they offer Bakarwal nomads to settle or farm part-time. Some farmers also offer them to stay the sheep in their farms for manure purpose. But during COVID-19 time, these relations were breakdown due to susceptibility of nomads as a carrier and spreader of COVID-19 virus. Relations were not only brake down between nomads and settled people but within pastoralist relations were affected due to pandemic such as *Pai-Chara* which is a group comprised of *dera* who come together to form a group for the efficient grazing and care of their animals. This functional unit provides labour, sharing of livestock, management of pastures and water bodies. It is a temporary functional grouping which changes year by year or according to the relationship with each other. The ultimate viability of the unit depends on the size of herd and labour availability. It is seen that relatives rarely creates the functional unit only non-relatives develop this functional unit. This institution of support within community badly affected due to COVID-19 pandemic.

**Economic issues:** the sale of livestock products tremendously affected due to non-functioning of market. Livestock and slaughtering business tremendously affected during pandemic. The demand of livestock declined. Bakarwal main source of income is goat and sheep sale which affect to their income and standard of living. Besides income coming from the livestock sale pastoralists are also engaged in daily wage laboring, employing their horse and mules in the tourist areas all these activities were greatly affected due to lockdown which indirectly affect the income level of pastoral nomads.



**Income and economic exchanges:** Bakarwal pastoral nomads have always been part of an economic system that included villagers and townspeople. They depend on the settled population in a symbiotic relationship that includes pastoral, trading and agriculture. Bakarwal pastoral nomads sell the products of their herds to villagers which include milk and dairy products such as cheese and ghee, meat (often as live goats and sheep for the markets), wool, skins, hides, hair. Bakarwal also hires out their transport animals like horses and mules to villagers or during Amar Nath pilgrimage in Kashmir. During lockdown this relationships has totally disturbed and pastoralists badly affected.

**Decline income from supplementary sources of income:** Bakarwal livelihood not only depend upon the sale of livestock but they also depend upon the sale of other products that they sale such as herbs, wool, milk etc. Agriculture (crops), forest collection (items), working as a shepherd (*Ajri*), daily wage labouring, remittance, interest, wool, hides/skin, goat hair (*jatt*), milk, ghee, weaving of wool. Forest collection items such as medicinal plants provides supplementary incomes to many Bakarwal pastoralists, also used as traditional remedies to cure the diseases, especially in areas which are poorly served with modern medicine availability or which are not treated with modern medicines. They collect wild honey. Bakarwal also engaged in collecting minor forest produce and sell it either in the market or work under the agents or contractors but due to lockdown these activities restricted and badly affected their livelihood. Every Bakawal pastoralists strategy always attempts to raise its livestock number up to the labour potential a household have but due to Covid-19 pandemic period the productivity of livestock has been declined. Beside it the government support has also declined during this period for example the pastoralists get government supports in term of material as well as non-material supports such as blanket from the government at the time of the extreme climatic event. But during lockdown period the support and access has denied.

**Conflict arises:** conflict arise over common resources. Pastoralists share the common resources in the winter camps with settled villagers. The COVID-19 pandemic condition makes horror among the settled villagers thus the pastoralists livestock and pastoralists itself were targeted and restricted to graze their livestock in the common grazing sites where settled villagers livestock graze. It is always seen that resources are controlled and mostly utilize by the powerful whereas the marginal are forced to live in the marginal environment area same can be seen during this pandemic time, nomads were forced to live outside the settled society in the marginal areas.

**Crime increased:** The issue of livestock theft has increased in their areas health issues have increased due to non-functioning of health sector. Untouchability and creating distance from the nomads has been increased. The settled community start making distance from them in fear of that they move from one place to another place and carry virus. Social remoteness has increased; pastoralists forced to live in remoteness from the settled community. The decline in income level directly affect on the standard of living, whereas they are already facing poverty.

## CONCLUSION

The research concludes that nomads faced various issues at the time of pandemic and lockdown period, during this time the access to various basic services such as access to water, transhumance routes, common grazing sites, health services has been halted. Moreover, environment of crime and conflict incidents has increased. During this time the demand for pastoralists' products such as raw mutton and milk has been declined and brought economic loss. All these issues put a great pressure on the livelihood of Bakarwal pastoralists.

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