

Vangujjar-Hindi Musalman Transhumance of Uttranchal

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ABSTRACT Hindi Musalman are not homogenous population and are divided on the basis of religious denominations, affiliations with schools of legal jurisprudence. Research among these sociobiologically distinct and divergent entities is still conducted within the framework bequeathed by the British who considered it as a population aggregate from across the frontiers of Bharatvarsh. The present paper is a case study of a transhumance small group referred to as Vangujjar since its abode is Sivalik and Garhwal hill ranges. A Musalman group often projected by the media as a Vegetarian Musalman. The pre-change cultural practices indicate their faith in gotra system and their occupation of rearing buffalos in the higher reaches of Himalayas is being threatened since their traditional rights and customary practices of utilizing the forests for fodder, fuel and temporary shelter are being abrogated with the promulgation of the forest area as wild life sanctuary or reserved forest by the concerned state governments.

INTRODUCTION

India is multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country. People belonging to many religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Christianity and Islam live in this country since time immemorial. However, there appears to be substantial differentials in the socio-economic and demographic profiles of major religious communities, mainly emerging from socio-cultural and historical reasons.

It must be emphasized that various religious groups in India especially Musalman are not homogeneous population. They are divided and subdivided into innumerable qoum, biradari, zat, kunba, khandan, sects and cultural entities. If we have Shafi in Kerala and Lakshadweep, we have Shia, Sunni, Wahabi, Sufi too. Within Shia we have Asna Ashariyah, Zaidiyah, Dawoodiya, while within Sunni we have Hanafi, Maliki, Hambali, Firangimahali, Deobandi, Barelwi besides innumerable cultural entities such as Meo, Gujar, Jat, Tyagi, Khoja, Mansoori, Memon, Momin and so on and so forth (for details see Rizvi et.al., 2000). They speak different languages, attire differently and practice diverse customs and rites.

It is our view that studying socio-economic

differentials in India at the level of religious aggregations is simplistic and hence not favoured by many researchers. Nevertheless academic research has to reflect the socio-economic and cultural realities of its age. In order to make objective assessment of this reality we may have to go back to relevant facts and figures found in the records.

Research among Musalman is still conducted within the framework bequeathed by the British and some nationalist writers. The categories used to define them have been questioned but not changed. There is still talk of a "Muslim mind" a "Muslim outlook" and an inclination to construct a "Muslim Identity" around Islam. A sense of otherness is conveyed in such image.

Musalman are made to appear different in the present media, in some literary works and in the world of cinema. In this respect there is often a striking convergence between the 'secular' and 'communal' perspectives.

At the outset, it must be borne in mind that a Musalman like his counterpart in any other community has many diverse roles to play. He is not cast in the role of a religious crusader or a relentless defender of the faith. Besides being a follower of Islam by birth and training, a Musalman and for that matter a Hindu or a Sikh, is a peasant or a landlord, an industrialist, a student or a teacher, a litigant or a lawyer a Shia or a Sunni, a Wahabi or a Barelwi, a Bohra or a Khoja.

What did the enumerators find when the first all India census was tabulated and analysed in 1881. They found that Musalman numbered 19.7 per cent of the population. They uncovered a geographically dispersed aggregate of Musalman forming neither a collectivity nor distinct society for any purpose, political, economic and social. They found Musalman whose religious rituals had a very strong tinge of Hinduism and who retained caste and observed Hindu festivals and ceremonies. In the Bangla countryside in particular pre-Islamic ceremonies relating to birth, marriage and death continued to be observed. In

fact the diffusion of Islam in different forms ensured that this religion would present itself in many different epiphanies seen from different angles. Neither to its own adherents nor to non-Musalman did Islam seem monochromatic, monolithic or indeed mono-anything. Yet by the close of the nineteenth century the Musalman, separate and distinct from the 'others' had arrived as a community with its accompanying baggage of concepts, which bore no relationship with the ground realities.

We would not go back to time and space to draw inferences on the ethno genesis of this religious aggregation instead let us look at the growth of this population since independence. After partition of India a large number of Musalman moved over to newly carved nation. In the first census of India, taken after independence, there were 35 million Musalmans living in India. It grew at the rate of 25.6, 30.8, 30.6 and 32.76 and by 1991 there were 95 million Musalman living in India (Table 1) thus forming the largest minority.

On reviewing the distribution of Musalmans for states and union territories (Table 2) we find that Jammu and Kashmir and Lakshwadeep are the two territories wherein Musalmans are in majority (64.19 and 94.31 per cent, respectively) Musalman as dominant minority (any minority having a population share of 20 per cent and more) are found in Assam, Kerala and West Bengal. Musalman constitute about 17.33 per cent in Uttar Pradesh, 14.81 per cent in Bihar and 11.64 per cent in Karnataka (Table 3).

The analysis of data on fertility and child mortality for various states (Sharif Abusaleh, 1995) presents a comparative picture of household size of three religious populations (Hindu, Musalman and Christian). Overall the household size for Musalman, both in rural and urban areas, is higher than that of Christian and Hindu for all states and for all India. The larger household size among Musalman suggest that

Musalman by and large live in extended joint families and it also brings forth the fact that actual family size per couple is relatively higher among Musalman.

The data on differentials in fertility and mortality in general and GMFR (General Marital Fertility Rate) and TMFR (Total Marital Fertility Rate) in particular for all states exhibit that the two rates are higher among Musalman when compared with Hindu and Christians. A combination of positive growth of population and a low infant mortality rate (and also low death rate) might have enabled a growth rate of population as a whole. Does this mean that over a period of time Musalman population would exceed the Hindu population in India? An answer to this may be found in a simulation exercise undertaken in a research (Mistry, 1990). It can be deduced from this exercise that if the growth rate differentials remains unchanged over years then the Musalman base population of 1.0 per cent would increase to 19.8 per cent in 200 years period. Since Musalman constitute only about 12 per cent of total populations and that the growth rate differential is about 0.005 at the national level it is not possible that the Musalman can outnumber the Hindu for a considerable period of time to come.

We have not only inherited the demographic basis of communal consciousness through our British Colonial census commissioners who brought forth the majority-minority cleavage but also sparked off a communal debate on the size and growth of population of different religious communities as early as 1872. In the wake of communal polarization the scientific explanation of higher population growth among Musalman could find little space. The census reports mentioned reasons for higher population growth among Musalman. These include their nourishing diet, (though not supplemented with factual data on nutritional status), fewer marriage restrictions, (though not specified), widow

Table 1: Growth and distribution of population by major religions of India (1951-91)

Census Year	Total Population (millions)	Hindu (millions)	Musalman (millions)	Christian (millions)
1951	361.11	303.6	35.4	8.3
1961	428.4 (21.5)	358.8 (20.3)	44.2 (25.6)	10.5 (27.4)
1971	533.5 (24.8)	442.8 (23.7)	57.8 (30.6)	13.8 (32.6)
1981	665.3 (24.7)	549.8 (24.2)	75.5 (30.6)	16.2 (17.4)
1991	816.17 (23.79)	672.5 (22.78)	95.2 (32.76)	18.8 (16.89)

Figures in parentheses are percentage increase

1991 Census excludes Jammu and Kashmir and 33 villages of Maharashtra; 1981 Census excludes Assam.

Table 2: Population dynamics of Muslims

State/ Union Territory	1951	1961	% increase 1951-61	1971	% increase 1961-71	1981	% increase 1971-81	1991	% increase 1981-91	% to state/U.T total population (1991)
Andaman & Nicobar Island	4783	7398	54.67	11655	57.54	16188	38.89	21354	31.91	7.61
Andhra Pradesh	2410168	2715021	12.65	3520166	29.65	4533700	28.79	5923954	30.66	8.91
Arunachal Pradesh	NA	1008	NA	842	-16.47	5073	502.49	11922	135.01	1.38
Assam	1995936	2765509	38.56	3592124	29.89	NA		6373204		28.43
Bihar	4973360	5785631	32.29	7594173	31.26	9874993	30.03	12787985	29.50	14.81
Chandigarh	NA	1467	NA	3720	153.58	9115	145.03	17477	91.74	2.72
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	159	443	178.62	740	67.04	1932	161.08	3341	72.93	2.41
Daman & Diu	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	7144	NA	9048	26.65	8.91
Delhi	99501	155453	56.23	263019	69.19	481802	83.18	889641	84.65	9.44
Goa	14008	14166	1.13	32250	127.66	41317	28.11	61455	48.74	5.25
Gujarat	1451214	1745703	20.25	2249055	28.88	2907744	29.29	3606920	24.05	8.73
Haryana	NA	290438	NA	405723	39.69	523536	29.04	763775	45.89	4.64
Himachal Pradesh	15253	25619	67.96	50327	96.45	69613	38.32	89134	28.04	1.72
Jammu & Kashmir	NA	2432067	NA	3040129	25.00	3843451	26.42	NA	NA	64.19*
Karnataka	1950077	2328376	19.40	3113298	33.71	4163691	33.74	5234023	25.71	11.64
Kerala	2374598	3027639	27.50	4162718	37.49	5409687	29.96	6788364	25.49	23.33
Lakshadweep	21018	23789	13.18	30019	26.19	38173	27.16	48765	27.75	94.31
Madhya Pradesh	1050298	1317617	25.45	1815685	37.80	2501919	37.79	3282800	31.21	4.96
Maharashtra	2436357	3034332	24.54	4233023	39.50	5805785	37.15	7628755	31.40	9.67
Manipur	37197	48588	30.62	70969	46.06	99327	39.96	133535	34.44	7.27
Meghalaya	NA	23019	NA	26347	14.46	41434	57.26	61462	48.34	3.46
Mizoram	NA	203	NA	1882	827.09	2205	17.16	4538	105.80	0.66
Nagaland	520	891	71.35	2966	232.88	11806	298.04	20642	74.84	1.71
Orissa	176338	215319	22.11	326507	51.64	422266	29.33	577775	36.83	1.83
Pondicherry	NA	23470	NA	29143	24.17	36663	25.80	52867	44.20	6.54
Punjab	284993	393314	38.01	114447	70.90	168094	46.87	239401	42.42	1.18
Rajasthan	991246	1314613	32.62	1778275	35.27	2492145	40.14	3525339	41.46	8.01
Sikkim	124	1207	873.39	335	-72.24	3241	867.46	3849	18.76	0.95
Tamilnadu	1442935	1560414	8.14	2103899	34.83	2519947	19.77	3052717	21.14	5.47
Tripura	136940	230002	67.96	103962	-54.80	138529	33.25	196495	41.84	7.13
Uttar Pradesh	9028992	10788089	19.48	13676533	26.77	17657735	29.11	24109684	36.54	17.33
West Bengal	5118269	6985287	36.48	9064338	29.76	11743259	29.55	16075836	36.89	23.61

*Based upon 1981 population data

Table 3: Distribution of population according to major religious affiliations for states and union territories

State/Union Territory	All	Percent increase (1981-91)	Popu-lation	Hindu % to total population	% increase	Popu-lation	Musalman % to total population	% increase	Popu-lation	Christian % to total Population	% increase
Andhra Pradesh	66508008	24.20	59281950	89.14	24.74	5923954	8.91	30.66	1216348	1.83	(-15.14
Arunachal Pradesh	864558	36.83	320212	37.04	73.34	11922	1.38	135.01	89013	10.29	225.98
Assam	22414322	-	15047293	67.13	-	6373204	28.43	-	744367	3.32	-
Bihar	86374465	23.54	71193417	82.42	22.72	12787985	14.81	29.50	843717	0.98	13.99
Goa	1169793	16.08	756621	64.68	16.95	61455	5.25	48.74	349225	29.86	10.55
Gujarat	41309582	21.19	36964228	89.48	21.12	3606920	8.73	24.05	181753	0.44	36.96
Haryana	16463648	27.46	14686512	89.21	27.18	763775	4.64	45.89	15699	0.10	28.52
Himachal Pradesh	5170877	20.79	4958560	95.90	20.95	89134	1.72	28.04	4435	0.09	12.16
Jammu Kashmir	-	-	1930448	32.24	-	3843451	64.19	-	8481	0.14	-
Karnataka	44977201	21.12	38432027	85.45	20.66	5234023	11.64	25.71	8594478	1.91	11.12
Kerala	29098518	14.32	16668587	57.28	12.62	6788364	23.33	25.49	5621510	19.32	7.41
Madhya Pradesh	66181170	26.84	61412898	92.80	26.61	3282800	4.96	31.21	426598	0.65	21.20
Maharashtra	78937187	25.73	64033213	81.12	25.29	7628755	9.67	31.40	885030	1.12	11.26
Manipur	1837149	29.29	1059470	57.67	24.18	133535	7.27	34.44	628669	34.11	48.60
Meghalaya	1774778	32.86	260306	14.67	8.09	61462	3.46	48.34	1146092	64.58	63.06
Mizoram	689756	39.70	34788	5.05	(-) 1.30	4538	0.66	105.80	591342	85.73	42.89
Nagaland	1209546	56.08	122473	10.12	10.07	20642	1.71	74.84	1057940	87.47	70.20
Orissa	31859736	20.06	29971257	94.67	19.11	577775	1.83	36.83	666220	2.10	38.67
Punjab	20281969	20.81	6989226	34.46	12.73	239401	1.18	42.42	225163	1.11	21.75
Rajasthan	44005990	28.44	39201099	89.08	28.09	3525339	8.01	44.46	47989	0.11	21.28
Sikkim	406457	28.47	277881	68.37	30.60	3849	0.95	18.76	13413	3.30	91.20
Tamilnadu	55858946	15.39	49532052	88.67	15.15	3052717	5.47	21.14	3179410	5.69	13.63
Tripura	2757205	34.30	2384934	86.50	30.02	196495	7.03	41.84	46472	1.68	86.84
Uttar Pradesh	139112287	25.48	113712829	81.74	23.11	24109684	7.33	36.54	199575	0.14	23.04
West Bengal	68077965	24.73	50866624	74.72	21.09	16075836	23.61	36.89	383477	0.56	19.96
Andman Nicobar	280661	48.70	189521	67.53	55.61	21354	7.61	31.91	67211	23.95	39.23
Chandigarh	642015	42.16	186895	75.84	43.24	17477	2.72	91.74	5030	0.78	12.53
Dadra Nagar Haveli	38477	33.57	132213	95.48	33.45	3341	2.41	72.93	2092	1.51	3.31
Daman Diu	101586	28.62	89153	87.76	28.87	9048	8.91	20.05	2904	2.86	23.73
Delhi	9420644	51.45	7882164	83.67	51.57	889641	9.44	84.65	83152	0.88	34.97
Lakshadweep	51707	28.47	2337	4.52	29.91	48765	94.31	27.75	598	1.15	124.81
Pondicherry	807785	33.64	695981	86.16	34.56	52867	6.54	44.20	58362	7.23	16.93

No Census was conducted in Assam in 1981 and in Jammu and Kashmir in 1991

remarriage, (though sanctioned but no data whether practiced or not), and uncommonly early marriage were over shadowed by popular stereotype explanation of higher fertility (?) since Musalman is allowed to marry four times and there is religious proclivity to reproduce more number of children. But no author or social analyst ever mentioned the concept of *zabt-e-tawlid* (to restrict the progeny) engrained in practice of Islam. The data on prevalence of polygynous marriages among Musalman brings forth the fact that it is lower (5.73%) than what one finds among the Hindu (5.80%) and highest among certain tribes (15.25%). On the contrary polygynous marriages actually may decrease the fertility since more than one female marrying one male and hence likelihood of increased fertility is remote.

CASE STUDY

According to an estimate one third of a million pastoral Musalman Gujjar live in north and north Himalayas comprising parts of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal. They claim that their ancestors probably were Huns (Ephalites) who entered in Himalayas in large numbers in the fifth century. The group derives its name either from Sanskrit word 'gouchar' (meaning cow grazier) or from the name of ancient country Gurjar. In Uttaranchal they, in order to identify themselves as distinct pastoral nomads and different from settled Gujjars, refer themselves as Van-Gujjar meaning "forest dwelling Gujjars" and trace their migration from Gujrat – a place now in Pakistan (Fig. 1).

They instead of cow keeping are traditionally buffalo keepers. One of their legends claim that they were converted to Islam by Taimur when he attacked Delhi. In Uttaranchal the Vangujjar claim to have migrated from Jammu some 85 years ago and after trespassing the Himachal Pradesh reached the Garhwal Himalayas.

They still practice ancestral profession of buffalo keeping, selling of milk and milk products. According to our estimate there are about 140 families living in Mohand, Dhaulakhand, Ranipur, Asarori, Motichoor, Chandi Sabalgarh and Laldhang forest ranges of Uttaranchal while around 989 families are settled in non-hill portion of Nainital, Tehri Garhwal and Dehradun. In summer these 140 families migrate to hills and remain in vicinity of Kedarnath, Badrinath,

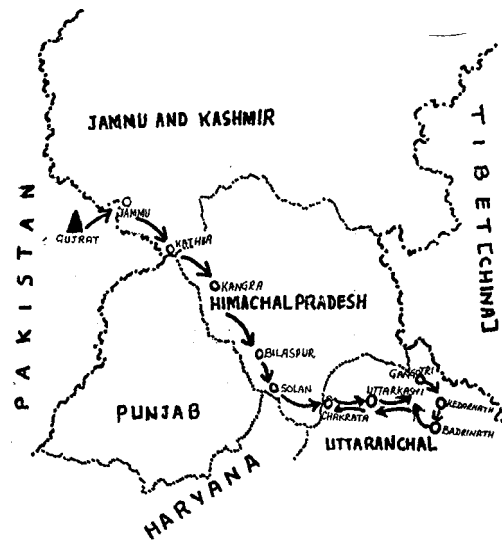


Fig. 1. Ethnogenesis of Vangujjars

Gangotri and Jamnotri ranges. The present discussion is restricted to 140 families spread over eight forest ranges in districts of Dehradun and Uttarkashi (Table 5). It would be relevant here to say a few words about their economy. Buffalo keeping still remains their main occupation. Our study shows that only 7.5 per cent families possessed land and the average land holding being 5.7 acres per family. All the studied families possessed buffaloes – the average number of buffaloes per family being 12.8. Due to poor yield and exploitation by middlemen in marketing of milk and milk products the majority of Vangujjar were found to be quite poor. It was also found that 85 per cent families were indebted.

They profess Sunni Islam and employ a 'maulwi' (religious teacher) in each 'dera' (habitation of families of one genealogy) who not only presides over the rituals but also teaches recitation of Quran. Besides he is also a medicine

Table 4: Population estimates of Vangujjar in Uttaranchal and Uttar Pradesh

District	Population size
Nainital	1418
Garhwal	606
Saharanpur	1556
Bijnaur	1749
Dehradun	1939
Total	7268

Table 5: Got of Vangujjars (Families studied for ethnography)

Forest Range	Kas.	Lod.	Pad.	Baq.	Din.	Bha.	Ch.	Ban.	P.	C.	K.	C'.	K.
Mohand	21	14	8	1	5	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
Dahulakund	5	3	2	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ranipur	2	1	2	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
Asarori	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	-	-	-
Motichur	4	-	1	-	-	-	3	-	-	2	-	-	2
Chandi	-	4	10	-	-	-	6	4	4	3	-	-	-
Sabargarh	4	3	2	-	-	-	-	5	1	-	2	1	1
Laldhang	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
Total (140)	39	26	25	1	5	1	12	14	5	5	3	1	3

Kas: Kasana; **Lod:** Lodha; **Pad:** Padhana; **Baq:** Baqri; **Din:** Dinda; **Bha:** Bhainsi; **Ch:** Chauhan; **Ban:** Bania; **P:** Pessuwal; **C:** Chachi; **K:** Khatana; **C':** Chopra; **K:** Kalas

man and holds power to performs witchcraft while dealing with diseases of men and cattle. Each family contributes for the upkeep of this 'maulwi' who generally receives training at seminary situated in Deoband near Saharanpur. He collects a fixed amount from each family and deposits the same with the seminary during his yearly visit.

The Vangujjars, on the pattern of Hindu social stratification, are subdivided into got (gotra) which are exogamous. The main gotra found are Kasana, Lodha, Padhana, Baqri, Dinda, Bhainsi, Chauhan, Chechi, Khatana and Baniya. There are many versions on genesis of gotra name. According to members of Kasana gotra the name is derived from Kansa – the well-known king who was killed by Lord Krishna. His followers formed the gotra Kasana. Chauhan is borrowed from Rajput gotra while Bhainsi most probably originated from Bhains (buffalo).

Gotra plays important role in some of the rituals associated with marriage. As for example in engagement ceremony ('kudmai') the groom's side is offered a special dish made of hot milk mixed with butter and if any member in the groom's party belongs to the gotra of bride, in such case he is not allowed to even touch the dish. Similarly in the ceremonial bath the groom can be assisted by men of his gotra only. No traces of socio-ritual hierarchy could be found among the gotra. They zealously guard their gotra system. They do not have any linkage with either other Muslim or Hindu settled Gujjars of non-Jammu and Jammu origin. Neither they have any social intercourse with the other Musalman groups of their neighbourhood.

The reasons for such social isolation may be due to their physical isolation since major part of

the year they live in the interior forests of Uttaranchal hills. Their womenfolk have hardly any chance to come in contact with non-Vangujjar. The men have only occasional contacts with others when they visit village markets or meet forest officials. They spend the winter in the peripheral forests of Dehradun, Hardwar, Saharanpur and Pauri Garhwal districts of Uttaranchal, Uttar Pradesh and Sirmour district of Himachal Pradesh. They spend summer in the grasslands (bugyals) of the higher mountains.

The group has traditionally subsisted on the breeding of buffaloes and the consequent milk products. Due to efforts of an NGO about 400 Vangujjars received training at the National Dairy Research Institute (NDRI), Karnal. This was done in order to make them interact with and understand the techniques of dairy farming, which are, till date, alien to them. This expose' may help in a shift from mere subsistence to a market oriented economy.

The partition of India raised artificial boundaries, which reduced the rangeland – the Vangujjars earlier traversed. The subsequent state boundaries of Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal further fragmented these ranges and restricted their movements to the pasture area of the forests now falling within Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal. The increase in population of cattle and their masters coupled with degradation of grass lands due to climatic changes, deforestation, road building, landslides and plethora of so called development schemes the Vangujjars are face to face with the threat of survival. It may be borne in mind that they are bound to control the growing number of buffaloes since restrictions are laid on the number

of animal units allowed within the forest ranges under the control of forest department. Herding permits have to be negotiated with the forest officials. If more animals are kept than the permits allow, bribery has to be given to the local forest officials mostly in the form of milk, milk-products and sometimes goats too. In spite of this, severe limitation is set on herd growth. They thus feel that their survival is based on the mercy of forest officials since negotiation for obtaining permit continues unabated. Their immediate problem reduces itself as how to achieve sufficient productivity from the manipulation of available livestock within the available environment so that the people may be kept alive from one year to the next. Their central concern hence revolves on the axis of survival of a whole group within the ambit of their environs.

The problem gets compounded when we observe the role of middlemen in their economy who apart from buying their milk also act as moneylenders. He advances money for all kinds of their needs like purchase of fodder on to meet marriage expenses. By augmenting debt he ensure a regular supply of milk on the rates decided by him and not by the rates prevailing in the market. Vangujjars thus irrevocably gets tied up to the middleman. Since Vangujjars are not literate hence are not in a position to maintain any accounts of transaction and therefore middlemen manage to manipulate the records and keep the Vangujjars indebted. Furthermore, during their stay in the hills they are pursued by the middlemen who collect either fresh milk whenever there is a close by market for milk and also collect 'ghee' (clarified butter) whenever transportation is more difficult.

To add to their woes the forest department wants to evict them from their niche, since the government in 1983 declared 820 sq. kms. of forest area, housing three wild life sanctuaries (Rajaji, Motichur and Chilla), as National Park. This declaration adversely affected over 3000 Vangujjar families. Their settlement sites at Pathri is to house 512 families and while in between 1983 and 2001 the number of families have grown. Moreover the Vangujjars find squalid living conditions and absence of forests in settlement area deprive their cattles from fodder and fuel for their hearths. These settlement are concrete tenements and the forest dwellers are not used to live in such structures. Even in Himachal Pradesh the concrete tenements remained unoccupied and resettled Vangujjars constructed

their huts to live in. the concrete tenements are used as storehouses. Moreover in the resettlement plans they have been allowed to keep only six animals (milching and non-milching buffaloes including calves) for the entire extended joint family, that is, the whole 'dera'. Vangujjars call this settlement as 'kalapani' as it is bounded by marshy land of Ganga on one side, by rail-track on the other side and on remaining sides are cultivated fields of local zamindars. Thus they not only have to buy fuel for their survival but also buy fodder for their cattles' survival. The local market charge higher rates and hence becomes an expensive proposition for a family, which has meager yield of milk and milk products. These are two basic necessities of a Vangujjar's life, which were met by nature when he was in forest.

There has been a demand to accord a status of a tribe to this group and the state government has forwarded its recommendations on the basis of reports prepared and supported by a number of NGOs working in this area. There are certain cultural characteristics, which set the Vangujjars apart from Musalman stereotype. They are not threat to forests and its wild life since they not only refrain from eating flesh but also do not even burn a termite eaten dead log of wood. No case has ever been recorded of a Vangujjar poaching and neither any report of any wild animal (including man-eater tigers/leopards) ever having killed any Vangujjar. Though they lop trees for fodder they lop off only the leaves as their very survival depends upon the regeneration of these leaves in the following year. They even pay tax for lopping and pay fee to obtain grazing rights too.

It may be noted here that Vangujjars are given only individual rights on forests unlike Northeast India where community rights are given for grazing and jhuming (slash and burn method of cultivation) in the forests. This individualistic based policy inherited from the British Raj continues unabated. This policy makes easier for even a forest guard to isolate and harass one single permit holder, while others who were in waiting, stand apart. This also prevents cohesiveness of the whole forest based indigenous ethnic groups. The individual rights of permit deprived them of all the opportunities to unit for their cause and struggle against corruption, deprivation and malpractices adopted by the forest officials.

What future lies ahead for nomadic pastoralism? Would this mode of production and sustenance become extinct due to shrinking of natural base? Till date the Vangujjars have survived because they had occupied a niche and producing milk from marginal land but what happens when there would be no more marginal pastureland available since the land is either turned into wasteland or being taken over by other vested interests.

It may be stated that apart from restrictions the modern world might also provide new opportunities by opening up new markets for the pastoralists' products. The fast growing urban centers close to traditional habitats of Vangujjar and emerging middle-class, who turn into consumers of milk and milk products since buying from Vangujjars is not only economical but their yield has high fat content and free from urea traces generally found in the milk supply in urban centers. It is argued that since cattles of Vangujjars graze in those pastures where the grass and other constituent fodder remains devoid of any chemical manure and hence the

animal produce too remains free from urea - a common chemical found in most of the milk samples in urban centers.

The above scenario are the social realities in which this pastoralist nomadic group has to make its choices and work out strategies. How this can be achieved - is a question only time would answer.

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