
SUSTAINING SEASONAL MIGRATION: STRUGGLES OF BAKARWALS AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Abstract: *The novel coronavirus has disrupted the lives and livelihoods of many people around the world. This muddle has been experienced in India by people in line with existing vulnerabilities. 'Bakarwal', a pastoral nomadic tribe residing in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, India undergoes this equivalent dilemma. For them, the year 2020 becomes convoluted owing to the adversaries of the pandemic. COVID-19 induced lockdown becomes an obstruction for their seasonal migration and further experiences numerous uncertainties. Keeping into view these observations, the present study explores their socio-cultural and economic struggles before, during, and after their seasonal migration. A qualitative approach was employed. Telephone Interviews using an Interview schedule were conducted. Results indicated that 'Bakarwal' tribe have undergone unfamiliar conditions with the onset of the pandemic. Movement barriers, seasonal animal diseases, the stigma of being carriers of the virus, psychological pressure, inadequate basic amenities, and loss of annual trade were the major repercussions encountered by them.*

Keywords: *Bakarwal tribe, COVID-19, lockdown, seasonal migration, novel vulnerabilities*

1. Introduction

The novel coronavirus outbreak was declared as a global pandemic by World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020. As per WHO, 2020 many diseases, epidemics, and pandemics have emerged and created threats to human life and health

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throughout history. On December 31, 2020, various cases with mysterious low respiratory infections were detected in the Hubei province of Wuhan in China and were firstly reported by WHO Country Office in China (Cascella et al, 2020). The disease was infectious and started to a blowout at an alarming rate (WHO, 2020). Shortly, the symptoms of the virus become observable which made it easy for the health care workers in recognizing the cases. WHO developed a method for weekly examination to report the online sources of misinformation and spread confirmed material on health emergencies (Purnat et al., 2021). Governments all over the world have to put various restriction and prohibitions on their citizens except Antarctica (UNDP, 2020). According to United Nations Development Plan (UNDP), the pandemic results in noticeably more than just a health care crisis. It produced an exceptional socio-economic and political crisis all around the world. The International Labour Organization (ILO) also estimates that around 400 million jobs could be lost due to COVID-19.

In India, the loss of individual lives and the economy was also witnessed due to the pandemic (Janardhanan et al., 2020). On March 24, 2020, Prime Minister declared a nationwide lockdown for initial twenty-one days in the country. The restriction and prohibitions were expected to safeguard the citizens from the spread of this disease. Indian citizens responded positively in support of the nationwide lockdown (Barkur and Vibha, 2020), whereas other studies indicated the negative implications of the lockdown. The coronavirus-induced lockdown has harmfully impacted the primary, secondary as well as tertiary sectors of the economy (Nicola et al, 2020). This economic aftermath also interrupted the socio-cultural life of the people. According to Lancet (April, 2020), the instant lockdown by the Indian government has enlarged misery among vulnerable groups. It has adversely impacted the public wellbeing institutions including education, tourism, agriculture, food sector, livelihood as well as health. A report by ILO in May 2020 titled “COVID-19 and the World of Work: A Focus on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples” illustrated that owing to the coronavirus pandemic, vulnerabilities of tribal and indigenous communities intensified. The world around the tribals experienced numerous ramifications amid COVID-19 induced lockdown and restrictions. According to a recent assessment report by the Forest Rights Act (FRA) titled “Impact of COVID-19 Outbreak and Lockdown Measures on Tribal and Forest Dwellers”, the issues faced by nomadic and pastoral communities enlarged during the coronavirus pandemic. As per Power et al., 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic has created huge disruption among the socio-cultural traditions of tribal people. Tribal communities in India were also unable to safeguard themselves from the havoc of this virus. Its ramifications reached even the remotest of the tribal villages.

One of the very significant tribal groups in the Union Territory (UT) of Jammu and Kashmir (J & K), India, is the ‘Bakarwal’ tribe. It is the second-largest tribe in the UT after Gujjars. Both Gujjars and Bakarwals share the same history, ethnicity, culture, and language besides clan structure, sub-castes/castes, and another traditional lineage. Some of the tribesmen claimed that the Bakarwals form a separate identity. They believe that Gujjars are mainly identified as cow-keepers; buffalo-keepers besides they are associated with minor agriculture produce however Bakarwals are goatherds and shepherds’ community.

The total population of the Bakarwal tribe in the UT as per Census 2011 is 113,198. It constitutes 7.58 percent of the total tribal population in J&K. They are highly concentrated in the Jammu region followed by the Kashmir region. Poonch, Rajouri, Anantnag, Udhampur, Kupwara, and Srinagar are the highly populated districts with this tribal population. It is a pastoral nomadic tribal group possessing its distinct features and culture (Dwivedi, 2018). Pastoralists can be defined as “members of a caste or ethnic groups with a strong traditional association with livestock-keeping, where a substantial proportion of the group derives over 50 percent of household consumption from livestock products or their sale, and where over 90 percent of animal’s feed and fodder is from natural pasture or browse, and where households are responsible for the full cycle of livestock breeding” (Sharma, 2003). Pastoral Nomadism can be defined as “a mode of life dependent primarily upon herding of animals and involving regular movements to new pasture lands which, from the agriculturalist's point of view, are marginal resources” (Leshnik, 1972).

Bakarwals are predominantly found in the Pir Panjal Range of the Western Himalayan Region (Sofi, 2013). They received the status in the constitutional list during 1991 (Warikoo, 2000). Bakarwals keep large herds of goats ‘Bakri’ thus; they have been named as Bakarwals by local people (Ibid). Livestock farming is the only source of income for them (Rao & Dilnaz, 2021). This pastoral community migrates twice a year to their upper summer pastures from lower winter pastures in October and returns to their summer pastures in April against all odds (Rao, 2003). They migrate with their family members, cows, buffaloes, horses, mules, dogs, goats, and sheep. Their animals couldn’t endure the same climate throughout the year. Therefore, seasonal migration is the opted coping strategy by this tribal group. The pastures fulfill the fodder needs of their cattle (Florentina and Grazia, 2014). They migrate within the districts whereas some migrate to other districts. This bi-annual migration is very demanding. They experience numerous challenges during their migration (Kumar & Kumar, 1998; Sofi, 2013). Lack of transportation facilities, overcrowded roads, and harsh climatic conditions, shrinking of pasture lands, water and fodder shortage, and lack of educational facilities for the children, military unrest, inadequate medical facilities, and dysfunctional animal husbandry centres are some of the major hurdles in their bi-annual migration (Rahi, 2013 and Kheraj et al, 2017).

Considering the existing dilemmas of bi-annual seasonal migration and the present-day challenges imposed by COVID-19, Bakarwal tribe has experienced unfamiliar distresses. The purpose of this exploratory study is to discover the muddle experienced by the Bakarwal tribe owing to the coronavirus pandemic before, during, and after their bi-annual seasonal migration from April 2020 to November 2020. The experiences of Bakarwals with delayed seasonal migration before April 2020 have been examined. The misfortune encountered by the tribes during the delayed migration were also explored.

The economic repercussions experienced by Bakarwals during the downward migration in November 2020 were also included in the study. The specific objectives of this study are:

1. To explore the impact of delayed migration amid COVID-19 on the Bakarwal tribe.
2. To examine COVID-19 induced struggles among Bakarwals during and after seasonal migration.

2. Methodology

Research Design and Approach: The present study is exploratory, conducted using a purely qualitative approach. The challenges encountered by Bakarwals amid coronavirus pandemic and lockdown are an exploration of new dimensions for social work research. In the UT of Jammu and Kashmir, very few empirical studies have explored the issues of this nomadic pastoral group during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Locale and Sample of the study: The study has been conducted in the Jammu division of the UT of J&K, India. The respondents represented all ten districts of the Jammu region. In the UT they fall into the list of Scheduled Tribes since 1991. Lokur Committee, 1965 embraced features such as “Indications of primitive traits, Distinctive culture, Shyness of contact with the community at large, Geographical isolation, and Backwardness” for considering Scheduled Tribe (Panduranga and Honnurswamy, 2014; Xaxa Committee, 2014).

Sampling Technique: The snowball sampling technique has been used to reach the respondents. Many respondents were not ready for face-to-face interviews, whereas the lockdown sets other grounds for choosing snowball sampling. As the sample population was widely dispersed, the snowball sampling technique was most appropriate.

Mobile numbers for telephone interviews with ten respondents were firstly arranged by one of the researchers, continuously engaged in tribal activism and welfare. Out of ten, four of them (mobile numbers) were contactable and six were not contactable at that time. Hereafter, the researchers relied on the existing inter-district networking among the respondents to reach the remaining six respondents. Ten respondents (Eight men and two women) were interviewed in total. The age of the respondents ranged from 25 years to 70 years. All of them were engaged in the bi-annual seasonal migration from their childhood. Pastoralism was their major source of livelihood. Bakarwals who performed bi-annual seasonal migration in the year 2020 were selected.

Sources of Data Collection: The study was empirical, simultaneously; equal importance to secondary sources was also given. Empirical data was collected by administering an open-ended Interview Schedule. Secondary data from journal articles, books, and news portals were also used for validating the results. Published journal articles and books were considered to understand the COVID-19 induced repercussions. The literature provided the base to understand the culture of Bakarwals and for framing the study tool. News portals were considered to explore the documented issues during the lockdown and also to report the similarity of responses

and issues across different regions. These issues include their pre, during, and post-pandemic socio-cultural, economic and political issues.

Tool and Procedure of Data Collection: The interview schedule was finalized after pre-testing and disquisition among the researchers. The tool was pretested on three respondents and later finalized. Telephone interviews were conducted with people belonging to the Bakarwal tribe, as suitable during the pandemic and lockdown.

Ten telephone interviews were conducted during the return migration of Bakarwals in November 2020, other than the pre-testing. The interview duration ranged between 30 to 50 minutes. Data has been collected by one of the researchers in a mixture of 'Gojri' and 'Pahari' languages. The other two authors complemented the process of preparing the tool. The final draft was prepared by all the authors jointly.

Informed Consent to participate in the study was taken orally. The prior appointment was taken from them considering their time and availability. The aims and objectives of the study were made clear to the respondents in advance. Telephone interviews were recorded on the cell phone of one of the researchers after taking their (respondents) approval. These recordings were later deleted from the researcher's cell phone. 6/10 respondents were ready for the on-spot interview, whereas 4/10 of them gave another suited time. The respondents didn't experience any inconvenience, or harm during the interviews. Researchers considered the confidentiality of names as no names are revealed in the study results. Research ethics were suitably considered while documenting the narratives too.

The interviews started from taking the demographic profile of the respondents along with their pre-pandemic experiences with bi-annual seasonal migration. Keeping in view the study objectives, the researcher interviewed the respondents on different heads: "What were the pre-pandemic issues encountered by the tribes during seasonal migration?", "What is their understanding about COVID-19 disease?", "What were the consequences of delayed migration amid COVID-19?", "Did they ever experience a similar pandemic in the past?", "What were the challenges associated with migration during a pandemic?", "What were the socio-cultural, economic and political consequences of delayed migration on their tribe?".

Data Analysis: Firstly, from the handwritten interview notes the researchers transcribed the narratives into MS Excel. The process of transcription helped the researchers gain familiarity with the responses (Bailey, 2008). Next, different codes were created after timely and comprehensive reading. These codes were later converted into different categories as already done in the tool. These categories were centered on the issues that were given much prominence by the respondents following the heads and sub-heads of the study tool. Further, four themes were created out of these categories to create a broader picture of the research issue. This process was done with dissection among the study researchers. The themes were created as per the emerging issues experienced by the Bakarwals in different dimensions. These dimensions comprised of socio-cultural, economic and political impacts of COVID-19 lockdown. Starting with the repercussions owing to the delay in the seasonal migration, the first theme emerged. The second theme mentions the tribal name for COVID-19 and its similarity with past

diseases. The third theme examined the common struggles associated with migration during COVID-19 lockdown. Hence, the fourth theme discussed the livelihood repercussions during downward migration encountered by the tribes. Data collection and data analysis were done altogether as suitable in thematic analysis (Dawson, 2002). Spoken narratives (Narrative data) were chronologically quoted in the themes to reflect their pre, during, and post-pandemic experiences with seasonal migration. The interconnection between the individual experiences and social identity was majorly established. The similarity of findings with secondary sources was also mentioned.

Limitation of the study: The study could not conduct in the entire UT of Jammu and Kashmir due to the dearth of resources and lockdown situation across the region. The study results cannot be generalized in the Kashmir region or other tribal populations, as the study includes respondents from the Jammu region only.

3. Results and Discussions

The results of the study talk about the struggles of the Bakarwal tribe during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has been primarily divided into four themes. The first part describes the impact of delayed bi-annual seasonal migration on the Bakarwal Tribe. The second part mentions the ‘*Gojri*’ name given to COVID-19 by the tribal group. The third part refers to the struggles and challenges faced by Bakarwals during seasonal migration amid COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions. The fourth part discusses the livelihood repercussions of COVID-19 lockdown during the downward migration of the Bakarwal Tribe. These themes are explained as:

Delayed Migration: A curse for Bakarwals

The delayed seasonal migration emerged as a curse to the Bakarwal tribal group. They consider this migration as empowering owing to the availability of fresh fodder for their livestock. The unexpected delay in the seasonal migration due to COVID-19 was not appreciated by them. As per the majority of the respondents (9/10) *“Bi-annual seasonal migration is the sole source of existence to the Bakarwal tribe. Life without this migration cannot be imagined by us. We are practicing this migration for ages”*.

The respondents perform this kind of migration practice as a survival strategy (10/10). The performance of this seasonal migration is quite essential for the livestock they possess. Bakarwals perform this migration as per the changing season (climatic conditions) which is April for reaching high summer pastures and November when they return to lower winter pastures. It takes one and a half months (45 days) to reach high pastures and another one and a half months to return low lying pastures. Their stay at one seasonal pasture is around four months. They carry their daily essentials with them which include: rice, maize flour, pulses, warm clothes and blankets, and utensils. They collect firewood from the nearest places and women cook the meals. Along with sheep and goats they also take horses to carry load and dogs for protection. Each Bakarwal possesses around 50-150 goats and sheep.

The respondents (10/10) mentioned that the delayed migration due to the COVID-19 lockdown appeared as a curse to their community. Their livestock were not in the position to bear the summer heat and warmth while their stay at lower winter pastures (India Spend, 2020). Fodder shortage was another dilemma for them. Unavailability of fodder in the lower pastures was one concern whereas the sole option to purchase expensive fodder from local landlords was another.

One of the respondents grieved “*Kburak ki kami se musibat aa jaegi*” which means “*lack of fodder will bring disaster for their livestock*”. Whereas many of the respondents (8/10) stated that the delayed migration and the summer heat caused certain diseases to their herd. These diseases are commonly known as ‘*Mokbar*’ in Gojri and ‘Foot Rot’ and ‘Foot Scald’ in English. This disease caused further pressure upon these tribals as it is a seasonal disease and shifting from one pasture to another is the single option for its prevention.

Bakarwals get frightened due to the COVID-19 disease as well as to the restrictions. All the respondents (10/10) were quite familiar with the health implications of COVID-19. They felt more terrified due to the strict lockdown and its restrictions. One of the respondents said, “*Bimari ka ilaj toh doctor karta hai, par hame yeh samaj nhi aaya ki police aur army ka isme kya kaam hai*”. This means that “*we know that diseases can be cured by doctors, but in this disease what role do police and army have to play*”.

As per one of the respondents “*the pandemic situation seemed more like a war to us as we experience physical violence at some places*”.

Lack of authentic information sources caused these undesirable circumstances. Thus, the delay in seasonal migration caused huge psycho-socio stress among Bakarwal Tribes. It also leads to health issues among their livestock which remained uncured for a long time.

“Bhavaa”: A tribal name for the disease

When the respondents were enquired about their understanding of COVID-19, many of them (7/10) called it “*Bhavaa*”, in their dialect. They also resemble COVID-19 with similar past diseases. Bakarwals speak the ‘*Gojri*’ language and they have their literature (Rahi, 2021). They use *Gojri* words instead of many Hindi and English words. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Bakarwals used the term “*Bhavaa*” and “*Mahamaari*” for novel coronavirus disease. As per the respondents, “*Bhavaa*” means “*something which emerges so sudden with less information available for the illnesses*”. The respondents believed that the COVID-19 disease emerged unexpectedly and so suddenly. People and health care workers also have little information regarding this disease. They also called it “*Mahamaari*” in the translation of the word epidemic to the Hindi language.

When the respondents were enquired about their encounter with similar diseases or illnesses in the past, they said (6/10) that “*not us but our grandfathers have encountered a similar disease*”. As per the respondents, “*Kalataap*” or “*Kalabukhar*” (Black fever) was also

one of the similar diseases encountered by their grandfathers. They believe that COVID-19 is similar to Black fever. Both of them appear as flu at an initial time which later becomes incurable, further causing loss of life. Thus, most of the Bakarwal respondents believed Black Fever and COVID-19 to be similar in terms of symptoms, incurability, and mortality.

Struggles and Challenges during Migration amid COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions

The study also aimed to study the struggle and challenges experienced by this tribe amid COVID-19 lockdown. In this regard, they were asked about the challenges experienced by them in terms of access and utilization of transport, market, health care facilities, animal husbandry, settling of camps, and children's education. Bi-annual seasonal migration is an inseparable part of the Bakarwal tribal group. Life without this migration cannot be imagined by them. The majority of the respondents (10/10) believe that *"The main aim of this migration is to find adequate pastures for our livestock. This migration is solely for our livestock not for individual members. Both of us (livestock and tribe) are interdependent for survival"*.

When the respondents were enquired about the difficulties they faced during upward seasonal migration amid COVID-19, many of them (8/10) responded that:

"The seasonal migration of this particular year is the most arduous one. Generally, we face numerous challenges during our migration but due to COVID-19, our struggles doubled. On one side we have to migrate on foot with our cattle and on the other side we have to bear the COVID-19 induced restrictions".

As per the respondents, it becomes difficult for them to access the market during the COVID-19 lockdown (8/10). Bakarwals carry a few eatable items with them during their tough migration and purchase additional basic items from the market. Some of the respondents (5/10) said:

"Even when the shops were open it was very hard for us to access them. Shopkeepers don't let us come near the shops. At some places, the shopkeepers closed their shops during our arrival. We were suspected to spread the virus by giving the money, or by spitting at public places. We faced so much embarrassment and stigma during this migration". During the migration Bakarwals also faced difficulty in getting testing for COVID-19. Many of the respondents (7/10) also mentioned that:

"As per the governmental directives we have to show our COVID-19 negative report to the local authorities for moving forward with the caravan. At some places, it becomes difficult for us to stay in long queues for tests and to show our reports after every few kilometers. Our cattle run here and there while meeting (showing reports and other documents) with the officials. When our cattle enter the localities, people maltreat and verbally abuse us. They think that we deliberately send our cattle to spread COVID-19. It becomes very hard to gather the cattle again in one place. This was a very troublesome situation for us".

Another issue faced by this tribal group is the lack of transport facilities. Bakarwals during their migration use local transport for easy traveling of unfit elderly, children, and women. The majority of the respondents (9/10) mentioned that:

“Sometimes we use local transport or hire private trucks for unfit family members and livestock. Due to lockdown, we cannot access local transport. There was no scope to hire private trucks and vehicles too. Due to this, it took more time for us to reach our destination”.

Bakarwals also faced serious health and educational implications due to COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions. One of the respondents mentioned that:

“We were unable to access health care facilities for elderly and children. Our children remained without medicine for around one week”.

Many of the respondents (8/10) also mentioned that:

“During COVID-19 it becomes very tough for us to access animal husbandry centres. We cannot avail medicine and vaccines for our livestock that are already facing ill health”.

Another respondent mentioned that *“Veterinary services are already inaccessible to us due to tough topography at high reaches. The additional restrictions laid by lockdown made this approachability matter more burdened”.*

The livestock of the Bakarwal tribe was already sick. Due to ‘Mokbar’ (Foot Rot), their livestock required immediate health services from animal husbandry centres. Many of them revealed grievances about veterinary services in their area (Verma, Gandhi, and Dash, 2019). Owing to the difficulty in availing of the animal husbandry services, Bakarwals faced livestock health challenges during the lockdown.

Mobile School, one of the amenities for schooling Bakarwal children also remained imperceptible during the COVID-19 lockdown. The majority of the respondents (7/10) said:

“Our children are already deprived of educational facilities. Few mobile schools which were functioning before also remained closed owing to the disease. There was no alternative for our children to study”.

The education of Bakarwal children through Mobile Schools is argumentative. Due to COVID-19, the little scope left for Mobile Schools got destroyed. Few children going to formal day schools remained inaccessible to the alternatives of “Online Education” owing to the unavailability of android mobile phones and staying at no network places. Digital Divide already prevails in the UT of Jammu and Kashmir due to digital illiteracy, poverty, geographic inaccessibility, external threats, and inadequate infrastructure (Hajam, Singh, & Rather, 2021; Hassan & Mirza, 2021). These factors adjoined the educational vulnerabilities of the Bakarwal children with COVID-19 pandemic.

In the light of the above-mentioned narratives, it can be concluded that the Bakarwal tribe had gone through numerous challenges and struggles during COVID-19. These challenges includes testing of COVID-19, showing the test reports, access to market, transport facilities, health services, and veterinary services, and educational facilities.

Livelihood Repercussions of COVID-19 lockdown during downward migration

The pastoral economy depends on the seasonal availability of products. Likewise, the economic activities of Bakarwals also rely on seasonal needs and production. Livelihood Repercussions were one of the most undesirable consequences of the lockdown for the Bakarwal tribe. The loss in trade, economic insecurity, low product pricing were some of the most highlighted challenges by them. The downward migration in November is of great economic significance among Bakarwals. During this migration, they used to sell their products to the dealers and earn their living. The month of November is usually the time of rituals and marriages that embrace huge demand for mutton and meat. The Bakarwals used to sell their goat and sheep to the local traders. Along with this, they also vend the wool of their sheep at the local wool centres. During the COVID-19 lockdown, marketplaces almost remained closed. This situation placed the traditional livelihood of Bakarwals in increased desolation and insufficiency. As per almost all of the respondents (9/10):

“We used to sell our goat and sheep during this period. This year the market shutdown declined our annual income and destroyed our traditional livelihood systems”.

Another respondent said:

“This year due to COVID-19 we were obligate to sell the wool for Rs. 5/kg which is the lowest rate. We have no option rather than selling the wool at low prices as only a few traders were available”.

Some of the respondents (5/10) also mentioned that:

“Sometimes we give our horses and mules on rent at construction and tourist spots. This year due to lockdown everything was shut down. We endured the loss of income and burden of arranging extra feed for our cattle”.

Some of the other respondents (7/10) stated that:

“During winter the demand for mutton increase. Similarly, the local rituals, marriage, and festive gatherings bring more likelihood to sell our sheep and goat in good amounts. In the lockdown period, all these gatherings were strictly restricted. This reduced opportunities to our local trade and business”.

Thus, people from the Bakarwal tribe faced a huge loss of livelihood opportunities and trade due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The traditional livelihood that they sustained over a long period got unsettled and troubled due to uncertain situations. Almost all of the primary and secondary livelihood practices of Bakarwals got hampered in one way or another.

4. Conclusion

The struggles of the Bakarwal tribe during the seasonal migration worsened amid COVID-19 lockdown and restrictions. The pastoral lifestyle which is already challenging fuelled the socio-cultural and economic deterioration for this tribe. Their existing vulnerabilities added more to the struggles during the COVID-19 pandemic. The present paper explored the hidden and unmapped struggles of the Bakarwal tribe in UT. The four themes of the study findings describe the COVID-19 induced escalated struggles throughout seasonal migration during April 2020 to November 2020 period.

The vulnerabilities of seasonal migration doubled due to the pandemic. The pandemic brings novel vulnerabilities and challenges among the tribal group. The entire period from April 2020 (the delayed migration) till November 2020 (the downward migration) keeps on placing new repercussions on the Bakarwal tribe. The lockdown-induced restrictions negatively impacted the socio-cultural, psychological, and economic dimensions of their life. Their social ties with the local communities become impaired due to the labeling attached to them. Their cultural practice of bi-annual seasonal migration also got obstructed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The lockdown results in a loss in trade and income placing them in extreme poverty. Along with this, the COVID-19 pandemic also levered psychological tension, fear, and anxiety among them. The administrative unpreparedness, delay in approval for migration, and damage of delayed seasonal migration faltered their political faiths too. The support provided by tribal leaders and activists strengthened their community bond whereas the lack of support mechanisms from other groups weakened their political convictions. Similar findings have also indicative from other studies done with the Gujjar and Bakarwal tribes in different regions of Jammu and Kashmir (Kishore, 2020; Majeed, 2020).

Although the tribal group faced all these challenges, they remained optimistic and assertive to sustain their old age culture of bi-annual seasonal migration. As one of the respondents mentioned:

“Marta kya na karta” mean “one who is dying will do everything for its survival”. Likewise, the Bakarwal tribe took every potential step to sustain their old age practice of seasonal migration amid COVID-19 pandemic-induced lockdown and restrictions.

Authorship

All authors contributed equally.

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