



Impact of the COVID -19 lockdown on pastoralists of Jammu and Kashmir

CfP Report 2021



Centre for
Pastoralism



Centre for Pastoralism

Published by Centre for Pastoralism - 2021

© Centre for Pastoralism – 2021

Study design: Dr. Anita Sharma, Dr. Ashwini Kulkarni,
Dr. Ovee Thorat, and Dr. Vasant Saberwal

Author: Anita Sharma

Data entry, calculations and graphs: Ashish Gutthe

Map by Janastu: Jammu & Kashmir (Gujjar migration)

Map by Kyra Pereira: Jammu & Kashmir (Bakkarwal migration)

Compiled by: Dr. Radhika Chatterjee

Designed by: Shruti Jain

Copy edited by: Chhani Bungsut

Supported by -

• **Bharat Rural Livelihoods Foundation**

An independent society set up by the Government of India
to upscale civil society action in partnership with the Government.

• **Axis Bank Foundation**

CSR unit of Axis Bank Ltd

and

• **Ford Foundation**

Centre for Pastoralism
155 Shah Pur Jat Village
3rd Floor
New Delhi 110049
www.centreforpastoralism.org



All rights reserved.
Permission to reproduce material from this book is not mandatory.

Contents

List of Acronyms	7
Introduction	8
Survey Method	14
Findings	14
Conclusion	25
Annexure I	26
Annexure II	28

List of Acronyms

J&K	Jammu & Kashmir
G&B	Gujjar and Bakkarwal
FRA	Forest Rights Act
FCS&CA	Department of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease or 2019-nCoV

Impact of the lockdown on the Gujjars and Bakkarwals of Jammu and Kashmir

Anita Sharma ¹

Gujjar and Bakkarwal of Jammu and Kashmir

The Bakkarwals, a subset of the Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir, were classified as a scheduled tribe in 1991. Two years thereafter in 2001, they were linked under the government's general program of positive discrimination and reservation. Commonly referred to as Gujjar and Bakkarwal (henceforth G&B), together they form the third largest ethnic group in Jammu and Kashmir after Kashmiris and Dogris. According to the 2011 census, when J&K was a provincial state of the Indian Union, the G&B were variously reported to constitute from 11.9% to about 14%, to even 16% of the total population of the state, with Bakkarwals being a numerically small sub-group as compared to the more populous Gujjars. The latter form sizable populations in Poonch and Rajouri districts and constitute smaller numbers in Anantnag, Udhampur, Kupwara, Riasi, Kathua, Samba and all other districts of J&K.²

The Bakkarwals have traditionally shepherded goats and sheep (they also keep a few horses and the endangered and fierce breed of Bakkarwali dogs), while the Gujjars herd buffaloes and some cows. In alignment with this herd composition, the Bakkarwals have summer pastures in the high mountain regions of the Pir Panjals and the upper regions of the Himalayas whereas the Gujjars migrate to areas of comparatively lower elevation in the same mountain ranges. This 'traditional' herd composition, however, has been changing: Gujjars indicate a growing preference for goat and sheep over buffaloes and cows. This might be a trend in other parts of the country as well, with plausible ecological and political basis; this survey being a small indication of a larger shift perhaps?



1. Assistant Professor,
Department of Sociology,
Shiv Nadar University
Email: asharma24@gmail.com

Image 1: G&B family in their camp. Photograph by Anita Sharma. (File photo)

Unlike most other nomadic pastoral communities in South Asia, the Bakkarwals are rare in that they have remained almost entirely nomadic till the recent past, with little presence in sedentary village life and society. They live in tents permanently, camping in forest land in their summer and winter migration areas well outside the bounds of settled hamlets, clusters and villages. The Gujjars are more semi-nomadic and construct kullas/dhoks or temporary shelters made of mud and logs in their summer deras or campsites. The Bakkarwals might seek out a village or town irregularly to meet their needs, yet they are not of it. Their life, in a sense, is lived always between points, movement being as pertinent a factor as 'settling' in a place for a time. Among other markers, the lack of such 'pure' pastoral nomadic communities have led some scholars to observe that South Asia does not have nomadic pastoralism at all but only animal husbandry. It is argued that nomadic life — often characterised by acephalous, flexible and more egalitarian social structures — is not an expression of an archaic way of being but an active manifestation of a politics that resists incorporation by centralising powers. However, being somewhat closer to being 'pure' nomads proved to be too much of a good thing even for the Bakkarwals in the embattled Himalayan Valley... and increased surveillance of movement and the need for documents such as identity cards, domicile and migration papers have existed over a long period (their rights to pasture were first recorded under the Dogra rule going back to 1846). These requirements have linked G&B to procedures of governmentality, and thus to specific administrative blocks. For many years now, annual G&B pastoral movement is contingent on possessing a maatu or the required migration papers renewed annually by tehsildaars or revenue officials of respective domicile villages — often the nearest one from their winter camping areas.

As with all populations living in the midst of violence and upheaval, militancy and large scale mobilisation of armed forces in the region has had a very direct impact on the lives of G&B as well. They are perhaps amongst the most severely impacted communities of the violence in J&K — often a much misrecognised fact. G&B found migration in the strife-torn region increasingly difficult, with fear of both militants and the armed forces. Increasing restrictions in accessing important pasture areas, theft, abduction, violence and fear left them in a precarious position. When militancy was at its peak in the 90s', G&B men stopped migrating to the summer pastures with women and children and older family members. While many families have started going back

to their traditional pastures in the past few years due to decreased violence, others have become semi-nomadic, while others have given up pastoralism altogether. A movement out of nomadic pastoralism, however, need not always be an irreversible process; a facet borne out of my own field studies.



Image 2: Military truck in J&K.
Photograph by Anita Sharma. (File photo)



Image 3: While collecting data.
Photograph by Irfan Bejran.

With increased sedentarisation, many G&B have started buying land in their winter areas and constructing permanent homes as land in Kashmir is far more expensive than in the Jammu region. Those who are unable to buy land simply squat on forest rims in temporary shelters. The Bakkarwals have already negotiated with these pressures for a while. Semi-sedentarisation has been easier for the G&B elite, allowing them to settle down and even reap the financial benefits of pastoralism at the same time, while herding and migrating are relegated to illiterate cousins or servants. This is the case, for example, with the now largely settled Khatana clan. They have established their own hamlets an hour's drive from Jammu by a picturesque temple and holy lake, brimming with islands of sunbathing turtles. Their strong political links have allowed them to access not only land and villages, but amass government jobs within the clan, all of which has resulted in a general rise in their social, economic, and political status. Even Mian Altaf — a politician from perhaps the most elite of all G&B families revered for being the descendant of the famed Bakkarwal Sufi, Babaji Larvi — continues to own large flocks of goat and sheep and old claims to highland pastures. The taciturn Mian Altaf once confessed long ago in a conversation that keeping goats, sheep and horses was part of his identity and he was simply trying to keep up his tradition. Like most Bakkarwal men, Mian is also a fine horse rider.

This shift towards rapid sedentarisation has mainly taken place in the last 10-15 years, despite the group remaining almost entirely nomadic for so long. In 2003, the then Resident Commissioner of J&K, Parvez Dewan mentioned in a conversation that about 99% Bakkarwals were entirely nomadic, with no presence in the village life of J&K. At that time, however, some community elders were under the impression that about 2-3% of the Bakkarwals had settled down. In my observation,

largely owing to the very specific history of the region and the ensuing repercussions, this percentage seems to have risen sharply since then — about 20-30% Bakkarwals seem to have settled down — buttressing the significant claim by scholars that politics prevails over all other factors for nomads.



Image 4: Community members having a discussion. Photograph by Zahid Parwaz Choudhary.

Narratives of education and a good-life compel G&B towards a more sedentary life. Nonetheless, while oppositions and binaries such as nomadic vs. settled, educated vs. illiterate, are little else but conceptual simplifications of greater complexity, many G&B continue with their traditional way of life perhaps because pastoralism still offers them the highest returns in their current operating systems. Nevertheless, this is not to imply that economics explains away all crucial subjectivities related to life choices of pastoralists of the region. It is evident that the resilience and pliability of the nomadic pastoralist model finds robust moorage in J&K despite daunting odds.

G&B subsistence strategies revolve around the sale of their animals for meat. They also sell ghee and butter, but only Gujjars sell milk. They may also sell other animal products such as wool. When survival through purely traditional means became tenuous in the Valley, they persisted through diversifying strategies such as trying to educate one son, or by plying tourists on horseback in picnic spots and pilgrimage sites such as Vaishno Devi and Amarnaath yatra. Nonetheless, as mentioned above, G&B continued to migrate to higher pastures even during the most troubled periods of violence in Kashmir.

With the increasing establishment of roads and residential areas, G&B are being pushed into migrating through dangerous and congested tunnels and roads with heavy traffic and nervous tension. Consequently, they incur heavy losses each year. Navigation through bottlenecks such as the Jawahar Tunnel that connects Jammu to Kashmir ends up in numerous accidents for the Bakkarwals, resulting not only in the deaths of their

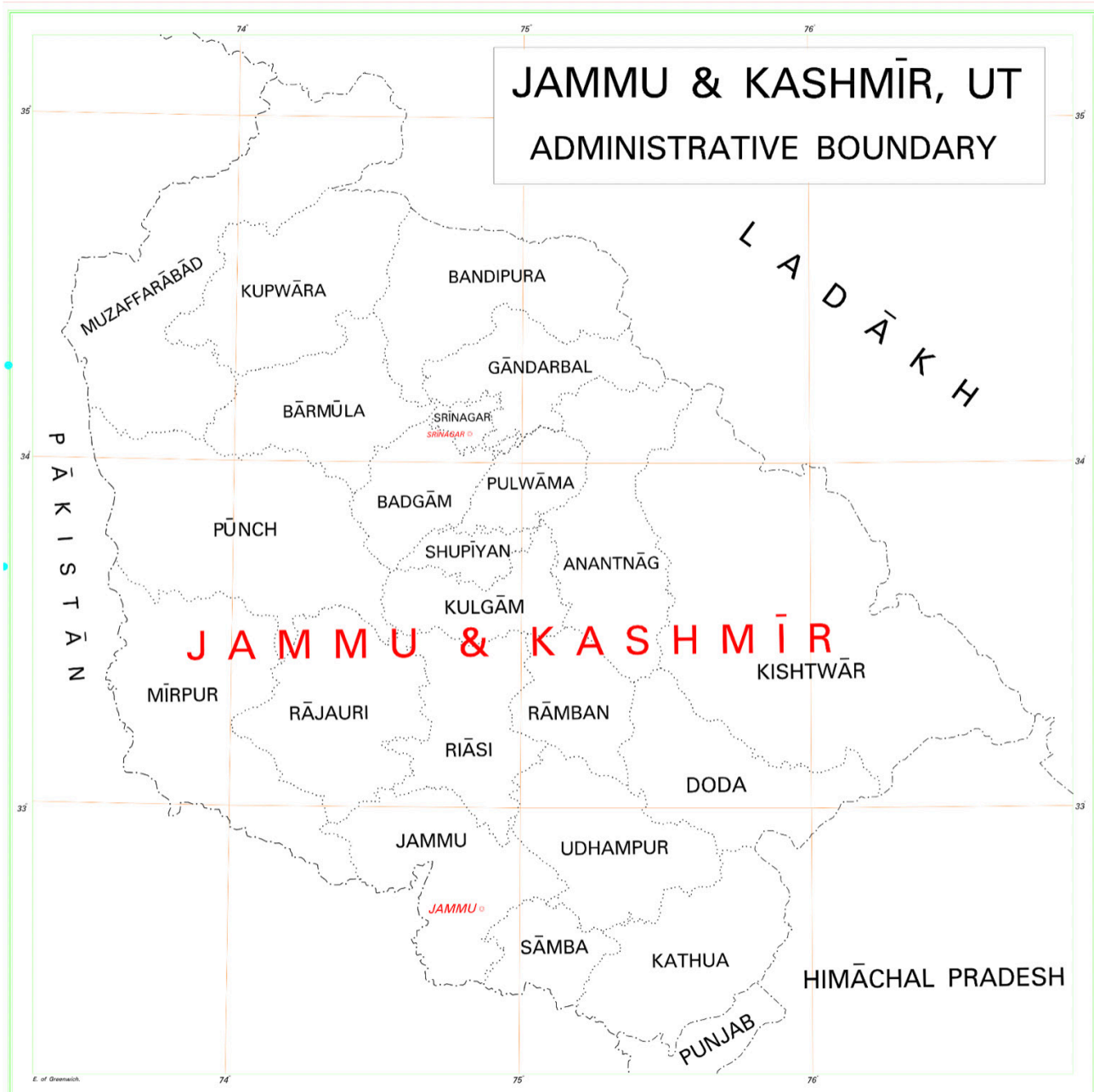
animals, but also in the loss of lives. Remote Himalayan passes such as the Zaz Nar have proved to be equally dangerous to cross. On top of this they are bullied both by the traffic police and the forest authorities, who, like others generally, increasingly view their migration as an indulgence. The fencing off of forest land on the one hand and the growing number of settlements and privatised compounds on the other is squeezing the G&B from both sides. Moreover, new high-altitude roads are often constructed on the migratory corridors, trails and routes established by the Bakkarwal, who are then unable to claim their traditional rights to these passages.

Furthermore, as with elsewhere in the country, depleting relations between the G&B and sedentary folks along their migration routes have further exacerbated this situation. Where once they were welcomed to camp right by highland villages before moving up, now the villagers perceive them as competition for grass for their domesticated animals. Nonetheless, this ability to switch between forms of production and composition of migrating livestock units has allowed them to 'find routes' through the tension-riddled past decades.

In the last decade, the Bakkarwal community has seen a degree of political mobilisation with attempts to secure their rights within the state, particularly through the voices of a small number of young and educated leaders. This was perhaps most evident when an eight year old Bakkarwal girl was raped and murdered in a village in Kathua district in 2016, an incident that brought the nomadic pastoralists of J&K to the notice of the nation and the international press.

The emerging micro-politics of the region reveal that the G&B have been left in a somewhat altered position after the Indian government de-operationalised Article 370 of the Indian constitution on 5th August 2019, thus revoking the status of limited autonomy historically granted to Jammu and Kashmir. The significant changes this has brought for the G&B are decreased vulnerability and fear in the Valley, increased political reservations, and the implementation of the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (or in short FRA). Yet, some also report a growing unease in Hindu-dominated districts of Jammu, Samba, Kathua, and Udhampur.

Since the FRA was successfully tabled and passed, it has been applied across states in India and has, in some cases, successfully secured the livelihoods of those who rely on the forests. This has generated enthusiasm among community members and the process of filing claims is currently underway in J&K as I write this report in New Delhi. However, how successfully the G&B can access their rights through such claims remains to be seen.



Map 1: District map of Jammu and Kashmir. Map prepared by Survey General of India, accessed via <https://static.pib.gov.in/WriteReadData/userfiles/UT%20of%20J&K.pdf>

2 According to a report by the Centre of Policy Studies, “A large majority of the STs of J&K are Gujjars. Of the total 14.9 lakh STs in 2011, 9.8 lakh are Gujjars and another 1.1 lakh are from the related tribe of Bakkarwals. These two tribal communities are almost entirely Muslim and they are found in all parts of J&K. During the last decade, the population of the two tribes together has grown by nearly 33%,” which is markedly higher than J&K’s average growth of 23.6% — The proposed ‘increase’ in population of G&B is perhaps a reflection of what they believe was a deliberate undercounting of the G&B numbers. The report adds that about 52,000 Gaddis and Sippis also live in J&K. They are mainly concentrated in the southern districts of Udhampur, Kathua and Doda, “The latter two adjoin Chamba of Himachal Pradesh, which has a larger number of Gaddis. Gaddis number about 46.5 thousand; during 2001-11, their population has grown by about 30 percent. The population of Sippis, who add up to just about 6 thousand, has declined by 9 percent.” Available at <https://blog.cpsindia.org/2016/12/religion-data-of-census-2011-xxxiii-jk.html>.

Summary of Survey Method

A group of us involved in research on pastoralism designed the questionnaire to understand the impact of the lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic on pastoralists. We put together a set of questions, conducted a test run on a few communities, refined the questions and then settled on the final version. I conducted the test interview on the phone with a Bakkarwal respondent, following which my friends and colleagues based in J&K, Irfan Ali Bajran and Zahid Parwaz Chaudhury, carried out the survey in the field. Irfan Ali Bajran worked on surveying the Bakkarwals, whereas Zahid Parwaz Chaudhury and his team of colleagues Razaq Ahmed Khatana & Sadat Hussain, a research scholar at the Kashmir University, conducted the surveys with the Gujjars. Both Irfan and Zahid belong to their respective communities and have been important researchers, spokespersons, and activists of the community in the state. We conducted 40 interviews, out of which 20 were with Bakkarwals and 20 with Gujjars living across J&K. All respondents were Gujjar and Bakkarwal men, as the task of primary herding is vested only with men while women take care of other related chores. Unlike in other states, most interviews for J&K were conducted in person and not over the phone. The survey results were then examined to isolate gaps in responses. Zahid and Irfan then went over the missing links by contacting some respondents and filling in whatever information was lacking. This helped us gain a greater uniformity across the 40 interviews.

Findings

Nearly all Bakkarwals interviewed had Aadhaar cards while 95% had bank accounts. Interestingly this number was very different for the Gujjars where none of the Gujjars had bank accounts while 75% had Aadhaar cards.

Table 1: Profile of respondents

Community/ Group	Aadhaar card holders	Bank account holders	Herd size	Presence of sheep and goat	Travel beyond 10 Km from their native village in summers
Bakkarwal	18/20	19/20	32-415	20/20	20/20
Gujjar	15/20	0/20	26-300	20/20	20/20

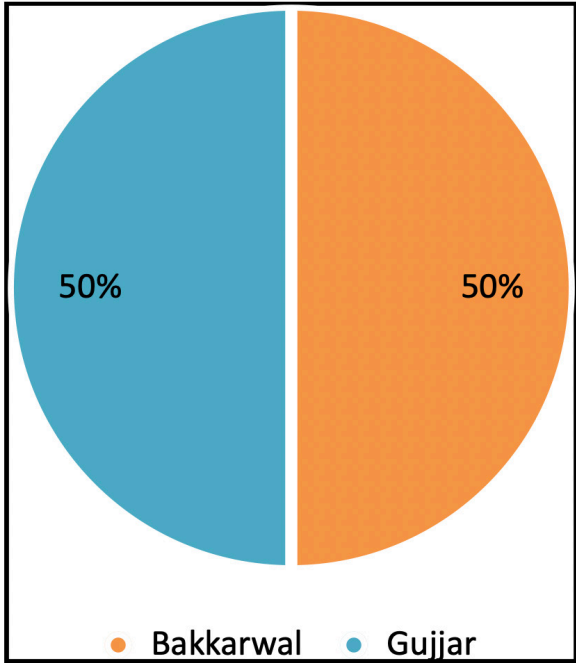
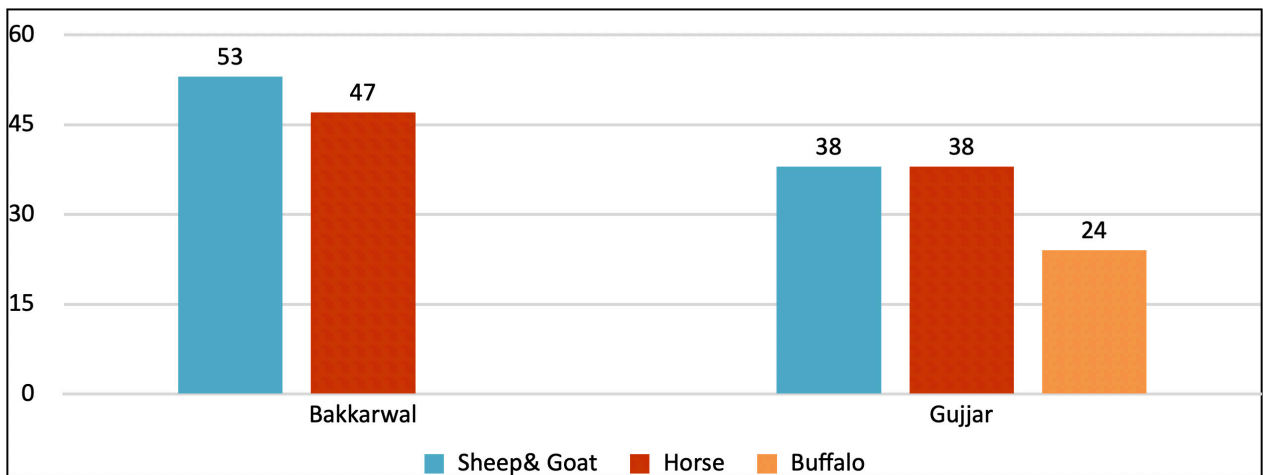


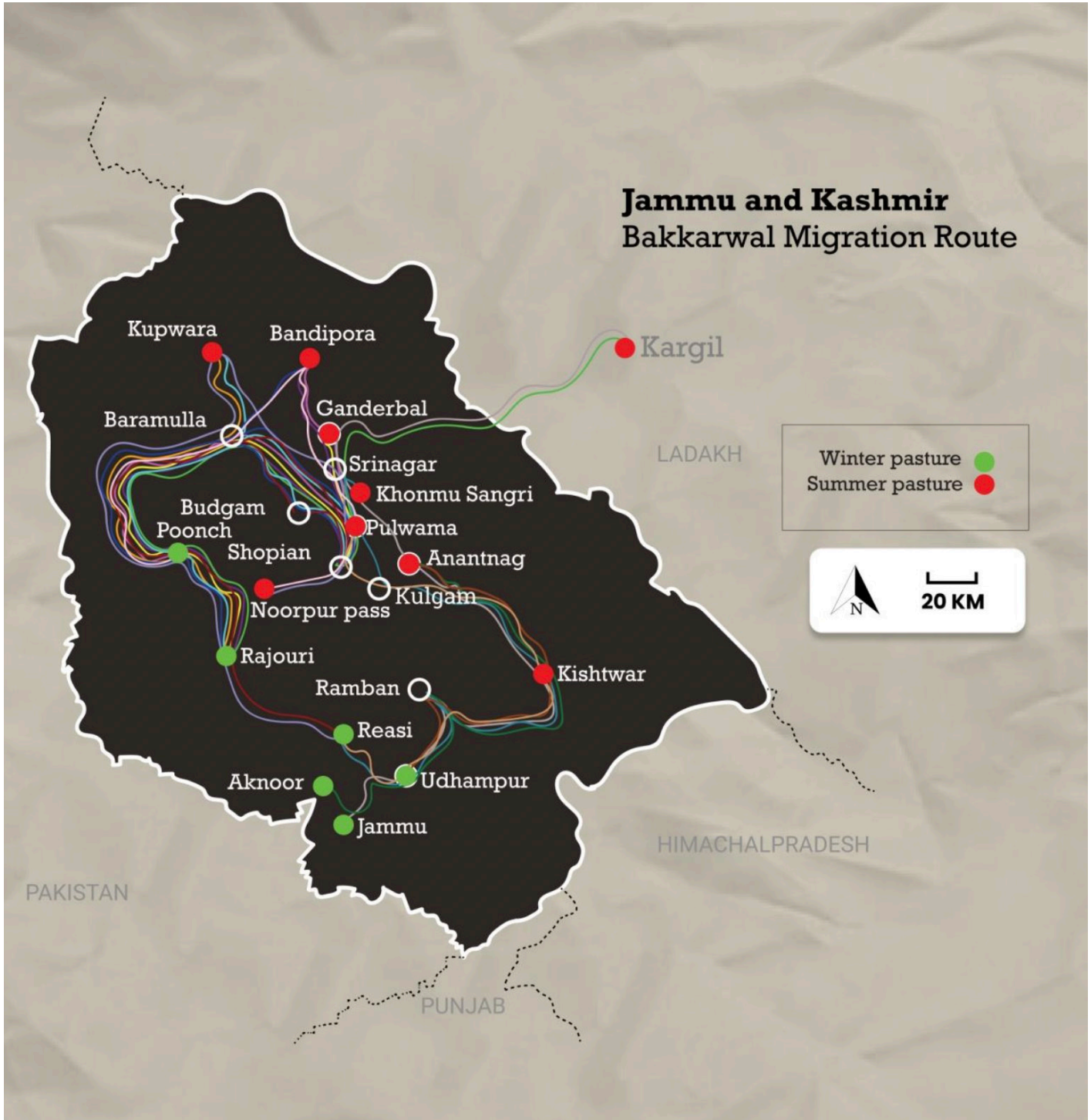
Figure 1: Community wise break up of respondents



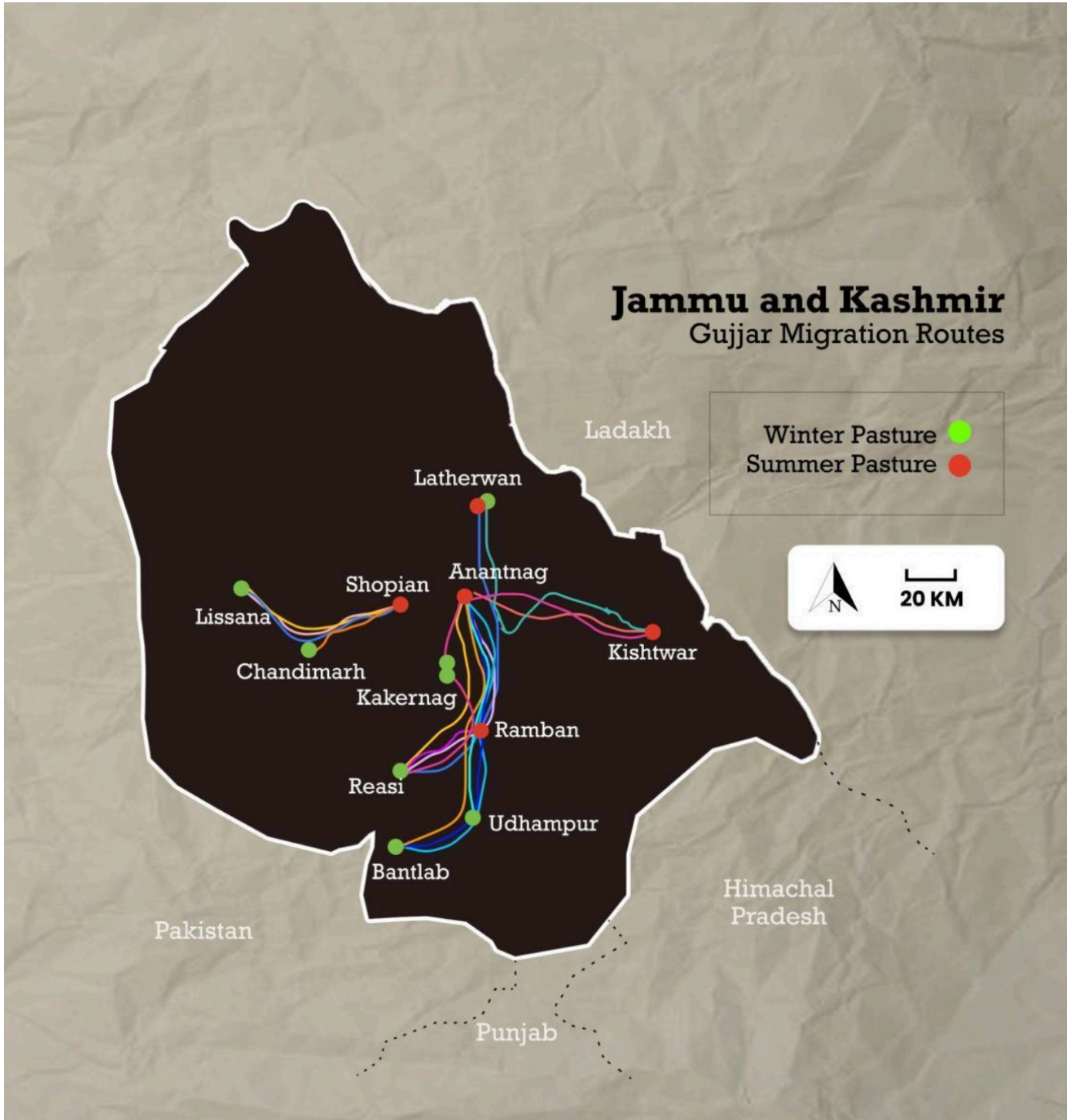
Bakkarwal	20
Gujjar	20

Figure 2: Livestock composition of respondents (percentage wise)

Map 2: Bakkarwal migration routes



Map 3: Gujjar migration routes



Impact on movement during the lockdown

Depending on the migratory route employed, migration for the G&B may take up to two months, during which they camp at various sites and altitudes en route to the final pasture. This makes the migratory corridor and halting spaces as important for their livelihood as the 'final' pasture. Factors such as cold weather require them to stop and wait for the right window of opportunity before gradually moving camp. Most G&B cross at least a few districts during migration (some may also cross state boundaries).

G&B normally commence migration around April through early May. However, in 2020 they could only start towards the end of May owing to the restrictions under lockdown which were gradually eased specifically for nomadic pastoralists. They start descending from their highland pastures as the rains intensify but continue to climb down slowly, stopping at various campsites for different periods as they make their way back to their winter areas, with the grass becoming available there by around October. All the Bakkarwal respondents were on migration during the lockdown whereas 89% of the Gujjars interviewed were migrating during this period.

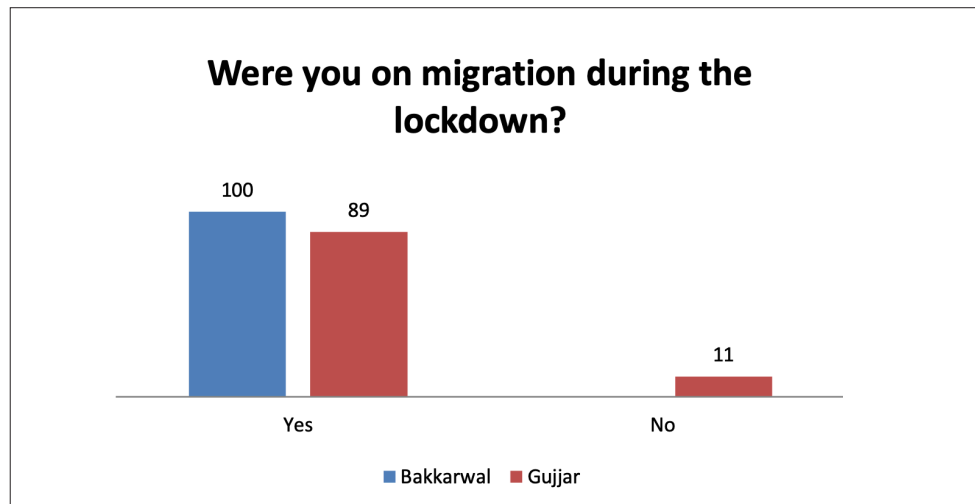


Figure 3: Herder responses w.r.t. whether they were on migration during the lockdown (percentage wise)

The lockdown was not just unprecedented but also began at around the same time as the G&B migration period towards summer pastures. This created many hurdles and a delay of about a month, after which G&B were allowed to move. It was difficult to get supplies as shops and markets were closed although shops opened for a few hours which allowed the G&B to purchase essentials and other articles of need during migration. Yet, this meant that shops not only charged a premium, but that G&B had to spend more cash and often carry heavier loads for longer distances as supplies remained erratic. This process also slowed them down: "This year we took ration from Kalakote and carried it up to Shopian 160 Km away." No ration was provided by state authorities to facilitate the journey although one or two Gujjars reported receiving

some kilograms of grains at specific points. “We received some rice in Jammu from FCS&CA (Department of Food, Civil Supplies and Consumer Affairs) at a lower rate as compared to the market.” These issues also caused delays: “This extended our migration period to five days,” reported a Bakkarwal.

We received a mixture of responses on how the G&B negotiated with the lockdown. Some felt the lockdown worked to their advantage, although these advantages were also often offset with related pressing issues emanating elsewhere. For example, the unprecedented luxury of empty highways and roads were offset by the burden of having to carry heavy loads for hundreds of kilometres while on migration.

Quotes:

“I think our community is better off during this situation as compared to other communities because we think we can sell our produce at other places while moving and we are the only ones allowed to move.”

“Our community was the only one allowed to move but along with many difficulties we think we have suffered less than other communities. Also, there was less traffic and checking during our migration this year.”

“We faced more problems because we have to move from one place to another.”

“If we compare ourselves with other settled communities, I think they are more affected by this disease. We are a tribal people and none of us is infected. Our immunity is stronger than that of other communities.”

On the question of whether the lockdown had a positive or negative impact on their movement, 75% of the Bakkarwal respondents expressed the lockdown had a positive impact on their movement. In a stark contrast, 85% of the Gujjars shared their movement had been affected negatively by the lockdown.

On obtaining forage and water under normal circumstances

Grass is abundant in Kashmir in the warm months and G&B do not normally need to purchase fodder during migration in the summer. However, they do buy fodder in the winter months, especially for cows and horses. According to a respondent, “We purchase maize at Rs 800 per quintal, and feed (for buffalos, cows and horses) at Rs 1,800 per quintal.” Bakkarwals purchase fodder only for horses and only while crossing certain difficult areas. Another respondent reported that, “This fodder normally costs Rs.100 per day for one horse but this year it was very expensive (Rs. 500-700).” G&B have no trouble finding freely available water sources in the Valley as the wide hills and valleys of Kashmir have abundant water bodies, from gushing aquamarine rivers,

streams, and lakes to fresh water springs. Water can sometimes be an issue in the winter areas.

Accessing forage and fodder during the lockdown

The data gathered shows that Gujjars rely more on village commons as opposed to the Bakkarwals who depend more on forest land to access pastures. This is perhaps a reflection of the semi-settled status of the Gujjar while the Bakkarwals might rely on forest land more, owing to their greater mobility and lesser reliance on village life. However, such a conjecture needs to be ascertained by future research.

While 90% of the Bakkarwals reported they normally purchase at least some amount of fodder, only 45% of them were able to do so during the lockdown. Similarly, while 55% of the Gujjars normally purchase fodder, only 45% were able to buy the required fodder and feed during lockdown. Evidently, it was far more challenging during the lockdown as shops and other public utilities were closed, creating delays and other stresses during migration. Moreover, even when shops were open, fodder was extremely expensive and several G&B lamented that the shopkeepers pretty much charged any amount they liked during this time of restriction.

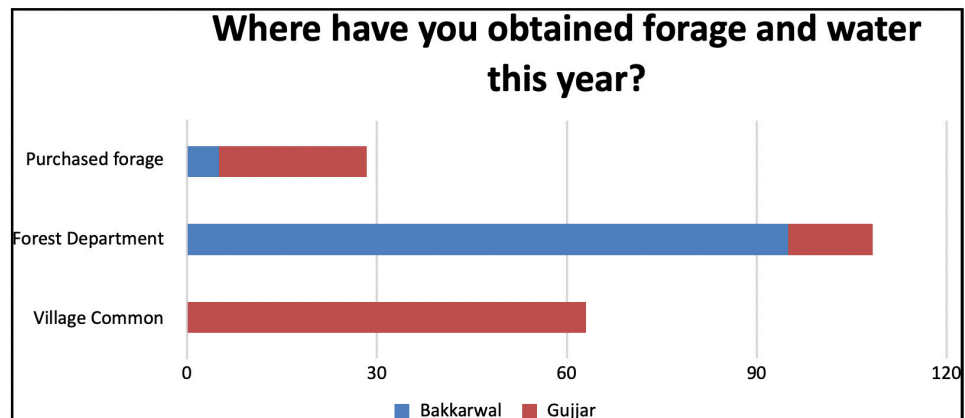


Figure 4: Herder responses w.r.t. forage sources during the lockdown (percentage wise)

On Revenues and Expenditures

Both the G&B reported that there were reduced sales in 2020 due to low demand for animals in the market. “People are not eating meat due to COVID-19,” they said. Gujjars were also not able to sell milk and milk products owing to a lack of transport facilities and the general conditions that prevailed during the lockdown. The rate of wool also came down by half — from Rs. 60-70 per kg, to only Rs. 30 per kg this year. Another Bakkarwal reported, “rates were very low, at Rs. 80 per kg when we normally sell at Rs. 120-130 per kg.” The following quotes of G&B respondents show the impact of the lockdown on animal prices.

Quotes:

“In the previous year, the rate of sheep was Rs. 600 per kg, this year, the rate was only 550 per kg even on the eve of Eid. Before Eid, the rate per kg was even lower at Rs. 500 per kg. Moreover, it was not possible for us to sell animals as well as milk related products.”

“Yes, rates were higher for animals this year but we were not able to sell as much as expected due to lack of demand. The rate for mutton is Rs. 600 per kg, but due to lack of demand we sold at lower prices (around Rs.100-200) than the market rate. Similarly, the rate of buffaloes was higher but we were forced to sell at lower prices as these were distress sales.”

The COVID-19 situation generally and the circumstances under the lockdown especially have had a negative impact on G&B earnings. Not only was their movement delayed and restricted, but they also had to pay more cash to fulfil their needs.

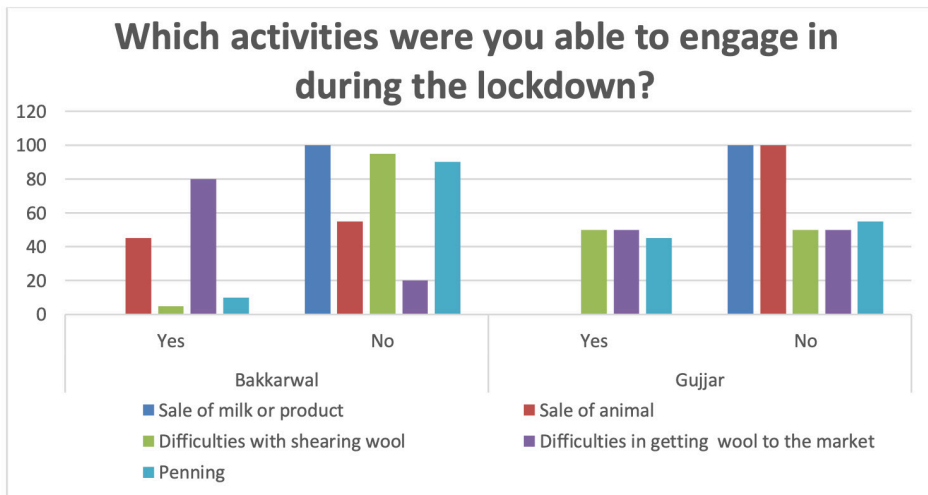


Figure 5: Herder responses w.r.t. difficulties faced during the lockdown (percentage wise)

Gujjars faced greater difficulties in selling milk products, shearing wool, and getting wool to nearby markets under lockdown. The Bakkarwals on the other hand faced some issues related to selling animals, shearing, getting wool to markets and penning.

Bakkarwals rarely need to ask villagers for help with penning their animals as they mostly squat on forest land while making their way up the Himalayas. On the few occasions that such a requirement arises and they seek shelter for their animals on someone’s private land, they are often accommodated for free or for a small payment. Gujjars require penning facilities more often than the Bakkarwals. Sometimes at one or two places only, they pay Rs. 200 to 300 per night for penning.

“We camp near state lands, village commons, and sometimes, in private land with the permission of the owner. We hardly have to pay for

penning. In some places people even request us to keep our animals on their land to get manure.”

All the Bakkarwal respondents and almost all except one Gujjar attested that the lockdown caused a fluctuation in the rates received for produce. A total of 80% of the Bakkarwals reported their incomes had been affected a lot, while only 20% felt the lockdown had a medium impact on their incomes. For the Gujjars, these figures stood at 55% and 45% respectively.

Breakdown of changed expenses:

In sum, during the lockdown, expenses went up owing to the steep rise in the amount paid to labour, transport, food, fodder and feed as well as the cost of medicines. As reported by many, “transporters and shopkeepers charged prices as per their own will.” There was an increase of 15% in labour wage rates experienced by both communities. A dramatic 32% rise in transport expenses was reported by the Gujjars. An increase of 50% for food expenses was experienced by the Gujjars, while for the Bakkarwals this figure stood at 45%. Forty percent of the Bakkarwal respondents reported spending higher amounts on medicines and annual vaccinations, but among the Gujjars, only 17% reported incurring a higher expenditure for this purpose. From the responses received, it is safe to conclude that prices were higher for all products in 2020, including food and transport.

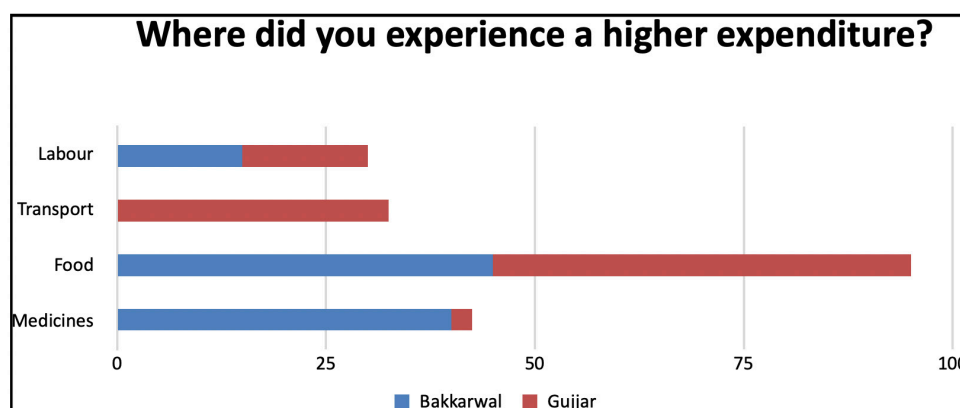


Figure 6: Herder responses w.r.t. expenditure incurred during the lockdown (percentage wise)

Labour requirements and situation during the lockdown

G&B may hire labour for a day or two while crossing difficult passes as help is needed if an animal is stuck or there is an accident due to bad weather. The need and expense for labour went up this year as some passes and roads did not open till very late in the summer, and extra labour was used this year by a majority of the pastoralists. The Mughal Road and other difficult passes opened very late in J&K in 2020, directly affecting G&B migration patterns. Under normal circumstances, the Bakkarwals tend to hire up to five labourers to help them with herd management. The Gujjars, on the other hand, hire up to three labourers.

A majority of the Bakkarwals reported they managed their herd on their own, and only 25% reported hiring labour for this purpose. In contrast, only 55% of the Gujjars reported managing their herds on their own. While 40% reported their hired labour could come to work, one Gujjar shared that his hired labourer was unable to join work this year.

Table 3: Situation of labour during the lockdown

Type of labour employed	Bakkarwal	Gujjar
Self-Work	70%	55%
Hired labour could come to work	25%	40%
Not Mentioned	5%	0
Hired labour could not come	0	5%

Veterinary care during the lockdown

A recurring issue was the unpredictability of medical and veterinary care available during the lockdown, and the lack of routine checks and vaccinations. “Doctors came to administer vaccinations, but did not visit frequently enough,” claimed a Gujjar, “We had to purchase medicine at higher prices than even market rates; for example, we had to buy Terramycin at Rs. 50 as compared to government rates of Rs. 6...” The general lack of government-organised health camps accentuated this problem for the G&B in the summer of 2020.

Nevertheless, by allowing pastoralists to move in many parts of the country and permitting the G&B and their animals to migrate in J&K, the state effectively buttressed the fundamental survival strategy of pastoralists. Thus, it can be seen as much an enabling force as a restricting one.

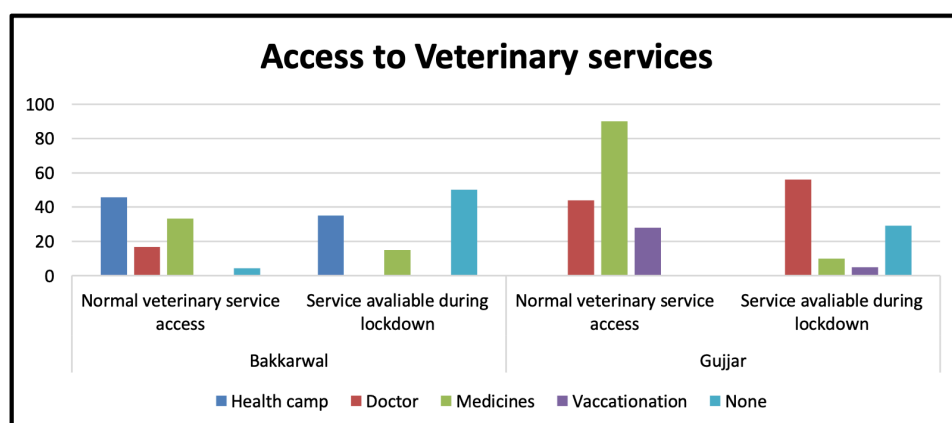


Figure 7: Herder responses w.r.t. availability of veterinary services (percentage wise)

Data shows that 15% Bakkarwals and 10% Gujjars faced problems related to medicines during the lockdown. Only 56% of Gujjar respondents shared that doctors were available during the lockdown. The situation was felt more harshly by the Bakkarwals as none of them could find any

doctors during that period. A total of 50% Bakkarwals and 29% of the Gujjars reported they could not secure any veterinary services during the lockdown.

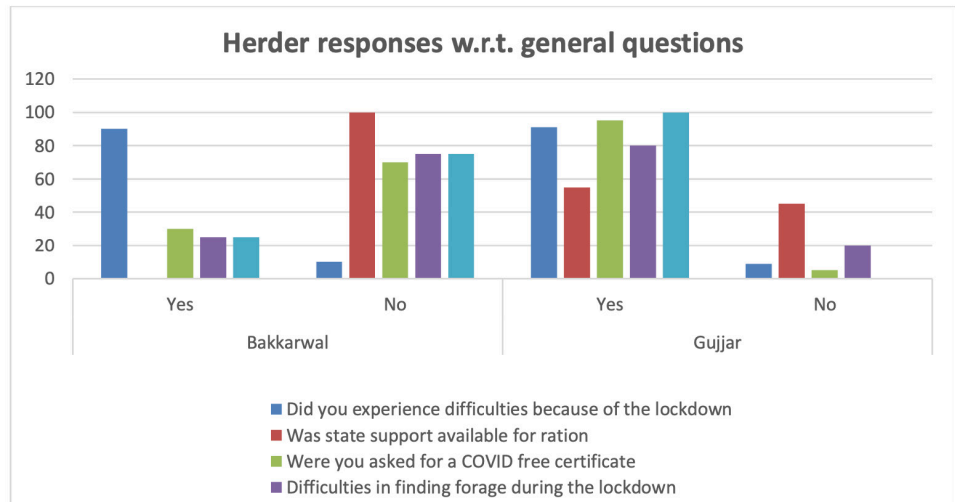


Figure 8: Herder responses w.r.t. general questions (percentage wise)

A total of 90% of the G&B faced difficulties and travails during the lockdown. Among the Gujjars, 55% felt that there was adequate support from the government during this difficult spell and also reported receiving some ration, whereas among the Bakkarwals who were surveyed, none received any such provisions. Additionally, only 30% of the Bakkarwals required COVID-19 free certificates whereas 95% Gujjars reported facing such a requirement. A total of 25% Bakkarwals and 80% Gujjars had issues related to finding space to camp and maintaining social distance as they were not allowed to access villages and settlements. As one respondent shared, “it was difficult to camp near villages this year as compared to previous years, people were so scared of the virus that while we were not denied places, we were told to stay outside the populated areas (at some distance).” Significantly, 25% of the Bakkarwals reported experiencing a sense of social stigma as opposed to a remarkable 100% of the Gujjars attesting to feeling socially stigmatised, elaborating on how COVID-19 has added to the already existing sense of marginalisation they feel. While all these comparisons make for interesting areas for possible analysis, the subjective dimensions of data collection and the modest sample size of this survey has to be kept in mind and further research is required before drawing up robust lines of interpretation.

Hopes for the future

The G&B have expressed hope that things will return to normal again soon, and hopefully prior ways of going about their life will be restored. They were especially apprehensive about the possible cancellation of the Amarnath Yatra which is an important source of revenue for them — as is Vaishno Devi where G&B also ply pilgrims on horseback for returns in cash — especially for the G&B families going to Sonamarg, Sukhnai, and Baltal areas in the spring and summer. Such a unanimous expression

of projected hope is not without consequence and underlines the enhanced capacity of nomads to cope with unpredictability and risk, perhaps as a consequence and component of nomadic life itself.

Table 4: Herder responses w.r.t. hopes for the future

	Bakkarwal	Gujjar
Hopefully the situation will improve	0	20
We hope that things will be better in coming days	9	0
We are hoping for better rates for our animals when we come back from hills	1	0
We hope that government will announce a package for us especially for Bakkarwals who work during the Amarnath Yatra	1	0
Everything will be back on track	2	0

Conclusion

The lockdown was undoubtedly a difficult period for the G&B. The most immediate impact felt by the G&B was the delay it caused in their migration. Nonetheless, a majority of them were still able to migrate eventually. But the shutting of shops and markets during the lockdown meant that they faced difficulties in accessing basic supplies and rations. Related to this was the problem of premium prices charged by the few shops that managed to stay open for the limited period of hours that were permitted by the government. Consequently, they were forced to buy additional supplies and carry a heavier burden during their migration. Even as their expenses climbed, their incomes saw a decline during this period as the prices of meat and wool plummeted. The lack of adequate public veterinary clinics and medicines was another factor that added to the expenses of G&B during the lockdown.

Within this overall scenario, there were some variations in the experiences of Gujjar and Bakkarwal respondents. For instance, the Gujjars reported facing greater difficulties in selling milk. This is possibly because Bakkarwals usually do not sell milk. Similarly, Bakkarwals had a tougher time accessing veterinary services and doctors as compared to the Gujjars. A greater number of Bakkarwals reported spending higher amounts on medicines for their livestock. On the other hand, a higher proportion of the Gujjar respondents were able to access doctors during the lockdown, though none of the Bakkarwals could do so. A similar difference can be noted in their responses with regard to availability of state support, with 55% of Gujjars reporting receiving state support while all Bakkarwal respondents shared they did not receive any state support. These variations explain why 80% of Bakkarwal respondents expressed that the lockdown had impacted their incomes a lot, while the corresponding figure for the Gujjar respondents stood at 55%. One of the few parameters where the Bakkarwals reported a better experience than the Gujjars was concerning the impact on their migration. For instance, 75% of Bakkarwal respondents felt the lockdown impacted

their movement positively, while 85% of Gujjars felt it had affected their movement negatively. Similarly, the Gujjars reported facing greater difficulties in finding camping sites as compared to the Bakkarwals.

Despite these variations, one must note that 90% of the G&B reported facing difficulties during the lockdown. This indicates the strong requirement for provisioning state support to these communities. The variations in the experiences of G&B also highlight the importance of formulating context-specific policies.

Annexure I

Summary of findings from a telephonic survey undertaken by CfP in April 2020

1. Restrictions on movement

Pastoralist migrations were halted by state governments either temporarily or for the entire year, on the assumption that all movements held the potential for transmission of the virus, and hence represented a threat to communities that pastoralists interacted with. In some instances, pastoral communities were able to convince governments to permit them to continue with their migrations. Others, such as the Van Gujjars of Uttarakhand were banned from moving to their summer pastures for the entire year, and were forced to either stall feed their buffaloes or find alternative grazing arrangements within the lower altitudes. Either option resulted in higher costs but also significantly reduced animal productivity. The Himachal government was particularly proactive in supporting pastoralist movement, because for the most part herders travel alone and tend to spend time in relative isolation, reducing the likelihood of viral transmission.

b). Accessing markets:

Pastoralist communities across states spoke of the difficulties of accessing milk, meat and feed markets, all closed due to the national lockdown. Some surplus milk was being converted into ghee and buttermilk, but as the weather warmed, even these products needed to be disposed of to avoid spoilage. The closure of meat markets had implications for immediate cash flows but did not represent the loss of a crop, such as may have been experienced by milk-selling pastoralists or by farmers with perishable, fresh produce.

c) Shortage of Labour:

In some instances, herders had returned home in February to attend to family functions or to help with cultivation. Post the imposition of restrictions, these herders were unable to move to where their herds were, resulting in a significant shortage of labour in managing the herds. Many herders also reported instances of hired labour choosing to return

to home, owing to the limited information available on the pandemic and the associated desire to be close to home during this period of uncertainty

d) Shearing sheep:

Sheep need to be sheared just before the onset of summer, and this is generally undertaken by shearers not necessarily part of the herding community. When sheep are not shorn, ahead of the summer heat, there are heightened levels of sickness within the herd. Owing to the lockdown, shearers were simply unable to travel to where the sheep were located. While the Himachal government was ultimately able to facilitate shearer travel to the herds, in most States shearing operations were badly impacted. Many herders spoke of the likely impact of the lockdown and its aftermath on the import of wool and on the export of woollen carpets and durries.

e) Obtaining ration

Pastoralists on the move normally obtain ration from village kirana shops or from shops in small towns. Pastoralists across the country spoke of the fact that villagers, normally welcoming, were wary of potential transmission of COVID and were often unwilling to have transient pastoralists enter the village. In instances where the state was providing ration, pastoralists tended to miss out since they were on the outskirts of villages or were grazing their animals at some distance from human habitation.

f) Social Stigma:

Pastoralists from various parts of the country reported that they experienced a great deal of social stigma on account of their religion or their nomadic lifestyle. Gujjars in Chamba, Himachal Pradesh and from the Rishikesh/Haridwar areas in Uttarakhand faced ostracism as minorities and had difficulty in selling milk and in embarking on their annual migrations. In both instances, there were rumours to the effect that their milk carried the coronavirus and so customers should not buy their milk. Pastoralist mobility in itself has been causing social stigma for many decades and reports from across the country indicate this was accentuated throughout the lockdown.

g) Pastoralism, Resilience and COVID-19:

Several pastoralists mentioned that they may have experienced fewer negatives resulting from the lockdown than many other with rural livelihoods. This is likely linked to the fact that pastoral communities have historically needed to adapt to climatic, political and other changes. Pastoralist adaptability may have played a role in mitigating to some degree the various issues listed above.

Annexure II

Questionnaire to understand how pastoralists have fared under COVID-19

Code (State letters, followed by 1st three letters of Community name, followed by serial number of interview, in two digits – e.g. GUJRAB01)

Interviewers name

Date

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| a. Name | b. M/F |
| c. Community | d. Phone # |
| 1. Home Location | 2. Current Location |
| 3. Aadhaar Card Y/N | 4. Bank account Y/N |
| 5. Migratory Y/N | 6. Owner/helper? |
| 7. Are you with the herd Y/N | 8. What animals do you manage? |
| 9. Herd size | 10. Were you on migration during LckDn Y/N |

On each of the following please describe your normal practice and how this is affected because of the COVID epidemic:

A. Obtaining forage/water

1. What is your normal pattern of migration at this time? Do you cross district or state boundaries?
2. Has your movement been interrupted this year? Positively/Negatively?
3. Where have you obtained forage and water this year (village commons, Forest Department land, Protected Area, cultivated land, purchased, others?)
4. Do you normally purchase fodder? Were you able to do so this year?

B. Revenues/Expenditures

1. During lockdown have you had difficulty in the following:
 - a) Sale of milk and milk products
 - b) Sale of animals
 - c) Sale of wool
 - i) Difficulties with shearing?
 - ii) Getting wool to markets?
 - d) Penning
2. Has COVID/lockdown caused a fluctuation in the rates you receive for produce?

3. Where have these expenses changed (medicines, food, water, transport, alcohol, labour)?

4. Has COVID had an impact on your earnings?

A bit, Medium, A lot

C. Labour

1. What is the normal labour requirement? How much of this is hired labour?

2. What is the situation during lockdown? (could not come, had to leave, stranded?)

D. Veterinary care

1. What are the normal veterinary services that you access? Health camps, doctors, medicines, vaccinations?

2. Are these services available during lockdown?

E. General Questions (Rations, health care, places to stay, social stigma)

1. Where do you normally get your rations while on migration?

2. What difficulties have you encountered because of the lockdown?

3. What state or other support has been available to ensure you have adequate ration?

4. Were you required to carry a Coronavirus free certificate? Where were you required to show such a certificate? Did you need permission to move?

5. Have you experienced difficulties in finding places to camp during the lockdown?

6. Have you experienced social stigma? Please elaborate?

F. Open-ended

1. During COVID have you been better off or worse off than other rural communities (agriculture, settled livestock keepers)... Can you compare your situation with others from your community who have moved out of herding?

2. What are your hopes and fears with regard to the next 6-12 months?

3. Do you have anything to add?

G. Additional Comments by interviewer



Centre for
Pastoralism