



CATEGORIES OF REARERS OF LIVESTOCK IN KASHMIR During 19th And First half of the 20th Century

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ABSTRACT- Up to 1950s Kashmir was essentially an agrarian society, as more than ninety-percent population lived on agriculture supplemented by other allied pursuits. The agrarian economy consisted of food and cash crops, cattle, trees (both fruit and non-fruit bearing trees) and domestic manufactures especially spinning and weaving of woollen blankets. The staple crop namely paddy and other subsidiary rain-fed crops provided food to the people. The other assets mentioned above were collectively called *mal* meaning wealth or more appropriately as *muhimuk yar* meaning the friend in need. Of the above allied/subsidiary agricultural activities perhaps the most significant was the cattle rearing as it not only helped the peasant in need but it helped him in meeting his multifarious demands. The cattle were indispensable for carrying out agricultural pursuits and providing clothing and bedding as well as fuel for cooking purposes. After all, agriculture depends upon cattle for ploughing and manuring of the land. The poor peasantry wore woollen clothes even in summer and the people in general used cow dung for fuel besides using it as the basic manure for their fields. This is besides the fact that cattle provided milk, butter, ghi, and meat along with defraying the peasants' expense he had to incur on various necessities in the absence of any other non-agriculture source. Given this crucial significance of livestock for the survival of peasantry, it is not surprising that the men and the cattle lived under the same roof. In some cases the family lived on the one side and the cattle on the other side of the house though generally the ground floor was kept reserved for the cattle and the family lived in the first floor, the third floor (*keni*) was meant for the storage purposes, both for humans and cattle. The hencoop (*mud*) was also housed in the same structure.

Key Words: Mal, Phoel, Galwan, Choepan and Sher-Gujri.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Gojjar and Bakarwal: Gojjar and Bakerwal constituted 20 percent population of the state. In general, they are semi nomadic people and always dependent upon pastoral economy.¹ Due to climatic conditions which varied from place to place, Gojar and Bakerwal had attuned themselves to different patterns of life and adjustment.²

In the valley of Kashmir the Gojars on the basis of their settlement can be defined into two categories i.e., Gojars who had settled in remote parts of the valley and had taken to agriculture as secondary source of livelihood. As regards the other category these are the Gojars who had not taken to a settled life. They kept on moving from pasture to pasture as the main source of their livelihood was rearing of sheep and buffalo. The semi-settled Gojars as mentioned above had imbibed certain social and cultural imprints from the local Muslims where as the nomadic Gojars had not been influenced by modernization. The nomadic Gojjars in the valley were commonly known as Dohi Gojjars and Gojjar Bakerwals. Dohi Gojjars had also been given name of Binhara Gujars. Bakerwal Gojars who took their cattle to most envious pastures situated at high altitudes were commonly known as bakerwals because their source of sustenance was exclusively the goat, sheep, buffalo and poultry rearing³.

The hutments of the semi-settled and mobile Gojars were commonly known as kothas. These kothas have any kind of any ventilation with a small entry point. they don't have separate cowsheds and they always lived with their livestock in the kotha. It can be well imagined that the Gojjars lived under most unhygienic conditions. Because of perpetual moisture inside the *kotha* different types of insects and bacteria bred a host of communicable diseases to which the Gojjars were exposed. The *kothas* were scattered in all directions at the

low lying hilltops of the valley right from Banihal, Anantnag upto district Baramulla and Kupwara i.e., northern part of the valley. Shopian district was thickly dotted with such hutments.⁴

As we know that the economy of these nomadic tribes was cattle wealth and was dependent upon the natural pastures. They used these pastures as seasonal because in Kashmir these pastures were covered with heavy snow and they move towards Siwalik-ranges in the south which had mild winters. As summer approached the pastures in the Siwaliks dried up, but those higher up (Margs) begin to thaw, resulting into the growth of luxurious and nutritious grasses. Consequently, the Gujjars and Bakarwals moved back and forth from the lower Himalayan to the pastures in the upper-Himalayan region. In their movements they followed well defined tracks known as *Rasto* from *Sardiyonki Charageh* (winter pastures) to the *Dhoks* (summer pastures). In this process they drew large *Rewads* (flock) through snow clad Galis (mountain-passes) over the ridges, steep slopes, spurs, streams and rivers.⁶

B. Shephreds (Phol): This was another category of rearers. The herdsman who rears sheep in of Kashmir were locally known as *chaupan* or *pohal* and they formed a separate class, inter-marrying sometimes with the Galwans.⁷ *Chaupan* was a cheery active man with a most characteristic whistle and his healthy life in the high mountains made him strong and robust. He also had some knowledge of samples and brought down medicinal herbs for the local doctors. These upper pasture lands were portioned among these herdsman and no body will allow to enter into the pasture of another one.⁸ The newcomer was admitted only if *choupan* brotherhood consented. Every family have a separate herdsman and they hardly change this person for this job because this work needed a very honest man.

In the spring and early summer the valley was green with grass and the sheep found a rich, sweet food in the willow leaves. When the days become warm and the sheep sought the shelter of the trees, the professional shepherd made his appearance and led the village flocks away to the higher slopes of the valley⁹. During his traveling towards higher slopes with his flocks he folded the sheep on the rice fields as yet unsown and in one night added enormously to the fertility of the soil, for this service he was well paid and as the shepherd passed up towards the mountains he was very popular and jaunty person.¹⁰ But when once the shepherd was on the mountains popularity was followed by distrust and at fixed intervals the villager took a long journey to carry up salt for his sheep. The remuneration for each sheep taken to grazing land by the *choupan* varied from two to three *manwatas* of paddy or maize. During the October November shepherds come down from upper pastures and the client families waited for this person very eagerly. If any sheep was missed shepherd will be the answerable and sometimes his wages will cut. Sometimes the villagers insisted on the shepherd clearing himself by taking an oath at a shrine or beneath some tree of ordeal.¹¹ In case *chaupan* returned all the sheep honestly the peasant was rewarding him by providing him a sheep as gift. The sheep in reward was called *Dup-chir*¹². But this practice was true only in case of well to do peasants who possessed a good number of sheep.

C. VILLAGERS: The villagers were another category who reared the livestock. Owing to the significance of livestock in rural economy almost every village house hold used to rear cattle. The types and number of livestock varied from family to family. Poor families of the villages without any cattle average possessed only milch cow and economically affluent households with large holdings whose number used to be very little assumed a good number of cattle. Those peasants who were rich in livestock as well as land were called *Bued Grees* (rich peasants). As summer approached the village folk used to send all the cattle except the milch cows to the high mountains, under the control of *chaupan* (a herd keeper) who was paid for his work either in grain or cash, where they obtained excellent grazing, returning in the autumn to the stubbles.

The villagers obtained various products from their live stock. The cow fulfilled the daily requirement of milk in peasant homes. Not only were the young one's fed with cow milk, the adults also cherished the salt tea *Sher-Chai* prepared with cow milk. Only the limited number of families afforded to take milk tea while as the poor families had to be contend either with milk less tea *Tet Chai* or they consumed Goat milk, that is why goat was called poor man's cow.¹³ The droppings of the sheep were used in the fields in order to increase the fertility of its soil.¹⁴ The people sometimes also slaughtered their sheep especially on festive occasions; however the preference was always given to wool, manure and warmth than mutton. The cottage industry was also dependent on livestock for raw material.

D. MILK-SELLERS (sher-gujri): The milk sellers reared cows for commercial purposes. Each milk seller possessed at least four to five cows. There were two kinds of milk sellers, urban and rural milk sellers. Rural milk sellers sold milk locally mainly against kind. Whereas the urban milk sellers supplied milk to urbanites generally against cash. These people supplied milk and milk products mainly to urban population. The livestock acted as the main source of income for them.¹⁵ In the long and bitter winters of Kashmir valley the

milk sellers depended upon peasants for fodder because of their not being in possession of enough land. However, in the summers milk-sellers grazed their cows in common pasture lands called *Gass-chrai*.¹⁶

E. GOOR (cow-herd): In every village there was one *Goor* (cow-herd) who reared the cattle of villagers. He was taking his flock in autuman when the peasant was completing his harvest. The people belonging to the lower section of the society did this work. In the early morning villagers used to bring their cattle to a place called *Goorwan*. It was a place where all the cattle of villagers were gathered in the morning. Then *Goor* took this flock to the grazing fields and other places around the village. During mid-day young girls of the village went with the flock for the collection of cow-dung. This cow-dung was dried in the sunlight and then used for the fuel purposes. He was daily collecting food in form of rice and dishes from the villagers and was taking it during the mid day, when he was taking the cattle to rest the practice was known as *behward*. In the evening the *Goor* returned to the village with the cattle and handed over them to their owners. Later, he was collecting from every household some quantity of rice. Besides, he was taking Mangai from every type of peasants produce. During this door to door campaign the *Goor* was very often invited by someone from his clientele for evening tea.¹⁷ But with the passage of time due to encroachment of pastures the institution of *Goor* almost ended and these people switched over to other professions.

F. HORSE-KEEPERS (GALWANS): The *Galwans* were the horse-reares of Kashmir. Lawrence writes that some people considered *Galwans* descendants of *Dums* and some thought them to be descendants of the *Tsak* tribe largely due to their dark complexion which differentiated them from Kashmiri peasants.¹⁸ Lawrence portrays them as pony lifters and that the stolen animals were disposed off at Poonch. He further writes that the *Galwans* had developed into a criminal tribe who frequently attacked threshing floors and marriage parties and carried off the bride.

There is a locality called Galwanpora, situated in close proximity to the posh colonies of Hyderpora and Peerbagh Srinagar. The elderly people of this locality used to earn their livelihood by pony and horse farming. They took their ponies to large pastures for grazing and when the animals became big enough they used to sell them off.

II. CONCLUSION:

The history of livestock in Kashmir unearths largely self-reliant and even exporting economy, local processing of a host of livestock products, best utilization of local resources available by means of best application of traditional wisdom regarding feeding practices and many other husbandry practices. However, exploiting structures due to feudalism prevalent here has been the bane of Kashmir agriculture resulting in large scale poverty of most of marginal farmers, besides creating big hurdle in development of livestock industry. Generality of peasants had been living in perpetual uncertainty and bondage of few big landowners. The common people could hardly afford to buy enough number of sheep or quality cows to achieve economic clout. There were many drop outs due to accidental losses or unknown or uncured diseases due to primitive state of knowledge regarding veterinary medicine. Failure of modernization contributed to lack of insurance and healthcare facilities. Organized farming has yet to take over, despite passing of many decades after efforts in this direction were made. It was never a pro-people or pro-farmer rule or State and livestock was developed or not developed as per interests of the ruling class. Taxation policy was anti-people and antidevelopment. However despite negative role of government village communities have been able to create sustainable agriculture. Local breeds were well adapted and best used for fulfilling variety of needs. We have seen how booming livestock sector has been a key to development of wool based industry for which Kashmir has been world famous.

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- 2 Motilal Lidoo, *Kashmir Tribals*, Publication Minakshi Srinagar, p. 55.
- 3 Kashmir Tribals, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

4 Ibid.

5 ibid

6 Majid, Hussain, *Geography of Jammu and Kashmir State*, Rajesh, New Delhi, 1987, p. 43.

7 Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, Srinagar: Chinara Publishing House, repr. 1992., p.312.

8 Ibid.

9 *The Valley of Kashmir*, Srinagar: Chinara Publishing House, repr. 1992, p. 361.

10 Ibid.

11 *The Valley of Kashmir*, Srinagar: Chinara Publishing House, repr. 1992, p. 362.

12 Dup-Chir means providing a sheep to the chaupan in the form of gift for his honesty.

13 Interview with Sonaulah Ganie on 20-3-2010.

14 Interview based.

15 Interview Based.

16 Interview based.

17 Interview with Muhmmad Akbar Sheikh on 10-4-2010.

18 Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir*, Srinagar: Chinara Publishing House, repr. 1992 *op. cit.*, p. 311.