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COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN PASTORAL CONTEXTS: REFLECTIONS FROM THE NORTHWEST HIMALAYAS

Abstract

Although disasters strike equally, pastoral communities, unlike other agrarian groups, have experienced minimal scholarly intervention during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pastoralism has been disproportionately impacted by global lockdowns and restrictions, as this mode of subsistence is defined by its spatial mobility. In this narrative article, I address several COVID-19-related themes by responding to critical pastoral context inquiries. Due to the dynamic nature of spatial mobility, I utilise the Bakarwal tribe in the northwest Himalayas as a case study for this purpose. Owing to limited access to the Himalayan pastures, information was mostly gathered through the use of "Smart Ethnographic Methods" whereby six key themes were identified based on information received from the respondents: Spatial Mobility, Market, Livelihood, Education, Health, and Politics and Marginalization. The narrative case study approach was used alongside researcher reflexivity while conducting this study.

Keywords: Bakarwals, COVID-19, Himalayas, Narrative, Pandemic, Pastoralism, Smart Ethnography.

Introduction

Corona virus continues to haunt the world with its presence and countries have still not come out of the impact it has inflicted. Through its impact on several domains of life, corona virus exposed the enormous structural disparities that exist amongst societies worldwide (Simula *et al.* 2020). While pandemics and natural catastrophes strike equally, the scholarly intervention has mostly focused on the impacts on development in economic, political, and social terms. Government action and intellectual criticism frequently fall short of reaching the populations that traverse marginal regions and rely on seasonal movements as their sole sources of livelihood. The administration was able to prevent the spread of the fatal virus to some extent by restricting mass travel, but it was exceedingly difficult for Himalayan pastoralists who saw it as a threat to their livelihood and culture.

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This narrative article is the outcome of anthropological research conducted with pastoralists in the Western Himalayan region of Kashmir. As is the case with the majority of pastoralists worldwide, these tribes have adapted to harsh terrain and unpredictable conditions, relying entirely on livestock movement across different landscapes. With mobility as a primary consideration, pastoralists in the Himalayan Mountains utilise a variety of pastures with varying topographies. Conducting an anthropological study of all the Himalayan pastoral tribes is an unrealistic endeavour for an individual researcher such as myself. Thus, the Bakarwal tribe was chosen as a study group for my doctoral research, to collect ethno-archaeological data. As the pandemic began to spread in March 2020, I began documenting its impact on the groups with which I expected to walk. Each year in April/May, these Himalayan herders begin their journey via the Kashmir valley with their livestock and households from the outer Himalayan plains to the Greater Himalayan meadows (Khatana 1992). Thus, this period was critical for the annual movement, and my involvement in the group was also impacted. To collect data on this critical aspect when the world is closed and mobility restricted, I could use the digital ethnographic methods (Caliandro 2018), in which information about mobility, pandemic, and other cultural aspects was gathered through routine phone/video calls, as well as sharing photos and videos via social networking sites. By the time I re-joined the tribe following the Indian government's announcement of the unlock period, I had accumulated enough data to warrant the title of my study. The PASTRES (Pastoralism, Uncertainty, and Resilience: Global Lessons from the Margin) project seeks to address a variety of issues relating to the uncertainties induced by various natural and manmade factors, and in this article, I will discuss several of the key themes identified by the project in their research reports based on pastoral groups from various continents.

COVID-19 was first considered remote, particularly by the Indians, but by the time the threat arrived, it was far too late to impose calibrated limitations. Thus, the government enforced a total lockdown in this respect, and the country was immediately enveloped in an uncertain future. The PASTRES initiative posed a question that must be addressed from the standpoint of all disadvantaged people, regardless of time and space: How did pastoralists in various locations respond to and were impacted by this pandemic (Simula *et al.* 2020)? Conversations with Bakarwal pastoralists indicated that the tribe viewed the infection as a plot to stymie their migrations. Given the magnitude of the challenges faced by the Bakarwal tribe in 2019 as a result of the repeal of Article 370 of the Indian constitution, the announcement of a virus connected with mobility was seen as an offensive action. With news from every part of the globe, the threat became tangible, and the tiny strand of RNA began to have a noticeable effect on the Himalayan herders.

The purpose of this study was to elicit information on the Bakarwals'

experiences in COVID-19 in terms of livelihoods, production and marketing strategies, health, and education by analysing pertinent parts of narratives gathered as part of a broader inquiry. Additionally, questions about how the epidemic exacerbated the community's marginalisation were asked, garnering startling replies. Thus, the case studies given below help put the situation of pastoralism in the region during the pandemic into context.

Methods

The study collected and analysed detailed narrative descriptions of Bakarwals' experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic using a narrative case study technique. This method to case study research recognises the researcher's reflexivity as a primary tool for collecting, interpreting, and demonstrating stories of first-hand experience (Simons 2009), and views knowledge and the knower as inextricably linked and rooted within history, context, culture, language, experience, and understanding (Etherington 2004).

My participation with the pastoralists in the region lasted around three years, during which time I was regarded as one of their own, which aided in the collecting of more accurate narrative accounts. The information provided in this article is derived from audio-recorded conversations that I conducted using smart ethnographic approaches such as WhatsApp and Face book messages, audio and video calling, and photo and video sharing. Due to the restriction of movement, it was unable to gather data using standard anthropological approaches. In total, I talked to eight participants in multiple communications of 15-20 minutes each. As a narrative researcher, I was willing to follow participants wherever they led me by putting myself in the shoes of an inquisitive ethnographer. Although participants were initially informed about the use of pseudonyms to conceal their identities, it was revealed during the study that they were more than ready to allow me to use their real names instead.

In the beginning, I treated each individual's narrative independently (Harvey & Chavis 2006), considering them as discrete bits of knowledge that I made sense of as I verified and modified them. After extensive amendments, the transcripts were given to the participants for selection of the most pertinent narratives from their perspective, since narrative inquiry places a priority on the researchers' and participants' collaborative production of meaning. After I had done and collected back all the interviews, it was time for the examination of parallels, inconsistencies, ambiguities and contrasts between the participants and my thoughts of the research problem.

Narratives through Case Study

Eight narratives were gathered for this paper using a narrative case study approach and are presented thematically concerning diverse challenges

confronting Himalayan herders during the epidemic. After completing the interviews, the materials were verified with them via narration, before sending the article for publication:

1. Walking in the Pandemic: the story of Doda Khatana

Following the government of India's announcement of a countrywide lockdown on 24 March 2020, the adverse effect on public movement was felt on the ground. There were debates and write-ups on the effects of this global pause on the migrant labourers (Yadav and Priya 2020), yet pastoralism has received little attention in the subcontinent so far. Kashmir Himalayas are home to a variety of pastoral communities, and the Bakarwal pastoralists in Jammu and Kashmir were also affected by the pandemic since this time of year coincides with their yearly migrations. Each year, Bakarwals migrate from the plains of Jammu to the higher elevations of the larger Himalayas in April at predetermined dates (Khatana 1992), and interviews with pastoralists indicate that even little delays in the movement can cause an infinite number of complications along the way. As the year 2019 was marked by significant disruptions in movement and commerce as a result of the abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian constitution, they were expected to recoup their losses in 2020.

Doda Khatana, a 48-year-old Bakarwal man, was preparing for the spring migration in March 2020 as normal when word reached their community of a fatal pandemic. He, his two wives, and children were unaware of the implications at the time, and when the group was refused permissions to begin their yearly movement by the authorities, he told me how tough it was for them and when:

...we learned that only herders may be permitted to travel to the upper reaches this year, Fatima broke into tears. For her, traversing the difficult passes is more honourable than being stationary at the planes in Poonch.

Even if the family was permitted to relocate, it was too late for the people and animals to cross the rushing water channels that were frozen only a month ago thereby providing natural bridges for easier movement. The average temperature in the Gulmarg climatic region is lower in early April, resulting in significant snow accumulation in the pastoralists' mountain passes, while in early May, as the average temperature rises, the snow melts into gushing waters and becomes nearly impossible to walk on. During late October fieldwork among pastoralists, I identified several carcasses of sheep, goats, and buffalo, and it was determined that these animals were unable to cross the water streams owing to the late migration in April/May. Doda told me that it was similar to 'losing my family members' and that:

In early March, I acquired another horse for 40,000 INR and ten goats

to supplement our herd. I was unable to sell anything in the Kashmir valley last year due to the curfew, and I hoped to make up for the losses this year, however, due to the delay in migration, my 12 goats died of heatstroke in the plains, and my 07 sheep were killed by the melting snow in the Pir Panjal mountains. Even a one-day delay has a significant impact on our travel.

He also mentioned a friend who was involved in a similar incident:

A dear friend was subsisting on a buffalo to support his family of eight. When we crossed the Jammiya pass in May, the buffalo was unable to travel on the thin layer of snow owing to its enormous weight and fell into the gorge. Numerous attempts to save it were undertaken, but the risk was too severe. As a result, it was abandoned to scavengers, and all that remains are its bones.

Was the remainder of the journey through the Kashmir valley uneventful?

Our journey would be impossible without any occurrences. And this year, several similar instances occurred that would likely have a lasting influence. In terms of the Kashmir valley, we used to remain there for a while but were forced to leave after only one night due to the authorities' restrictions of large gatherings.

Arriving late in the summer pastures is particularly difficult for Doda Khatana since there is rivalry for grazing areas between local shepherds and Bakarwal pastoralists. Additionally, there are times of the year when they engage in certain economic activities. When they arrive in their summer home, the first thing they do is repair any damage caused by the winter snow. They then relocate their sheep to higher pastures, while the remaining household members harvest medicinal herbs. The next is the time for sheep and goat shearing and the production of dairy products. They then will begin their journey back to the plains in early September. But:

...if we arrive late in the first place, how can we expect to do all of this work during the calendar month's designated times? Consider one type of herb that must be harvested within a week; if we do not collect it within that week, we must wait another year.

2. Re-imagining the markets: the story of Junaid Khatana

The authorities' declaration of a lockdown affected everyone in every walk of life. Markets were closed for most of the year 2020, which disproportionately impacted Himalayan herders. The marketplace is critical for pastoralists in two ways: first, they need to purchase livestock and essential items to spend four months in the higher Himalayan ranges (average altitude 3400m AMSL), and second, livestock fed during the winters must be sold to local *pujis* (Kashmiri for butchers) to meet local populaces' demands.

Junaid, a 39-year-old Bakarwal, first met me in the fall migration of 2019. We maintained contact throughout the six months of winter, and my field base eventually became Junaid's home. His group has been severely impacted by the ongoing pandemic and is concerned about the market economy's un/predictable future. When contacted by phone, Junaid stated that he and his family were struggling to subsist with shops closed and even basic kitchen goods in short supply. He said he was 'desperate' for essential food items when he went to the market and told me that 'normally:

"we get necessities like tea, rice, spices, and notably salt for the cattle at the Sopore market (34°16'17"N 74°28'11"E). However, markets are closed this year, and the police have prohibited us from camping in Sopore grassland for more than two days. If we ascend without these necessary things, we will survive just on milk. In another instance, we could walk down to Gurez from our meadow, but Gurez is a small town, and it will be unable to maintain all the pastoralists living in the highlands and their populations during this epidemic. We are now unsure about the next step."

His desperation was heightened when he proceeded to purchase items essential for survival at the upper reaches. However, upon entering the market, he discovered that the shops that sold such things were already out of stock and in a state of despair. He highlighted the significance of such market transactions by referring to one of his acquaintances who deal with such items. The Bakarwals acquire equipment such as tents costing thousands of rupees throughout April, May, September, and October, but were unable to purchase anything during this season owing to the prohibition on commercial activities. In comparison to other corporations and enterprises, this business exists just for these four months and for Junaid's friend.:

...he [Ghulam Nabi] is dear to me since we have dealt with his family for several generations. He was enraged when I phoned him because he had placed an advance order for equipment from Srinagar and the payment date was nearing. If this tendency continues, he may have to find another line of business. Uncertainty looms huge from every angle.

Additionally, the livestock trade, which provides a significant source of income for herders, became disrupted due to a lack of prospective buyers, resulting in a further decline in cattle prices. Thus, this time saw the demise of a traditional market economy, with conventional demand and supply laws rendered ineffective, pushing pastoralists in these places to seek new means of income. Gurez Valley, located at an elevation of 2438m above sea level, is home to the Dard people, and its neighbouring meadows are used throughout the summer by the Bakarwals and local shepherds. Winters in this part of the Himalayas are extremely harsh, and residents must stockpile fuel in preparation for the forthcoming winters. As a result, this became a lifeline for Junaid and

his group, who collected and sold firewood as well as dairy products like ghee, cheese, butter, and milk to the established populations. Another relief came when the government designated limited times during which individuals were permitted to conduct animal sacrifices on the eve of *Eid-al-Adha* (Islamic festival). The vast majority of sheep and goats were relocated to the valley and sold at fair prices to the local populace. It did not compensate for the losses, but it provided much-needed relief to the otherwise distraught herders.

3. (Un)waged Pandemic: a narrative by Altaf

Pastoralism is very dynamic in terms of livelihood resources, and Bakarwals have adapted to non-herding sources of income when geopolitical circumstances have shifted. Altaf, a 31-year-old Bakarwal, and his family like other pastoral groups in the region have gradually acquired the capacity to maximise profit from animals through the processing and sale of animal products like butter, cheese, ghee, and skins. In the recent decade, these herders have shifted their focus to hired wage labour, and during my field trips, I saw the majority of male adults engaged in agricultural and other labour activities on the valley floors. Additionally, some Bakarwals do not migrate to higher altitudes and instead camp in the Kashmir valley, where they are entirely reliant on the revenue provided by physical labour, which has been ingrained in the pastoral way of life.

As seen by the migrant labour dilemma and the proclamation of a nationwide halt, there has been a clear correlation between the pandemic and the labour sector. On the one hand, pastoral activity in the Kashmir valley declined significantly in the summer of 2020, by around 93% (from three pastoral groups including 39 families). However, Altaf narrates how the changes in herd composition as a result of the limitations necessitated an increase in workforce, engaging women and children and creating an imbalance in the already pre-existing division of labour.

The absence of paid labour resulted in a substantial drop in average household income. Our group consists of 16 families, and the average income per person from paid manual work was approximately 27000 rupees in June and August of 2019, but in June and August of 2020, the same has decreased to 6000 rupees.

It was not only Altaf's group who faced such problems but the repercussions were felt throughout the industry. He directed me to a group of farmers who narrated about this problem, revealing that the current year's wage for harvesting paddy fields has increased to 700 rupees per day per worker, up from 400 rupees previously. When I inquired about the explanation for the massive increase in paid work, a farmer said that the rate per person is determined by the land layout, the type of labour, and the individual's level of expertise. By 2020, there will be a severe scarcity of trained workers with

Altaf and his coworkers not able to work, resulting in a sharp increase in wages.

4. E-educating a minimalist: Bashir's story

Bashir Khatana is a 37-year-old Bakarwal who firmly believes that the Bakarwals have a low literacy rate owing to factors such as their nomadic lifestyle, poverty, and lack of parental engagement and the same has been also reported by (Sofi 2014). Overcoming this issue, Bashir described many cases in which families sold their herds and abandoned seasonal migrations to higher elevations in order to ensure their children received a decent and good education. Indeed, in one of my earlier works (Dar 2020), it was stated that up to 21 percent of Bakarwal families settled in Kashmir valley choose education over the traditional goat and sheep rearing. Bashir and his group persisted in their move to higher altitudes regardless of the repercussions, and they were eventually given with mobile school instructors from within their community, who were compensated on a seasonal basis.

Nevertheless, with the declaration of a countrywide lockdown, schooling across the country switched to a virtual environment. We saw the rise of online classroom culture, in which everyone seeking to give or gain information was required to have an electronic device, a stable internet connection, and uninterrupted power. While virtual teaching has undoubtedly shown to be beneficial in terms of COVID-19 safety, online education has been challenged on a variety of fronts (Magson, et al. 2021). A critical factor to consider is the locations where internet access and/or electricity were unavailable or were limited to 2G speeds (case of Jammu and Kashmir). Unknown to the internet, Bashir's group had only two android smartphones and that were connected to the internet for a total period of five days from April to October 2020. Having received textbooks in the previous year, due to the shutdown of schools, Due to the closure of schools, Bashir's children did not even get textbooks throughout the pandemic and in addition to all this, the seasonal teachers were strictly instructed to abstain from conducting in-person classes. He has a family consisting of a wife, three daughters and a son, and all he wants for them is:

...to have a decent education and a stable future. I do not want them rearing goats and travelling these perilous roads. Everything was going according to plan until this infection entered our life. As you can see, my children have lost even a fundamental understanding of the things they study as a result of the lockdown. I have heard that youngsters in the valley are learning through their mobile phones, yet I possess a 1200 INR mobile phone that stays switched off for roughly three months. If this trend continues, I believe my children will spend their summers performing just everyday tasks.

To solve the issue of the non-availability of basics for online classes, the directorate of school education (DSEK) Kashmir declared the immediate beginning of 'community classes' after the government of India's announcement of the unlock. Community courses proved beneficial on valley floors but contact with Bakarwals living in meadows was never successful. Bashir and his group had suffered several such losses as a result of this communication breakdown, including welfare programmes, educational perks, and employment notifications. For him, there was no purpose in conducting even community classes at higher elevations because teachers and learners were not concentrated at a single place owing to the lesser number of persons who had migrated. Additionally, in the year 2020, the education department had not distributed study materials to pupils, making it much more difficult to re-establish the teaching-learning process. The year 2019 had already dashed the hopes of countless people due to the complete closure of Jammu and Kashmir following the repeal of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, and when the spark of hope was rekindled with the spring of 2020, Bashir's children could not even see the dawn of the future they desired.

5. Emotional Distress: the narratives of Showkat and Bashir

Gujjar and Bakarwal pastoralists have increased health risks due to limited access to modern treatment at the levels of affordability, acceptability, and accommodation (Verma, Gandhi and Dash 2019). Additionally, owing to the lack of state-run healthcare facilities in isolated pastoral areas, pastoralists worldwide rely on community-based assistance and solidarity (Simula, et al. 2020, et al. 2020). In the instance of the Bakarwals, the administration has established a mobile healthcare centre for the community and cattle, but in the year 2020 Showkat and Bashir, two adult Bakarwals, never saw any health official visit the tribe in the high altitude western Himalayan mountains. Due to this lack of availability, the groups in this region have entirely lost faith in the government and developed their health-related issues. When questioned about this non-availability, Showkat stated that before, a team of health authorities would visit the group for a week and supply required medication, but by 2020, there was a complete lack of administrative help, notably in healthcare.

In the Himalayas, rugged terrain and unawareness are adversaries to pastoral health. Numerous instances of health problems were documented throughout this fieldwork, and treatments were also worsening. With the start of COVID-19, health problems multiplied as a shortage of medical supplies and competent assistance exacerbated the situation. Although the group had no positive cases, they were nonetheless discriminated against in community health centres and chemist stores due to their nomadic lifestyle. Two young girls died in the Kafila with which I was present, and their deaths were not caused by COVID-19, but by incompetence, politics, and ignorance. Both the

cases demonstrate the enormous disparity between the state-run healthcare system for pastoralism and the reality on the ground in pastoral communities.

Showkat and his wife met me first at Bandipora district, holding the medical prescriptions. Three months after experiencing significant abdominal discomfort, she was diagnosed with acute renal failure. Showkat had first given her some herbal remedies and tablets to relieve the pain, believing it to be a minor annoyance, but when the agony intensified, he took her to a community health centre in Dawar Gurez, but:

...the officials present at the health centre declined to treat her and requested that she submits a negative COVID-19 report. Although we tested negative, she was still not treated well and the agony persisted until it became intolerable. When things seemed out of control, I rushed her to Sher-e-Kashmir Institute of Medical Sciences Srinagar where she was ultimately diagnosed with acute kidney failure due to a delay in the medical treatment.

Due to the lockdown and the requirement for negative COVID-19 reports at all levels, Showkat was unable to see a doctor regularly, which resulted in her condition deteriorating worse. By September, her condition had deteriorated to the point where she required weekly dialysis. However, as the season of migration drew near, they were unable to continue treating her in the Kashmir valley and she was transferred to a hospital located in the winter pastures. Again, his wife was denied treatment for various reasons and were told to seek care at a hospital in Jammu. This delay caused:

...further infection until she died in November awaiting treatment. If the authorities had not disregarded us from the beginning, we would not have wandered, resulting in the primary delay in her treatment.

I got the idea that things could not get much worse based on what Showkat had said to me until I spoke with Bashir Ahmad, Showkat's cousin. He married his 27-year-old daughter in September 2020, while the country was still reeling from the fear induced by the coronavirus. This was an unusual marriage, as Bakarwals do not normally marry on their periodic trips. Khalida complained of acute lower back discomfort shortly after her marriage but owing to mobility constraints and a fear-based climate among the populace, she was forced to rely on medicine provided by local pharmacists. She was not taken to the hospital until she got excruciating agony across her abdomen and back region. To add insult to injury, hospital officials denied her emergency care, which resulted in her death during the procedure. She was eventually identified with an ectopic pregnancy that had burst, and early treatment may have saved her life and allowed her to live to this day.

6. Invisible Crisis: Zubair and Pardesi's story

For the last seven decades, politics has transformed the Indian

subcontinent in terms of religion and ethnicity. There are times when people tend to transcend political forces and join in solidarity, and COVID-19 was one of such forces. Despite its unifying power, the coronavirus epidemic exposed our society's profound structural inequities, to the point where even dread of infection became communally politicised. For instance, while the entire globe was concerned about the virus's threat, the media sought to assign blame based on religion and race. Similarly, in several other nations, ethnic and sociocultural distinctions were highlighted and fed to the populace in order to foster dread and insecurity. Because the COVID-19 epidemic was related to human movement, pastoralists worldwide bore the brunt of this political backlash as well. Pastoralists have historically been a source of contention between political parties and are viewed as a danger to established communities (Simula, et al. 2020, et al. 2020). Discrimination of various types has been reported in areas where pastoralists perceive themselves to be marginalised and 'other.' Bakarwal pastoralists in the Himalayan highlands have long faced political marginalisation. They had observed similar prejudice before to the pandemic at all levels, including the state, administration, and local communities.

Zubair (Pseudonym), a 37-year-old Bakarwal, has been working as an ATM guard for the last eight years. He left his traditional way of life to give his family a better way of living. Throughout these years he has been living in the Srinagar city and has been working at par with other employees in the department. But to date, Zubair has not been accepted as one of their own by his colleagues and whenever something wrong happens in the department, he is the one to be blamed. He went on to describe his experience at the workplace:

...I have not seen a single day in the last seven years when my efforts were acknowledged, and I was treated with dignity like all others.

With the implementation of lockdown and limitations in an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty, the region's political marginalisation of herders intensified exponentially. Initially, Bakarwals were not permitted to migrate with their herds, but owing to rising pressure, they were granted authorization for the migration of a restricted number of persons. Zubair's brother Pardesi and his family were not permitted to visit villages or towns during their move and suffered severe shortages of critical goods. With communal politics at its pinnacle in the country, Gujjars and Bakarwals were targeted throughout the plains based on their religious identities. Additionally, because of politics' pervasive impact in all spheres of life, polarisation was evident in the fields of health, education, and the market. In terms of market exchange, Pardesi and his group were not permitted to enter villages or neighbouring cities to barter their dairy products, limiting their ability to acquire daily necessities. They subsisted on wild vegetables and fruits throughout the lockdown time because purchasing culinary necessities was impossible while Bakarwals were deemed carriers of the viral illness. At this point, Pardesi went on to explain how they

have grown accustomed to prejudice on different levels and how the prospect of not even being able to feed their families never occurred to them. These pastoralists have limited resources and lack the financial security necessary for survival in such situations.

...There were times when we needed to travel somewhere but the authorities quadrupled the expense of transportation. If food was available, it was sold at a premium price. Since we were not permitted to visit health centres, our alternatives were restricted. Pandemic was brutal to everyone, but especially to us, it was cruel.

Discussion

Whether pandemic or endemic, mobility is the primary target and has a significant influence on the state's economy. Pastoralism is a significant source of production and subsistence in Jammu and Kashmir, and mobility is critical to its sustainability in these rugged physical terrains and seasonal variations. Despite this, it has been and continues to be neglected while attempting to contain a health crisis, resulting in enormous costs to every connected industry. In terms of mobility, while Himalayan herders were permitted to travel by late April, barely 10 percent of the Bakarwals I met for my research were accompanied by their families. This personnel shortage has a direct influence on herd management, dairy production, herb gathering, and other economic activities. Additionally, as a consequence of decreasing demand for animals in the Kashmir valley as a result of limited mobility, Bakarwals were forced to sell their livestock at lower rates or take them to pastures, which might result in conflict over grazing grounds. Pastoralists incurred a loss and asset depletion in each case. Bakarwal groups also trade with residents residing in the Kashmir valley for necessities, cattle, and shelter-related equipment during their seasonal migrations, but both sides suffered serious consequences in 2020 owing to a lack of government help. According to data from one family, the following pattern regarding the purchase of products for 2019 and 2020 appeared in April:

Table 1: Expenditure during the years 2019 and 2020

	Essentials	Livestock	Shelter and Survival Gear	Total Expenditure
2019	8000 INR	65000 INR	3000 INR	76000 INR
2020	2000 INR	9000 INR	0	11000 INR

According to Table 1, a single Bakarwal household in Jammu and Kashmir's Sopore sub-district cut their expenditure on essentials, livestock, and housing equipment by 85.5 percent in the time of COVID-19. So, in every sector of the region's market economy, the lockdown was severe. Some fared better than others, while others endured considerable hardship. While those living in the other world were able to bypass the global pause by switching

from offline to online, the requirement for a basic internet connection and a charged mobile phone restricted those who traversed incomprehensible passes, and they were the ones who suffered the (un)predictable collapse. Nine out of ten Bakarwal youngsters have not attended a single class in the previous two years, and with no online educational system available in the high mountain passes, there is an urgent need to address this issue with a greater emphasis on community-based classes.

Likewise, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the labour market, with everyone facing an uncertain future. The pastoral context felt the effects in terms of income disparities, gender disparities, and age-restricted labour. With limited access to markets and labour, Himalayan herders are trapped in a survival struggle where one side threatens the very existence of the tradition, while the other side risks their survival. In any event, the imminent appears un/predictable from an emic standpoint. Nevertheless, pastoralism is dynamic, and it is critical to grasp this dynamic structure in order to plan an appropriate reaction in a circumstance such as COVID-19. While the pandemic appears to have had a minimal direct impact on pastoral health at the moment, it has been deadly implicitly, necessitating health care techniques that include pastoral health holistically (Bisson 2020). While administrative and municipal assistance and solidarity are critical in times of crisis, they can become politicised and communalized. Pastoralists are marginalised in several sectors of life, and so there is an urgent need for this solidarity, at the very least during difficult times. From a pastoral standpoint, they are adept at maintaining relationships, as their livelihood is contingent on local contact. Thus, issues of marginalisation, politics, and structural inequalities must be addressed peacefully and compassionately (Simula, et al. 2020, et al. 2020) to assist pastoralists in sustaining their centuries-old heritage.

Conclusion

COVID-19 is spreading across India, with the Himalayan state of Jammu and Kashmir being one of the places most affected. Numerous linked circumstances, such as co-mingling and the gathering of individuals over time and space, can act as catalysts for viral epidemics. Numerous socioeconomic complications have arisen as a result of the government's endeavour to contain and prevent the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic through strict lockdown and isolation measures. These include a reduction in commerce and economic activity, a decline in demand for animal products, an increase in the cost of necessities, an increase in transportation expenses, and a general decline in public assistance during an emergency. While the COVID-19 difficulties were unrelated to the decline in the livelihood crisis, they did contribute to the sufferings that were a direct result of the economic embargo and restrictions. These problems are threatening the food security and livelihoods of local pastoralists unless immediate action is done.

Pastoralism has always had to adapt to a harsh physical environment in the Himalayas, but COVID-19 presented additional complications that were not anticipated. These pastoralists suffered a severe blow as a result of the virus's risks, which impacted their whole economy, health, education, and way of life. Even though the corona virus continues to influence the world today, it is difficult to establish the corona virus's long-term impact on other regions of the world where it persisted. However, pastoralism in the northwest Himalayas appears to have adapted to the current state of the globe, as evidenced by the regions' persistence despite the virus's long-term impacts.

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Author's Contributions

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Competing Interests

The author declares that there are no competing interests.

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