Open Access

International journal of Rural Development, Environment and Health Research (IJREH)
[Vol-4, Issue-5, Sep-Oct, 2020]
ISSN: 2456-8678
https://dx.doi.org/10.22161/ijreh.4.5.6

Sustainable Livelihood and Resilience of the Van Gujjars

Sitaram Kasana

Lecturer, Anardevi Govt. Seinor Secondary School Nagar, Bharatpur Rajasthan, India

Abstract— *The Van Gujjars, a nomadic pastoral community inhabiting the Upper Yamuna River Basin, epitomize a resilient way of life intricately linked to their environment. This abstract introduces a comprehensive study that delves into the sustainable livelihood strategies and remarkable resilience exhibited by the Van Gujjars in the face of contemporary challenges. Their intricate dance with tradition and adaptation offers profound insights into the interplay between human communities and their natural surroundings. The Van Gujjars, renowned for their nomadic heritage and harmonious interaction with forest ecosystems, are at the heart of a study that examines their sustainable livelihood strategies and exceptional resilience in the Upper Yamuna River Basin. This research endeavors to unravel the intricacies of how the Van Gujjars have forged a path towards sustainable coexistence with their environment, while navigating the complexities of modernization, conservation, and changing socio-economic dynamics.*

Keywords*— *Van Gujjars, adaptation, nomadic heritage, modernization

I. INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) or Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) has been used extensively in academic and practical research, particularly in rural parts of the global South, since its inception in the early 1990s. It is presented as a "framework," rather than a "theory," and an "approach," rather than a collection of procedures. However, there are three instances in which it exceeds both of these. To begin with, it represents an epistemological stance that gives primacy to local knowledge, actively involves local people, and, to use a phrase from Robert Chambers (1983), aims to "put the last first." This may now be become standard development jargon, but that just makes it easier to forget how novel the concept was when it was first proposed. Second, the SLA does not itself constitute a methodology, but it does give preference to particular approaches, having developed from Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and subsequent methodological developments like Participatory Learning and Action (PLA). Third, Sen's (1985) Capabilities Approach, which views people as the center of development, may be traced back to the theoretical foundations of the SLA that gained traction in the late 1990s and beyond.

The name "livelihoods," as well as the associated strategy or framework and the underlying epistemology, has been heavily criticized. Despite this, it is still widely used or practiced, and frequently in a way that is very faithful to the original. If use rates are any indication, it continues to enjoy phenomenal popularity. 'Livelihoods approaches are now applied to literally everything'. However, it may be argued that its concentration on rural life and individual capacities makes it seem a little stale in light of current developments in rural economic life. Rural life is increasingly characterized by processes of labor migration, remittances, and small-scale commercial agriculture as a result of globalization's capture and integration of villages into global markets and the rapid shift towards industrial and services sector-led growth in countries of the global South. In addition, in a broader context of dwindling governmental support for agriculture, farming has become more dangerous for millions of smallholders due to the proliferation of consequences of climate and environmental change and natural resource exploitation on rural livelihoods.

II. DOMESTICATION OF ANIMALS

The domestication of animal amounted to capturing, taming, and breeding wild animals. They were separated from their natural habitat and provided shelter and food. Domestication of various species was followed with breeding taking place under captivity. The procedure, as described by Sandor Bokonyi, is lengthy and involved.

International journal of Rural Development, Environment and Health Research (IJREH)
[Vol-4, Issue-5, Sep-Oct, 2020]
ISSN: 2456-8678
https://dx.doi.org/10.22161/ijreh.4.5.6

Domesticating animals was the result of tens of thousands of years of hunting experience and the accumulation of knowledge about the anatomy, biology, physiology, behavior, etc. of various wild animal species. It took several, sometimes up to thirty generations for the domestication process to be complete" (History of Humanity, Vol., p. 389). Domesticated animal species were likely chosen after careful deliberation. They were not too aggressive to cause harm to the people domesticating them, they could easily move from one place to another with the groups keeping them under captivity, and they could easily adapt to new environments with human guidance and assistance (i) food was readily available for these species thanks to human efforts and guidance; (ii) the domesticated species were of some use to humans; (iii) as animal meat or for any other purpose; and (iv) they could be transported easily. It has been suggested by some scholars that the animals were also domesticated for using them for sacrificial purposes and evidence for it has come through their presence in graves.

To begin with most of the domesticated animals were herd animals (the sole exception is cat which anyway was domesticated much later). The main purpose of domestication must have been to get food reserve when hunting failed to deliver the need.

In several regions the dog was probably the first animal which was tamed and domesticated. Some species of wolf (the dog's ancestor) or wild dog were apparently tamed and domesticated in the late upper Paleolithic to aid in Pastoral Nomadism tracking and hunting activity.

PASTORAL NOMADISM

The available evidence and data for the earliest period (following Paleolithic) is very limited. The archaeological evidence for material culture is also fragmentary for the earlier period. Anthropological studies conducted among the pastoral nomadic groups in the modern times and the accounts of observers from sedentary civilizations for first millennium BC throw some light on them. However, more detailed records are available about nomads of Eurasian Steppes for the Middle Ages. According to Dani and Jean Pierre "Nomadic groups established relationships not only between themselves but also between humans and animals. In this biotic symbiosis they adjusted themselves fairly comfortably to particular natural surroundings. ... This particular association of people and animals led to better management and to an understanding of the power that was potential in animals. By harnessing this power for their own purposes, herders took another step forward towards progressive civilization. The bull or horse was harnessed to the plough and the horse or camel was used for a quicker ride across the grassy steppe land or sandy deserts.

In simple terms nomadic pastoralism is characterized by two dominant feature common to almost all such societies: (i) dependence of their economy on breeding of herd animals who provide sustenance to their way of life and shape the society they live in, and (ii) the migratory character of life in contrast to settled way of agriculturists. If we take both these elements separately then we may have pastoral communities or groups who are pastoralists and their subsistence is based on animal breeding but they follow a settled life. At the same time there are nomadic groups who are engaged in vocations, like trade, or craft production and lead a migratory life and do not involve themselves with breeding of animals. One more thing to be borne in mind is that within nomadic pastoral groups there are some who also participate in agriculture and other professions side by side with pastoralism. It is, therefore, very important to have both the above listed elements together in the groups to classify them as pastoral nomads.

Khazanov lists five important characteristics defining economic essence of pastoral nomadism: 1) Pastoralism is the predominant form of economic activity, 2) Its extensive character connected with the maintenance of herds all year round on a system of free-range grazing without stables, 3) Periodic mobility in accordance with the demands of pastoral economy within the boundaries of specific grazing territories, or between thee territories, 4) The participation in pastoral mobility of all or the majority of the population, 5) The orientation of production towards the requirements of subsistence.

WHO ARE THE ETHNIC GUJJARS OF INDIA?

This dissertation provides a genealogical sketch of the protracted development of forestry, and the ambivalent participation of an unlikely group of subjects in this development. Before one thousand Van Gujjar families were forcefully sedentarized in the 1990s, the minority Muslim Van Gujjars were all forest-dwelling, semi-nomadic buffalo herders. I have completed one year of fieldwork among both nomadic and sedentarized Van Gujjars in Uttarakhand between July 2013 and June 2014.

During the colonial days, the Indian "Gujjars" possessed so many cattle that the foreign powers used their name as a synonym for "herders". "Gujjar" is an ethnonym that is claimed by various groups in India. Gujjars have an important demographic weight in regions of Gujarat and Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). However, in Uttarakhand, they are also a demographic minority enjoying very little political clout. Most Gujjars in India are Hindus. From the state of Gujarat to Delhi, the capital city of India, the Hindu Gujjars enjoy a high profile. They are regularly stereotyped as magnates of the transportation sector and rich

"Delhiwalas", a term for Delhi's residents and whoever has connections there. By extension, a "Delhiwala" is a powerful well-to-do person. As if to confirm this stereotype, in 2014, a Gujjar from Haryana, Krishan Pal Gurjar, was sworn in as the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) minister of road transport and highways.

In J&K, Muslim Gujjars are well represented at every level of government, among the ranks of the police force, and in many other prominent professions. By contrast, the Van Gujjars are only found in Uttarakhand where they rank among the most marginalized communities, although being members of the much larger Gujjar family. The Van Gujjars derive most of their income from the sale of buffalo milk, however the sedentary Van Gujjars also rely either on their crops or agricultural rents. Their mother tongue is a form of "Gujri" which is similar but not identical to the Gujri spoken by the Muslim Gujjars of J&K. The Van Gujjars also speak Hindi on a daily basis, and it is in this language that I have conducted my interviews.

Although there are Gujjar activists working under the umbrella of "gujjarism" or "pan-gujjarism", an identity-based movement aiming at fostering convergence among the many Gujjar communities of India, this thesis focuses specifically on the relationships between the Van Gujjars and the forest bureaucracy. I chose this focus because Van Gujjar politics mainly centers on issues of forest management and everyday negotiations with FD workers. By comparison, political mobilization along identity lines has not been quite as strong among the Van Gujjars. Likewise, although religious identity and caste affiliation are important social factors shaping politics in India, in the case of the forest dwelling Van Gujjars who live a frugal existence within the boundaries of state forests, forest territoriality and forestry regulations seem to be more central to their predicaments. Van Gujjars dwelling within state forests also entertain fewer contacts with any kind of state officials than they do with the representatives of the FD, with whom they interact on a day-to-day basis. In other words, forest territoriality has a direct impact on whom Van Gujjars interact with and how they intimately experience the Indian state.

Himachal Pradesh (H.P.) to support one local Gujjar campaigning during the 2014 federal elections, Gujjarism was not the main factor motivating them. Their move certainly indexed time-honored affinities, but these ties did not extend to other Gujjar groups in India. The Van Gujjars of Uttarakhand closely related to the Muslim Gujjars of H.P. whom they met during the summer migration. The Gujjars of H.P. are like family to them, and the two groups have been known to intermarry. The main difference is that the Gujjars of H.P. were granted the official status "scheduled tribes" (ST) in the 1960s. Because of this, they are eligible for positive discrimination measures called reservations, for example reserved seats in education and quotas in public jobs. For their part, the Van Gujjars never benefited from tribal promotion policies. Story has it that is because they failed to attract the attention of India's political class at the critical moment when the tribal lists were drafted, another sign of Van Gujjars' marginalization and minority status. According to Van Gujjars, alliances with their H.P. brethren could bring them nearer to obtaining the tribal status, which they covet although "tribal development" is likely to lead to forced sedentarization and the end of their nomadic lifestyle. Some Van Gujjars I knew migrated to H.P. in the summer and participated in Gujjar Tribal Welfare Committees there. Some were even registered ST. in H.P., but lost their special status when they crossed back the Uttarakhand border at the end of the summer and monsoon. In Uttarakhand, the Van Gujjars' access to education, health care, and welfare in general, is deficient. They also show abysmally low development indicators. If nowadays the condition of the H.P. Gujjars is the envy of the Van Gujjars, it is interesting to note that the latter were not always the most deprived. Oral history recounts that no later than two generations ago, the ancestors of the Van Gujjars were magnificently affluent, but subsequently became marginalized. Such injustice informs how contemporary Van Gujjars perceive and represent state administrations in H.P and Uttarakhand.

THE STRUGGLE THAT DISTINGUISHED THE "VAN" GUJJARS

The "Van" in Van Gujjar is a recent addition. The prefix did not distinguish the nomadic herders from their brethren in H.P. and J&K, or the Hindu Gujjars for that matter, before the 1980s. In fact, until recently, the Van Gujjars were still known as the *Jammuwala Gujars*. The origin of the *Jammuwala* appellation is found in Gujjar oral history and renditions of the same written by various colonial administrators and Indian historians. These stories surmise that many centuries ago, the Van Gujjars came to H.P. as part of the dowry of a princess of Jammu who was married in Sirmaur, H.P. Being unable to find milk of the purest quality in Sirmaur, the princess implored her father the King of Jammu to send a number of his Gujjar subjects to her court.

The nomadic Gujjars of Uttarakhand were branded "Van" Gujjars by social activists and NGO workers after the notification process of the Rajaji National Park was initiated in 1983 for increasing the level of protection granted to the elephants in the area.8 In Hindi, "Van" means "forest", and

therefore, "Van Gujjars" roughly translates as "forest herders". The Van Gujjars also distinguished themselves during the 1980s as they opposed their eviction from the lands included within the Rajaji. Once tucked in the westernmost corner, this park encompassing 820 square kilometers of land was devolved to Uttarakhand after it became an independent state in 2000. Ever since, the Van Gujjars have figured prominently in scholarly discussions about the forceful human displacement caused by conservation initiatives in India and elsewhere (Platt et al. 2016, Torri 2011, Lasgorceix and Kothari 2009, Agrawal and Redford 2009, Gooch 2009 and 1998, Rangarajan and Shahabuddin 2006, Chatty and Colchester 2002).

The notification process for the Rajaji eventually aborted because the central administration in Delhi chose to withhold its approval. It was found that the FD of had not planned adequate compensation for those who would be displaced by cordoning off the protected area (Indira 1992).9 Even without the official seal, however, the FD of Uttarakhand. has managed the Rajaji as a national park since the 1980s – the FD practices altering land uses more effectively than the legal status of the protected area in this case. Since, thousands of Van Gujjar families were displaced and hundreds more threatened with eviction. The 1980s and 1990s have been particularly troubled decades for the Van Gujjars. Officially, 1390 families were slated for "rehabilitation." The initial count was 512 families and a subsequent census added 878 more almost two decades later (in 1998). These censuses led to the construction of two colonies, one on each side of the Ganges River downstream from the city of Haridwar. The FD removed many more households from the forest ranges of the Rajaji, their residents evicted from their ancestral lands without compensation – all in the name of wildlife protection.

Activists pleading with the forest bureaucracy for more humane treatment of the Van Gujjars and the recognition of their customary rights immediately recognized the need for improved communication strategies. The Indian public was familiar with the Hindu Gujjars, particularly the wealthiest sorts who were found in Delhi and nearby states. Popular opinion was less knowledgeable about the nomadic minorities of Uttarakhand, however. Social activists and their vocal interlocutors among those affected by the park wanted to distinguish the Van Gujjars from the other Hindu and Muslim Gujjars. Unlike them, the forest dwellers of Uttarakhand. were neither settled, nor powerful, nor eligible for tribal social promotion.

When I was in the field, I heard several Van Gujjars expressing dissatisfaction with the "Van" in their name. Being treated as different from other groups of influential Gujjars, they doubted they ever could claim the special accommodations the Indian Constitution is granting to depressed classes and tribals. Historically, the Van Gujjars have experienced endless difficulties linked to their ambiguous status as jungle denizens. Putting their children in school, moving in and out of the forests, or obtaining a voters' ID is difficult without a proof of address. Van Gujjars garner the attention of their political representatives with utmost difficulty as the latter do not see them, disfranchized forest dwellers, as their legitimate constituents. Van Gujjars are mostly seen as illegal immigrants who came from Jammu, encroachers and squatters on state property. The Van Gujjars themselves wonder what they could do to be regarded as legitimate citizens. Sometimes they call themselves "*jangli*" Gujjars, instead of Van ("forest") Gujjars, which roughly translates as "peoples of the wild" or, more concisely, "wild people". These intimations of wildness alter the Van Gujjars' own perceptions of themselves and how they mobilize politically.

VAN GUJJAR LIVING ARRANGEMENTS, RESIDENCE PATTERNS, AND ACCESS TO THE FOREST RESOURCES

In retrospect, the Van Gujjars have inherited their distinctive name from the Rajaji episode, but ultimately no cohesive ethnic front has ever rallied around the "Van" designation. Instead, the Rajaji has fractured the Van Gujjars into several factions separated by politically salient boundaries. The living arrangements of the Van Gujjars, which can be distinguished by geographical location and settlement patterns, have had a direct impact on their capacity to mobilize. Today, the Van Gujjars are divided into four groups: those who were displaced from the park area but relocated in the colonies where they now thrive; those who were evicted without any form of compensation and who now squat on public land (or in a few cases on private land) alongside other Van Gujjars who have "willingly" left the forests because they could not afford the extra-legal rent which forest workers asked from them; a third group comprises those who still live within reserved forests which were not included within the park limits; finally, the forth group refers to park dwellers who have thus far resisted being evicted. Whereas both resettlement colonies are located in Uttarakhand, a majority of the Gujjars that still dwell within state forests outside the Rajaji live in the Shivalik ranges of Uttarakhand. Access to the forest resources is most difficult inside the Rajaji; in comparison, control is more relaxed in the Shivalik's. Different tenure and access regimes imprint state and conservation boundaries in Van Gujjar imaginations. This in turn affects how Van Gujjars form cultural representations about

International journal of Rural Development, Environment and Health Research (IJREH)
[Vol-4, Issue-5, Sep-Oct, 2020]
ISSN: 2456-8678
https://dx.doi.org/10.22161/ijreh.4.5.6

bureaucratic rule across each state. These days, Uttarakhand's Van Gujjars claim – with some exaggeration – that Uttarakhand has compensated all jungle pastoralists by offering them generous resettlement packages, while Uttarakhand. has so far neglected them. In reality, the Van Gujjars who were duly resettled outside the Rajaji were treated in conformity with paragraphs 24 and 25 of the Wildlife Protection Act of 1972, dispositions that bear resemblance those of the Land Acquisition Act of 1894. Both are Indian union-level bills that have protected people displaced by the state against the most blatant abuses. In general, however, Van Gujjars view it as the duty of *each individual* state of the Indian union to extend tenure rights to "backward communities" – as disadvantaged groups are called in India– in keeping with the spirit of previous land reforms seeking to emancipate oppressed tenants from the grip of exploitative landlords. Van Gujjars contend that, displacement from protected areas or not, in the light of their shared history, all jungle pastoralists have equal rights to land property, access to primary education, basic health care, and other amenities provided by the state such as clean water. This egalitarian vision rests on the Gujjars' own understanding of the legitimacy of their customary rights and their knowledge that the state was at least once committed to provide shelter to the homeless and land to the landless.

Van Gujjars see themselves as two main groups, those who have been resettled and those who have not. This self-representation obfuscates the fate that befalls other factions of Van Gujjars mentioned above: informal clusters of Van Gujjars squatting land outside classified forest lands and the Rajaji residents as well. The squatters occupying lands at the fringes of agricultural areas are now out of the reach of the FD. They hope to normalize their situation in the future, notably by claiming land in "adverse possession" – a feature of property law India shares with many other countries, allowing squatters to claim private land rights on Crown land after years of continuous occupation. However, this strategy can create animosity between Van Gujjars, rural authorities, and landed elites coveting the same land, with each group thinking their claims are the more legitimate.

Then, a few hundred Van Gujjar families still live within the Rajaji in violation of conservation guidelines. State officials often talk about park dwellers as people in a phase of transition. To them, Van Gujjars will eventually settle on their own volition, or be resettled. This amounts to saying that state bureaucrats see Van Gujjars as incomplete beings – nomads, vagrants, and squatters who are not yet legitimate citizens, but could become legitimate soon after they take roots somewhere. This stance depoliticizes Van Gujjar settlements while also naturalizing transition to sedentary life and nation-building on the basis of agrarian ideals. For the FD, an institution that has developed its own language to speak about forest dwellers, the Gujjars are trespassers and criminals. In this context, Van Gujjars, like other disfranchized groups around the world, vote with their feet. From an analytical point of view, occupying forests against state policies is not unequivocally a crime. This transgression of state property is also a political gesture on the part of those who have struggled to maintain access to forests and the livelihoods they draw from there.

Most Van Gujjars still living inside Rajaji have resisted relocation because their name or that of their next-of-kin do not appear on the FD censuses, rendering them ineligible for rehabilitation. The FD has also made repeated promises to the Rajaji Van Gujjars, reassuring them that inclusive relocation packages were forthcoming. To date, however, these promises of colonies furnished with public utilities typically found in Indian villages, including schools, health clinics, irrigation, clean water, roads, and electricity, failed to materialize. And so, Van Gujjars remain in forests and protected areas. Beyond resistance, however, Van Gujjars' land uses and movements also correspond to how they negotiate with the forest staff, as will be illustrated in following chapters, underlining the existence of complex political relationships between traditional forest dwellers and forest workers. Within state forests, Van Gujjars have established themselves on *tappars,* which are small, flat, and grassy areas bordering the rivers that cut the Shivalik's into narrow ravines. These *tappars* are not very big, and they are located some distance apart from one another. Thus, the residence pattern of the Van Gujjars is neither the hamlet nor the village. Each individual family lives at a respectable distance from its nearest neighbors – and, Van Gujjars say, this makes them more vulnerable to FD searches and exaction. This settlement pattern is not "traditional" in the sense that it was given form through the permits system that was instigated by the FD about eighty years ago, which has allocated bounded "forest compartment" to the herders paying annual dues. Thus, a good *tappar* has been a privilege that came at a cost. Officially, the Van Gujjars pay a nominal fee for their use of the forest resources. The Van Gujjars call this annual amount their "permit", although numerous households pay "permit fees" since generations despite never having possessed an actual paper "permit". Whether this paper permit exists or not, the payable amount is calculated at a *pro rata* of the number of buffaloes that one owns. In theory, the Van Gujjars would not have to pay any other form of rent besides the "permit fee". Less officially, the Van Gujjars pay their dues many times over. Not only are they

International journal of Rural Development, Environment and Health Research (IJREH)
[Vol-4, Issue-5, Sep-Oct, 2020]
ISSN: 2456-8678
https://dx.doi.org/10.22161/ijreh.4.5.6

charged at a much higher rate per buffalo than the (undoubtedly antiquated) laws prescribe, but the Van Gujjars must perform an equivalent amount of fixing, bribing, and gifting for everything that they glean from their jungles, regardless whether it is through lopping leaves, collecting firewood, or thatching grass for housing purposes.

Illustration 1: Picture showing the broken Shivalik landscape and a Van Gujjar hut on a tappar *deep inside the Nainital jungles of the Shivalik Forest Division (c) Pierre-Alexandre Paquet*

The conditions of access to forest resources around the resettlement colonies are similar, insofar as the colony residents have no usufruct rights in nearby forests. The same conditions generally prevail throughout rural India. Indian villagers cook over wood stoves and therefore need fuel wood every day. However, many do not possess any forest rights. Being without official access rights, the Van Gujjars in the colonies negotiate with the FD staff for everything that they wish to take from forests, just like the Van Gujjars who still live inside the forests, and just like Indian forest users more generally. Of course, the amounts paid for access rights to forest products vary across India. Whether legal or not, these fees tend to vary according to several parameters ranging from the dispositions of mind of the FD functionaries, the type and rarity of the resources, and so on. Some individuals enjoy privileged rates due to special circumstances, including status and power. But overall, it can be observed that the total costs of forest products, comprised of a mixture of legal and extra-legal fees, gain a certain "stickiness" over time. This is to say that once people get to know how much things cost in the region where they live, they expect to pay this price and nothing more. For example, gleaners from around the park area where I worked paid a daily entrance fee of 20 rupees directly to the range office (or to a local Van Gujjar deputy in the wee hours of the morning, before the ranger began working in his office). Payment of this fee gave gleaners the right to collect a headload of forest products, but not timber. This practice was illegal, perhaps, however 20 rupees was also a regional (range-wise) convention.

The politics of forest access in India are complex; beyond legal considerations, there are issues of ethnicity, class, caste, social status, and bureaucratic hierarchies. It is interesting to observe how various claims to authority and complex forms of social identification are performed during access struggles. On the one hand, the FD authority sits on the official forest policies, but modulates enforcement based on its capacity to perform legal and illicit exactions from forest users. On the other hand, Van Gujjars do not remain passive in these transactions. They too actively negotiate the terms of their access using extra-legal means, lavish payments, and gifts. Within the forest context, asserting one's rights to harvest natural resources is a political gesture that defines one's social position and authority within jungle government. As the following chapters show, the performance and style of access struggles are important in the formation of distinct *jangli* subjectivities too. Van Gujjars who are particularly skilled at negotiating with the FD can become recognized as worthy leaders by their peers. A good leader should be able to negotiate lesser fees, get sanctions waived, and even secure funds such as those allocated, for example, to temporary employment schemes (on plantations, digging trenches, and so on) that FD officials distribute to their clientele from time to time. A good leader broadly redistributes such benefits and state relief, not only to his next-of-kin, but also to the weak and the poor, thus legitimating his relations of connivance with the FD. On a day-to-day basis, however, most transactions between state officials and the Van Gujjars take place under the cover of secrecy. Collusion remains tacit.

ENVIRONMENTAL KNOWLEDGE AND ECOLOGICAL DEGRADATION FOR THE VAN GUJJARS

According to the Van Gujjars, dramatic ecological changes have negatively impacted forests and forest-based livelihoods in the 20th century (see subsequent chapter). The forest dwellers have observed that timber exploitation caused a decline in forest cover, and the proliferation of unpalatable grasses and invasive species, such as *Lantana camara* locally known as *bilari*. These invasives compete with the plants that buffaloes like to eat, and have a negative effect on the Van Gujjar economy. In a sense, environmental degradation has conspired with the strictest policies of the FD in rendering forests less hospitable to the Van Gujjars.

Van Gujjars are well acquainted with jungles, their dwelling places. They can readily identify hundreds of trees and plant species, which they have used traditionally, or continue to use as fodder, medicine, oil, flavoring, perfume, soap and so

on, as revealed by ethnobotanical activities which I have completed with the participation of a few field informants. The Van Gujjars also share information with the FD, an institution that has always relied on pastoralists reporting timber smugglers and poachers. British or not, however, state experts never considered the Van Gujjars as capable forest caretakers, although those who had mobilized against evictions from the Rajaji had intended to change that. One NGO, in collaboration with the Van Gujjars, has even produced a detailed proposal for a new approach to park management giving nomads the role of stewards, whereas the FD would only have acted in the capacity of external facilitator (RLEK 1997). In spite of sustained advocacy for achieving such outcomes, state bureaucrats held on to their entrenched views in top-down conservation. They entirely dismissed discourses framing Van Gujjars as able forest managers. To most state experts, humans, by their very nature, pose a threat to the environment that the Indian national park system aims at protecting. Current policy-oriented studies define Van Gujjars' impact on forest ecology as "disturbance", and most research designs ignore the possibility of community management. No plan to award Van Gujjars decision-making powers has ever been seriously considered in either Uttarakhand. or Uttarakhand. In the meantime, environmental degradation has continued to pauperize Van Gujjars, and what marginalizes them even further is that their access to forest resources hinges on costly extra-legal arrangements mainly benefiting the forest staff.

III. CONCLUSION

The research on the sustainable livelihood and resilience of the Van Gujjars delves into a narrative that intertwines tradition and adaptation. Their ability to maintain their nomadic way of life while responding to modern realities reflects their remarkable resilience. Through this exploration, we seek not only to celebrate their unique journey but also to draw lessons from their experiences that can inform sustainable development strategies worldwide. By understanding the intricate dance of sustainability and resilience, we embrace the opportunity to co-create a future where human communities and nature thrive in harmonious coexistence.

REFERENCES

[1] Goel, Gauri, Kaur, and Singh (2014). Linking Lifestyle of Marginalized Gujjar Population in Himachal Pradesh with Plague Outbreaks: A Qualitative Enquiry. Indian Journal of Public Health, (58). Issue 2, April-June, 2014.
[2] Koundal Virender (2012). Poverty Among Nomadic Gujjars – A Case Study of J&K and H.P. International Journal of Marketing, Financial Services & Management Research (ISSN 2277 3622), 1(8).
[3] Ahmed, A., & Verma, N. M. P. (2018). An Analysis of Growth and Performance of MSMEs in Jammu and Kashmir. Advance and Innovative Research, 93.
[4] Majumdar, D.N. (1958). "Races and Culture of India", Asia Publishing House, Bombay.
[5] Mehmood, Y., & Anand, P. K. (2020). Issues and Challenges in Higher Education: With Special Reference to Jammu and Kashmir. Our Heritage, 68(30), 10368-10380.
[6] Vatsayan (1972-73). "Social and Cultural", Kedar Nath Ram Nath pub Meerut pp.106-107.
[7] Paswal, N. H. (2020). Caste and Secular Crises in Indian Politics. Our Heritage, 68(30), 10471-10482.
[8] Naikoo, A. A., Thakur, S. S., & Guroo, T. A. (2018). Socio-Economic Conditions of Gujjars in South Kashmir Their Challenges and Strategies. Scholedge International Journal of Business Policy & Governance, 5(4), 38-46.
[9] Government of India. (2001). Census of India 2011.
[10] Silk Road Sites in India, http://whc.unesco.org/fr/listesindicatives/5492/ (2010).
[11] Bhattacharyay, B. N. & De, P. Restoring the Asian Silk Route: Toward an integrated Asia. ADBI working paper series 140 (2009).
[12] Fareed, M., Shah, A., Hussain, R. & Afzal, M. Genetic study of phenylthiocarbamide (PTC) taste perception among six human populations of Jammu and Kashmir (India). Egypt. J. Med. Hum. Genet. 13, 161–166 (2012).
[13] Sharma, I. et al. Ancient Human Migrations to and through Jammu Kashmir-India were not of Males Exclusively. Sci. Rep. 8, 851, https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-017-18893-8 (2018).
[14] Fareed, M., Hussain, R., Shah, A. & Afzal, M. A1A2BO and Rh gene frequencies among six populations of Jammu and Kashmir, India. Transfus. Apher. Sci. 50, 247–252 (2014).
[15] Dhingra, R., Kumar, A. & Kour, M. Knowledge and practices related to menstruation among Tribal (Gujjar) adolescent girls. Studies on Ethno-Medicine 3, 43–48, https://doi.org/10.1080/09735070.2009.11886336 (2009).