

IMPACT OF CORONA VIRUS [COVID -19] ON HIMALAYAN TRIBE: GUJJARS OF UDHAMPUR DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Novel Corona Virus has affected many parts of world and India also. It has also affected the milk economy of the Gujjars of Udhampur District of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir. "Gujjar" is the most populous Scheduled Tribe in the study area. Out of the total Gujjar population who are the scheduled tribe in the U.T of J&K, a majority comes in the 'Below Poverty Line' category. The novel Corona Virus has affected the lifeline of the Gujjars of Udhampur District and their milk economy. Milk economy is the major source of livelihood for Gujjars. Due to lockdown restrictions, Gujjars had been facing transportation problems for their milk and milk products. A hate campaign was spread against the Gujjars Community related to Tablighi Jamat gathering last month in Delhi's Nizamuddin, which has emerged as a hotspot of Covid-19, because several participants came from abroad and due to this some sections of the society in Udhampur District have been boycotting the milk and milk products supplied by Gujjars. In this paper an attempt has been made to assess and evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on Gujjars of Udhampur District and give some suggestions for the welfare of this community.

Keywords: Covid-19, Novel, Gujjars, Milk Economy.

INTRODUCTION

Gujjars constitute a Himalayan Tribe, most populous scheduled Tribe of the Union Territory, Jammu and Kashmir, a border Union Territory of India, inhabited by a number of tribal communities who have settled down in all parts of this Himalayan U.T. For many years, Jammu and Kashmir had no Scheduled Tribe (ST) population. It was only in 1989, that eight communities by the Constitution (Jammu & Kashmir) Scheduled Tribes Order, 1989 and four communities namely Gujjar, Bakkarwal, Gaddi and Sippi were

notified as the Scheduled Tribes by the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Act, 1991. These twelve hill tribes of Jammu and Kashmir (erstwhile State) which were granted ST status are Balti, Beda, Bot (Boto), Brokpa (Drokpa, Dard, Shin), Changpa, Garra, Mon, Purigpa, Gujjar, Bakkarwal, Gaddi and Sippis. All the twelve Scheduled

Tribes (STs) were enumerated officially for the first time during the 2001 Census recording a population of 1,105,979. The Scheduled Tribes account for 11.9 per cent of the total population of the State as per Census 2011.

Out of the total Gujjar population who are mostly scheduled tribe in Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, a majority came under B.P.L. The Gujjars in the Udhampur district depend mainly on the milk economy as their major source of livelihood but due to traditions like Pastoral Nomadism and Transhumance, this community continues to live in social isolation and leads a more or less marginalized economic existence. Due to Covid-19 their conditions have worsened, and they faced a lot of problems as per their traditional way of living. They used to move to upper hills with their livestock by the end of March. Covid-19 restrictions restricted their migration to upper hills in 2020. Owing to the spread of deadly Covid-19 pandemic, their migration practice got affected. No thermal screening related programme had been conducted by the Government for this section of the society before the migration process and as such no movement could be allowed to them.

COVID-19

Corona Virus Infection disease started in December 2019, at Wuhan China. WHO announced "COVID-19" as the name of this new disease on 11 February 2020, following the guidelines previously developed with the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations. Since December 2019, many cases of pneumonia of unknown etiology have been confirmed in Wuhan city, Hubei province, China. Wuhan City is a major transportation hub with a population of more than 11 million people. Most of the patients visited a local fish and wild animal market in the month of December (Lu et al. 2020). Symptoms of COVID-19 infection include fever, cough and acute respiratory disease, with severe cases leading to pneumonia, kidney failure, and even death (Sabino et al, 2020).

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The present study which has been undertaken in Udhampur district of Jammu province is quite relevant, as it is important to understand the impact of COVID-19 on Gujjars of Udhampur. The education levels among the tribes of Jammu and Kashmir especially Gujjars of Udhampur are quite low. Nomadism has also contributed to their lagging behind in the field of education. All these factors contribute in Gujjars present situation and backwardness. The study is significant as, it is important to explore the challenges being faced by the Gujjar community during this novel pandemic and then also suggest some measures to overcome the same. The proposed study is of much significance as never before such kind of research work has been undertaken in Udhampur district.

METHODOLOGY

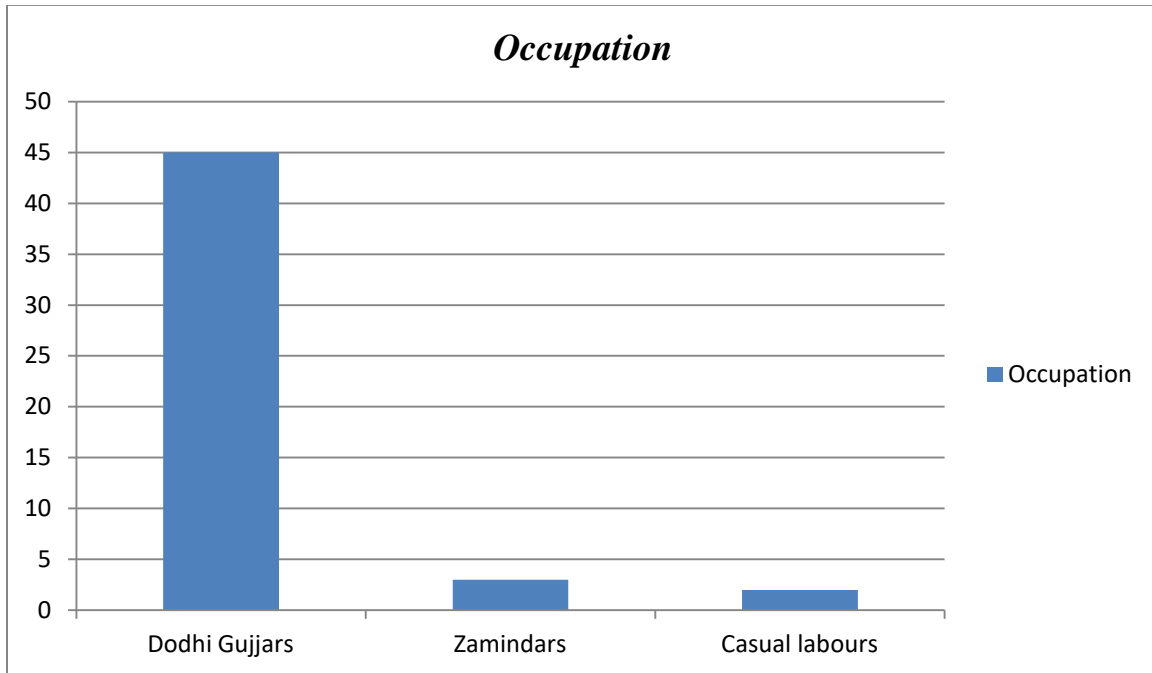
In present study, we use both primary and secondary data. Udhampur district comprises of seven tehsils out of which Udhampur tehsil was selected for the present study. From tehsil Udhampur, 50 households were randomly selected for investigation. Data for the study was collected by using a designed interview schedule.

FINDINGS

Occupation: - The tribals herd animals like sheep goats and buffalo. Semi-nomadic people of Gujjar community are in the habit of migrating to upper parts of Himalayas along with their cattle during the summer season and back to the plains with the onset of chilly winters. Gujjars perhaps is the only community which has preserved and maintained its originality throughout ages.

Occupation	households
DodhiGujjars	45
Zamindars	3
Casual Labours	2

Source:- Survey Data

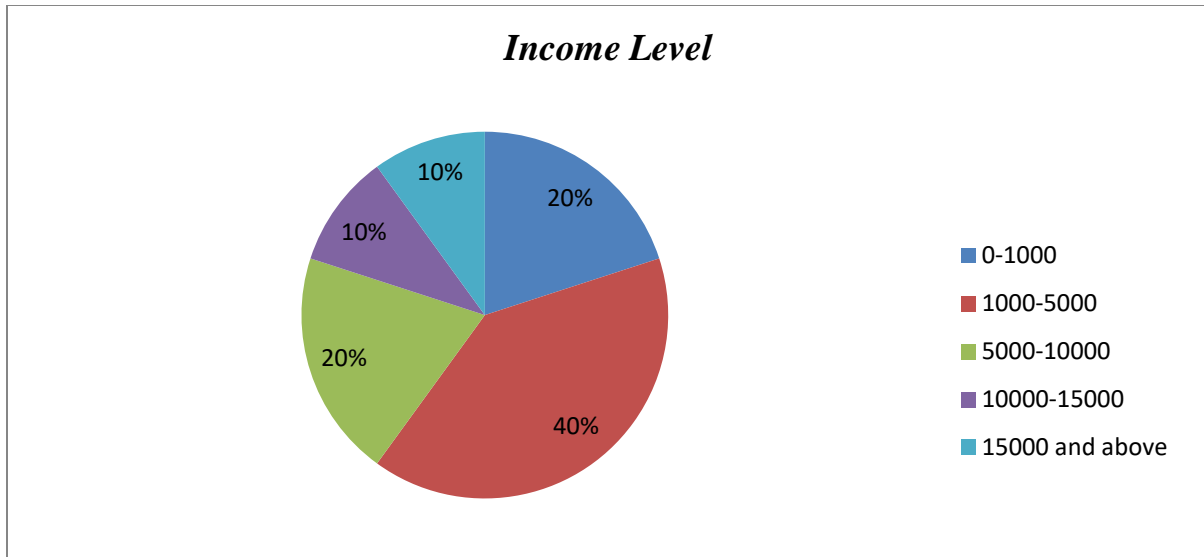


The above table shows that the majority of the Gujjars are Dodhi Gujjars and milk production is the primary occupation.

Monthly Income level before lockdown period

Income	No. Of Households	Percentage
0-1000	10	20
1000-5000	20	40
5000-10000	10	20
10000-15000	05	10
15000 and above	05	10
Total	50	100

Source:- Survey Data.

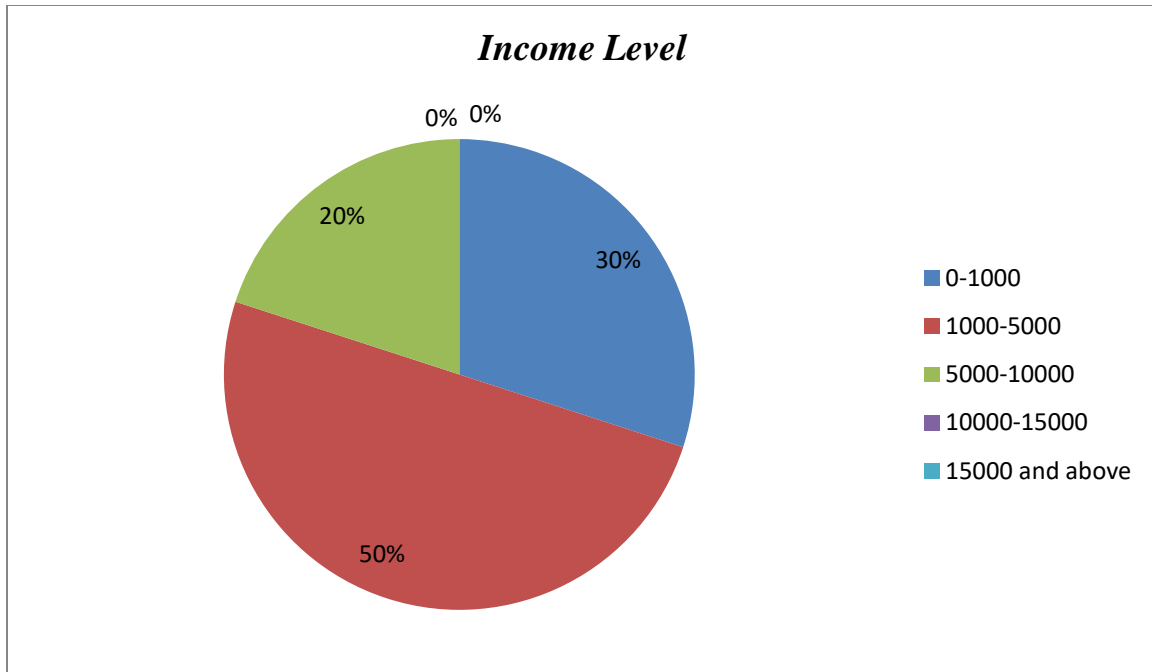


The above table shows that the majority of the Gujjars come under 1000- 10000 income level. Only few families were found above the monthly income level of 10000.

Monthly Income level during lockdown period

Income	No. Of Households	Percentage
0-1000	15	30
1000-5000	25	50
5000-10000	10	20
10000-15000	Nil	Nil
15000 and above	Nil	Nil
Total	50	100

Source:- Survey Data.



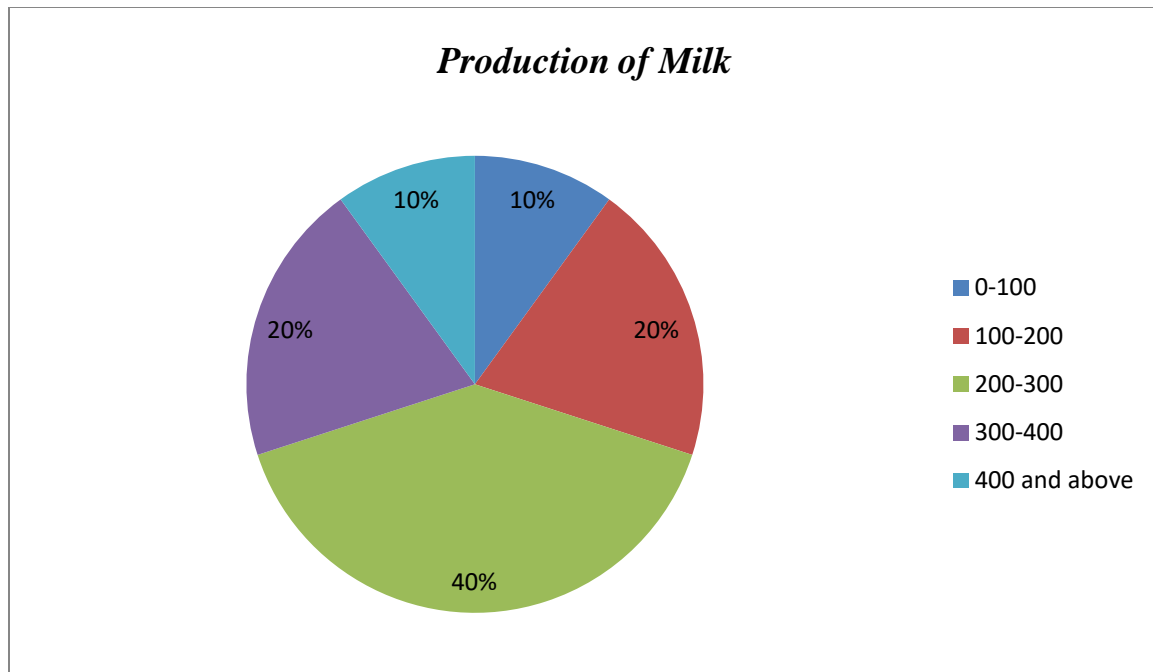
The above mentioned table shows that the majority of the Gujjars are facing problems due to Covid-19, the monthly income level has fallen during the lockdown period. Before lockdown period, for 0-1000 income level 10 households were found and during the lockdown period 15 households were found for the same income level. The table also

shows that for the next income level before lockdown 20 households were found and during lockdown 25 came under this level. 10 households were found in the 5000-10000 income level which reveals that the monthly income level has fallen for all of the Gujjar families due to the impact of Covid-19.

Production of Milk in Litres per month

Milk in litres.	No. Of Households	Percentage
0-100	05	10
100-200	10	20
200-300	20	40
300-400	10	20
400 and above	05	10
Total	50	100

Source:- Survey Data.



The above table indicates that the average production of milk lies 100-400 litres per month i.e 80 percent of the total production in the study area. Due to lockdown restrictions, Gujjars had been facing transportation problems for their milk and milk products.

Central idea of the study is that their milk economy should be organised like co-operative or given a level on the pattern like Amul of Gujarat. So that they could diversify their product not just to sell only plain milk but sell other products of milk like Ghee Butter, Chees and Milk Sweets, packaging their product to sell not only in Udhampur District but other parts of the J&K UT and country also. If, we organised their Milk Economy, they will not face this type of problem or crisis in near future. Government should play main role in organising the milk economy of the Gujjars of Udhampur District. They should not depend upon one area for the sale of their Milk and not only on one product like Milk. If, they will have the facilities to store their products or to convert the Milk into other products. Their income level will rise and they will settled permanently in one place. Their Milk economy is

flourished, they rear high breed buffaloes. When they organised their standard of living will automatically upgrade, they will get proper housing facilities, bank accounts, children get proper education and government jobs also.

PROBLEMS FACED BY GUJJARS COMMUNITY OF UDHAMPUR DISTRICT

1. Due to lockdown, Gujjars are unable to sell their milk and milk products.
2. Due to this Novel Corona Virus, all the sweet shops and other related shops are closed and it directly affects the Gujjar community because Gujjars mostly sell their milk and milk products to these shops.
3. One of the most important problem is transportation because mostly Gujjars use public transport and due to lockdown it has not been working.
4. Tablighi Jammah gathering in Delhi's Nazamudin, is also a one of the reasons due

to which the people of the area boycotted the milk and milk products supplied by Gujjars.

5. Government announced many plans for other sectors during this lockdown period, but not a single measure has been announced specifically for the Gujjars community.
6. Shortage of fodder for the cattle has also been a major problem during the lockdown period.
7. Veterinary or medical facility was also hampered.
8. The migrant labourers have moved out and this impacted the demand and sale of liquid milk in the Udhampur District.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Government should take initiative for the collection of milk and milk product from Gujjars by creating a central milk market or milk aggregation/collection points.
2. Government should announce some policy measures for safeguarding the milk economy of Gujjars.
3. Government should provide financial help to this community through Direct Cash Benefit Transfer.
4. N.G.Os and social workers of the area should also come forward for their help.
5. Government should setup a collection Centre at the local level or run a vehicle programme for collection of milk and milk products from this community to be sold through mobile vans in different parts of the district or to be taken to the neighbouring states.
6. Diversification of production should be encouraged at this juncture, so that different types of milk based items can be produced and marketed in the

neighbouring as well as distant areas through specialized cold storage facilities, as it would not only secure the economic interests of the gujjars, but will also prevent the wastage of precious natural resource such as milk.

CONCLUSION

On the whole it has been observed that due to restrictions imposed by the Government to contain the spread of deadly Covid-19, their migration practice got affected. Covid -19 cases have been traced to some Jammatt attendees belonging to Gujjars community of Jammu region. Due to this, people of the Udhampur had boycotted the milk and milk products supplied by this community. This has directly impacted the livelihood of this community, which produces more than 70 % of milk everyday and sells it in different areas of the Udhampur District. The Reserve Bank of India has offered Monetary measures such as lowering the Bank Rate, Cash Reserve ratio and other measures, as important ways to increase liquidity. Some fiscal concessions too have been announced by the central government which target 'the poorest of the poor' beneficiaries. All these measures are not sufficient, Union Territory government should provide some direct cash benefit to this community through Direct Benefit Transfer Scheme along the policy of the central government.

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