

## **Living on the Margins: A Socio-historical Profile of the Nomads in Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

The nomadic population of today's Pakistan is scattered in the sandy deserts, barren plateaus, the pastures of Northern Areas, as well the cities and villages all over the country. A sizable number of nomads are engaged in seasonal migration, pastoralism and peripatetic movements across the boundaries. This article describes the socio-economic characteristics of the nomads and also tries to construct a linkage between their present and past in order to enquire into the evolution of lifestyle and culture of Pakistani nomads. Anthropological and philological aspects of nomadic life are discussed to highlight the nomads' distinct characteristics. Since Pakistan is facing another phase of climate change, ecological determinism has also been discussed with respect to its impact on general population as well as the nomads.

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### **Introduction**

Nomadism has been the oldest style of human life which dates back to the time when wild plants and animals were the main sources of survival for human beings. Religious literature contains many references to this fact. Take any extreme and remotest region on the globe – arctic, sub-arctic, tundra, steppes, deserts, high mountains, sea and lakes, dense forests – nomads are found every where. Pakistan, too, has a sizable number of nomadic population – the people who are regularly on the move, from one place and province to another. Some have been habitually crossing the international boundaries even in the present day conditions of war and terrorism. The nomads are found in every nook and corner of Pakistan. One can find them in the high mountains of Himalayas, Karakoram, and Hindukush, stretches of inaccessible valleys and passes, deserts of Thar, Cholistan and Dasht, as well as in urban centres. Some of them have been crossing the Pak-Afghan border and trading from the Central Asia to the heart of Indian empire of the yore.

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Pastoralism has inevitably been associated with nomads in conditions where it could ensure humans' survival after they learnt domesticating animals. It is believed that the nomads do not exhaust natural sources by overgrazing but leave them in a renewable state and they look out for the scarce harvest spread sporadically in vast tracts of inhospitable territories. In this sense they are very important contributors to the national economy, utilizing marginal resources, but their hard labour goes unrecognized. In both India and Pakistan, though pastoral nomads have been using resources on the lands which are marginal and agriculturally unproductive, yet they have to interact with the settled and agricultural areas to meet their need for grains, cloth, pottery, tools and ornaments. Some agriculture is also practiced by them in favorable conditions on the land they own or get such a right. Since they live in extreme ecological conditions, they have to adapt and be flexible according to ecological changes, thus they become opportunistic. It remains a historical fact that in two major nomadic regions in Pakistan – Balochistan and Cholistan – the climatic conditions have undergone drastic change in the past. The old rivers dried up and rains went away. Even today rainfall pattern determines their decision to stay, cultivate or move to green pastures. Sudden rainfall in arable land may halt their movement forward as they come back to plough and sow their fields which were left in desperation for rain. The total picture of nomadism in Pakistan represents a scheme in which a particular 'nomadic' group could be located on a continuum with two extremes – complete sedentary and complete impermanent. This location may change with change in conditions, round the year or over the years, depending upon climatic and geographical variations.<sup>1</sup>

Accompanied by their animals, carrying brief household items and tents, the nomads are seen either moving from place to place or settled in open places or the margins of the cities. Their lifestyle, religion, customs, social life, and problems make a very interesting and challenging topic for study. These are people who are exposed to a large number of risks; both man-made and natural, but they are groomed to face them bravely. Their leadership system has evolved to give immense power and trust in the personality of the chief who has to guide, decide and manage all issues wisely. Their laws are tribal, according great value to security of life and honour and also to sacrifice inadvertently. Women are no less brave; they groom such qualities and live in the same harsh

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<sup>1</sup> A similar pattern is suggested for existing conditions in India, by Lawrence S. Leshnik, 'Pastoral Nomadism in the Archaeology of India and Pakistan', *World Archaeology*, 4:2 (October 1972), p.151.

environmental conditions. With growing exposure to modern life conditions many of the old virtues are dying and the cost of adjustment is always heavier on the part of the 'less civilized' since they are mostly driven to adjust rather than doing it on will. Though the nomads are usually good friend of the natural resources, their sharing these resources with the 'more civilized' population, leaves these 'less civilized' people with even lesser resources of subsistence.

This paper seeks to present an overall picture of nomadic life in Pakistan with a historical perspective. Since the diversity in geographical regions has been changing the pattern of nomadism in different parts of the country, the present day scenario of nomadism will be explained to see how a big section of population is living in harsh economic, cultural and geographical conditions. The paper will end by highlighting the prospects for nomadism in the wake of recent climatic changes in Pakistan and the globe, which are overwhelmingly threatening the present balance of man-nature-development nexus.

### **Theoretical background**

The foremost condition of survival for humans is getting food from the environment. Hoebel states that:

The subsistence resources available to a people depend upon three factors: the natural environment, culture, and population. People who subsist by collecting and gathering roots, berries, seeds, and insects are for the most part directly dependent upon what the natural environment offers for the taking.<sup>2</sup>

The animals have been a sure source of food (meat), as well as of secondary products (milk and its products, hides, wool, hair, bones, horns, blood, hides, and fertilizer). They are also used for transport, carrying load, ploughing, milling, and threshing. Animals play an important role in mythology, philosophy, literature and vocabulary of a nomad society. Cattle become capital as well since they bring good income and profit and can be invested in. Nomads also develop a cooperative relationship with the agricultural population, sometimes on seasonal basis.<sup>3</sup> Hoebel asserts that the natural environment<sup>4</sup> is not the

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<sup>2</sup> Adamson E. Hoebel, *Anthropology* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966), p.236.

<sup>3</sup> This has been visible in the lower Swat Valley and nearby Kohistan region in Pakistan.

<sup>4</sup> Defined as 'the sum total of all the physical subjects and the invisible forces and processes in our surroundings which exist and operate entirely

absolute determinant of food. Environmental determinism has been rejected as far as shaping of a culture is concerned, however, the environment has influence upon the mode of subsistence, social organization, political structure, religious and ceremonial aspects. Indeed the physical environment does limit the nature of culture, cultural selectivity and innovation.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Nomadism: definition***

*Nomade* (French), or *nomos* (Greek) refer to people wandering in search of pastures.<sup>6</sup> *Britannica Concise Encyclopedia* explains nomadism in terms of cyclical or periodical movements, temporary stay and the ways particular to a hunting and gathering society.<sup>7</sup> Their routinely movements are altered according to alteration in rain pattern or seasons.

### ***Nomadism: categories***

Nomadism is understood under three categories:

- a. Nomadic hunters-gatherers, living on subsistence level by collecting wild plants available in each season and storing them as well. This is usually confined in a small well-known area and activity is organized in small bands.
- b. Pastoral nomads, who keep moving with their herds to fresh pastures. It is common in areas having little cultivable land. These are found in large number in Central Asia and Sahel (West Africa).
- c. Peripatetic nomads, who live by selling their trade in mostly modern societies.<sup>8</sup>

Semi-nomadism is taken as that pattern of life in which people wander for some part of the year and do farming or other job in the rest of the year.

### ***Nomadism: history***

Humans have been moving from a place to another in search of food, especially in the days when they had not learnt agriculture. But their

independent of human efforts'. Rollo E. Wicks, *Man and Modern Society* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1958), p.20.

<sup>5</sup> Adamson E. Hoebel, *op.cit.*, p.236.

<sup>6</sup> Definition by *American Heritage Dictionary*, available at, <http://www.answer.com/topic/nomad#ixzzlBqTsqQVO>, accessed 26 Feb 2011.

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.answer.com/topic/nomadism>, accessed 26 Feb 2011.

<sup>8</sup> *New World Encyclopedia*, 'Nomad', available at, <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/nomad>, accessed 22 March 2011.

movement in both old and new ages can be described in two ways;<sup>9</sup> (a) migration which involves ‘a major and permanent move from one location to another’, and, (b) nomadism, referring to the nomads who ‘move periodically or cyclically, usually returning to their original location at various times’.<sup>10</sup> The present day world population of nomads is estimated to be 30-40 million,<sup>11</sup> who are the heirs to an ancient culture which is believed to be the origin of human culture in various habitats in world regions inhabited by human race. In Pakistan are found the earliest remains of stone-age in Soan valley (Potohar region), made by homo-erectus about 600,000 years ago, indicating that this was the habitat of the earliest nomadic humans in the land of Pakistan. The Paleolithic age was largely an age of nomadism. Even the Cro-Magnon humans of the later age (35,000 to 10,000 years ago) had adopted a nomadic or semi-nomadic mode of life. These old residents of this land used to live along the rivers. They had adopted hunting for survival, animal hides for clothing, and was used to stay temporarily at places having food and water. Animals like horse, dog, cow, camel and buffalo, were domesticated by then. This was the age of developing language, hunting collectively, storing food, painting the caves, and developing a rudimentary form of religion.<sup>12</sup> From here started the indigenous nomadic life of today’s Pakistan, in which invaders from other regions had kept coming, even today.

### **Geographical scatter, ecological inevitability**

Nomads are people living in close proximity with nature. Their lifestyle and culture develops under the compulsion of adjusting to the environment. They become rugged like the rugged mountains they are to live in or the unbroken paths they tread on, unendingly. They have to move like shifting sands hence they scatter wherever their search for livelihood takes them. As Akbar S. Ahmed explains:

Nomad ethnographies have traditionally, and perhaps correctly, placed an emphasis on the dominant role of ecology as a factor shaping society; indeed, comparative studies have almost come to regard nomadism as an ecological adaptation. Climate and terrain, availability of pasture and water, and types of animals herded, are seen to

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> For detail see, Yahya Amjad, *Tarikh-e Pakistan Qadeem Daur Zamana Ma Qabl Az Tarikh* (Lahore: Sang-e Meel, 1989), pp.108-202.

influence patterns of movement and forms of herding and camping associations.<sup>13</sup>

In Pakistan, nomads live in all the four provinces, FATA, PATA, Gilgit-Baltistan, Azad Kashmir. They live in deserts, plateaus, highlands, forests, river beds, and fertile lands, too. They live in the margins of cities, towns and villages, and can be seen walking on the roads with all their belongings loaded on animals. The following description deals with the main regions and features of nomadic life in Pakistan.

### **Northern Areas**

The Central Asian region is known for having the largest population of pastoralist nomads. In the extreme northern part of Pakistan, the Northern Areas of Pakistan lie in the same region, covering 72494 square kilometers. Here converge the world's highest mountain ranges: Karakoram, eastern Hindukush, western Himalayas, west Kun Lun Shan mountains, and the eastern Pamir mountains. Its altitude varies from 4000 to 25,000 feet from the sea level. This is a region of highest plateaus, largest glaciers, passes, natural lakes, springs and valleys. Little rainfall (annual average about six inches), heavy snow, waterfalls and streams define the geography of this region. The pastoral system found in the region is called transhumance.<sup>14</sup> This region has extensive pastures in the bottom of the valleys for which both farmers and nomad herders have competed for centuries. On high altitude only one crop and at lower altitude and plains two crops are grown annually. Cultivable land is very small so people have to support their survival through alternate means, such as trade, logging, herding, or employment in public/private services. Nomadism in the three major zones of the region is described at length below.

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<sup>13</sup> Akbar S. Ahmed, 'A Taste for Freedom - The Case of the Gomal Nomads', <http://www.khyber.org/publications/006-010/gomalnomads.shtml>, accessed 5 September 2011.

<sup>14</sup> In this case, it typifies the pastoral system at the alpine and sub-alpine altitude, where the pastors take their cattle to high mountain pastures in summer. Since pastoralism is crucial for landless people, with rising number of animals pressure is built upon land and fodder resources, resulting in weak animals. Instead the experts suggest developing agro-pastoral system. S.M. Rafique, 'Status of Fodder Production and Pastoral Systems in Northern Mountaineous Region, NWFP,' <http://www.fao.org/ag/AGP/AGPC/doc/Proceedings/Tapafon02/tapafon6.htm>, 26 September 2011.

### ***Gilgit, Ghazar and Diyamir***

This region falling beyond the zone of monsoon for being on the northern side of the Himalayas, has little agriculture based on springs and streams from the glaciers. Among the five districts, those named as Gilgit, Ghazar and Diyamir, form one cultural zone.<sup>15</sup> About 4% area is under forest cover. There are game sanctuaries, game reserves, and community-controlled hunting areas as well.

Historically the residents of the valley relied on agriculture and pastorism. It is believed that the early Aryans entered the land of Pakistan through this region.<sup>16</sup> Two major castes/tribes of the region are Shen and Yeshkin. They settled here and promoted their language, later called as Indo-Aryan group. Among various ethnic groups living here is a nomadic caste Soniwal<sup>17</sup>, locally known as Maroh. These people used to extract gold from the river sand. Wakhi tribe is found in the eastern Hindukush region and Karakoram, and is known for its main occupation, herding, but after the opening of Karakoram Highway, they have adopted many other occupations.<sup>18</sup> Here, long winters do not allow any cultivation for five months. The area is mostly rocky. In this sense it has a desert like condition, in which both humans and animals have to rely on pastures, due to little cultivable land, mostly on the slopes of mountains. Wool products were made in the near past but it has declined due to integration within the national economy after opening of the Karakoram Highway.

Traditionally, the people of Northern Areas have been herders, whereas in the plains they were engaged in cultivation depending upon the availability of cultivable land. The Shina zone is famous for pastoralism. Cultural Encyclopedia of Northern Areas explains that pastorals, locally know as '*pialo*', spend most of their life in high pastures. They move with their herds from one place to another and shift their residence as well. The herds have animals (goats, sheep) owned by other people, many of them very rich. Males, who could not get into school and do not find other jobs, resort to pastoral job on payment. The

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<sup>15</sup> *Pakistan ka Saqafati Encyclopedia, Vol. I, Shumali Elaqaajaat, Silsilah Karakorum, Himalaya, Hindukash* (Islamabad: Lok Virsa/Al-Faisal Nashran, 2004), p.1. hereinafter, PSESE.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.

<sup>17</sup> Soniwal is name given to people who extracted gold from the local sand by washing and cleaning it. Since it was a laborious job paying less in terms of income than other sources, local people have abandoned it. However, it can be guessed that the nomad Soniwal might have afforded this labour due to their poverty.

<sup>18</sup> PSESE., *op.cit.*, p.165.

Gujjar tribe is famous for this. They live in high mountains where there is good amount of grass and fodder. They inevitably have to move seasonally. It happens that they are exploited by the rich persons.<sup>19</sup> The pastoral economy works on exchange of *ghee* (butter oil), wool, skins, and hair of the animals for the service of grazing. However, when the herds stay in high pastures, their milk cannot be transported to the villagers so they usually have little content of milk in daily food. The cows of this region are very small in size and give milk for only two months. Some other essential nutrients are missing in the local food which affects physical and mental growth of people. All surplus animals' products are sold in the market and neighborhood. Women are engaged in making wool product by making thread and knitting various items for household purposes, whereas the weavers use to make woolen cloth, sheets etc. This is another bi-product of the nomad economy. In the past people have been using animal hides to cover their body as well.<sup>20</sup> Cobbler uses leather for making various items both used by common people and mountain climbers. People also preserve meat of cattle at the start of winter, since they cannot feed animals in winter.<sup>21</sup> The animals sell for a good price especially for the *Eid-ul-azha* and *Nisalo*.<sup>22</sup>

Mostly in grazing communities, grazing rights are fixed; limited to certain people; those not entitled if want to use pasture, were supposed to pay for it. In the past, a tax was imposed on sheep and goats of herds for grazing them in pastures. Another tax was in the form of a share in the butter of cow if it gave birth to a calf during May-October. A calf per household was also gifted to the ruler as a tax.

Apart from common popular animals – sheep, goat, buffalo, cow – yaks are also found in small number as pet animals only in the coldest region. It provides meat, milk, hair, and transportation need. The number of yak and yak hybrids are estimated to be around 37,000 in the Pakistani region of Chitral, Ghizer, Gupis, Ishkoman, Yasin, Hunza, Nagar, Baltistan and Istor.<sup>23</sup> This rare animal was brought in this region through

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p.51.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.54-5.

<sup>21</sup> PSESE., *op.cit.*, p.20.

<sup>22</sup> *Nisalo*, means the seasonal slaughtering of animals to preserve their meat for the winters. *Ibid.*, p.99.

<sup>23</sup> Yak Keeping in Western High Asia: Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Southern Xinjiang, Pakistan, available at <http://www.fao.org/DOCREP/006/AD347E/ad347e0t.htm>, accessed 17 March 2011.



the traders from Pamir region. Ponies are also found and used here usually for transportation.

Pastoralism has been an institutionalised aspect of life in the northern Shina region. Many rituals are associated with pastoralism. When the herders use to go to high/remote pastures, they are given farewell and welcome seasonally as a cultural event.<sup>24</sup> When the cattle are taken in the jungle, a group of young men go along with them, enjoy a picnic and come back. This 'departure' rite is a collective activity of June, whereas their coming back is also celebrated at the outset of winter in October. A group of young men walks in the jungle to welcome the herd; mostly they accompany their own cattle back home.<sup>25</sup> This is typical of the people living in harsh weathers particularly harsh winters, so people have to be ready to store food for winters.

Pastoralism is still popular with men who do not go for school education. This is a profitable business hence it employs a large number of men. Nomadic people are also found associated with the occupation of 'danel', which is to progress in the art of foretelling and revealing about the apparently unknown through spiritual training. They also treat people for the jinni's effect. This act is a mixture of spiritual healing and exorcising. This occupation is not as such valued or respected though it is supposedly helping people out of their psychological problems.

### ***Baltistan***

Despite the geographical and weather limitations and less availability of cultivable land, agriculture is the dominant occupation of population in Baltistan. Herding is also very popular and has been an ancient occupation of the Baltis. In Baltistan, an ethnic group known as Brokpa<sup>26</sup> is found in villages in the upper pastures. Traditions say they originated from Shen tribe; started from Chilas and Kohistan with their herds and came to Baltistan.

Despite having little jungle and pasture area, cattle are raised to meet local need of meat and dairy. Pastures are reserved for residents of a particular area and no one else can trespass. There animals are kept in 'khalas' (goats' house). In daily trip of the herders to the jungle/pastures people hand over their goats/sheep which come back in the evening and the shepherd is paid by the owner for his services mostly in the terms of butter. This pattern is popular in many other areas of Pakistan. Like in the Gilgit region, seasonal departure of cattle to the upper pastures is

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<sup>24</sup> For detail see, PSESE., *op.cit.*, p.52.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p.61.

<sup>26</sup> The word *Brokpa* itself means 'people of upper pastures'. *Ibid.*, p.218.

associated with a ritual called ‘*Barok kheer*’. At this occasion near relatives are invited to join a night long party. Women, men and children also join the departure to the pastures with lot of humdrum. The cattle raising on the basis of share-herding is also popular. Giving animals to others for herding is economical for the families who do not want to do herding or have only a small number of animals. But such arrangements can not be discussed under nomadism, though it is a part of pastoralism. These animals are also cut to preserve meat for winters, a practice called ‘*losar*’ or ‘*saton phiyok*’. It resembles the one in Gilgit but in Baltistan it is not made public that some one has stored meat for winter. Modern technology has, no doubt, undermined such old practices.

### ***Chitral***

A part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, lying in the upper north at an altitude ranging from 3727-12000 feet, is Chitral. It has Afghanistan in its west, and across the Wakhan belt are Kunar, Badakhshan, and Nuristan area of Afghanistan. The ancient routes to Chitral connected it to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkistan states of Central Asia. Like Gilgit and Baltistan, this is also a region having the highest peaks<sup>27</sup> well-known in the world. The passes connecting Chitral to Afghanistan are very high, mostly impassable in winters. This is also a land of glaciers and small streams growing into rivers. Two big natural lakes and numerous small lakes are found here.

At lower altitude two and at upper altitudes one crop is sown in a year. Fourteen ethnic groups are found there.<sup>28</sup> Population of Chitral is largely of Aryan stock, having elements from immigrants from the neighbouring Central Asian states, Kashmir, Iran and Afghanistan.

The Gujjar tribe is known for its pastoral activities and it lives in the juniper forests in the southern part of Chitral. Kho mountain farmers and Gujjar are engaged in herding in Chitral. Their herd may include others’ animals as well. They pay tax for grazing their animals. *Pasal*, local name for shepherd, is an inevitable occupation in Chitral as it has been an ancient activity across the community. It happened only after the 19<sup>th</sup> century that the Gujjar tribe dominated this profession. Gujjar are not old inhabitants of this area, rather they are reported to have come here in the 19<sup>th</sup> century from Hazara and Swat,<sup>29</sup> where they are known as herdsmen. They buy land in the winter pastures. They also do agriculture and business. The shepherd, if hired on daily basis, is

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<sup>27</sup> There are 204 peaks higher than 18,000 feet in Chitral. *Ibid.*, p.317.

<sup>28</sup> For details see, *ibid.*, pp.320-3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.322.

provided food, and given special treatment on the eve of festivals, and a share in harvest/milk, etc. The shepherds living far away are given a particular amount of raw food, a share in milk/butter, or cash.<sup>30</sup>

The Afghan war has put great pressure on the pastures in the north-western region of Pakistan. These refugees had been enjoying good pasture conditions of the Hindukush range whereas the pastures in Pakistani region are not that rich. The Gujjars have been raising small herds since centuries. Even then the range specialists had warned of serious threat due to overgrazing. Further land degradation was predicted causing denudation of land, allowing more silting in dams, and associated ecological hazards.<sup>31</sup>

Like any group of people living in close proximity of nature and extremely dependent upon it, but having a little knowledge of modern day science, the nomads of Northern Areas also believe in many superstitions. Tell-tales and rituals associated with jungles and pastures are generally followed by the shepherds and nomads. As the people in general believe in many fairies/goddesses, or in modern terms 'pirs', they call upon the one related to the job in hand or the place they find themselves in. For instance, as they believe that jungles, mountains and pastures are under the control or influence of Shatavan Nan, so they give *nazar* (ritual offering) to her in the form of small flour biscuits dropped here and there on their way to pastures. The other famous goddess is Shiri, who is given a share in milk and meat items. The herdsman calls out the name of Shiri in the shed of cattle before eating and leaves a little food on the pillar as an offer to the goddess.<sup>32</sup> In Northern Areas, mostly the nomad men or women belonging to Shen tribe become *duniyal* (fortune-teller or clairvoyant), who are trained in this occupation from the very beginning if they possess a spark in this regard.<sup>33</sup> People, who live in close proximity with nature and who have little to safeguard against ravages of nature, destiny and the unseen forces controlling their life, inevitably develop belief in superstitions.<sup>34</sup>

The Kalash people also depend upon herding and raising cattle since they live in isolated valleys, which have good amount of food for

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p.329.

<sup>31</sup> 'Afghan Nomad Refugees in Pakistan', <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/csqa/article/afghan-nomad-refugees-pakistan>, accessed 17 Mach 2011.

<sup>32</sup> PSESE, *op.cit.*, p.357.

<sup>33</sup> John Biddoulf, trans. Javed Shaheen, *Hindukash kay Qaba'il* (Lahore: Sang-e Meel, 1991), p.125.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.124-5.

animals. They believe in a large number of deities. For each purpose they have specified one deity. The deity responsible for rivers and herds of goats, sheep, and cattle is called Bajeg. To please Bajeg, ritual sacrifices are performed along the river bank and the head of slaughtered animals are thrown into the river after roasting them.<sup>35</sup>

### **Khyber Pakhtunkhwa**

Nomads in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have been of Pakistani and Afghani origin. There are four patterns of international migration between Pakistan and Afghanistan. These include: (a) those coming in search of winter employment through Khyber, Kurram and Gomal passes; (b) trade caravans mostly through Khyber Pass; (c) nomadic pastoralist groups coming in winter through Peshawar and Kohat to trans-Indus plains; and (d) Powindas doing long-range migration in winter through Gomal Pass.<sup>36</sup> According to the historical sources, a well-known tribe of Afghan nomads, Kuchis, has been doing seasonal migration since centuries. They were offered land by the government to settle in northern Afghanistan but the local tribes did not welcome it. However, multiple factors – war, drought, terrorism, civil war – affected their process of settling or shifting to semi-nomadic life. Thus the number of Afghan Kuchis has come down from two million in pre-1979 times to almost half in 2000. Their 80 per cent livestock has perished because of drought in 1998-2000.<sup>37</sup> That has contributed to reduction in the number of Kuchis coming to Pakistan.

It is estimated that about three million Afghans, who entered Pakistan in search of security as refugees after Soviet invasion of December 1979, '[a]mong them are several groups of fully nomadic people, many others who have traditionally combined settled agriculture with seasonal migration into the mountains with small herds, and also the pure agriculturalists. They brought large numbers of animals, mainly sheep and goats, but also camels, horses, cows, buffaloes, and donkeys with them. These people's ...migration has placed great ecological, social and political demands on the limited resources of Pakistan'.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the refugees' rehabilitation efforts also motivated them to get benefits of refugee status by abandoning their 'nomad' status, but their

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p.165. For details of sacrificing rituals see, p.166.

<sup>36</sup> 'Afghan Nomad Refugees in Pakistan', *op.cit.*

<sup>37</sup> 'Severe Drought Driving Nomads from Desert', <http://articles.latimes.com/2000/june/30/news/mn-46357>, *Los Angeles Times*, 30 June 2000.

<sup>38</sup> 'Afghan Nomad Refugees in Pakistan', *op.cit.*

nomadic habit and search for pastures posed problems for the administration.

Nomads are also found in the resource-poor Indus Kohistan which has been a tribal territory. In the Kaghan valley, the land near the villages is reserved for the villagers' cattle, usually very small in number, and at some distance each family has reserved its land for grazing. There were about 200,000 animals in Kaghan valley, a number already posing serious threat of overgrazing. Later, about 500,000 animals were added from the Afghan refugees, who were advance in capturing the summer pastures before the Gujjars reached there. Such year by year depletion of grassland coupled with deforestation by timber mafia has been inviting a major ecological disaster by depreciating grass, forests and land. Inter-ethnic conflicts also simmered out of sharing pastures, neglect of local customs, and paying little fees for taking big advantages and getting richer than the locals due to having large herds.<sup>39</sup> Gujjar women also take part in grazing. The winters see migration from higher altitude villages to the bottom of valley or towns.

### **Balochistan**

Physical geographic features of each region determine rather limit the possibilities for the nomad population regarding its mobility, availability of the food, fodder and water; and economic and settlement prospects. In the case of Balochistan, according to Scholz, the desert basin, lowland embayments, and mountain ranges are the natural regions. Wherever the cultivable land is rare, or is rain-fed, economic activity cannot secure sufficient food and fodder. He adds that in the desert basin:

Pasture conditions are just as modest, but less unfavourable. A sparse layer of vegetation consisting of halophytic and hard grasses in extensive portions of the basin areas compels stockbreeders to wander constantly. However, the relatively balanced temperatures permit staying in the desert basins permanently and the problem-free utilization as accommodation of dwellings not fixed firmly to the ground, simple tents, and protective screens. The desert basins' natural endowment appears to favour a predominantly mobile lifestyle and economic conditions.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Fred Scholz, *Nomadism and Colonialism, A Hundred Years of Baluchistan 1872-1972* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.18.

The historical literature mentions the Balochs as nomad, brave, frightful, looters of caravans, as their history paints them so. Marxist historian M. K. Pekolin, while writing about the origin and vicissitude of the present day Baloch people, describes them in four major stages of evolution. These correspond to: ancient communalism (from tenth century to sixteenth century), tribalism (from sixteenth century to nineteenth century), feudalism and capitalism (from nineteenth century onward).<sup>41</sup> The Balochs migrated to the present land in different phases of history. Their oral traditions claim their origin from Arabia, while researchers have categorized them as originating from Turks and Indian Rajputs as well. A British ethnographer Dames and Soviet anthropologists L.V. Ashanin believe that Balochs have migrated from northern Iranian region lying around the Caspian Sea. Both such claims have certain validity, since all the Balochs are not racially monolithic. They have absorbed a variety of other ethnic/racial/cultural elements to whom they came across and who were subdued by Balochs. The bigger and stronger tribes have been assimilating smaller/weaker tribes. Such an overlapping has occurred among the Brahvis, Pathans, Jats, and Rajputs. Pekolin asserts that Balochs of the western and eastern Balochistan have not distinguished themselves from others rather the neighbouring tribes and ethnic groups were assimilated in them. But in the marginal regions of Baloch's mainland, that is Sindh or Seistan (Iran), the Balochs were assimilated in the Indian races or in the Iranians respectively.<sup>42</sup> In this way it has been mainly the nomadic or pastoral way of life which went along with the Balochs all along in various phases of their temporary stays and migration. Their alliances or wars were mainly centered on the objective of securing pastures for survival. The basic reasons for the series of Baloch migration were paucity of pastures, internal conflict among Balochs, and their interaction with the rulers of the new lands. The strong tribes used to occupy better lands and greener pastures. The weaker were pushed to outer areas.

Climatically Balochistan has the extremes of seasons, very hot to very cold. It has scarce vegetation cover especially in the Makran coast thus people have to survive on fish. The northern region has wonderful orchards of fruit of cold region, while in the south and along the oasis spots one can find clusters of date trees. In the eastern border there is

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<sup>41</sup> M.K. Pekolin, *Baloch*, Urdu transl. Shah Muhammad Marri, *Baloch* (Lahore: Maktab-e-Fikr-o-Danish, 1988). The author has explained the history, migrations, tribal distribution and nomadic characteristics of the Baloch at length.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.23.

grown fruit like olive and mango. The wild animals are not much diverse, but they are enough to terrify a herder, such as wild dog, pig, wolf, and hyena. Some very poisonous snakes also pose threat to human and animal lives.

A large number of Balochis are semi-nomadic – agriculturist in general and nomadic in winter. They live in the villages where sufficient water is available. Be it extreme weather conditions, high speed winds, torrential rains and devastating floods in otherwise dry streams, they brave all the seasons. They may be living on largely rocky or sandy land in both scorching heat and chilly winters; it is the nomadic population which weathers all the troubles to live their life.

Balochistan was not always so dry.<sup>43</sup> The cyclopean works found in Balochistan, once used to control water for agricultural purpose, were dismantled as well to contain and consolidate the alluvium from the hills. These arrangements could have stored that amount of water which could have supported a far bigger and denser population than today's inhabitants in these areas.<sup>44</sup> Ancient prehistoric remains at the Sindh-Balochistan border, built by the Amri people, found in the hilly region have been of small villages of a predominantly pastoral community. They used to build rectangular houses with stone in the foundation and rubble with gypsum or sun-dried mud in the walls thatched by *pish*<sup>45</sup> matting and mud over a wooden framework.<sup>46</sup> It is estimated by scholars<sup>47</sup> that when pastoral nomads from Balochistan entered present bordering region of Sindh, they would have found the hilly region with springs and sheltered valleys more familiar and favorable for building settlements than the dusty Indus plains and a mighty river with annual vagaries. Later the pastoral Baloch stopped by the Kachho area, due to rich grazing and water sources for their herds.

Balochistan is understood as a land of convergence and intermediacy. Ethnically, Pakhtuns dominate the districts of Loralai, Zhob, Pishin and Quetta, Brahvis dominate Sibi, Kalat and Quetta, and Baloch are found in majority in the Iranian highlands, Sindh and

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<sup>43</sup> Malik Mohammad Saeed Dahwar, *Balochistan Ma Qabl Tarikh* (Quetta: Ruby Publishers, n.d.), pp.15-20, 42-45.

<sup>44</sup> H.T. Lambrick, *op.cit.*, pp.53, 55.

<sup>45</sup> *Pish*: 'dried leaves of the dwarf palm for making strong clean and long lasting floor coverings, and such mats are a virtually essential component in the flat mud-plastered roofs of modern Sind houses'. The Mohen-jo-Daro houses are also estimated to be built with *pish* matting. *Ibid.*, p.66.

<sup>46</sup> For details see, *ibid.*, p.58.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.62-3.

Punjab.<sup>48</sup> An important nomadic ethnic group in Balochistan is that of Brahvis who, though having mixed up with Baloch, have developed indistinguishable features, yet their language is believed to be of Dravidian origin; quite different from the Balochi language. Brahvis are more nomadic than the Baloch, as they keep shifting their herds and they are equally used to tolerate the harshest of winter in the north and hottest of summer in the south of the province. A section of Brahvis own land and were cultivators in the area of Kalat. Their favorite food is meat, and they dry meat in autumn for winter use. According to Pottinger, their social characteristics were found more pliable, generous, trustworthy and content than the Baloch. However, such stereotyping based on secondary sources need to be subjected to test of truth afresh.<sup>49</sup>

### Sindh

Sindh has remained a primitive agricultural society for long. Travelers' accounts<sup>50</sup> affirm this fact till the growth of urban society in the 20th century. A large part of it is still agricultural and nomadic, depending upon the geography of the area. Geographically, Sindh has two visible divisions: barrage lands irrigated by canals from Indus River and the river itself, and the semi-desert and desert region lying in the eastern and southern part of the province. The western highlands of Kirthar have valleys and pastures, which attract herders, and there are passes which allow migrants to Sindh. In the central Sindh, ancient river beds of Hakra are still visible but the desert has been encroaching upon them. Hakra had its branches leading to the sea especially during the monsoon season. The present day Nara canal is also developed from a natural old river channel.

Thar desert extends from Cholistan to Nagarparkar in Pakistan and in India from south of Haryana to Rajasthan. The region lying in Pakistan receives annual rain of three inches. But the pattern of rain has been changing; now expectedly making a significant change in the geography, economy, society, culture and politics of the desert. This aspect would be discussed at the end of this paper.

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<sup>48</sup> Fred Sholz, *op.cit.*

<sup>49</sup> Henry Pottinger, *Travels in Baluchistan and Sind* (first edn. 1816), trans. Urdu, M. Anwar Rooman, *Safarnama Balochistan wa Sindh* (Quetta: Nisa Traders, 1983), pp.85-92.

<sup>50</sup> For instance see, Mubarak Ali (ed.), *McMurdo's Accounts of Sindh* (Jamshoro: University of Sindh, 1985), reporting conditions of the early nineteenth century.



McMurdo found, in around 1812, that people living in the eastern borders were mostly shepherds driving their herds from place to place. They lived in temporary huts of grass, lived on milk, butter and *bajri* bread, and kept arms to safeguard against bandits of the desert who drove their herds away if they failed to protect them.<sup>51</sup>

Thar Desert is formed by the wind-blown sand. Lambrick explains that sand is heaped up and parallel longitudinal ridges are formed in the direction of the monsoon wind. These are connected by the transverse dunes. Sand hills are gently rounded. The light wind converts an embryo sand dune to take shape of a horse shoe, with increasing tails after deposition of sand and flattening and furrowing the windward slope. Its crust is constantly cut away to give it an elongated shape, hence the tendency to form a separate parallel ridge. The hard alluvial particles are constantly blown away thus fertility of the land is undermined.<sup>52</sup> Vegetation here is sporadic, thorny, and leafless, seemingly of stunted growth. High dunes are stabilized when come under the vegetation cover. The Thar desert nevertheless 'affords grazing for large number of camels and goats, and the desert is unrivalled for the excellence and variety of its grasses. These are scarcely perceptible for many months together, but as soon as rainfall starts up in sudden luxuriance, the sand is then covered with a tenuous veil of green and the desert is at once beautiful and prosperous'.<sup>53</sup>

Like all such deserts, the life in Thar is closely associated with availability of water. Naturally there are found few lakes of saline and sweet water in shallow depressions surrounded by sand dunes. Sometimes rain-water is collected in pools and embanked for use. Since the water-table is very low here, the wells sunk in the land are usually two to three hundred feet deep and in the years of no rain this further goes deep. Both humans and animals rely on well water. Agriculture is possible only in areas where the embanked water is available in the 'valleys' formed between the dunes/sand hills, or if good rainfall gives sufficient moisture to the soil for growing fodder crops.

Ethnically, the people of Sindh belong to Rajput, Baloch and indigenous tribes. The type of people coming to Sindh included herders and nomads along with the Muslim preachers, traders and representatives of power. Since the opening of Sukkur Barrage in 1933, more migration towards Sindh happened. The report about non-Muslim population prepared in 1907 held true till 1947. It stated that Balochis are found in a

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<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52.

<sup>52</sup> H.T. Lambrick, *op.cit.*, pp.6-7.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.

very small number in Tharparkar, whereas Bania, Bhatia, Dhed, Bhil, Kohli, and other low castes of Hindus lived in lower Sindh especially in Tharparkar.

In the 1951 census, conducted after the partition, the Hindu population was recorded to have shrunk in most areas of Sindh, but the number of scheduled caste Hindus went up in Hyderabad, and Tharparkar.<sup>54</sup> The settlements on barrage lands was main reason for migration of Hindu tribes of Rajputana to come to Sindh in pre-partition days especially in dry years. The Baloch from the barren hills of Marri-Bugti area and arid plains of Kachhi (Balochistan) were attracted to Sindh plains. Baloch are found in almost all corners of Sindh, including Thar desert. Their main tribes are Talpur, Nizamani, Chandia, Buledi, Karmati, and Jamali, while small tribes are Jatoi, Khosa, Leghari, Lund, Gabol, Bozdar, Bugti, Domki, Mazari, among others.<sup>55</sup> Perhaps, due to their nomadic past, certain Baloch tribes prefer to rely on livestock than on land for livelihood. The Lunds ply camels and Kapirs of Tharparkar raise sheep.<sup>56</sup> In the western hills and the *Kacho*<sup>57</sup> tracts along river bank, herds are raised. The tribes also allocate particular areas for particular *Paros* for grazing, so no one can encroach upon it, however, the un-assigned land serve as a common pasture. The Baloch nomads who find it difficult to survive in winters migrate to Sindh plains and live by selling animals, working as farm or non-farm labour and they return back when the rain comes in their area. Brahvis were also reported to follow similar pattern. They used to carry all their household belongings on oxen and donkeys, and put weak animals, humans and children on these beasts of load.<sup>58</sup> They travel in groups and settle separately in temporary

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<sup>54</sup> *Sindh Gazetteer*, (Selection from T.H. Sorley's enlarged version), trans. Urdu, M. Anwar Rooman (Quetta: Matbooaat-e-Annisa, 1991), pp.159-60.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, p.200. It is further noted that the British historians and gazetteer writers have called the nomad, herders, or migrant Balochi tribes entering Sindh as vagrant, criminal, or furious fighters. It had something to do with their homelessness and lack of means of survival in the new home. For details, see, *ibid.*, p.203-4.

<sup>56</sup> Faiz Mohammad Soomro, *Cultural History of Sind* (Karachi: National Book Foundation, 1977), pp.55-6.

<sup>57</sup> Local word for the rich alluvial sand tract along the river banks where wild trees and grass grow in abundance. The place is good for cultivation, wildlife, animal grazing, and also good for criminals' hiding, as the dacoits have shown in Sindh. In the Punjab this area is called 'bela'.

<sup>58</sup> *Sind Gazetteers*, *op.cit.*, pp.207-9.

villages of reed huts till they can find some job,<sup>59</sup> then they move on. Brahvi women make handicrafts, spin wool, or weave items for sale.

The nomadic population of Sindh is mostly found in Thar desert. It holds the poorest community of Pakistan. Long spells of drought and famine are not new to the Tharis.<sup>60</sup> This region is targeted by a number of NGOs for various purposes: water conservation, checking desertification, income generation, health and education, etc. The mode of life for a large number of people is semi-nomadic, depending upon the availability of fodder and water in dry season, or job on construction sites or as farm labour. The low-caste Hindus, known as Bhil, Kohli and Meghwar, are the one moving from one place to another in search of job as labour on farm or construction sites. They usually move in groups; whole family or tribe, traveling for miles to make temporary huts till the job lasts. They are known as hard workers; but are usually paid less because they cannot bargain. Being landless and poor, they cannot even contract the *kachho* land when it is given by the Revenue Department. Their women are efficient farm workers, mostly engaged in harvesting and picking cotton. Women also work in construction. In moist seasons they usually stay near their places of origin in Thar. These are highly discriminated people; even during the flood relief, they were not given shelter in public schools or building. One can imagine their plight in repeated flood havocs (2010 and 2011) and resultant unemployment due to massive wastage of crops in lower Sindh.

Economically, the Thar region is largely inaccessible and the people have traditionally been living a lifestyle little changed over centuries. They have been 'graziers, shepherds and goatherds; with these occupations are associated tanning and wool weaving'.<sup>61</sup> Due to very little cultivation they get their staple diet from the plains where they sell their animals. Thar region is a good source of animals for round the year need of meat and sacrifice on Eid-ul-Adha. They mostly use camel for ploughing. Cows are also raised in large number in favorable grass conditions. In drought conditions the animals have to be driven or transported in modern days to the plains to keep them alive otherwise

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<sup>59</sup> They used to make seasonal contract with particular land owner so they returned to him in next migration as well.

<sup>60</sup> For instance, about 42 per cent of Thari population (total population of Thar in 1998 was about one million), migrated out of season in search of livelihood to barrage areas of Sindh, according to an estimate of Thardeep Rural Development Project. For details see, Zeenat Hisam, 'Thar: Diminishing Livelihood in the Arid Zone', *City*, No. 3, p.52.

<sup>61</sup> H.T. Lambrick, *op.cit.*, p.12.

they become thin and die of starvation. In the hope of rain the cattle are kept in the desert and it happens that they become too weak to walk out to irrigated areas. Cows and sheep die earlier than camels and goats as these can feed on shrubs. However, watering them is hard from the deep wells. Humans have also been suffering due to famines in drought years though in recent years improved communication has slightly helped to save them in hard times. Some emergent threats have been noticed due to coal mining in Thar. Apart from loss of livelihood from the pastures, these include,: 'joblessness, homelessness, marginalisation, food insecurity, loss of common lands and resources, increased health risks, and social disarticulation'.<sup>62</sup>

Historically old trade routes in the area have been of camel caravans from Sindh to Marwar, Gujarat and Kutch (India). There were also tracks for trade from Rohri and Khipro to Jaisalmir. Modern train track in the desert region has lessened the value of such trade routes.<sup>63</sup> Mostly these desert dwellers have remained aloof from the irrigated areas and their connection with the surrounding world of civilization has remained weak.

Deltic region of Sindh also holds another big population of nomads. These are Jat tribes, considered indigenous to Sindh, known for raising camels, which were a source of transportation before modern train or roads took over. They were pushed to south Sindh due to raids of invading armies. Some Baloch are also mixed in their popular identity of 'camel raisers'; only language differences can give some clue to this difference. These nomadic groups wander in the delta of Indus with their camels which can find a good amount of fodder and tree leaves. They carry camels and sweet water in boats to the areas surrounded by water; leave them there until they are fully fed. In this way they have been denuding the natural forest sources to the extent of inviting natural hazards by overgrazing the plants which can offer a barrier to sea storms and cyclones. This is in fact another example of living in extreme conditions and on extremities where nomads and pastoral folk behave in a lawless manner.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Thardeep Rural Development Programme, 'Coal Mining in Thar: Dislocation in the Offing', *City*, No. 3, p.63.

<sup>63</sup> H.T. Lambrick., p.13.

<sup>64</sup> Findings of, 'Benchmark Survey and Social Analysis of the Forestry Sector in Sindh, District Thatta and Badin', Forest Department, Government of Sindh, 1997. The author, as chief investigator conducted the research and compared the situation of twelve districts of Sindh.

## Punjab

In this province, three types of nomads are seen moving from one place to another. The first group comprises those pastoral nomads who come from the western provinces of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, as has been explained in the preceding pages. The desert people of Cholistan also come in this group. The second group is of the semi-nomads. They may have a few goats, sheep or asses, but not the herds. They can be categorized as peripatetic nomads. The third group is of the semi-nomads, who spend some time as sedentary population and then move on to new destinations.

The castes of all these groups reported by Ibbetson are as follows: Ode, Beldar, Changar, Bavaria, Ahiri, Thori, Sansi, Pakhiwar, Jhabeel, Kehal, Gagra, Meena, and Harny. They are found all over the Punjab, and can be further categorised under three types. *First*, Ode, Beldar and Changar, who have particular occupations, but they keep on moving. *Second*, Bavaria, Ahiri, Thori, Sansi, Pakhiwar, Jhabeel, Kehal, and Gagra, who are either living on the banks of rivers or jungles, are semi-nomads, and their occupations include hunting and fishing. *Third*, Meena and Harny castes, who are predominantly vagrants, not hunters, having no fixed occupation and in the past they had the propensity to engage in criminal activities.<sup>65</sup> The occupational groups keep moving in order to pursue their particular trade, such as jugglers, acrobats, tumblers, monkey and bear-breeders and other entertainers, etc. These wandering tribes have qualities like the gypsies, found elsewhere in the country or world.

The Gazetteers have detailed reports about vagrant and nomadic population but it is a pity that after the colonial administration no data on nomads has been collected so their number cannot be estimated. However, small extracts from the Gazetteers help make a picture. Pathans are also a prominent vagrant ethnic group in the Punjab. It has been true throughout the last century. For instance, it was noted in the case of Multan District in 1901, that there were indigenous as well as nomadic Pathans:

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<sup>65</sup> Denzil Ibbetson, *Punjab Castes*, first published 1922, transl. Yasir Jawad, *Punjab ki Zatain* (Lahore: Fiction House, 1998), p.614. Ibbetson, owing to his colonial background and the conditions of the time has termed the third group as criminal, typical of the colonial writers. Due to extreme poverty they might be engaged in theft or looting, as any group or caste may become, yet they should not be termed as criminal tribes or castes permanently.

There are a certain number of immigrants, chiefly from the Ghazni district who come every cold weather and wander about the district, either as builders of walls or as peddlers of fruit, cloth and indigo. They are looked on as excellent workmen, but are a bit turbulent in exacting their dues. They live on the proceeds of begging, and take away in the spring the whole of their earnings for the winter. They almost always leave their women behind them in 'Derajat,...'<sup>66</sup>

This shows the movement of Kuchis and similar Pathan nomads, not exclusively for one district but in almost all the districts of Punjab since they used to look for work and sell the items of trade.<sup>67</sup>

The vagrant castes in Multan district include Langrials, Labanas, Mahtam, Odes, Pakhiwar and Marath.<sup>68</sup> Similar detail on vagrant castes is available about the districts of Punjab in the Gazetteers prepared in the first quarter of 20<sup>th</sup> century. The extracts published after 1947 do not follow a regular pattern or details on ethnicity. Though the data on vagrant tribes is not updated yet gives an idea of the nomadic life in the province. They may go anywhere in the country hence it is also difficult to count them.

*Language:* Grierson (1922) prepared a linguistic profile of the migratory people of the Punjab. He reports that mostly the gypsies or wandering nomads are bilingual or multilingual, because they learn the language of the areas where they stay inevitably for their survival, while they retain a particular language/dialect of their own group, called 'argot', as their 'home tongue'. This is also a variant of the local dialects, but they do not let others learn or enter into this language group. This practice helps them develop community solidarity and preserves their culture in the face of interactions with alien cultures.

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<sup>66</sup> *Extracts From The District & State Gazetteers of The Punjab (Pakistan)*, reprint (Lahore: Research Society of Pakistan, 1977), Vol. 2, p.131, based on, E.D. MacLagan, *Gazetteer of the Multan District*, 1<sup>st</sup> edn. (Lahore: 'Civil and Military Gazette' Press, 1902).

<sup>67</sup> Balochis have also been found in Multan District since the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. According to early reports (1902), they were mainly related to Rind, Korai and Daudpotras tribes, but they largely settled as agriculturists, hence do not fall under the category of nomads, *ibid.*, p.132. Author's own observations about nomads in different parts of Punjab and reports of the observers confirm the information referred to in this section.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.142-41.

Regarding the occupations, according to Ibbetson,<sup>69</sup> Odes and Beldars are usual construction site labourers; they are usually diggers so they got the name beldar (*bel* means the spade). Odes resemble Beldars in activities and, it is said, they can eat a large variety of food, irrespective of its being *halal* (fair/allowed) or *haram* (prohibited) despite their claim to be Muslims. They can also work as labourers in the towns but do not mix up in the local community. Their children and women also engage in labour to earn their living. They usually camp at open places and use their animal in labour jobs such as transporting sand or earth. Muslims do not accept them as pure and true Muslims rather they are treated as inferior as the *shudras* of the Muslim community. Perhaps they were *shudras* in the past and they accepted Islam to gain status but their poverty and nomadism continued so was their inferiority. The Ode of Punjab seems to be originated in Rajputana and western regions of India. The Hindu Odes claim to have descended from the Rajputs or Khashtiris of Marwar (India). They survive better near the water channels and riverine areas, so are rarely found on hilly or plateau areas.

Changar, another vagrant caste, untouchables of the past, according to Ibbetson,<sup>70</sup> were all converted to Islam by Shams Tabrez, a sufi saint of Multan. They claim coming down from the hills of Jammu. They work as agricultural labourers as well as in petty earning activities. Bavarya is a hunting tribe, who catch wild animals through primitive techniques, such as terrifying them and trapping them in nooses. They make small items from grass, leaves, and disposable trash for sale. They do also work as tenants or farm labourers. They claim origin from Rajputana, and are Ahiris and Thoris, but are expert in hunting. They do not eat horse meat or dead animals. In the last century, they settled in communities in large number due to availability of manual work or other means of livelihood. Sansi, largely Hindu, on the other hand, eat dead meat and all types of wild animals. Sansi women are known to be singers, dancers or prostitutes. They claim to have originated from their religious rites, and their beliefs largely resemble those of the Hindus, but they eat wild animals except lizard and pig, apart from dead animals. Obviously it is essential for their survival. Resembling in many ways to Bavaryas, Marwar and Ajmer, another vagrant tribe is Pakhiwar, which literally means, 'those living in straw hut' or 'killers of sparrows'. These are Muslims by religion, but eat dead animals, which indicates their

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<sup>69</sup> Denzil Ibbetson, *op.cit.*, pp.614-16. Ibbetson has described the peripatetic nomads of the Punjab at length in pages 607-47.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p.616.

origin from lowest castes of untouchables. Jhabeel, apparently Muslim, former fishermen of Sindh, living on hunting, or labour, etc. They speak Sindhi. Similarly Kehal and More are other fishing tribes, who eat crocodile and tortoise, despite claiming to be Muslims. Gagar are Muslims, but have strange religious practices resembling the Hindus. They also breed leeches and use them for treatment to earn money. Harnis were known to be dacoits or criminals, always on the move on the main roads.

Ibbetson has mentioned some tribes as essentially nomadic,<sup>71</sup> such as Nut, Bazigar, Parna, Qalandari, who earn by performing as entertainers or acrobats, or selling handicrafts made of grass/leaves. They can be traditional healers, or they raise monkeys and bears to earn money. Their women also work as entertainers or sex workers especially in the theaters or sex-industry. They breed dogs to catch wild animals. Some of them are even beggars. They have some sections adhering to Islam, otherwise they are Hindus. Indeed their practices and eating habits put them in a category of confused religion. Various castes have Muslim, Hindus or Sikh believers, but their practices do not match perfectly to any one. For instance, in the case of Kotanas, a menial caste, it is reported that 'they eat anything clean or unclean; (always excepting snakes, rats, spiders, jackals and pigs); but in other respect they are outwardly Mahomedans;...' <sup>72</sup> Generally, religion for the poor castes of very low origin, or for those converted from Shudra caste, becomes a confused identity, not matched by their living conditions or practices. Yet they practice some 'religion' to fulfill their social and psychological needs.

### **Cholistan**

Spread over 11,4000 square miles (4,600,000 acres), with a population estimated as 0.1 million, Cholistan desert lies in the Punjab province of Pakistan. It joins the greater desert lying further east in India. Before 1947, Cholistan was a part of Bahawalpur state. In the centre of this desert used to run the old river Hakra, and another river, too, as the

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.638-47. The author has mentioned a large number of ethnicities mostly concentrated in other provinces but occasionally found in the Punjab, such as large groups of Baloch, and Pathans, or minor groups of lower caste Hindus found in Sindh.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p.142.



researchers indicate.<sup>73</sup> Now the desert has hundreds of human settlements buried under sand dunes. The old bed of river is also covered under dunes.<sup>74</sup> The sand dunes here rise up to 500 feet. The vegetation here is that of the desert regions. Water table is usually eighty or more feet deep and annual rainfall is about three inches. Both winters and summers are severe. Currently no perennial water channel is found here. When the *tobas* (rain water storage ponds) start getting dry, people start moving to a place with water. They come back when rain comes.

This region has an ancient history. This region is believed to be under sea at some stage in geological formation. Some archeologists indicate this region as the centre of the renowned Indus civilization; as both Harappa and Mohenjodaro lie in its north and south. Hakra civilization is also reported by some other researchers as distinct from the Indus civilization, yet both views confirm flourishing of a culture when the river was there. At certain point of time, around 18<sup>th</sup> century BC, the river(s) dried up. There are found 35 forts, some of the pre-Christian era, Hindu and Buddhist era, as well as the Muslim era. The region has been invaded and ruled by various rulers of the east, west and south – Iranian, Greek, Ashoka and Kanishka, Rai dynasty, Chach, Dahir, to Arabs invasion of 636-712 AD. It was also ruled by the Ghazanavids, Sumras, Summas, Ghoris, Mughals, Arghuns, and Daudpotras. The British agency was established here in 1866. The princely state was established in 1727, and was annexed to Pakistan in 1947 and merged in One Unit in 1955.

The Cholistani people are descendents of those who did not abandon the desert, but stayed near springs. They live near *tobas* in temporary reed huts called ‘gopa’, due to round shape and dome like roofs. They have relatives across the border in Indian desert, so they keep crossing the border illegally. A very small number of Hindus also live here along Muslims, and both maintain social distance. Non-Muslim tribes include Maingwal, Gandheer, Boday, Hi Jaipal, Bhil, Pannun, Jatani, Tarkay, Seehy, Tarahti and Parhaar.<sup>75</sup> Nomads of Cholistan earn by selling wool, animals, *flossis* (handicraft) made by women, and some other unique products of desert, such as minerals, in the towns and

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<sup>73</sup> See Mujahid Hussain, *Bahawalpur Khushhal Riyasat say Pasmanda Division Tak* (Lahore: Saanjh, 2011), pp.13-40, for an overview of the physical, cultural and archeological history of Cholistan.

<sup>74</sup> For details in ancient geography of Hakra region, see the *Punjab State Gazetteers*, Vol. XXXVI A, Bahawalpur State with Maps, 1<sup>st</sup> edn. 1904 (Lahore: ‘Civil and Military Gazette’ Press, 1908), pp.1-8.

<sup>75</sup> Mujahid Hussain, *op.cit.*, p.32.

festivals. These people are very fond of festivals held at tombs of saints and they enjoy folk songs as well. Chanan Pir is one of the many popular saints.

### **Philological perspective on nomads**

To trace origin of a nomadic group, philological evidence is very helpful. In the context of Pakistan, this account starts from the gypsies – a very interesting group. The colonial writers have passed queer and contradictory judgments about them. For instance, they believed that migratory tribes had descended from adventurers and individuals of mixed castes and trades, as the migratory tribes were found wandering all over India to pursue their trade. Some others were found resembling ‘the Gipsies of Europe, tumblers, jugglers, acrobats, or thieves or robbers,....’<sup>76</sup> Grierson denies any link between the European and Indian gypsies,<sup>77</sup> but nowadays certain ethnic and linguistic linkages between the gypsies of Europe and South Asia are speculated.<sup>78</sup> Their migratory route is also described to support the assertion about their Indian origin. In *The Linguistic Survey of India*, the tribes mentioned under gypsies include: Pendhari, Bhamti, Ode, Ladi, Sansi, Kalmati, Garodi, Myanwali, Kanjari, Doom, Malhar, Qasai, Sikaldari, and Gulculia. The gypsy languages are the languages spoken by the vagrant tribes all over the country. Interestingly their languages/dialects are described under the Dravidian languages, Bhil languages, as well as their own particular language called argot’. The ‘argot’ is associated with certain quality of minor ethnic groups which makes their languages unintelligible and secretive for the sake of security. Tribes having Dravidian origin include Sansi,<sup>79</sup> Kanjars, Nuts, and Beldar speak a Dravidian language. There are found philological reasons to believe that all these tribes branched out from one great nomadic race. As these are migratory tribes, if they stay at a certain place for some time, may adopt the local language hence it is also guessed that they have Aryanized their languages long time back.<sup>80</sup> Another important thing to note is that if a tribe is found in different corners of the country, it definitely will be having its dialect according to

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<sup>76</sup> G.A. Grierson (ed.), *Linguistic Survey of India*, Vol. XI, Gipsy Languages (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 1994, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1922), p.1.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> <http://www.scottishgypsies.co.uk/early.html>, 5 October 2011 and many similar websites explain this point of view.

<sup>79</sup> Locally used pronunciation is used here instead of the one written by British authors.

<sup>80</sup> G.A. Grierson, *op.cit.*, p.5.

the locality, such as Punjabi in the Punjab, and Hindustani in the eastern parts of the pre-partition Punjab.<sup>81</sup> Though they use ancient techniques of hunting and life style but they have ‘modernized’ through their interaction with the modern economy. So they are partial primitive, partial modern.

### **Anthropological perspective on nomads**

Ethnically, the nomads of different regions have different as well as common origins. For instance, most widely distributed nomad groups seem to be those of Balochs and Pakhtuns. They are found concentrated in their own regions, the provinces named after their ethnic names, and all other provinces of Pakistan.

*Baloch:* Baloch have been recognized as an ethnic group since ancient times and the meanings given to ‘Baloch’ indicate different qualities. Balochs are historically known for, such as, ‘those who live in desert’, ‘bare’ ‘those who are looters of the desert and barbarian’, but it also denotes ‘nomad, traveler’.<sup>82</sup> Persian poet Firdousi mentioned them in *Shahnama*, referred to them as those fighting in the war of Khusrao, wearing turbans with cock *kalghi* (which is named as ‘baloch’). Such references indicate that nomadism has inevitably been taken as a characteristic of the Baloch people. Their ancestral origin is traced back to Arabs, Turks, Indian Rajputs, or people living around the Caspian Sea. They are called Aryans as well. Whatever their point of origin, their exodus and migration has been due to two main sources: war and subjugation by powerful armies, and shortage of means of survival such as pastures. This also reveals that they were confined to mainly arid zones of Balochistan only because they could not retain hold of their pastures at their points of origin. They continued searching new pastures and also grabbing lands of other tribes (such as Jats, Rajputs). They also crossed the boundaries of present Balochistan and reached Multan in the east, Karachi and Hyderabad in the south-east, valleys of mountains bordering western Sindh. In the north they could not grab lands under the controls of Brahuīs. In the thirteenth or fourteenth century, a sizable number of Balochs also occupied lands in Sindh. In the Punjab, they moved further up to Multan in search of livelihood. Some Baloch even went to serve the Moghul King Humayun (1530-1556 AD). This had been the search for livelihood which made Balochs invaders, dacoits, land grabbers, and warlike. Due to the same reasons they became

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<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.6, 50.

<sup>82</sup> As was given in the *Imperial Gazetteers of India*, Vol. 6, p.389.

notorious for attacking the trade caravans traveling between Iran and India. Some other qualities of Balochs have been listed as brave, sturdy and ready to fight.<sup>83</sup> Unlike Pukhtuns, Baloch do not insist upon endogamy, rather they take women from non-Balochs or they were absorbed ethnically and assimilated culturally in other powerful tribes; the reverse is true as well.

*Powindas*: It literally means ‘wanderer’, or ‘one without any permanent home’, and commonly this is the label put on nomadic people of Central Asia. They are found in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. Since 1947, they have been crossing borders and are permanently in a state of migration usually on seasonal basis. Earlier their population was believed to be around 300,000, but it increased after the 1978 revolution in Afghanistan, which forced a large number of other Afghan tribes as well as nomads to enter Pakistan. They feared that they would forcibly be recruited in Afghan militia, so they preferred to become refugee.<sup>84</sup> Kundi explains that Powindas can be identified into two types – Pakistani and Afghani – both are indistinguishable due to stark cultural and linguistic resemblance. Their dialect and dress are same. They speak Pushto and Dari. It is understood that in the post-1978 conditions, many Afghan Powindas started claiming Pakistani origin.<sup>85</sup> Like other nomad groups, Powindas travel on foot,<sup>86</sup> as the right to ride on animals is given to children, old or sick persons. Women are no less strong in such a lifestyle, though male dominance is the rule. Girls are married without their consent at an age of 14-18 years. They find extreme weathers, especially summers, difficult to bear in tents. Powindas are endogamous as this practice reinforces group solidarity and homogeneity.

The number of Powindas is dwindling like other nomad groups, though they rarely come near anything modernizing such as literacy which is zero among them. They are settling down and starting farming or doing business. It is understood that today certain Pathan tribes, both in Balochistan and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, were powindas in the past. Their major source of earning is sale of goats or sheep as well as daily wage labour. In 1961, the number of powindas was 72,300 excluding the

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. Ibn Abdullah Yaqoot, in Pekoline, *op.cit.*, p.26.

<sup>84</sup> Mansoor Akbar Kundi, *Balochistan A Socio-Cultural and Political Analysis* (Quetta: Qasim Printers, 1994), p.111.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.111-12.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, Kundi reports of a powinda who traveled from Ghazni in Afghanistan to Shikarpur in Sindh and back, p.112.

tribal areas.<sup>87</sup> When they settle in towns they use this money for purchasing immovable property. In the 1980s, thousands of powindas were accorded the status and benefits of Afghan refugees on the promise of not migrating. Their children are now studying in schools, ready to relinquish their powinda identity and their prospects of leading a civilized life are much brighter than for their parents. However, the elders not only feel it difficult to adjust but also have less motivation to do so.<sup>88</sup>

*Nomadic movement:* Movement is usually seasonal for the pastoral nomads of northern region, or Balochistan, Thar or Cholistan deserts. Each particular group follows the routes and places their ancestors had chosen and followed. They come down from high mountains before the first snowfall to the warmer plains and go back as summer sets in the lower altitudes. In Balochistan and Sindh, regular seasonal migration occurs between Kirthar and other mountains to the alluvial plains of Sindh. Peripatetic nomads move mostly according to the availability of work. All these groups need to be researched further to elaborate their conditions.

### **Economic perspective on nomads**

For the desert dwellers the ways of life are definitely different from those living in green valleys receiving good amount of rainfall. The desert nomads contribute to the national economy in many ways, as is described in the following:

*Handicrafts:* Initially the handicrafts were made for household needs and bartering other needs, but later through marketing system these became a sources of cash income. Textile, embroidery, weaving, leatherwork, pottery, woolen carpets, rugs, *khes*, *pattu*,<sup>89</sup> *khaddar*, *lungis* from cotton, and *sufi* (a type of cloth) from silk and cotton, are famous. These have been traditional handicrafts of the Indus Valley. Traditional embroidery techniques and patterns have been inherited, developed and popularized mainly by the nomadic and semi-nomadic women. Along with thread-work, mirror-work, patch-work (*rilli*), *ajrak* (block-printing in red and

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<sup>87</sup> Cf. Yu. V. Gankovsky, *The Peoples of Pakistan An Ethnic History*, trans. Urdu. Mirza Ashfaq Baig, *Pakistan ki Qaumiyatain*, footnote 11, preface, p.13 (Karachi: Maktaba-a-Daniyal, 2008), p.13.

<sup>88</sup> Mansur Akbar Kundi, *op.cit.*, p.115.

<sup>89</sup> Local names for woolen or cotton blankets with white-black pattern for *khes* and white ground base in *pattu*.

blue), tie and dye (*chunri*) items are also made in hundreds of patterns using bright colours. There are many more items, such as toys, bead-work, ropes, baskets, fans, decorative items, furniture, etc. Camel hides are used for making lampshades, kuppies, and goblets. Woolen blankets and rugs are also made. Numerous items of leather are produced due to livestock-raising. A major item is of shoes, mostly the local *khussa* of Punjab bedecked with rich delicate designs. Moreover, a wide range of jewelry items made of gold, silver, or other low price metals, enamel work, and glass, are also famous, all having the style and form particular to the region and the ethnic group of the makers. Another outstanding aspect of nomadic life is their use of bright colours in all their items, dress, and animal decorations. It is mainly in response to the colourlessness of the desert, or for security-alertness of a person in wilderness.

*Other crafts:* Their other useful crafts emerged from stone-cutting, processing animal hides, weaving wool, making mats and different items from reeds and local plants. Though they were good sculptors in the past, in the new conditions they have shifted to other usages of stone. Certain non-Muslim tribes still use this skill for religious purposes.

*Modern marketing:* The nomads sell their handicrafts, products of their herds and minerals of the desert in the city markets, festivals or fairs that are held on the shrines of *Sufis* and *dervais* since these provide a chance of interaction among the desert nomads and the town dwellers. Lately, in response to the modern day market demands, the middlemen (and middle-women, and such NGOs, too) are guiding these crafters to incorporate designs and mould according to the demands of the urban people, who have emerged as consumers of the 'ethnic products' especially in the upper class of the cities. The amount of exploitation, no doubt, is very high in these cases. Yet it is only through the presence of their handicrafts in shopping arcades that the urbanites come to know the remote existence of their compatriot nomads but largely with passing thoughts of their troubles and challenges.

*Livestock:* Raising animals is the greatest source of livelihood, providing meat, milk, wool, and income from sale. Wool sells costly as a raw material for handicrafts and cottage industries. Nomads contribute to the national economy, especially to ensure food security by providing meat and dairy needs. They raise millions of animals in deserts, which are under the threat of hunger, death and drowning as well due to recent climatic changes.

## Prospects

The 20<sup>th</sup> century has fast reduced the population of nomads in the world. Its major factors have been industrialization, advancement in agriculture, and immigration controls. Moreover, for the nomads, spatial marginalization, compulsion for economic integration, cultural alienation, and shrinking access to natural resources, which are dwindling fast, are also pressing problems. These peoples, already living on extremes, risk and vulnerability are facing new challenges as well, which would further marginalize or possibly reduce their way of life, as is discussed below.

*Constraints of nomadic way of life:* At the global, regional as well as national level, it is feared that nomadism is on the verge of extinction if the modern governments keep enforcing their border-checking and migration rules and try to integrate the nomads in ‘more advanced societies for the purpose of taxation as well as to improve their health and literacy. However, many researchers now consider that nomadism represents the best use of fragile ecosystem’.<sup>90</sup> While more threats are coming up for the ecosystem, population is growing, and land resources are shrinking or depleting, nomads are the ones giving support to sedentary life of the villages or cities.

*Technological adaptation:* Ecological theory is found helpful in understanding the process of migration and nomadism. Adoption of technology is no doubt related with the values system conditioned by the group’s mobility. ‘The semi-nomadic and nomadic tribes find summer and winter opportunities in their respective ecological zones, which finally combine into one ecological system, forming a mosaic of natural and cultural areas’.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, it is rightly said that the nomadic way of life and seasonal migration is perhaps the best way to take advantage of fragile resources of environment. Though nomadic population has reduced in the recent decades, but Balochistan is that province of Pakistan which has a large area of it inhabited by nomadic population following a pattern of livelihood which remains responsive to ecological changes since the region provides for dual subsistence; agriculture at one time and nomadism at the other’. Migration as an outcome of this dual

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<sup>90</sup> With Geographical Dictionary, available at, <http://www.answer.com/topic/nomadism#ixzzlBqUdbcxy>, accessed on 26 Feb 2011.

<sup>91</sup> Akhtar Husain Siddiqui, *Baluchistan (Pakistan): Its Society, Resources and Development* (London: University Press of America, 1991), p.252.

subsistence leaves little chance for adoption of modern technologies. The present '[N]omad technology concentrates on sheep raising, for it is sheep that provide the subsistence base of nomadic life, furnishing milk, milk products, meat, wool and hides'.<sup>92</sup>

*Shrinking population:* These 'sons and daughters of pathways' are on the verge of extinction, because they are fast assimilating in the sedentary communities. New constructions, highways, farmlands, parks, cantonments, and above all multinationals grabbing lands make them restricted to even more marginal lands, obstruct their traditional routes. Fodder, water and sufficient open land are necessary for them and their herds. All the Afghan refugees have experienced disruption of their community life, either due to the fighting or migration. They have lost many of their friends and neighbors, their support networks, and marriage pools. Their economic and credit systems have been thrown into chaos. Migrants have lost or may lose all means of support other than dependency upon international donor agencies, either as a result of abandoning their land or because they cannot long maintain their herds on the pastures that are available to them. The nomads, more flexible at present than the refugee agriculturalists, may be forced to give up their entire mode of living when their demands upon limited resources of the area become too great.<sup>93</sup> Conflict and war conditions in a large part of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan pose another imminent danger for age-old migration of Kuchis. Gorilla war, movement of armed bands or military forces, and hide-outs of the insurgents; all have now restricted the nomads' freedom to move about in their traditional lands/routes.

Their restriction or forced integration in the settled communities would, no doubt, be a painful transition for them, at least for a generation. Their earning skills, education, training and life skills have been evolved out of nomadism. Yet it is more probable that the 'civilizing agents', who do not care for their troubles, would continue pushing the nomads further to margins and hostile corners.

The major losses to be incurred on the part of nomads would involve: decline in livestock raising, unemployment, cultural alienation, discrimination, vulnerability of women and children to hazards of town life and rise in poverty. Despite all these troubles, it is true that they are paying the price, by gradually leaving this mode of life and depriving the deserts and unexplored valleys of their echoing sounds, tinkling bells and goats' bleating.

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, p.253.

<sup>93</sup> 'Afghan Nomad Refugees in Pakistan', *op.cit.*



Another important emergent threat for the nomads is change in the climate and pattern of monsoon in South Asia, as is explained below.

### **Ecologically uncertain future**

Pakistan has entered a state of climatic change which is definitely going to affect the balance of man-nature relations. Going back in 2000, one can see serious drought in Sindh, affecting two million people, 22,000 kilometers of land and killing thousands of cattle. In 2010, the unprecedented rain causing historic floods, displaced 20 millions of people in whole Pakistan, causing damage of 855 billion rupees and leaving 10.1 million people in need of shelter. The severely affected population was largely the unskilled labourers and small farmers.<sup>94</sup> Then the rain was not interpreted as a definite sign of climatic change.<sup>95</sup> However, soon it became apparent that ‘when we look at the weather patterns that were followed by these floods, climate change predictions suddenly become more immediate, more serious and extremely alarming’.<sup>96</sup> In August 2011, Sindh received 271 per cent more rain than the normal pattern. Noorpur Thal received 219.1, and Mithi (Tharparkar) received 530 percent of average rainfall. The departure from normal was only 22 per cent for Balochistan and 17 per cent for Punjab province.<sup>97</sup> These figure show that the lower Sindh region, including Thar desert, is expected to have heavy rainfall in coming years due to the global warming.<sup>98</sup> This summer, monsoon

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<sup>94</sup> Government of Pakistan, *Pakistan Economic Survey 2010-11* (Islamabad: Finance Division, Economic Adviser’s Wing, 2011), pp.221-22.

<sup>95</sup> As explained by an environmentalist, this was caused by multiple factors, mostly man-made, yet the scientists soon came up to warn that ‘weather conditions could definitely be more erratic in the future’. See Fatima Aqeel, ‘Unnaturally Erratic’, *Herald*, September 2010, pp. 40-1.

<sup>96</sup> [http://images.search.yahoo.com/images/view;\\_ylt=A0PD0TCIFXxOo2QA96eJzbkF;.....](http://images.search.yahoo.com/images/view;_ylt=A0PD0TCIFXxOo2QA96eJzbkF;.....) 30 September 2011.

<sup>97</sup> Government of Pakistan, *Pakistan’s Monsoon 2011 (July & August)*, Karachi; Pakistan Meteorological Department, <http://www.pakmet.com.pk/cdpc/prg/monsoon2011/monsoon2011progress.htm>, 29 September 2011.

<sup>98</sup> Statement of Dr. Moazzam Ali Khan, Institute of Environmental Studies, University of Karachi, *Daily Times*, September 30, 2011, p.B1. He emphasized that as, ‘we have seen in the recent floods, volatility and unpredictability in the South Asian monsoons can wreak disastrous havoc. These floods should be treated as a serious wake-up call’. For details see, [http://images.search.yahoo.com/images/view;\\_ylt=A0PD0TCIFXxOo2QA96eJzbkF](http://images.search.yahoo.com/images/view;_ylt=A0PD0TCIFXxOo2QA96eJzbkF), accessed 28 September 2011.

season has started earlier than normal and lasted later as well.<sup>99</sup> Now it is more probable that, 'Climate Change is a rapidly unfolding challenge of catastrophic global, regional and national proportions. Pakistan will be affected by the impacts far more seriously than is generally recognized by the policy makers and opinion leaders'.<sup>100</sup>

The 2010 floods inundated one-fifth of Pakistan, directly affected about 20 million people – mostly by destruction of property, livelihood and infrastructure – and killed about 2000 people. After that disaster, aid groups had warned the Pakistan government to invest in prevention measures to mitigate impact of seasonal rains, to avoid a repeat of last year's experience. But the government failed miserably.<sup>101</sup> It is also recognized that the 'poor and marginalised communities in this region [South Asia] tend to be the most vulnerable to climate change and least able to cope with weather-related disasters because of lack of access to information and resources to reduce their risks'.<sup>102</sup>

Climate change has been recognized as the most complex challenge faced by Pakistan. Water and food security and coastal areas are thought to be highly threatened. Pakistan is now concerned about increased risk of floods, droughts,<sup>103</sup> cyclones, deforestation, depleting biodiversity, energy shortage, and health hazards for humans in

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<sup>99</sup> 'The heavy rains began in the 2nd week of August, and have continued into the 2nd week of September, accumulating to 2 1/2 times more than average. According to Dr. Qamar-uz-Zaman Chaudhry, Pakistan's Federal Advisor on Climate Affairs, this is the highest 4-week monsoon rainfall total ever recorded in Sindh province, amounting to more than 37 million acre feet of water, 'which is unimaginable'. The 'unimaginable' rains occurred after a 12-month period where the province received no rain and was under severe drought conditions. At least 226 people have been killed in the new flooding, 1.2 million houses have been damaged or destroyed, and 280,000 people made homeless. There were already 1 million people needing food aid and 800,000 families without permanent shelter due to last year's floods, making this year's renewed flooding particularly disruptive'. <http://www.worldweatherpost.com/2011/09/14/new-floods-in-pakistan-kill-226-maria-heads-towards-brush-with-bermuda/>, accessed 5 September 2011.

<sup>100</sup> <http://www.lead.org.pk/cc/>.

<sup>101</sup> <http://links.org.au/node/2490>.

<sup>102</sup> *Poverty & Vulnerability Cycles in South Asia, Narratives of Survival and Struggles* (Kathmandu: South Asian Alliance for Poverty Eradication (SAAPE), 2010), p.121.

<sup>103</sup> With reference to Pakistan's Federal Advisor on Climate Affairs, <http://www.worldweatherpost.com/2011/09/14/new-floods-in-pakistan-kill-226-maria-heads-towards-brush-with-bermuda/>, 29 September 2011.

particular. The arid and semi-arid areas are seriously under threat. Melting of glaciers is resulting in increased flow in rivers, to be followed by reduced flow some years after. Already serious droughts during 1998-2001 and serious floods of 2003, 2006, have indicated imminent impact of climate change. Its impact on wildlife, their habitat, forests, rangelands, and biodiversity is expected to be disastrous.<sup>104</sup> Large scale and long distance migration, and conflict are most likely results of these changes, warns Asian Development Bank.<sup>105</sup> Since the nomads live in close contact with, and rely for their sustenance on, the natural resources found in forests, rangelands, coastal areas, deserts, mountains, or valleys, they are bound to be seriously affected by any major change in natural environment.

## Conclusion

The history of nomadism is a history of human race as well. Nomadism started in Pakistan in the pre-pottery–Neolithic–age. Since then, the nomadic groups of Pakistan have been relying mostly on pastoralism, to a little extent on agriculture, and rarely on hunting. Hunting, however, is a source of survival mixed with farming and foraging. In Pakistan, nomads have been contributing to the national economy in many ways despite their hardships.

The population in deserts or desert-like conditions of Pakistan had been affected by extreme change in climate and river-courses, or drying up of water sources. This region has a history of destruction due to climate-related disasters. The first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century has ushered in another series of such changes. Asia and the Pacific region forms the epicenter of these changes.

Though the fears in the case of Pakistan about shrinking of nomadic mode of life are based on reality; the pace of development in the marginal areas of Pakistan is too slow to cause their extinction in the near future. However, the recent phase of climatic change is bound to affect nomadic population swiftly and immensely, probably in the direction of dislocating a larger number of people by destroying their habitat and fixed sources of livelihood. What lies in the near future, must be addressed in advance. Both the people and the governments need to give this a priority.

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<sup>104</sup> *Pakistan Economic Survey 2010-11, op.cit.*, pp.215-16.

<sup>105</sup> *The Nation* (daily), 20 September 2011.