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## Violence of science and development: Withering away of the displaced Van Gujjars in and around Rajaji National Park, Uttarakhand

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This paper examines the displacement of the semi-nomadic pastoral community of the Van Gujjars from the Protected Area of Rajaji National Park, displacement falling under the rubric of ‘development-induced displacement’. The study carried out was based on qualitative data collection. Primary data was collected through interviews that were semi-structured. Purposive sampling was used to approach the three sets of respondents, viz. government officials, ‘experts’ from the Wildlife Institute of India and NGOs and the tribal community of the Van Gujjars. Data analysis puts forth a very ambiguous argument for the establishment of Protected Areas. The rehabilitation of the Van Gujjars is justified by those who argue that their way of life is unsustainable. By coming forward to put forth a proposal for a community management plan entailing their active participation, it validates the fact that they (Van Gujjars) too have a stake in the preservation of the forests and its wildlife and, thus, should have a say in crucial matters.

**Keywords:** Van Gujjars, forest conservation, wildlife protection, displacement, resettlement

### Introduction

The Rajaji National Park (RNP), spread over the districts of Dehradun, Haridwar and Pauri Garhwal in Uttarakhand, was declared a national park in 1983, fully notified as of 2012 and declared a tiger reserve in 2015. RNP is home to the Van Gujjars, only nomadic pastoralist tribe in winters and the tribe considers the forest to be their veritable lifeline. The Van Gujjars migrate to the *bugyals* (grasslands) located in the upper Himalayas with their herds at the beginning of summer and, at the end of the monsoon, they return to the foothills.

Their transhumance, every six months, is driven by the fodder needs of their buffaloes. This ensures, pointed out by many (Agrawal 2014; Gooch 2008; Nusrat, Pattanaik, and Farooquee 2011), a sustainable dependence upon the forest. However, the designation of the area as a national park necessitated the displacement and resettlement of the Van Gujjars. The attempt to relocate them from the forest goes back to 1975, but it became a priority in 1985, just after the announcement of the Rajaji National Park Project (Temper, del Bene, and Martinez-Alier 2015). The Gujjars (hereafter, the terms ‘Van Gujjars’ and ‘Gujjars’ are used interchangeably) are fighting their removal, and they are supported by a number of NGOs (Lewis 2003). Over these years the community has faced several eviction notices and harassment by the forest department, to convince them to leave their territory and give space to the national park. While many Gujjar families are still migrating, increasing barriers to their entry into the forests have hampered rehabilitated families from migrating. The rehabilitation process is justified in the name of development of the fragile Shiwalik ecosystem which is apparently succumbing to degradation due to the pressure put on it by the Gujjars. Thus, the immense pressure put on RNP by the various commercial and industrial interests is partially or completely discounted. As per the state forest Department Report, during last two decades around 26,000 ha. forestland has

legally been transferred for various development schemes in Uttarakhand, such as for mining, hydro power, road construction, transmission lines, etc. (Nusrat, Pattanaik, and Farooquee 2011).

This study highlights the dominance of the state-centric model of development and conservation<sup>1</sup> and the overlooking of the adverse impact of the developmental project on RNP. It examines how the statist model of conservation is unilateral in its conservation efforts given its sidelining and undermining the role and knowledge systems of the main stakeholders in the protected areas, i.e. those of the Van Gujjars. The objective of the present study is to analyze the nature of displacement of the Van Gujjars, and to examine whether the state or the Van Gujjars are undermining the conservation of RNP.

### Literature survey

The term ‘Development-Induced Displacement and Resettlement’ (DIDR) was introduced to scientific discourse in the mid-1980s by Cernea’s *Putting People First: Sociological Variables in Rural Development* (1991). In the case of development-caused displacement, land becomes a resource and source of conflict between the interests of the public authorities and the private sector and the potentially affected or displaced people (Terminski 2013).

Debates on the displacement and relocation of the Van Gujjar tribes from the protected forests of the RNP essentially pertain to the larger issue of the legitimacy of the development/modernization discourse. The state and traditional communities indulge in blaming and counter-blaming when it comes to determining who is responsible for the disruption of the ecological balance of RNP. While the state heaps the blame on the local populace for placing undue pressure on the resources of the park, the local communities hold the advance of the developmental project in the park as the main culprit. Such state-sponsored linear development projects have often failed to examine the nature of the state itself, its location within the matrix of

a class-divided society and its relationship with contending social forces. The state should not be thought of as an entity that stands outside and above society, as an autonomous agency enriched by technical assistance from the metropolis. It is important to examine the march of the developmental project in RNP which is not only responsible for further marginalization of the tribal populace but also ecological imbalance.

Two main strategic models came up in the 1960s and 1970s namely the 'exclusive' and 'inclusive' management approaches. In the first, management plans were developed with the intention of de-coupling the interests of the local people from protected areas with options ranging from an open anti-participatory attitude to the outright resettlement of the resident communities. In the second model, the interests of the local communities were central to the protected areas (Ferguson and Lohmann 1994).

Ramchandra Guha, delivering the keynote address at the conference on wildlife and human rights in Asia at the University of Oslo said,

the belief in a total ban on human intervention is misguided. Studies show that the highest levels of biological diversity are often found in areas with some (though not excessive) human intervention. In opening up new niches to be occupied by insects, plants and birds, partially disturbed ecosystems can have a greater diversity than untouched areas. (cited in Dogra 1997)

Ashis Nandy (1988) offers valuable insight into the workings and ideological basis of the state when he states that two new reasons of the state have acquired immense importance; that of science and development. He insists that hitherto science has never been the reason of the state. Science has always been an instrument of the state and not vice-versa. This is witnessed in the way science has advanced discounting the democratic processes evidenced in the displacement of indigenous peoples for the 'greater good'.

Alvares (1988) argues that modern science and technology is colonizing nature and is nothing short of imperialism. In its attempt to bring about an order in society modern science (its processes) is naturally at variance with life processes and natural events. According to Alvares (1988, 72),

The attempt of the machine to replace the organism, of science to replace natural principles, cannot remain confined to a particular culture or society. A civilization driven by a theory of science/machine *ipso facto* becomes a colonizing force, and aspires to bring under its sway every other culture that has based its survival on a natural relationship with its surroundings.

Thus, modern science and its proponents would be wary of, and would seek to modernize cultures such as those tribal ones that are so fully integrated into their surroundings so as to maintain ecological balance.

### Violence of science and development

Modernity, as an ideology, has guided much of scientific enterprise and its theorization. Science, both as theory and practice, is organically linked to the idea of controlling nature and mastering it. Many perceptive thinkers

have linked this idea of control over nature to the central political phenomena of the contemporary period, namely institutionalized controls of 'some' over others. These 'some' are usually not wo/men of property in the traditional sense but wo/men of expert knowledge. Scientific knowledge and proprietary technologies have become the source of power over nature. However, in reality, power over nature gets translated into power over people. It is this domination of expert knowledge and its nexus with political power that makes a mockery of liberty in any substantial sense (Mallick 2009).

Shiva (1988) stresses the reductionism of science by highlighting the fourfold violence it unleashes, viz. violence against the subject of knowledge, the object of knowledge, the beneficiary of knowledge, and against knowledge itself. Violence is inflicted on the subject socially through the sharp divide between the expert and the non-expert, a divide which converts the vast majority of non-experts into non-knowers. In order to prove itself superior to alternative modes of knowledge and be the only legitimate mode of knowing, reductionist science, Shiva argues, resorts to suppression and falsification of facts and thus commits violence against science itself. The *object* of knowledge is violated when modern science, in a mindless effort to transform nature without a thought for the consequences, destroys the innate integrity of nature. People who are to be the beneficiaries of scientific knowledge, particularly the poor, are its worst victims: they are deprived of their life-support systems in the reckless pillage of nature.

### Culture of displacement

Orozco-Quintero, Burlando, and Robinson (2015) talk about a 'culture of displacement' that seeks to treat humans as being an anathema to wildlife all the while writing off human security as collateral. Agrawal and Redford (2009) contend that 'displacement is a consequence of conservation projects because conservation, like development, is inherently spatial'. However, the authors contend that the arguments justifying displacement need to be coupled with two assumptions: 'that human presence has a negative impact on conservation, and that there is a calculus of gains and losses through which the worst effects of involuntary displacement on humans can be balanced by gains for conservation through displacement.'

Agrawal and Redford (2009, 5) caution against policy that attributes declining biodiversity to gaps in the 'number, extent and representation' of Protected Areas or to the inability to impose restrictions on resource use in traditional areas by the local communities. The failure is at a larger level in the flawed policies of the conservation agencies. Agrawal and Redford (2009, 7) note several problems. They opine that

the pursuit of conservation through the creation of boundaries and enclosures which divide communities and nature and place nature under the strict control of powerful, unaccountable non-local institutions can only work to the extent that protected areas can be buffered from social discontent beyond their boundaries.

The views on the role of people's displacement in the conservation policy are divided along disciplinary lines. Biologists tend to look at conservation as hinging upon an ecosystem devoid of human presence thus effectively placing species and the ecosystem to be penultimate. Rangarajan and Shahabuddin (2006, 366) adopt a cautionary tone and argue that 'such linear causative linkages may be convenient to managers in decision-making. But they have clouded complexities of ecosystem dynamism and diversity that would involve much a greater engagement with human use issues'.

There a number of debates about national parks in India – the place of cattle – and people is just one of them (Sankhala 1985; Schaller 1967). These debates demonstrate the impact of conservation science on the management of protected areas. These are centred around the definition of 'natural' which determines whether cattle and wo/man belong. Calls to eliminate cattle from wildlife sanctuaries are repeated time and time again. Kailash Sankhala of Project Tiger denounced cattle grazing as the major problem faced by protected areas. For George Schaller, while cattle posed no threat to the tiger population, he felt that from the 'stand point of habitat conservation and the maintenance of the park as a sanctuary devoted to the perpetuation of wildlife, the livestock should be eliminated and the wild hoofed animals be permitted to increase' (Schaller 1967, 38).

A BNHS study on Bharatpur that commenced a few months before it was declared a national park in 1981 is perhaps one of the most significant of ecological studies to address these debates on the management of protected areas. The hope was that the project would demonstrate the need to practice an 'exclusionary' form of management (free of cattle and people) for the health of the wetlands. What followed were the prohibition of livestock-grazing and the collection of NTFPs (Non-timber Forest Products) by the villagers. The study, positioned as it was to study the park before and after a ban on human activity was imposed, however, produced data to the contrary. The report indicated that bird diversity was dropping post the ban, and thus, a hands-off management would not work (Lewis 2003).

India has largely accepted the validity of the US style of management (of protected areas), one that is guided by the principles of complete non-interference-natural management (under criticism in Parks like Yellowstone). India implemented the natural park system in 1972, which contained the key provisions of no people, no cattle and natural management. The BNHS study indicates that the natural management model is problematic, in Bharatpur, if not in other parks as well. Ramchandra Guha, a leading critic of large-scale reserves and what he calls 'authoritarian biology', has argued that 'ecological notions of people-less nature are an American cultural artifact, and inappropriate for anciently civilized and densely populated nations such as India' (Lewis 2003). For Shiv Visvanathan, large-scale conservation parks are reminiscent of the dangers of science and development. 'Ecology is implicated in Visvanathan's critique insofar as ecologists make attempts to manage nature, or to change the local (Indian) landscape in the interests of an

international environmental agenda' (Lewis 2003, 135). For him, the way forward is the formation of small-scale biodiversity refuges in which local villages can develop appropriate management strategies.

However, one can notice a growing trend among even the staunchest of conservationists who are now moving away from the simplistic understanding of human-wildlife conflict and degradation of protected areas as being the result of growing human population. Nalin Ranjan Jena (1994, 2768) attributes degradation of protected areas to be 'the growing charge of industrial and commercial interests on P.A.s ... the failure of development program to take the complex realities into consideration, exploitation of wildlife, timber and other forest produce in connivance with politicians and forest bureaucracy, etc.'

### Methodology

The study carried out was based on qualitative data. Primary data were collected through semi-structured interview schedules to enable the respondents to open up freely. Secondary data were collected through a literature review of articles, journals, reports, etc. The areas where research was conducted include Mohund, Gaidikhata, Sabalgarh, and Pathri. Gaidikhata and Pathri where members of the community have been relocated.

Three sets of respondents were approached for the study. The first set was the Van Gujjars, comprising 10 respondents, all of whom were household heads. The second set was government officials/forest officials, comprising five respondents: the DFO, Haridwar; two IFS officers; two forest rangers. The government/forest officials chosen for the interviews were intimately involved in the maintenance of the Park and the rehabilitation of the Gujjars and therefore well aware of the realities on the ground. The third was civil society 'experts' who are intimately involved in policymaking regarding the displacement of the local forest dwelling people in Protected Areas. There was a total of six respondents: four Wildlife of India Institute (WII) members and two NGOs. The NGOs, namely RLEK and SOPHIA, were chosen as they are the only ones working solely to promote and protect the interests of the Van Gujjars.

This study attempts to gauge whether the displaced Van Gujjars do accept the rationale behind their displacement from the Park and thus, somewhere internalize the dominant discourse of development, modernization and conservation. Are they, as Nandy (1988) puts it, willing to stake their way of life for the greater good of the society (via development projects)? Do they place faith in the government in terms of its ability to bring about their welfare? These are some questions we would like to shed some light on.

### Discussion

#### *Sustainability of Van Gujjars' lifestyle*

A common thread running through the arguments rationalizing the displacement of the Van Gujjars from the forests is that whereas the forests used to be able to sustain the Gujjars and their lifestyle, now – due to an upsurge in their population and their livestock – the forests can no longer sustain them. The director of the WII is a bit

ambiguous in his opinions about the sustainability of the Gujjars' way of life. He states that in earlier times their 'occupancy was seasonal' and their 'impact on the environment was also seasonal'. He alleges that they have almost become 'residents' of the area, perhaps implying that their impact on the environment is year-long.

Jena (1994, 2768) attributes degradation of protected areas (PAs) to be 'the growing charge of industrial and commercial interests on PAs ... the failure of development program to take the complex realities into consideration, exploitation of wildlife, timber and other forest produce in connivance with politicians and forest bureaucracy, etc.' A study conducted in the Simlipal reserve in Orissa seems to corroborate the fact that one cannot ascribe the degradation of the reserves to the local populace but must shift the focus to forces external to the Park, more often than not in connivance with the state (Jena 1994, 2767).

Mr. Kaushik,<sup>2</sup> from the NGO SOPHIA,<sup>3</sup> makes a valid point when he raises the question of Protected Areas like national parks welcoming a different kind of pressure when it, as a gated entity, is permeated by 'elites' – bureaucrats, capitalists and tourists. He says: 'So much pressure and so many hotels have come up; guesthouses, farm-houses have come up around Rajaji [National Park] and all national parks'. Further, Mr. Kaushik notes, there seem to be 'two conflicting interests' playing out; while on the one hand, 'we want urban people to come there, those who are powerful who have money and more bureaucrats, more politicians, more people from media'; on the other hand, we are keen to move the Gujjars to the fringes.

In the change in lifestyle of the Gujjars, the Director of WII, locates a bigger conflict, i.e. that of overlapping resource use (water and fodder) between the Gujjar livestock and the elephants in particular. Mr. Lamding, Additional Chief Conservator of forests, talks along the same lines when he pits the resource usage (fodder and water) of the Gujjar buffaloes against that of the deer in the Park.

Mr. Kaushik is convincing in his argument that the Gujjars have hitherto been sustainable in their resource usage (in terms of fodder specifically) as with their migration every six months the forests had enough time to re-capacitate. However, he acknowledges that their means of life would not be as sustainable as before since all of them do not migrate from the area at the same time. He points out that it is because all the families do not migrate within the same time-frame, which it leads to a year-round pressure on the forests, which is a cause for concern. He was one among the few respondents who feels that the Gujjars' pattern of lopping off of trees for fodder is sustainable.

What was gauged during the course of this study is that the various experts seem to hold the Van Gujjars culpable (in degrading the environment) primarily due to the lopping off of trees and overgrazing by their cattle. The various experts and even the government officials allege that the Gujjars lop off the trees in such a manner that regeneration takes far longer than it ought, and this is unsustainable in the long run as the forests are not given

time to rest. While in the field, the forest rangers pointed out the trees that the resettled Gujjars had lopped bare, with hardly any branches intact at the top. They alleged that the Gujjars lopped the trees in areas that they were not permitted to enter freely and in such a manner that would hamper the regenerative capacity of the trees.

Further, the forest rangers stated that six months is not enough time for the forests to regenerate. To corroborate this fact, Mr. Kaushik mentioned that the British, to enable the regeneration of the forests, sought to cordon off certain blocks of the forest land, thus preventing the local populace from gaining access to forest resources.

Mr. Gopal, a WII expert puts forth the view that the way Van Gujjars practise pastoralism is unlike any other form of pastoralism he has come across. He compares the manner in which pastoralism is practised by the pastoral nomads in Rajasthan with that practiced by the Van Gujjars. He highlights the crucial difference in the grazing of livestock. He says that while those in Rajasthan graze their livestock on the 'worst of grasslands' thus allowing for regeneration of grass quickly, the Gujjars lop trees for fodder, i.e. their 'buffaloes are fed'. This he argues leads to various changes at the micro-environment level and consequently leads to 'canopies to open' that affects elephants, etc.

However, Gooch (2008, 86) comments on the pattern of lopping off of trees by the Gujjars asserting that they are 'always cutting the leaves before the particular species of trees would have lost them naturally'. She mentions the pattern of lopping which involves lopping trees farthest away from the *dera* (Gujjar hutment) when they come back in the autumn season slowly making their way towards the *dera*. Once they are near the *dera* they make their way back into the mountains leaving the dried-up forests to regenerate. Badola (1998, 1248) puts forth the argument that the local populace does have a positive attitude towards conservation but 'because of their dependencies and lack of proper alternatives, they are not able to change their present resource use patterns'.

'We will cut them in such a way that these will give us leaves next year ... a Gujjar, when he collects fodder for his cattle, will never uproot a tree. His daily bread is dependent upon the trees' says Ghulam Mustafa, a Gujjar who is yet to be rehabilitated. Another Gujjar (from Gaidikhata village) says, 'We lopped in a manner that half the tree is left on the top and half is cut'. He is assertive in his statements that the trees which are not lopped dry up and thus lopping is needed as manure is required to maintain the fertility of the soil.

Agrawal (2014, accessed on May 6, 2016, <https://www.epw.in/reports-states/no-rights-live-forest.html>) perhaps is appreciative of the Van Gujjars symbiotic relationship with the forests and says that 'they have their own model of forest management with customary rules for harvesting biomass – extracting only as much as they need – and also rules which prohibit hunting and extraction of resources during certain times of the year.'

Mr. Lamding makes an interesting observation when he opines that due to overgrazing and lopping, oaks give way to pines which ultimately give way to thorny forests. The presence of thorny forests, he says, is a

problem in itself which leads to the growth of a highly degraded and moisture scarce forest. Thus, in a way, he is rejecting the Gujjars practice of sustainable resource usage through the practice of lopping based transhumance that has been built upon decades of conservative ethos and practice.

The popular assumptions held by conservationists and development agencies are that third world rural populations hold beliefs and indulge in practices that may be antagonistic to conservation and are unaware of conservation issues (Badola 1998). Contrary to this from what was gauged during the study was that the Van Gujjars (those interviewed) are not by any means averse to the conservation needs of the Park and nor do they lack awareness about conservation issues. They are aware of the conservation needs of the Park which necessitates their removal from within.

However, they, by and large, maintain that their presence in the forests is by no means antithetical to that of the wildlife within. Hence, the Van Gujjars, who are strictly vegetarian, abstain from poaching of wildlife and only extract forests resources adequate to sustain them. They maintain that the forests are their lifeline and they seek to ensure that the resources are utilized in a sustainable manner. They also seek to act as guardians of the wildlife and to an extent take pride in curbing poaching and illegal logging.

They state that the government projects have the view that the presence of Van Gujjars in the forests disturbs the wildlife and thus for the preservation of an undisturbed ecosystem they must move outside the area now designated as a National Park. However, for the Gujjars who have lived harmoniously and at close quarters with the wildlife for decades, this notion is rather absurd. The Gujjar respondents maintain that they along with their livestock have existed in the absence of conflict with the state. It is not uncommon for them to make statements like this. In fact, most of the Gujjar respondents express this belief passionately but there is also perhaps a sense of acceptance of the statist notion of their being a hindrance to the conservation when they state that they are willing to relocate if the government takes this to be a development project.

These statements speak volumes about the ethos of sustainability and the awareness of such sustainable practices displayed by the Gujjars. They are well aware of the fact that they are dependent upon a healthy forest ecosystem and that in order for them to sustain their lifestyle it is imperative to ensure that forest resources are utilized in a sustainable manner.

Amrita Kumar, a WII expert acknowledges that the Gujjars with their indigenous knowledge do provide insights into how to carry out conservation. She concurs that: 'There have been Gujjars who have been talking about which are the good areas where protection would matter, the exact area where the best water resources are, where water resources existed 10 years ago and they're drying up.' This acknowledgment by the 'experts' of the insights that can be provided by the Gujjars perhaps can provide the basis towards a reconciliation between state-led conservation and community management.

### **Development project in RNP**

Orozco-Quintero, Burlando, and Robinson (2015) point to the fact that underlying the logic of exclusionary conservation is the logic of development. In short, while conservation ideals seek to protect against 'development' they, in fact, mirror it as 'extractive industries, agribusiness, and conservation alike encroach into community and indigenous lands, and hinder local people's ability to manage and be sustained by their territories and to play a role in fostering biodiversity' (Orozco-Quintero, Burlando, and Robinson 2015, accessed on December 12, 2016, <https://intercontinentalcry.org/just-conservation/>).

Mr. Rawal, a WII expert says, 'Adjacent to the Park places like Haridwar, Rishikesh, the southern area of the Park and Chidiyapur range are developing very rapidly. That, in future will make a very strong barrier for the animals to move here'. Other 'experts' concur and say that the rapidly growing urban setups have and will further fragment the Park.

A case in point is the Haridwar-Dehradun highway through the immensely fragile and vital ecosystem of RNP. It must be pointed out that the Chilla-Motichur corridor which is vital to the conservation of species is one of the most disturbed areas. The scholars of WII do acknowledge, reluctantly though, that the development project as has been carried out in this vital corridor has in a sense undermined the conservation goals of the state. The fragmentation of the habitat of the animals poses an immediate threat to their survival.

They highlight the disturbances caused to the ecosystem by the highway, which is currently unsustainable due to the unprecedented traffic on the road, the high-tension electricity lines running through the Park and the fringe village settlements that disturb the isolation of the area. Mr. Gopal of the WII holds the view that the building of the highway has restricted the movement of animals which holds the key to 'potential conflict' as this would lead to inter-breeding thus undermining the robust gene pool of animals (especially elephants). Thus 'continuity' has to be maintained between areas important from the point of ecology and biodiversity.

To restore balance, the need for further changes to the environment is felt that embodies the desire of science to replace the natural with the man-made (expert made). This has resulted in placing an obstacle in the way of the free movement of animals, especially the elephants. This has led to frantic policy-making by the 'experts' and the government to now mitigate the disturbance (caused by them in the first place) to the area.

Ultimately this has led to the attempt to salvage the project by constructing more structures in the form of elephant underpasses. 'Blunt development for the need of conservation' is perhaps what the 'experts' are now attempting to do. Whether these underpasses will work is a matter of contention. Mr. Rawal, a WII expert says, 'Construction of underpasses for elephants is a very good initiative provided either side of this highway is restored and maintained as elephant habitat'.

The management Plan, 2012–13 (cited in Rasaily 2012) for RNP drafted by an IFS officer highlights how the movement of elephants in the Chilla-Motichur corridor

is hindered by the presence of the Raiwala Army Ammunition Dump<sup>4</sup> in the Johra block of the Park. It acknowledges how the relocation of the ammunition dump from Khandgaon is important for the integrity of the wildlife corridor. Further, the Plan mentions how the building of SIDCUL, which is just outside the southern boundary of the Haridwar range of the Park, is allegedly causing springs within the Park to dry up through indiscriminate pumping of groundwater (Rasaily 2012).

### **Illegal logging**

The DFO of Haridwar insists that there is no illegal logging going on, by the state or otherwise. Mr. Bhargava, an IFS officer, says while rampant illegal logging did take place until a few years ago, the number of instances has now reduced. This he attributes to better protection and/or to people ‘developing’. It came as no surprise when the Gujjar Pradhan from Mohund, who is still a resident of the Park, alleged that the government was ‘selling timber on a large scale’.

The Pradhan’s view is corroborated by that of another Gujjar who is eager to project that the state is not as righteous as is being projected, given its complicity in carrying out illegal logging. He said with an assured air that it wasn’t the Gujjars who were responsible for the damage to the forests, it was the government. He alleges that the government was cutting down trees and thus not only causing degradation but was also the reason behind the human–wildlife conflict.<sup>5</sup>

### **Resettlement sites**

Kothari and Lasgorceix (2009) contend that at the new (rehabilitation) site, the main environmental impact is the destruction or degradation of natural ecosystems. This is directly due to clearance for cultivation and housing sites, roads, etc., or indirectly due to increased biotic pressure by the relocated human and livestock population. Again, there are very few systematic studies on this aspect. The relocation of villages from the Tadoba National Park has claimed 550 hectares of biologically diverse forest, in which forest officials and local people have reported the presence of tigers, leopards, and other wildlife including substantial floral diversity.

The settlement sites of Gaidikhata, Pathri and for that matter Sabalgarh are built upon cleared reserve forest land and as corroborated by the forest guards a great number of trees were cut. Mr. Kaushik argues that these are not forests per se given that they are plantation covered lands and that forest land is uncultivable. An earlier instance of resettled people abandoning their new sites due to their inability to cultivate on forest land should provide insight into how unplanned resettlement policies are formulated.

Also, no provision was made for grazing land or fodder. The loss of livestock in the relocation process is also quite frequent, which can lead to a loss of income. As Mr. Bhargava argues, the Van Gujjars have struggled to adjust to the new settlement site given their inability to maintain their large herds in such contained spaces. Moreover, they do not have the requisite skills to take to agriculture which they are forced into. Some families

also have no access to land ownership or land titles in the relocation process. Kothari and Lasgorceix (2009, 39) argue that this is ‘particularly problematic where land legally classified as a forest is given for relocation, and its legal status is not changed, exposing the relocated population to future uncertainties created by legislation related to forests’.

### **Rehabilitated Van Gujjars**

RNP as of September 2012 has been a fully notified National Park, which implies that the Van Gujjar community has to be shifted out.

On interviewing the Gujjars, there seems to be a consensus regarding the need to move out of the Park. About six out of ten of the Gujjar respondents seem to accept the rationale behind the displacement as being that for conservation purposes/to ‘ensure that the environment is preserved’ and for their ‘betterment/welfare’. Thus, by accepting the state’s policy of dislocating them for the conservation of the Park, on the face of it, the Gujjars place faith in the government’s intentions to conserve wildlife and the environment.

One must not take for granted the ‘positionality’ of the Gujjars. This group of respondents can be further divided into those who have been displaced and resettled and those who are still in the Park. It has been observed that those who have been resettled respond favourably in terms of their acceptance of the rehabilitation policy. They seem to opine that it is for the best and that the government will work for their welfare.

The Gujjars, at least those who have been dislocated and resettled, seem to internalize the state’s rationale for displacement. The inevitability of the displacement had long been accepted and desired. They seem satisfied with their new found access to, to name a few, proper education and health facilities which they previously had no access to.

Those within the Park are reluctant to move out given the inherent flaws in the relocation scheme. Some Gujjars express their dissatisfaction at the government rehabilitating only some and not taking into consideration others still within the Park. Still others within the Park refuse to move out of the Park because they are demanding their adult sons (above 18 years) be treated as separate familial units and be allotted separate land. There is also the claim that while many Gujjars families are being pushed out of the Park, they are not being rehabilitated and are stuck in limbo.

Gooch (1989) points to the manner in which Gujjars have not taken to ‘pure’ crop producing agriculture, even when settled, preferring pastoral activities and milk production. An earlier move to settle the Gujjars permanently in the Shiwalik forest division failed due to them claiming that the land was not cultivable and was insufficient to maintain their buffaloes. Gooch (1989, 12) opines that there is a strategy at play behind the rehabilitation of Gujjars in areas circumscribed by agricultural land. ‘Here it will be very difficult for the Gujjars to slip back into pastoral nomadism and it will be easy to control them.’

The Gujjars irrespective of whether they are still in the Park or have already been rehabilitated, on the whole,

seemed to appreciate the fact that they too would be integrated into the 'mainstream'. Mr. Bhargava's statement, that they had this 'killer assumption that free dwelling communities will suddenly become farmers', has much to reveal. Perhaps this is symptomatic of the need for the state to settle nomadic communities into defined and controlled spaces wherein the state can at the end of the day exercise its power over them. Mr. Bhargava acknowledges that the Gujjars are still struggling to adjust to this new lifestyle.

Gooch (1989, 18) also points to a crucial change in their economy, i.e. they seem to have moved away from subsistence to a market-oriented economy attaining their livelihood through the sale of milk. They have turned into what may be called 'market-oriented pastoral specialists'. The economy of the Gujjars is completely based on milk production. And they play a very important role in the milk and butter supply to the towns lying within daily transportation distance from their habitats. The Gujjars have become integrated into the local economy of the areas near their routes of migration. Mr. Kale emphasizes the importance of the Gujjars and says that due to the restrictions on the migration these townships dependent upon the milk (and other products) supplied by Gujjars are left high and dry.

Gooch (1989, 20) points out that even from a pragmatic view on development, nomadic pastoralists have a 'vital contribution to make to the Indian economy.' She bases this assumption on their skills in specialized cattle breeding and their ability to use marginal lands for milk production, lands which are not otherwise fit for agricultural production. Further, she finds that milk production, given the right conditions, compares favourably with milk-production, done on the basis of high-yielding cross-breeds. Bhupinder Singh of the Anthropological Survey of India places faith in the expertise of the Gujjars in animal husbandry and thinks that the most constructive approach would be to help the community develop organizational, technological and marketing facilities within livestock production and dairying without them giving up on nomadism (Gooch 1989).

But if this relocation seems voluntary then it may do well to understand what underlies this consent. While it may seem that, as the state has projected, people like the Van Gujjars are not forcibly displaced, displacement is always a 'mixture of physical and rhetorical persuasion and coercion' (Brockington 2004, 414). There are many voices to contribute to the argument that those Van Gujjars who refuse to move out are physically harassed and coerced by the forest officials. The move is by no means voluntary. Even as some voices among the Gujjar populace express their willing acceptance of the rehabilitation policy, which necessarily entails a drastic change in their traditional way of life, they hardly have a choice in the matter. It can be argued that hegemonic projects can appear to win the support of the subaltern groups even if their interests are poorly served by them. The Gujjars can hardly stand up against the state when the state arms itself with the noble and grandiose ideals of conservation, 'development', through its espousal of Protected Areas. With

the coming up of the Park, the local populace has no option but to relocate.

### ***Impact on the environment with the displacement of Gujjars***

The question that begs to be asked is how the state, the 'experts' and those displaced perceive the environment to have undergone changes with the initiation of the rehabilitation process. The Gujjars seem confident in their assertion that the forests were better off with their presence there. They state that the trees are drying up now that they are not logged.

'Things have improved tremendously on ground' proclaims Amrita Kumar, a WII expert. She says that there is an improvement in vegetation and increased presence of wild animals in the vacated areas, especially the tiger. Further, she<sup>7</sup> claims that overgrazing leads to the growth of invasive species like weeds. According to Mr. Bhargava the Chilla range which had witnessed massive degradation due to rampant overgrazing is now occupied by tigers and other animals, given its continuity with Corbett, after the rehabilitation drive. This is echoed in Mr. Gopal's statements wherein he stresses upon the 'huge recovery programs' and how tigers and elephants have started roaming. During surveys conducted by Johnsingh in western TAL, the Chilla range of east RNP which was then inhabited by Gujjars recorded a relatively low-frequency occurrence of tigers ( $18.3 \pm 24.1$  SD%). However in his study in East Rajaji Park (Harihar, Pandav, and Goyal 2009) documents a recovery<sup>8</sup> in the population of tigers and wild ungulates following the rehabilitation of Gujjars. This was attributed to the connectivity of this area to Corbett Tiger Reserve through the Lansdowne Forest Division (Rajaji-Corbett corridor). Another finding was 'the sharp increase in recruitment (5 fawns to 55 fawns per 100 adult females) among chital in three years following the minimization of disturbance.'

In a *Down to Earth* article (1993), the argument is put forth that severe curbs on the human activities can adversely impact the sanctuaries/protected areas. Further

In Bharatpur, when grazing was disallowed in the bird sanctuary, the grasslands thrived, but this dissuaded the birds from nesting in the tall grass. Only when grazing was resumed did the birds nest again. The Valley of Flowers in Garhwal is also facing an infestation of weeds following a ban on grazing. (Down to Earth 1993, accessed on April 15, 2016, "Time To Change – India Environment Portal India, South Asia." [Indiaenvironmentportal.org.in](http://Indiaenvironmentportal.org.in))

'A sudden proliferation of unpalatable species and other weeds has been observed in different areas of the Park' (Rasaily 2012, 65). He also points to a spurt in areas coming under intrusive species like Lantana<sup>9</sup>, Sida, Parthenium, etc. Further, concern is expressed at the taking over of a large part of Kunao Chaur in the Gohri range of the Park by cannabis sativa, which used to be grassland sustaining all kinds of herbivores. It's a similar story in the valley of flowers where a ban on grazing led to a proliferation of weeds. While there is no conclusive data proving the correlation between a lack of grazing



on the proliferation of weeds, it seems as though the spurt in *Lantana* and other weeds coincides with the period of Gujjar relocation from the Park. Local people and scholars also point out that relocation sometimes leads to the reclamation of grasslands by the forest reducing the space for herbivores and grassland birds, and indirectly impacting predators (Rangarajan and Shahabuddin 2006).

Pernille Gooch (2009, 245) asserts that the result of the conflict over conservation was that the Van Gujjars lost out, and the Forest Department and the concept of conservation prevailed. 'In the end the forest also lost out. Today, the forest is in many places in a much more deplorable state than it was twenty years ago at the start of the conflict over conservation.'

The existence of Gujjar pastoral transhumance is one of the best examples of symbiotic relations of these pastoralists with the forests and sedentary population spread over in the migratory routes. Often there is a long history of co-evolution between wild species and livestock. Evicting the livestock from wildlife reserves may lead to an exodus of predators, or result in habitat changes that make it unattractive for wildlife. (Nusrat, Pattanaik, and Farooque 2011, 1)

#### *Access to the forest*

Mr. Kaushik perhaps made the most striking of comments regarding the rehabilitation of the Van Gujjars. His comments provided the much-needed insight into what the ground reality actually is. He says that the reality is that those who have been resettled have land, are still in forests and are still nomads. By this he means that the Gujjars who are being allotted land are in a sense refusing to leave the forests completely given that they depend on the forests for its resources. Further, he states that the displaced Van Gujjars, in fact, continue with their nomadic ways by migrating to the higher altitudes during summer. His insight is invaluable and had this not been provided to me the study would have probably been superfluous and driven by simplistic assumptions. What he says is in fact corroborated by the Chief Wildlife Warden. Therein lays the catch. While the displaced Gujjars state that they do not migrate now and are settled communities, the officials who are aware of the fact say that they do migrate.

The Gujjars depend exclusively on forests resources for meeting daily requirements of fodder, firewood, wood for construction purposes, etc. Mr. Bhargava acknowledges that the Gujjars do not have the kind of access they enjoyed previously over use of forest resources. The Gujjar respondents, those who are still in the forests, respond in the affirmative when asked if they faced any restrictions in access to forests resources. Most of them allege that the officials ask for bribes in order for them to access the forests to meet basic requirements such as that of firewood, wood for construction, etc. Mr. Kaushik opines that 'strict laws become the basis of bribes'. He is of the view that two laws form the basis of corruption when it comes to the access of resources by the Gujjars. The first is that the 'Gujjars cannot lop more than one-third of the tree. But to survive they have to'. The second law is that 'they cannot lop all the trees because a lot of trees have economic value; they are out

of the allowed list'. The DFO of Haridwar, Mr. Kumar alleges that the Gujjars are using these resources either 'legally or illegally'; this, due to their presence at the fringes of the forest which enables easy access. The DFO takes this to be inevitable as he opines that those people who have for generations been dependent upon the Park to meet their requirements would not suddenly wean themselves away from that usage according to the demands of a law imposed from above.<sup>10</sup>

Even as the Gujjars claim to have given up on the practice of buffalo rearing as they once used to practice it, the government officials tell a different story altogether. They maintain that the Gujjars who have been rehabilitated have their buffaloes in the forests itself. The DFO of Haridwar says that the Gujjars who shifted out of the forests handed over their buffaloes to their relatives for them to graze the livestock and sell the milk. He alleges that those in the forests keep buffaloes in excess of what is permitted. He says, 'If they have the permit for 10 buffaloes, they will have 50 buffaloes with them.'

#### **Conclusion**

The Gujjars who do migrate face a very different reality now. Given the rapidly changing political geography of the area, the Gujjars who would once traverse the states of Uttarakhand, Himachal, and Uttar Pradesh freely are now faced with a clamp-down on their movement. The Director of the WII states that the Uttarakhand government is not allowing the free movement of the Gujjars between Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. Thus, their migration routes have changed forcing them to literally confront the state borders, urban settlements and various markers of development (railway lines, roads, etc.) as they make their way to higher altitudes. If indeed traditional forest dwelling communities are contributing to a loss in biodiversity, this must be placed within the larger context of industrial and geo-politicized landscapes. The Van Gujjars' pattern of migration linked to a sustainable resource usage has been disrupted by the changing geopolitical boundaries and, hence, is putting immense pressure on the forests. With traditional grazing grounds being cut off for them, for this reason, the Gujjars are forced to confine themselves in small pockets of the state (Uttarakhand) and migrate to grazing grounds which are at a lower altitude; moreover, there they face competition from the local graziers.

Also, it seems that the rehabilitation sites are not suitable to house and rear cattle, which means that the Gujjars have been forced to sell or give up most of their cattle until they can figure something out. We see how slowly the displacement has and will bring about a change in the Van Gujjar economy by forcing them to shift to a more settled, agricultural economy than that of a pastoral, cattle-rearing economy. By shifting them out of the Park, the Gujjars have lost access to lands that were vital fodder grounds, and initially the Gujjars were an integral part of the economies at the upper altitudes. They were suppliers of milk for the months they set up camp there. With their movement being restricted, the local economies that benefitted from the Gujjars' presence have been hit. For the Van Gujjars, nomadism and cattle-rearing are

vital to their identity, and this curtailment is more a cultural than economic loss for now. Time will tell whether the Gujjars taking to agricultural activities and dairying is profitable enough for their successful rehabilitation.

‘There is an urgent need to redefine the strategy of conservation through protected areas to include local people and tribals and not exclude them’, says Mr. Avdhash Kaushal, RLEK president. The very fact that the Van Gujjars’ proposal has not been taken into consideration when it comes to the management of the Park portrays the state’s top-down and exclusionary approach towards conservation of the Park. Since 1996 the state government has adopted the Joint Forest Management Policy in the area which aims to conserve forests by involving the local communities as partners and provide them usufructuary benefits in return for forest regeneration and protection (Badola 1998).

The government needs to rework its conservation policy so as to ensure that the forest-dwelling communities, who are the major stakeholders, have a say in the manner in which conservation policies are implemented. For this the government needs to understand that the traditional practices of the forest dwelling communities need not be antagonistic to conservation needs. The Van Gujjars should be given a stake in the management of the Park which would pre-empt any violence arising out of the arbitrary rehabilitation process. What one can take away from the BNHS study is that a hands-off approach may not be conducive to conservation efforts in protected areas, nor would it be feasible in areas where human activity has become enmeshed in the ecological system. There is no clear consensus as to whether the complete removal of the Van Gujjars from the forests is absolutely necessary. Forcible displacement and the subsequent prohibition on human activity within the Park may not be a viable solution, given how the Forest Rights Act 2006 seeks to protect the community rights of forest-dwelling tribes within Protected Areas. One can’t help but agree with Dr. Christy Williams, of WII, who states that conservation biology is useless when it actually comes to saving biodiversity (Lewis 2003). He argues that in the face of increasing human pressure, social planning is the key – curbing population growth and improving people’s material lives (so their dependence on forest resources decreases).

The kind of violence in the name of science and development that the state has unleashed at various strategic points has significant implications for the structural changes that capitalist societies have periodically undergone to escape economic recession and decline, while masking the social costs these structural changes have imposed. In the past, these costs included the imposition of new forms of wage labour, the introduction of assembly-line discipline, and so on; today, they range from the relaxation of regulatory norms regarding health, safety to humans and the environment to large-scale dislocation caused by the violence of science and development in resulting in involuntary displacement of indigenous communities. The issues that need to be included in the agenda of relocation and rehabilitation that seek to ‘contest’ the growing control of multi-national corporations over political life is to evolve a system that will promote science and

development in harmony with the goals and values of equity and democracy, not in conflict with them.

## Notes

1. The Indian state is attempting to uncritically follow the Western development trajectory. In the process, conservation has been treated on a par with the development agenda.
2. Names have been changed to maintain the anonymity of the respondents.
3. SOPHIA and RLEK are the only NGOs working with the Gujjars for their due entitlements.
4. According to the Supreme Court Order No.1003 in IA No. 965 in writ petition (202)/1995 dated 16 March 1997, the ammunition dump is to be shifted from the area to complete the establishment of Chilla-Motichur corridor, but the process is still pending.
5. ‘The elephant is killing people, why? We know why. Due to the trees being cut down it is not able to feed properly. In its anger it is killing animals. When these trees are gone the elephants feed on teak, which are very valuable. Now these are also being cut down. This is troubling the animals.’
6. The most common interpretation of this category is that no human settlement or human access and rights to resources are allowed inside the area.
7. ‘Because such excessive grazing leads to all kinds of impact and if you constantly have an area exposed to this kind of a pressure you will see more of weeds and species more adaptive to these areas. They started coming and not necessarily having a value for wild animals. As soon as they were gone the grasses came back and there was a lot of forage available’.
8. The frequency of occurrence of tigers increased to 60.8% ( $\pm 31$  SD %) and density increased from three to five tigers/100 sq. km.
9. Lantana infestation jumped from 29,514.13 ha to 46,359.71 ha.
10. The DFO suggests provision of free gas cylinders. He says,
 

... every month provide them with free gas cylinders and get someone to teach them to operate it then. Then they will use gas cylinders. If they have to pay 500–600 rupees to buy a cylinder and use it for a month then they will not buy and use it. They would rather go the nearby forests, collect firewood.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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