TRANSHUMANT COMMUNITY OF GAWALDAI VALLEY

Shamshad Akhtar
Muhammad Rafique Dhanani

ABSTRACT

In the Hindukush Mountains region of Pakistan there are several places where transhumant communities live. They have dual settlements. Animals herding is activity and agriculture is their main interest. They practice transhumance which is a short distance seasonal movement of herders from their villages to their pastures for grazing their animals. This paper is a detailed study of the transhumant community of Gawaldai valley in Upper Dir District, Khyber Pukhtunkhawah *Province. The study describes: (i) transhumance practice in the Gawaldai valley, (ii) settlement and house structure of transhumant community, and (iii) farming practice.*

INTRODUCTION

The Gawaldai River valley is located in District Upper Dir of the Khyber Pukhtunkhawah Province. The Gawaldai River is a tributary of Panjkora River which is in its turn a tributary of Swat River (Fig.1). The Panjkora River valley is comprised of several valleys drained by different small tributaries of Panjkora River like Gawaldai valley, Siri valley, Kalkart valley etc. These valleys are located at the heights ranging from 7500 feet to 11000 feet above sea level (Photos 1 & 2). These are the valleys where transhumant communities live. Most of them belong to different Pathan tribes who came from Afghanistan centuries ago and settled here. They speak pushto language. Kohistani language is also spoken in Kalkot, Tal, Kalkart etc. There are few villages of 'Gujars' who were originally mountain nomads coming from Kashmir. Some of these families settled in these valleys and now they live along with different Pathan tribes. They are no more mountain nomads. Like other transhumant communities in the valleys they have permanent villages and seasonal abodes. They have agricultural lands where they grow crops. In summer they

take their animals to their pastures for grazing animals where they stay about four months (Ehlers, E & H.Kreutzmann, 2000). They live in the area from centuries with other transhumant communities. They speak *Gojri* at home while they can also speak Pashto and Kohistani languages. The present paper is a detailed study of a transhumant community of village Bishu Bala, Gawaldai. The study describes transhumance practice, settlements and house structure of the community and farming practice of the villagers.

TRANSHUMANCE PRACTICE

The Gawaldai valley is located in Tehsil Shringal of District Upper Dir. It is a narrow valley. Agriculture is limited due to scarcity of arable land, soil erosion and short farming season due to long and harsh winter. Therefore, the villagers have to depend on animals rearing which provides them as an additional source of income. Grazing land is limited at the lower height of mountain slope which are occupied by settlements and crops. Grasses grow when glacial melted water flows on the surface. Such grasses are harvested and are kept dry for winter when the whole area is covered by snow. Therefore, the people of the Gawaldai valley have to take their animals to their summer pastures for grazing which are located either at the top of mountains or located at higher valleys. In the Gawaldai valley there are several villages like Bela, Daba, Berklay, Daikan, Jaikand, Bishu Pyne and Bishu Bala. Like people of other villages the villagers of Bishu Bala practice transhumance which is locally called 'Banda Jaat'. The villagers of Bishu Bala belong to different tribes like Kazim Khail, Yousufzai, Wardik, Tajik, Memon and Gujar. They speak Pashto and live together for centuries.

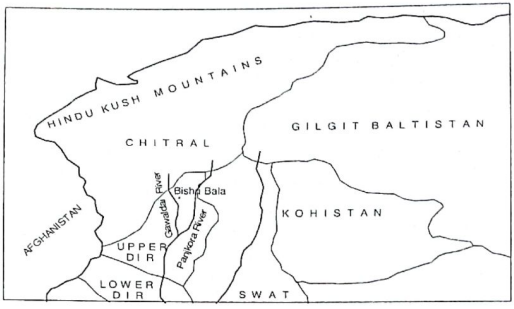


Fig 1 : Location of Gawaldai valley

Winter starts in the valley in October and the whole valley is covered by snow. Melting of snow season starts in March. Sowing season starts in May. Maize and potatoes are main crops which farmers grow. They also grow barley as a fodder. Snow also melts in their pastures locally called *banda*. Grass grows in *banda* and become tall up to June. The villagers of Bishu Bala take their animals to their pastures in June. Goats, sheep and cows are animals which the villagers rear. Donkeys are used for taking goods to *banda* while dogs are used to keep watch on animals.

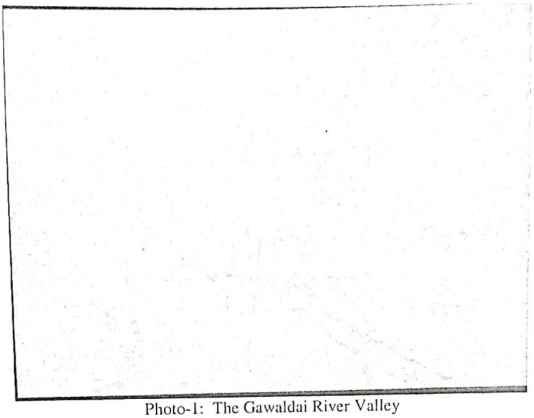


Photo-1: The Gawaldai River Valley

There are several *Bandsas* in the Gawaldai valley. Up to 1970 the area was treated as a tribal state controlled by Mallaks. The right of the ownership was given by the British Government and after the creation of Pakistan the same status was maintained up to 1976. The Gawaldai valley was owned by a ruler called Nawab Hazrat Mohammad who belonged to Zordast Khail tribe. All *banda* of Gawaldai valley were his property. He took taxes in form of six kilograms ghee per family who used their *banda* for animals grazing. In 1974 a war was fought between Nawab of Gujars 'Baj Mallak' and Nawab Hazrat Mohammad. As a result Baj Mallak got right of ownership of a few *banda.* In 1976 status of the state was abolished by the Government. The ownership of different *banda was* given to herders who went to respective *banda* for grazing of their animals. Generally each small tribe keeps right of ownership of two *banda.* One is small, located at the top of mountain slope relatively near to their villages like Sara Pata, Kachal Banda, Wargala Banda etc. The other is a large *banda* located at relatively lower height but far away about 20 to30 kms from their villages (Figure-2).



Photo-2: The Panjkora River Valley

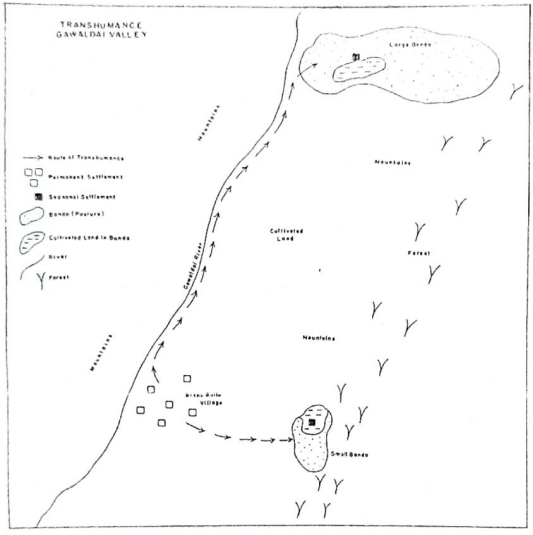
There are several large *banda* in Gawaldai valley like Danda banda, Jaba banda, Mir Alam banda, Laiba banda, Mir Baz banda, Bostan banda, Na Pasdan banda etc. (Photos 3 &4).In the large *banda* right of grazing is ascertained by more than one tribe. There are several families who do not have their own *banda.* Therefore, they go to *banda* of others. In return they have to pay remuneration either in cash or in form of animals. Generally they pay Rupees 2000 to 4000 or two to four goats as a rent to owners of *banda* for staying and utilizing *bandas.*

The herders of Bishu Bala go to their *banda* in June. Generally two to three members of family, male and female participate in transhumance. Others members of family remain stayed at home and look after their crops. If herders of any family does not practice transhumance they give their animals to other herders and in return they pay remuneration in form of ghee which is 1 kg for 10 kg. Generally herders of each village take 200 to 300 animals which include goats, sheep and cows. Donkeys are

used for carrying daily domestic goods of herders. The decision whether to go to small *banda* or large *banda* depends upon number of animals. If animals are in between 20 to 30 then they go to small *banda* otherwise they go to large *banda* where enough grass is available for their animals. Each group of family which comprises families of brothers , sisters, uncles, and cousins has one house both in small or large *banda* which are collectively used by them. The grazing right of a small *banda* is either given to one village or two to three groups of families. The grazing right of a large *banda* consists of herders of more than one village. The herders who do not have their own *banda* take their animals to *banda* of others for grazing their animals and in return they pay remuneration in form of money, animals or *ghee*.

In the first week of June the villagers of Bishu Bala move towards their *banda* in separate small groups along with their animals. Their small *banda* are 'Sara Pata', Kachal Banda, Daba Banda and Wargala Banda while Mir Alam Banda and Laiba are their large *banda*. They start traveling just before sun rise and they reach at their small *banda*, located about 9,000 to 11000 feet above sea level in five hours. The village Bishu Bala is located about 7500 feet above sea level and the distance between their permanent settlement Bishu Bala to their seasonal settlement Sara Pata, Daba Banda, Tarakna Banda etc, is about 4 to 5 kilometers but because of steep slope traveling is difficult and time taking. The distance from Bishu Bala and large *banda* Mir Alam and Laiba is about 40 to 50 kms. These are located at the height of 8000 to 10,000 feet above sea level. Generally the herders reach there in two to three days because of difficult terrain. On the way there are rooms built by local villagers for travelers who want to stay at night. Because villages are far away from each other and it is a common tradition that the local villagers treat residents of other villages or travelers as guests. Guests in Pakhtoon society are treated as God blessing. The herders of Bishu Bala also stay during night on the way to their *banda*. Women and children sleep in room while men sleep out-side the room along with their animals.

Figure-2
Transhumance in the Gawaldai Valley, District Upper Dir, Pakistan



In *banda* herders cultivate crops. They irrigate their fields through glacial melted water and springs. In small *banda* they generally cultivate maize and potatoes while in large *banda* they cultivate potatoes and mustered like crop called *sonchal*. In small *banda* a wooden barrier called *Angar* is erected between grazing land and cultivated land to protect their crops from their animals. Herders carry food stuff and luggage comprises wheat or maize flour locally called 'Aura', sugar, onion, rice, ghee, tea, cooking utensils, sleeping beds and farming tools like sickle, axe, pick axe, spade. Due to short distance from small *banda* male herders often visit to their village Bishu Bala. However women stay in *banda* because in pushtoon society women are not allowed to

move freely out-side their houses unless they have any urgency like ailment. In large *banda* due to long distance any one family member comes to Bishu Bala after 15 days for taking food stuff. In *banda* all herders keep arms to protect themselves from their enemies and their animals from wild animals.

Life of herders in *banda* is very busy. They wake up around 5 a.m. After prayer men and women are engaged in milking of animals. Milking of small animals like goats and sheep are done by females while milking of large animals like cows are done by males. Initially amount of milk of each animal is measured with the help of a pot. It is necessary because share of *ghee*, butter and cheese of each family is divided according to their share of milk. After that milk of all animals are mixed. After milking animals are set free in *banda* for grazing. Male collect fire woods while female are engaged in boiling milk which is done in large pots. After boiling milk women prepare breakfast locally called *sar cha*, which comprises of bread of maize, milk, *matar* and butter. Women are engaged in making butter and ghee. For this purpose milk in a pot called *chai* is shacked with a wooden stick called *bandarad*. For making cheese initially milk is spoiled by putting a small piece of intestine of goat into milk. They keep butter and *ghee* in wooden pot called *Lokh*. Generally from 15 goats and 4 cows 50 to 60 kilograms of *ghee* are prepared in 3 to 4 months. Male members are engaged in ploughing and sowing which are done with pick axe. A male herder is engaged in collecting of fire woods and keep watch on animals in grazing land. Those herders who keep sheep, also remain busy in cutting of hair which are used for making bed sheet called *Lamsa* and woolen bandage called *Lukhte* which is used by herders to protect their legs from severe winter. Herders also sell wool to local market. Herders use hair of goats to make rope called *selly*.



Photo-3: Small *banda* (pasture) of the herders of Bishu Bala

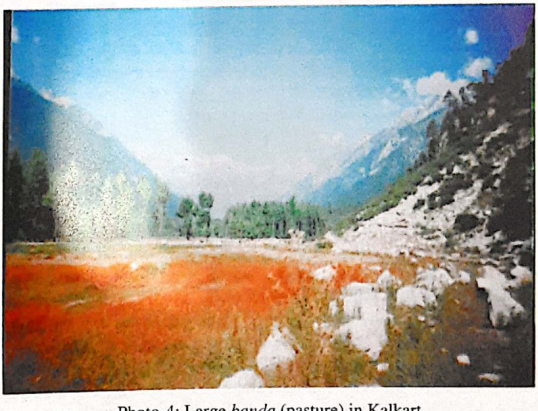


Photo-4: Large *banda* (pasture) in Kalkart

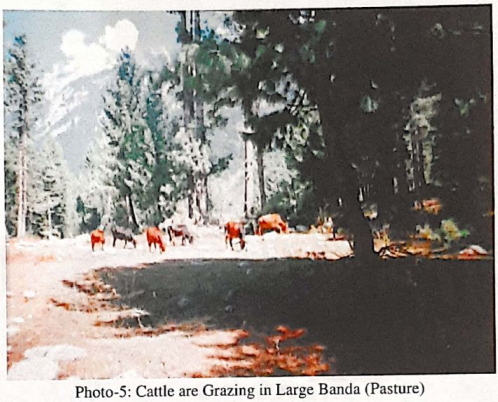


Photo-5: Cattle are Grazing in Large Banda (Pasture)

In *banda* glaciated melted water channels and springs, locally called *china* operate in late April when melting of glaciers starts and it remains alive till early November when temperature drops to below freezing point. In evening herders gather their animals. They milk their animals. Women are engaged in boiling of milk and making ghee, butter and cheese. After dinner male herders sit together and listen religious speeches of the elders called *taleem*. The herders who grow potatoes harvest their crops up to late September. A herder of each family brings his crop on donkeys to their village and then return to his *banda*. In the mid of October when temperature at *banda* falls up to freezing the return journey of herders start. They bring ghee which is generally about 50 to 60 kilograms per family. They keep 10 to 20 kilograms for their own use and remaining 30 to 40 kilograms are sold with the price of rupees 300 to 400 in the market of Patrak which is about 15 minutes of jeep drive from Bishu Bala. When herders reach at Bishu Bala crops have been harvested and animals are set free in the field. In early November snow fall starts on mountain while in

late November snow also falls at the lower part of valley. In November, each family slaughters one animal which is either cow or goat. This folk tradition is called *suhbat*. Each family invites their relatives at lunch or dinner and eats meat of slaughtered animals together. From late November to March villagers remain at their homes along with their animals due to heavy snow fall.

The transhumance practice in the whole area has declined significantly. This is mainly because many young males are now working in cities like Peshawar, Lahore and Karachi as well as in Arab countries. Some families have migrated to Peshawar while young family members are more interested in other economic activities like small business, public transport etc.

SETTLEMENT AND HOUSE STRUCTURE

The transhumant community of Gawaldai valley has three settlements. One is permanent settlement located at the down slope of mountain at the height of 7000 to 8000 feet above sea level. Shops, schools, basic health unit, water mills and a community based small hydel electric generation unit are built at the bottom of the valley along a narrow unlined road. In the Gawaldai valley there are number of permanent villages called 'Kle' like Bishu Bala Klewhere 60 houses, Sundri Klewhere 100 houses, Bela Klewhere 150 houses, Decan Klewhere 30 houses etc (Photo-6). These are dispersed settlements. Houses are constructed on the mountain slopes which are cut in form of terraces. These houses are built within their cultivated lands.

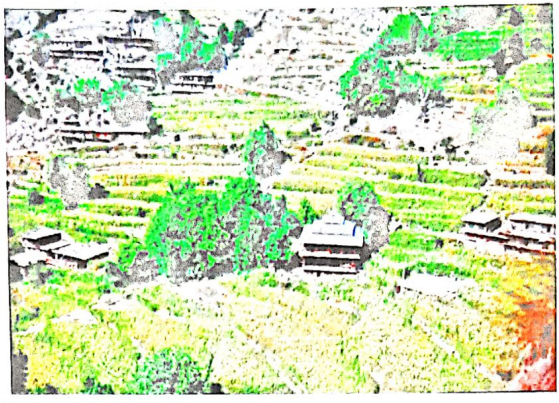


Photo-7: The Village of Bishu Bala

The villagers have two seasonal settlements located their pastures *(banda)* where they stay 3 to 4 months from June to October. One seasonal settlement is located in small *banda* Sara Pata, Kachal, Daba, Tarkana, Wargala etc. These are located near permanent settlement at a distance of 5 to 8 kms at the height of 11,000 feet above sea level. Another seasonal settlement is located in large *banda* Mir Alam, Mirza, Laiba, Danda, Jaba etc. These are located at the height of 8000 to 10,000 feet above sea level at a distance of 60 kms from their village.

House of permanent settlement is called *Kore* while house of seasonal settlements is called *Chopal*. The *Kore* is large and well built house. It is in rectangle shape covering area of 100 to 200 sq. metres. There are two general types of *Kore,* the modern Kore and old traditional Kore. The modern Kore *is* comprised of six rooms (Photo-7) including one guest room called *Hujra*. The door of *Hujra* opens outside the house and has no connection with other portion of house. The second room, called *Da Khorak Kamra* is used as kitchen-cum-dining and sitting room. Third room is sleeping room called *Da Khawab Kamra*. A small hearth is built in each room. For smoke outlet a pipe is used which is connected

with roof chimni. The fourth, fifth and sixth rooms are constructed on back side of these three rooms. The fourth room is called *Da Mall Kota* used for keeping animals while the fifth room is called *Da Wakh Kota* for keeping grass and other fodder. The sixth room is called *Largi* used as a store for keeping beds, blankets, grains, farming tools etc. There is no courtyard in this type of house. Generally the villagers do not build bath rooms and backside of house is an open space is used for this purpose. In the modern house an attached bath room is built in guest room.

In the second type of house there are three rooms and one 10 feet wide and 40 to 50 feet long front court yard. First room is used as guest room. Second is used for sitting and dining and third is sleeping room. Generally cooking stove called *Naghare* is kept at the last portion of the courtyard. A log is kept at the height of 4 feet above the ground in the courtyard called *Oara* which acts as a table for keeping cooking utensils. The main door of the house opens in the courtyard near the guest room. In the court yard between guest room and other rooms a thin wooden wall called *Parda* is built to observe sanctity of female family members. Animals' room, store and fodder's room are built separately or jointly ten to 30 feet away from the house. Electricity is now available in the area however still villagers use their old traditional torch bearer made up of deodar wood for lightening.

Wood of deodar tree which is abundant in the area is the main building material in the area. Stones and woods are used in making walls while clay and dry grinded wastage of maize plants are used for mud plastered. The foundation is built by large boulders. In the modern houses large boulders are cut in block shape which are used in making foundation and wall. After constructing foundation a durable wooden structure of the house is built. Walls of the house are about 15 centimeters thick built with stone blocks or cobbles called *ghatta* and a thin horizontal wooden frame. Stones are placed on this wooden frame with the help of mud. The wooden frames and stones develop a shape of alternate layers of stone and wood. The roof of the house is made very strong which bears weight of 6 to 10 feet snow. The roof of the house is flat. A grid like wooden frame of roof is initially built. Generally 8 logs of 10 meters long and 50 centimeters thick called *Bush* while 16 logs of 6 meters long and 30 centimeters thick

called *Berga* are used for making a flat grid shape frame. The *Bush* and *Berga* act like beams. The wooden roof is supported by 8 to 10 vertical logs of 10 feet long and 80 centimeters thick which act like pillars. Small pieces of woods called *Dara* are used to cover the roof along with leafs of Shah Baloot tree called *Pante*. The roof is thickly plastered by mud and it is pressed by roller called *Berghande*. The roof is used for drying grasses and maize.

The house of seasonal settlements is called *Chopal* (Photo 8). The chopal of small *banda* is like *Kore* but it is relatively small covering an area of 60 to 80 sq. metres. It comprises two rooms. There is no store room and a fodder room. A room for keeping animals, called *Ghojal* is built 10 to 20 feet away from *Chopal*. The materials and techniques for house construction are same as used for constructing *Kore*. The house of large *banda* is also called *Chopal*. It is just a room used by six to seven family members. It is built near to cave like rocky shade called *Asmas* where animals are kept at night. A small room called *Kotani* is built near to it where weak and sick animals, kids, lambs and calf are kept. Walls of *Chopal* are made of stones while roof is made up of logs, small trunks and leafs. The roof is generally covered by plastic sheet to keep protection from rain. A few families use tents and build a square shape room. Its walls are made up of boulders while roof is built by trunks and bushes.

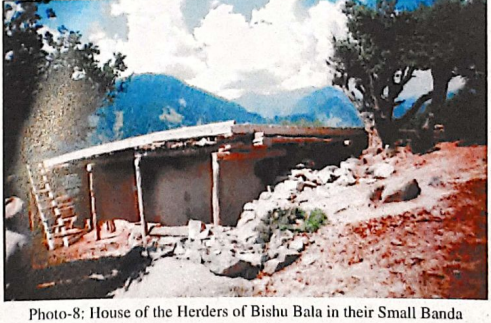


Photo-8: House of the Herders of Bishu Bala in their Small Banda

AGRICULTURE

Agriculture is the mainstay of the area. Due to hilly terrain and rocky surface lands for farming are limited which are in small size developed by cutting mountain slope in form of terraces. Subsistence farming is practiced in the area which is of two types; rain fed farming, locally called *Lalma* and other is irrigated farming called *Abada*. The *abada* dominate in the area. Farms are irrigated by diversion canals which obtain water from glacial melted streams and springs. The *Abada* is further classified into springs irrigated *abadas* which provide water for short period, therefore one crop is grown by them. The other types of *abadas* are streams irrigated *abadas* which provide sufficient water. Therefore, two crops are grown there (Photo-9).

Cropping season starts from the end of March when temperature rises up to 6 degree Celsius and snow of lower ground has melted. Farmers clean their fields from stones and debris. Boundaries of terrace fields are repaired. Farmers plough their fields with wooden plough called *Yuwa* and oxen called *Ghawai*. Small spade and pick axe are also used by farmers for ploughing. Sowing of crops starts from the mid of April. Maize is the main crop in the area while wheat is grown little because of low acreage. Maize is usually sown in mid of April and harvested in September. In Gawaldai valley one crop is generally grown on a small area because most of the lands are irrigated from spring water that are erratic and stop in winter. However second crop that are potatoes, Jowar and mustered are grown on such fields which are irrigated by stream water. Jowar is used as fodder for animals while mustered crop is the source of edible oil. Potatoes are generally grown as a cash crop. Some farmers grow two crops of potatoes in a year. Climate of the area is appropriate for fruit plantation like apricot, apple, walnut etc. But because of limited land plantation, these fruit trees are not on commercial scale.

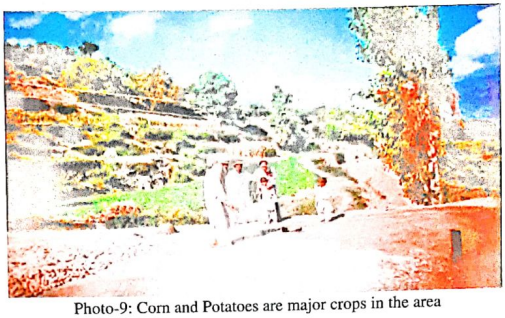


Photo-9: Corn and Potatoes are major crops in the area

CONCLUSION

The Gawaldai valley is one of the places in the Hindu Kush mountains region of Pakistan where transhumant communities inhabit. Bishu Bala is one of those villages. They are farmers as well as animals' herders. In June they move to their summer pastures called *banda* for grazing of their animals. Their village is located at the lower valley while their seasonal settlements are located in their *banda*. There are two types of *banda*; small *banda* and large *banda*. Small *banda* are located near to their village while large *banda* are located far away from their villages. In October when winter comes herders return to their village. They bring ghee, butter and cheese which provide an additional source of income.

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