



Original Article

A Transient Life Behind the Mended Cloth Walls: The *Khanabadosh* of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to delineate different factors associated with the spatial mobility of the khanabadosh¹ community located in Changaryano Daag in the fringes of Hathian Bazaar, District Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Empirical data for this micro-focused ethnographic research was collected through participant observation, key informants, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. Khanabadosh, under study, is going through a transitional period of spatial mobility towards permanent settlement, which reflects the evolution of the given society from a mobile to a settled mode of life. Hence, through time some of them are permanently settled so far. The findings of the study show that there were multifaceted factors that pushed them to move from one place to another. Those factors include socio-economic, seasonal conditions, delinquency, illiteracy, and the issue of national identity cards.

Keywords: *khanabadosh*, spatial mobility, distinctive social group, assimilation

Introduction

Khanabadosh is a small community of dark-skinned marginalized people who reside in Changaryano Daag on the fringes of Hathian Bazaar in the district of

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¹ The word *khanabadosh* is derived from the Persian language, which is the composite of two words: *khana*, which means home, and *dosh*, which means shoulder. Literally, it means the people who carry their “houses on their shoulders” or “with houses on their back.” They are the people who do not have permanent places for houses, move from one place to another in search of life’s necessities and do not have permanent dwellings (Angelillo, 2013; Ali, 2019).

Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. They are known by different names. Across the world, in other countries, they are called gypsies (Berland, 1982; Okely, 1998). In Pakistan, they are given different names, i.e., *khanabadosh*, *pukiwas*, *jogiwat*, *tambuwal* (Berland, 1982), and *changaryan* (Ali, 2019). In the area under study, they identify themselves as *khanabadosh*, while the local people call them *Changaryan*. However, in this research, the term *khanabadosh* is used for them as they introduce themselves using the same term.

More reliable information about the total population of *khanabadosh* in Pakistan needs to be provided. The Dawn Newspaper 2015 reported their total population as seven million individuals (Dhakku, 2015). The Grass-root Organization for Human Development (GOHD) recorded their population as twelve million in Pakistan (Mehmood, 2020). In the area under study, 503 persons (including 123 males, 120 females, 140 males, and 120 female children) live in 90 nuclear families. They are in transition from spatial mobility towards permanent settlement. Based on a residence, they are classified into two categories, i.e., the permanently settled and spatially mobile. 17 families (119 persons including 25 males, 28 females, and 66 children) out of 90 have settled down permanently since they purchased personal lands and have constructed permanent houses in the area under study. They have national identity cards with permanent residential addresses of the area and reside on different streets with the local people. They almost have reciprocal relationships with local people and will amalgamate with them.

Contrary to those permanently settled, the remaining 73 families (384 persons including 98 males, 92 females, and 194 children) out of 90 were spatially mobile. They reside on the land of government reserved for the railway departments and personal plots of the local people, where each household pays a rent of eleven hundred rupees to the leaseholders and owners of the land, respectively. Some of them practice seasonal mobility, move to the hilly areas once or twice a year, usually for three or six months, and return to the Changaryano Daag.

However, only some constantly move to change their locality without any time bound and rarely return to the Changaryano Daag. The present study primarily concerns those who practice seasonal mobility and those who constantly move from one area to another. They are appropriately termed by the local people as *kada pa sar*.² They used to live in temporarily constructed tents and *chapsars*³

² People who carry their tents on heads and moving from one place to another

³ *Chapar* is the modified form of a tent, which is relatively durable and protected. The *khanabadosh* usually pitch a tent and then build four walls almost six feet high around it,

including 46 tents and 27 *chapars*, usually on the bank of water near the roadside because they can go to another area at any time of the day. Since they live in *chapars* and *tambwan* (tents), they are also called by the local people *chupro wala* or *tambwano wala*⁴. Each tent or *chapar* is a nuclear family. Generally, married brothers preferred to live in the patronage of their father in adjacent tents or *chapars*, marked by boundary walls of multicolor-mended cloths. The extended tents/*chapars* of several families form a *dhera*, which can be translated as a camp.

Literature Review

There are communities of non-pastoral nomads or gypsies across the world, but little anthropological literature is available about them (Berland, 1983; Rao, 1986; Robertson, 2014). According to Salo (1986) and Hyden (1979), ethnographic research in Europe started early, but gypsies, in particular, came to focus only in the 1970s. Lewy (2001) opines that over the last few decades, research on gypsies has developed mainly in Europe. Different scholars identify them with other terms, i.e., “symbiotic nomads” (Misra, 1978), “trader nomads” and “professional strangers” (Simmel, 1950), “craftsman nomads” (Hubschmannova, 1972), “economic nomads” (Acton, 1974), “non-food producing nomads” (Rao, 1982), and *khanabadosh* (Berland, 1977). Salo and Salo (1982) investigated that the Romnichels gypsies of America have a variety of mobility patterns. Some families move across the country. Some are restricted to specific regions, while some have confined themselves to local areas. Some have bought personal lands and used them as focal points for their movements, with a wide range of intercultural changes in movement and settlement patterns. Montesino (2012) identified in Europe that the concept of spatial mobility among the gypsies was passed down for generations. The forefathers of some gypsies preferred spatial mobility for exploring new places, and still, some of them liked a mobile lifestyle. They also travel from one place to another to maximize the probability of earning opportunities.

Studies conducted on gypsies, particularly in South Asia, reveal that limited anthropological data is available about their culture. The same was stated by Birch (1971), Tapper (1977), Rao (1987), and Robertson (2014). Ruhela (1968) identified that the Gaduliya Lohar gypsies of India serve the agricultural communities. They frequently move from one area to another with their bullock carts to make farming tools for the farmer communities. Singh et al. (1998) investigated that the Cobra gypsies of the Kalbelia caste are living

generally of broken bricks, for the purpose of making it secure and stopping the air from coming inside.

⁴ A tent is known among the host community as *chupri* or *tambo*. Those who live in *chupri* or *tambo* are known as *chupro wala* or *tambwano wala*.

a nomadic lifestyle in the deserts of Rajasthan. They frequently change their location to exploit the resources, particularly in an arid environment. Therefore, they are guarded by tame dogs. They keep donkeys for the necessary transportation of tents and other goods for domestic use. They camp for a short time and start their journey towards another area by completely exploiting the available resources there. Rao (1982) identified that in Afghanistan, the gypsies serve the local population and are known as *Jats* (singular *Jat*). They are largely nonproducers and dependent on other human populations for their food. Their income is primarily associated with their women begging and daily wages.

In Pakistan, Berland (1982) suggests that there needs to be more literature about the culture of itinerant people, with a significant portion available about the pastoral communities. The lack of availability of enough information about the non-pastoral nomads or *khanabadosh* means that there is no clear understanding of their movement from one place to another. He investigated that the *khanabadosh* mostly live in areas with a large, settled population. They mostly depend on the resources of the settled population of the area. They usually move from one place to another to exploit the resources as per their inclination.

In the area under study, the *khanabadosh* have been living for many years. They move to other areas, particularly the hilly and cold areas. They prefer to live on the roadside, where water is available at their doorstep. They reside in temporarily constructed tents and makeshift *chapars* on the land of the government and host community. The reason behind temporary dwelling structures is the uncertainty of moving to other areas at a time. They travel to widespread parts of the country, mainly the hilly regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, by carrying their belongings and pitch tents to the area where they plan to stay.

In the current study, the researchers agree with Berland (1977), who suggests that the inequalities faced by *khanabadosh* are primarily due to their mobile lifestyle. Likewise, Ali (2019) identified that spatial mobility is one of the major reasons for minimizing the social status of the *khanabadosh*; therefore, the settled people avoid amalgamating with them. There is a saying among the local people that rolling stone gathers no moss. Hence, they exist as a distinctive social group within the larger community.

Methodology

This study was qualitative in nature. Various qualitative research methods were used to collect data, which comprised participant observation, eight key informant interviews, twenty-three in-depth interviews, and six group

discussions with forty-two respondents. This was a micro-focused study because there were 73 households of the spatially mobile *khanabadosh* in Union Council Hathian with a population of 384 persons. Therefore, all of them were studied. Data collected through different tools were cross-checked. To get entry into the field and to extend relationships to a maximum number of *khanabadosh*, we conducted two broad-based community meetings (hereafter BBCMs), i.e., one each with a male and one female.

Moreover, they were introduced to the purpose of the study, and they were actively involved in the whole inquiry. Considering the culture of the area under study, we hired and properly trained a female research facilitator. She collected information from the female respondents. Therefore, this enabled us to accurately describe the factors contributing to spatial mobility among the *khanabadosh*.

Discussion and Analysis

Research on the spatially mobile *khanabadosh* has produced some results, which are hereby described. Data illustrate that, contrary to the opinion of the host community, they do not travel aimlessly. Complex and multifaceted interrelations of socio-economic factors, seasonal conditions, delinquency, illiteracy, and the lack of national identity cards govern their movements.

One of the contributing factors to the spatial mobility of *khanabadosh* is to explore new areas where they come in contact with different cultures. It was identified that all of them know much about every place and the culture of its people because they extensively move across the country by watching the lifestyles and behaviors of different people. Therefore, they are known as good mobilizers in businesses by the local people because they can sell their stuff to the local people in any situation. One of the critical informants explicated in a group discussion that all his eight children were born in every new area, as his six brothers and three sisters were. It was identified that some of them could not stay in one place as they felt suffocated due to living in a given place for a long time. Most of the respondents, including key informants, expressed their views in in-depth interviews that they have inherited this tradition from their forefathers to move from one area to another.

The second reason for the *khanabadosh* movement is associated with *bad dua* (curse). It was identified during interviews with key informants and group discussions with the graybeard *khanabadosh* that their forefathers were cursed by their ancestors, that they would not see a settled life and would be roaming around to different places. Therefore, they move from one area to another. Misra (1977) identified the same in the case of Gadulia Lohar of India and Berland (1979) in the case of Qalandar *Khanabadosh* of Pakistan.

The third reason for *khanabadosh* mobility is *sharam* (shame), which is a condition of one's inferiority or worthlessness in a particular social situation. During conversations with the key informants and in-depth interviews, it was identified that they moved from one area to another due to shame. For example, if a married woman flees to get another marriage, it is considered *sharam*. In this situation of conflict, the respect of the woman's family is enormously affected, and resultantly, serious disputes occur, which are necessarily reported to the police to pressure the opponent. However, it was observed that most of such disputes were resolved informally by *jirga*⁵ through a tradition of imposing a fine on the accused party, which is known as *dan juram*. A woman's family members, including her father and husband, usually move to a strange and unknown area to hide the shame. Similarly, the members of the family of a man who abducted a married woman are expelled by the *jirga* from the camp.

The fourth reason for spatial mobility is stigmatization and the negative connotation the local people use for *khanabadosh*. Everywhere, the settled population stigmatizes and negatively connotes them (Powell 2008). Javed (2018) identified that the *khanabadosh* of Pakistan are discriminated against and stereotyped by the local people in their routine lives. In the area under study, the *khanabadosh* are stigmatized and discriminated against by the local people because of the involvement of *khanabadosh*'s women in earning, prostitution, thefts, drug addiction and trafficking, and gambling. Further, they are also stigmatized due to the unhygienic conditions of their camps and low caste. In routine lives, the settled population uses several negative connotations for *khanabadosh*, which indicate prejudice, discrimination, and opposition. In some instances, coercion is also used to oppress them. In these circumstances, they are compelled to quit the area.

The fifth reason for the spatial mobility of



Picture-01: A female *khanabadosh* has put a heavy load (*pund*) of bed sheets and cloths on her head by selling it among the settled population.

⁵ A council of elders that use to settle a dispute among the disputant parties (Ali 2019, p. 10).
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khanabadosh is *musafari*⁶. They shift to a new area to earn money, where the females start selling various goods and begging while a few males start small-scale businesses, praying and sometimes working on daily wages. Among them, females are primarily responsible for fulfilling the economic needs of the households; therefore, they are associated with outdoor economic activities. The males are economically dependent on females. The men usually engage in indoor activities, particularly domestic chores, caring for babies, and securing tents/*chapars*. During the socio-economic survey, it was identified that 88 out of 92, i.e., 95.65%, females worked to earn money to fulfill household needs while 72 out of 98, i.e., 73.47%, males, did not work to earn money. Instead, they were economically dependent on females. It is noteworthy that the



females regularly work to earn money, often six days a week, while the males rarely work to earn, particularly for a day or two a week. It was identified that most females visit the houses of the settled population in the peripheries by selling bedsheets, clothes, bangles, and other cosmetic items. As Okely (1998) identified that the gypsy females mainly contribute to economic activities by hawking various goods in the streets or door to door. Among the *khanabadosh*, 26 out of 98, i.e., 26.65%, males, occasionally worked to earn and begging. Males' earning activities are to sell *cheer*⁷; hence, they are known in the host community as *cheerwala*⁸ (Ali 2019). Some also sell ice cream and plastic utensils and collect rags by visiting nearby rural areas. Moreover, they also sell dogs, pigeons, cocks and quails, and gamble in the *dhera* (camp).

⁶ *Khanabadosh* move from one area to another particularly for exploiting the resources which they called *musafari*.

⁷ A sweet substance like a lollypop

⁸ A person who sells *cheer*

The sixth reason for *khanabadosh*'s movement is to receive *Ushr*⁹ and *Zakat*¹⁰, as well as *Sadaqaat* or *Khairat*¹¹ from the host community. As the wheat crop is ripened and threshed, the females and some male *khanabadosh* visit the houses of the host community, particularly of the farmers and landlords, to get *Ushr* and *Zakat*, and *Sadaqaat* or *Khairat* in the crops and other material things. In the meantime, a few males work in the nearby fields by harvesting and threshing the wheat in return in cash or kind. After local earnings, they move to hilly and cold areas where wheat and other crops are ready for harvesting. Generally, the crops are grown in hilly areas pretty late due to the cold weather and hence ripened later as well. Therefore, *khanabadosh* gets another chance to earn from *ushar*, *zakat*, and *sadaqat* or *khairat* in hilly, chilly areas.

The seventh reason for the *khanabadosh*'s mobility is the lack of availability of personal property. It was identified that they earn and spend daily. Due to extreme poverty, the *khanabadosh* are almost unable to purchase personal property like a plot or house. Therefore, they reside on the land of others. Javed (2018) posits that everywhere in Pakistan, the *khanabadosh* often live in the land of government. In the area under study, the *khanabadosh* are camped on the land of the government (railway department) and host community for which they pay a rent of eleven hundred rupees for a single tent or *chapter*. So, they move to another area when they are informed that they should vacate the land either by the government or the owners.

⁹ *Zakat* on the agricultural produces is known as *Ushr*. In Islam, Muslims are liable to give us on agricultural produce at the rate of ten percent if the land is rainfed and the rate of 5 percent if the land is watered artificially (Manzoor 1989, 374).

¹⁰ The word *Zakat* is derived from the Arabic language *Zakah*, which means purification. It is one of the five pillars of Islam. The Muslims who fulfill the necessary criteria of wealth (until one year passes on it), and it is obligatory for him/her to give it to the poor and needy Muslims (Manzoor 1989, 379).

¹¹ The two words *Sadaqat* and *Khairat* are used interchangeably. The word *Sadaqa* (plural *Sadaqat*) is derived from Arabic language which means charity. In Islam *Sadaqat* means, the giving of something to someone without getting anything in return, for the purpose to get the favor and blessing of Allah (Manzoor 1989, p. 441).

The eighth reason for the *khanabadosh*'s movement is begging. They prefer to shift to those areas where opportunities for begging are more significant. Among them are two types of beggars: professional and unprofessional. Professional beggars are those who essentially rely on begging, while unprofessional beggars mainly work to earn money and rely on begging. There was 12 out of 88, i.e., 13.64%



Picture-06: A professional female *khanabadosh* with a newborn baby begging in a nearby bazar.

13.64% females, and 7 out of 26, i.e., 26.92% males, professional beggars. The females are primarily associated with outdoor economic activities; therefore, the professional female beggars, along with newborn babies and little children, visit bazaars, markets, hotels, and the houses of wealthy people for begging. The primary purpose of keeping newborn babies is to attract and get the sympathy of the people to give them money or other material things. The little children, either boys or girls, according to the males, accompany the females to get training in earning activities as well as to keep an eye on the females to protect them from developing extramarital affairs with members of the host community. Rao (1986) also identified in Afghanistan that among the Kowli gypsies, the females, along with their little children, beg for cash to fulfill their economic needs.

In contrast, the unprofessional female beggars sell various goods, particularly in the rural areas, by visiting the houses of settled populations where they also beg for foodstuff, i.e., grains, flour, and brown sugar, plus used clothes, dry bread, or cash. They justify begging because of increased poverty, low income, and the main responsibility to fulfill the household needs of females. It is worth mentioning that they sell the aforesaid material things in the local market because they need cash to meet the daily needs of the households. This is a general observation that the majority of the *khanabadosh* females indulge in prostitution, which is one of the reasons that the host community considers them inferior and avoids amalgamating with them rather than pushing them to quit the area.

All of the professional male beggars are aged. They used to visit the houses of the settled population in rural areas and beg for foodstuffs like flour, grains, brown sugar, etc., which they sold in the nearby markets as they needed cash

to fulfill their needs. They also begged cash to pay transportation expenses during visits to different localities.

The ninth reason for the spatial mobility of the *khanabadosh* is arranging circuses for the entertainment of local people and to earn a livelihood. Javed (2018) posits that the *khanabadosh* customarily arranged circuses to entertain the settled population in various parts of Pakistan. Berland (1982) observed the same in the case of Qalandar *khanabadosh* of Pakistan. In the area under study, few of the *khanabadosh* are associated with arranging circus to entertain the people of the settled population. To earn more, they preferred to travel to widespread areas by arranging a circus to entertain the people where they started temporary residence. When they realize that the local people no longer require their services, they quit the place and move to another area.

The tenth reason for their spatial mobility is to enjoy friendly weather. Hence, they move to the hilly and cold areas in summer and return to plain areas as winter arrives. Generally, they live in makeshift tents and *chapars*, suitable for low summer temperatures and cold weather in winter. When the summer began, due to high temperatures, they started moving towards hilly and cold areas, particularly Malakand, Dir



Picture-08: The structure of a makeshift tent of the *khanabadosh*

Lower and Upper, Shangla, Batagram, and Kohistan Districts. Similarly, in the winter season, due to extreme cold in the hills, they return to plain areas where the temperature is relatively normal.

The eleventh reason for *khanabadosh's* movement is delinquency. After committing any crime particularly related to theft, drug trafficking, quarrels, etc., they move to another area for protection from the enemy, police, and other security agencies. Dyer and Choksi (2006) state that they are often involved in criminal activities and perceived as a “threat to the established social order.” In the area under study, the *khanabadosh* are popularly taken as professional thieves by the host community. Generally, the members of the host community warn their children to remain inside their houses as *changaray* (*khanabadosh* female) may kidnap them. As Okely (1998) states that the gypsies are best known for child kidnapping and thefts among the host community. Besides,

extreme poverty, limited social relationships with the local people, and lack of national identity cards are the main reasons for delinquency among the *khanabadosh*. Therefore, after thefts or committing any other criminal act, the *khanabadosh* left the area within no time by shifting to another area.

This is a general observation that disputes are shared among the *khanabadosh* for which they are stereotyped and negatively connoted by the local people and police. It was identified that they almost resolved their disputes informally through *Jirga*. The intra-community disputes are easy to resolve, but the disputes with the local people are rare and difficult to resolve because the local people are dominant in the area under study. Therefore, in the case of a dispute with the local people, the *khanabadosh* are pressured and expelled from the area. During a quarrel, the researchers identified a case where a *khanabadosh* male struck the head of a local person with a steel rod and seriously wounded him. Initially, the case was reported to the police to pressure the opponent, but later on, it was resolved through *Jirga*. According to the decision of *jirga* the culprit's family paid medical expenses and was expelled from the area. It is, therefore, concluded that disputes are also a major factor of spatial mobility among the *khanabadosh*.

The twelfth reason for the *khanabadosh's* movement is illiteracy. Dhakku (2015) suggests that education is a main factor in reintegrating Pakistan's gypsies, but in the area under study, 84.97% of them were illiterate. Only 15.03% are found literate up to the primary level. Generally, the children of *khanabadosh* start earning at an early age. Since women are responsible for outdoor economic activities, they visit rural areas with their female children to sell bedsheets, clothes, bangles, and other cosmetic items. The male children stay there with males to assist them in

domestic chores, caring for the younger siblings, and security of the tents/*chapters*. It was found that the children of permanently settled *khanabadosh* are almost attending formal schools, while the children of those who are not permanently settled are not attending formal schools. One of the



Picture-09: A group of *khanabadosh's* children in a nearby government school, along with the School Head Teacher and key informant

critical informants shared during a group discussion that formal schooling requires the daily presence of children in schools while they do not have permanent dwellings; therefore, they did not enroll children but rather involved them in earning and domestic activities. Thus, this lack of education among them catalyzes the tendency of mobility from one area to another.

The last reason for *khanabadosh*'s movement was the lack of national identity cards. Javed (2018) identified that enough *khanabadosh* are not registered with Pakistan's NADRA (National Database and Registration Authority) department. In the area under study, it was identified during the socio-economic survey that 20% of the *khanabadosh* are not registered with the NADRA department due to several reasons, particularly socio-economic, lack of awareness, and cultural traditions. Therefore, they move from one area to another and prefer to reside in those areas where there are fewer checks and balances on them by the police and other security agencies.

Conclusion

The main purpose of the study was to explore the factors that contribute to the spatial mobility of *khanabadosh*. The factors that contribute to the spatial mobility of *khanabadosh* are socio-economic, seasonal conditions, delinquency, illiteracy, and lack of national identity cards. The findings of this study can serve as a baseline for research on other similar groups of *khanabadosh* who exist in other regions of Pakistan. Because of spatial mobility, their social status is low; hence, *khanabadosh* exists as a distinctive social group within the larger community of the settled population. However, a trend of transition is witnessed among mobile *khanabadosh*, and like their other permanently settled fellows *khanabadosh*, they are inclined to get permanently settled to attain economic prosperity and see their children in schools.

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