CHAPTER EIGHT

GUJAR SETTLEMENT LANDSCAPE

The Gujars, fairly widespread in northwestern India form one of the major culture groups in the study area. Their settlements occur in the Siwalik Hills and higher and rugged parts of alluvial fans which have only marginally productive agricultural and grazing lands. According to Russell and Hiralal, the Gujar is a great historical caste which has lent its name to the state of Gujrat, the town of Gujranwala in Punjab (Pakistan) and the tract known as Gujargarh in Uttar Pradesh. (1)

The origin of the Gujars has always been debated owing to their distinctive appearance, character and exploits as cattle-thieves. Cunningham identifies Gujars with the Yuch-Chi or Tochari, the tribe of Indo-Scythians who invaded India in the first century A.D. (2) Berreman believes that the Gujars form one of the oldest tribal castes of India. (3) According to him, the Gurjara tribe, which invaded India about the sixth century A.D. first occupied the sub-Himalayan tract known as the Sapadaksha. Today, its descendants are found in large numbers in every part of the northwestern Indian
sub-continent from the Indus to the Ganga and from Hazara mountains to Gujarat. (4) A majority of them took up pastoral pursuits whereas the remainder turned fighting nomads who were identified with Kshatriyas. (5) Ibbetson considers them as one of the most superior cattle-herding groups of the north Indian sub-montane tract. (6) Crooke writes of them as a tribe noted for its turbulence and habit of cattle stealing. (7) Babur, in his memoirs has recorded that everytime he entered Hindustan, the Jats and the Gujars regularly poured down in prodigious numbers from the hills and jungles to carry off oxen and buffalos. (8)

In northern India, the Gujars are primarily a pastoral caste. In the study area they are engaged in sedentary farming with a residual but strong pastoral element. Although regarded as excellent cattle-rearers, they, as a group, have been considered inferior cultivators. Darling observes 'they take not the slightest pride or interest in any agricultural pursuit; their fields are cultivated in most slovenly manner; you see none of the neatly-kept houses, well-fenced fields, fat bullocks and wells kept in good repair which distinguish the industrious castes; no fences ever protect their fields, their cattle are half starved, and their wells often in the most dilapidated condition.' (9) Ibbetson has made similar
observations about the Gujar as a cultivator. 'He is lazy to
a degree, and a wretched cultivator, his women, though not
secluded, will not do fieldwork save of the lightest
kind.'(10) However, it can be said in defence of the Gujars
that they do not share the history of the Jats and other
efficient farming castes. Their cultural history is deeply
rooted in pastoralism and few would question their ability
in cattle rearing. Bose describes them as 'a simple
all-enduring race thrifty and industrious, with no ambition
but to be left alone in peace with cattle and fields, many
of them being fine men in every way.'(11) A saying goes about
them, 'Ahir, Gadaria, Gujar, "Bh tinon chahan ujar" meaning
that the Ahir, the Gadaria and the Gujar, all want wasteland
for grazing their flocks.(12)

It is in the context of this brief culture-historical
outline that the settlement structure and the folk houses
of the Gujars need to be understood. Their settlements provide
a classic example of the relationship of the settlement with
cultural evolution. They reflect a continuous evolution from
the pastoral nomadism to pastoral farming and finally to
farming-pastoralist mode of living, currently practised by the
Gujars.(13) Despite their appearance on the Indian scene
centuries ago and even in the study area, their permanent
impress on the landscape, their settlements, nowhere dating more than 250 years back, suggest late adoption of the sedentary settled mode of living.

Although, as already mentioned, the Gujar settlements exist in the Dun as well as the Siwalik Hills, there is practically no difference in their cultural landscape. Landewal, the settlement under study has been selected to represent ecological zone of Siwalik Hills. Landewal was picked up for intensive and detailed analysis after an extensive survey of ten settlements with 90 to 100 per cent of the Gujar population had been conducted. The Gujar settlements of the Siwalik Hills have either a hill-foot or a chhae-terrace location. Landewal belongs to the former class.

Landewal used to be a part of the neighbouring village of Kalianpur. During the reign of Raja Ram Saran of Nalagarh one Tholla, a Gujar of Kalas gotra, migrated to this village from Mauza Gochar in tahsil Kharar and with the permission of the Raja occupied a part of Kalianpur which was lying untilled at that time. Tholla started cultivation and settled down firmly in the village. As his family grew in size and the cultivated area expanded, there arose a need for people rendering various services in agricultural operations. The Raja too required begar (forced labour) in exchange for the land he
had allotted to Tholla. Therefore, Tholla invited one Mangta, mirasi by caste, from mauza Bara and one Sukhu, of Bhandani gotra a Gujar, from village Daddi. Tholla offered a part of the cultivable land he possessed to both of them. As a result, the two invitees also settled here permanently. Initially Tholla had 4 hals ( 2500 acres, one hal is equal to 625 acres ) of land. But he gave one and a half hals to Sukhu and retained the remaining two and half hals for himself. Mangta was landless and rendered various services to Tholla and Sukhu. Tholla was in possession of that part of Kalianpur which lay close to a small choe. The newly settled part, because of its location, came to be called Kalianpur Lande Choe Wala, ( lande meaning small ). Gradually, its name changed to Landewal. At present, it is altogether a separate entity and has its own revenue records.

The morphology of the Gujar settlements is simple. Each settlement is comprised of houses having large courtyard where cattle are stalled. The courtyard is flanked by rooms and verandah on two or three sides, forming, as the case may be, a L or U. There is more of courtyard and less of room in a Gujar house. Every Gujar house is conceptualised as a cattle enclosure. The houses are agglomerated into lineage blocks which emerge through accretion during different phases of occupancy without orienting to a point of nucleation.
The existing morphological structure of a settlement comprising of gotra and lineage behra has evolved pari passu with the successive disintegration and collaboration of joint families, into nuclear families. Hence, it reflects the increasing complexity of the multi-generation family and the uni-generation family and its preceding segments comprising of several generations. (Fig. 100) Beginning with a single nuclear family, the subsequent joint family again breaks into two or more nuclear families. The evolution of the family is, therefore, the main process involved in the agglomeration of the settlement and is a cultural phenomenon.

The Gujar settlement reveals no preconceived ground plan and houses are not nucleated around any central point. There is no well defined street pattern. The complete absence of any directional bias reflects their casual religious attitudes. Contained within the enclosed portion of the house are two elongated rooms running the entire breadth. Between the two rooms is a wall partition with a single doorway to allow passage from baharla kamra (outer room) to andarla kamra (inner room). (Fig. 101) The nomenclature suggests that the Gujars have a well understood notion of what constitutes andarla and baharla. In one corner of these rooms lies a well decorated grain storage bin (kothi). Both the rooms are used for sleeping purposes. But the andarla kamra is used by women.
Genealogical tree (Sajra nasab) of village Landewal

Fig. 100
Ground plan of Gujar house

A K Andarla kamra  B K Baharia kamra  C Chhappar
0 Obra  B Behra  R Rasoi  F Fodder room

Fig. 101
when a household receives a male guest. In such a situation, male members of the family excluding children and the guest sleep in the baharla kamra. The andarla kamra is also used exclusively by a young married couple.

The front wall of the house usually supports a chhappar, a lean-to gable of thatch, covering a rectangular strip between the front wall and the behra. Functionally, chhappar is used as a verandah. One enters the house by first passing through the chhappar. On one end of it is a kitchen hearth area which is secluded by a low mud wall called oat. (Fig.102) The chhappar can be called an outer threshold as it seems to provide a kind of break in the movement of outsiders within the house. In the chhappar, one is within an individual house complex but not within the house. It is essentially a family space but serves as a lower order social space as well.

The construction of the house begins with the digging of foundation (neel ). Among the Gujars Sunday, Monday, Thursday and Friday are considered auspicious days for the digging of foundation. It is dug approximately to a depth of about four feet and is filled with cubical sandstones. The stonewalls are raised to about a foot above the ground level whereafter sun-baked bricks replace sandstones. Mortar prepared from mud bhoosa (finely chopped wheat stalks) is used as the cementing medium for stone as well as brick walls. The mortar is prepared
by trampling over the mixture of mud and wheat stalks by the feet for sometime. The walls are usually constructed by the members of family themselves and outside labour is, as far as possible, avoided. However, free assistance (huari) by the neighbours is not uncommon. All the four sides of the proposed room are raised simultaneously. They are two to two and a half feet wide and are raised to about eight feet. The door frames are placed when the walls attain a height of about a foot. Small alas are created in the walls during the construction for keeping small household articles. Roofs are made of wood, mud and dry grass. First a framework of wooden beams and rafters with roughly right-angled intersections is prepared atop the walls. The beams are usually extracted from such trees as tahli, kikar, and cheel, and the rafters from kikar and chhal. All over it the khar, a dry grass, is laid uniformly and this in turn is covered by a five to six inches thick layer of mortar which is held in situ by means of the underlying khar. As the mortar starts drying up it is repeatedly rammed down by wooden mallets whereby it is compressed and hardened. Finally, the roof is plastered with about an inch thick paste of clay, animal dung and bhoosa mixed together with water. Projecting out from the roof are banehras or stone-extensions which are intended to protect the walls from the direct impact of rain. The floor are kutcha and are periodically coated with a loose paste of mud and dung.
The houses are generally dark as few windows and ventilators are provided. The interior of the house is not visible from outside. There are no baths and latrines inside. The females take bath in the morning when it is dark or during the day behind the cover of cots and house walls.

In the Gujar mud-house a central courtyard, which is a prominent feature of the Kanet and Jat houses, is absent. Substituting the single family courtyard is the multi-family, uni-clan common courtyard called behra. (Fig. 103) The behra, as mentioned earlier, is L or U shaped courtyard surrounded by house of the same clan or lineage. It is a site of many secular and religious functions in the Gujar house. It provides private space for the members of the family, lineage or clan group to assemble and perform birth, marriage, death and other rituals. The behra is used for drying of grams, their thrashing and for sleeping during summers. It serves as the stalling and feeding area for the livestock. It also functions as a street joining all the houses around. (14) These functions of a behra suggest its antecedents in the Aryan cattle camps. For the Aryans, the symbolic participation of the plenary bodies in the rituals was essential. In the Gujar culture it reflects a selective adoption of Aryan culture traits. The performance of the rites de passage in the behra is widespread and deeply rooted in their tradition, although their religion contains
elements of animistic and anthropomorphic worship and generally rejects the deities of the Hindu pantheon.

The Gujar settlement is comprised of behra complexes. The behra complex did not evolve by itself sui generis. It is the result of the gradual nuclearisation of the extended families constituting a minimal lineage. Thus agglomeration in a uni-caste multi-clan settlement operates at two different scales, (i) the gross settlement, in which all clan blocks are agglomerated although without any order with reference to the khera and (ii) the individual houses of a clan block, which are agglomerated with reference to the behra. The microcosm of the behra is thus projected into the microcosm of the majra.

Khera, an integral component of a Gujar settlement, is located outside the majra where the villagers pay obeisance before and after important social and religious occasions. (Fig.1C4) On Sundays deep, a holy lamp, is lighted. Khera is a brick and mortar structure. It is a place of ancestral worship but through time it acquires the sanctity of a formal religious place of the village god.

Origin and Evolution of a Gujar House Type

The Gujar mode of living is a combination of the pastoral and farming elements. It is reflected in their house types and in forms produced at each stage in its evolution. The pastoral
traits are expressed in the location of the cattle-shed. In a hypothetical evolutionary sequence the cattle-shed would be absent in the first stage. Humans and cattle share the same room. (Fig. 105)

In the second stage, the adoption of agriculture as a secondary occupation introduces a slight change indicated by the separation of human and cattle rooms, though with a connecting doorway. Subsequently in the third stage the two may have a common wall but separate entrances. Although separation has begun, their traditional pastoral ties encourage them to maintain close contact with their cattle which continue to be an indispensable component of their genre de vie. The increased significance of agriculture and consequent declining dependence on cattle eventually leads to severing of ties, signified by a complete separation of cattle-shed from the living quarters albeit it is still retained within the behra premises. Initially it shares a wall with the living room but in course of time it may become a separate physical entity by itself. (Fig. 106)

Nowhere in the evolutionary sequence does the mode of living become independent of the cattle involvement even though agriculture becomes gradually but increasingly significant. The yield of milk from the milch cattle usually exceeds the
Hypothetical evolutionary sequence in the location of cattle-shed

Humans A - Animals

Fig. 105
domestic requirement and then the surplus is sold at the nearby shops. Bullocks are the backbone of all agricultural activities. As a matter of fact, in the Gujar settlements of today, all the stages mentioned above can be identified. They suggest the declining significance of the pastoral mode of living and also a gradual transition and acceptance of the farming mode of living.

Land System and Field Pattern

The shape and structure of the mauza is rendered unique by the disproportionate elongation on either side of Sirsa Nadi and its fragmentation into three units separated from one another by the intervening lands falling under adjoining villages. (Fig. 107) This fragmented structure of the village territory originated from the way it was carved out as a separate revenue village from Kalyanpur so as to include only those fields which belonged to the Gujars of Landewal. Since these fields were intermingled with those falling under Kalyanpur, the new mauza had two constituents within one of which there were three chunks of land belonging to Kalyanpur. Later, the third unit, the smallest of the three, was also annexed from the neighbouring settlement of Bilanwali. All the three units were identifiable within the boundary running
through the burjis which had been erected by the state revenue department in order to facilitate the identification of village boundary. (Fig.107)

Of the three territorial segments comprising the mauza, the largest has a very irregular outline and its width varies from over a thousand feet to less than a hundred feet. Its continuity is broken by a broad stretch of the Sirsa Nadi bed. The other two units are more regular and compact.

Spatially, the mauza extends from the crest of a Sivalik Hill Range across the two fluvial terraces, separated by Sirsa Nadi, towards the middle parts of the Dun valley. (Fig.108) The hill slopes covered with grass and scrub round the year form the village charand. At the foot of the hill slope is sited the abadi. (Fig.109) Between the abadi and the nadi sprawls a fertile alluvial terrace containing the lehri land of mauza. An elongated flattish strip on the left bank of the nadi constitutes the dabbar (paddy growing area). East of dabbar lies another fluvial terrace classified as talla land and referred to by the people as hear (a lowland near a river). After a break of about a kilometre further upslope stands the second unit of the mauza. It is called changar. The third unit situated near hear is considered a part of the hear. (Fig.107)
Fig. 108

Village Landewal
Spatial structure

Charand
Settlement
Fields
Sirsa Nadi
Fields

Fig. 108
The cultivated land has all the three major types of land **lehri**, **talla**, and **changer**. All these types are **awal**. There is no **daum** or **saum** land. The **dabbar kuhlar** (paddy fields irrigated by **kuhls**) belongs to **talla** type. Most of the fields receive irrigation round the year. That is why except at few places the entire cultivated land is **chahi**. (Fig. 110)

The map showing the field boundaries reveals that an overwhelming number of fields in **lehri**, **dabbar** and **haer vanddas** are either rectangular or quadrilateral. In **changer** their shape is rectilinear. The **dauls** marking the field boundaries appear as straight lines running according to the degree and direction of slope. Where the land is almost flat, as for instance in **dabbar**, the fields make perfect rectangles and go parallel to one another. But a slight increase in slope tends to change their shape as well as direction. Their direction can, however, be maintained in a uniformly sloping land.

The size of the fields varies from 0.003 hectare in **dabbar** to 0.58 hectare in **changer**. In general these are the smallest in **dabbar** and the largest in **changer**. Within the fields individual plots created for convenient ploughing are still smaller. As a result, contrary to the field pattern as appearing in the **latie**, the actual agricultural landscape
is a mosaic of tiny plots. Such a pattern of size and shape of fields is a product of division and sub-division of land among the successive descendants of the initial settlers. Besides, to some extent it is related to the cropping pattern as well. In dabbar the small size of fields is attributable to paddy cultivation which requires water retentive flat surfaces. Their relatively larger size in changar suggests influence of the distance from abadi in shaping individual fields.

The present field pattern does not show much variation from that existing in the late nineteenth century. (Fig. III) The division of fields, though on a small scale, is noticeable in all the four vanddas, lehri, dabbar, haar and changar. As a consequence, the fields which were already very small have been further reduced in size. The dabbar fields have suffered the most from such fragmentation. It is related partly to the division of property among the descendants of initial settlers and partly to paddy cultivation.

The map showing the division of production territory in the mauza indicates that about 30 per cent of the entire land is occupied by charand, nadi, choe and benjar kadim, all of which are government lands. About 40 per cent of it is either a part of the other mauza or is in the possession of people
living outside Landewal. Thus only 30 per cent of the total land is owned by the present inhabitants of the village. Of this 30 per cent nearly 18 per cent is with the Kalas gotra, the founding clan and 12 per cent with the Bhadani gotra. (Fig.111) Within each of these gotra differences exist in the amount of land owned by individual lineage segments. But these are difficult to explain because a large part of the parental land has been sold out by them in different generations during the past 60 to 70 years. The extent of such sale is evident from the amount of land which belongs to people living outside Landewal. (Fig.111) The entire changar except two fields and quite a large part of haar has been lost through such sales. Only the dabbar and lehri have not been touched because these vanddas are situated close to the abadi. Such sales have been transacted between the lineage segments as well. One of the lineage segments of Kalas gotra has been left with only a small plot in the abadi. Its land in the lehri and dabbar has been retained within the gotra itself.

All the land owning lineage segments have their lands in three vanddas, lehri, dabbar and haar. But in changar, the two fields that are left with the inhabitants of Landewal belong only to one of the Kalas gotra segments.
Bars are a part and parcel of the cultivated fields lying along the chaurand and paths used for the movement of the cattle. Wannabs are, however, absent because the abadi itself is situated at the most vulnerable point from where the wild animals can enter and destroy the crops.

The major crops grown in the mauza include wheat, vegetables, and pulses in the rabi and maize, paddy, groundnut, and chari in the kharif season. (Figs. 112 and 113)

References and Notes


5. See ref. 3, p.39.


10. See ref. 6, p. 184.

11. See ref. 4, p. 309.

