

RIGHTS

Punjab: Muslim Gujjar Families 'Beaten and Boycotted' in Hoshiarpur Villages

Locals said that the dairy farmers were violating the lockdown. While the police said the Gujjars are free to sell their milk, no case has been registered yet.



Gangs holding batons and lathis forcibly stopped Muslim Gujjar families who were on the move along with their cattle herds on the Talwara-Mukerian Road in Hajipur in Hoshiarpur district on Sunday, April 5. Photo: Special Arrangement



Prabhjit Singh



COMMUNALISM | GOVERNMENT | RIGHTS | 07/APR/2020

Hoshiarpur/Ludhiana: Several families of the Muslim Gujjar (milk selling) community in Hajipur and Talwara blocks of Hoshiarpur district were allegedly beaten by unruly groups in many Hindu majority villages. The Gujjars had to throw hundreds of litres of milk into Swan, a rivulet of the

Beas river, amidst their social boycott, as they were also not allowed to leave their mud-house dwellings.

Such incidents took place in villages including Tote, Sathwan, Mohri Chakk, Rohli Mor, Kamlooh, Bhatoli and Rajwal, all in the jurisdiction of the Hajipur police station. The Hoshiarpur district police officers have so far remained tight-lipped over incidents of violent crowds chasing away or thrashing the Gujjar families.

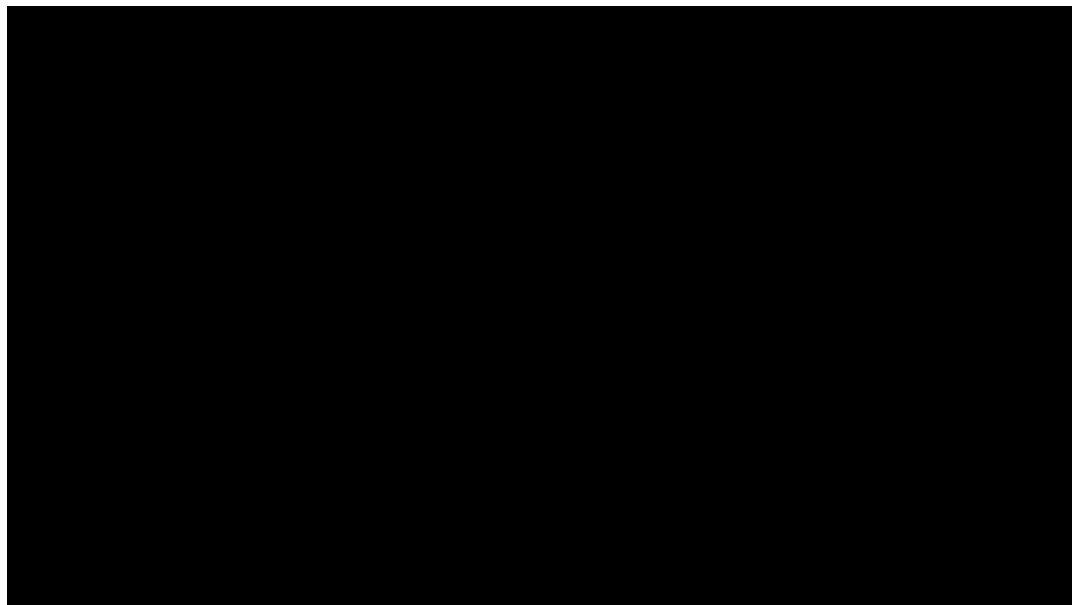
“We have been asked not to move around to sell our milk, nor are we getting permission to sell the milk. Our cattle are also hungry now,” Farman Ali from Hajipur told *The Wire*.

“Yesterday (April 6), I threw two quintals of milk. They [Hindus] blocked our way and did not allow us to graze the cattle, telling us that we are dirty and spread that sickness (novel coronavirus disease or COVID-19),” Farman said.

On Sunday (April 5), the youth of different villages, wielding lathis and batons, stormed the Talwara-Mukerian state highway, blocking the way of some Gujjar families and their cattle.

Sathwan village sarpanch Seema Rani seemed to agree with the action. “The administration should stop these Gujjars, as

there is a lockdown all over and nobody is allowed to move out,” Rani said.



Mukerian DSP Ravinder Chaudhary, when contacted, attributed these incidents to fake news that the coronavirus is spread through the milk being sold by the Gujjars. He said the situation was now “under control”. “The (Gujjar milkmen) are free to sell their milk,” the DSP maintained, in contradiction to Farman’s assertions.

The police have not registered any case, which the DSP said was because no formal complaint had been registered. He also added that the situation was now “normal” in the area.

Farman said that about 250 Gujjar families spend their summers in the adjoining Una district of Himachal and they cross over the Beas river and the marshy stretches to the Punjab side, settling in Hajipur and Talwara areas throughout the winters. This has been their lifestyle for the past 60-70 years, he says.

“Now we want to go to Una, but the police also is not allowing us to cross the Ramgarh ‘chowki’ on the Punjab-Haryana border,” he added.



Farman and his family. Photo: Special arrangement

Two arrested in Ludhiana for rumours against Muslims

In yet another incident, the Ludhiana police have arrested two women under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) for spreading rumours that the Muslims in the area were “spreading the coronavirus by shaking hands”. The women asked people to “guard themselves against the Muslims with lathis”.

The women, who were arrested by the Jamalpur police in the Ludhiana suburb, were identified as Pushpa Rani, a local private school principal and Sharda Vidya. Jamalpur’s Mundia police ‘chowki’ incharge sub-inspector Harbhajan Singh on Monday told the local media that the police were also on the lookout for more people, including one Kanchan, who they said was spreading rumours and communal messages through WhatsApp.

The FIR, in which 20 persons were named, quoted a Whatsapp message in Hindi. It says Muslims are entering the houses and spreading the coronavirus infection by “forcefully shaking hands”. It claimed that a gurdwara had

asked the people to stay “keep any kind of weapon or baton” for self-defence.

Habib-Ur Rehman, an imam at a mosque in the Jamalpur locality, told *The Wire* that he had also lodged a verbal complaint with the police against some identified men who had humiliated him “for being a Muslim”. “Three-four men surrounded me in a street and insulted me by saying that Muslims are spreading the coronavirus,” the Imam said.

The Imam said that the local police has acted swiftly and brought the entire situation in Jamalpur under control by arresting some of the culprits.

Gujjar man dies by suicide in Himachal Pradesh

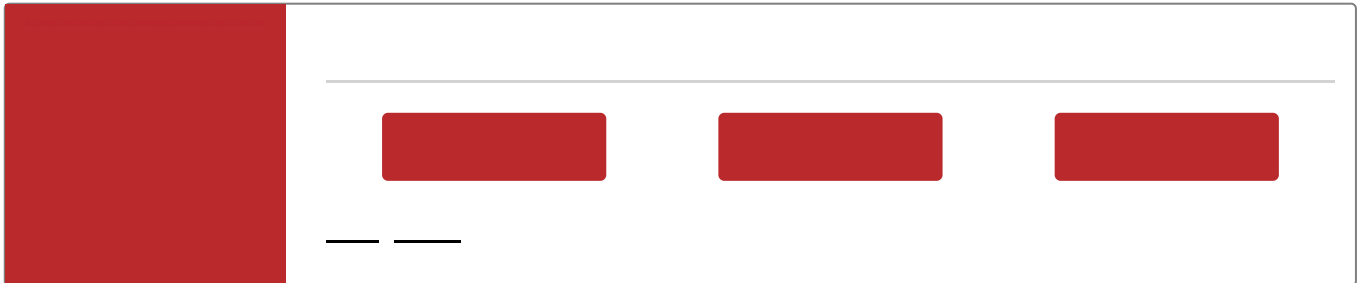
On April 5, one Dilshad Mohammad in Dharamshala in Himachal Pradesh died by suicide after he was reportedly humiliated in the wake of the Tablighi Jamaat congregation in New Delhi.

Dilshad, who belonged to the Gujjar community and was a dairy farmer, was tested for the coronavirus infection after he came in contact with two persons who had attended the Tablighi Jamaat congregation. The test returned negative, according to a [report in *The Tribune*](#). Locals had stopped buying their milk and accused Muslims of spreading the coronavirus, the report added.

The *BBC Hindi news service* also reported an assault on a Muslim joint family of four brothers in Haryana's Jind district. Some residents of the Thathrath village argued and reportedly assaulted the Muslims family which did not switch off the lights in their house at 9 pm on April 5. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had appealed to the people to light lamps and candles in solidarity.

If you know someone – friend or family member – at risk of suicide, please reach out to them. The Suicide Prevention India Foundation maintains a list of telephone numbers (www.spif.in/seek-help/) they can call to speak in confidence. You could also appear them to the nearest hospital.

Prabhjit Singh is a freelance journalist with extensive experience covering Punjab and Haryana.



[TERMS & CONDITIONS](#) | [PRIVACY POLICY](#) | [REFUND POLICY](#)