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Duck Pastoralism in Kerala

By Ishaan Raghunandan

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By Ramya Ravi

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Lessons from the History

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By Aarati Halbe

PHOTO ESSAY

'Quack-packing' across Kerala

Paddy Fields are
'teaming' with Ducks to
support a thriving form
of Pastoralism

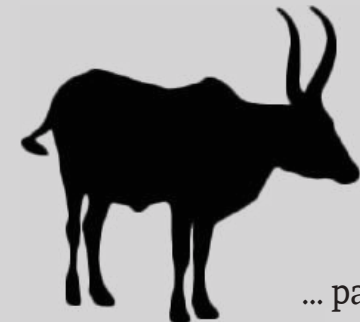
Photographs by Ishaan raghunandan
Text by Dr. Jayadevan N.

Bypassing a herd of sheep while driving, on highways running through rural countryside, will remind a thoughtful observer of the continuing existence of shepherd communities in the modern world. Travelling through Kerala, where the backwaters are equivalent to a road network, one may come across a similar sight. But, instead of sheep, you will see scores of ducks 'paddling' their way through these waterways.

The paddy fields, post-harvest, are an ideal grazing ground for these ducks, who wade through the backwaters from one field to another. Duck pastoralism is prevalent in Kerala's wetlands. The Kuttunadu region – an area encompassing Alleppey, Pathanamthitta, Kottayam and Ernakulam districts – is characterized by many rivers, rivulets and lakes. Also identified as a Ramsar Site (a wetland designated to be of international importance under the Ramsar Convention), Kuttunadu is a low-lying area with rich alluvial soil, ideal for paddy cultivation, and duck pastoralism.

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How Dinka Got the Cow?



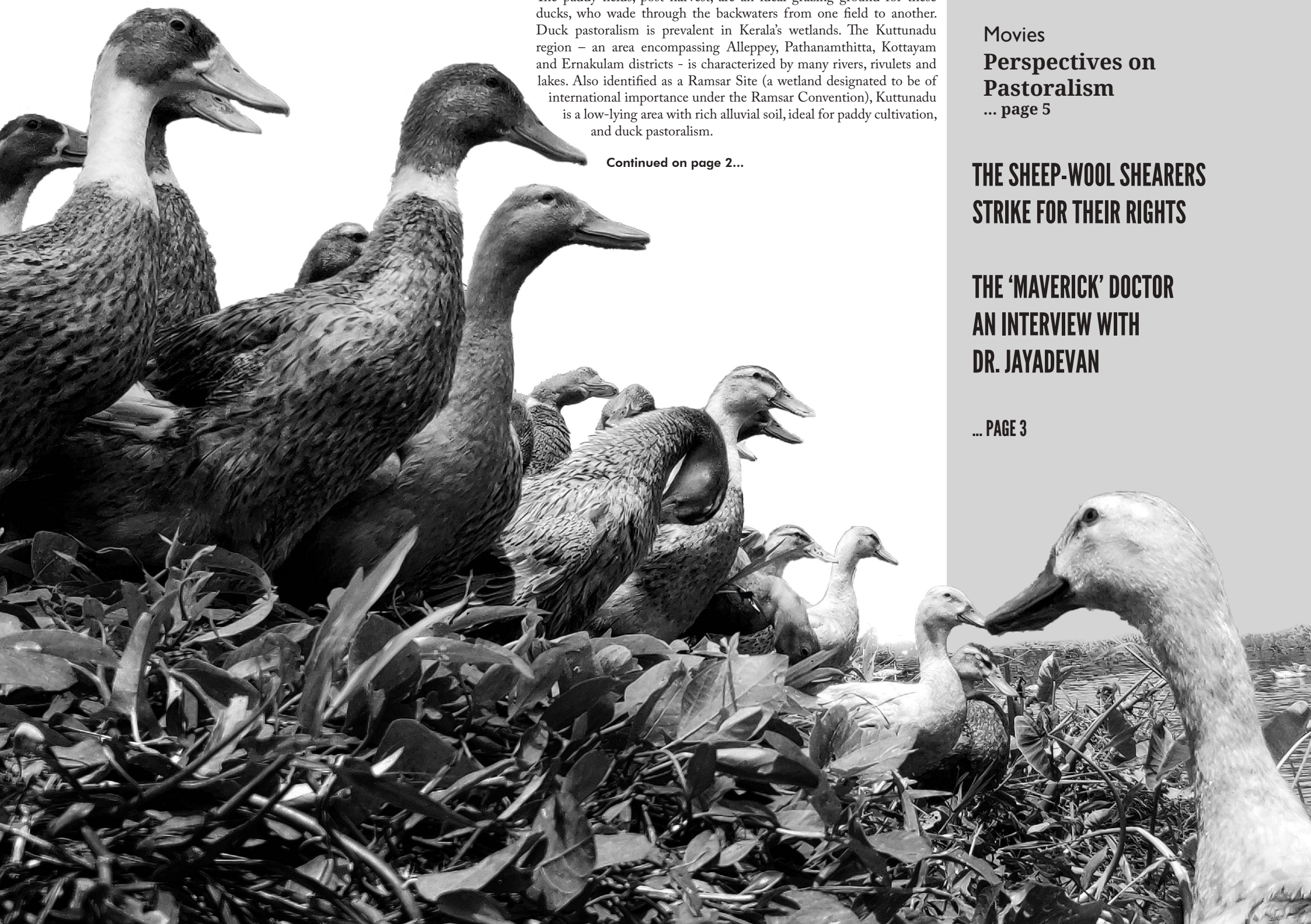
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‘Quack-packing’ across Kerala

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Typically, herders buy one-day old ducklings from the state government farm in Niranom, Tiruvalla, Kerala, where the ducklings cost 21 rupees, as opposed to 24/25 rupees on a private farm. On the first day, the ducklings are fed boiled rice. For the next 10 days, they feed on poultry feed starter and rice. Within a week, the ducklings are ready to go into the water. The ducks are also fed with small shells, small fish and fish waste that is rich in protein. In 25-30 days, ducks can feed on their own in a water body. With enough nutritious feed, they start laying eggs in nearly 5 months’ time.



ABOVE: Ducks are raised in these duck pens, where they are reared for their meat and eggs. Ducks can lay eggs for about 1.5 years producing around 200-230 eggs. Later, the birds are sold for their meat. Each egg costs around 8-9 rupees in Kerala.



ABOVE AND RIGHT: The herders look on as the ducks do their work in a farm. While there is no specific community (religion or caste based) that is involved exclusively in duck herding, the practice is in general taken up by those in the lower income group with limited land holdings.



ABOVE: The backwaters of Kerala, which double up as highways, are used by the duck pastoralists to paddle their ducks from one paddy farm to another. About 2-3 herders, or pastoralists, both on boat and on foot, manage a large ‘team’ of up to a thousand ducks.



DID YOU KNOW?

In the English language, a group of ducks in flight is called as a flock, while they are known as a raft, team or paddling when in water.



LEFT: The ducks take an afternoon break from a hard day’s work of feeding on leftover grains, insects, small mollusks, shells and weeds, while their herders do some fishing. The ‘team’ of ducks migrates during the two main paddy harvest seasons - Puncha (December to March) and Virippu (May to October).

ABOVE: A herder drives the ducks back at the end of the day in his boat. The inundated paddy farms and backwaters form a seamless ecosystem for the thriving ducks. Once the season is over, herders load their birds in small trucks and travel to areas 300-350 km away to Palakkad district in the northeast of Kerala.



Dr. Jayadevan N is a Veterinary Doctor and Surgeon working in Kerala’s Animal Husbandry Department in Kottayam.



Ishaan Raghunandan is an information science engineering graduate turned photographer and naturalist.

The ‘Maverick’ Doctor

An interview with Jayadevan N.

by Dilip Mekala

Dr. Jayadevan is a veterinary surgeon in Kerala’s animal husbandry department, who has used his position to help duck pastoralists in the state tide over a large number of problems. We spoke with him and about his interventions in duck pastoralism in Kerala.

In one of his early stints, Dr. Jayadevan was posted to the Veterinary dispensary at Arpooakra Grama Panchayat in Kottayam District. It was a challenging posting for a Veterinarian because there were more ducks than any other animal or poultry than you would normally expect. But it also turned out that duck pastoralists were frustrated because they were not getting the vaccines they needed – and they would vent their frustration by complaining about the veterinarian, using foul language, throwing things ... even approaching the MLA for help.

Dr. Jayadevan realized that part of the problem was that there was no formal recognition of the contribution that duck pastoralists make to society. Often from poorer sections of society, other communities saw them as trouble-makers – quarreling and spending time in the toddy shops – as they face pressures to make ends meet. The duck pastoralists, it being difficult to find grazing grounds, often have to portray a tough exterior

Dr. Jayadevan started building a registry of duck pastoralists in the state. Gradually through word of mouth, he managed to get more and more to sign up, each of them being given an Identity Card.

when negotiating with unwilling paddy farmers to let them use their private grazing lands.

The doctor reached out to colleagues at the Veterinary Biological Institute (VBI), Trivandrum, which produces some of the best vaccines in the country. As it turned out, they were producing avian vaccines, and Dr. Jayadevan worked with the institute to ensure he had a ceaseless supply. At one point, he noticed that more than a 1000 vaccines had been used up in his district hospital, a puzzling event given there were much fewer duck herders around. He figured they were taking vaccines and selling them on the black market in regions where the vaccine was not available.

Proper inoculation was the next issue. The duck herders were not following scientific methods like disposal of syringes and needles, in the process causing infections and deaths. They were using plain coconut water as diluents for freeze dried vaccine. These problems were overcome by introducing automatic syringes, which also required training of herders on their use, and ensuring abundant supply of quality diluents.

Dr. Jayadevan started building a registry of duck pastoralists in the state. Gradually through word of mouth, he managed to get more and more to sign up, each of them being given an Identity Card. Pastoralists who have received the card are appreciative, saying this has made it easier for them to obtain services while travelling through Kerala.

In 2007, a state level seminar was organized on duck pastoralism. The meeting was spearheaded by the Director of Poultry Science, Dr. Leo Joseph, attended by district-level officers of the Animal Husbandry Department and Scientists of Avian District Diagnostics Lab. During the programme,

There are now plans for branding duck eggs and having them sold at super-markets! It has been a long journey, but Dr. Jayadevan derives considerable satisfaction from his three decade long association with duck pastoralists,

people were served duck delicacies in order to bring awareness, appreciation and a possible future market. Most duck is normally consumed only in toddy shops, and through such public consumption, Jayadevan has managed to get a far wider cross-section to appreciate duck produce.

His next big challenge was the “heart attacks on ducks”. It was diagnosed as an infection of *Pasturella mutocida* – also called Duck pasturellosis. Once again, he turned to the VBI, who were doing trial runs for treatment of the disease at the time, and was the most effective cure at the time. In 2016 there was an outbreak of avian flu. Since the region has large numbers of tourists, the government ordered the killing of a very large numbers of birds. Once again, people became reluctant to consume duck meat and eggs. A number of public events have been organized since then to encourage the consumption of duck produce.

There are now plans for branding duck eggs and having them sold at super-markets! It has been a long journey, but Dr. Jayadevan derives considerable satisfaction from his three decade long association with duck pastoralists, and the general improvement in how society treats them today and their enhanced returns from duck pastoralism. 🐥



Dilip Mekala is a permaculture practitioner, currently working on soil regeneration projects in North India.

Pastoralists release a ‘Manifesto’ of Demands before Assembly Polls

Maharashtra: In October 2019, as Maharashtra went to polls to elect a new state government, pastoralists, with help of organisations like Anthra and CPC, articulated and released their demands the form of a ‘manifesto’.

The pastoralists state, “we have been neglected by the state and its policies. This is largely because we are not organised. Our nomadic lifestyle makes it difficult for us to come together unlike other communities.” The manifesto was signed by pastoral groups representing the Dhargar, Gawli, Bharwad, Mathura Labhan, Kurumar, and Golla communities across the state of Maharashtra, which are clubbed together under the category Nomadic Tribes (NT).

The demands are comprehensively listed under six specific issues faced by the pastoralists – identity, knowledge systems, services, access to resources, education and new opportunities. The demands include everything from proper identification documents, representation in local dairy unions and compensation for loss of livelihood due to dams, to mobile schools, a comprehensive fodder policy and basic infrastructure on migratory routes.

This is the first time Maharashtra has seen pastoralists come together to develop a manifesto and campaign for their rights with contesting parties in an election. This has also inspired shepherds from the neighbouring state of Karnataka, who were present at some of the forums. They shared their thoughts and ideas, asked for a similar document for their state too.

Through this manifesto, the pastoralists “request the state of Maharashtra to understand our problems and our concerns so that policies in future are made keeping in mind the special problems faced by nomadic and migratory communities.”

Course on Pastoral Ecosystems with a focus on Banni Grasslands

Any individual in the age group between 18 and 25 may participate in this six month long course, although it is primarily targeting the youth of Banni and MSc (Environmental Science) students of Kutch University.

The objective of the course is to help students understand the connections between pastoralism and their ecosystems, and better develop the necessary skills to work actively on issues related to pastoralism. The course, offered twice a year, will be managed by Sahjeevan with support from the Earth Science Department of Kutch University. The Staff of Sahjeevan, Centre for Pastoralism (CfP) and Faculty of Earth Science Department, along with a vareity of guest faculty will teach the course. Sahjeevan will invite pastoral Bhagia’s (knowledge bearers), conservation biologists, sociologists and legal experts to help design and teach the course.

As part of this course, students will get to use the ongoing implementation of the grassland restoration by Community Forest Management Committee as an opportunity to learn planning, implementation, monitoring, and research. They will also be taken for learning exposures outside the Banni. That pastoral and MSc students are learning together will provide valuable cross-cultural learning opportunities.

The hope is that over a two year period, each Community Forest Management Committee (CFMCs) from Banni will send 2-3 youth to participate in the course, and that over time these will become the key functionaries of their respective CMFCs. In time, the course may be offered to youth from pastoral communities in other parts of the country.

Sheep-Wool Shearers Strike for their Rights

Facing an uncertain future, the sheep shearers of Himachal Pradesh went on a two week strike to demand regularization of their jobs under the Wool Federation.

by Gurpreet Kaur

Himachal Pradesh: The month of September was marked by a consecutive 15 day strike by the sheep-wool shearers of the state of Himachal Pradesh. The striking wool shearers sat on a dharna outside the Collector’s Office in Kangra District, demanding regularization of their jobs under the Wool Federation of Himachal Pradesh. They also submitted a memorandum of their demands.

One of the shearers explained, “except for false promises since so many years, we have got nothing from the Federation”. He points out that Wool Federation has regularized only 3 of 13 shearers, that too by questionable means. According to him, despite getting funds for various projects like organic wool, sheep shearing machines and now medicines for animals, Wool Federation has failed to utilize these funds to secure their livelihoods. He himself has been working for the Federation for 8-10 years now, without any perks of a government job.

There wool shearers travel through the entire state with no regular salary from the Wool Federation, no medical benefits and no accident



SOURCE: TELEGRAPH INDIA

insurance. They get a 13 rupees commission from the pastoralists per sheep, out of which Rs 2/- goes to the Wool Federation and Re 1/- to a veterinary pharmacist. This commission is submitted at the Wool Federation office in every location, and then the shearers get this money back via bank transfer. So, the pretense of a government job is very much there.

The wool shearers were supported by the Ghumuntu Pashupalak Mahasabha, which also mobilized the Gaddi shepherds, who suffered losses last year due to a similar strike. Pawna Kumari, an activist with Ghumuntu Pashupalak Mahasabha, alleges malpractices in the introduction of imported machines and technology in the wool shearing process, which replaced traditional manual methods, adding to their difficulties. The shearers travel all over the state at their own expense through difficult terrains, without any protective gear, with only a sleeping bag and the shearing machines. Any costs of repair or damage to the machines also has to be mostly borne by them alone. It is during the

months of August to March/April that most of the shearing is done, requiring them to be away from home for months.

Attracting media attention, the group was invited by the Chief Minister for a meeting along with the President of Wool Federation and Minister of Animal Husbandry to fix things, who had earlier failed to respond to their demands. The Chief Minister promised the shearers that their jobs would be secured. So far, there have been no changes on the ground, and the shearers are yet to receive any letters about regularization of their jobs. They have resumed shearing till December on the request of the pastoralist community, as they would suffer if their sheep’s wool is not sheared off. But the shearers have vowed to go on a strike again if nothing is done to regularize their jobs till December. 🐏



Gurpreet Kaur is a researcher working with Institute of Social Studies Trust and Centre for Pastoralism in Delhi.



Music

Prayer from a Sufi Soul

Remembering a Very Special Risalo Recitation

By Ramya Ravi

PHOTOGRAPH BY NIPUN PRABHAKAR

Kicking up sand as it went, our Bolero came to a slow halt outside this beautiful old building. “Ferozaben lives here”, I am told. We wait for the dust to settle, step out under the shade of a large, old Prosopis tree. Ferozaben’s family greets us at the car, and takes us into their baithak (guesthouse). Here, we’re served piping hot tea from an intricately designed kettle in rakabis (saucers). Tea in Banni is a deeply cultural affair - made from fresh buffalo milk, and served with deep love that reflects their love for mehman-nawazi (hospitality).

A chai is symbolic of Banni’s centuries old pastoral system and its people, the Maldharis (Maal-livestock, dhari-owner). I allow the tea to warm me, and the rakabis to warm my hands. I compliment them for the beautiful serve ware, and they proudly declare that Ferozaben brought it back from her Hajj, an annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca. Women who undertake this journey are called hajjiani, and men hajji. Hajjiani Ferozaben handles many identities like all women of Banni. She’s a homemaker, she’s a Maldhari, she makes handicraft, she helped shape a few generations of tough Maldhari women, and within Banni’s social milieu of twenty-one communities, she’s a Jat. But the one identity that makes her special and renowned in Banni, is that she is a woman who recites the Risalo.

Shah Abdul Bhattai and the Risalo

Risalo is a compendium of the famous Sindhi Sufi poet Shah Abdul Latif (1689-1752) of Bhit located in modern-day Hyderabad, Pakistan. Shah Jo Risalo, or Poetry of Shah, is considered to be one of the greatest classic in Sindhi literature. Compiled by his devotees after his death, Risalo is a term used for Shah Abdul Latif’s poems.

The spell-binding Swedish song that calls cows home

For centuries, herdswomen have lured cows with haunting melodies

By Abbey Perreault

“Sindh is deeply embedded in Banni’s cultural identity. However, the amalgamation of Banni as a part of Kutch, thereby Gujarat, has now added to their more heterodox cultural identities. This, coupled with rising traditional Islam, makes the present a chalice with a heady mix of old and new. Should they drink from this chalice or not, is only for the people of Banni to decide..”

The meaning of Risalo is multi-layered. It means ‘treatise’ in Arabic - the description of an Islamic topic in a prose. It is cognate with the term rasul meaning ‘apostle’, an affectionate and respectful term for the Prophet. And finally, Risalo also loosely means a ‘message’ - of love, which is central to Sufism.

Abdul Latif Bhattai received his honorific title ‘Shah’ indicative of his status as a Sayyid, a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. He belonged to a select group of Sufi saints who enjoyed great prestige as pir, or holy men. His poems had a great mystical and aspirational quality to them. Shāhu jo rāgu (Shah music) was rendered through 36 Surs (Svara in Sanskrit), sung in ‘bayt’, or verses, in a state of reverential ecstasy through a form of singing called the va’i. His message buried in these verses, and across all his compositions, is the embodiment of Sufism - ‘aspire to become a better version of yourself, never let the ego impede the finding of your true purpose’. What a message for our times! Infact, it is believed that Shah Abdul is an Uvaisi Sufi, a term used for those whose spiritual initiation came from divine inspiration, i.e. without association to any ‘saintly human intermediary’. So revered was he that upon his death, a shrine was established in his honour by the then ruler 14 Safar A.H, 1166 (1752 C.E.) called the ‘Bhitshah’, or Shah’s Dune.

Less than a century ago, Sweden’s remote forests and mountain pastures swelled with women’s voices each summer. As dusk approached, the haunting calls of a haunting, high-pitched song known as ‘kulning’ echoed through the trees in short, cascading, lyricless phrases. Though often quite melodic, these weren’t simply musical expressions. They were messages intended for a responsive audience: wayfaring cattle. Kulning was a surefire way to hurry the herds home at the end of the day. According to Susanne Rosenberg, professor and head of the folk music department at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm and kulning expert, the vocal technique likely dates back to at least the medieval era. In the spring, farmers sent their livestock to a small fäbod, or remote, temporary settlement in the mountains, so cows and goats could graze freely. Women, young and old, accompanied the herds, living in relative isolation from late May until early October. Far from the village, they tended to the animals, knitted, crafted whisks and brooms, milked the cows, and made cheese—often working sixteen hour days. Life on the fäbod was arduous work, but it was freeing,

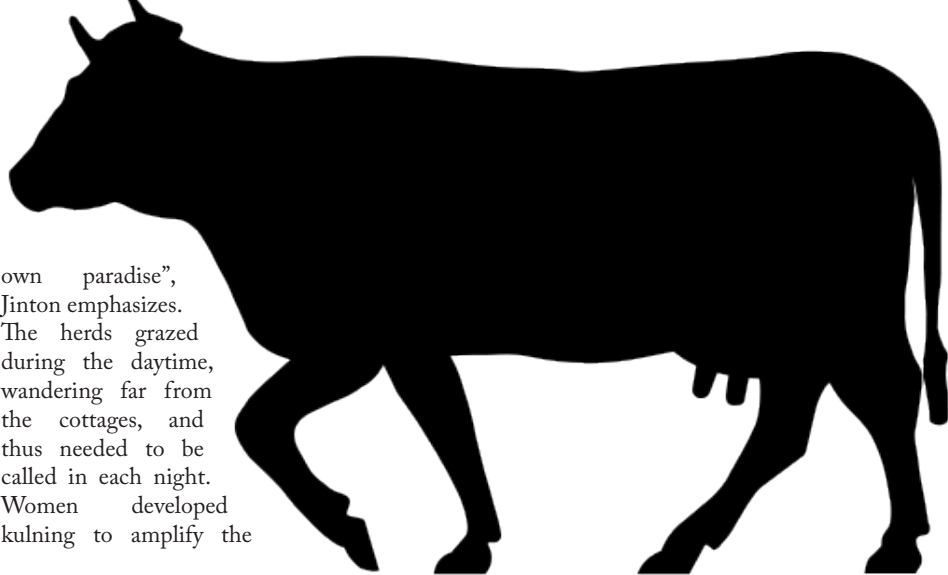
Sufism in Banni

The poems that still fascinates literary circles, and the stories that compelled me to dig deeper into the Risalo and Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai, were the stories of his heroines known as the Eight queens of Sindhi Folklore - Sassui, Momal, Sadia, Noori, Sohni, Sorath, Marui, and Lila. The poems celebrated the queens’ love of divine quality, honesty, integrity, piety and loyalty. Soon the queens and their tragic love stories became the metaphorical equivalence of a spiritual life that has inspired generations of men and women of Sindh to fight oppression and choose love. Because at the very heart of Risalo is Sufism - which perpetuates tolerance to plurality, love, peace and the celebration of a divine feminine.

Sufism is often mistaken by outsiders like me to be an extension of Islam. However, the belief systems are different. Sufism encourages its followers to renounce material wealth, rise above sects, and avoid politicization of religion; it allows for adaptation to local culture and inadvertently encourages a deeper connection to Nature and its unpredictable ways.

It was thus fitting that Ferozaben, perhaps the closest one can come to Shah Abdul Latif’s heroines, knew Risalo. Women of her generation have experienced, and risen above the eccentricities

too. “It was only women, and they had all this free space to make a lot of noise,” says Jonna Jinton, who performs and posts her own kulning songs for hundreds of thousands of captivated YouTube subscribers and Instagram followers. “They had their



own paradise”, Jinton emphasizes. The herds grazed during the daytime, wandering far from the cottages, and thus needed to be called in each night. Women developed kulning to amplify the

“Come, listen and acquire passion,” is what they said today. They have learned no other words, all they say is: “Flee from self.” Do not make a sound like an instrument; listen and let the duality slip away.”

**Verse 90, Sur Sasui Abiri
Translation in English by
Christopher Shackle**

of the landscapes. Drought, floods, extreme heat, famine, migrations, partition of India and Pakistan in 1947, sedenterization drives, changes in governments, rise of traditional Islam, so on and so forth, are only some of the life changing events that she and her ilk have faced. But then what else makes her knowing Risalo special?

Ferozaben and her ilk are living relics

A woman who was taught how to read the sacred text by her scholarly father is special. Reading and writing in Sindhi was, and possibly still is, exceptional among the people of Banni. More and more, people like Ferozaben are relics of a past that was fundamentally Sufi - inclusive of both genders, minimal wealth, and maximum tolerance. Sindh is deeply embedded in Banni’s cultural identity. However, the amalgamation of Banni as a part of Kutch, thereby Gujarat, has now added to their more heterodox cultural identities. This, coupled with rising traditional Islam, makes the present a chalice with a heady mix of old and new. Should they drink from this chalice or not, is only for the people of Banni to decide.

I hear a rustling outside, halt my casual conversation, and park my thoughts aside. I turn to the door, and this beautiful lady, freshly bathed and dressed in her finest red and green ghaggo - a dress unique to jat women - holding a silver box in her hand, enters the room. With a fierce look in her kajal-smeared eyes, she greets me. She notices the other men in the room, and draws her ghunghat - a long, colorful cloth worn over the head as a sign of respect and dignity - lower. They all respectfully stand up for the ‘scholar’ in the room. Her son, a man in his fifties, tells me that I must not tape her or record her - ‘the Sufi kala will be insulted’. And so, I prepare to tape every second of this incredible meeting mentally. Afraid to miss even a single moment, I step over to sit close by. She grabs her silver box out of the way, and throws me a furtive look. I know I have insulted her in some way, and apologize for my foolishness. She decides to forgive me, and opens the box. In it is a copy of a Risalo that has been changing hands since her grandfather’s time. Hands, that bear the distinct signs of time, open the pages of this dated, well-preserved book. She takes a deep breath, and with a quavering but sure voice starts her recitation. We are lost to her reverie, and have begun our own. 🐮



Ramya Ravi is a PhD student at Bangalore’s ATREE. She has carried out her fieldwork in Banni region of Kutch.

power of their voices across the mountainous landscape, resulting in an eerie cry loud enough to lure livestock from their grazing grounds. 🐮

This article was first published in an extended form on <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/what-is-kulning>

Books

Colonising the Wastelands

Neeladri Bhattacharya’s *The Great Agrarian Conquest* is an important book in understanding how colonialism destroyed Punjab’s pastoralism...

A Review by Vasant Saberwal

Studies of rural Indian history have focused overwhelmingly on cultivated India, premised very much on the notion that rural India is synonymous with village India. For the most part, this body of work has ignored the communities that lie outside the village, dependent for their livelihoods on forest or grasslands. Neeladri Bhattacharya’s superb account of 100 years of British rule in Punjab argues that such an exclusive focus on village India, to the exclusion of non-village India, has led to a homogenisation of our understanding of the terms of British engagement with this part of the country and an erasure of the histories of communities that inhabited such spaces.

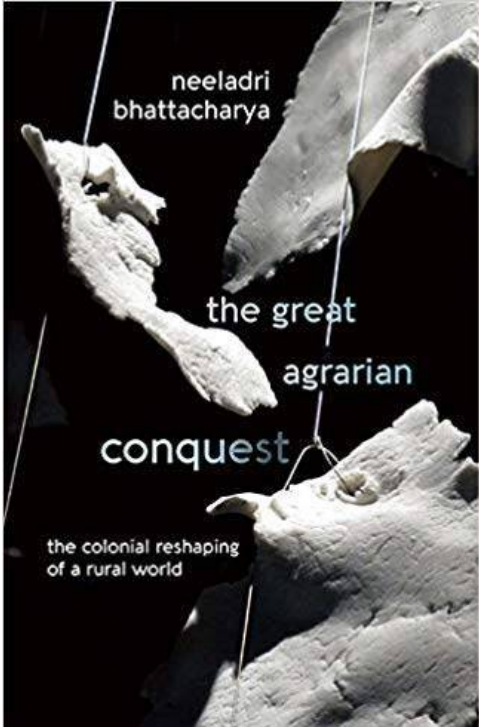
As the British empire expanded into Punjab in the mid-19th century, it came across extensive landscapes that were thinly populated, with transient populations, moving seasonally between different parts of the landscape, and transitioning between cultivation, when the rains were good, to some form of agro-pastoralism, to full blown mobile animal husbandry in search of water and forage, at times of extended, multi-year drought. This fluidity was accompanied by an equally fluid property regime, entailing complex, overlapping customary norms as the basis for accessing and either cultivating or grazing the land. Both pastoral mobility and the fluidity of property

relations were problems that the British grappled with, as they attempted to settle, tax and govern the vast expanse to the east of the Sutlej river.

Even as a seemingly paternalistic state used clearly defined property rights and clearly demarcated village boundaries as foundational bases to “improve” the moral, physical and financial state of the Punjab peasantry, there was continual pushback from the latter, for whom both tenurial ambiguity and freedom of movement were seen as central elements of living with extended periods of drought and scarcity.

In the most arid parts of western Punjab, officials saw this vast open scrubland as the tabula rasa on which they could showcase the benefits of combining tenurial security with systematic planning for large-scale irrigation. The canal colonies were developed in areas populated by mobile pastoralist communities. Cultivators from settled communities to the east were encouraged to settle here, with promises of assured water, large land grants, provision of services and so on.

In return, the British hoped for a physical and social transformation: the wild landscape, subject to inefficient use by wandering communities, would yield to carefully tended farmland, peopled by efficient, responsible and morally advanced communities. The bureaucracy saw the pathos of the marginalised pastoralist as an unfortunate but



“Pastoralism has largely disappeared from the Indian Punjab, collateral damage for a modernising state. It seems likely that a similar process of marginalisation would have unfolded in arid and semi-arid Gujarat, Rajasthan and the Deccan Plateau.”

unavoidable consequence of such social evolution. As Bhattacharya points out, however, following an initial bounty in agricultural yields, the colonies report widespread water logging in lands unsuited to irrigated cultivation. This combined with a sharp fall in nitrogen levels, led to dramatically lower agricultural yields. Disease, death and abandonment are recurring themes in the canal colonies.

Bhattacharya highlights the violence and disruption that accompanies the colonial encounter in the Punjab. Ultimately, the bureaucratic desire for homogenisation, simplification and standardisation, combined with the colonial desire for building progressive modern societies, leads (i) to the introduction of a property regime with no bearing in local custom; (ii) as a corollary, to an elimination of subtle variations in tenure and in the terms of access to and use of land resources; and (iii) as a further corollary, to a consolidation of land holdings (via newly constituted tenurial rights) and of power within an existing patriarchal, caste elite.

Pastoralism has largely disappeared from the Indian Punjab, collateral damage for a modernising state. It seems likely that a similar process of marginalisation would have unfolded in arid and semi-arid Gujarat, Rajasthan and the Deccan Plateau. And yet, substantial pastoralist populations survive in each of these geographies. Are these remnants of much larger populations or did they encounter a different state, less intent on imposing tenurial and cartographic order?

This review was first published in India Today magazine. It is reproduced here with author's permission. It can be found online on <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/up-front/story/20190401-the-great-agrarian-conquest-review-1484131-2019-03-22>

Movies

Perspectives on Pastoralism

A film festival brings the world of pastoralists from across the globe and their issues to urban audiences in Europe



The months of September and October saw a collection of short and feature films being show-cased in two European cities. ‘Perspectives on Pastoralism’ is a film festival that “aims to deepen understanding of how diverse peoples across the world gain their livelihoods from extensive livestock production”. Featuring a diversity of films from different genres - documentary, narrative and animated, made by pastoralists (participatory video) and/or about pastoralists – it offers insights into issues important to them.

The short films featured in the festival document the various contemporary issues that pastoralists deal with, be it climate change or

occupation of their lands by dam and mining projects, or their struggle for livelihood due to market forces. ‘Olosho’ is one such film, where 6 community members of the Maasai clan document their struggles due to eviction due to setting up of a game reserve on their lands by foreign companies. ‘Let’s not export our problems’, by Switch asbl, is an animated short-film that shows how milk exports from Europe are inhibiting development of markets for milk from pastoral and other herds in West Africa.

‘Tes River Mongolians’, by filmmakers Namuulan Gankhuyag and Tseelei Enkh-Amgalan, shows the relationship between nomadic

herding families and the tes river in Mongolia. Whereas in ‘Bayandalai: Lord of the Taiga’, Bayandalai, an elder reindeer herder from Dukhas tribe in the taiga forests, speaks about spiritual truths and higher consciousness, that he may not be able to pass his younger family members before the city-life entices them away.

‘Shepherdess of the Glaciers’ is a feature film, directed by Ladakhi filmmaker Stanzin Dorjai with his French collaborator Christian Mordet. Tsering, a 50-year old shepherdess and one of the last in the region, who driver her flock of 350 sheep and goats eleven months of the year at altitudes ranging from 4000 to 6000 meters. The

film depicts her solitary precarious life.

The film festival was held on 17th September on the side-lines of Tropentag 2019 conference at the University of Kassel, and on 15th October at Brussels, as part of the Annual General Meeting of Coalition of European Lobbies for Eastern African Pastoralism (CELEP). It was jointly organised by Agrecol (Association for AgriCulture and Ecology), DITSL (German Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture) and VSF (Vétérinaires Sans Frontières) Belgium, member organisations of CELEP.

More information about ‘Perspectives on Pastoralism’ can be found at www.pastoralistfilmfestival.com/

Pastoral Jewels of Kachchh

By Aarati halbe

The Banni grasslands of Kachchh, once visited, are difficult to forget. An hour into the drive from Bhuj towards the Great Rann of Kachchh, the landscape changes abruptly as the road turns north from a village called Lodai. Thorny scrub gives way to a vast expanse of grassland which is, depending upon the season, often bare and occasionally grassy. The land stretches out on either side of a straight road, punctuated by stretches of an invasive thorny tree called *Prosopis juliflora*, that has taken on a life of its own. Yet, Banni is a name that remains unfamiliar to many, even as increasing numbers of tourists drive through it and indeed, stay in it, when visiting the Rann of Kachchh.

Once the largest sub-tropical grassland in Asia, it has been home to pastoralist communities for over 500 years. Today, over 18 distinct pastoralist communities, collectively called *maldharis*, maintain a livelihood dependent on their buffalo and cow herds. The *maldharis* of Banni are Muslims who migrated into Kachchh many generations ago. They claim their closest cultural ties to Sindh, yet the oral histories trace the path over time to present-day Iran. Multiple conversations with elders of different communities reasonably lead to this conclusion (“We came from Halab,” or “Sindh is recent history, we all first came from Arabistan”—an old name for Iran). There are visible links also - embroidery styles, clothing and jewelry from Banni bear similarities to those seen in Afghanistan and Iran, reflecting a gradual migration.

Banni’s extraordinary history is evoked in a variety of ways, depending on who is looking. But if one pays attention to the various strands of coverage, what becomes most striking about the representation of the Banni grasslands in the media, or any wider forum, is the simultaneous presence and absence of its women. There is an abundance of photos of Banni women, but they are all dated – taken sometimes upwards of 15 years ago. As Banni opened its doors to the outside world, it also subtly shifted inward. The women can no longer be photographed, nor can their voices be recorded. Their place in everyday life, and their importance to the cycle of work with the animals remains largely invisible. In public space they are primarily represented by their clothing and their embroidery. Their jewelry, while less documented, also tells a story – about tradition, connection and evolving aesthetics.

In Banni, silver predominates - whole gold has smaller representation in daily wear. Wedding jewellery however, is mostly gold, and much that a woman wears to signify that she is married is gold as well. Gold is forbidden to be worn by Muslim men, who wear minimal jewellery. (1)

The jewellery worn by women in Banni is distinctive. Most designs are specific to the community that wears them, and each style of ornament has a different name. In some cases, the name of an ornament is common across multiple communities, yet remains distinct in design and also sometimes in use. In other cases, the same type of ornament goes by multiple names and is roughly the same shape with distinctive markings that distinguish different communities.

The photos that follow show jewellery only – the women that wear it are absent, though they helped with each photograph and carefully explained the name and context of each piece.



Aarati was the coordinator and curatorial anchor for *Living Lightly: Journeys with Pastoralists* from 2013-2016, during which time she researched the material culture of pastoralists in Kachchh, among other things. Herds make her happy. She lives in Bangalore.



The distinct jewellery worn by maldhari women in banni also has stories to tell – of traditions, connections and aesthetics

Different names across different communities:

Occasionally identical pieces of jewellery are referred to by different names. Found instances of this are listed below.

ABOVE AND LEFT: The Raysi and Hingorja communities refer to these heavy open-ended silver bracelets as *mangali*, the Mutwas as *hethariyu*, while the Halepotras call them *simaari bangdi*.

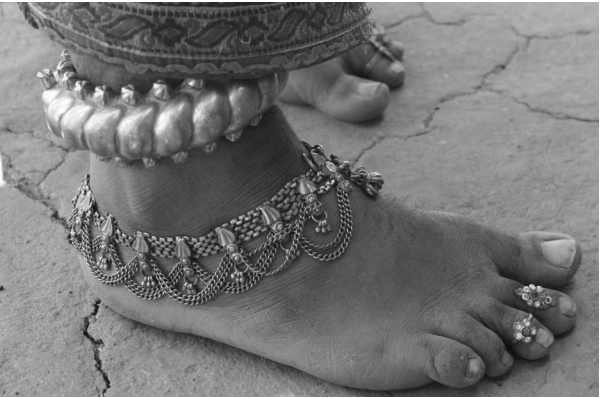
Earrings worn through the tragus of the ear maybe called as *nasbi* by Mutwas, or *kuki* by Dhaneta Jats.



LEFT: *Varlo*, as referred to by the Mutwas, or *vallo*, as the Hingorja community calls them, are wire-wrapped heavy choker necklaces made of silver.

Halepotras call decorative gold wedding necklace as *chirmal*, while the same necklace is referred to as *jarmar* by the Mutwas.

BELOW: These heavy silver anklets are called as *kadiyu* by the Raysipotras, *kadi* by the Hingorja community and *paaniyu* by the Dhaneta Jats.

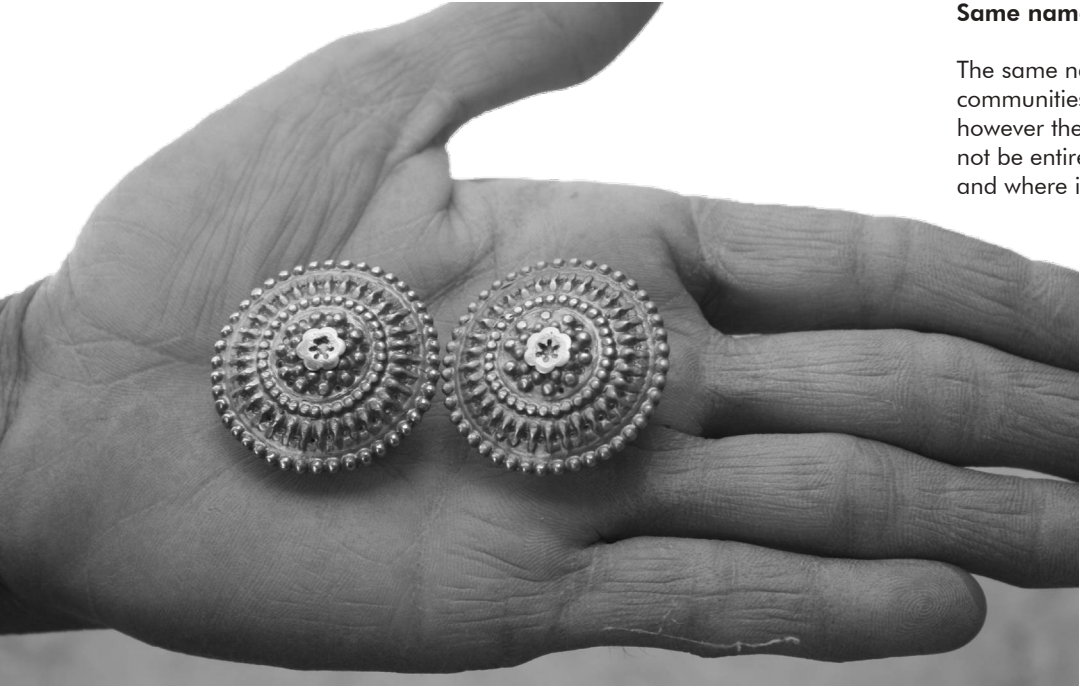


Same name across different communities:

The same name will often appear in different communities referring to a piece of jewellery, however the jewellery in question may or may not be entirely similar in appearance, or in how and where it is worn.

Bunda / Dur Bunda (ABOVE WITH VARLO): Earrings made of either silver (which is more common) or gold in a range of designs. Bunda and dur bunda are found in almost all communities in Banni.

LEFT: *Nasbis* are earrings ranging from large and chunky to small and quite delicate. This name can apply to an earring worn either in the main lower ear piercing by Mutwas, or earrings worn in the tragus of the ear by Raysi and Hingorja communities.



Reference: 1) Information provided by Jumabhai Raysipotra. Collected and documented by Aarati and Sonal. Location: Ghadiado, Banni, 20/12/2013



Chris, the world’s wooliest sheep from Australia, dies

An Australian sheep who made headlines in 2015 for the record-breaking weight of his fleece has died, according to the carers of the Merino named Chris.

The animal, believed to be aged about 10, was found dead on Tuesday morning by his minders, having died of old age, said Kate Luke, co-founder and vice president of the Canberra-based Little Oak Sanctuary, a charity that shelters over 180 farm animals.

“We are heartbroken at the loss of this sweet, wise, friendly soul. Chris is known as the world record holder for having grown the heaviest fleece on record,” the sanctuary said in a Facebook post.

“He was so much more than this, so very

much more, and we will remember him for all that he was – someone, not something.”

In 2015, Chris the sheep was discovered on the northern outskirts of Australian capital Canberra, struggling to walk under the weight of his wool, which had not be shorn in more than five years.

The 40.2 kilos of wool removed from Chris in 2015 – worth about \$413.6 at current prices – made him the unofficial carrier of the world’s heaviest fleece, dethroning New Zealand sheep Big Ben, who was found carrying nearly 29 kilograms of wool in 2014. 🐑

This article was first published online on <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-australia-sheep/australias-chris-the-sheep-the-worlds-woolliest-dies-idUSKBN1X10KM>



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How Dinka Got the Cow?

By Jakob Jiel Akol

Dinka herdsmen of South Sudan have a unique ritual before their bedtime stories. Just before the first story begins, someone shouts out “Our old home!” and in response, the sleeping mates will reply with “All of us! Our old home! All of us!” This, according to them, serves two purposes: to prevent nightmares about the stories to be told; two, to warn everyone that whoever interrupts the story risks having nightmares. The story then begins with “This is an ancient story” and proceeds to announce the title of their story.

So let’s begin. “Our old home!”. Please say “All of us!” and read on.

This is an ancient story.

How Dinka got the Cow?

A long time ago, the Cow and the Buffalo lived in the forest with their mother. One day, their mother was killed by humans in a hunt.

“We must revenge our mother,” said the Cow.

“Yes”, said the Buffalo, “we must revenge our mother! I am going to kill any human I see in the forest! They will dread my fury!”

“Today we know which of the two has killed more people than the other. It is the Cow! Brother kills brother for the Cow. Clans will feud over the Cow. Nations will go to war over the Cow. And a man without cows cannot marry a decent woman. The Cow has more than revenged her mother.”

“No,” said the Cow, you must not get too furious. Just calm down and think. They will kill us like our mother if you attack them. Think.”

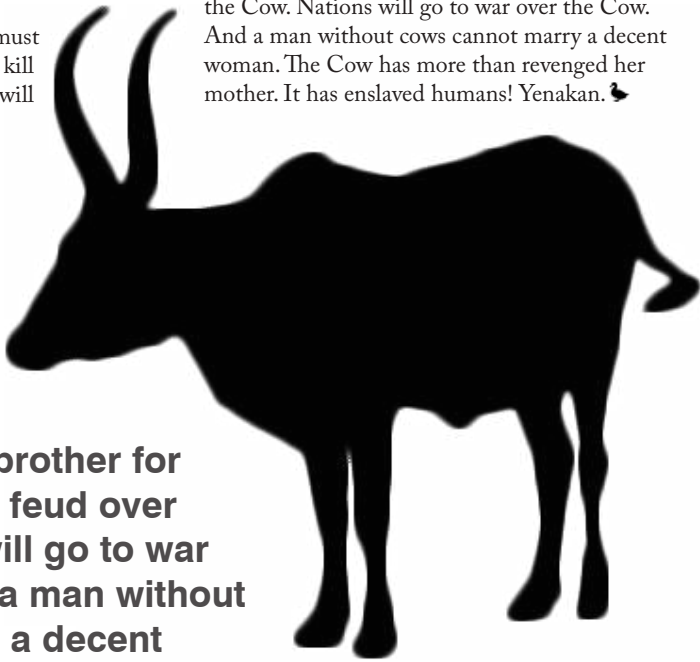
“What is there to think about!” said the Buffalo angrily. “This is war!”

“Yes I know, it is war,” replied the Cow, “but there must be a better way of killing humans. I know!” The Cow said: “We must surrender to humans and give them milk. Feed them and in due time they will value us so much that they will begin to fight over us and thus kill each other. That’s the best way to revenge our mother!”

“What nonsense!” said the Buffalo, “me surrender to those who killed our mother! Have you gone mad? I will never do such a thing. You do it your way and I will do it my way!”

The Cow and the Buffalo then parted company. The Cow surrendered to humans and the Buffalo remained in the forest.

Today we know which of the two has killed more people than the other. It is the Cow! Brother kills brother for the Cow. Clans will feud over the Cow. Nations will go to war over the Cow. And a man without cows cannot marry a decent woman. The Cow has more than revenged her mother. It has enslaved humans! Yenakan. 🐮



Edited excerpts from the book MYTHS & FOLKTALES: AFRICAN STORIES FROM THE DINKA OF SOUTH SUDAN by Jakob Jiel Akol

B	X	C	J	L	K	H	X	R	Q	E	U	C	H	B	J	F	I
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PUZZLE: HIDDEN CRAFT!

How much do you know about these craft items that are associated with different pastoral communities?

Clues!

1.

A traditional woolen blanket woven and used predominantly by the indigenous Kuruma pastoralist communities of Deccan region.
2.

A sheep-wool waist band typically worn by Gaddi women in Himachal Pradesh.
3.

This is a traditional camel strap tied around the body of the animal to support a saddle.
4.

Male pastoralists of Banni wear this piece of cloth with floral patterns on their shoulder.
5.

This craft of block printing is still one of the most popular in Kutch. Pastoralists are one of the main clienteles for this artform.
6.

Brokpas, the pastoralists of Arunachal Pradesh, store Yak cheese in this handmade wooden box.
7.

It is a unique carpet weaving technique done by only two families in Kutch. Geometric patterns on these carpets give them their distinct look. Goat and camel wool for this purpose is supplied by nomadic herders.
8.

This colorful embroidered hat is worn by Kashmir’s Bakarwal and Gujjar women.
9.

Knitted socks by Bhotias of Uttarakhand.
10.

Deccan’s Dhangar community weaves these hand-made baskets.

Would we all be happier living as nomads?

Bruce Chatwin thought the world would be a better place if we all did a lot more roaming. Chris Moss wonders what we've lost by abandoning our nomadic roots...

by Chris Moss

Nomadism was Bruce Chatwin's enduring obsession. In 1965, while working for Sotheby's, he went to Sudan where he enjoyed a camel trek and, according to his biographer, Nicholas Shakespeare, "experienced his first taste of nomadic life".

Later that year, during a visit to the Hermitage in Leningrad (St Petersburg), he gawped in wonder at the embalmed body of a nomadic herder that had been deep-frozen in the Mongolian Altai and preserved in pristine condition. He decided to give up auctioneering and become an archaeologist.

University work was dry and stuffy – and static – so he gave that up too. Turning to his real talent, writing, he became obsessed with a project, The Nomadic Alternative, which he would later describe as "a wildly ambitious and intolerant work, a kind of 'Anatomy of Restlessness' that would enlarge on Pascal's dictum about the man sitting quietly in a room."

"The argument, roughly, was as follows: that in becoming human, man had acquired, together with his straight legs and striding walk, a migratory 'drive' or instinct to walk long distances through the seasons; that this 'drive' was



BRUCE CHATWIN; SOURCE: GETTY

“Many of the darkest chapters of human history – slavery, wars, plagues, deforestation, wildlife depletion, chauvinism – can be traced back to the collective drive to settle and multiply.”

inseparable from his central nervous system; and, that, when warped in conditions of settlement, it found outlets in violence, greed, status-seeking or a mania for the new.”

It's hard to disentangle the way we live from our being settled. From around 10,000BC humans began to hoe, plough and sow grains at fixed locations, constructing seasonal and, later, permanent dwellings. The payoff or, was that women, freed from gathering wild wheat, were able to have children every year, which led to a population boom. “But the extra mouths quickly wiped out the food surpluses, so even more fields had to be planted.” Harari calls the early agricultural revolution “history's biggest fraud.” It fed more mouths, but an elite was created and the newly established lower classes were made to work ever harder for scant rewards.

Many of the darkest chapters of human history – slavery, wars, plagues, deforestation, wildlife depletion, chauvinism – can be traced back to the collective drive to settle and multiply.

Chatwin claimed that “as a general rule of biology, migratory species are less 'aggressive' than sedentary ones.” Although sharks are pretty damn aggressive, and Genghis Khan was not one to chillax while watching his goats.

But it is fair to say that nomads have to live in harmony with the seasons and nature. They move only to where they can gather food or feed their herds.

Dr Stephanie Bunn, an anthropologist at the University of St Andrew's, in her work alongside Kyrgyz herders, found their attitude to the environment enlightening, “...which accepted that the land was for all its inhabitants, and that humans were custodians of the land and all its inhabitants. People could take what they need, but not take more, or that would create an imbalance which could negatively rebound and affect humans.”

Other scholars write that nomads maintain very strong family bonds and have profound respect for elders. Chatwin's work is littered with such positives. Gypsies, he wrote, “were egalitarian, thing-free and resistant to change”. Chatwin never finished his masterwork on nomads. Instead, he left us In Patagonia and The Songlines – both books finding their key inspiration in nomads, the extinct Patagonians of South America and the living cultures of Aboriginal Australians.



SOURCE: GETTY

In settling we have lost intangible, even spiritual, values. Nomads live in the present, while farmers spend all their time worrying over the future. Nomads explore, and expand, their immediate world; modern travellers take holidays in places usually divorced from their homeland. Nomads move at walking pace; travellers are often hurrying. Nomads carry what they can; homeowners rent storage units.

We're most likely, these days, to hear the word “nomad” in relation to digital nomads. I can't help thinking Chatwin would have found them to be self-deceived. An essence of nomadism is to live naturally, to watch the landscape and the sky changing, to keep your head raised for coming storms and prowling wolves. Being hunched over a screen, virtually zipping from web browser to social media site to email box is, surely, closer in spirit to staying put than it is to being free, drifting hither and thither, ever searching. 🐾

This article was first published in an extended form on <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/comment/would-we-all-be-happier-living-as-nomads/>

Is Transhumance an intangible cultural heritage? Spain, Italy, Austria and Greece think so...

According to a statement released by Euromontana, a European association of mountain areas, Italy, Austria and Greece proposed Transhumance as a candidate for the UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list. The wide range of practices, know-hows, skills, ethnographic elements, toponyms, festivals, gastronomy, and events linked to transhumance, together with its socio-environmental benefits, has prompted the three countries to make this move. Spain has already declared transhumance as an intangible cultural heritage in their country.

Transhumance is a form of pastoralism based on the seasonal migration of people and their livestock. This form of migration vary from community to community. They herders lead their animals to the best pasturelands all year round. Since these herders constantly migrate, it also ensures overexploiting area's resources.

One of the reasons that compelled these countries to formally nominate transhumance for this year's UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage list is the knowledge systems of these communities which are derived from a deep

understanding of nature and its conservation. “Such migratory movements require transhumant herders to have a broad and profound knowledge on, for instance: their animal's needs and how to protect them; the characteristics of the different habitats and climate; and sustainable management of the land and its natural resources”, Euromontana statement emphasized. “A special bond with their animals is a must, as the herders do not only travel accompanied by livestock, but also by dogs, for protection, and pack animals”.

Beyond the knowledge of nature, the communities also have a rich oral traditions and expressions such as stories, myths and legends as well as music traditions that are used to pass on knowledge from generations to generations. Altogether, transhumance is more sustainable than other intensive livestock farming, providing both important ecosystem services and increasing human well-being in many ways. It is not just cultural heritage, but a way of living through a sustainable relationship between humankind and nature.

In November 2019, the governing Commission of UNESCO will make public their final decision on the nomination. 🐾

This article was first published in an extended form on <https://www.euromontana.org/en/transhumance-as-unesco-intangible-cultural-heritage/>

California Fires: Goats help save Ronald Reagan Presidential Library

California: In May, the Ronald Reagan Presidential library hired a herd of goats to clear flammable scrub surrounding the complex as a preventative measure. The goats ate the brush, creating a fire break that slowed the flames and gave firefighters extra time to react. The library near Los Angeles was threatened by the Easy Fire, the latest in a spate of fires causing evacuations and power cuts across the state.

The caprine contractors included Vincent van Goat, Selena Goatmez and Goatart. They helped save exhibits including an Air Force One jet and a piece of the Berlin Wall. “We were told by one of the firefighters that they believe that fire break made their job easier,” Melissa Giller, a library spokeswoman, told Reuters.

The goats were hired from a local company - 805 Goats - to clear around 13 acres of land. Scott Morris started the company last

November and charges around \$1,000 (£771) per acre of land. As California continues to have more wildfires, Mr Morris says he will need to double his herd to meet the demand. 🐾

This article was first published on <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-50248549>

