



PASTORAL TIMES

Monday, June 1st 2020
A Centre for Pastoralism Publication
website: pastoralism.org.in
pastoraltimes.cfp@gmail.com
Editor: Puneet Bansal
Editorial Board: Sushma Iyengar, Vasant Saberwal,
& Bhawna Jaimini



The Travelling Teacher
by Balaram Sahu
EDITORIAL



The Migrating Villager
by Jaideep Hardikar
NEWS



Desi Oon: Hamara Apna
by Shouryamoy Das
EXHIBITION



Asia's Largest Cattle Fair
by Ritayan Mukherjee
TRAVEL

HOMES ON THE MOVE:

Story of the World's first Packers and Movers

Animals play an important role in the domestic architecture of nomadic pastoralists. Students of architecture document this unique relationship.

by Gauri Bharat

People not familiar with nomadic pastoralists may find it incredulous that some communities carry everything they need and set up homes at different locations along their migration routes. This lifestyle presents the most pared down form of living and the most basic sense of what may be considered a home.

The Rabaris in Kutch, the Dhangars and Dangis in Maharashtra, the Brokpas in Arunachal Pradesh, and the Changpas in Ladakh are some such nomadic pastoralist communities across India that have a distinctive tradition of carrying their homes along, usually involving a pack animal.

Packing their Homes

Through skilful packing and sequencing, usually done by the women, all of the family's needs are packed on to the animal. The Rabaris load their belongings on camels, while the Dhangars use horses. The Brokpa

and Changpa used the yak before but have increasingly turned to motorised vehicles.

The basic sequence of packing is divided into three broad layers: several layers of blankets tied to the animals' back which provide cushioning; the saddle and/or the bag-like contraption containing all household belongings; followed by the upturned cot. This sequence is possibly linked to the sequence of setting up the camp - so the cot comes off first and becomes the place to store other objects.

Unpacking the Ideas

A key characteristic of these homes is that they do not have a fixed form. It emerges in the interplay of the families' requirements, the relationships defining their ideas of domesticity, and the setting in which they build at a given moment.

Continues on page 2...

**DOWN AND OUT: HOW ARE
PASTORALISTS COPING WITH
THE LOCKDOWN?**

**ICAR RECOGNISES 13 NEW
INDIGENOUS BREEDS OF
LIVESTOCK**

... PAGE 3

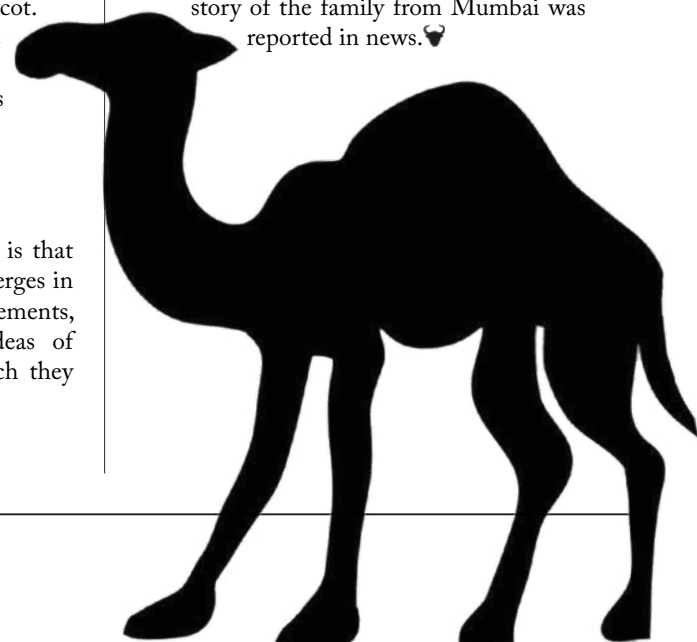
Railways deliver Camel Milk during the Lockdown

An autistic child from Odisha's Berhampur and another from Mumbai, who both had severe food allergies, were delivered camel milk and camel milk powder by the Indian Railways. These were transported from Falna in Rajasthan to the respective cities, as reported by IANS.

The milk was transported to Berhampur by the Parcel Express via Delhi and Howrah. Similarly, a parcel cargo train running from Ludhiana to Bandra Terminus made an unscheduled stop at Falna to procure 20 litres of frozen camel milk and 20 kgs of milk powder for the child in Mumbai in early April.

Both the families, who were procuring camel milk from Rajasthan earlier, could not find it anywhere during the nationwide lockdown and reached out to authorities via Twitter. Indian Railways has now put in place a formal system—Setu—to ensure the steady supply of essentials across the country. The initiative was taken up soon after the story of the family from Mumbai was reported in news.♥

Picture Credit: AJ Heath



Homes on the Move

...Continued from page 1

This shifting notion is seen even more clearly among the Brokpa, who build increasingly minimal shelters as they move to higher altitudes. This fluid conception does not mean that the homes are arbitrarily set up in any way. Rather, the idea of home is understood as a body of knowledge around how to create shelter, how to inhabit a given micro-environment, and a nuanced understanding of animals’ needs as well as their own. To imagine the home as something almost intangible is an alien concept to us from settled and grounded societies accustomed as we are to our concrete and finite environment.

The families’ belongings are limited by what the animals can carry. They thus constantly adapt and strike a balance between to what they can carry vis-a-vis what can be procured from the areas they reside in. This delicate balance requires skill and knowledge of the landscape within which the pastoralists move and dwell, acquired through the process of migration over the years.

“This almost fluid conception does not mean that the homes are arbitrarily set up in any way. Rather, the idea of home is understood as a body of knowledge around how to create shelter, how to inhabit a given micro-environment, and a nuanced understanding of animals’ needs as well as their own. ”

Many of the Dhangars, for instance, inhabit two distinct geographies. During the monsoon months, they move to the higher plateaus and descend to the fertile Konkan region during the dry period. In each place, they constantly gauge the topography, soil conditions and availability of fodder and water, to ensure a suitable environment for camping. As younger members of the family participate in the process, they too acquire the necessary abilities to understand the needs of the animals and the equations with other communities they engage with.

Changing with the Times

The idea of a delicate balance also embeds the question of change, both within the communities and in relation to the wider world. A major change is the increased use of motorised transport instead of pack animals, as seen extensively among the Changpa in Ladakh. This fundamentally transforms the material culture of the pastoralists since they can now carry more belongings. It also replaces the process of packing and unpacking and its associated skills with the apparently haphazard aggregation of objects in the back of a truck.

In time, it is possible that this too will form a more systematic process and a new knowledge system, but given that vehicles offer fewer constraints, it is unlikely to happen in the near future. The other major change is the natural fabrics used in making the shelter, such as cotton or wool, giving way to tarpaulin or plastic. Here too, the gain is offset by a loss in the skills applied to producing woolen shawls or in embroidering cotton fabrics.

These transformations are a few of the evident ones related to building practices. Deeper changes have been taking place over the decades and they continue to do so. What remains constant, though, is the minimal architectural and material culture of the nomadic pastoralists in comparison to other ways of living.



Gauri is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Architecture, CEPT University, where she leads the postgraduate program on architectural history and theory. She researches indigenous cultures and is interested in how people engage with built environments.

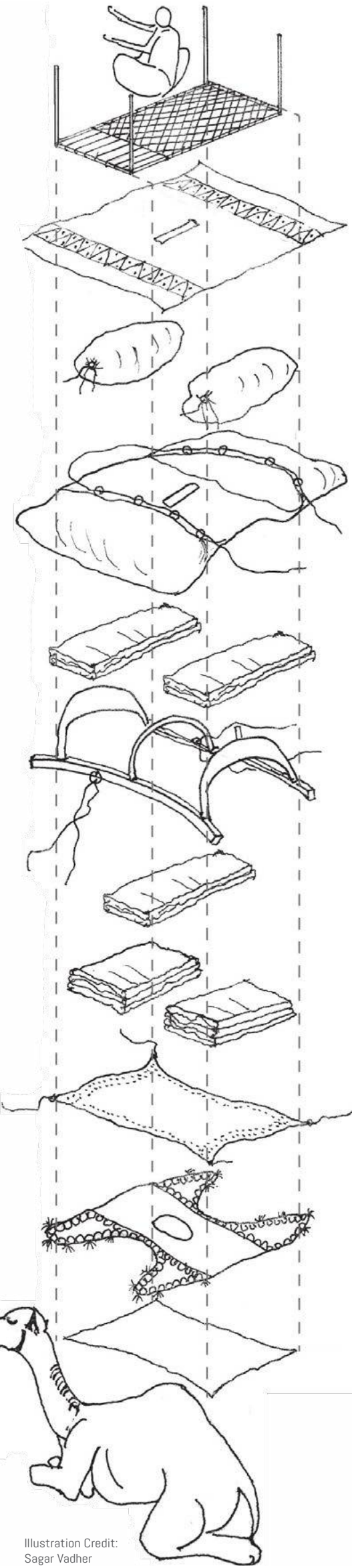


Illustration Credit: Sagar Vadher



Picture Credit: Sagar Vadher

The Brokpa

FRONT PAGE: Brokpas migrate with Yaks carrying their belongings. The Yak is first loaded with multiple layers of clothes and blankets, followed by *Gha*, a customized saddle, and then with a waterproof carpet of Yak hair - the *Leu*.

RIGHT: At the campsite, they reside in these *Brokbrang* - permanent ‘common’ structures shared by relatives and friends, used by whoever stops to camp at that moment, and who are also responsible for its upkeep.



Picture Credit: Priyanka Kumari



Picture Credit: Nidhi Pipaliya



Picture Credit: Nidhi Pipaliya

The Changpa

RIGHT & BELOW RIGHT: A typical Changpa dwelling, called *rebo*, is erected over a low sunken wall enclosure set in the ground and covered by a fabric traditionally made of Yak wool. The fabric provides good insulation and can withstand strong winds and the weight of snow. It is passed down generations, with frayed patches repaired when necessary. Made in two parts, a Yak can carry only one half of the tent or *rebo*. Increasingly, lorries or other vehicles are used for transportation, facilitated by highways constructed by the military in Leh. Among the Changpa, it’s the men who primarily do the work of making sunken walls, weaving, and erecting tents.

The Rabari

LEFT: The sequence of loading a camel’s back by the Rabaris—first with multiple blankets, followed by the saddle, then a special bag known as a *kandhar* which, filled with household articles, is hung on either side of the camel’s back. This is followed by clothes tied in a cloth-pack and finally the string cot placed upside down and tied on.

BELOW: A migrating Rabari family. The Rabari dwelling centres around the *khatla* (cot) which is always set up under an open sky and close to the animal enclosure.

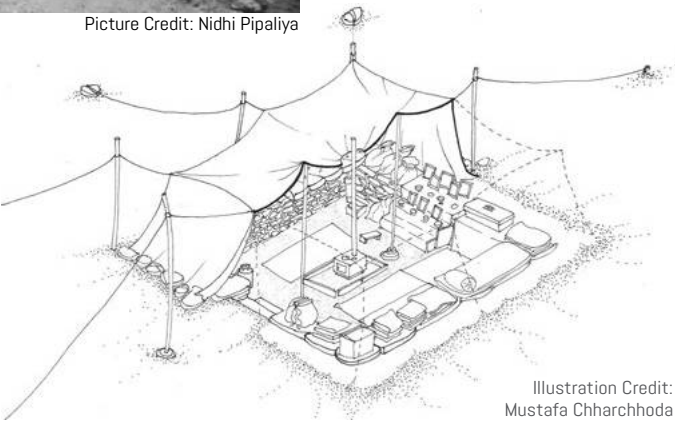


Illustration Credit: Mustafa Chharchhoda



Picture Credit: Akash Ghadiyali



Source: Hunnarshala

The Fakirani Jat

ABOVE: The Fakirani Jats of Kutch are known for their pakkha houses - reed houses constructed entirely by the Jat women. The walls consist of a wooden framework which can be dismantled and carried on ‘camel carts’, covered with a mat woven from a range of local grasses called *beer*, *aarundi* and *kal*. Almost all the materials are collected through foraging in the surrounding areas.

The documentation of the architecture of nomadic pastoralist communities was carried out through a collaboration between the Centre for Pastoralism and the Faculty of Architecture, CEPT University, Ahmedabad between January and November 2018. The following students undertook this work under the guidance of Ms. Gauri Bharat and Ms. Sushma Iyengar: Aesha Gandhi, Priyanka Kumari Rohit, Nidhi Pipaliya, Sagar Vadher, Akash Ghadiyali, and Mustafa Chharchhoda.

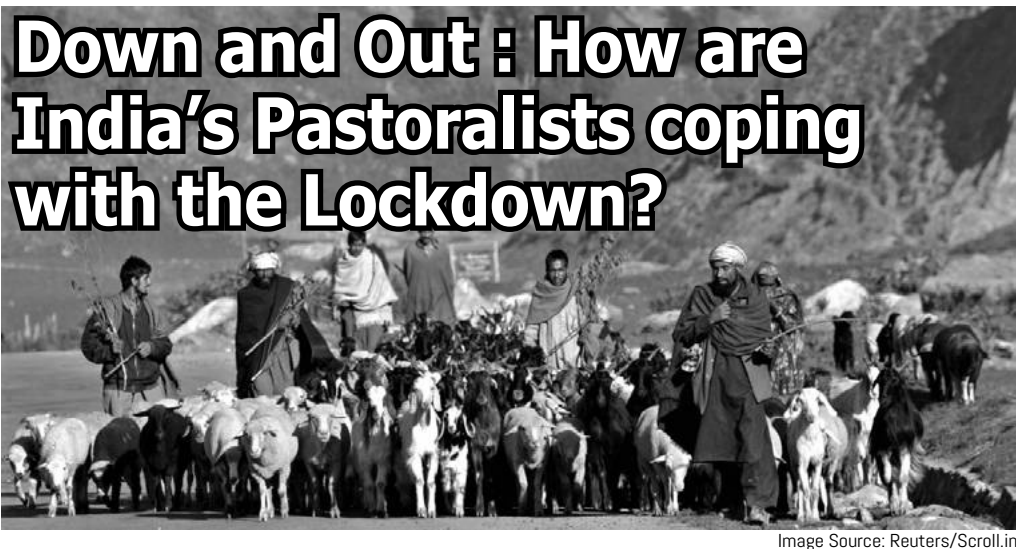


Image Source: Reuters/Scroll.in

Down and Out : How are India’s Pastoralists coping with the Lockdown?

Economic Loss and Social Stigma summarise Indian pastoralists’ experiences of the national lockdown to control coronavirus even as civil society steps in to help.

Dilshad Muhammad was a Gujar who attended the Tablighi Jamaat meet in Delhi. On returning to his village in Himachal, he got himself tested for coronavirus, which turned out negative. But the constant taunts and accusations of him spreading the disease by the villagers led him to the extreme step of committing suicide. However, no official toll has kept count of such deaths.

Mashru Rabari’s relatives in Rajnandgaon, Chattisgarh have been facing a similar stigma after being accused of spreading the coronavirus. In early April about 300 shepherds from Rajasthan

were stuck in forests and fields in and around Ujjain and Khandwa as farmers refused to pay or help them. The local administration and civil society had to step in to resolve the issue.

Such social stigmatization of pastoralists is only one part of the story. Many are struggling to sell their produce, especially milk, like the Gaolis in Maharashtra, the camel herders in Kutch, and sheep and goat herders in Surendranagar in Gujarat. The Bharwads in Nagpur find themselves struggling as Haldiram, their biggest customer, is not procuring milk anymore. For now, several families are making *ghee* and *marva*. Sheep-shearing and procurement of wool have also suffered in Himachal due to the lockdown.

In a meeting on March 25, the Himachal government allowed pastoralists to procure fodder

and sell milk, but lack of an official notification hindered implementation on the ground. In Punjab, The Wire reported on the harassment of several families of the Muslim Gujar community in Hoshiarpur district by unruly groups in villages. The Gujjars had to throw hundreds of litres of milk into the Swan, a rivulet of the Beas River, as they were not allowed to leave their dwellings amidst a social boycott.

In Mandi, Himachal, buffalo herding-Gujjars face diminished demand for milk as hotels, which are now shut, constituted their major clientele. The Gujjars based in Pathankot have obtained passes to sell milk and cottage cheese in Dalhousie.

The lockdown has affected annual migration patterns too. Several Van Gujar families in Uttarakhand deferred their seasonal migration in the hope of the curfew being lifted. These families now face hurdles in procuring fodder as pastures in forests at this time of the year are scarce. There was no help forthcoming from the government or its departments. If the Van Gujjars start migrating too late, it will significantly reduce the time available as well as their routes which may now change from the Upper Himalayas to the Khaddar region in Bijnor, UP.

Measures like ‘social distancing’ and living on minimal resources are not new to nomadic herders but the times are fraught with new hazards. Swaroop Chand from Palampur believes that this is a desperate time for humanity, and this epidemic may engulf thousands if precautions are not followed. Raj Kumar, originally from

“Raj Kumar ... opines that practicing caution is in their best interests because once they reach the mountain pastures, there are no medical facilities to help them.”

Palampur, migrates to the erstwhile Jammu & Kashmir border in Lahaul-Spiti. He knows that practicing caution is in their best interest because once they reach the mountain pastures, there are no medical facilities to help them. He supports the government’s measures, but at the same time feels that police excesses should be checked.

Another issue has been procuring groceries and supplies for personal consumption. Hariram Raika from Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh has revealed that they were not being allowed to buy rations in villages and were facing significant harassment by the police. Camel-herders in Kutch faced a similar situation. Since they didn’t carry their ration cards with them, they were unable to access the Public Distribution System.

Pastoralists who started migrating before the lockdown lack proper access to information, and have been prone to believing in rumours, like the woman in Himachal who heard that disinfectants would be sprayed from helicopters to control the disease. The older generation is especially at a loss for access to information. As one shepherd put it, he only relies on the radio. However, social media used by the younger generation has been helpful.

On the brighter side, the Van Gujjars report easier movement due to the absence of vehicles. Cases of animal theft, more importantly, have been negligible since the lockdown, as a shepherd reluctantly admitted, hesitating to think of a positive outcome from a global health crisis. Enhanced police scrutiny with curbs on human and vehicular movement is what has stopped this menace, though only temporarily.♥

ICAR recognizes 13 New Indigenous Breeds of Livestock

by Ramesh Bhatti



Source: Ramesh Bhatti

In January, the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) through its National Bureau of Animal Genetic resources (NBAGR), Karnal, recognised 13 new breeds of livestock in India.

India has very diverse indigenous livestock breeds—estimated to be more than 300, raised in different ecosystems. Till 2010, 129 livestock breeds were recognized. Through the joint efforts of the Animal Husbandry Department, Gandhinagar, Dantiwada Agricultural University, the Banni Maldhari Association and Sahjeevan, the Banni buffalo was recognized as the 11th breed of buffalo in 2010. Thereafter, 68 new breeds were granted recognition within a decade throughout the country.

In a recent report, compiled by Centre for Pastoralism and led by Dr. D K Sadana, which is yet to be published, 73 out of 197 registered breeds of domestic livestock have been identified as pastoral breeds. “While the nation has focused on high production hybrid animals, a large contribution to India’s food security has come from a number of indigenous breeds and locally defined populations. Several of these breeds are maintained and bred by pastoral communities across the country,” the report states.

To understand different aspects of pastoralism, it is necessary to also know the livestock breeds. Most hybrid programmes breed animals to maximize production of milk or meat. By way of contrast, pastoralists have bred animals attempting to maximize both productivity and the animal’s capacity to adapt to the challenging environments they inhabit. Such intensely focused breeding is responsible for our significant biodiversity in domestic livestock.

Since government support for breeds and breeding programmes is contingent on official recognition of breeds, the bulk of populations nurtured and developed by pastoralist communities remain ignored with little support. Without such support, pastoralist systems run the risk of dying out which would result in the loss of a significant part of India’s unique agrobiodiversity.

In the current exercise, 4 pastoral breeds were recognized. The breed descriptor and application for the *Nari* cattle reared by Rajasthan’s Raikas was jointly developed by the Lokhit Pashu Palak Sansthan (LPPS), Sadari and the Sahjeevan-CfP. Sahjeevan also identified the *Dagri* cattle in Dahod district of Gujarat, for which further work was undertaken by Anand Agricultural University. WASSAN, Conare and Sahjeevan are responsible for the characterization and registration of the *Thurupu Poda* breed of cattle in Telangana.

Other breeds recognized were *Thutho* cattle from Nagaland; *Kacchhi* donkeys from Gujarat; *Shweta Kapila* cattle from Goa; Himachali *Pahari* cattle; Purnea cattle, the Purnea pig and *Maithili* ducks found in Bihar; the *Mali* pig from Tripura; the *Gojri* buffalo found in Punjab and Himachal Pradesh, and the *Kajali* sheep from Punjab.♥



Ramesh is associated with Sahjeevan and CfP. He has over 15 years of experience in development sector, particularly in Natural Resource Management, Pastoral Development, Livelihood and Gender issues.

The Migrating Villager Whom We Refuse to See

by Jaideep Hardikar

Hatingaram’s life is less “here”, more “there”. Here - his village. There - in the open, across the country, under the sky. The ‘Raika’, a semi-nomadic pastoralist community from Rajasthan are always on the move, lock, stock and barrel. In his home state, he is a near-absent citizen; in Madhya Pradesh a seasonal visitor; in Maharashtra an unacknowledged guest camping in open fields with sheep herds, camels, guard-dogs, and family.

Call him a non-resident villager or an ever-migrating Indian who the census finds difficult to enumerate. At least the 2011 Census could not. We don’t know if he’ll be counted in 2021. He and his ilk, estimates say number at about a hundred million and are categorized differently in different states - Other Backward Classes, Scheduled Tribes, or Vimukt-Jati/ Nomadic Tribes.

In our New India, what would he be? An illegal immigrant? Or an un-enumerated someone without rights?

As India undergoes a churning from within, sparked by new laws and newer questionnaires about citizenship, millions of pastoralists and nomadic tribes beg for an answer: will they ever be counted as citizens and get rights? If you ask for their proof of residence or birth, hundreds of thousands of Hatingarams may find it hard to provide any documentary evidence. In that case what would the newly emboldened vigilantes of society do to them?

Pointers are all over. In July 2018, five individuals were lynched by a mob in Maharashtra’s Dhule district. They belonged to a little known ‘Dongari-Nathpanthi-Gosavi’ tribe among the 650-odd Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes. Mistaken for child-lifters, they were landless poor, doing what they do round the year for a living — seeking alms or moving places as fortune tellers.

If the minority Dalit and Adivasi communities are vulnerable groups, pastoralists and nomadic tribes live beyond the margins. It was not a one-off incident in Dhule. Many pastoralists, cattle-keepers, alms seekers, fortune tellers, street magicians, or ‘Bahurupiyas’ regularly fall victim to such mobs.

In 2008 and in 2017, the National Commissions for Denotified, Nomadic and Semi-Nomadic Tribes highlighted a long history of their

marginalization, continued stigma, crass neglect and oppression during pre and post-colonial rule. The two successive commissions asked the Centre to enumerate them, plan for their development and end their stigma. Nearly 200 of these communities were branded in the British era as criminals by birth by a law that was annulled post-independence but failed to bring them justice.

“Call him a non-resident villager, or an ever-migrating Indian, who the Census finds difficult to enumerate.”

For most of the year, thousands of pastoralists and nomadic tribes roam about, conserving animal breeds, delivering services, aiding our economy in diverse ways. Shepherds of Ahmednagar climb up the Sahyadri and descend into the Konkan. Van Gujjars climb up the Himalayas, braving a difficult journey, protecting and preserving their special breeds of buffaloes. Donkey-keepers along the Telangana-Maharashtra border migrate great distances ferrying sand and building materials.

The Bahurupias wear funny costumes to play mythological characters as entertainers, singing and performing on the streets for a living, staying out of school or colleges. The Citizenship (Amendment) Act, National Register for Citizens and the National Population Register do not change their reality.

While Delhi emphatically argues over giving asylum to the persecuted minorities from our neighbouring countries to the exclusion of Muslims, our hypocrisy lies in turning a blind eye to those persecuted by us here - marginalized communities pushed out of the basket, made to suffer as cattle classes. Such hypocrisy is what has come to define a new India!♥

This article was first published on <https://www.telegraphindia.com/opinion/with-the-new-caa-nrc-npr-what-will-be-the-state-of-india-many-nomadic-and-pastoralist-tribes/cid/1737430>

Jaideep Hardikar is a Nagpur-based journalist and a reporter with PARI. He is the author of ‘A Village Awaits Doomsday’ and currently also a Fellow at the Mumbai School of Economics and Public Policy.



Desi Oon: Hamara Apna

An exhibition in Delhi highlights the world of Wool-crafts of Kutch

text by Shouryamoy Das
photographs courtesy Khamir

This January, Khamir presented *Desi Oon: Hamara Apna* - a four day exhibition on the story of wool - at Bikaner House, Delhi. *Desi Oon* showcased the indigenous wool of India through the microcosm and spotlight on the wool of Kutch. The exhibition garnered rave reviews and enthralled craft enthusiasts, design students, and many others from 10th-13th Jan, 2020.

The exhibition spoke of sheep herders, sheep breeds, and expositied the elegant relationships that shape the wool-craft of Kutch. Expressly, the integrity of craft value chains is dependent on the local availability of raw materials. Hence, local sheep herding systems are of special importance to wool craft. Sheep herding is also special because it is one of the 'lightest' production systems, often leaving an indiscernible footprint on mother earth.

A number of weavers, spinners, dyers, felters and designers joined hands with Khamir to organize this exhibition. The exhibits presented the subtle wisdom of sheep herding, the local craft of spinning, weaving and dyeing wool through workshops, artisan interactions, exquisitely crafted products, and photo essays. The workshops proved to be especially popular among the visitors. Hordes of students from top design and architecture schools of Delhi, Jaipur, and other cities were active participants in soaking up all the flavours that were on offer!

This exhibition is a first step in a series of events planned by different partners of CfP to communicate the utility of indigenous wool to urban consumer markets. We are hopeful that the story of wool and sensitively designed woolen products will help sway consumer preferences, opening them to accepting wool in their households and closets.



ABOVE: *Desi Oon* was an opportunity for end-consumers and artisans to meet face to face. A visitor interacts with Shamjibhai, a noted weaver from Kutch.



ABOVE: Designers and students of art, design and crafts thronged the exhibition. Many of them were found absorbed amongst the craft exhibits.



ABOVE: Gavin McGillivray, Head, DFID India, learns spinning from an artisan. Hands-on workshops on felting, spinning, and embroidery were part of the exhibition. Many more on-the-fly workshops had to be scheduled on popular demand as Delhi-ites lapped up an opportunity to experience the craft-world of Kutch first-hand. The felting workshops were especially popular!

RIGHT: The retail space had fabulously handcrafted woolens. The buyers did not miss a beat in claiming their textiles of choice.



Shourya works with craft and pastoral communities in India, with a primary focus on sheep pastoralism and wool-crafts. He is a consultant with CfP and has worked with Khamir on wool. He was a part of the curatorial team for the *Desi Oon* exhibition.

PASTORAL PUZZLE!

V	R	X	N	M	Z	K	A	U	F	D	S	D	I
D	J	S	C	G	R	W	Q	S	C	V	B	H	E
F	Q	U	H	I	O	P	E	O	A	Z	U	A	S
H	W	T	A	B	E	Z	X	N	M	C	T	N	T
J	E	U	N	U	S	H	I	E	L	I	N	G	A
I	R	A	G	C	B	O	V	P	R	E	O	A	Z
Q	V	Y	P	L	N	X	M	U	Y	A	U	R	W
A	X	K	A	N	D	H	A	R	J	N	A	K	I
S	Z	E	D	T	A	Y	D	V	C	O	T	G	K
T	N	L	N	B	G	L	O	F	Y	G	E	S	N
Y	A	J	V	U	R	A	Z	E	S	A	W	A	D
M	A	A	S	A	I	O	Y	W	U	O	V	Y	F
O	I	A	F	H	U	T	R	E	W	L	B	O	T
P	T	Y	A	E	B	E	D	O	U	I	N	G	H

Can you find the answers to these clues about various facets of pastoralism, which are hidden throughout the current Pastoral Times?

1.

The bag-like contraption tied on a camel's back which carries all the belongings of a Rabari family during migration
2.

Nomadic pastoralists of Leh and Ladakh who keep goats that yield the prized Pashmina fibre
3.

This village in Bihar claims to host Asia's largest cattle fair
4.

Establishment of this National Park, whose name means 'endless plains', displaced several Maasai pastoralists in the 1950s
5.

These 'desert-dwellers' are nomadic Arabs known for herding sheep, goats and dromedary camels
6.


Cattle-keepers in Maharashtra, and one of many communities severely hit by the national lockdown
7.

Cattle breed found in Gujarat mainly survives on grazing and is mostly used for household milk consumption
8.


Shepherds, cowherds and weavers from this pastoralist community in Maharrashtra are known as Hatkars, Ahirs and Khutekars respectively
9.

This community from Odisha practices pig pastoralism
10.

Upland pastures in Western Britain where transhumant pastoralists used to take their cattle for grazing in summers



Camel Milk Chocolates



Aadvik's Handmade Camel Milk Chocolates represent the refined elegance. These exquisite assorted chocolates, available for the first time in India, will leave you mesmerized.

Now available in Butterscotch, Almonds and Pan flavours.

Order your favourite flavour from www.aadvikfoods.com

Fiction

The Story of the Yak’s Fur

by Dakar La

My grandpa once told me a story about the buffalo and the yak. A yak is a large ox with shaggy hair and large horns, found in Tibet and Central Asia.

Centuries ago, Yak used to live in India. At the time, the creature did not have the long, thick and shaggy hair that it now has.

It was also believed that Buffalo was the Yak’s uncle. The Buffalo used to have long, thick and shaggy hair, which the Yak now has. The Yak had heard stories of the beauty of the land of Tibet from a herd of Tibetan antelope when they came to o

visit India. And so he decided he must go to Tibet to find out.

He began on his journey but didn’t succeed because the road to Tibet was hard to navigate. It was also very cold and unbearable for an animal like the Yak. And so he came back to India. But of course he did still want to go to Tibet. He knew he needed to plan well before he tried again, and so approached his thick furred friends for help. They decided they would all go to Tibet together. Now Yak had to get some fur for himself. He went to his uncle, the Buffalo, to ask for his fur but his uncle refused even after Yak assured him he would give back his fur along with lots of salt, once he returned from Tibet. With no other option left, Yak stole some of his uncle’s fur.

The next day at sunrise Yak and his furry friends began their journey. They crossed the Brahmaputra with great difficulty and reached the border between Tibet and India. As they were crossing the river, a pack of wild dogs attacked them. After a long struggle, they fought off the dogs and carried on their journey towards southern Tibet, now Lhasa.

“He went to his uncle, the Buffalo, to ask for his fur but his uncle refused. Yak assured him that he would give him his fur back along with lots of salt, once he returned from Tibet.”

While crossing some fields, they were caught by a bunch of farmers who tied them up, making it difficult for them to escape. At midnight, managing to break free from their ropes, they ran for their lives. After three days, they finally got to Lhasa.

It was even more beautiful than what the antelope had told them. The air, the water and the sky were much cleaner than they had ever been in India, and so they decided to stay there forever.

Back in India, as time passed, Buffalo began to realise that his nephew had duped him. Buffalo then learnt that one must not be gullible.♥

Dakar La is a school student studying in Dehradun. Hes ubmitted this story in a competition organised by Antara Foundation.

Job Alert!

CENTRE FOR PASTORALISM is looking to hire a **GRAPHIC DESIGNER!**

Where: Located anywhere in India, the person will work remotely and report to the Director, CfP.

What: Responsibilities include working on all communications-related work within the organization, managing a presence on social media and the internet, generating and updating content for our website and managing the design and layout of all publications.

Who: Educational background and/ or 4-5 years professional experience in communications, graphic design or a related field.

How: For more information please email v.saberwal@gmail.com copied to riyasequeira@gmail.com, or send in an application with a statement of interest/ cover letter, resumé with contacts of two references and your portfolio.

When: Immediate

CfP is an equal opportunity employer.

The Travelling Teacher

An interview with Dr. Balaram Sahu, who runs *Pathe Paathshala*, a travelling ‘People’s University’ that shares traditional ‘people-oriented-technologies’ with pastoralists in Odisha.

by Puneet Bansal

Can you introduce *Pathe Paathshala* to our readers?

Pathe Paathshala, a Peoples’ University on the Move, is a travelling school/class imparting training to people at the grassroots about low input-based small skills related to livestock-keeping, herbal remedies for animals, indigenous poultry keeping, herbal pesticide-making for crops, fisheries, irrigation and natural resources management.

Classes are attended by villagers, farmers, pastoralists, women, artisans, and others. We make use of stories, rhymes, songs and anecdotes to teach, which the people can remember easily and also pass on to their friends and peers. I usually carry some booklets and visual aids to show to the participants.

***Pathe Paathshala* must be a fun class to attend! How did you come up with the idea of starting such a school?**

When universities, *Krishi Vigyan Kendras* and other government agencies conduct training, people who are not involved in farming or livestock keeping are made to attend them to fill the quorum. These reluctant participants end up losing their daily wages. Women rarely attend as they also have domestic responsibilities.

English often acts as the medium with trainers using much jargon alien to the participants. It occurred to me then that such training should be at a place, time and in a language convenient to the people.

Many people at the grassroots feel uneducated and excluded as they did not have much formal education. *Pathe Pathshala* gives them a chance to attend classes and not feel excluded from the education process.

Indeed, education’s importance cannot be overstated. What is the idea behind the ‘people-oriented technologies’ taught in your training programmes?

In a rural context, there is a lot of indigenous knowledge and ‘people-oriented technologies’ in people’s daily lives. Many have been scientifically validated by different agencies. All we need is to nurture them so that it empowers people with knowledge. The tools and ingredients for these are locally available. Women and farmers have immense faith in them. My motto is to tap into their skills—something they can do by themselves, without help from outsiders.

For example, there is a herbal remedy for diarrhea in livestock used by farmers. It can be summed up as a rhyme: “*Dast jab hua patla/Haridra, dahi usko khila.*” All one needs to do is make a mixture of 150 gms of *haridra* (turmeric) and half a cup of *dahi* (curd), and feed it to the animal two times a day for 3 days. It barely costs 10-15 rupees. This simple low-input skill is affordable for a villager, as medicines cost a lot more. It is scientific too as turmeric contains bio-molecules like curcumin and dahi contains RNase and probiotics which kill the bacteria. People do not perceive such remedies as alien and readily accept them. We need to scientifically describe these and give it back in a language they can understand. In my book ‘My poetic therapy to cure cows’, now translated into English, every such technology is described in rhyme in Odia.

How interesting! Could you tell us more about how *Pathe Paathshala* has helped pastoralists in the region?

Many pastoralists struggle to access veterinary doctors who can attend to sick animals, especially during migration. The doctors are often too busy to come to the field to treat the animals.



Source: Balaram Sahu

Pathe Paathshala gives the pastoralists remedies to treat animals on their own. We also run a Tele-Vet programme. Pastoralists call us whenever they have a problem and we give them detailed information on the ingredients needed, how to procure them, and then use them.

Periodically, pastoralists invite us to conduct trainings. We have published booklets in local languages for them, covering several relevant topics for pastoralists, like breeding. Since the beginning of the current lockdown, the daily number of calls we receive has gone up 4-5 times. This shows that many pastoralists do not have access to vets, as also that they find our methods useful.

How has pastoralism contributed to your own knowledge bank?

Pathe Paathshala is a platform for the cross-pollination of knowledge, especially between different groups or communities inhabiting separate geographies, who may not be communicating with each other. This is also true for pastoralists.

“Since the beginning of the lockdown, the daily number of calls has gone up by 4-5 times. This shows that many pastoralists do not have access to Vets, as also they find our methods useful.”

You have also worked with pig pastoralists. Can you tell us something about it?

Pig Pastoralism is prevalent in East and North-east India. The *Kellas* are a community in Odisha practicing pig herding. Society gives them a tough time and people are generally hostile towards the pigs who are blamed for destroying crops and spreading diseases like swine flu. It is well established that swine flu is not spread by pigs but human transmission, which I always mention in my public interviews.

Finally, what has your experience of running *Pathe Paathshala* taught you?

I was once taking a class in a Maoist-affected tribal area of Nuapada district in Odisha. Initially there were about fifty participants, that later swelled up to about two hundred people. The class was on herbal remedies for diseases in goats. After the class, they requested me to participate in a spontaneously arranged community feast, giving me a grand farewell later. On our way back, my companions told me that some of the participants were Maoists. I did not however feel threatened at all while I was there. Rather, they were very courteous and kind to me. This experience taught me how working with love can conquer all odds.♥



Dr, Balaram Sahu is a Veterinarian by profession in Odisha. He has won several awards for his work on traditional knowledge and technologies, and has authored 14 books on the subject, which has been translated into several languages.

The Changing Face of Asia’s Largest Cattle Fair

As times change,
humans and animals
struggle to continue
their celebration
of myriad cultures
and traditions,
at the
Sonepur Cattle Fair

photographs by Ritayan Mukherjee

A fortnight after Diwali, on the day of Kartik Purnima, Sonepur, a village in Bihar located at the confluence of the rivers Ganga and Gandak 30 kms from Patna, hosts what is described by the tourism department as ‘Asia’s largest cattle fair’. It goes on for close to a month. In the past it attracted traders from as far as Central Asia. The cattle fair is held in commemoration of Vishnu who in his Harihar Nath avatar rescued the devout elephant Gaj Grah from being maimed by an attacking crocodile while paying him obeisance. In this backdrop, the Harihar Nath temple, the holy dip in the rivers and the ceremonial bathing of elephants are central to the carnival. The fair is also historically significant as Chandragupta Maurya is believed to have bought elephants for his army from here. But with changing times, the fair is changing too.



ABOVE: A vendor polishes the horns of his cow to attract customers. A place where some 15000 animals were once sold, ‘Gai Bazaar’ wears a comparatively deserted look these days. Old timers say cow politics has hit the *Gai Bazaar* hard. Cattle traders complain that business—on a decline for a decade—has virtually dried up these days. The worst blow came in 2017 when the central government banned the sale of cattle for slaughter at animal markets. Many farmers stopped bringing milch animals fearing attacks by vigilantes. Cattle traders say it was wrong to link slaughtering of animals to cattle fairs.



ABOVE: A boy carries fodder to the camp for his cattle. The *Sonepur Pasbu Mela* wears a different look these days. Gone are the crowds of animals, and bargaining over them isn’t the first order of business on the minds of visitors. Instead, clothing and handicraft stalls, those selling sweetmeats and other hawkers line the dusty fairgrounds. Celebrities peddling everything from hair oil to batteries vie for visitors’ attention from the hoardings.

RIGHT: Elephants are not for. It was banned by the Government under the Wildlife Protection Act in 2004. But they are brought to the fairground anyway for a holy dip in the Gandak River, which is considered auspicious. Unfortunately, as the Gandak has changed its course, this ritual is becoming a rare sight, so too the elephants, whose numbers have dwindled over the years.



LEFT: A horse is seen relaxing on the ground after winning a race. These races are meant to showcase the abilities of the horses before they are sold off. The ‘*Ghoda Bazaar*’ still sees brisk business and thousands of horses are traded. They remain one of the major attractions of the fair.



RIGHT: Crowds gather outside a market fully dedicated to birds, dogs and other pets such as rabbits and guinea pigs. Some vendors also sell dogs of different breeds. The fair used to attract traders with goats, birds, asses, and camels too.

Makeshift theaters that draw huge crowds of traders, villagers and visitors are a more recent and increasingly major attraction these days. Nearly 15 theatre performances, traditionally known as *Nautanki*, are held at the fairground.♥



This article was first published in a different form on <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8285313/Flock-Hundreds-SHEEP-overrun-Turkish-city-coronavirus-lockdown.html>

Text based on <https://scroll.in/article/946389/indias-restriction-on-cattle-sale-has-dulled-the-shine-of-asias-largest-animal-festival>



Ritayan Mukherjee is a Kolkata-based photography enthusiast and a PARI (People’s Archive of Rural India) Fellow.



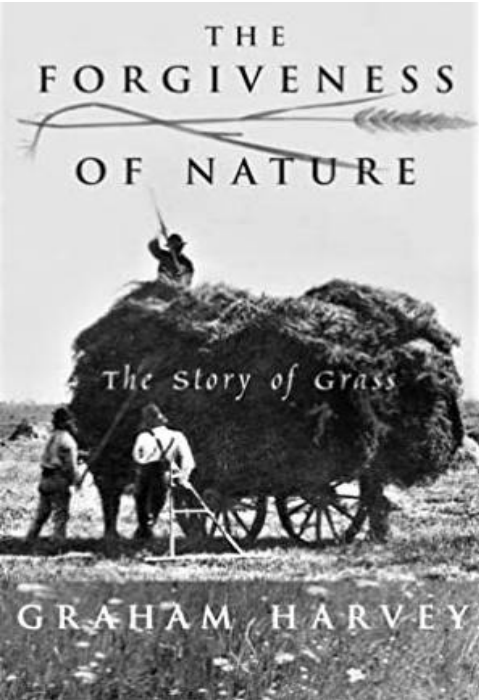
Source: YouTube

Books

Our Grassy Instincts

Graham Harvey develops a narrative in ‘The Forgiveness of Nature:The Story of Grass’tracing how grasslands have played their part in shaping modern Britain, as also modern Humans

by Puneet Bansal



A Chinese proverb proclaims “Wait, and grass will soon enough be milk.” While this may point to the many uses of this ubiquitous plant, it also asks us to have patience to see nature transform itself into newer wonders. Graham Harvey foregrounds grasses and grasslands to narrate a history of pastoralism and agriculture in Britain by covering both of these aspects.

Grasslands are a reminder of our nomadic roots, when we thrived on them before the advent of settled agriculture and ‘civilisation’. The associated freedom instinctively makes the city-dwellers bring the countryside into cities in the form of lawns and urban parks which, in Britain, Harvey says, are descendants of medieval-era ‘commons’. It is no coincidence that sports like cricket and football are played on turf, as both evolved into their modern avatars in medieval countryside, where life centred around the common pastures.

Neolithic nomadic pastoralists left their signs all over Britain with monumental structures of stone and earth. Private land ownership did not exist then. Nomadic pastoralists, unlike others, are bound to a landscape, rather than land.

Grasses are a ‘Forgiveness of Nature’ for their ability to take over wastelands. They thrive, and make other life possible, because of what lies under the surface— a network of roots and the dependent animals which make the weathered rock particles come alive as fertile soil. Poaceae is possibly the most successful plant family, due to their ‘domestication of human beings’, Harvey

says. Our food, directly as grains or indirectly as meat and milk, is highly dependent on grasses.

Britain’s grasslands supported a large population of sheep, facilitating a wool trade that generated enough wealth to lay a groundwork for capitalism and the British colonial project. In the 14th Century, there were six sheep for every human being in England, when both tenants and lords maintained flocks independently. The development of the famed English breeds of cattle and sheep on these pastures which grazed “five continents” during the late industrial era, played a prominent part in feeding the burgeoning urban population. These ‘improved’ breeds were known for either their milk or meat, like the Leicester Sheep developed by Robert Bakewell. Harvey calls them the ‘pinnacle of pastoral achievement’.

Shielings were the upland pastures in western Britain, where the women migrated to with their cattle during the summers— a transhumant practice and remnant of the older Neolithic tradition. It allowed the lowland meadows to regrow and prevented cattle from grazing into the cultivated fields. The concept of fencing off land had not yet developed. The enclosure movement later brought with it a decline in pastoral traditions, paving the way for a simultaneous rise in modern agriculture. Large farms being cultivated for profit, and large pastures with animals being reared for meat came into existence with both the activities happening exclusive of each other while ‘enclosing’ the common pasture land and depleting natural grasslands

Due to a growing population, Britain found itself in the classic ‘Malthusian trap’ of demand outstripping grain production. Thus the era of innovation in cultivated fields began, like irrigation (catch and floated meadows) and mixed farming, in which food crops were planted in rotation with a grass—the Red Clover, a legume that returned the soil to a fertile state. As did the dung of the animals who grazed on it, supplementing the farmer’s income with dairy products.

From the Victorian Age onwards, fertilisers were used to increase the yield, which in time became chemical in nature. This ‘industrial agriculture’ and ‘industrial livestock-keeping’ laid waste to Britain’s rich grasslands and impoverished the rural peasantry who migrated to the cities to labour in its factories. It is their progeny who slowly brought the meadows back into the city.

The subsequent impoverishment of soil fertility is well-documented. Although there was some resistance to the onslaught of chemicals by people like Albert Howard (of the ‘Indore method of composting’ fame), they largely failed. Given the subsidy-laden economic climate that tilts the scales in favour of modern practices, going back to pastoral methods has become difficult.

A product of its time, the book traces how grasslands have played a key role in maintaining the ecological balance of agro-pastoral ecosystems, without explicitly mentioning sustainability. Farming, an extractive process, is made sound by pastoral practices which replenish the soil. The book is an engaging and coherent introduction to the role of these seemingly ordinary plants. For Britain, as George Stapleton put it, grasslands and seas formed the cornerstone of the British Empire. For us in India with a colonial connection to Britain, it may be worthwhile to examine how the Empire treated and shaped our own grasslands and pastoralist traditions.♥

Movies

“Many have spoken for us.. now we speak for ourselves”

‘Olosho’ is a short film created by six members of the Maasai community from three distinct clans who were battling for over twenty years to protect their territory. The community’s land—sandwiched between the Serengeti, Maasai Mara and Ngorongoro—was under threat from foreign companies and the Tanzanian government, who were intent on evicting the Maasai and creating a luxury game hunting reserve.

These particular Maasai communities were resettled in their current home – Loliondo – from lands that constituted the Serengeti National Park in the 1950s. Several violent evictions have been carried out by the authorities, like the one in 2009 and another in 2015, sometime after this movie was shot. Although this particular project was cancelled in 2017 with allegations of corruption

against officials and the company, Maasai lands continue to be threatened after Loliondo was brought under Ngorongo Conservation Area, and the threat of eviction looms again.

Olosho is a powerful movie in which the community members, very concisely and eloquently, talk about their culture, their relationship to their land and animals, the problems they face like lack of access to clean water, and their ongoing struggle to protect their land, while demanding the Government recognize their rights, all in 15 minutes.

Their struggle will resonate with many in India, especially when the Maasai describe the attempts to violently evict them and how they are branded as migrants, and not citizens. As they speak for themselves, these proud pastoralists tell us how anything other than living where their ancestors are buried is unimaginable.♥

This movie is available on Youtube and can be viewed on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRvRRxoDggQ>

For more information on the struggles of the Maasai in Loliondo, visit <http://termitemoundview.blogspot.com/>

She Leads Hikers along Egypt’s Sinai Trail, Rejecting Bedouin Gender Norms

by Salma Islam

Abu Zenima, Egypt: As Umm Yasser reeled off her household chores, she stopped to say why she decided to lead hike trails through the mountains of Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula. “Normally, a woman’s role is to take care of the household, family and children,” Umm Yasser, a Bedouin member of the Hamada tribe, said. “Hiking is the first time I earned an income.”

Umm Yasser, whose name means “mother of Yasser” as per tradition, became the first woman to sign on as a guide on the Bedouin-led hiking initiative along the Sinai Trail. The initiative is run by eight tribes in the region, of which Hamadas are among the most impoverished, and smallest.

She broke the traditional gender norms of the Bedouin—who have a long history of escorting travellers and pilgrims through the Sinai—when she led her first group of hikers in April last year at 47. The two-day trip in April was restricted to female tourists, with a special agreement on that occasion for some male journalists to attend. The 16 female hikers and six male journalists were however not permitted to camp overnight in the wilderness and returned to the village before sunset. Still, this marked a milestone.

“The other tribes had objected before the trip because they thought it shameful for women to walk with tourists,” Umm Yasser said at their family home. “I don’t think it’s shameful, so I’m not concerned. I believe what I’m doing is right because work is a good thing.”

Autumn marks the start of another hiking season, generally running through spring, and head trail guides can make roughly the equivalent of \$40 per day. The trail which aims to help the tribes by attracting tourism money, covers more than 340 miles and can take six weeks to complete.

Umm Yasser, considered a trailblazer for Bedouins, actually started as a guide in 2015. Here she first hiked with British trail developer and Sinai Trail co-founder Ben Hoffer at the suggestion of her husband, Ibrahim Ebeid Saeed. Hoffer was scouting routes for the Sinai Trail with Saeed, each time staying at their home. Saeed suggested that Hoffer try Umm Yasser as a guide, who then started to walk with Hoffer, initially accompanied by her son and other small boys from the village. Here she earned her first income as a guide.

When the Sinai Trail extended to Hamada lands, Umm Yasser, Saeed and Hoffer discussed the possibility of Umm Yasser becoming a guide on the trail. Saeed, a head guide representing the Hamada on the Bedouin cooperative managing the Trail, discussed the idea with the other tribes while Umm Yasser found a few other women willing to get involved, including her sister.

“When people of other tribes objected, it didn’t bother me because while their lands may be more open or interconnected, ours is secluded and safe.” Saeed said. “The women can go off and won’t encounter men from other tribes.” He said his fellow Hamada tribesmen didn’t object, because in the Hamada tribe, women shepherd goats into the mountains on their own, so it’s similar to hiking.

Umm Yasser expects to lead solo trips, including mixed groups—possibly with outdoor overnight stays. She also expects to co-guide a mixed-group with her husband involving overnight camping. “I feel very proud,” says Umm Yasser of her work guiding hikers on the Sinai Trail.♥

This story was first published in an expanded form on <https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2019-10-25/shes-a-bedouin-trailblazer-in-egypts-sinai-peninsula>

Trivia: Did Goats discover the wonders of Coffee?

Coffee, grown worldwide, traces its heritage centuries back to the ancient coffee forests on the Ethiopian plateau. There, according to legend, a goat herder named Kaldi was the first to discover the potential of these beans.

As the story goes, Kaldi discovered coffee after he noticed his goats becoming 'so energetic they couldn't sleep at night after eating the berries from a certain tree. Kaldi reported his findings to the abbot of a local monastery who made a drink with the berries and found that it kept him alert through the long hours of evening prayer. Thus began humanity's affair with coffee.

The story is however considered apocryphal by some researchers, and first appeared in a written account only in the 17th century. But if the legend holds true, coffee lovers should be grateful to Kaldi's enterprising goats.

Pastoralists choose Wildlife over Real Estate Millions

A lease-payment programme pays Maasai pastoralists for protecting wildlife instead of selling their lands to real-estate developers.

by Leopold Obi

Nairobi, Kenya: Loise Matunge would have been enviably wealthy had she agreed to sell even an eighth of her expansive land which lies by one of the world's few national parks located within a city.

With Nairobi nippily advancing towards Athi River and Kajiado County, where Matunge lives, the 75-year-old often receives offers from developers eyeing her 170 acres of prime land to turn it into property worth millions of shillings.

But the Maasai pastoralist won't yield an inch. She and several fellow pastoralists from Kitengela, the town that borders the metropolis to the south, have opened up acres of their land to the community wildlife conservancy for paltry returns.

Their selfless act, offering their farms for wildlife conservation rather than giving in to soaring pressure from the eager real estate market, is best appreciated when standing at the nearby Embakasi Primary School. At the school which sits between Athi River town and Nairobi National Park, one's eye easily takes in the panoramic beauty of the adjacent wildlife haven.

Thirst for Education

The wonder of watching the zebras, ostriches, wildebeests and cattle grazing side by side doesn't last long as the mushrooming skyscrapers extending towards the park quickly soar into view. One wonders what would become of the park if this trend continues for even another year.

"I'm very happy seeing the wild animals grazing here alongside my cattle. This has been our

way of life for a long time and I would like to see it continue," says Matunge.

With many locals finding it increasingly difficult to resist the temptation to sell, partition or fence off their lands, a non-governmental conservation organization came up with a lease payment programme to encourage them to hold on to their land.

Under the programme, pastoralists who have offered their land to the conservancy are paid Sh 500 per acre every year to not fence off their farms and keep them open for wildlife to graze. They are paid three times a year, towards the beginning of every school term for their children's school fees. It's worth noting that many locals here sell their land to educate their children.

Earning Dividends

Tarayia Semei Karusei, who has leased 60 acres of his land to the conservancy, says he uses the proceeds from the lease programme to educate his three children in high school and college.

"We are given cheques a few days before the school opens, which is convenient because I channel the money directly to school fees," explained Karusei, who agrees that the money

"But the Maasai pastoralists won't yield an inch. She and several fellow pastoralists who hail from Kitengela ... have opened up acres of their land to the community wildlife conservancy for paltry returns."



Source: Nation Media Group

LEFT: Loise Matunge is one of the several pastoralists in Kitengela who have reserved acres of land for wildlife conservancy.

they get, though not a lot, has been beneficial to many locals.

With more than 2,000 acres of land around the park under the community conservancy for wildlife, the animals here can now use the park as a fallback grazing area.

The conservation efforts are paying off too. Nickon Parmisa, the area chief, observes that the project has significantly contributed to the rise in wildlife population, especially of lions. "There were about nine lions in the National Park in 2003, while now there are 42 lions and 27 cubs. We advise the community to not sell their land because they can still retain it and get school fees for their children," Parmisa pointed out.

The lease-payment programme, spearheaded by The Wildlife Foundation (TWF), was started in the year 2000 with funding from the World Bank. At the time, it had 55,000 acres of land under lease.

Darkest Time

The programme ran into trouble in 2014 when the World Bank funding ended, throwing the initiative into disarray, with a number of locals selling off their land. The period between 2014 and 2016 was the darkest for the park and its dispersal areas.

Rattled by the stalled conservation gains, The Wildlife Foundation went back to the drawing board, raised funds and re-established the project. Except this time, they did not have the same financial muscle to lease all the 55,000 acres, so they started small, with 1,500 acres.

Jacob Tukai, an administrator at TWF, recounts that when they reintroduced the programme, a lot had changed. Many locals had partitioned their land and sold some of it or fenced it off—interfering with important wildlife corridors.

While TWF has not found a big-enough donor yet, it recently turned a facility near the park into a tourist resort, and proceeds from the facility go towards the lease payments.

The initiative was recently dealt a heavy blow when a local landowner fenced off 200 acres of his property, which falls within the dispersal area. The future depends upon the choices that pastoralists make, who understand the environmental benefits of their lands well, depending upon how long they can resist the onslaught of development. For the moment, most have chosen wildlife.♥

An expanded version of this story was first published on <https://www.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/dn2/Pastoralists-choose-wildlife-over-millions-from-real-estate/957860-5424156-6naux2z/index.html>

SHEEPS' DAY OUT

Hundreds of sheep overrun a Turkish city during the Coronavirus lockdown

Samson, Turkey: Residents of Samson situated on the northern coast of Turkey were surprised in early May when they looked out of their windows to see a huge flock of sheep overrunning the streets below.

As people were staying indoors due to the country's coronavirus lockdown, a huge number of sheep were seen flocking into the city, with some even stopping on grassy patches to graze.

A resident in one of the city's apartment blocks filmed the sheep

from above, showing just how many of the animals had found their way onto Samson's streets, and took to social media to share the surprising experience.

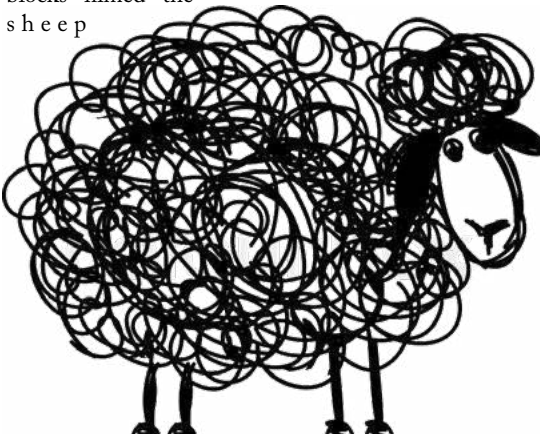
Another video of the same incident shows a man at the front of his herd, very nonchalantly leading them through the streets, with his sheepdogs keeping the sheep in line.

The bells on the sheep were heard ringing and echoing off the tall apartment blocks as the sheep 'baa'd' their way down the roads, following their owner.

Since roughly a third of the world's population is currently under some form of coronavirus lockdown in an effort to fight the global pandemic, nature has taken the opportunity to try and reclaim some lost ground.

Many other wild animals have also dared to explore deeper urban areas and been found in places which are usually impossible for them to venture into, like packed beaches, city roads and waterways.♥

This article was first published on <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8285313/Flock-Hundreds-SHEEP-overrun-Turkish-city-coronavirus-lockdown.html>



Camel Dung Paper Greeting Cards

What is a more ethical and eco-friendly way to send well wishes to your loved ones than by using our camel dung paper greeting cards? They come in attractive, tribal designs that suit all occasions.

For more information, log on to camelcharisma.wordpress.com

'Where are our Beautiful Camels?' Syria's Bedouin Wonder



Source: AFP

Nomadic breeders say their prize herds have been scattered by the ongoing civil war

by Mohammed Bassiki

From a rented room in Athens, Saleh Suwaidan recalls his family's former life as Bedouin camel breeders in Palmyra. By April each year, Mr Suwaidan, 32, would have been busy training the finest from his herd—improving their speed and honing their fitness for the big Palmyra race.

Thousands of tourists once travelled to the Syrian Desert for this event which was part of the Palmyra Camel Festival. At that time, 11 years ago, Mr Suwaidan's family were prominent members of Palmyra's Bedouin community. Together the family owned 300 prize camels, which were passed down from Mr Suwaidan's grandfather.

That changed the day ISIS stormed into Palmyra. But it was not just the ensuing violence that forced the family to flee—"We left because our camels were stolen and smuggled out of the country," Mr Suwaidan says.

Syria's camel industry is another victim of the nine-year conflict that has shattered Syria. For many nomadic breeders, protecting their camels became unaffordable as the fighting intensified and food sources dried up. They found themselves with no choice but to abandon their herds or sell them to smugglers and merchants.

Eyewitnesses say thousands of camels were sold on the black market and smuggled out of Syria. The final blow was delivered when the ISIS fighters came into the desert demanding that the Bedouins hand over their herds.

Omar Saeed, responsible for counting camel numbers at the Syrian government's desert department before 2011, estimates that up to 20,000 camels have been smuggled out of Syria. A study by the Arab Centre for the Study of Arid Zones (ACSAD) and the Syrian Ministry of Agriculture found that there were 50,202 camels in the country in 2010, with an annual growth rate of 12.7 per cent. Now that number is much lower.

The loss is felt most keenly by Syria's camel breeders, even those no longer living in the country, like the Suwaidans. After finishing his shift each day, Mr Suwaidan returns to his room in Athens and swaps his clothes for traditional Bedouin dress. He takes a seat on the sofa and drinks tea with his cousin, just as they did in the desert at home.

The picture on the wall shows a young Saleh in happier days, riding a camel in Palmyra. "For us, camels were everything. We left the desert and came to Europe. Those pictures are just a distant dream of memory now," he says with a sad smile. Taking his phone out, he flips through pictures of the camel race they used to run each year. "Where do you think our beautiful camels are now?" he asks. "Maybe in Iraq or Jordan, Turkey or in the courtyard of one of the Gulf princes."♥

This story was first published on <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/where-are-our-beautiful-camels-syria-s-bedouin-wonder-1.1007084>