

Gujjaran go Kaarj

Journeys with Pastoralists

A Living Lightly Exhibition & Utsav: A Report
24-27 March, 2022, Rishikesh, Uttarakhand



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Rajaji National Park, Rishikesh, Uttarakhand



Centre for
Pastoralism

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LIVING LIGHTLY









Journeys of Pastoralists



Centre for
Pastoralism



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Inauguration

Inauguration

The 'Gujjaran go Kaarj: Living Lightly Exhibition and Utsav' was inaugurated on March 24th, 2022 at the Jeevan Utsav Resort inside the Rajaji National Park, Rishikesh, Uttarakhand. The event was hosted by the Centre for Pastoralism in collaboration with the Van Gujjar Yuva Tribal Sangathan. Under a beautifully constructed bamboo shed, over 500 men, women and children from the Van Gujjar community along with dignitaries and visitors, gathered to celebrate the life and stories of Van Gujjar pastoralists.



Utsav being inaugurated with the customary ritual of churning milk in a Mathani next to the Seemal tree

Guests were welcomed ceremoniously with melodious Beyts sung by members of the community. Dignitaries included Avdhash Kaushal who was felicitated for his tireless work in the field of education and on the rights of the Van Gujjars (this was his last gathering with community members before his unfortunate demise). The MLA of Yamkeshvar, Renu Bisht also graced the occasion. Elders from the Van Gujjar community Abdul Kreem Kasana, Safi Loudha Gandhi, Apsana Chechi, Akal bibi, Haji Kasim Chad, Noor Alam Kasana and Mustafa Pardhan were felicitated for their contributions to the community.

Mohd. Ameer Hamza, the founder of the Van Gujjar Tribal Yuva Sangathan welcomed community members and visitors to the inaugural ceremony. The inauguration was kicked off by the planting of a Seemal tree (silk cotton tree, scientific name - *Bombax Ceiba*), which has been used in Gujjar deras for many generations as the tree that holds the Mathani (traditional milking vessel) firmly to the ground. Known to take root as soon as it is planted, the Seemal tree has travelled as far as Uttarkashi, along with the Gujjars as they have migrated. It is a source of medicine, fodder for animals, and food for humans and is symbolic of Van Gujjar life.



Avdhash Kaushal, who fought tirelessly for the rights of Van Gujjars throughout his life



Afsana and Akal Bibi who prepared the stage, watch the inaugural celebrations

Top images:
*Community members
sit under a thatched
hut as festivities begin*

Bottom image: *Gojri
Buffaloes wait for the
Pashu Mela to begin!*





Top image: *Aamna Gujjar leads a panel of young Gujjar women demanding inclusion in community decision making*

Bottom image: *Gujjar prowess on display in the traditional art of lifting the heavy wooden 'Mukhdar'*



पहली बार वन गुर्जरों पर केंद्रित कोई कार्यक्रम उत्तराखंड राज्य में हुआ है। हमारे समाज ने अपनी कहानियां सुनाई धरती और जंगल के साथ अपना संबंध बताया अपने मुद्दों और उम्मीदों को लेकर चर्चा की। पहली बार किसी कार्यक्रम के माध्यम से हम सब एक साथ आए।

This is the first time an event spotlights the Van Gujjars has been organised in Uttarakhand. Our community came together to talk about our stories, our relationship to this land, our issues and our aspirations. The event brought us all together, on one platform for the very first time.

AMEER HAMJA

Founder, Van Gujjar Tribal Yuva Sangathan



Right image: *Biodiversity exhibit by Zanskar Theophilus*

Left image: *Painted panels telling the genesis stories of the Maldhari communities of Kutch*



Exhibits

The Gujjaran go Kaarj Exhibit

In an open garden, visitors walked through a series of exhibits brought together by the Van Gujjar youth. The text panel at the entrance read, "This exhibition is a way for us to remind ourselves of our past and to share our stories with all of you." At centre stage were two life-size Gojri buffaloes sculpted with mud, welcoming guests to the Utsav. The lyrical verses of a bairn sung by the Gujjars accompanied the installation:

**उठ माई रंजना जागे सवेले मंजडिया शेंडे गईयां!
शर्मै दी मारी बोलेना सकदी बासे बेगाने पेईयां,
हर कोई ना हांके मंजडियां हूरं दिया परियां,
सेगें उनादे बल बल कुंडे दादे चवेदियां गलियां,
थाणे उनादे लेट्टू लंबे जोमं केले दियां फलियां,
दोदे उनादां शरबते गीठा जों मिश्री दियें डलियां।**

Wake up dear Mai, the day has risen!

Elders in the Dera call to the animal keeper,

Wake up! The buffalo awaits,
to the forest she yearns to go

Speak she cannot, with words,
her feelings,

No one, but you Mai,
can be the caring angel,

Look at her!

With horns so perfectly round, her cud,
she chews, in a rhythm,

Her udders are such a beauty, her milk
so sweet like sugar.





A pair of Gojri Buffaloes sculpted with hay and mud at the exhibition

On one end, a rustic pedestal sculpted with mud showcased large and small traditional brass and copper vessels such as the Bultoi, Thramba, Mathani, Patila and Lota used by the Van Gujjars to make and store buffalo milk, buttermilk, ghee and Kaladi cheese. Diagonally across was an exhibit depicting the qafila (caravan) with saddle bags, ropes made from horse hair and bells that adorn horses, the pack animal that accompanies Gujjar families on their annual migration. Across from this, an engaging installation conceptualised and brought together by Zanskar Theophilus along with community members Asif and Suleiman, showcased a range of plant species, grasses, wood and leaves used by the Van Gujjars for firewood, construction, fodder, medicine and



much more. Yet another section displayed embroidered blankets, bead jewellery, embroidered hand fans and beautifully embroidered caps worn by Gujjar men as a symbol of Van Gujjar pride. Next to this, a small table displayed jars of forest honey harvested by the Gujjars alongside a few bottles of freshly made ghee for sale.

A photo exhibition, 'Gujjarango Aino', curated by Zuha Junaidi, showcased photographs taken by Van Gujjar youth - of life in the forest, up on the hills, by the river, in the deras and on the fields of resettled colonies. The accompanying text read, 'Showcasing snippets of our lives and culture through visuals; we try to inform, educate, and delight as we take charge of our own narrative.'

Top image: *The copper 'Bultoi' with a narrow mouth is used to store milk*

Bottom image: *Exhibit showing the packing of their horse in preparation for a long summer migration*





Van Gujjar women checking out their craft exhibits and traditional embellished blankets



Top image: Visitors paying close attention to the biodiversity exhibit

Bottom image: Embellished hand fans made from peacock feathers

*A glimpse of the images
from the Gujjarango
Aino photo exhibition
by community members*



13-year-old Asma takes her cattle (Dangar) to graze in the forests. This takes up most of her mornings. “We learn young to tend to our cattle, they are extensions to our family,” says Asma



After his father returns home from a day's work of selling milk, little Yakub unloads the milk carrier from his father's bike



4-year-old Taiba is an energetic child, who only seemed to sit still when her mother, Reshma braided her hair. This is seldom a part of Taiba's daily morning routine just before she goes out prancing in the forest.

Top right image: *Be it the forest or the village; the cattle remain a significant part of the Van Gujjar community and the children grow up tending to them. The difference is that, the cattle usually aren't let out to graze but the fodder is brought by the family, grinded in the machine and fed to them*



Middle right image: *Tamkina, Intezaar and Afsa spend the evenings studying and finishing up their homework*



Bottom image: *Bashir's family is one of the few Van Gujjar families that still seasonally migrate with their livestock. They spend their winter months in the lower Shivalik regions of Uttarakhand as the temperatures there are relatively higher allowing for plenty of vegetation and fodder. As summer months arrive and the river beds start drying up, they migrate higher up to the Himalayan regions on foot with their entire families and herds of cattle.*



The 'Living Lightly- Journeys with Pastoralists' Exhibition

In one corner of the resort, exhibits from the 2016 Living Lightly Exhibition were brought out and put on display to engage and enthrall audiences in Uttarakhand.

Visitors viewed painted panels depicting the genesis stories of three pastoral communities - the Rabaris, Kurumas, and Gaddis. A series of photo essays by photographers such as Monisha Ahmed, Kalyan Verma, Christina Nobel and Micheal Benanav gave them a peek into the pastoral worlds of the Changpas, Dhangars, Gaddis and Van Gujjars respectively. On the other side, photographs taken by pastoral youth were on display, giving visitors an insider's perspective on the life of young pastoralists. Taking centre stage was an installation on the vast grasslands with which pastoralists share a symbiotic relationship. A painted copper thali symbolically depicted the myriad grass species that together make up a wholesome diet for the pastoral animals of Kachchh.

The 'Kudrat ji Kalai' section spotlighted crafting traditions from pasturelands across Kachchh. A series of beautifully embroidered textile panels depicted the story of a migrating camel and her herder. Visitors walked past a collage of embroidery created by 992 women pastoralists from different



Setting up the Living Lightly Kandhaar



Painted panels depicting the genesis stories of three pastoral communities from Kachchh



Top image: *Visitors looking at photos taken by the young Maldharis of Kachchh*



Two woven carpets made from the thick coarse wool of Rabari sheep highlighted the traditional relationship shared between the Rabaris and Vankar weavers of Kachchh.



communities, each contributing one patch of their unique embroidery style. Following this was a free-flowing printed ajrakh panel, showcasing yet another craft technique born in the land of pastoralists. Two woven carpets made from the thick coarse wool of Rabari sheep highlighted the traditional relationship shared between the Rabaris and Vankar weavers of Kachchh. Kachchhi bells tuned to a distinct pitch suspended from the roof and highlighted the significance of highly skilled bell makers in the life of pastoralists and their animals. A range of leather products traditionally made by artisans for pastoralists also represented the intergenerational relationships between these communities.

A series of four short films on the buffalo breeders of Banni, the Jat herders and their swimming 'Kharai' camels, the Kankrej cows and their herders, and the Debharia Rabaris who herd sheep and goats played for audiences of young and old Van Gujjars who watched the films with rapt attention.



The Pahada Da Lan Exhibit

Pahada Da Lan means the woollen garment of the hills. This exhibit was conceptualised and brought together by a group of Himachali women who call themselves 'Dhaarchidi,' meaning the Himalayan Sparrow in the pahadi language.

The key attraction of the exhibition was the Gardu - a woollen garment traditionally made at home by Gaddi pastoralists of Himachal, especially women. In the embroidered installation, the Gardu was not just a garment but a symbol of identity, emotions, and lived experiences. It also represented the eco-friendly lifestyle and sustainable economy of the Gaddis. Through this exhibit, the mountain life and landscape, as well as their continuous changes, were brought to light.



Pahada Da Lan means the woollen garment of the hills. This exhibit was conceptualised and brought together by a group of Himachali women who call themselves 'Dhaarchidi,' meaning the Himalayan Sparrow in the pahadi language.

Change Room Sound Art Installation

Change Room Archives, conceptualised by artist Baaraan Ijlal with sound architect Mir and archivist Salomi, is a growing compendium of voices of people who have gone on record, anonymously, at Change Room art installations across India and other countries. Change Room is a travelling sound art installation of these voices, with the artist as a witness. The installation was set up at the Utsav and members from the Van Gujjar community listened to the sound installation and contributed their stories to the anonymous archive.



Change room art installation



Salomi, Baaran Ijlal, and Mir who conceptualised the Installation



Performances

Performances

Each evening, musical Beyt performances took place against the backdrop of mountains and the setting sun. The Beyt, sung in Gojri - the language of the Gujjars - described their love for their buffaloes and their journeys of migration. They also included poetry about love and longing.

On the 24th, Alamgeer Loudha and Gama Chechi, two Van Gujjar musicians, performed the Beyt, followed by a performance from Yusuf Loudha Pathri. The Gojri Beyt was translated into Hindi by Mohd Meer Hamza. On the 26th, Noor Alam Ksana, along with Gama Chechi and Nwab Chechi, performed the Beyt, translated by Amanat Ali.

On the 25th, pastoral musicians from Kachchh - Jat Ataullah, Seikh Saidhu, Langa Sikandar, Vandha Koli Rava Bhai and Shah Khalid Alimamad Mutva - enthralled audiences with songs from Kachchh's pasturelands.

जंगल सड़े फ़सिफ़ जंगल दे।

जंगल साड़ी रोजी।

त्तक्के जांगलती फ़न जांगलानो। शीने साड़ी रोजी।

फ़न गुज्जरानो कड़ान कारण। फ़ बोतान बनाया।

रिश्तत खान ग्राईया कोल्लो। शीशम साल कटाया।

चढ़ गफ़ माफ़ पाते रुख़ादे। ठंडी शाफ़ जिनांदी ।

The forests are ours; we are the forest,

The forests are our lifeline.

Many have their eyes on them,
threatening to snatch them from us,

They make up stories to keep us out,
Cutting Sheesham and Sal for petty bribes.

Mother! the leaves have fallen off the
trees, that once gave us shade.





Aalamgir Lodha, Gama Chechi, Mustafa Lodha and Yousuf Lodha singing the traditional Beyt in the Gojri language



Pastoral Musicians from Kachhh



Gojri storytelling



Conversations

From Gujjars to becoming Van Gujjars: A session on History and oral narratives

Participants: Kasim Baniya, Shafi Loda (affectionately called Shafi Gandhi by the community), Haji Kasim Char, Mohmmad Sadiq (J&K), Amananatullah, Mohammad Mirza (J&K), Anita Sharma and Sushma Iyengar

Moderator: Ishaq

Multiple oral narratives were shared by elders of the community about different aspects of the Gujjars' lives – starting from where they came from, to how they live, their religion, their relationship with animals and the forest, the many gotras the community is organised into, and so on. Listening to these narratives, it became evident that the larger Gujjar community that is spread across Northern and Western India is united by their cultural history, despite their varying lifestyles.



Playing games

Many elders believed that the Gujjars were given as dowry to the King of Himachal Pradesh by the King of Jammu & Kashmir. Lore has it that when the Himachali King visited J&K for a wedding, he tasted the delicious milk being served in the Kingdom. So enamoured did the Himachali King become of the milk served by the Gujjars, that he requested the J&K King to send some Gujjars to Himachal with him. The generous King of J&K complied happily and sent ten Gujjars to Himachal as part of the dowry. These Gujjars were given permits or 'maths' for Sirmour in Himachal Pradesh. Thus began the spread of Gujjars from J&K to Himachal Pradesh, and eventually to Uttar Pradesh, (and what is now Uttarakhand). The Gujjars of this area were designated as 'Van Gujjars' by forest conservationists like Avdhash Kaushal, who was struck by their harmonious ways of living in the forest.

Ecology and relationships with the forest: The Biodiversity Pithara

Facilitator: Zanskar Theophilus Singh

Speakers: Ghulam Nabi Kasana, Chief Guest –
Dr Praveen Malik

This session was divided into two parts. One part was devoted to playing interactive games with Van Gujjar community members. Facilitated by Zanskar Theophilus, these games facilitated an exchange between the youth and older members of the community about their traditional knowledge. The games brought an element of fun and frolic to the extremely important conversation on conserving forests and traditional knowledge of Van Gujjars.

The second part involved sharing insights from community member Ghulam Nabi Kasana who spoke about the Van Gujjars' relationship with the forests. The Chief Guest in this part of the session was Mr Malik, the Commissioner of the Department of Animal Husbandry, Government of India. He

‘ हम तो बस किरायदार है, और शेर
मकान मालिक है जंगलो का।
हम तो खुद जानवरों की तरह ज़िन्दगी
जी रहे है।’

‘We think of ourselves as tenants, while
the Tiger is the owner of these forests.
Much like the animals, we live our lives
inside the forest’.

– Ghulam Nabi Kasana

shared with the audience the Department's interest in working with nomadic pastoralists and the various issues that they are facing in moving forward with the work. He paid close attention to the issues that community members shared they were facing in their lives and promised to initiate necessary actions to support community members.



Dr Praveen Malik (middle) addresses community members



**Address by Shri Malik,
Commissioner, Department
of Animal Husbandry,
Government of India**

“I am sympathetic to the issues of pastoral communities. Our biggest challenge is the lack of data on nomadic pastoralists, making it difficult to implement appropriate development programmes. There is a need to find a balance between the work of the Forest Department which is working to conserve forests and the Animal Husbandry Department which is working to promote pastoral livelihoods and production.

We are interested in working on value addition in products like milk, wool and meat to sustain the livelihoods of pastoral communities. There is a need to work with organisations like the Centre for Pastoralism and community representatives to prepare this roadmap. Data on Gojri buffaloes in the state should be collected and submitted to the department to initiate the process of Gojri breed registration. Likewise, on the issue of better delivery of vaccination services, data on pastoral migratory routes will help us coordinate with the state government to set up special vaccination camps at appropriate sites.”



The Painchi

Participants: Ghulam Nabi, Gani Dhinda, Ameer Hamza

Facilitator: Sandeep Virmani

Guest facilitator: Dr Gopal Rawat

This session replicated the local governance institution of the Van Gujjars called the 'Painchi'- a council of elders chosen to decide on issues of forest management by the community. This session involved a theatrical role-play in which Sandeep Virmani acted as a representative of the Forest Department and Gopal Rawat as the judge, while individuals from the Van Gujjar community (Ghulam Nabi, Gani Denda and Ameer Hamza) were presented as the ones who were facing trial. Sandeep posed several questions and allegations to community members, who in turn shared responses in front of an audience. Gopal Rawat as the judge shared his 'judgement' at the end of the hearing. The allegations that were levelled against

Forest officials refer to lopping in Hindi as 'पेड़ काटना' (cutting trees), whereas Van Gujjars call it 'शाखा तराशना, पत्त बढ़ना, गुटा बढ़ना' (trimming branches, growing leaves, growing branches). The differentiation in the use of language by the Forest Department and the Gujjars represent how these two groups regard this action.

community members were largely about the role they play in forest degradation through actions like excessive lopping, indiscriminate grazing by their buffaloes etc. However, community representatives defended themselves by saying that the Forest Department levels those allegations against them because it wants to remove Van Gujjars from the forests, to ultimately take control of the rich natural resources of the forests. The Gujjars also made several other nuanced arguments about their logic of lopping and grazing that were based on traditional knowledge.



Ghulam Nabi, Gani Dhinda and Ameer Hamza with Dr Mohan Rawat at the Painchi - a mock court session



Reclaiming access to forests: A sharing session on experiences with the FRA

Participants: Safi Ghandhi, Mohamad Meer Hamja, Yaqoof Choupra, Amant Ali

Resource People: Tarun Joshi, Shankar Gopalakrishnan, Ashok Choudhary, Akshay Jasrotia, Satya Prasanna, Munni Lal

Facilitator: Tushar Dash

Since the inception of the FRA in 2006, a lot of work has been done to ensure access to forests for dependent communities. However, the implementation of the FRA has been significantly poor in the context of pastoral communities. Despite this, many pastoral groups have been able to mobilise and claim grazing rights under the FRA. The consultation aimed at understanding the diverse experiences and challenges of pastoralists from Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir and Uttarakhand as a way to encourage discussion within the community on current issues and challenges in FRA claim-making processes and ways to effectively address them.

Top image: *Dr Javed Rahi, Editor and Cultural Officer, Jammu & Kashmir Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, being felicitated by members of the community*

Bottom image: *Panelists discussing the Forest Rights Act (2006) and its implications for pastoral communities*



Pastoral economies: Milk-based livelihoods

Facilitators: Manoj Mishra and Vasant Saberwal

Participants: Shabeer Chouhan, Safi Baniya, Saddik Baniya, Shrafat Kasana

The Van Gujjars face increasing difficulties in practising their transhumant way of life due to ecological and economic constraints as well as their strained relationship with the local government. They face several challenges - a shortage of fodder with increasing restrictions on their traditional grazing route; degradation of quality and number of livestock and its diversity; economic marginalisation; need to survive on a subsistence-based milk economy though endowed with a rich natural resource; above all a skewed local milk supply chain.

The session was designed to create an explicitly “community-centric” approach to addressing the challenges faced by the Van Gujjars in harnessing the economic potential of their valuable resource

The session was designed to create an explicitly “community-centric” approach to addressing the challenges faced by the Van Gujjars in harnessing the economic potential of their valuable resource - pastoral milk.

- pastoral milk. The session offered opportunities to learn from the perspectives of the private sector and civil society. As part of the discussion, there was also a chance to explore the potential for enhancing strategic considerations and prioritising investments in Van Gujjar livelihoods.



A Conversation with Van Gujjar Women

Participants: Bano bibi, Reshma khatun, Hajan Taj bibi, Shakina bibi, Kammo bibi, Jetun bibi, Sonam, Reshma, Jetun, Mariyam, Jubeda, Khatoon, Seani, Shkina, Jano, Akal bibi, Bano, Salma, Husan, Tabu
Facilitators: Dipta Bhog and Sushma Iyengar

Young and old Van Gujjar women gathered in their dera to share stories about their life and insights into the changes that Van Gujjar women have experienced over the years. Older women recalled migrations in their younger days which stopped after families began settling down in the Rajaji forest, while many younger women had never gone on migration. Older women also shared that they used to be much stronger and healthier than women today. The discussion veered towards women's role in the care of buffaloes, community weddings and celebrations, and the active role they played in protests against the Forest Department when their homes were demolished in 2017. The session began with Gujjar women singing Beyt songs and concluded with songs from rural Rajasthan sung by Sushma and Dipta.

The session began with Gujjar women singing Beyt songs and concluded with songs from rural Rajasthan sung by Sushma and Dipta.



Participants at the dera conclude the session with rural Rajasthani songs





Watching over her beloved Gojri buffaloes



Accompanying Events

Cheese Workshop

Led by Namrata Sundaresan, the cheese workshop spanned the first two days of the Utsav. In attendance were seven young Van Gujjars and Yaqouf Chopra who helped organise their participation. The main purpose of the workshop was to show the process of cheese-making to the pastoral community, for them to tap into the growing artisanal cheese market in India. With a large surplus of their Gojri buffalo milk, there is great potential for them to benefit from the value-added product.

In the first session, Namrata explained the process of coagulating milk, moulding the cheese and how to keep it overnight to firm up. She was also aided by Arpanbhai, a young Bharwad pastoralist from Sayla, Gujarat, who now makes cheeses in the Panchal Dairy Pvt. Ltd. set up in Sayla with CFP's support. The next day's session was more of a tasting session where Namrata explained the natural ways of



Namrata Sundaresan of Käse Cheese led the cheese workshop

preserving the cheese as well as how to pair it with local flora to give it a distinct taste. Afterwards, there was also a cheese-making session run by Sharafat, a member of the Van Gujjar community, who demonstrated how to make Kaladi cheese - a paneer-like product that is a traditional way of turning milk into a food product.

The cheese workshops were paired with cheese tasting sessions, with cheese produced in Panchal dairy. Different types of cheese like goat cheddar and camel cheeses livened up the event, especially the palates of attendees familiar with the peculiarities of cheese. However, through interactions with the Van Gujjar community members, we found that many did not prefer the flavour of artisanal cheese. They claimed that the taste was not sweet enough and had a pungent flavour. Mr Yaqouf Chopra shared that "Our community has enjoyed cheese in a certain form for many generations. We cannot be expected

The cheese workshops were paired with cheese tasting sessions, with cheese produced in Panchal dairy.

to suddenly embrace such an alien flavour in our everyday cuisine.” Namrata then explained that the cheese was not a replacement for their traditional products, but rather an additional milk product that could be stored easily and would fetch higher profits in the markets (particularly urban ones). Producing cheese for economic reasons seemed to be a more valid reason for the Gujjars to embrace cheese making, even if they seemed hesitant to produce the ‘alien’ cheese for household consumption.



Cheese from the Panchal Dairy, Gujarat, run by two young pastoralists



Van Gujjar community members demonstrating how they make Kaladi cheese

The main purpose of the workshop was to show the process of cheese-making to the pastoral community, for them to tap into the growing artisanal cheese market in India.

Pashu Mela

On March 27, the Van Gujjar community hosted and attended its first Pashu Mela or Animal Fair with the help of members of the Maldhari pastoral community and the Centre for Pastoralism. Held at the Meena Bazaar Dera, the Pashu Mela saw participation from the Van Gujjars of the nearby deras as well. There were three categories for the

Held at the Meena Bazaar Dera, the Pashu Mela saw participation from the Van Gujjars of the nearby deras as well.



First Van Gujjar pashu mela

competing buffaloes; the first judgement was based on the quantity of milk the buffaloes produced; the second was Healthiest Buffalo – Female; the third was Healthiest Buffalo – Male. On the morning of the day before the Pashu Mela, the buffaloes that were competing in the milk category were first emptied. The same evening, the first milking was done and weighed. The second milking was done on the morning of March 27 and the quantity was tallied from both the milking sessions to assess the winners. The buffalo that came first produced 15.7 litres of milk. The second competition was Healthiest Buffalo – Female; researchers Dr Sadana and Dr Sabyasachi Das and Van Gujjars Amaanat Shari, Irshad and Gulam Nabi judged the competition.



Buffaloes at the Pashu Mela in the Meena Bazaar Dera

The competition was followed by a session on the different breeds of buffaloes. This session had the attention of all the Van Gujjar men as they learned about the difference between the Jafrabadi, Banni and Nagpuri Buffaloes and the Gir Gai. The session also included a presentation on the Gojri Buffaloes and why they are special. The Breeders Association of Uttarakhand was formed and its members were announced. This saw a positive response from the Van Gujjars who raised their hands in agreement that the association is necessary for the advancement of their buffalo breed. The association was formed with the hope of getting the Gojri Buffalo breed recognised and registered in Uttarakhand. The association also aims to help the Van Gujjars fight for their rights, to preserve and protect their

tradition. The Pashu Mela ended in high spirits with a prize distribution for the winners. The prizes which consisted of a milk pail, a traditional Maldhari buffalo neck accessory, cash and a certificate, were handed out by the judges to the winners of each category. Certificates were also handed out to certain members of the Van Gujjar community who contributed to making the Pashu Mela a massive success.



Milking buffaloes for the competition



Information session on different buffalo breeds



A traditional hut with a thatched roof in a Van Gujjar dera



Gojri buffaloes



The Pashu Mela saw the initiation of the Van Gujjar Gojri Breeders Association



Shafi Kasaana being awarded the 1st prize for his buffalo, which produced the highest quantity of milk (15.7Ltr)

Traditional Games



Every day of the Utsav saw lively games at the end of each session. The games were often a break from the more serious consultation sessions and a chance for the members of the community to show off their skill and strength, share a hearty laugh, and cheer each other on



Confident boys and men of all ages were encircled by avid viewers as they took to the makeshift stage in the middle of the Utsav grounds. While mostly men participated in these show of endurance and agility, everyone participated equally in egging them on.





Media

Utsav in the Media



वन गुर्जर युवा संगठन एक नया संगठन है और इस उत्सव ने हमें हमारे कर्तव्यों के प्रति और ज्यादा सजग किया है हमें अपने समाज के लिए काम करने के लिए नया उत्साह प्रदान किया है।

The Van Gujjar Yuva Sangathan is a young organisation and the Utsav has given us clarity on our aims and objectives, it has given us new energy to work for our community.

AMAN CHECHI
Vice President,

Van Gujjar Tribal Yuva Sangathan





In March 2022, the Centre for Pastoralism in collaboration with the Van Gujjar Yuva Sangathan organised the ‘Gujjaran go Kaarj: A Living Lightly Utsav and Exhibition’ inside the Rajaji National Park in Rishikesh, Uttarakhand. The event brought together women and men, both young and old, from the Van Gujjar community, bureaucrats, academics and activists, entrepreneurs and artists to celebrate the lives and stories of the Van Gujjars and to engage with issues of pastoralists.