Beyond the meadows:
Changes in transhumant pastoralism in the Gori basin, Kumaon
by Emmanuel Theophilus

Small as it is, barely 120 km long and about 30 km at its widest, the Gori river basin in itself has a remarkable elevational gradient (from 7,400 meters to 590 meters asl). Therefore, it also has climate types that range from Polar to Subtropical, that you would otherwise have to look across continents to find. Such variability yields, among other things, a year-round habitat and vegetation types for forest and grassland ungulates that humans have learned to take advantage of to graze their domestic livestock on.

The settlement of humans in the Himalaya has invariably been associated with and made possible by land-use strategies mediated by livestock, whether it be nutrient-cycling for settled agriculture, as a means of transport and trade of produce in remote and difficult terrain, and for the conversion of vegetation not directly usable by humans into food. The scale, scope and value of transhumant pastoralism has been variable over time, being greatly determined by changes in access and opportunity within changing economic and legal environments. Access (or the lack thereof) to transboundary trade, using sheep and goats as pack animals, or even for the transport of contraband plant and animal parts off-trail, and therefore off the radar of regulation, for instance.

What would be a useful timescale to measure or describe changes in practices and fortunes of transhumant pastoralists? Since most economic occupations and access to wherewithal has in the past been largely determined by caste and ethnicity, perhaps speaking of change over generations may be useful. I attempt to describe, very briefly, rapid and radical changes over two generations, in an occupation that has been otherwise relatively stable for perhaps a thousand years before:

1. The Gori basin, being located at the trijunction of the borders with Tibet and Nepal provided pastoralists the opportunity to engage in carriage and trade across borders, of products that were particular to either the cis or the trans Himalaya. Salt from the dried lakes of Tibet, food-grain, wool, gold-dust, horn, pelts, musk and so on. Hostilities with China in 1962 led to the closure of borders and trans-Himalayan trade with Tibet.

2. Many transhumant pastoralists, who used to winter in the mid-altitude ranges in neighboring western Nepal, had to use sheep and goats as pack animals in an area with little or no road infrastructure. The Maoist uprising and ensuing civil war for over two decades led to intensive road-building in western Nepal for military movement, and reduced the need for, as well as access by pastoralists from the Gori basin.

3. The ethnic and caste preponderance of people involved in transhumant pastoralism has changed. Two generations ago, it was the Bhotia community that was almost exclusively engaged in keeping sheep and goats, and in the ancillary possibilities such as trade. Due to their dominance in trade, and their being at the apex of the economic and power structure, the Bhotia also owned most of the agricultural land, which was given out on share-cropping.

...Continued on page 2
The abolition of Zamdani in 1964 when the lake was changed to open grazing has allowed our peoples to increase their herds and the provision of more cash to buy necessary items such as clothing, education, and other necessities. They have also earned money from the sale of milk, meat, and wool. This has improved their overall standard of living and has enabled them to save money for the future. In addition, the herders have also benefited from the increased demand for quality products such as milk and cheese, which has led to higher prices and greater income for the herders. As a result, the livelihood of the pastoralists has improved significantly.

4. For the past four decades or so the Government has attempted to create a new type of livestock system by encouraging the use of crossbred animals. However, this has led to a decline in the number of indigenous breeds. The crossbreds are more productive and can provide a higher price for meat, but they are also less likely to adapt to local conditions. This has led to a decline in the number of indigenous breeds, which are often better suited to local conditions and provide a more sustainable source of meat.

5. While more people have started to practice managed grazing, the overall number of herds has continued to decline. This is due to the increased competition for grazing land and the pressure on water resources. The herders have also been forced to migrate to higher altitudes to find grazing land, which has led to a decline in the number of livestock. In addition, the crossbreds are more prone to diseases and require more veterinary care, which can be costly for the herders.

6. The most important change that has occurred is the increase in the use of technology. The herders have started to use GPS devices and other tools to monitor their livestock and to plan their activities. This has helped them to improve their efficiency and to increase their profits. However, this has also led to a decline in the number of herders who are able to afford these tools. The herders who can afford these tools are often those who have access to credit or who have a good economic situation. The herders who cannot afford these tools are often those who have a poor economic situation and who are unable to afford the costs of maintaining their livestock. As a result, the number of herders who are able to afford these tools is declining, which is leading to a decline in the number of livestock.

If these trajectories continue, so will the downward spiral. Pastoralism has been, and can remain a versatile and stable option for those still dependent on their landscapes for their livelihoods and their well-being.

Livestock for a small planet?

The book is divided into two distinct sections. The first section covers the history, culture, and traditional understandings of livestock. The second section covers the current global crisis of livestock production and the need for sustainable livestock systems.

Two Norway wind farms lose licences in landmark ruling over indigenous rights

Norway's supreme court stripped two wind farms of their operating licences on Monday in a case that could boost the legal rights of the country's indigenous Sami people.

Reindeer herders in Norway argue the sight and sound of wind turbines frightens animals grazing nearby and thus disrupts age-old traditions, and that land should not be expropriated for such projects. The supreme court centre on Wednesday struck down licences for the construction of turbines in the towns of Sorhaug and Roan in the Fosen region of central Norway, part of a 8.1 billion development that is Europe's largest onshore wind farm, had interfered with Sami herders' cultural rights under international conventions.

"A grand chamber of the supreme court unanimously found an interference with this right" in the Sami's ability to "exercise the occupation tradition," the court said in its ruling. It did not say what would happen next, saying it was for the state or the trade body representing the herders to decide the verdict and that the风暴 turbines should be dismantled.

"Our starting point is that these two wind farms are illegal and have to be torn down," Knut Helge Hurum of the Fend law firm told Reuters.

"We are awaiting contact from the owners of the wind farm to see what they have to say about this," he said.

The court's decision came as a surprise, Soren Vind said in a statement, adding it would avoid a response from the energy ministry before making further comment. The ministry said it was studying the verdict.

"We'll have to come back to how this case should be handled," an energy ministry spokesperson said.

The verdict could also affect other projects, Hurum of the Fend law firm said.

"It will have quite an impact on later developments inside the Sami reindeer area. It's certainly relevant for other wind farms, but also for mines and other big development projects, big roads for example," he said.

(8.1545 Norwegian crowns)

The book is first published in Reuters. Livestock for a small planet?

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"Livestock for a small Planet" extends a hand to readers familiar with problems linked to modern animal agriculture but may not be aware of alternatives—or that pastoral cultures have much to teach us. In all, Ilse Köhler-Rollefson has attempted to breed in Merino and Rambouillet to create a lower price for meat, and the castrated males now shear and discard wool on the alpine meadows. Shepherds report that there are now increased decline in the number of herds continuing to do so.

Shepherd of the Fend law firm told Reuters.

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Participatory Conservation in the Himalaya: An Interview with Yash Veer Bhatnagar (part 2)

By, Joshua Rapp Learn on Smithsonian Magazine

Livestock and wild herbivores do interact on pastures and other places such as watering points and salt licks. Some studies show that wild herbivores may avoid direct contact with livestock, especially since they are often accompanied with people and ferocious dogs.

Easier said than done, but this is necessary for their own survival as well as the native wildlife. While PSL provides a sound framework for participatory conservation, the alpine tracts need a strong policy for sustainable pastoralism.

Have there been any studies that try to document the carrying capacities of these lands and look at how many livestock and ungulates are grazing in these areas? Especially in comparison to the biomass available to support them?

The carrying capacity of an environment is the maximum population size of a species that can be sustained by that environment, given the food, space, habitat, water, and other available resources. I am not aware about good studies on carrying capacity from the Himalaya. I think carrying capacity is more like an intuitive concept and the numbers don’t really say much.

If you imagine a system where you have no green patches for two to three, and a sharp decline in the plant biomass again, then the carrying capacity of herbivores it can sustain is always fluctuating. So, carrying capacity cannot be one number for an area. Even if a seasonal figure is obtained, we need to consider the wild herbivores in this calculation. And remember these wild herbivores need to survive in these degenerated pastures through the remaining non-growing season, from autumn to next spring, when the livestock descend to the lush forests of the Himalayan foothills.

Can you please tell us about specific interactions between livestock and wild herbivores? For example, are there any instances of livestock passing on diseases to wild ungulates?

Livestock and wild herbivores do interact on pastures and other places such as watering points and salt licks. Some studies show that wild herbivores may avoid direct contact with livestock, especially since they are often accompanied with people and ferocious dogs. They can then be pushed to suboptimal habitats (interference competition). And as mentioned earlier, when there are a very large number of livestock decimating the summer abundance, the wild herbivores still need to sustain themselves through the severe and long non-growing season of winter (exploitative competition).

There can also be transmission of diseases between livestock and wild herbivores. One of these diseases that can spread rapidly is ‘The Oor Health’ concept, with the goal of achieving optimal health outcomes by recognizing the interconnectedness between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment is a timely international initiative that needs to be developed in the pastoral areas on priority.

Ritual Cemeteries—For Cows and Then Humans—Plot Pastoralist Expansion Across Africa

By, Joshua Rapp Learn on Smithsonian Magazine

In the Saharan regions of Africa around the sixth millennium B.C., 2,500 to 3,000 years before the great dynastic city of Ur rose along the Nile, a new way of life spread across the northeastern reaches of the world’s second-largest continent. While the Sahure Desert was still relatively wet and green, nomads began to cross into the region, possibly from the Middle East, seeking more stable and plentiful lives. The traditional subsistence method of hunting and gathering was slowing, giving way to a more secure practice, keeping a backup store of food living right next to you through animal domestication and herding. Around this time, some of the earliest ritual monuments to the gods were created by animals. These cemeteries were built for cows, not humans.

“Cattle already, at a very early date, have social and probably symbolic significance in these societies,” says Paul Lane, a professor at Cambridge University. It's not hard to see why early herders worshipped the docile and accompanying animals, which provided a reliable source of food and saved them from the hassle of tracking them down to their next feeding sources, and from being attacked by hostile neighbors and poorly understood climate patterns. In order to overcome these obstacles, ancient herders must have had the ability to move from place to place to provide breeding opportunities for their animals and replenish lost livestock, not to mention renewing family ties and forging new bonds through the propagation of our own species. At the same time, periodic gatherings allowed the nomads to share advice about good pastures and warnings of danger in unfamiliar lands.

“If you are a lone dude with a herd, as soon as you lose your herd, you are done,” says Elizabeth Sawchuk, a postdoctoral archaeological researcher at Stony Brook University. According to new archaeological research led by Sawchuk, early cattle cemeteries may have provided the assembly grounds that cemented networks of herders. These social gathering points allowed the pastoralists to spread through vast stretches of northern and eastern Africa over the millennia. Along with the booms of livestock, archaeologists have discovered colorful...Continued on page 4

Photo Credit: Hashmat Singh

Photo Credit: Khoikhoi of South Africa dismantling their huts, preparing to move to new pastures—aquatint by Samuel Daniell (1805).
Stone beads and other artifacts at the burial sites, suggesting the cemeteries played a critical role in early pastoralist life.

“We’re dealing with groups that have developed sophisticated social networks that they adapt and modify as they encounter new landscape challenges,” Lane says.

“It’s about the beginnings of herding,” Sawchuk adds. “It’s really the thing that kicks off the east African pastoralist tradition.”

The beginning of cattle herding in Africa is contentious, but some of the first evidence for pastoralist ritual gathering dates to around 7,500 years ago at a cattle burial site in modern-day Egypt called Nabet al-Playsa. This and other burials in the region, as well as standing stones, reveal that herders took the time to bury their animals, a significant ritual practice, even before they started burying each other.

But the good times quickly dried up for pastoralists of the Sahara. Desertification and conflicts with hunter-gatherer tribes sent the herders out from Egypt, some moving west as the desert dried, while others followed the lush Nile Valley to the south. At this point, humans start to show up in the huge cemetery mounds attributed to herders.

“We can see that these early pastoralists around the Nile are doing similar things to the people burying cattle were doing,” Sawchuk says, adding that these burials sometimes included family groupings. Recently, Sawchuk was involved in a prominent dig at a monumental, roughly 5,000-year-old cemetery called Lothagam North Pillar on the shores of Lake Turkana in Kenya. The site is one of the largest such cemeteries discovered in the region to date, with an estimated 580 burials spanning a period as long as 300 years. It also contains the telltale signs of ancient herders—people who made their way even further south from the Nile Valley. The dig revealed human remains along with vibrant stone beads, rodent teeth necklaces and other artifacts.

These grand cemeteries have long perplexed archaeologists because they contrast strongly with the burial practices of modern-day African pastoralists, which are influenced by religious conversion to Christianity or Islam. The massive group burials also differ from the customs of African herders encountered by colonial Europeans, who up until the early 20th century often left their dead out in the bush due to a belief that burying them would pollute the earth.

Sawchuk and a team of researchers are attempting to fit Lothagam North into the larger trend of monumental pastoralist cemeteries, spanning roughly 7,500 to 2,000 years ago, when the last pastoral burial sites, which had expanded to the Central Rift Valley by this point, mostly disappeared from the archaeological record of East Africa. The team published a study suggesting the grand cemeteries were among the first things that pastoralists created when they arrived in new territories. After all, one of the first places a culture needs to make a place to bury their dead. Lothagam North shows a high degree of multi-generational planning, with bodies interred in such a way that they rarely overlapped with others. But what’s particularly unique about the Lothagam North site is the lack of hierarchy between the buried dead.

This egalitarian approach to death separates these cemeteries from the monumental burials of agricultural societies. (Entire pyramids were built for certain pharaohs, while ancient Egyptian noblemen were laid to rest in unmarked pits.) “It’s really not about one person but about community,” Sawchuk says.

While the Sahara’s captivating blue attire is becoming a relic from the past, in Mauritania, the fashion tradition is still alive and looks like it’s here to stay.

**The Blue Men of Sahara**

By Juan Martinez

While the Sahara’s captivating blue attire is becoming a relic from the past, in Mauritania, the fashion tradition is still alive and looks like it’s here to stay.

The Saharan daraas and tagelmusts, as they could afford to make a brand new style of the form of the long, flowing, wide-sleeved tunic.

**A melting pot of the Sahara**

**Like other tunic-style clothing such as the kimono from Japan or the kaftan originating in ancient Mesopotamia, the daraa has found a place in fashion history.** The first versions of the clothing are thought to have come from the Haalpulaar, who resided along the Senegal River between modern-day Senegal and Mauritania.

**“It is comfortable, easy to clean and looks good”**

End hashtags

This article was first published in the Smithsonian Magazine. You can read the full version here: https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/ritual-cemeteries-owes-humans-pastoralist-expansion-across-africa-180970683/

The Blue Men of Sahara

By Juan Martinez

“Pastoral Times, Jan 1st, 2022”
techniques such as bale dyeing (an easy process in which the fabrics are put through a cold-water bath), a variety of blue shades became possible. And with the rise of the middle class in Mauritanian towns and cities, people have been increasingly choosing light blue daraas for their similarity to traditional white daraas and the social status they symbolise.

“A light blue daraa looks like the white one, but it only needs to be cleaned every three to four days,” said Jdeidou.

A world coloured in blue

The central market in Mauritania’s capital, Nouakchott, is truly a blue world. Many sellers offer only blue clothing, and at least one out of every four men wears some shade of a blue daraa. In Mauritania the blue colour extends beyond clothing, and can be found in blankets and stall umbrellas, but also in architectural elements such as doors, ceilings and fences.

Although the colour blue represents the sky and divinity in the Quran, local Mauritanians have a more practical reason to use it: it’s the perfect colour for protection from the sun.

Dress to impress

The very first daraas were made of silk, but were later considered to be haram, an Arabic term meaning ‘forbidden’ under Muslim law. Today, at shops in Nouakchott, it’s common to see daraas made from polyester, muslin and the wool of camels and goats, in addition to silk versions for non-Muslims. Many daraas in Mauritania are also embellished with gold and white embroidery, and some even have several internal and external pockets — details that would have been rare centuries ago but are useful in today’s modern, urban world.

There have been attempts to introduce more Western clothing in Mauritania, however, most have failed. According to Hademine Ahmedou, a local guide from the town of Zouerat, teachers there were once told to avoid wearing a daraa while working and to start adopting the smart dress culture from Europe or North America. Nevertheless, many Mauritians couldn’t bear to leave their traditional daraa and its cultural importance behind.

Proud of their nomad heritage

While elements of the traditional attire have been lost in most cities across the Sahara, men proudly wear their blue daraas in Nouakchott. They have become such an integral part of Mauritanian culture that even businessmen dressed in smart suits wear a custom daraa instead of a blazer.

“It is comfortable, easy to clean and looks good”, said Jdeidou (pictured) with a smile.

A trend for generations to come

While most Saharan countries now look to the West for fashion trends, in Mauritania, change seems a long way off. The younger generations are also proud of their traditions and regularly wear daraas.

There are also hints of the clothing appearing in the modern fashion world. Recently, versions of Saharan tagelmusts have inspired trendy scarves in Europe. And this year, luxury Italian fashion house Valentino drew inspiration from the traditional Saharan daraa in designing its spring/summer 2021 collection.

As more and more cultural traditions are becoming endangered in today’s fast-paced, ever-changing world, the blue daraa and tagelmusts — and the long-held traditions they represent — still continue to shine from the Sahara to the rest of the world.

An extended version of this article was first published on BBC Travel. You can find the full version here: https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20210927-the-blue-men-of-the-sahara

Bowls of Chai in Kachchh:

by Shouryamoy Das

Livestock outnumber humans in Kachchh and the region is known to produce a humongous amount of milk. There is great diversity of produce too. There is milk from cows, buffaloes, goats, camels, sheep, and donkeys! Perhaps unsurprisingly, Kachchhis love their chai, and chai is a constant in the burning heat of the summers as much as the biting cold of the winters!

The Maldharis of Kachchh, while out grazing their animals, carry a matchbox, tea leaves, sugar and a small saucepan without fail! A thirst for chai strikes often and they always manage to milk one of the nursing mothers in the flock, gather twigs, and light a fire to make chai. There are no chats without chai, and it is always offered to anyone who visits them — be it a friend or a bunch of strangers— at their homes or on the grazing lands. In Kachchh, it is an ice breaker like no other! After all, conversations are much better over cups of piping hot chai!

Shouryamoy Das is an engineer and certified financial risk manager by training. He has been working with development organisations on pastoralism and related livelihoods for the last five years.
Pastoralists are found in all the inhabited continents and in a huge range of climates and landscapes, from the Arctic tundra of northern Russia to the hot deserts of Africa, from the mountains of Europe to the rice paddies of southeast Asia. Raising livestock is the only possible way to produce food on most of this land. But pastoralism is under-appreciated and often does not appear in official statistics. We do not even know how many pastoralists there are around the world. And statistics are anyway dry, and the pastoralists are anonymous. Figures on milk production or livestock populations say nothing about the human aspect – how pastoralists care of their animals, and the challenges they face.

The pastoral map being developed by the League for Pastoral Peoples and Endogenous Livestock Development aims to show the range and diversity of pastoralists around the globe. It currently details 495 pastoralist groups, mainly in Asia, Africa and Europe. Each group is represented by a map pin showing the rough area in which it lives. Click on the pin, and up pops a sidebar with a short description of the group and its pastoral system, along with a list of the species it keeps, the areas where it raises livestock, and for many groups, a photo. You can zoom into particular areas on the map, and you can select layers to show different species. Links give access to more information about each group.

The map still has some big blank spaces, especially in Pakistan, southwest Asia, the Americas and Australia. And in India too. The map currently shows 43 pastoral groups in India – mainly from the west and north of the country, plus some pig pastoralists in the east. But India has a lot more pastoralist groups than this. Many groups in the east and south are still not represented. Even though it is incomplete, the map still offers some revealing insights. One is how widespread and diverse pastoralism is. Pastoralism includes reindeer herding in the Arctic tundra, horse-raising in the steppes of central Asia, crofting in the highlands and islands of Scotland, seasonal transhumance in the mountains of Europe, and nomadic herding in the savannahs of east Africa. But despite this diversity, the map also shows many commonalities among pastoralist groups. Peoples throughout the world have found common solutions to similar problems. In arid areas, they move their herds to follow erratic rains, but know they can use certain reliable water points and emergency grazing areas in times of need. In mountain areas, they herd their animals up to higher elevations in the spring and down again to the lowlands in the autumn. In areas with seasonal rains, they practise horizontal transhumance, sometimes herding their stock hundreds of kilometres along fixed routes. The map also reveals the pastoralists’ reliance on the natural environment and the knowledge they have accumulated about it, their skill and care in taking care of their animals, and the challenges they face in dealing with a changing and sometimes hostile world. Pastoralist groups all over the world face similar issues in terms of access to land and water, control over and conservation of natural resources, marketing of products and relationships with farming and urban communities.

Pastoralists are organized in different ways in different parts of the world. In India, caste is important in determining whether someone keeps livestock. In Africa, ethnicity is central. In such places, the way of life is passed down from one generation to the next. But this is true in Europe too, European herders can also learn the skills in college, and the profession is open to outsiders who wish to take up herding for a living. In Europe too, pastoralists are a tiny minority of the population, in contrast to countries like Mongolia and Mauritania, where they form the majority.

You can find the map here: www.pastoralpeoples.org/pastoralist-map/

The League for Pastoral Peoples would be delighted to receive suggestions from readers of the Pastoral Times on which other groups to include, as well as corrections for the information already in the map.

How to use the map:

Menu at top left
Pan: Press and hold the mouse button and move the mouse
Zoom: Use the scroll wheel on your mouse, or click on the + or – button at the top left of the screen.
Layers: Click on the layer icon (looks like a pile of chapattis) on the left side. Click on the eye icons to reveal or hide each layer.

Each livestock species is on a separate layer. If you want to see only the groups that keep goats, hide all the other layers.

Species distribution: The coloured shading shows the approximate world distribution of each species. Click on the shaded area to see details about that species in the sidebar. Pastoralist groups: Click on a map pin to see a sidebar with details of that group.

Sidebar
At the top of the sidebar, click See all to see a list of all the items on the map.
Zoom to item: Click on the magnifying glass next to the item to bring this to the centre of the map.
View item: Click on the item in the list to see the sidebar for that item.
About: Click About at the top of the sidebar to see the introductory sidebar (if necessary click See all first). You can also turn particular layers on and off here.

Credits: Scroll down to the bottom of the sidebar and click on Credits. Then scroll down again to view the credits and usage rights.

Corrections and additions: Please contact mapping@pastoralpeoples.org

Paul Mundy is a British/German communication specialist who has worked on livestock and development issues for over 40 years. He has written and edited numerous publications on livestock in the developing world. He is co-author of a book on sheep in Shetland, a group of islands off the north of Scotland.
In 2018, I embarked on a journey to better understand how the nomadic pastoralists called ‘Dhangars’ and their Dangi (cow) herders for many years and they use it for 4-5 months a year to provide shelter to their cattle during the monsoon, after which they return home.

The basic needs of the nomadic pastoralists are healthy pasture, water, and fuel. Settlements are chosen to optimise these needs. Since the pastoralists practice mobile lifestyles, the two vital factors they consider are the capacity of the carrier animal to transport belongings from one place to another and their sustenance in the different local conditions every time.

The Dhangars’ transport their building materials by horseback, including bamboo/cane sticks and metal rods for the skeleton of the shelter, tarpaulins shringed for roofing, and ropes to tie everything up. Thus, they are limited by the carrying capacity of the animals. As the carrier animal is taken to transport belongings from one place to another, they also travel on busy roads, thus the size of the luggage is an important consideration.

The Dangi keepers, on the other hand, do not carry building materials. The rest of their amenities such as flour, grains and pulses, necessary utensils, and clothes are transported manually and by motorcycles. However, they are limited by the large size of their cattle herd, and hence, cannot cover large distances at a time.

As both the tribes herd different animals, their requirements for pasture also vary. Dhangars, who keep small ruminants, can choose a campsite surrounded by limited pasture as compared to the Dangi keepers who keep cows. Therefore, the Dangi must choose to settle in areas with access to large parcels of grazing land.

In both cases, these pastoral communities are adept at dealing with multiple unknowns - such as the health of the cattle, the difficulty of accessing resources or finding a market for their produce. Their nomadic lifestyle is a fundamental strategy that enables them to optimise the use of natural resources and ensure the safety of their tribes and cattle. It lets them move to easily accessible resources, allowing the previous campsites to regenerate before their next visit, and allowing local farmers and landowners to guarantee grazing lands for a small fee in exchange for manure fertilisation.

As mentioned earlier, the shelters of the two tribes are vastly different. For Dhangars, there is more flexibility of the space so that goats can be accommodated in smaller shelters and the sheep in open grounds. The architecture of their house reflects the temporal nature of their settlement. Their entire settlement pattern and loading/unloading of their houses revolves around their most prized possession, their cattle. The materials are either easily available on site or produced by their cattle and carried along with them.

The Dangi keepers are constrained by the existing structures as their primary objective is to provide shelter for their large herds during the monsoon season. They rely on pre-existing cavities in which they build partition walls using stones, bamboo straws, and cow dung, which they prefer over the construction of new structures. Over generations, they have used the same cavities where the partition walls have already been built, leaving them only with the tasks of maintenance and renovation.

Healers of Herds
by Priyadarsini Mani

On a recent visit to the Bargur hills in Tamil Nadu, I met Jogappa, a semi-nomadic Lingayat pastoralist who had a herd of 60 animals. A resident of Usimalai, Jogappa and his family, along with his son Jakappa, were accorded the status of local farmers by the Karnataka government for 8 months of the year in search of greener pastures for their animals. The Karnataka government has accorded this semi-nomadic pastoral community living around the Bargur forests of the Western Ghats. They breed the unique Bargur cattle which was registered as a distinct breed by the National Bureau of Animal Genetic Resource (NBAGR) in 2018.

A few weeks ago, one of Jogappa’s cows was heard lowing in a very deep tone. Jogappa’s wife, Bommi, noticed that the cow looked tired and weak. Upon examination, they found that the cow had contracted a throat infection. The next morning Jogappa went into the forest and returned with a Tuber (ingelkappe gensu). This was boiled in water, mashed, and kept aside. A mixture of butternut, turmeric and cardamom powder was prepared, and the boiled tuber was added into the mixture. The cow was fed the concoction, and, in a few days, she was bright and well.

Many studies have documented the specialised and technical knowledge of herding communities on livestock management. These studies have recorded the rich animal husbandry and ethno-veterinary knowledge possessed by certain members in the community. For instance, the pastoralists of Banni in Gujarat provide natural nutritional supplements such as mustard oil and jaggery, and eggs and ghee to calves and breeding bulls respectively. In Rajasthan, the Raikas routinely deworm their sheep and goat herds by feeding them dried and powdered pumpkin seeds. In Northeast Africa, pastoralists have highly evolved systems to manage and maintain healthy herds. Management practices include the provision of additional salt in the dry months, not mixing herds with unfamiliar ones, and housing animals well to enhance livestock health and productivity.

In Jogappaya’s community, certain elders possess this specialised knowledge too. Specific forest leaves, bark and roots are used in a variety of preparations to treat illnesses in cattle such as sores on hooves, lumps on the body, fractures, and snake bites. In most cases, western medicine is seldom used to treat illnesses as it requires herders to incur a financial cost and, in many cases, veterinary services are inaccessible in remote locations. During a discussion, members of the community reported that their animals fall sick more often nowadays. The herders reported that the health of their herd depends on the availability of diverse and good quality fodder found inside the forest. However, their inability to access these grazing lands due to restrictions by forest officials has had an impact on the health of their herd. Erastic rainfall and the widespread use of pesticides and weedicides were also cited as causes for the depletion of certain nutritious grass species.

There is a growing recognition of the weight of knowledge about livestock possessed by pastoral communities around the world. However, Jogappa claims, “We don’t know even half of what our ancestors knew.”

There is an urgent need to document and safeguard this cultural heritage. These systems of knowledge have supported pastoral livelihoods over centuries and have an important role to play in modern-day pastoralism.

References
1. https://banni.in/people-of-banni/traditional-knowledge/

“Dhangara” cows are heard lowing in a very deep tone. Jogappa’s wife, Bommi, noticed that the cow looked tired and weak. Upon examination, they found that the cow had contracted a throat infection. The next morning Jogappa went into the forest and returned with a Tuber (ingelkappe gensu). This was boiled in water, mashed, and kept aside. A mixture of butternut, turmeric and cardamom powder was prepared, and the boiled tuber was added into the mixture. The cow was fed the concoction, and, in a few days, she was bright and well.

Priyadarsini Mani has worked for over 13 years in the development sector with marginalised communities in the areas of livelihoods, women’s empowerment and child rights. She has a Masters degree in Development Studies from London School of Economics and Political Studies (LSE), UK and an undergraduate degree in Sociology from Delhi University.
While the nation locked itself in during the 2021 Covid lockdown, the nomadic Van Gujjars struggled to access the forests they have called their summer home for generations. The forest administration of the Govind Pashu Vihar National Park in Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand denied their access to traditional grassland this summer, their access to 600 hectares of forest land. They were restricted from entering the Van Gujjars were treated as trespassers and whims. They were often prohibited from entering the forest altogether. Fighting long legal battles to gain access, the Gujjars could finally take a breath of relief on May 25, 2021. The High Court of Uttarakhand ordered the deputy director of the park to allow Covid-negative families entry into the meadows and also ordered that their rights to access their summer homes be assured.

In September, following the High Court's order and ensuing pressure on the Forest Department, Van Gujar families from Long Ykullu Fullu Thatch village submitted Community Forest Rights (CFR) claims to use and access forest resources in the Sankari Range of the national park. The process of claim filing was led by the Van Gujar Tribal Yova Sangathan (VGTYS), a community-based organisation, and Arjun Kasana, a member of the Think Act Rise Foundation, who acted as the petitioner who lodged a PIL in the high court advocating for the rights of the pastoral herders. Yakhub Chopra, a Gujar herder, led the process as a part of VGTYS. Yakhub was successful in getting the other village residents to agree to the CFR claim being filed by the Van Gujjars. This was done in the face of the Forest department's efforts to create divides between the pastoral and non-pastoral locals. The process to hand over the rights was implemented by the Uttarakhand Social Welfare Department who acted as the nodal agency. The application process included mapping of migratory routes and procuring evidence that the Van Gujjars had depended on forest resources for at least three generations. Their evidence consisted of Working Plans & gazetteers from as far back as the 1920s. With ample discussions and evidence, they filed a CFR claim.

Three months after the filing of claims, on October 22nd, the pastoralists received entitlements from the District Collector. This gives the community rights over forest use and access to 600 hectares of forest land. They were granted several rights under Section 3 of the FRA:

1. Section 3 (1) (j): Which gives them the rights of ownership, access to collect, use, and dispose of minor forest produce which has been traditionally collected within or outside village boundaries.
2. Section 3 (1) (k): Which gives community rights of uses or entitlements such as fish and other products of water bodies, grazing (both settled or transhumant) and traditional seasonal resource access of nomadic or pastoral communities.
3. Section 3 (1) (a): Which gives rights to protect, regenerate, conserve, manage any community forest resource which they have been traditionally protecting and conserving for sustainable use.
4. Section 3 (1) (b): Which includes the community right to intellectual property and traditional knowledge related to biodiversity and cultural diversity.

This development is worth celebrating especially because this is the first time the state machinery has recognised Van Gujjars as OTFD (Other Traditional Forest Dwellers). For years the state departments have refused to accept Van Gujjars as OTFD, maintaining that they had come from Jammu. However, it is also only a beginning for the Van Gujjars, a community that has received the short end of the state’s inconsiderate policies for decades. The pastoral community and VGTYS, galvanised by this entitlement, is working to advocate for CFR claims in other parts of the state. In particular, FRA claims for the Haridwar district are already in the process of being filed, and the community hopes to have their rights recorded and recognised under FRA soon.

The land title received by the 43 families of Long Ykullu Fullu Thatch village sets the precedent for a hopeful future where pastoral communities both in Uttarakhand and the rest of India can have undisturbed access to their traditional grazing lands and forest resources.

**Crossword Puzzle:**

Test your knowledge of pastoral communities around the world!

Hint: You can use the online interactive map featured on the previous page to find the answers.

Across

1. A large Arab tribe of the northern Sahara in Algeria. They keep dromedary camels and goats
6. Traditional nomadic reindeer herders and hunters in the Russian Far East
7. The first pastoralists in southern Africa who keep goats, cattle and sheep
9. Pastoralists with large zebu cattle herds in western and northwestern Madagascar
10. An indigenous Swedish population with a tradition of thousands of years of reindeer herding

Down

2. Nomadic herders who inhabit the Jiddat al Harasis, a stony desert in central Oman. They keep goats, sheep and dromedary camels
3. Herders from South America who keep llama, sheep, and vicuna. They can be found in Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, Chile, and Colombia
4. A semi-nomadic yak-herding community in the northeast Indian Himalayas
5. Shepherds of the Romanian Carpathians
8. A tribe of camel breeders who keep the Kobi camel breed in Pakistan

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