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PHOTO ESSAY

How Mapping Indigenous Knowledge is Helping Nomadic Communities to Fight Climate Change—and Extinction

By Eva Diallo

When Hindou Oumarou Ibrahim was growing up in the 1980s, along the shores of Lake Chad, she was dazzled by her elder's knowledge of the land. "Reading the clouds, listening to the wind, they could tell you that in several hours it's going to rain," Ibrahim recalls.

Ibrahim is Mbororo, part of a nomadic pastoralist people who have grazed the land around Lake Chad for millennia. "We live in harmony with nature because we depend on it for food, fresh water, materials," Ibrahim says. An award-winning climate change and indigenous rights advocate, and environmental activist, Ibrahim has spent her career advancing the rights of indigenous communities, particularly those around Lake Chad.

As with indigenous groups in the Arctic and the South Pacific, the pastoral Mbororo communities around Lake Chad have found themselves on the front lines of climate change. "In Chad, right now, the climate is already changing. I was home in the community during the first days of April, where we faced a heatwave of 130°F (54.4°C)," Ibrahim says. "In the Sahel, the average temperature has increased by more

than 1.5°C over the last century, meaning we have already missed the Paris Agreement target. Extreme weather events, with drought, floods, and desertification, are becoming the new reality."

The shifting climate - drier, hotter, and more extreme - has devastated the livelihoods of the nomadic pastoral communities, and particularly the cattle herds that are the foundation of their existence. "For example, 20 years ago, we used to milk our cattle twice a day, even during the dry season. Today, because of climate change and the lack of water, we can milk them only once every two days. That means that milk production, which is our main economic activity, has been divided by four within a couple of generations," Ibrahim says.

As the local climate has changed and resources come under strain, the situation has put pressure on local communities - particularly between pastoralists, farmers, and fishermen. In some cases, the pressure has forced people to migrate to urban areas, where they end up living in informal settlements. "That's why I have decided to fight. Because if we don't

take action against climate change, my people simply face extinction."

Ibrahim was determined to help. In 2005, Ibrahim founded the Association Des Femmes Peules & Peuples Autochtones du Tchad (The Association for Indigenous Women and Peoples of Chad, or AFPAT), which works with indigenous communities to help advance women's rights, and the rights of indigenous people. In her activism work with local women, she saw resources dwindling and was reminded of her elders and their knowledge of the land. "In Chad, official meteorological forecasts don't always reach rural areas. So who do the farmers consult about when to plant their crops?"

"Who provides the forecast of whether or not it's going to rain tomorrow? An indigenous grandmother," she says. "In my community, a grandmother is far more useful than a smartphone."

Inspired by this, AFPAT has pioneered the use of what Ibrahim calls "participatory mapping." "We develop maps with satellite images of ...Continued on page 2

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an area, informed by indigenous traditional knowledge from our elders. This includes identifying where there is clean water, trees for food, and wood - even the land is considered sacred, and holds spiritual meaning,” Ibrahim says. “It helps us to share the resources, to define rules to sustainably manage our environment, to prevent and solve conflict.”

Ibrahim first developed the idea in Baïbokoum, in southwest Chad, assembling 500 indigenous leaders to help map the natural resources in the area. In each case, AFPAT works with groups of local people - farmers, pastoralists, fishermen, and villagers - to begin a conversation about local resources, from water to forests, to transhumance (or herding) corridors, which are vital for pastoralists and their livestock. “We then put all the elements on a large map, each group adding, completing or correcting what the previous has

done,” Ibrahim explains. The mapping is done in the local native language, and all groups of society are encouraged to take part.

“What is amazing is that you see the added value of all groups. Women have unique knowledge that men don’t, for instance on specific crops they use for cooking that are resilient to drought in case of a food crisis, or for traditional medicine. It’s also great to learn and map from the memories of our grandfathers that some fresh water sources still exist, and can provide water even in the middle of the dry season,” Ibrahim says. The maps are then digitized so that they can be shared. The data has been adopted by the local government; in others, the process is prompting local solutions.

Maps, after all, can show the way - to something better. “People still believe that indigenous peoples represent the past,” Ibrahim says. “But let me tell you that we are the future.” 🏡👤

Women of Kalama are changing their community one bead at a time

By Peter Muiruri

The open plains of Northern Kenya are among the most stunning places in Africa. Scattered acacias jut out of the Earth, breaking free of the parched red Earth that has seen little rain for months. Rocky peaks stand out of the expanse, creating the perfect stage for hiking enthusiasts. With its fame as a wildlife haven, Northern Kenya looks like a tiny paradise.

But behind this vaunted beauty, Northern Kenya is haunted by conflict, mainly driven by a lack of sufficient resources that have marred this serene environment. Poor rains have turned the region into a dry landscape where little in the way of food crops grow.



PC: David Gichuru/Standard

On the other end of the courtyard, Nabiki Lesuper’s shop stands out like a desert rose in a parched land. Two elderly women find the shade of the veranda irresistible.

Lesuper has had no formal education but is a beacon of hope to her community. One of the star beaders of the group, her shop is constructed out of the proceeds of a thriving beading industry that incorporates close to a dozen other women here. On this day, Lesuper’s compound is a beehive of activities. She began beading in a nearby manyatta when hope was all but gone.

The women noticed her determination and followed suit. Today, these women, once at their wit’s end, have turned their small-scale beading industry into a thriving enterprise. With the support of the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT), they are turning their traditional skills into a viable business model that has seen children go back to school and community restock after vicious drought cycles decimate their herds. “The drought has killed our livestock, our principal means of living,” she says. “Beading has come in to fill the void. It was a hobby. It is now serious business. We can pay for our children’s education, and have some money for food and water.”

Lesuper and her group, along with 1,300 women, are transforming their communities through beadwork while earning decent earnings through the local and export market. In the greater region

under NRT control, beading artisans earned Sh12 million (79 lakhs INR) as labour payment in 2021, a 28 % increase compared to Sh9.3 million (61 lakhs INR) they earned in 2020.

Although beading is a painstaking task that involves meticulous stitching and passing a thread through the tiny beads with a needle, the women of Kalama have found a way that helps them go through the rigours of this chore with ease - they sing. In Samburu, there is no shortage of good music. In fact, singing is part of any pastoralist community’s life. They sing during birth rites, initiation and marriage ceremonies, and when performing any group task.

In Lderkesi, they sang, including one elderly lady sitting towards the back of the pack. She was not beading, but her voice carried well over those of her fellow women. Perhaps she no longer beads because her eyesight is not good enough to put the thread in the bead hole. Or her hands are a bit shaky to pass the thread through the bead holes. But by singing, she contributes to the task by giving moral support to the rest of the team. It is a battle against poverty. In a battle, those who go to the battlefield and those who watch over the baggage are valued members of the fight.

As we head to our pit stop in Isiolo later in the afternoon, we could not help but admire how these resilient women of Kalama are changing the fortunes of their community, one bead at a time. 🏡👤

Film Review

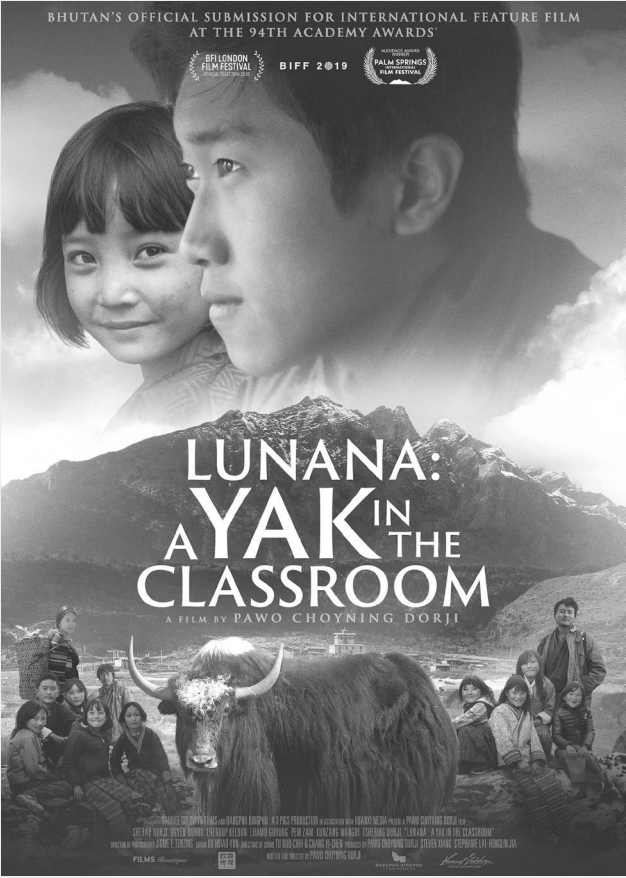
Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom

By Nicolas Rapold

In “Lunana: A Yak in the Classroom,” an indifferent young teacher, Ugyen, is assigned to a school high in the mountains of Bhutan. This is far from where he’d rather be - Australia - and it’s an eight-day schlep by foot from where he currently lives, the modern Bhutanese city of Thimphu. As Ugyen makes the trek with two guides, the director, Pawo Choyning Dorji, shows the declining population and rising altitude along the way. Lunana numbers less than 100 residents.

Ugyen’s charming, yak-herding hosts are an internet-free picture of serenity against the backdrop of verdant, misty slopes. Parables about teachers sent to the provinces are usually a two-way street: education and advancement for the students, life lessons for their instructor. Ugyen (plainly played by Sherab Dorji) is especially undistinguished, and despite teaching the children about math and toothbrushes, he receives the brunt of the story’s enlightenment about the upsides of traditional living.

The gently efficient story feels like an attempt to illustrate Bhutan’s real-life “Gross National Happiness” initiative. (The film gives credit to “the noble people of Lunana,” as well as “School Among Glaciers,” a 2003 Bhutanese documentary about a teacher sent to the mountains.) Ugyen’s aspirations for a singing



career are amusingly unremarkable in Lunana, where locals croon songs to the valleys as spiritual offerings.

About that yak: he’s a gift to Ugyen (to produce dung fuel), and he sits and chews in the background of classroom scenes, just happy to be there. The film basks in a similar mood of mild-mannered contentment.

Around the World

“Winter is not coming!” Echoes from Portuguese mountains

By Julio Sa Rego

Traditional pastoralism has a legendary place in Portugal: the mountains of what is now called the Natural Park of Montesinho. These mountains were the centerpiece of the most prominent, classic ethnographies on pastoralism and pastoral life in Portugal with their social landscape of centuries-old agropastoral villages rooted in communitarianism. There I was, side by side with a shepherd in his daily grazing itinerary, a half-century later, in the footprints of my anthropologist predecessors. The shepherd was guiding me into his lifeworld. Pastoralism is still part of the local culture and economy, although in frank decline. The area counts 47 productive flocks of indigenous small ruminants, together with a dozen of cattle flocks, that are in constant jeopardy due to the ageing of local shepherds. Demography is a well-known adversary; the elderly pass away and young people go away. Pastoralism dies and with it an entire social ecosystem in Montesinho. Pastoralism is a source of animal protein, contributes to the environmental management of the landscape, offers economic opportunities, and represents a cultural identity.

The concern of the shepherd at that time, though, was not demography, but the winter, more precisely, the absence of winter. Climate was erratic and winters were warmer and dryer. Snow, critical to the vitality of the local water system, was last seen five years ago. Snow sparks water springs and feeds rivers at thaw. Consequently, the drought progresses in the landscape, drying up springs and making forage scarce.

The situation in Montesinho is not unique. Climate change has been challenging rural livelihood across the globe. It brings drought and frosts; it favours wildfires, storms, and plagues; it raises temperatures and oceans; it defies local ecological knowledge and individual relationships with nature; it compromises harvests and animal husbandry. The general history of pastoralism, though, is one of the adaptations to survive the uncertainties of challenging environmental dynamics and worldwide, pastoralists are already adapting their

practices to ensure the survival of their communities and the continuity of their activity. In Montesinho, specifically, the response to climate change, I discovered, was to be found in the old cornerstone of the local communities: communitarianism. Communitarianism in Montesinho is a Celtic and Germanic cultural inheritance. It places common lands at the core of the agrarian system as providers of pasturelands, foliage, woods, stones, water and cultivation plots, and favours cooperative work and communal properties. Communitarianism is nowadays in decline but was punctually revived to cope with the climatic external threat. The community decided to work together, once again, in view of saving their water. The inhabitants cooperated to locate and clean the remanent springs, and fountains were built to facilitate responsible access to water for all.

Community involvement in the preservation and management of water in Montesinho has ensured the continuity of pastoralism for now. Climatic predictions are nonetheless not optimistic: temperatures will rise four degrees Celsius till the end of the century in Montesinho. The landscape will keep deteriorating, challenging the survival of local pastoralism. Continued adaptation will therefore be critical and governments, as academia, can, must, support pastoralists in this effort through the systematisation and sharing of their responses to climate change. The survival of pastoralism is a collective concern of food security, landscape management, and rural vitality. We have just started in Montesinho.



Julio Sa Rego is an economist and anthropologist born in Paris (France) and raised in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). He lives in Portugal to dive into the lifeworld of mountain pastoralists and support their struggles for economic and environmental justice. He currently does an ethnography in the Montesinho Natural Park for the interdisciplinary research project PASTOPRAXIS (FCT- MTS/CAC/0028/2020) on the adaptive responses of pastoralism to climate change. <http://pastopraxis.cimo.ipb.pt> 🏡👤

Editorial

The way it was, the way it could be

By Chhani Bungsut

A year has passed since I began my engagement with the Centre for Pastoralism and Pastoral Times. Without much experience with pastoralism or even editing newsletters, I was slowly led into the role of Editor and have trudged through with the support of the Editorial Team. In September, my role as Editor and my time with C&P come to a pause as I leave for graduate studies. With the editorial of this edition, I wish to reflect and pen down a sliver of a year’s worth of learning and a lifetime’s worth of lessons that pastoralism has gifted me.

In late November 2021, I journeyed to the Southern Deccan ranges, hiking through the hills and plains of Tamil Nadu. One particular evening in the field, I faced an unfamiliar sight; heaps of dung littered my vision, the smell following soon after. In the air, I could almost see the vibration of a thousand bells tolling without regard for time. I pulled out my phone to capture the grazing Pulikulam cattle silhouetted by the cloud-dotted sky, bells swinging around their necks as they chewed their way across the grassland. Yet nothing could imitate the peace I felt while watching it all unfold.

One year ago, I sat in Mizoram and experienced life only through the screen world and its inbuilt clouds. Pastoralism, cattle, grasslands - these were only words that occasionally featured in class readings. Yet there I was soon after graduation - in the outskirts of Madurai, flocked by cattle and their sonorous bells, herders speaking to them through an unfamiliar language of clicks and whistles. Pastoralists, their animals, culture, and voices surrounded me - voices that crooned melodies, shared concerns, and spoke about an alternate way of life.

What have I learned from a year of exposure to this new world? For one, I realised it is possible to truly love camels, goats, sheep, and even the once-seemingly threatening buffaloes! The animals that build the backbone of pastoralism are no longer mere prey on wildlife channels or roadblocks on a trafficked road. I see them now for what they are to pastoralists - a means of livelihood, sources of culture, catalogues of traditional knowledge, and undoubtedly, companions and family.

But what is pastoralism without the pastoralist? In the midst of talk and talk about sustainability, reducing carbon emissions, and climate change, the pastoralist might not say much, but she does what most of us cannot do - the doing itself. While many of us sit in air-conditioned cars and homes, the pastoralist walks thousands of kilometres on foot, with a mobile home packed on a mule or camel’s back. Yet her footprints are almost nowhere to be seen. Can we say the same for ours?

This is not to say that pastoralism is a movement for climate justice or that pastoralists actively choose their way of life to leave a smaller carbon footprint. If anything, the past year I spent reading, writing, and learning about pastoralists showed me how difficult pastoralism can be. The growth of sedentarisation and decline in pastoral animal numbers such as camels clearly indicate the unfavourable conditions that pastoralists now face. Herders have spoken about reduced access to traditional grazing lands, reducing demand for pastoral animal products including wool and dung, and the replacement of indigenous breeds with more productive hybrid and imported breeds.

In mourning the slow decay of pastoralism in the country, however, we risk truly losing it all. I, for one, choose to be optimistic. I see the resilience and wisdom with which pastoralists

Van Gujjars in National Dailies

By Pierre-Alexandre Paquet & Kaveri Choudhury

During the Covid-19 lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, it became difficult to know about communities living in the far peripheries of major towns and cities. For the Van Gujjars of Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh, whose livelihoods depend on the sustenance of their cattle, Covid restrictions critically hampered their capacity to thrive. The only way we knew of the Van Gujjars’ struggles during this period was through the media. While it was not possible for us to visit our contacts and friends, this challenging period presented an opportunity to investigate how the newspapers represent the Van Gujjars. What kind of information does the average news reader get about the nomadic Van Gujjars? And, are Van Gujjar voices faithfully related in daily news reports?

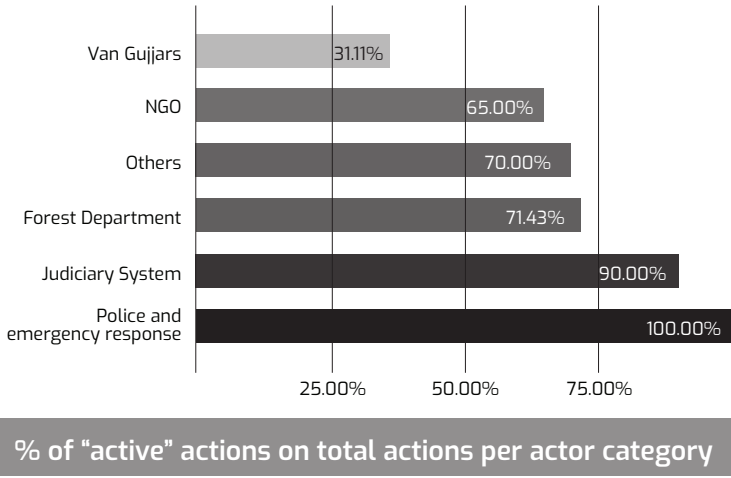
To answer these questions, we investigated the publications of four major Indian dailies, two in English (The Times of India and the Hindustan Times) and two in Hindi (Amar Ujala and Dainik Jagran). Using the Google search engine, we ran queries using a range of alternative spellings (Van Gujjars, Gujar, Gurjars, etc.). For the year



PC: Shivam Rastogi

Total actions and % active per Actor category		
Type of actor	Number of times this actor did something or has had something happen to itself	Active / total number of actions
Van Gujjars	36	36.11%
Forest Department	35	71.43%
Judiciary System	20	90.00%
NGO	20	65.00%
Others	20	70.00%
Police and emergency response	8	100.00%

Note: In "Others" are included public servants from all levels of government, politicians, and some citizens (workers and sedentarized villagers who are not Van Gujjars).



have mitigated risks and challenges over thousands of years and how they continue to do so. I admire their unceasing love and care for their animals and how they journey across difficult and sometimes dangerous terrains for their herd’s survival. There is joy in their songs, the whistles and clicks, the clamouring bells - the songs reminiscent of what once was, what is, and what could be. We also have our part to play, to safeguard pastoralism simply because it shows us how economy and ecology can prosper together. I hope the bells continue to ring across the country - in Madurai, Kachhh, Kangra, Changthang, wherever the pastoralist walks - to remind us all that pastoralism is not only a glimpse of the past but also a way of living lightly, of building a viable future.



Chhani Bungsut studied Sociology and Anthropology at Ashoka University. Until recently, she lead the Communications team and was the Editor of Pastoral Times. She recently moved to Oxford to start a Master’s degree in Social Anthropology.

2021, we gathered a total of 45 newspaper articles mentioning the Van Gujjars. Then we turned our attention to how the journalists represented the Van Gujjars.

Perusing the 45 articles, we found that a wide range of events related to the Van Gujjars had gotten some coverage in mainstream media. There were reports of Human-animal conflicts (8 articles), Natural and man-made disasters (4 articles), Interventions by local MLAs and NGOs (12 articles), Civic Rights (2 articles), State denial of pastoralist rights (7 articles), Eviction and rehabilitation (10 articles), Clash with the Forest Department (3 articles), Protests (2 articles) and Other miscellaneous events (2 articles). However, a key finding remains that although these articles all relate to Van Gujjar’s issues, they rarely relay their point of view.

We also identified whom the journalists made mention of (state workers, NGOs, citizens, etc.) and whether these actors were

mentioned because they did something (actively) or because something had happened to them (denoting passiveness).

Without a surprise, the Van Gujjars got the most mentions. After all, the community was the focus of our probe. What surprised us more, in the end, was that the Van Gujjars were seen as being “active” only 36.11% of the time. This suggests that the media are more inclined towards reporting on events where the Van Gujjars come across as victims, instead of as actors of change. In comparison, state actors were assumed to be taking matters actively on their ends 70-to-100% of the time. This kind of reporting, we argue, reifies the image of a powerful state and disorganised communities. Years of field studies tell us the opposite is closer to the truth.

This situation is upsetting. In different countries, the news media have adopted ethical guidelines that guarantee fair and equal representation to those whose story is being told. For the Van Gujjars these days, better representation could entail a more systematic inclusion of their voices and a more thoughtful consideration of the trope of victimhood. As expert dairy producers, the Van Gujjars we know are never idle, always active. They are very knowledgeable too, and they could write volumes about the injustices they have faced over time. They never remain passive in the face of adversity. And they should be listened to, more attentively, and receive a less complacent portrayal in the news, lest we tolerate a new injustice.

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PC: Ishaan Raghunandan



In a first, J&K’s migratory tribals, livestock offered a lift for highland pastures

By Ashiq Hussain

The lush green pastures and mountains of Kashmir would welcome their annual pastoral friends earlier than usual this year. Instead of their regular movement on foot which would take weeks of marches and halts, the tribal families and their livestock have now been offered a lift. In a first, J&K’s tribal affairs department on Sunday flagged off a fleet of 40 trucks for transportation of livestock and families of the migratory tribal population from various hot Jammu districts to the highland pastures in Kashmir.

“The lieutenant governor is committed to providing transportation support and transit facilities to the migratory tribal population. Directions were also issued to ensure saturation in transport facilities and cover 100% migratory population on NH and Mughal Road,” said Shahid Iqbal Choudhary, secretary, tribal affairs department. “Funds to the tune of ₹6.8 crores have been released in favour of J&K Road Transport Corporation for procurement of trucks for the purpose,” he added.

Transhumance, a practice of moving livestock from one grazing ground to another, typically to lowlands in winter and highlands in summer, is a centuries-old practice in J&K. As per conservative estimates, some six lakh people from tribal communities, including Gujjars and Bakerwals, travel every year with their livestock mostly from Jammu to Kashmir in summer and back in winter. A small population of Gaddi-Sippi travels within the Jammu division. The transport system will reduce the travel time of some of these families from 20-30 days on foot to 1-2 days, while it will also help in smooth management of traffic on the roads.

Dr Javaid Rahi, author and researcher on tribal issues, said the move was an important step for

Ensure pastoralists covered under government schemes: Centre to States

By Shagun

The Union government admitted that India’s pastoralist communities fell through the cracks when it comes to them benefitting from various schemes. It has urged states with a sizeable population of such communities to work to prevent this.

There is a significant population of pastoralists or cattle herders across India who move from one place to another to graze their animals. There are no official numbers but according to organisations working with pastoralists, approximately 10 to 20 million pastoralists graze India’s forests and grasslands.

The Union Ministry of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying wrote a letter on August 23, 2022, to the animal husbandry departments of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Karnataka, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Ladakh, Uttar Pradesh, Sikkim, Jammu & Kashmir, and Arunachal Pradesh. These states are estimated to have the highest pastoralist population.

The letter asked the states to provide assistance to pastoralists under National Livestock Mission, Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AHIDF) and Rashtriya Gokul Mission (for cattle). Till now, the schemes pertaining to livestock were mostly catering to farmers and the settled population of animal keepers. The pastoralists are theoretically not excluded from the schemes but the regulation documents don’t mention the community specifically.

The letter said:

The states with pastoralist populations may develop extension activities suitable for awareness generation in the pastoralist community and avail central assistance under this activity.

the recognition and welfare of tribal communities in J&K. “J&K witnesses the country’s biggest movement of tribal pastoral communities every year and never have any government-provided transport for the same,” Rahi, who also belongs to the Gujjar community, said.

He said till now, the tribals had to arrange logistics on their own while the government would provide them travel permits and identity cards after the families pay grazing tax. Additionally, government involvement in their travel would make their lives easy as they would otherwise face natural calamities, traffic accidents, and even attacks for vested interests. Their livelihood will also get a boost, he added.

“There was a persistent demand from the migratory tribal community for the provision of some transportation mode,” a government spokesperson said in a statement. Sometimes, due to harsh weather conditions, there was a loss of livestock and other damages, causing a lot of inconvenience to the affected families. The finance department has advised the tribal affairs department to avail the services of JKRTC for the movement till a formal policy is framed in this regard.



A Kharnak family tent sits below the Milky Way in the nomadic settlement of Zara. PC: Ronald Patrick



A young Kharnak rider named Rinchen looks over his shoulder during a horse festival near the settlement of Yagang. PC: Ronald Patrick

The central animal husbandry ministry is working on guidelines to ensure that the ignored pastoralist communities are included in the ongoing schemes, Parshottam Rupala, Union minister for fisheries, animal husbandry and dairying told Down To Earth (DTE) on August 30. “Currently, we have no schemes for pastoralists.”

There are schemes for livestock and animal husbandry but those are applied to the settled animal keepers and not the pastoral community, which are mostly included in schemes by the social welfare department, he said, adding:

The pastoralists are left out of all the benefits and incentives under different schemes of the animal husbandry department. For example, something like vaccination and upkeep of the health of the livestock population is not done for the animals reared by pastoralists because there is no record of them and it is difficult to reach them.

In a further boost for the age-old livestock practice, the central department is also working on introducing a separate unit for pastoralism under it, Rupala told DTE.

“The unit will be tasked with estimating the number of pastoralists in the country, the number of animals with them, and the economy of pastoralism, for which currently there are no figures,” the minister added.

Glimpses of Northern India’s Vanishing Pastoralists

By Ronald Patrick

From New York Times

Fitting a small stone into a sling made of yak wool, Tsering Stobdan whipped his wrist and let the object fly, sending it soaring across the arid landscape. This, he told me, was how he protects his flock from predators and convinces straggling goats to return – just one of the countless skills he has learned in the last 60 years that allow him to rear his animals in such an unforgiving landscape.

Meanwhile, some 15,000 feet above sea level, I was simply trying to breathe. Here on the Changthang plateau, in a remote region of the Indian Himalayas, the altitude had left me gasping for air.



Mipham Shakya, 61, prepares butter tea at her home in the nomadic settlement of Yagang. PC: Ronald Patrick

product, life in the mountains is extraordinarily difficult, especially in the winter. Today, fewer than 20 families are left to care for nearly 7,000 sheep and goats, along with several hundred yaks. And, like Tsering Stobdan, many of those who remain are growing older and are less able to cope with the daily demands of their work.

Climate change has also had a profound effect on the Kharnak’s way of life. The weather has become more difficult to predict, rain patterns in particular. Because of warming temperatures and the overuse of certain pastures, areas once thick with vegetation now lie barren. Small glaciers, which for centuries provided a reliable source of water, are receding. As a result, Kharnak shepherds are forced to shuffle their flocks around more frequently and with less certainty.

Among these nomadic communities, families and animals live in strict interdependency. The milk from the sheep, goats, and yaks – made into cheese, yogurt, and butter – forms the foundation of the dairy-based diet. Life for the Kharnak is difficult year-round. During the longer days of spring and summer, the shepherds milk and shear their animals in the early-morning hours before taking them out to graze, often walking more than 12 miles a day at altitude. Another round of milking and shearing takes place in the evening. But the work doesn’t end there. Food must be cooked, sheds maintained, carpets woven, ropes fabricated, and manure collected for fuel.

The real challenges, though, come in winter, when the temperatures drop to below -30 degrees Fahrenheit. Roadways are often blocked, and food becomes scarce. During these long months, from November to April, the livestock are enclosed in shelters and fed animal feed that’s provided by the government.

During the winter, most of the Kharnak move temporarily to a town called Kharnakling, on the outskirts of Leh, some 90 miles from their highland pastures. While away, they leave their livestock in the hands of a few family members and paid shepherds, who care for the animals during the harshest months of the year. To afford their homes

Tsering Stobdan is a member of a nomadic community known as the Kharnak, who for centuries have raised yaks, sheep, and goats in the high plains of Ladakh, in northern India, one of the most hauntingly beautiful – if harsh and inhospitable – places on earth.

Once a flourishing tribe, the Kharnak community is now dwindling. Younger generations are being sent to nearby cities, where they can find better health care and educational opportunities. And while pashmina, the lightweight wool sheared from the bellies of Himalayan mountain goats, is a profitable

in Kharnakling, many of the nomads had to sell their animals and leave behind their traditional stone houses and tents in the mountains. And with more frequency, members of the community are remaining in Kharnakling year-round, having given up on their old way of life.

At their home in Kharnakling, I talked with a Kharnak elder and one of his grandsons. Dawa Tundup, who was 83 when I met him, had left behind his nomadic life to settle near the city, where he could live more comfortably and with better access to health care. He reminisced about his days in the highlands and dreamed of returning, he said, but acknowledged that life there had become untenable for most younger people, given the lack of proper schools.

Everything in the city is about money, he lamented, adding that many urban values, centered on consumerism, were very different from the value system taught by his ancestors at home.

Later, while attending a series of traditional festivals held in the mountains, I watched as young men performed ancestral herding skills, including flinging stones on horseback. Here, the interest among younger generations in the culture of their elders was palpable, as most of them had come all the way from the city for this one event. There were no winners or losers during the festivities. Instead, the riders were given a shot of chhang, a local Ladakh beer, and a khata, a traditional Tibetan scarf, every time they hit their targets.

It was a heartwarming scene: tribal elders instilling hard-earned wisdom among their enthusiastic descendants. Still, one of the greatest concerns among the Kharnak is that their vast store of nomadic wisdom – the specific types of grass that certain animals need to survive, how meat is dried and preserved, how temporary shelters can be built with meager materials, among thousands of other examples – will be lost in the coming years.

Facing a generational exodus and the threats of a changing climate, their rich culture, amassed over centuries, may vanish in what amounts to the blink of an eye.

From Farms to Fashion:

Enhancing and Imparting Sustainable livelihood to Local Women through Avani Initiatives

By Avani Kumaon



Amidst the howling winds, rugged terrains, and inaccessible passes of the Himalayas, lies stories of people, of communities adapting and evolving to the might of nature. People in Uttarakhand living in the higher Himalayan range found ways of coping with the climate, the terrain, the forage, and the accessibility to the plains. All this and more revolved around protecting themselves from the harsh cold leading to the development of various craft cultures. Agriculture was not a viable source of income on the steep slope of the mountains; hence livestock became the mainstay.

Rise of Avani

In the year 1996, Avani was set up in a small village – Tripuradevi in the lap of the Himalayas, an initiative of the Social Work and Research Centre, Tilonia, Rajasthan. Owing to the lack of electricity in the region, the main objective of Avani was to generate solar power for the villagers. Efforts were made to use solar panels in the region of Kumaon, but the program was not as successful as anticipated in the beginning as villagers could not afford them. Herein came the initiative of reviving traditional

crafts to generate income for the people and provide a means of alternate livelihood.

Today, the organisation's activities can be divided into two categories, solar power generation and textiles-based livelihood. Capacity building was an essential part of the initiative. Likewise, training programs were conducted to teach people the technique of assembling and repairing solar panels as it was a completely new concept for them. Such workshops are also conducted for the textile department, which include dyeing, sericulture, spinning, and weaving.

Vocal for Local

The Women SHGs are involved in the collection of locally available raw materials such as eupatorium, marigold, walnut shells, tea powder, etc. for the dyeing needs of the centres. Since the need for specialised design inputs was identified, Avani has been constantly working with talented designers to bridge the market gaps and equip the women artisans with the abilities to cope with the demands of the fashion market. In all the field centres of Avani, electricity is generated from solar power. Avani also aims to ensure that they generate the least amount of waste. So, at every stage of the process, the organisation aims to ensure maximum utilisation of minimal resources.



Another core goal is maintaining a circular economy. The local sheep wool used in Avani centres for years, known as Harsil, comes in natural shades of grey, brown, cream, and black. The fleece is thick and warm, perfect for the mountain cold. With the input of designers and the building knowledge of the market, Avani has over the years developed a wide range of products made of local wool. They include handwoven shawls, stoles, handknitted mufflers, tweeds, readymade garments, and home furnishing items like cushion covers and throws. It also moved into catering to businesses that required our hand-spun yarn, custom woven fabrics, and naturally dyed woollens. A farm and forest-driven initiative, Avani has strived to create a sustainable way of life for the community and is grateful to be working with such talented artisans both traditional and trained from the Kumaon communities and hopes to leave the world in a better place for coming generations.

Food

A very Gujarati cheeseboard

Two pastoralists from Gujarat collaborate with Chennai's Kase to make feta, chevre, and pecorino

By Chitradeepa Anantharam

Arpanbhai Kalotra, a pastoral Maldhari (herdsmen) from Gujarat's Rabadi community drinks sheep and goat's milk every day. "Though Gujarat produces large quantities of this milk, it is less in demand so there is a daily surplus," he says, adding that the Maldharis consume it in multiple ways to minimise wastage. "We make tea, set curd, and even make khoa."

Arpanbhai and Bhimsibhai Ghanghal, who live in Surendranagar, Gujarat, have now found another way to make use of this surplus: artisanal cheese.

Namrata Sundaresan, co-founder of Chennai-based Käse who trained the Maldharis in cheese making last year explains that the feta they make is "terroir-inspired cheese where the flavour is impacted by the livestock and region where milk is procured."

"We at Käse are constantly on the lookout for ethically-sourced clean milk and this led us to cross paths with the Centre for Pastoralism, India (CfP). Milk is central to the livelihoods of pastoral households in Gujarat. With indigenous milk surpluses, we are presented with a unique opportunity to enhance pastoral livelihoods via artisanal cheese making," says Namrata, adding that the initiative began as an entrepreneurship training programme for the youth of the pastoral community, and Arphanbhai and Bhimsibhai were selected by the Centre for Pastoralism.

The duo now makes 10 types of cheese, including chèvre, feta, barrel aged feta, pecorino fresco,


cheddar, and tomme. They have set up a processing unit in their village at a cost of 26 lakh. "All these years so much precious milk was wasted. Now, we have over 100 goats and also buy goat milk from other pastoralists as we need 100 litres to make a kilogram of cheese," says Bhimsibhai.

At Käse's recent pastoral tasting event, the cheese was paired with delicious Gujarati snacks and pickles from Parul's Pickle Magic by Parul Bhatt.



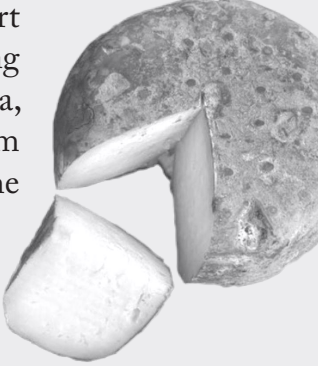

Feta, traditionally crumbled on salads, was served with thepla: the subtle flavour of ajwain and cumin blending well with the cheese. Says Namrata, "Since this range is made in rural Gujarat, we thought the best way to introduce it was by pairing it with traditional Gujarati condiments."

This article first appeared in The Hindu Metroplus News.



Panchal Dairy

Private Limited



Introducing Handcrafted Pastoral Cheeses from Cheese on the Move! Cheese on the Move is an initiative from the Centre for Pastoralism that collaborates with artisanal cheese makers to connect with sheep, goat, and camel pastoralists. It facilitates the making and marketing of a range of pastoral cheeses, made with milk sourced directly from pastoralists in Gujarat. We currently support Panchal Dairy - run by two young pastoralists and based in Sayla, Gujarat - to procure milk from goat and sheep pastoralists in the region.

Fresh Goat Cheese		Aged Goat Cheese		Specialty Sheep and Goat Milk Cheese	
Feta	330	Cheddar	375	Pecorino	375
Chevre	330	Tomme De Sayla	375	Fennel infused Pecorino	375
Halloumi	330	Lactic Cheese	375		

All rates in Rupees for 150 gms · Minimum order of 450 gms (Shipping charges extra)
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Photo Essay

Gujjaran go Kaarj- A Living Lightly Exhibition and Utsav

Photographs by Shivam Rastogi

From 24th to 26th March, the Centre for Pastoralism and the Van Gujjar Tribal Yuva Sangathan hosted ‘Gujjaran Go Kaarj: A Living Lightly Utsav & Exhibition’. The exhibition aimed to shed light on the lives of Uttarakhand’s Van Gujjar pastoralists and was followed by a pashu mela, or animal fair, on March 27th.

The three-day event was brought to life with Bainth performances, Gojri stories, multi-media installations, and film screenings that brought

forth pastoral cultures. The Utsav was not only a celebration of the Van Gujjars but also an opportunity to start a much-needed dialogue on a variety of issues pertaining to their lives through workshops and consultations. Under the blue skies at Jeevan Utsav Resort, Rishikesh, the event became an open space for Van Gujjar pastoralists and other participants to engage in conversations, listen to experiences of other pastoral communities, and for outsiders to learn more about Uttarakhand’s pastoralists.



A young child listens to a story installation at the event



Camel vista print, a part of the Living Lightly Kandhaar exhibition



A bainth performance, a poetic and rhythmic rendering of a Van Gujjar's life and world, by members of the Van Gujjar community



The Van Gujjars use horses during migration. Pictured here is a work-in-progress installation of a horse with its trappings during migration



Every day of the Utsav saw lively games at the end of each session, including this display of their physical strength



A Gojri Buffalo being milked early in the morning for a milking competition



Members of the Van Gujjar community decide to form a Van Gujjar Gojri Breeders Association



Art exhibits based on the genesis stories of the pastoral communities of Kachchh



Pastoral musicians from Kachchh regaling the audience on a breezy evening

Van Gujjars – A community stuck between a rock and a hard place

By Radhika Chatterjee

Van Gujjars are a traditional pastoral community spread across the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand. They also happen to be a forest-dwelling community. In fact, they are well known for having an intricate relationship based on coexistence with forests and wild animals. Today, however, these very forests have become a reason why the younger generation of the community finds itself stuck between a rock and a hard place.

Descendants of Gujjars of Jammu and Kashmir, Van Gujjars began living in parts of Uttar Pradesh (which is now a part of Uttarakhand) a couple of hundred years ago. According to the community’s oral history, they were sent to Himachal Pradesh by the King of Jammu and Kashmir as part of a dowry. Gradually, the community moved further down to reach Uttar Pradesh. Van Gujjars have for several years practised a transhumant lifestyle to rear their Gojri buffaloes, with summers spent in the higher alpine pastures, and winters in lower altitudes of the state. All in search of nutritious vegetation for their buffaloes. Their livelihood in turn depends on the sale of milk that these buffaloes produce.

No matter which part of the mountain they are in, Van Gujjars always tend to live inside forest areas, where they set up their makeshift camps called ‘Deras’. In doing so they have historically played an important role in conserving forests and wild animals. For a community that knows every nook and corner of the forests of Uttarakhand like the back of their hands, the prefix ‘Van’ or forest was added to their name rather late – in the 1990s. This too occurred due to the active role played by Shri Avdhesh Kaushal, the founder of RLEK.

Nonetheless, their relationship of coexistence with the forest continues to remain unacknowledged, especially by state officials who are responsible for ‘protecting’ forests. For more than two decades now, the community has faced increasing problems in accessing their traditional pastures inside forests as they are accused by officials of the Forest Department of causing forest degradation. The state officials argue that the Gojri buffaloes grazing through

forests is accelerating the degradation of forests. They, therefore, use every opportunity they get in fencing off forests to prevent the community members from entering.

The problem for the younger generation of the community however is a bit more complicated than just the declining access to forests. The issue they seem to be grappling with is their way of life itself. For instance, speaking at an informal discussion, a young Van Gujjar woman described her relationship with forests as that of a ‘bebasi ka pyaar’ or love borne out of helplessness. Elaborating further she said, had she found a chance for attaining better education, she too could have found employment in cities. She was staying in the forests only because she did not have the option to do otherwise. This feeling however is not shared by all young individuals in the community. Several of them are also engaged in activism for claiming their rights to the forests under the Scheduled Tribes And Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition Of Forest Rights) Act, 2006

In this context, there are two difficult questions that the younger generation of Van Gujjars has to reckon with. First, even if they are granted rights to the forests, will they be able to live inside the forests? Second, if they are rehabilitated in cities, would they be able to adjust to the altered lifestyle?

Whatever their answer may be, one thing that we can all be sure of is that the dilemmas of Van Gujjars will affect everyone. Their aspirations for a ‘modern’ lifestyle will lead to a loss of their traditional knowledge of forest use. This in turn will be a huge loss for environmental conservation and will leave no one unscathed, including the blissfully ignorant city-dweller who remains unaware of the Van Gujjars’ dilemmas.



Radhika Chatterjee has a background in public policy and did her doctoral studies at the Centre for the Study of Law and Governance at Jawaharlal Nehru University. She works as a Field Research Lead for Land Conflict Watch.

Encounters with nature and culture A discussion with women from the Van Gujjar community

By Anita Sharma

I met Anjum Nisha, Kulsum, Muskaan, and Aamna Khatoon at the recently held Van Gujjar Utsav at the Rajaji National Park in Uttarakhand with Sushma Iyengar who suggested we do a small interview together. Chhani and I found an empty room at the venue where all of us huddled in and sat on the carpet in a circle for a chat. This was too brief a meeting to make any generalizations about ‘Van Gujjar women’, or even attempt to put them together as an analytical unit (which is not an unproblematic homogenization in itself) yet, with this caveat in place, I would like to attempt to draw out a few themes based on this conversation that might be worth a thought for the reader.

The interview with Anjum Nisha, Kulsum, Muskaan, and Aamna Khatoon was a breeze. The conversation had a natural flow and their body language communicated as much as their words. They looked at each other with an intuitive rapport and never spoke over each other. They talked with candour about how their condition as Van Gujjar women has remained somewhat unchanged from the time of their mothers, who, just like them, were seldom allowed a voice in any decision-making body of the community. Just like their mothers they too have to look at the faces of the men in their families for permission to speak... It is the same even now they say... Yet they add that some small changes have started creeping into their otherwise patriarchal societal norms because of their newly acquired educational status. This is the first generation of educated Van Gujjar women and they have not been left untouched by the empowering potential of education, they say. “We have studied a little bit. This has informed us about our rights. Now we can talk to our family members and tell them what we want to do...” Aamna noted. The transformative capacity of education is deeply felt too, and they have struggled to educate themselves in spite of daunting odds. Anjum, who is in the final year of her master’s degree, has funded her education through money earned from stitching and tuition, Aamna has worked to pay for her education as well. Meanwhile, men too have changed a bit, they suggest, and it has become somewhat easier to communicate their need for some autonomy at least to one’s immediate family members. As one spoke, the others listened. They encouraged and approved with smiles and familiar tactile gestures. The individual voices of Anjum, Kulsum, Muskaan, and Aamna came through even in this rather brief encounter, as did their coeval communitarian spirit. They declare themselves as proud Van Gujjar women, as sisters and friends,

speaking for each other while allowing each other room to be. Their personhood seemed premised on a close communitarian coexistence, and their solidarity as women was palpable and infectious. Most of all, their trust and admiration for each other was clear and seemed forged on the firm foundation of familiar struggles.

In one respect, however, Anjum Nisha, Kulsum, Muskaan, and Aamna seemed very different from what in the mind’s eye is a picture of their mother’s generation of women — and this is in their relationship to ‘the wild’. Could the familiarity with wilderness their mothers lived with and espoused be a thing of the past? Curiously, Aamna felt she found the stories of older Van Gujjar women living in the forest to be ‘ajeeb’ or strange, or out of the ordinary. Why so when Aamna’s own father was tragically killed by an elephant in a forest some years ago – and this is sadly not an uncommon encounter for Van Gujjars. So why should such encounters with ‘the wild’ be strange for those who live in and around forests? Anjum also drew a clear distinction between ‘prakriti’, ‘nature’, and ‘culture’ and more significantly, how this proximity with nature was itself perceived as a lack and a symptom of poverty... I am not sure if this distinction between nature and culture is something we all gradually acquire through formalized education (even though academic thought has distanced itself from this idea at least in theory)... Or if this polarity gets gradually cemented in all of us as we settle down more firmly in one place (even as cosmopolitan nomads move across borders more freely than ever)... Or what role is played by the media and internet in our circulating conceptions of ‘culture’ and all that it entails (even though precisely a lack of ‘culture’ is what is often palpable in so many social media interactions). But that these facets may have something to do with our contemporary impressions of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ perhaps deserves some thought.

Chhani’s phone died after some 16 minutes into the interview so we finished a little abruptly, but we went on to chat and exchange phone numbers. Anjum Nisha, Kulsum, Muskaan, and Aamna left a few minutes later as they were running late for a meeting. Now we occasionally say hi on WhatsApp.



Anita Sharma teaches Sociology at the Shiv Nadar University and works with the Bakerwals of Jammu and Kashmir.

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