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website: pastoralism.org.in
pastoraltimes.cfp@gmail.com
Editorial Board: Bhawna Jaimini, Riya Sequeira,
Subhasini Krishnan, & Shouryamoy Das
Advisors: Sushma Iyengar & Vasant Saberwal



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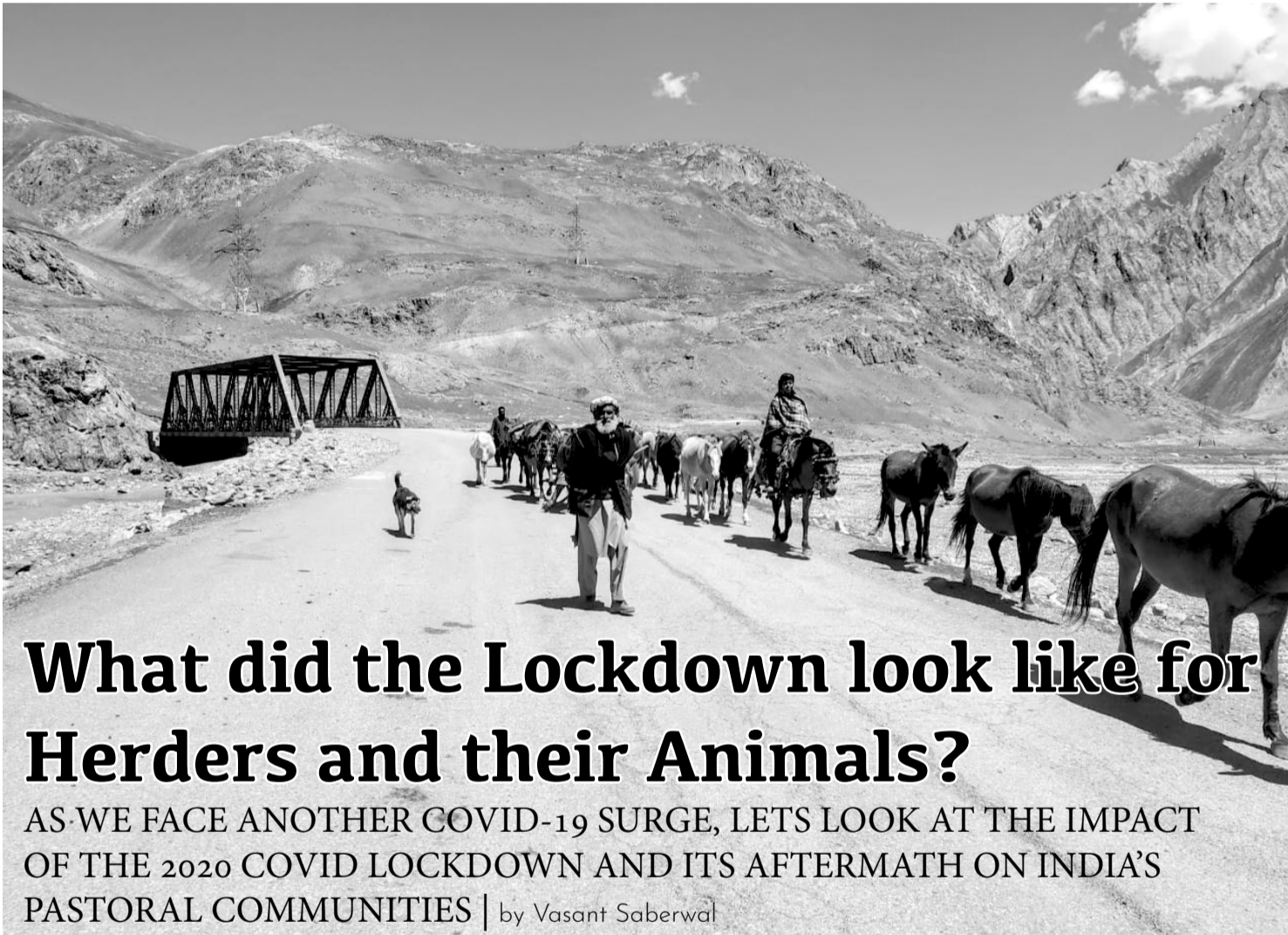
EDITORIAL



Following the Halari Donkeys
by Ritayan Mukherjee

TRAVEL

Photo Credit: Irfar Ali



What did the Lockdown look like for Herders and their Animals?

AS WE FACE ANOTHER COVID-19 SURGE, LET'S LOOK AT THE IMPACT OF THE 2020 COVID LOCKDOWN AND ITS AFTERMATH ON INDIA'S PASTORAL COMMUNITIES | by Vasant Saberwal

In April of 2020, the Centre for Pastoralism undertook a quick telephonic survey to assess the impact of the COVID-19 lockdown on pastoralists across the country. The survey suggested that pastoralists experienced many of the same difficulties that farming communities did. Some impacts, however, were specific to pastoralists, an outcome of their mobility and, in some instances, their identities. This article, based on our survey and on media reports of the time, provides an overview of these results and describes a larger study that is underway, based on this initial work.

Challenges experienced during the lockdown

Restrictions on movement

Pastoralist migrations were halted by state governments either temporarily or for the entire year, on the assumption that all movement held the potential for viral transmissions, and hence threatened communities that pastoralists interacted with. In some instances pastoralists convinced governments to permit them to continue with their migrations. Others, such as the Van Gujjars of Uttarakhand, were banned

from moving to their summer pastures for the entire year. They were forced to either stall feed their buffaloes or find alternative grazing arrangements within the lower altitude; either option resulting in higher costs and significantly reducing animal productivity. The Himachal government extended particularly pro-active support on the grounds that, for the most part, herders travel alone and tend to spend time in relative isolation, reducing the likelihood of viral transmission.

Accessing markets

Pastoralist communities spoke of the difficulties of accessing milk, meat and feed markets, all closed due to the national lockdown. Some of the surplus milk was being converted into ghee and buttermilk. As the weather warmed, even these products needed to be disposed off to avoid spoilage. The closure of meat markets had implications for immediate cash flows but did not represent the loss of a crop, that may have been experienced by milk-selling pastoralists or by farmers with perishable, fresh produce.

Shortage of Labour

In some instances, herders had returned home

in February to attend family functions or to help with cultivation. Post the imposition of restrictions, these herders were unable to rejoin their herds were, resulting in significant shortage of labour in managing the herds. Many herders also reported instances of hired labor returning home, owing to the limited information available on the pandemic and the associated desire to be home during this period of uncertainty.

Shearing sheep

Sheep need to be sheared just before the onset of summer. This is generally undertaken by shearers not necessarily part of the herding community. When sheep are not shorn ahead of the summer heat, there are heightened levels of sickness within the herd. Owing to the lockdown, shearers were simply unable to reach the location of the sheep. While the Himachal government ultimately facilitated shearer travel to the herds, in most other States shearing operations were badly impacted. Many herders spoke of the likely impact of the lockdown and its aftermath on the import of wool and on the export of woolen carpets and durries.

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What did the Lock-down Look Like for Herders and their Animals?

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Obtaining ration

Pastoralists on the move normally obtain ration from village kirana stores or from shops in small towns. Pastoralists across the country stated that villagers, normally welcoming, were wary of potential transmission of COVID and were often unwilling to have transient pastoralists enter the village. In instances where the state was providing ration, pastoralists tended to miss out as they were on the outskirts of villages or were grazing their animals at some distance from human habitation.

Social Stigma

Pastoralists from various parts of the country spoke of experiencing some form of social stigma due to their religion or their nomadic lifestyle. Gujjars in Chamba, Himachal Pradesh and from the Rishikesh/Haridwar areas in Uttarakhand faced ostracism as minorities and had difficulty in selling milk and also, in embarking on their annual migrations. In both instances, rumours that their milk carried the coronavirus and so must not be bought, led to significantly reduced demand for their milk. Pastoralist mobility in itself has been cause for social stigma for many decades and these reports indicate this was accentuated over the course of the lockdown.

Pastoralism, Resilience and COVID-19

A number of pastoralists mentioned that they may have experienced fewer lockdown hardships than many others with rural livelihoods. The adaptability of pastoral communities to climatic, political and other changes may have played a role



Photo Credit: Atree, Sikkim

in slightly mitigating the various issues listed above.

A Follow-Up Survey

These findings were based on a limited set of calls made to pastoralists. In June of last year, CFP staff met with colleagues in academic institutions and various NGOs to explore the interest in undertaking a more in-depth survey, to better understand how pastoralists had been affected by the lockdown and its aftermath. This study is ongoing, based on a set of telephonic and in-person interviews, drawing heavily on our findings from the initial survey. We have attempted to speak with approximately 20 individuals from each distinct pastoralist community, resulting in close to 500 interviews. The final report will be produced by the end of April.



Dr. Vasant Saberwal is part ecologist and part sociologist. He is the director of Centre for Pastoralism

Afforestation is making the livelihoods of Gaddi pastoralists in the Himalayas more vulnerable

Worldwide, efforts to curb climate change also include widespread and large-scale afforestation activities. However, a recent survey-based study finds that plantations in the Himalayan state of Himachal Pradesh enhance vulnerabilities of migratory Gaddi pastoralist livelihoods, thus stressing the need for the forest policy development to be inclusive of the needs of local communities (like, Gaddi) to minimise its negative impacts on their livelihood.

For centuries, Gaddi pastoralists have been herding goats and sheep in the Himalayas. The study found that plantations replaced fodder species with non palatable trees; contributed to the spread of invasive shrubs; disrupted migratory routes; and changed access to pasture lands. Vijay Ramprasad, lead author of the study and senior fellow at the Dehradun-based non-profit organisation, Centre for Ecology, Development and Research, noted that there was an overall decline in pastoral livelihoods.

Gaddis, like other pastoralists worldwide, were already transitioning to non-pastoralist income sources due to other pre-existing socio-economic, cultural, and biophysical stressors. Plantations have added to and accelerated the decline in the number of pastoral households and the size of migratory herds. However, many households have successfully diversified their income sources and this ability to adapt distinguishes between Gaddi herders who are vulnerable and those who are not, the team observed.

Listed as a scheduled tribe by the Government of India, Gaddis are agro-pastoralists tracing their ancestry to Bharmour in Chamba district of Himachal Pradesh. An average Gaddi household maintains about 250 goats and sheep and earns between Rs. 2.5 to 3 lakh (Rs. 250,000 to 300,000) a year from livestock by selling meat and wool of their sheep and goats. Using migratory paths, they navigate to low-altitude pastures in the winter to graze their livestock.

Gaddis use forests, high-altitude commons, village commons, and privately-owned land for grazing their livestock. While forests and high-altitude commons are accessed by permits issued by the forest department, permission to graze on village commons is obtained from local landowners and private lands are accessed by customary relations between Gaddis and individual farmers.

Unpalatable and invasive species

Afforestation policy analysis showed that over the past 40 years, the proportion of palatable trees planted by the forest department declined from 28 percent in the 1980s to 20 percent between 2009 and 2015. One herder noticed that grasses such as garna (*Carissa diffusa*), a favourite among goats, basoti (*Adhatoda vasica*) and plants such as peepal (*Ficus religiosa*) are now almost absent from pastures during winters.

Fencing of plantations and land access

Because grazing is a threat to the survivorship of planted tree saplings, plantations are fenced off for the first four to five years restricting access to fodder. Some afforestation practices involve the use of live fences composed of unpalatable species, which can harm livestock. Installation and removal of fences is often unpredictable for Gaddis and as a result, they become more dependent on private lands and village commons for grazing their livestock, posing other challenges such as competition from local livestock owners and negotiating with panchayats.

Another hurdle faced by Gaddis: increasing urbanisation on their migratory routes, leaving little space for herds. Gaddis were forced to either shorten their migration or shift routes to other areas.

CITATION: Ramprasad, V., Joglekar, A., & Fleischman, F. (2020). Plantations and pastoralists: afforestation activities make pastoralists in the Indian Himalaya vulnerable. *Ecology and Society*, 25(4). <https://india.mongabay.com/2020/12/afforestation-is-making-the-livelihoods-of-gaddi-pastoralists-in-the-himalayas-more-vulnerable/>

How many Indians are pastoralists? No official data, but report says 13 million

by Ishaan Kukreti

Photo Credit: Shouryamoy Das



India meets 53 per cent of its milk and 74 per cent of meat requirement from animals reared by pastoralists. While the Union government has no data on the community, a new, global report released in September 30, 2020, report has pegged their number in the country at 13 million — nearly one per cent of the population.

A wide range of pastoralist systems exist in India — from fully mobile to transhumant (seasonal movement of livestock between fixed summer and winter pastures) and sedentary. Animals maintained in mobile systems include camels, cattle, ducks, donkeys, goats, pigs, sheep and yaks.

The report, released by non-profit League for Pastoral Peoples and Endogenous Livestock Development (LPP), added: “Pastoralism is not an official category in India. No official definition exists. Officials are aware of its existence but do not recognise it as a distinct management system.

The non-profit arrived at the estimate by analysing data from the National Sample Survey Office reports, individual surveys as well as livestock population numbers.

LPP defines pastoralism as the “dependence on common pool resources, mobility, primary income from livestock, existence of traditional knowledge systems and association with specific breeds.”

“Our data shows the importance of pastoralism for the Indian livestock economy. India’s phenomenally productive livestock is sustained majorly on common pool resources, including forests and gochars, which are not wastelands but are treated as such,” said Ilse Köhler-Rollefson, a Rajasthan-based camel expert and co-author of the report’s section on India.

While most pastoralists in India belong to the traditional castes, other groups — the non-traditional pastoralists — have also been taking up mobile herding, the report stated. It added:

“According to the National Sample Survey, only one per cent of the land owned by farmers is used for livestock. This suggests that not only pastoralists depend on common-pool resources; a large number of farmers who keep crossbred cattle and high-yielding buffaloes also rely on these resources.”

The central and state governments need to acknowledge the significance of pastoralists and extensive livestock keeping for India’s rural

economy and gross domestic product, the report said. The livestock sector contributes 4.5 per cent to the GDP; the pastoralist sector amounts to around 3 per cent of the share, according to the report.

“This needs to be reflected in livestock policies sensitive to the specific needs of this way of livestock keeping, rather than on the current presumption that livestock is stall-fed,” the report said.

The report also put a monetary value on the manure distributed by animals in the fields adding that the manure is valued at \$45 billion (Rs 450

crore) a year and that it is a major source of nutrients for crops as well as for land. The report also stated that manure is the main income source for some herders and how some farmers compensate the pastoralists for their service in cash or in kind.

“The Indian livestock sector functions differently from what policy makers imagine. It is based not on stall-feeding but on animals roaming around, harvesting waste and transforming it into high value food.

Pastoralism runs only on solar power. At the same time, it ensures continued fertility of soil, hence saving billions of dollars that go in importing chemical fertilisers,” said Köhler-Rollefson.

There has been some focus on pastoralists, especially within the purview of the Schedule Tribe and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA) in the recent years. Section 3 of the Act specifies community forest rights of uses or entitlements such as fish and other elements in water bodies, grazing (both settled or transhumant) and traditional seasonal resource access of nomadic or pastoralist communities.

“According to FRA rules, pastoralists need to have a written proof of animal grazing in a particular patch of forest land for the last 75 years. It is impossible to do so in the absence of written permissions, which they may have never had. The system has existed before the forest department was instituted. The pastoralist system was anyway discouraged by the British,” said Kamal Kishore, another author of the report. He added: “The forest department has been reluctant to give them rights under FRA even in Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir, where pastoralists have permits for grazing.”

<https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/agriculture/how-many-indians-are-pastoralists-no-official-data-but-report-says-13-mln-73598>

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A glimpse into the indigenous wool economies of India

by Shouryamoy Das

Wool is a versatile fibre - it insulates against harsh weather, withstands rains, can be crafted in many ingenious ways, has great potential use as an architectural material and produces high quality compost when it degrades. Yet it accounts for only 3% of the world's textile market. This is quite a pity considering that production of wool, especially in pastoral systems has one of the lowest footprints of all textiles fibres. Woollens also last long, need few washes and tend to repel all kinds of grit and dirt, making maintenance relatively simple and frugal. Several arguments can be made to consider wool the fibre of the future.

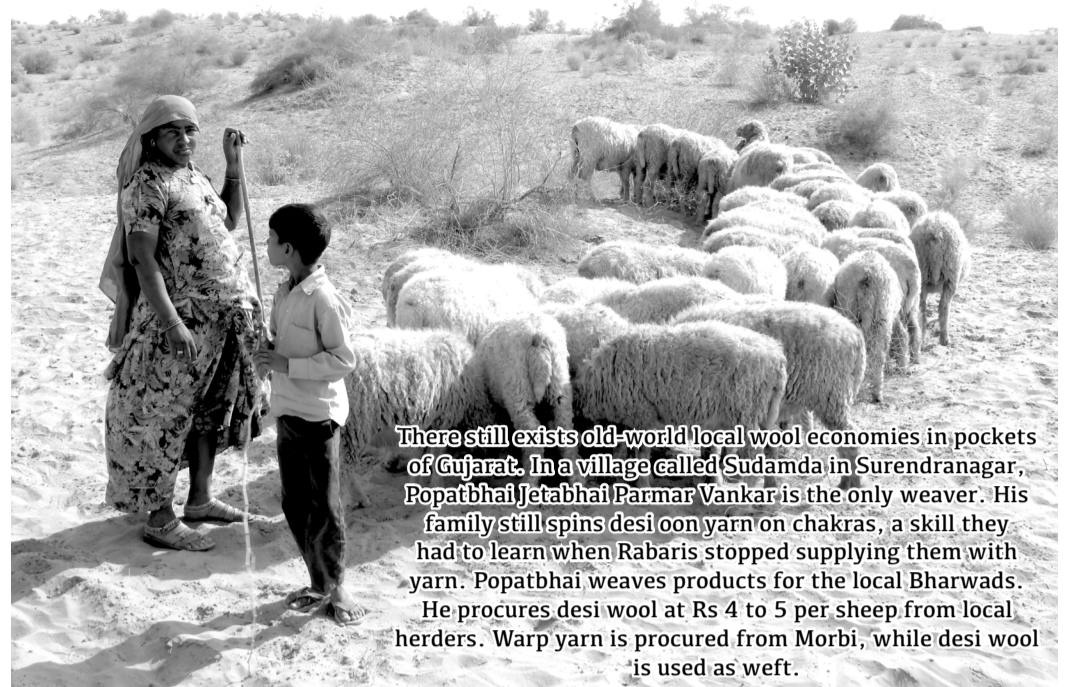
Our country produces more than 40 million kilos of wool and is one of the top producers of wool in the world. While, ideally, we should be developing infrastructure to position ourselves to take advantage of the wonderful fibre that wool is, the shocking truth is that most Indian wool is discarded for the want of a market demand. When Indian wool is used, it finds two chief uses- as a raw material for traditional woollens produced in a closed-loop local economy, and as a raw material for carpet exporters. Unfortunately, the use of wool in both the economies has been shrinking. Many herding communities, traditionally major users of wool, have started moving towards exclusively ritualistic use of wool while the carpet manufacturers have come to be increasingly reliant on imported wool. The loss of market is due to a shift towards resource intensive yet cheaper artificial fibres. The traditional wool production systems have also been hit by the easing of import restrictions on wool after liberalization. As things stand, we import wool worth 2000 crore rupees a year! The steady decline of the local wool economy

also means that wool artisans have to move to other jobs or other fibres. Many of them have moved to unskilled jobs. A matter of even graver concern is the loss of an important source of income for the herders who have responded by breeding meaty sheep, often at the cost of resilience of the system. Yet, there is hope!

While the traditional wool economies have been shrinking with alarming speed in the last two decades, India remains home to one of the most vibrant wool crafting cultures in the world. The Himalayan region of India produces the finest wool and still finds a ready market. Some private players have even started procuring wool from herders in bulk and marketing the wool in the west which values this wool because it is organic and non-violent. The herders in the Himalayas too continue to find wool better than any other fibre in the cold and wet monsoons. The arid west of India still has many wool weavers, and Bikaner remains one of the largest wool mandis of the world. Bikaner is also home to around 200 spinning mills which produce yarn for carpet exporters based in Bhadohi, Agra, Panipat, and Jaipur. The Deccan plateau is home to the iconic Gongadi, a textile for all seasons and all uses. The Gongadis are also offered to the Gods and often customized with painstaking skill by the wearers.

India is also home to a bounty of genetic resources housed in pastoral systems. One of the indicators of this bounty are the 43 registered sheep breeds of India. Our assessment also indicates that there may be a few more sheep breeds which may get recognition in the coming years. To put things in perspective, India is home to more than 10% of

Photo Credit: Arun Mani Dixit



There still exists old-world local wool economies in pockets of Gujarat. In a village called Sudamda in Surendranagar, Popatbhai Jetabhai Parmar Vankar is the only weaver. His family still spins desi oon yarn on chakras, a skill they had to learn when Rabaris stopped supplying them with yarn. Popatbhai weaves products for the local Bharwads. He procures desi wool at Rs 4 to 5 per sheep from local herders. Warp yarn is procured from Morbi, while desi wool is used as weft.

the total registered sheep breeds in the world. Our indigenous sheep find as much of a comfort in the icy alpine lands as they do in the hot deserts or the humid coasts!

There is a general trend of decline in availability of grazing resources in India. We expect that grazing resources will be even more contested in the coming years, a tussle in which pastoralists are often at disadvantage because they are used to grazing on large swathes of marginal lands traditionally part of the commons. Despite these challenges, the number of sheep in India has almost doubled since independence. This indicates that the practice of herding sheep remains a popular and economically profitable profession. The pastoral communities and the practice of pastoralism also allows for mobility- there are many instances of traditional pastoral communities exiting the trade and newer communities taking their place. As

indicated above, wool can find many uses other than use as a raw material for textiles. For example wool could be composted to produce high quality biofertilizer or be used as insulation material in built environments. It is imperative that initiatives look at leveraging all the qualities of wool to create demand for indigenous wool as solely the textile market may not be able to absorb such huge volumes of wool.



Shouryamoy Das is an engineer and certified financial risk manager by training. He has been working with development organizations on pastoralism and related livelihoods for the last four years.

Photo Credit: Shouryamoy Das



Anil ji is a Gaddi herder from Himachal Pradesh. He grazes his flock in alpine pastures of Bara Bhangal in the summers where his family has permanent settlements. He moves down to the lower hills via Chota Bhangal as the winters start setting in. He also collects herbs and mushrooms from the grazing lands and this is an important source of income for him.

“When I started work a kilo of honey, ghee, chillies, and desi wool were the same! In the past decades, the price of wool compared to the other three fell. No demand... and suddenly there is a spurt again. I hope our woollen handlooms are liked by you now... this is what we have done for the last 35 years... this is what we know how to do well.”
~ Mansa Ram, a member of the Gaddi community and one of the many deft wool pastoralist-weavers from Kangra.



Photo Credit: Jen Hoover



Himalyan Ecosystem

Himalayas is a home to many knitters, a relatively new craft community. Though not a traditional craft practice, the knit crafts-women are known to be super dexterous. It is not uncommon to find women knitting on the move; they negotiate twisting trails and intricate designs at the same time with equal serenity; a testament to their focus, skill, and balance. They, along with the weavers and shepherds of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand bring you a small flavour of new possibilities. Desi Oon brings in a collection of four delightful initiatives based in the Himalaya.

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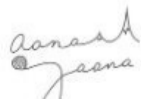


Photo Credit: Jen Hoover



There is More to Your Wool than Meets the Eye

by Jen Hoover

In recent years, there is growing interest in knowing where one's clothing was produced. Following the Slow Food and Locavore movements, which encourage consumers to connect with the farms that grow their food, Slow Fashion includes efforts to identify "fibersheds" or regions where textile materials are grown and processed within a fairly small geographic range. Wool is an especially interesting material for this project, as wool quality is directly affected by the type of environments in which sheep graze. Factors like the nutritional content of local grasses, mineral content of the soil, and amount and quality of water can affect the texture, strength, length, and color of wool.

But wool also complicates ideas of "place" and "local" for the simple reason that sheep move around. The Himachali herders among whom I have conducted research migrate hundreds of kilometers per year, crossing through several distinct climate zones. The high-altitude pastures of Lahaul contain high-protein grasses and medicinal herbs, keeping the sheep healthy and contributing to good wool growth. The lower altitudes where herds spend the winter are increasingly overrun by sprawling development and invasive, poisonous plants such as lantana, making it difficult to find adequate fodder and slowing wool growth. Herders deal with this variability by shearing the sheep twice when they pass through their home villages—once on the way up, and once on the way down. For personal use, they keep only the wool produced during summer and monsoon months in the high-altitude pastures.

For pastoralists on the move, place and time are inextricably entwined. So it is fitting that place and time are also entwined as they are expressed in wool. As a strand of wool grows outward from the sheep's skin, it becomes a slowly scrolling record of the sheep's experiences over a span of months.

An attentive woolgrower can see where along the length of the wool there is a weak spot, and trace it to a particular moment where some environmental stress caused the wool grown at that time to be brittle. Some Himachali wools also express pastoralist time in another way: two distinct types of fiber

grow at the same time, but at different speeds, intermixed on the body of the sheep. This trait is known as "double coated" wool. The slightly wavy outer coat may be 2-3 times longer than the inner coat, which is not only shorter but also highly crimped, creating an insulating layer full of air pockets.

The two coats of this fleece embody two different modes of moving through time: one quick, and the other slow, meandering, lingering. Himachali herders operate in both modes at different times of year, and even simultaneously. The months in the high-altitude pastures, when wool growth is at its fastest, are also times of relative idleness for the shepherds. Ample grazing grounds make minding the sheep easy. A few hundred animals can be managed by a team of two or three herders who spend a lot of time just sitting around. The winter months, by contrast, require more assistants

to keep sheep from getting into fields where they're not welcome or getting stolen by thieves. Shearing season is a busy time when villagers may work late into the night to fit this necessary task in among other agricultural work and their day jobs. And yet, even in this difficult task, shearers work at a somewhat leisurely pace, pausing to enjoy a cup of chai while the sheep flop over in their laps.

As a strand of wool grows outward from the sheep's skin, it becomes a slowly scrolling record of the sheep's experiences over a span of months.



Double coatedness is considered a "primitive" trait in sheep, one that is not prized by the global wool industry which relies on uniform material to be processed by machine. It is well suited for hand processing into the blankets and clothing that Himachali herders rely on for survival during their migrations. It is eminently adapted for the unique place in which it is grown and used, and also embodies an approach to living in place and time, with all of its variability, that those of us stuck in the fast lane of urban life would do well to learn from.

Photo Credit: Jen Hoover



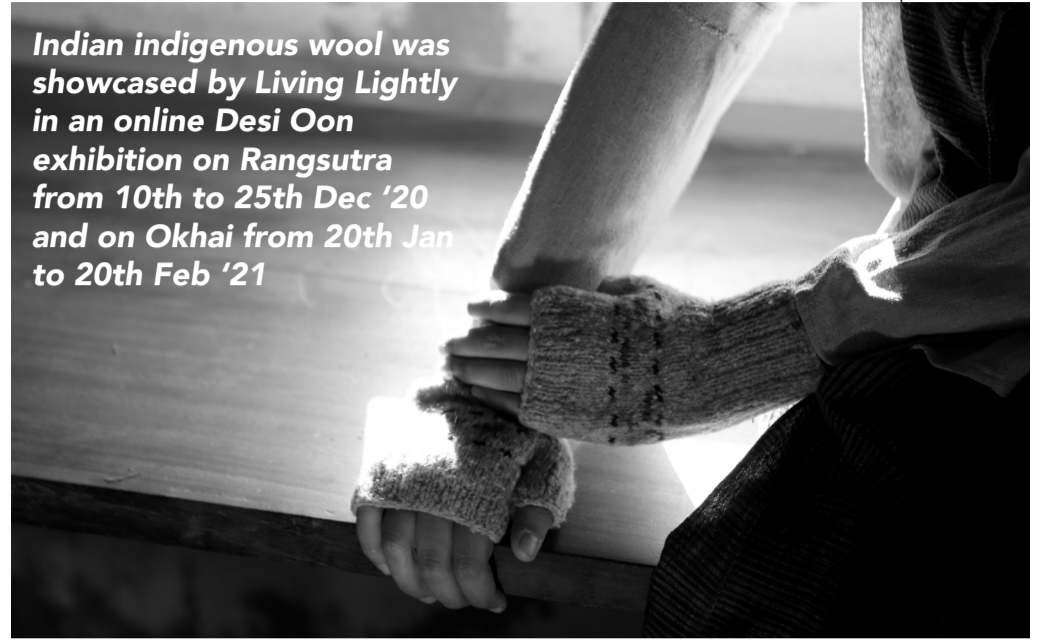
Jen Hoover is an independent researcher and textile crafter based in northern California. She has recently started a small fair trade business, aana jaana, in support of the region's herders and artisans.

Exhibition

Bringing Back Desi Oon

Photo Credit: Nipun Prabhakar

Indian indigenous wool was showcased by Living Lightly in an online Desi Oon exhibition on Rangсутra from 10th to 25th Dec '20 and on Okhai from 20th Jan to 20th Feb '21



Indian indigenous wool was showcased by Living Lightly in an online Desi Oon exhibition on Rangсутra from 10th to 25th Dec '20 and on Okhai from 20th Jan to 20th Feb '21

The online exhibition-sale on 'Desi oon' highlighted the central role of wool in pastoral movements, cultures, and economies, and featured different sheep breeds including the black sheep of Deccan, the Patanwadi sheep of Gujarat, and the Harsil sheep of Uttarakhand. The exhibition was accompanied by a film festival on pastoralism.

The exhibition in December 2020 featured the indigenous wool of India, showcasing a fantastic collection of products created by the wool artisans, the experiences of the pastoral herders, and perspectives of civil society members.

India boasts a rich diversity of indigenous wool and woolsens—a result of the sheep and its wool being nurtured by herders, hand spinners, weavers, felters, and dyers. As Neelkanth Mama, an octogenarian herder put it "Herding sheep is our dharma, more than a mere occupation. It has been entrusted upon us by the divine." Artisans too, derive pride and solitude from their practice. Mahadevi Mehta, a spinner from Uttarakhand, says that her main income is not money, but the happiness and peace she finds in spinning.

The Desi Oon story began with the wool fibre and through that traces the movement of the sheep, the uniqueness of each breed, gorgeous diversity of traditional products and the wonderful skill of the wool artisans.

Unfortunately, in the past two decades, the procurement of wool has fallen drastically leading to a significant drop in secondary income for the herders. Today most shepherds strew their migratory routes with discarded wool, for want of a market. India's wool requirements are met largely by imported wool, a commercial production system which has hurt indigenous economy.

As the world introspects and contemplates the "new normal", the creations of these pastoralists and artisans (through Desi Oon), showed how they inhabit time, space, work, and leisure, and also the possibilities of resilience they hold in a world endangered by climate change. If revived, the local wool

Unfortunately, in the past two decades, the procurement of wool has fallen drastically leading to a significant drop in secondary income for the herders. Today most shepherds strew their migratory routes with discarded wool, for want of a market.

industry can engage the entire country to lead a global shift towards green production.

The exhibition also connected pastoralists and artisans with some of India's best craft organizations, all of whom are breathing new life into an entire value chain of indigenous wool across India. Each partnering organization highlighted a particular breed -- the Black Deccani sheep was presented by Mitan and Earthen Tunes, Harsil sheep by Avani and Peoli, Chokla by Rangсутra, Patanwadi by Khamir, and the indigenized Gaddi-Merino sheep of Himachal Pradesh by Aana Jana and Kullvi Whims.

Photo Credit: Nipun Prabhakar



Denmark of Vidarbha

by Ajinkya Shahane

Wardha, a district at the heart of India just next to Nagpur is popular for its Ashrams - established by Mahatma Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave. It is home to large swathes of grasslands and forests. Estimates say the Arvi plains of the region are home to about 400 hectares of grasslands. These grasslands have sheltered several pastoral communities and animals for centuries.

Did you know that the Gazetteer of 1906 declared the Arvi plains of Wardha as 'The Denmark of Vidarbha'? The plains supplied milk to the entire district! Who could have inspired such a comparison?! It would have to have been the Nand Gaolis! The Nand Gaoli is a pastoral community of the region, known to be expert rearers of the Gaolao Cow and the Nagpuri Buffalo. The nutritious grasses of these lands have nurtured the animals, kept them healthy, and the milk flowing. It was literally a river that used to flow each day - 2.5 lakh litres of milk to be precise!

The full bodied milk was an excellent source of white butter which used to be exported to far away lands. Manchester in the United Kingdom was also a proud consumer of this butter! The Nand Gaoli herders used to store the butter in large tanks which used to be brimming with liquid butter. The story goes that often a buffalo calf would tumble into these tanks as they jumped around frivolously.

Did you know that the Gazetteer of 1906 declared the Arvi plains of Wardha as 'The Denmark of Vidarbha'?



Times have changed since! The Pimpal Khuta Bazaar, a favourite of the Nand Gaolis started facing competition from the Arvi Loni Bazaar which drew in crowds. The grasslands too were eventually encroached by people with vested interests while the forest department started restricting access to these lands. The farmers too shifted to cultivating cash crops. The crop residue of the cash crops was not good enough to feed the animals in the dry season.

Some of these Nand Gaolis still persevere and continue to conserve the traditional grazing

lands as well as the native breeds. We hope that someday Arvi will once again rise to its billing as the Denmark of Vidarbha!



After an IT sector stint, Ajinkya has returned to his farming community and works closely with farmers and pastoral communities of Maharashtra - Currently working with CPC (Center for Peoples collective Nagpur) on Pastoralism and Crop Damage by wild herbivores.

Tales of Goat Milk Gastronomy

by Riya Sequeira Shetty



Photo Credit: Nathubhai Khodabhai Sarsiya

Khodabhai Baddabhai Bharvad of the Bharvad community in Upleta, Jamnagar, Gujarat owns a herd of 130 Bagri goats. Efforts are underway (by Junagadh University and government agencies) to register this bagri goat breed that is free ranging and grazes across open areas. 75 of Khodabhai's goats are currently milking and since they are milked once in the morning, and once in the evening, Khodabhai gets 75 - 80 litres each day. Milk from the free ranging Bagri goats is like a polyphony of several notes - astringent, grassy, and earthy flavours combine, a taste perhaps best described as goaty! It has several therapeutic benefits, yet does not have much demand in the market.

Khodabhai says that the dairies, generally, don't procure goat milk and if they do, it is for any random amount between 10-15 rupees per litre. This makes the Bharvads wary of dairies. They prefer selling milk to chai shops which pay about 18 rupees for a litre of goat milk. Many goats roaming and feeding in the dense grasslands of Saurashtra, produce great volumes of milk. These volumes far outstrip the well-known Gujarati thirst for milky tea! Thus, chai shops can procure only a fraction of the total goat milk produced in the region.

Apart from using milk at home domestically, the Bharvad women make mawa, for three generations now. They are able to get 1 kg of mawa from 7 litres of milk. From Khodabhai's goats, around 8 kgs of mawa is made per day. Every 2-3 days the

men of the household take the mawa to nearby towns such as Jam Jodhpur, Dhoraji or Junagarh. The mawa sells for 200- 220 per kilo in these towns.

Kodabhai and his fellow Bharvads feel it is inadequate compensation for a food that is so good and now dreams of goat milk pedhas! He has been selling mawa to local halwais (sweet makers) who have started making small batches of pedhas to test waters. Some sweetness of sugar, dried fruits and spices are perfect companions to Goat milk mawa. Sweet makers are experimenting with it for the moment, distributing it for tasting and selling it in temples and in small markets.

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From the received positive responses and future demands, Kodabhai will play a key role in the setting up a Sangathan of herders to meet the demand from sweet shops, restaurants or caterers. Being a herder all his life, he is now keen to extend his steps from the world of grasslands to the world of enterprise. He feels they could even make pedhas better than the halwai, provided a market is created. The pedhas could well help them gain increased incomes and a greater share of the dairy economy. Success will mean inspiration to many other Bharvad families, and to the herders of the larger world. Perhaps it is time that these primary producers took control of their produce, cutting the need for large-scale procurement, processing, and promotion - thereby reaching the consumers directly.



Riya Sequeira Shetty has an interest in sustainability and has worked with ecology and conservation. She is currently the coordinator at Centre for Pastoralism.



Photo Credit: Nathubhai Khodabhai Sarsiya



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Seven thousand rupees for a litre of donkey's milk? For a litre of anything? Sounds insane, but that's what the newspaper headlines said in September 2020 about the milk of Halari donkeys in Saurashtra, Gujarat. It even turned out to be true – if only in a single verifiable instance. And the Halari-rearing communities of Gujarat would laugh you out of sight if you dared suggest that they were routinely finding such rates.

The price for this variety of milk, said to have rare medicinal qualities, seems to have touched a maximum level of Rs. 125 a litre in Gujarat. And even that came from an organisation buying limited quantities of it for research.

And so here I was in Saurashtra, following up on the newspaper headlines. In the barren cotton fields of Rajkot district I met Kholabhai Jujubhai Bharwad, a pastoralist in his 60s, from Jampar village in Bhanvad block of Devbhoomi Dwarka district, on an annual migration route with his family. They were tending a herd of goats and sheep, and five Halari donkeys.

“Only RAbari and Bharwad communities keep Halari donkeys,” said Kholabhai. And among them, very few families are “keeping the tradition alive. These animals are beautiful but not sustainable for our livelihoods. They generate zero income.” Kholabhai and his five brothers together own 45 donkeys.

Halari donkeys are an indigenous breed of Saurashtra, deriving their name from Halar, a historical region of western India corresponding to the present districts of Jamnagar, Devbhumi Dwarka, Morbi and Rajkot. These strong and

Following the Halari Donkeys of Saurashtra

by Ritayan Mukherjee



Hamir Haja enforcing night-time security protocols. He says the donkeys tend to run away if not tied up well.

well-built donkeys, white in colour, can walk up to 30-40 kilometres in a day. They are used as pack animals during pastoralist migrations and also to pull carts. The Halari was the first from Gujarat to be registered and recognised as an indigenous donkey breed by the National Bureau of Animal

Genetic Resources. Nationally, it was the second after the Spiti donkey from Himachal Pradesh and just ahead of the Kachchhi, also from Gujarat. The 20th Livestock Census 2019 records an alarming decline in the donkey population across India – with their numbers falling from 330,000

in 2012 to 120,000 in 2019 – a decline of around 62 per cent. In Gujarat, this drop is visible in the numbers of Halari donkeys as well as the breeders. The reasons for the decline? “Where is the land for donkey grazing?” asks a frustrated Mangabhai Jadabhai Bharwad, a pastoralist of Jampar village, who is in his late 50s. “Most grazing lands are now under cultivation. So much of farming everywhere. Nor can we graze in forest land. That's forbidden by law.” And, he adds, “Maintaining the Halari male is a tough job. They have a bad temperament. Their numbers do not grow fast.”

There is also, says Ranabhai, a social stigma attached with rearing donkeys. “Who wants to hear – ‘dekho gadhera ja raha hain’ [‘look, donkeys are going by’] – that's not something anyone deserves to hear from others.” Ranabhai's own herd has fallen from 28 to 5 over the past two years. He sold many Halaris because he was unable to maintain them and needed to raise cash. A Halari can fetch Rs. 15,000-20,000 at the fair which is held at Vautha in Dholka taluka of Ahmedabad district. The buyers are from within the state or from other states – from other nomadic communities, or some looking for sturdy pack animals – for use, for example, in mining areas – or for pulling carts

So what was that sensation over Rs. 7,000 for a litre of donkey's milk about? It began with local newspapers reporting the sale of a single litre – just the one – for Rs. 7,000 in Mota Garediya village of Jamnagar's Dhol block. The lucky recipient of that price was the herder Vashrambhai Tedhabhai. He told reporters he had never himself heard of anyone getting such a price, ever.



Chanabhai Rudabhai Bharwad demonstrates the process of milking a Halari. This milk is believed to be an immunity-booster and to possess many positive medicinal qualities.



The white-coloured Halari donkeys of Saurashtra are of strong, muscular build and can walk up to 30-40 kilometers a day carrying loads during pastoralist migrations.



Ranabhai Govindbhai with pictures of his once huge herd of Halaris. They are tough to manage, he says, and believes it is better to keep the herd small.

The Halari is a good-looking, good-natured breed, with gentle eyes: ‘These animals are beautiful but not sustainable for our livelihoods’, says Kholabhai Jujubhai Bharwad of Jampar village.



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

Notes on Fashion

Simply Style or Simply Living?

by Shabri Wable

Pastoralism has always charmed the city bred, at least the more romantic urban folks. We admire their ruggedness, their simplicity and ingenuity yet try to adopt their way of dress, and look amateurish at best. Surely the secret runs deeper than the fabric and the cut of the garment. Confidence and comfort makes for effortless style and pastoralists seem to be that, and also a picture of swag. While the denizens of the cities hope to assert individuality by way of their clothing, entire communities of pastoralists wear almost identical clothes, often in the same colour. How do they feel comfortable in the coarsest wools, extreme volumes, drawstrings, heavy embroidery and the chunkiest jewellery?

Perhaps the confidence comes from conforming, and belonging to a community. The wool is from the flock of a person's sheep, hand spun by a loved one and then dyed, felted, knitted, or woven in the village by someone they grew up with. However coarse the wool is, if hand knitted by the wife, or hand spun by the father, how could it not be comforting and wholesome? Perhaps just like home food. The roomy clothes are comfortable for sure, but also lend themselves perfectly to quilts in their afterlife. The cut is simple geometry- the quadrilateral of a fabric is cut into most rudimentary shapes that can be easily turned back into a rectangle of a quilt to give it a new life. Strings and drawstrings are often used to allow for pregnancies, mood swings of the body and probably allow for sharing of clothes. Embellishment in the form of embroidery is a tradition, a form of expression, an outlet, and also a showcase of skill. There is a lot

Photo Credit: Living Lightly Archives



While the denizens of the cities hope to assert individuality by way of their clothing, entire communities of pastoralists wear almost identical clothes, often in the same colour. How do they feel comfortable in the coarsest wools, extreme volumes, drawstrings, heavy embroidery and the chunkiest jewellery?

going on, in the circle of similarly dressed pastoralists. Not easy to detect, when seen closely the individual in the conformist emerges. A well worn ring that has taken the contours of the fingers, a bidi and a bunch of keys tied to the jacket string, a hidden pocket or a flash of beadwork on the drawstring all worn with easy nonchalance.

The dressing and adorning goes far beyond the human family - their wider family of camels, horses, ponies, cattle, sheep and goat are also lovingly dressed. Children build special friendships with

young lambs and goat kids. They turn friends, and the animal friends are decked up with fabric scraps and trinkets, a display of the creativity and resourcefulness of its human-mate. It is not unusual to find a pony saddled with a wool felt made from the fleece of sheep herded by his master, or to find new born lambs snuggled in the Chola, woolen coat, of a Gaddi - the wool from the herd holding man and lamb together in a warm hug. The same Chola also carries the Gaddi's food and belongings, and the dora - a woolen belt holding the vast coat together, is useful in pulling out fallen

sheep during the day, becoming a pillow at night. Pastoralist clothes then are not just covering the back but are living and evolving just as the wearer inside them.

Many of us who are a part of urban society are driven by change and perhaps make everyday improvements in our lives. This constant drive often gives way to a sense of displacement and perhaps even chaos. For the pastoralist, always on the move and often setting up camps, clothing is the much needed constant, a companion crafted by the caring hand. While we, surrounded by creature comforts, yearn for the idyllic, traditional society of the pastoralist is often described as idyllic. This idyllic life is only possible because pastoral societies are built on grit and gumption. In their daily life of harsh weather, physical exertion and watching out for the flock, very little of the self can be carried or cared for. When on the move, every item is a life-force on the back. There is only the bare minimum of material things between human and nature. In the wide horizons of nature when one has become part of the scenery, become insignificant, what allure will the man-made have if it is not deeply personal?

Few years ago, a Rabari embroidery artisan opened my eyes to the core of style. Kuverben, my colleague on a project, is an expert embroiderer with a great sense of composition and an instinct to know what works. While selecting embroidery threads I noticed that she would always pick deep shades of green, blue, red and purple regardless of the fabric we were working on. I asked her if she even looked at the fabrics before selecting the embroidery threads and she came her reply, "But these are Rabari colours!" I can see it now, being stylish is being comfortable in your own skin. Do we recognize ourselves in what we wear?



Shabri Wable is a clothes maker based in Kachchh interested in handmade, upcycling, indigenous clothing and vernacular pattern making.

on Cinema and more...

"The day we spent walking with the Rabaris was really hard. Our physical limits were truly tested."

In conversation with Filmmaker Ashwin Gokhale

"Rabari: The People of the Leopard" is a visual delight in every sense. The film tells the story of a Rabari family living in Jawai-Bera region of Rajasthan - the land they share with the leopards for many generations. As the title suggests, the viewer starts watching the film with the anticipation of getting to know the relationship between Rabaris and the leopards, and the conflicts of this co-existence. However, Gokhale, a wildlife enthusiast, struggles to find the lens through which he would want to tell his story, oscillating between the rabari and the leopard.

The region, due to its leopard population, is now attracting a lot of tourists, which is a point of conflict between the Rabaris and the resort owners. The film brings out various facets of life in Jawai-Bera region but does not tie them together in the end, leaving the viewer with a lot of questions in the mind. Still, the cinematography leaves the viewer spellbound till the very last frame.



Photo Credit: Ashwin Gokhale

Rabari: The People of the Leopard' was made by Ashwin Gokhale for his Master's thesis and was screened as part of the Living Lightly Film Festival. Here is an excerpt from a conversation between Gokhale and Bhawna Jaimini.

BJ. How and why did you choose to make Rabari: The People of Leopard?

AG. I had a chance to visit Jawai-Bera while during college and I found it to be one of the most exciting places on this planet. There are these 70 odd leopards living in caves on the hills surrounded by villages, where the Rabaris live with their animals. On my first visit there, I heard a 25 year old incident where a leopard took a child and dropped it outside the village without any harm. I come from Maharashtra where leopard attacks are very common. It was very intriguing to know that despite living in such close contact, there were such few incidents of violence involving leopards and humans.

BJ. The film has some really stunning shots of the leopards. Aren't leopards shy and not very easy to spot? How easy or difficult was it for you to get these shy creatures to act for you?

AG. We shot in January last year (2020) and because it was winter, the leopards were often out, basking. I was also told by the people of Jawai-Bera, that, because leopards usually reside in caves on the hills, they find

"I had a chance to visit Jawai-Bera while during college and I found it to be one of the most exciting places on this planet. There are these 70 odd leopards living in caves on the hills surrounded by villages, where the Rabaris live with their animals."



Photo Credit: Ashwin Gokhale

the altitude comforting and are confident to come out easily.

BJ. When the film starts, we hear a Rabari man talking about his life as a pastoralist which he explains with a lot of pride. However, when the film ends, we hear the same man denigrating his life as he compares himself to animals. This felt odd to me as I didn't want to leave the film with a sense of pity.

AG. I agree with your observation and I too felt that contrast and conflict during my conversations with the Rabaris. Somewhere the challenges faced by the community did not come out that well to help the viewer make that connection between the pride they feel and the issues they face for their survival. There is severe mismanagement from the government which doesn't pay severances to the Rabaris when the leopard takes their animals away. A lot of resorts are being set up which are employing people from the outside, instead of giving employment to the Rabaris. I think he compares his fate to that of animals to make it easy for us city folks to understand their reality.

BJ. Ashwin, what were the most challenging and rewarding aspects of making the film?

AG. The day we spent walking with the Rabaris and it was really hard! Our physical limits were truly tested. But this challenging day also turned into the most rewarding one, when in the evening we got to shoot the leopards mating.

BJ. Would you like to go back and film again in the region?

AG. I definitely would want that. I am thinking of making a series of documentaries around human-animal conflict in different regions of India. The process of making this film made me understand that no matter how many national geographic articles you read on wildlife, the realities on ground always hit you differently.



Ashwin Gokhale is a keen-eyed cinematographer and documentary practitioner, whose work spans five continents.