

A WORLD WITHOUT A ROOF



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A WORLD WITHOUT A ROOF

STORIES OF PASTORALISM
FROM INDIA

SARITA SUNDAR
ILLUSTRATIONS BY SOMESH KUMAR



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FOREWORD I

ILSE KÖHLER-ROLLEFSON

“A World without a Roof” transports us into the hidden world of Indian pastoralists, sharing with us their challenges and opportunities. It is a world that is far removed from the lives of urban Indians, a life that is both in tune and in struggle with nature, an existence in which animals and their welfare outweigh human comforts, and that is embedded in complex social structures and cultural practices.

Pastoralism is ancient and ubiquitous in India, but in a sense it is also ultra-modern. For it represents an alternative to the energy intensive and careless consumption patterns that are causing unpredictable climate change, unprecedented biodiversity loss, as well as pollution of soils, air, and water. Pastoralists “live lightly” on the land and in balance with natural resources. They are givers, not takers, providing the food, fibre and fertilizer that sustain India’s urban populations, without any policy support what so ever. It is time for the world to wake up to the wonder of pastoralism as a way of producing food that differs fundamentally from conventional agricultural practices. Without the use of fuel, pesticides, chemical fertilizers, agricultural machinery and without replacing the natural vegetation, they create food that is nutritious and “organic” in the best sense of the word, even if not yet formally recognized as such. Moreover this food is produced by animals – be it buffaloes, camels, cattle, goats, sheep, yaks, pigs and even ducks – that live together in herds and can express their natural behavioural patterns and graze on biodiverse vegetation.

The four stories in this book provide glimpses into the life of pastoralists and illustrate both the pressures they experience as well as the potential that is inherent in their way of life: the young Gaddi who is destined to become “educated” but takes an interest in his father’s hard herding life, the Jat

couple that can no longer take care of their camels due to “development”, although they produce milk that is much in demand as a healthfood, the Changpa girl that builds her career around the traditions and fine fibre produced by her nomadic family, the Kuruma people that join a cooperative reviving their weaving skills and culture.

Authors Sarita Sundar, Arvind Lodaya and illustrator Somesh Kumar have done a wonderful job of showcasing this neglected topic in a way that appeals to readers of all ages. It is an important step in making visible and revitalizing India’s diverse and bountiful pastoralist heritage. Read and enjoy!

Ilse is a native of Germany but has been partly based in Rajasthan since she met the Raika camel pastoralists during a research fellowship on camel socioeconomics and management systems in 1990. Her academic background is in veterinary medicine and anthropology and her research has been supported by the National Geographic Society, Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. She is associated with The League for Pastoral Peoples and Endogenous Livestock Development (LPP) and Lokhit Pashu-Palak Sansthan (LPPS), a local organisation in Rajasthan (India). She also advises international organisations, such as FAO, GIZ, Worldbank, and others on matters related to livestock.

FOREWORD 2

SUSHMA IYENGAR

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Sushma Iyengar is a social entrepreneur-scholar with interests in crafts development, community rehabilitation and social organization building. She founded Kutch Mahila Vikas Sangathan, a rural collective that helped transform women from wage-earners to skilled entrepreneurs and local development leaders. She later co-founded Kutch Nav Nirman Abhiyan – commonly known as Abhiyan – a network of civil society organizations in the desert district of Kachchh in western India. Sushma is also associated with Sahjeevan, an organisation that promotes ecological restoration, crucially water, through women’s empowerment. She is currently on sabbatical, and the ‘Living Lightly’ exhibition, conference and associated activities, such as this book, are the outcomes of her longstanding passion to highlight the genius – and challenges – of pastoralists.

A LITTLE BIT ABOUT THIS BOOK...



"I WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO GOING TO THE HIGH MOUNTAIN PASTURES – PAPA OFTEN SPOKE OF HOW MUCH THE GOATS LOVED THE GRASS THAT PEEPED TENTATIVELY FROM UNDER THE PATCHES OF SNOW..."



IN THE DISTANCE, THE CAMELS SEEM TO BE SWAYING TO THE MUSIC, THEIR BELLS ADDING TO THE ORCHESTRA OF SOUNDS. LIKE THE CAMELS, RABRAKHIYA ALSO SWAYS GENTLY, PENSIVELY MOUTHING THE LYRICS OF THE SONG.

When we were asked to put together a ‘learning’ book on pastoralism in India, the choice of using a graphic novella format was immediate. In a graphic novel every part of each frame plays a role in interpretation. Readers ‘visualize’ a piece of writing and also make inferences from an image; the subtle nuances of a character’s tilt of a head (or frown) can be more evocative than words strung together in sentences. In today’s media-rich world, where image and text are so closely intertwined, we felt this this genre without being overtly ‘educational’, would stimulate, inform and trigger reflection.

Like figures in a landscape painting that offer perspective and points of view, we chose four protagonists who would allow an intimate, ‘up close’ view of the hopes and fears, struggles and successes of their communities. The text oscillates between fleeting moments and events in their lives – and a long view analysis of their communities and surroundings. Each story emphasizes one core theme while together they speak of inter-generational conflict, common property issues; and the close linkages between animals, products, land and livelihood. While the characters are mostly imaginary – they could well carry with them shades of the people we ‘met’ in deeply researched papers, films and many conversations. At the core of this book lies the optimism that a more



"THAT IS ME, AS A TEENAGER, ON THE LOOM. IN OUR LANGUAGE THERE IS A SAYING THAT GOES, 'A WOMAN WHO IS PREOCCUPIED IN WEAVING WILL HAVE LITTLE TIME TO THINK WICKED THOUGHTS.' I OFTEN REBELLED AGAINST THESE NOTIONS"

YELLAMA KEEPS A WATCHFUL EYE ON LITTLE POCHIAH AS HE WANDERS OFF INTO THE COURTYARD, PULLING A YOUNG LAMB BY THE EARS, HIS NEW POTTUGONGADI TRAILING BEHIND HIM..

intimate understanding of how ‘other’ communities live will make our worlds a little more tolerant, a little more compassionate, a little less critical, a little less insular.

The unknown has always called out to imagination and humanity’s restless spirit has ensured that boundaries are pushed, new landscapes of knowledge and beauty discovered. Our characters – the pastoralists – seem to have an almost inherent need to seek out the unknown; migration is core to their way of life. A Maldhari saying goes, “If we stop building huts of straw and grass and stop moving around, danger is near.”

‘A World Without a Roof’ took us to many landscapes previously unknown: the desolate mangroves of Kutch, the craggy terrains of Ladakh, the verdant greens of Bharmour and the arid grasslands of Medak – with Jagan, Pemba, Rabrakhiya and Yellamma – and we invite you to join us on the journey.

Sarita Sundar & Arvind Lodaya

NOMADS, PASTORALISTS, ANIMAL KEEPERS, AREN'T THEY ALL THE SAME?

Anthropologists often group pastoralists into the larger category of **NOMADS**



Animal husbandry professionals and development agencies look at pastoralists as **ANIMAL KEEPERS**



IN INDIA, STUDIES OF COMMUNITIES AND DEVELOPMENTAL POLICIES HAVE CENTRED AROUND THE “VILLAGE”, and due to their transient and dispersed existence **PASTORALISTS** somehow have fallen through the gaps.¹



A DEFINITION OF INDIAN PASTORALISTS

“Members of caste or ethnic groups with a strong traditional association with livestock keeping, where a substanatial proportion of the group derive over 50% of household income from livestock products or their sale, and where over 90% of animal consumption is from natural pasture or browse, and where households are responsible for the full cycle of livestock breeding.” ²

“Mobility seems to be an unreliable defining criterion for pastoralism in the Indian context.” ³

WHY HAVE THEY BEEN MARGINALIZED AND OFTEN EXCLUDED FROM DIALOGUE?

“...partly because these communities are largely politically ‘quiet’- they themselves do not place their demands concertedly before the government, for they lack endogenous vocal leadership; and also, they are devoid of the patronage of a national leader who can help bring them to the centre stage of political discourse. Perhaps, they have not been seen as constituting a decisive vote bank. It is apparent that there is a lot of apathy among the policy makers and planners about these communities. For many of them these communities are inconsequential. Many are not even aware of their existence.”⁴

AND HISTORY HASN'T BEEN KIND TO PASTORAL COMMUNITIES EITHER... FROM THE COLONIAL PERIOD ONWARDS, MANY POLICIES HAVE NOT TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT THE LIFESTYLE, LIVELIHOOD OR CULTURAL NEEDS OF PASTORALISTS...

The Criminal Tribes Act in 1871 was the first of these policies where pastoralists were grouped along with other ‘gypsy-like tribes who had an innate preference for a life of adventure and were given to a life of crime.’ The Indian Forests Act of 1865 imposed a ‘grazing fee’ on pastoralists who wanted to graze their herds on forest lands.

VARIOUS COMMITTEES AND ACTS AFTER INDEPENDENCE HAVE ATTEMPTED TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES, ⁵ HOWEVER...

Colonial-era policies persist in our natural resource policies, even seven decades after independence. A few efforts were made in 1980, 2002 and more recently in 2006, when the Forest Rights Act (FRA) was amended to recognize the rights of pastoralists to access forestland, providing an avenue through the Forest Rights Rules to gain recognition for previously unrecorded rights.⁶

The overall framework, however, still remains heavily skewed against these ‘lightest of light-livers’, and their struggle for recognition and subsistence continues to this day.

TO KNOW MORE:

^{1, 2, 3} Vijay Paul Sharma, Ilse Kohler-Rollefson, John Morton, ‘Pastoralism in India: A Scoping Study’. United Kingdom Department for International Development. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08ce2e5274a31e00014fa/ZC0181b.pdf>

^{4, 5} ‘2008 Report, The National Commission For Denotified, Nomadic And Semi-Nomadic Tribes’. Ministry Of Social Justice & Empowerment, GoI. [http://socialjustice.nic.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/NCDNT2008-v1%20\(1\).pdf](http://socialjustice.nic.in/writereaddata/UploadFile/NCDNT2008-v1%20(1).pdf)

⁶ ‘Our Rights Under Indian Laws And Policies, ‘Biocultural Community Protocol of the Camel Pastoralists of Kachchh’. Kachchh Unt Uchherak Maldhari Sangathan <https://madeinkachchh.wordpress.com/tag/camels/>

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THE PASTORAL LIFESTYLE TODAY?

PASTORALISM OFFERS INSIGHTS INTO ADAPTATION TO A CHANGING CLIMATE.

The resilience of the Kharai Camels and the Jat Maldharis in the harsh climates of the Kuchchhi mangroves gives us a glimpse of indigenous knowledge systems about coping mechanisms for environmental stresses like droughts and floods.



The Changpas of Ladakh illustrate the potential to create livelihoods in arid and cold deserts.



Pastoralists have vital knowledge to create livelihoods without increasing pressure on degraded ecosystems or emitting more greenhouse gases.

PASTORALISM IS A VIBRANT, EXTREMELY LOW-IMPACT AND PRODUCTIVE WAY OF LIFE FOLLOWED BY MILLIONS IN INDIA AND AROUND THE WORLD.

The Kurumas of Telengana and Gaddis of Himachal Pradesh illustrate the potential to produce food on marginal lands. They also shed light on conserving genetic livestock diversity and valuable indigenous breeds.



There existed a symbiotic relation between pastoralists and other communities. Farmers would welcome migrating herders and their animals to graze and replenish farmlands with manure. The pastoralists would be paid for this service or could also barter milk and butter in exchange for grain.



Pastoral animals live off natural vegetation or crop by-products and do not compete with humans for food grains. They recycle waste products such as stubble and produce dung which can be used as manure to fertilize arable soil for the next crop and as cooking fuel.



Animals continue to play a central role in pastoral lifestyles and cultures and are closely linked to the well-being of herders. They provide meat and dairy for food, and wool and leather which are made into handicrafts that create livelihoods in the larger ecosystem of craftsmen and traders.



MAJOR PASTORAL GROUPS IN INDIA



LOCATION, ETHNIC IDENTITIES

LOCATION	PASTORAL GROUP & ANIMALS
Jammu & Kashmir	Banihar Dodhi Gujjars (Buffaloes) Bakrawals (Goats)
Ladakh	Changpas (Yaks, Sheep, Pashmina Goats)
Himachal Pradesh	Gaddis (Sheep & Goats) Kinnauras (Sheep & Goats), Gujjars (Buffaloes)
Punjab	Gaddis (Sheep and Goats)
Upper Uttaranchal	Bhotias (Sheep, Goat, Cattle)
Uttarakhand	Van Gujjars (Buffaloes - Tarai/ Gojri) Gaddis (Sheep, Goat)
Rajasthan	Raikas, Rabaris (Camel, Sheep, Goat, Cattle)
Gujarat	Jats, Samas, Rabaris (Camels, Cattle, Buffalo, Sheep, Goats) Bharwads (Cattle, Sheep, Goats) Charan/Gadhvi (Cattle)
Maharashtra	Dhangars (Deccani Sheep, Cattle)
Sikkim	Bhutttias
Arunachal Pradesh	Monpas (Yak)
Orissa	Ghunsur (Cattle, Goats)
Andhra Pradesh	Kuruma (Sheep), Golla (Cattle)
Telengana	Kuruma (Sheep)
Karnataka	Kuruba (Deccani and Bellary Sheep) Golla (Cattle)
Tamil Nadu	Toda (Buffalo) (Ramnad White Sheep) (Vembur Sheep), Duck Pastoralists

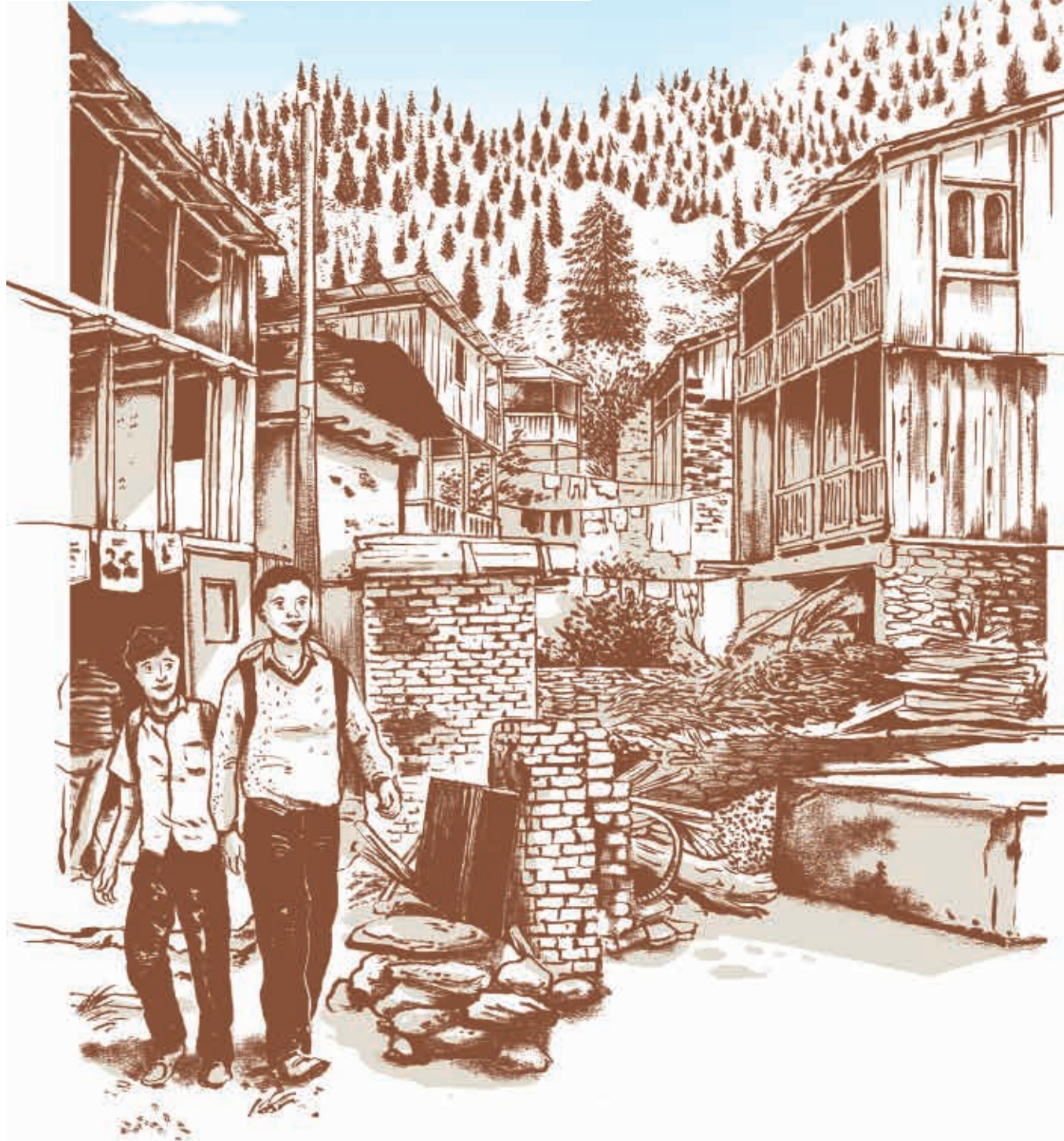


CHOLA, TOPA, DORA

Gagan, a Gaddi youth from Champa in Himachal Pradesh, looks with uncertainty at his future.

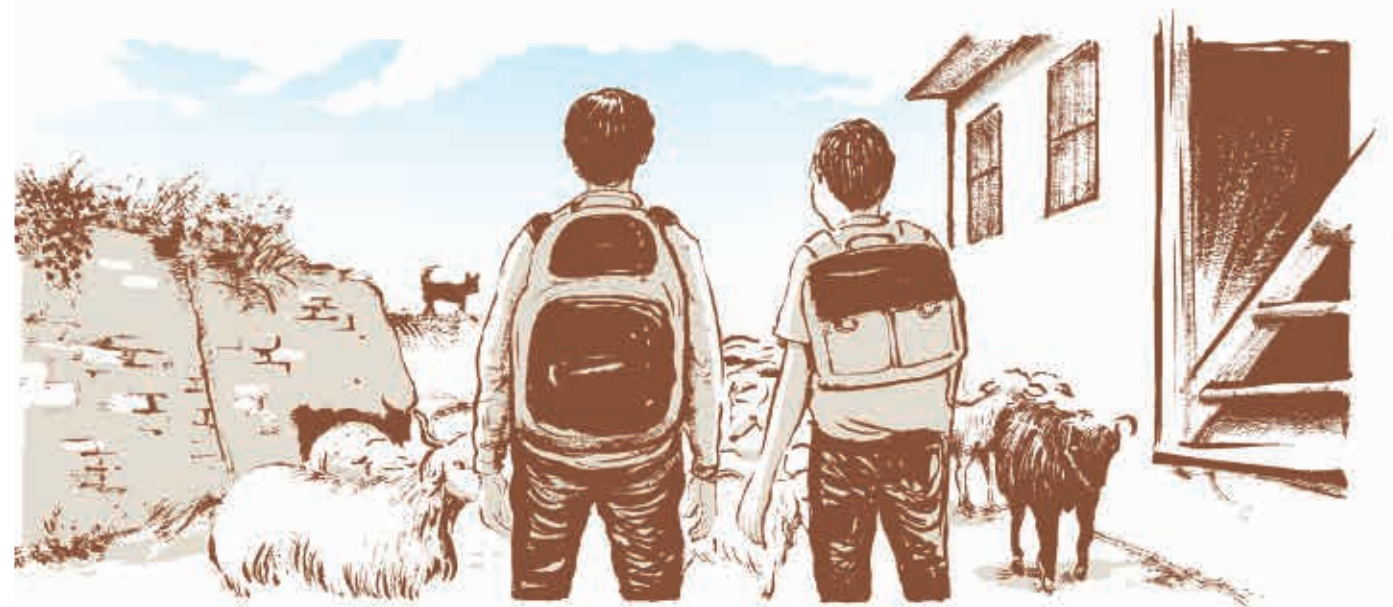
CHOLA, TOPA, DORA

AN OCTOBER AFTERNOON IN A VILLAGE IN CHAMBA DISTRICT IN THE NORTH INDIAN STATE OF HIMACHAL PRADESH...



GAGAN , THE NARRATOR OF THIS STORY, WALKS HOME FROM SCHOOL THROUGH THE NARROW STREETS. THESE HIGHLANDS OF THE MIDDLE HIMALAYAS ARE ONE OF THE MOST INHOSPITABLE GEOGRAPHIC REGIONS IN THE WORLD, AND IS HOME TO THE GADDIS – THE PASTORAL COMMUNITY THAT GAGAN BELONGS TO.

THE COURTYARD WHICH WAS QUIET TILL TODAY MORNING WAS BUSTLING WITH THE BLEATING OF GOATS AND SHEEP.



MITHU SEEMS TO BE TELLING ME ALL ABOUT HIS TRAVELS... HIS FUR IS MATTED. IN THE CORNER, I SPOT PAPA'S TOPA AND TRAVEL WORN SHOES...



I PEEK THROUGH THE DOOR, PAPA IS TELLING MA ABOUT HIS TRIP, AND THAT IT WAS BECOMING DIFFICULT FOR HIM TO MANAGE THE HERD BY HIMSELF. HE WAS THINKING ABOUT GETTING SOME HELP, MAYBE ASKING MY COUSIN TO JOIN HIM.



Gaddi families celebrate Shivaratri at the Bharmour temple, which is close to the Manimahesh Lake, a popular pilgrim destination. Legend has it that Shiva, the primary deity of the Gaddis, gifted the Gaddis with Chola (long coat), Topa (cap) and Dora (woven belt) to deal with the harsh winters.

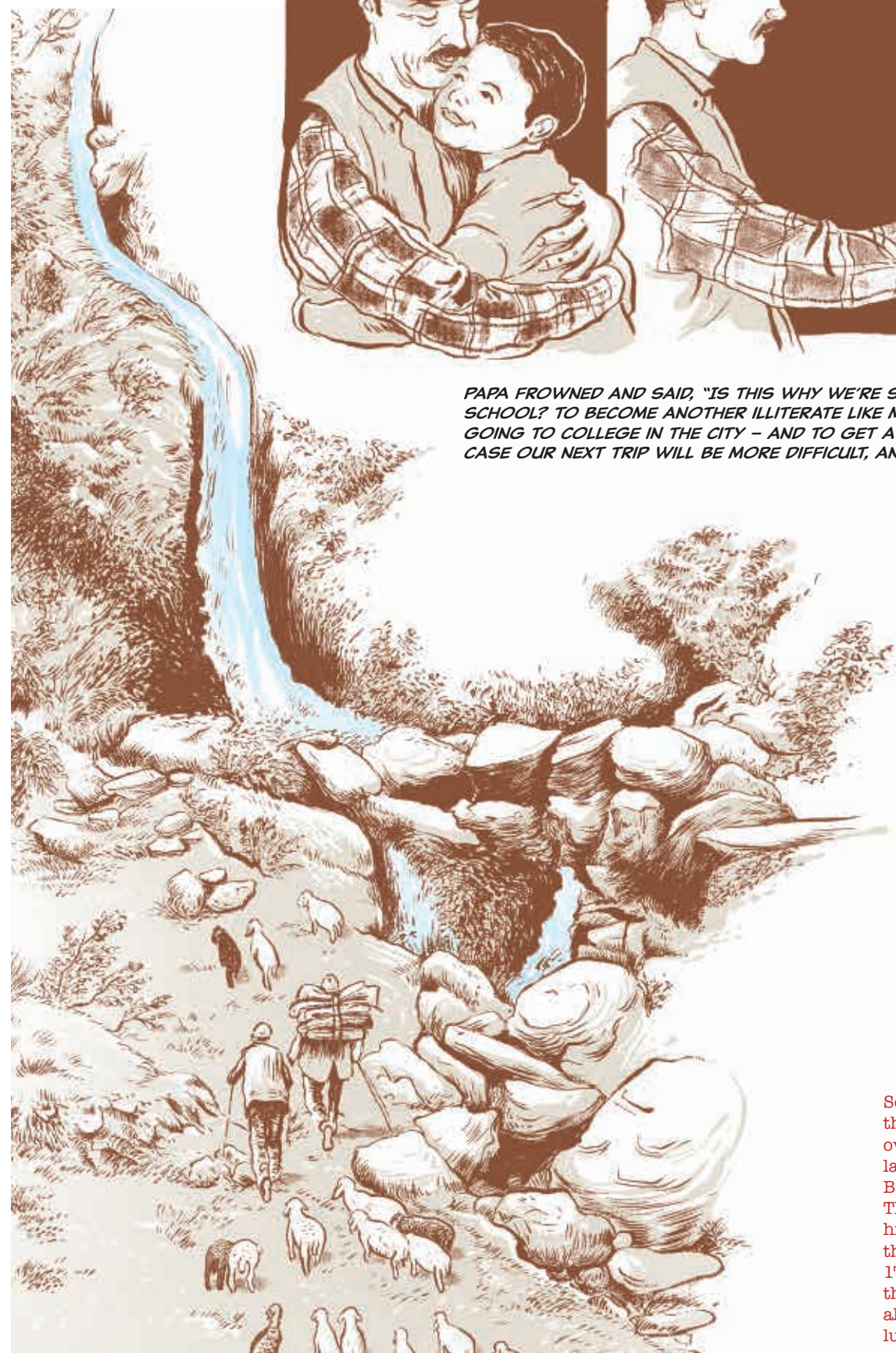
Many Gaddis have houses in Kangra as well as Bharmour – and women and children move between them. Dasua, Ropar and Hoshiarpur are the winter stops of some Gaddis. Here they share a symbiotic relationship with Punjab farmers, who provide them with a safe grazing ground during the winter months, while the Gaddi sheep and goats replenish the farms with manure.



I BURST INTO THE ROOM, AND BLURTED OUT THAT I WANTED TO JOIN PAPA ON HIS NEXT TRIP – HE SHOULD NOT ASK ANY COUSINS.



PAPA FROWNED AND SAID, "IS THIS WHY WE'RE SENDING YOU TO SCHOOL? TO BECOME ANOTHER ILLITERATE LIKE ME? NO WAY! YOU ARE GOING TO COLLEGE IN THE CITY – AND TO GET A PROPER JOB. IN ANY CASE OUR NEXT TRIP WILL BE MORE DIFFICULT, AND MUCH TOO COLD."



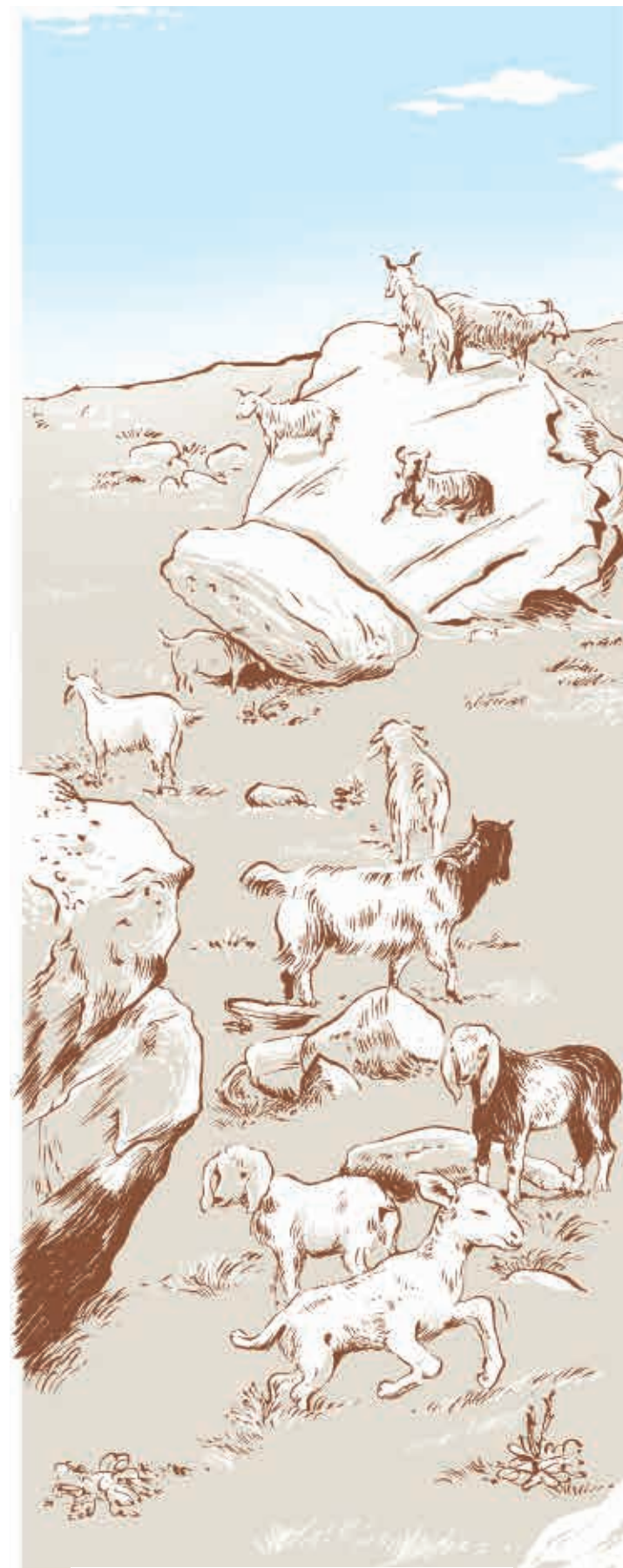
Some Gaddis cross the Ravi River valley over to the rich landscapes of the Bara Bhangal range. They traverse many high passes, such as the Laluni Pass, at 17840 feet, across the snow line to the alpine pastures with lush, green grass.



*BUT, I WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO GOING TO
THE HIGH MOUNTAIN PASTURES –*



*PAPA OFTEN SPOKE OF HOW MUCH THE GOATS
LOVED THE GRASS...THAT PEEPED FROM UNDER
THE SNOW...*



*HOW THE KIDS WOULD JUMP AND SCATTER ALL
AROUND WHEN THEY REACHED THERE...
I WANTED TO GO ALONG TOO.*



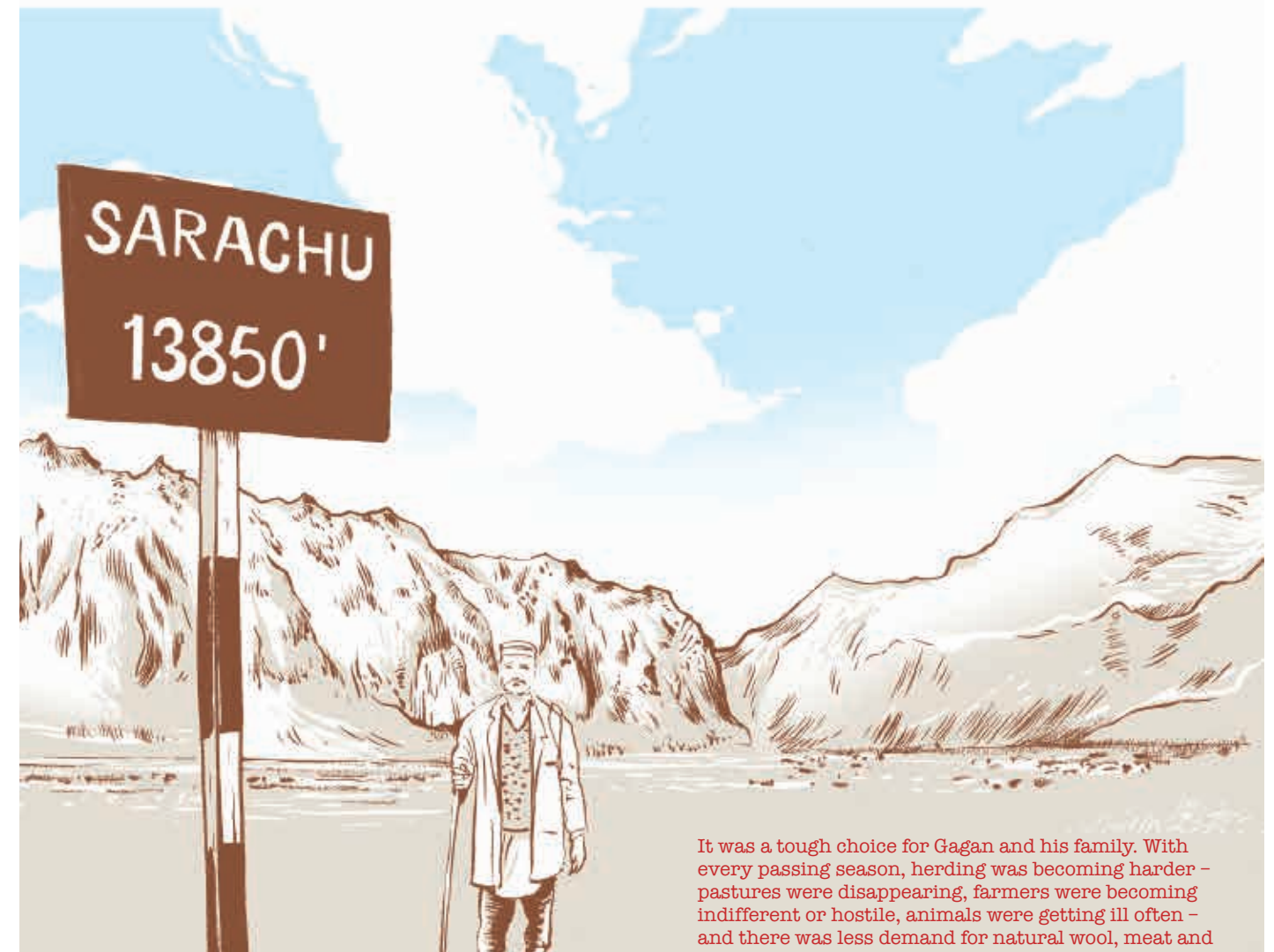
*WHO WOULD LEAD OUR GOATS TO THE GRASS WHEN
PAPA GETS OLD? ONLY PAPA KNEW THE ROUTES
THROUGH THE PASSES TO THESE PASTURES...*



PAPA SAID I WAS BEING STUPID, WHEN WHAT WE NEEDED WAS TO LIVE LIKE OTHERS IN THE CITY, WITH A SECURE FUTURE..



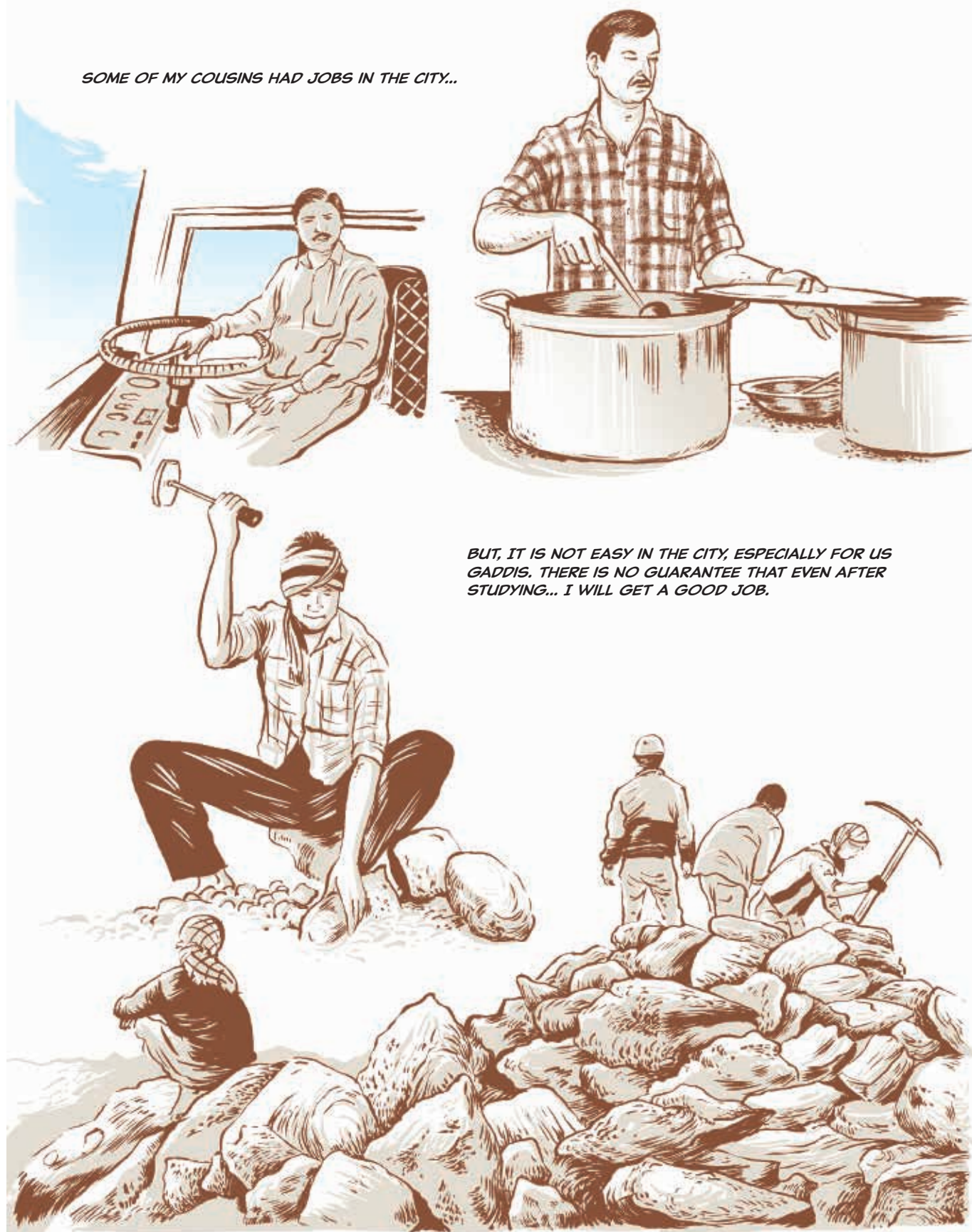
BUT THERE IS SO MUCH THAT PAPA KNOWS ABOUT HOW TO TAKE CARE OF OUR ANIMALS, USING LOCAL MEDICINES WHEN THEY FALL ILL. HOW WILL I LEARN ALL THIS IF I DON'T GO ALONG?



It was a tough choice for Gagan and his family. With every passing season, herding was becoming harder - pastures were disappearing, farmers were becoming indifferent or hostile, animals were getting ill often - and there was less demand for natural wool, meat and milk as people opted for other substitutes.

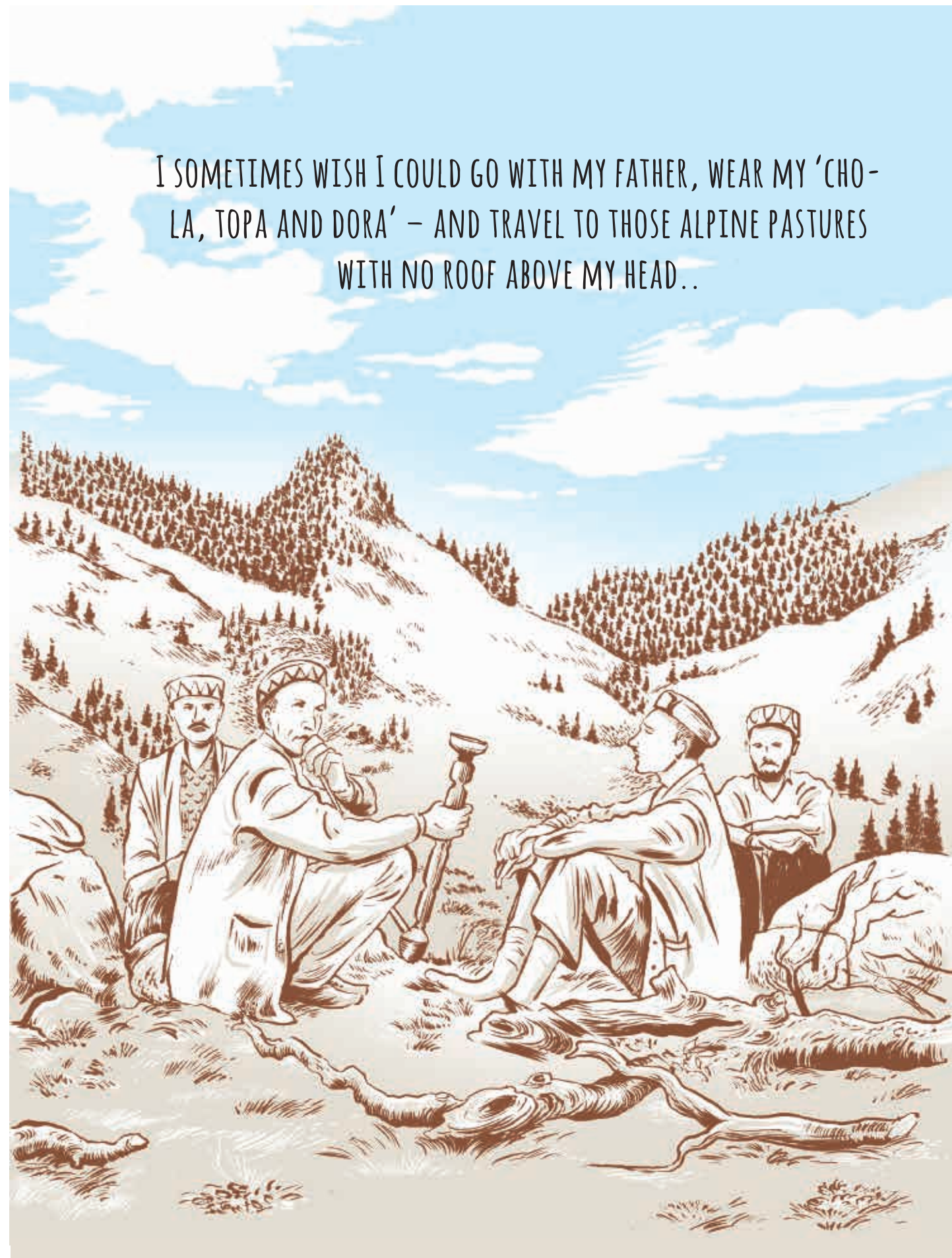
MAYBE THERE WAS A LOT OF WISDOM IN WHAT PAPA SAID...I'D HEARD HIM DISCUSSING ALL THIS WITH OTHERS.. AND EVERYONE WAS SENDING THEIR CHILDREN TO SCHOOL... NOBODY WANTED THEM TO TAKE UP HERDING.

SOME OF MY COUSINS HAD JOBS IN THE CITY...



BUT, IT IS NOT EASY IN THE CITY, ESPECIALLY FOR US GADDIS. THERE IS NO GUARANTEE THAT EVEN AFTER STUDYING... I WILL GET A GOOD JOB.

I SOMETIMES WISH I COULD GO WITH MY FATHER, WEAR MY 'CHO-LA, TOPA AND DORA' – AND TRAVEL TO THOSE ALPINE PASTURES WITH NO ROOF ABOVE MY HEAD..



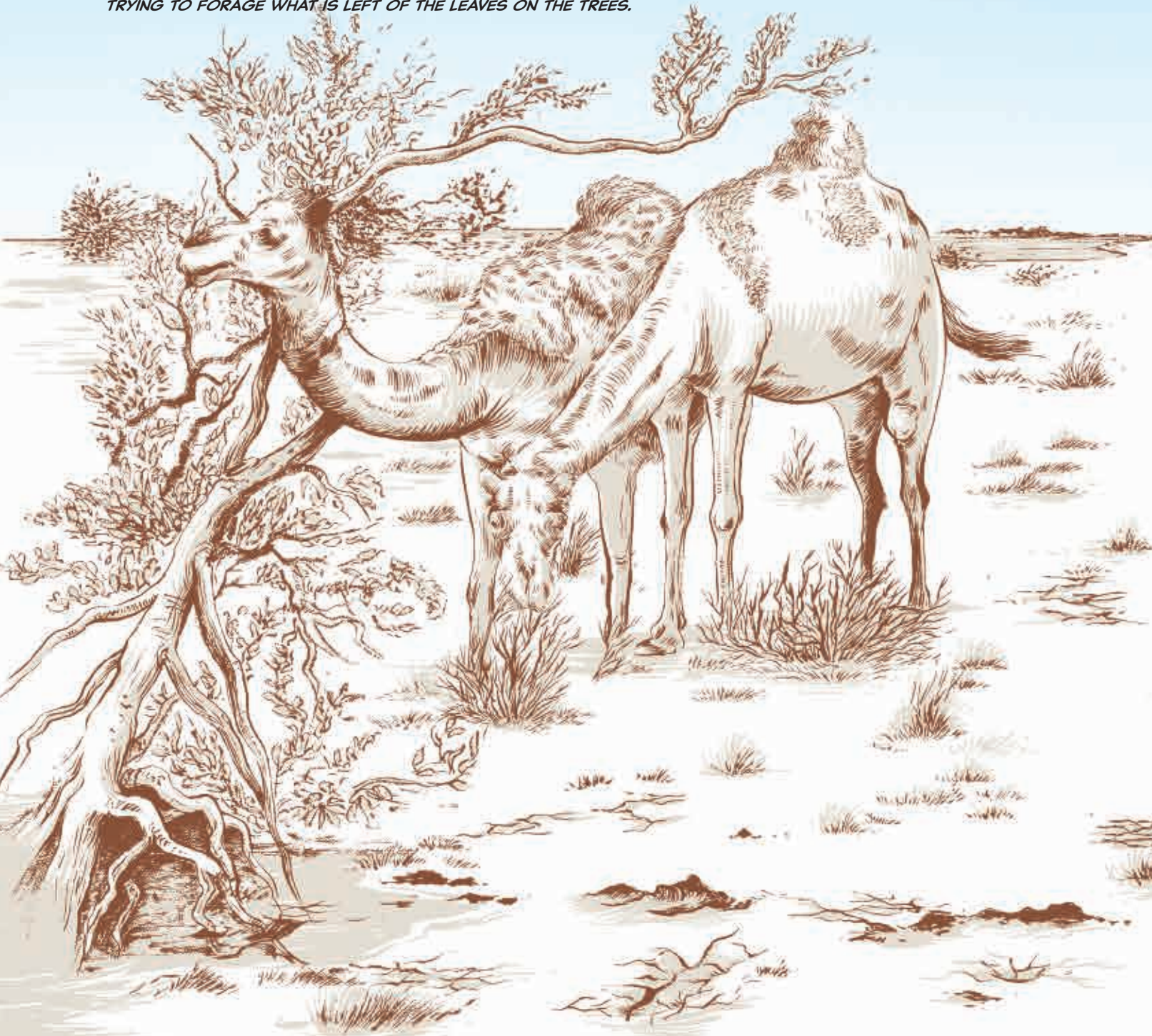


PAKKHE KE CHADANU NAAI

Rabrakhiya, a Fakirani Jat Maldhari from Lakhpat in Gujarat, seeks guidance from Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai's sufi poetry.

PAKKHE KE CHADANU NAAI

RABRAKHIYA, HIS WIFE, LACHMI AND RANABHAI ARE SITTING ON A DRY PATCH INSIDE A MANGROVE FOREST IN LAIYARI, KUCHCHH DISTRICT IN THE WESTERN STATE OF GUJARAT. A GROUP OF KHARAI CAMELS ARE TRYING TO FORAGE WHAT IS LEFT OF THE LEAVES ON THE TREES.



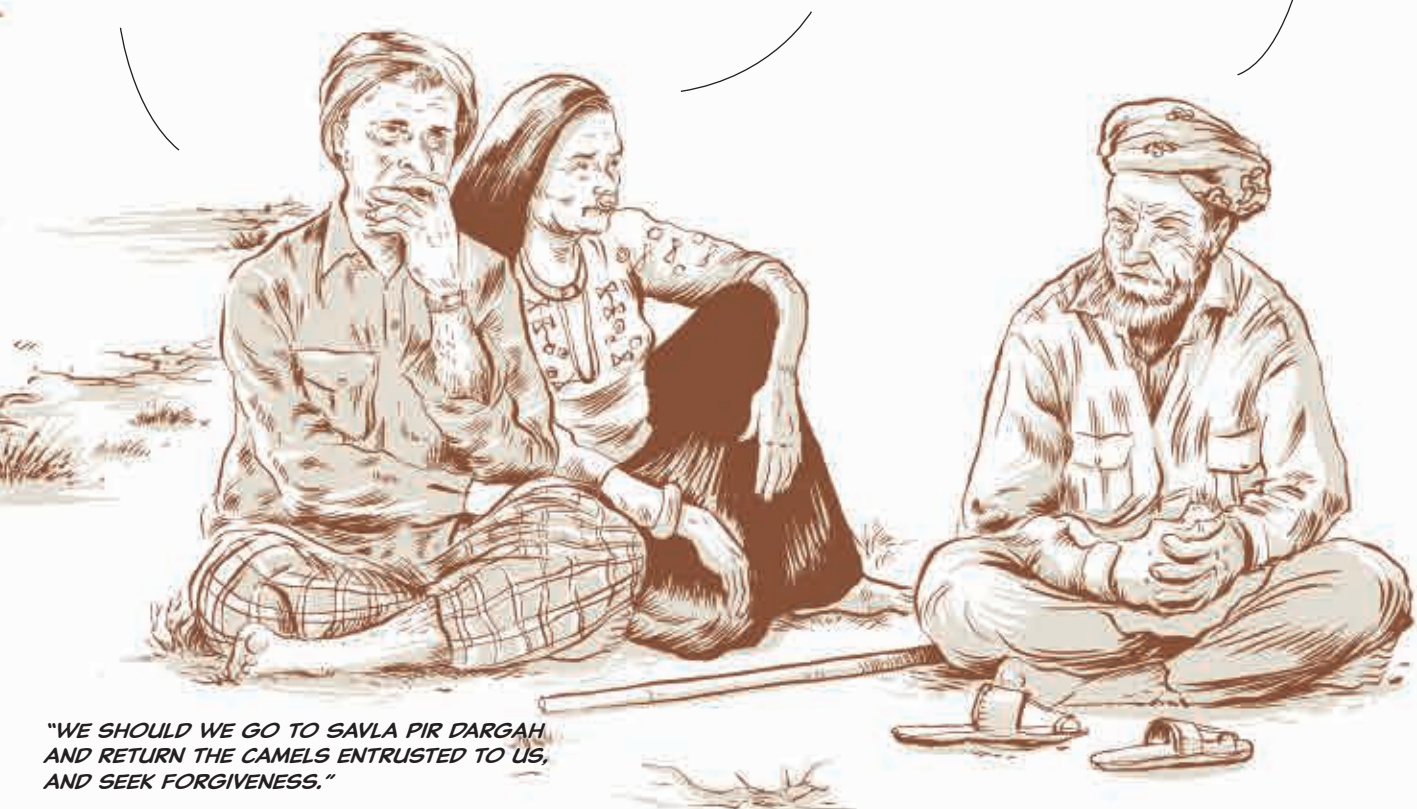
RABRAKHIYA AND HIS WIFE, ARE ELDERS OF THE FAKIRANI JAT MALDHARI COMMUNITY WHILE RANABHAI IS A RABARI. THEIR ANCESTORS HAVE BEEN TAKING THEIR LIVESTOCK TO GRAZE ON THE ARID GRASSLANDS AND HUMID COASTLINES OF KUCHCHH FOR MANY YEARS.



"LACHMI, I AM ASHAMED. I CAN NO LONGER TAKE CARE OF THE KHARAI. WE HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO MAKE THE GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRIES RECOGNIZE THE TREASURE GOD HAS BLESSED US WITH. THEY THINK OF THESE LANDS AS DESERTS. AS WASTELANDS - ONLY FIT FOR MINING, SALT AND JETTIES. WHAT DO WE DO?"

"THEY SHOULD REALISE THESE THORN BUSHES AND TREES AND GRASSES HOLD THE SECRETS OF HEALTH AND MEDICINE. SAVLA PIR CREATED THE KHARAI, TO EAT THIS VEGETATION AND AND MAKE ITS GOODNESS AVAILABLE TO MANKIND. THAT IS WHY SAVLA PIR BESTOWED UPON US THE CARE OF KHARAI. KYOON, RANABHAI?"

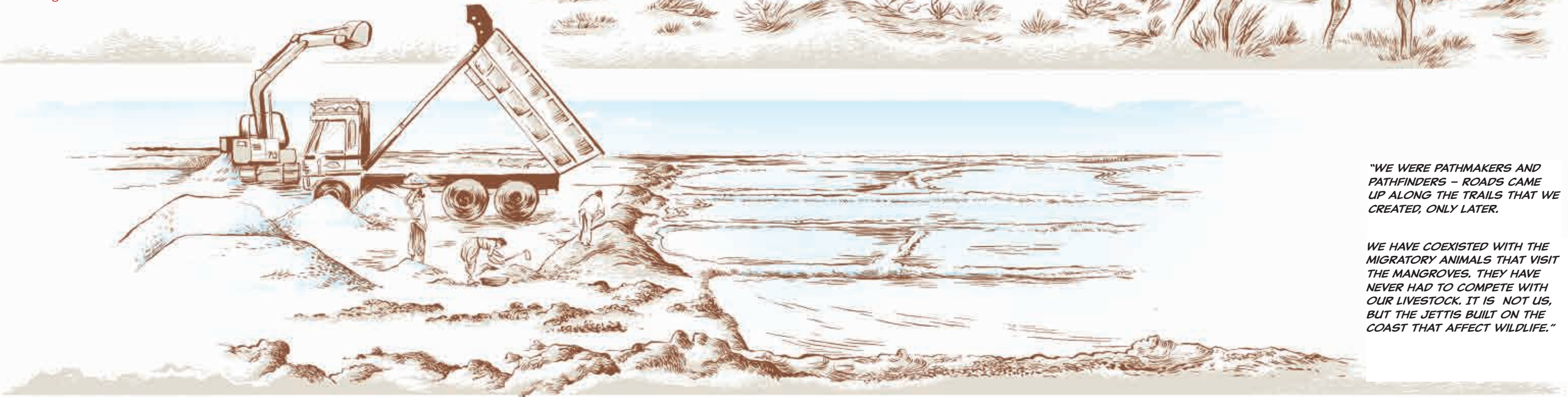
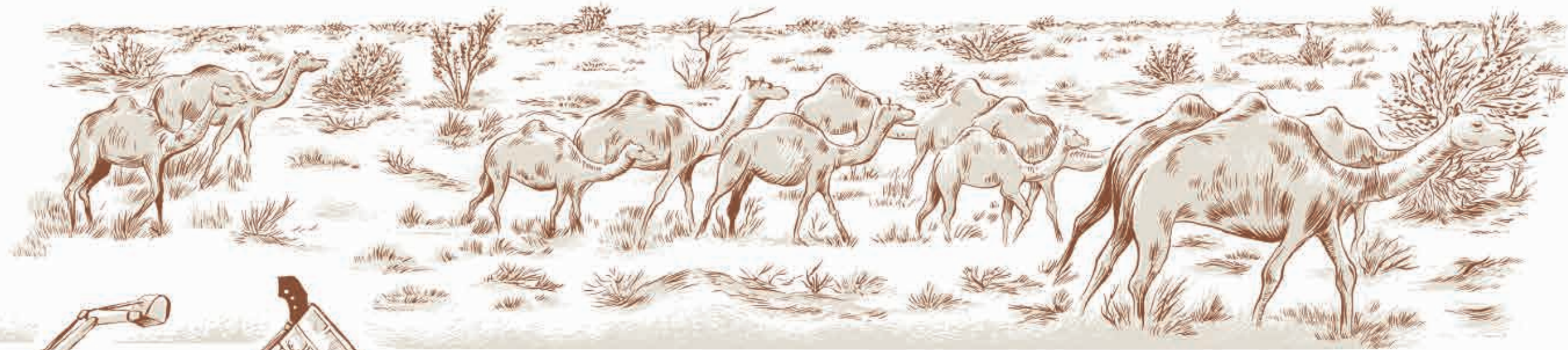
"YES, LACHMIBEN WE HAVE FAILED HIM....SOME DAYS, I STRUGGLE TO BRING THE KHARAI HERE AS THE CREEKS ARE BLOCKED BY THE INDUSTRIES AND THE SALT PANS, AND NOW THE MANGROVES ARE CHOKED AND DYING."



"WE SHOULD WE GO TO SAVLA PIR DARGAH AND RETURN THE CAMELS ENTRUSTED TO US, AND SEEK FORGIVENESS."

The coastal region of Kachchh is home to a high number of Kharai camels, which feed on mangroves for six to seven months a year.

‘Kharai’ means salty in Kachchhi - this breed gets its name because it feeds primarily on plants that grow on saline land.

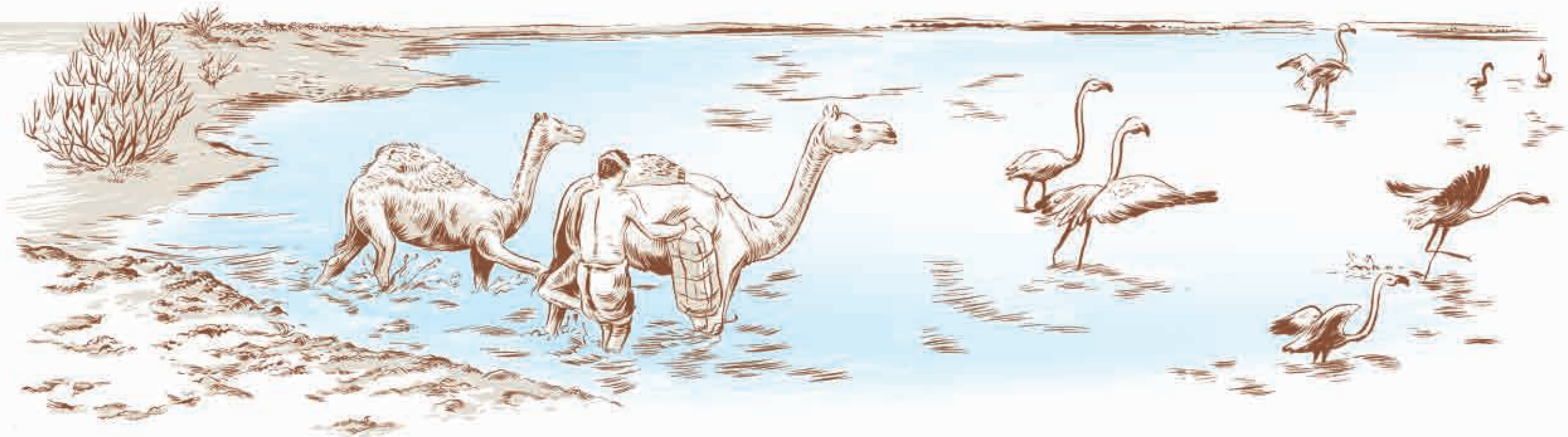


"WE WERE PATHMAKERS AND PATHFINDERS – ROADS CAME UP ALONG THE TRAILS THAT WE CREATED, ONLY LATER."

WE HAVE COEXISTED WITH THE MIGRATORY ANIMALS THAT VISIT THE MANGROVES. THEY HAVE NEVER HAD TO COMPETE WITH OUR LIVESTOCK. IT IS NOT US, BUT THE JETTIS BUILT ON THE COAST THAT AFFECT WILDLIFE."

The Kharai camel is the only camel breed that is eco-tonal – it is capable of survival in both marine and dry land ecosystems.

Allowing Kharai camels to graze on mangroves maintains the height of the trees and supports the sprouting of new leaves. Additionally, the footprints left behind by herds serve as micro-catchments for water, from which young saplings can grow.



Muslim and Hindu pastoralists of western Kuchhh believe in Savla Pir, a sufi saint, whose tomb is on an island in Lakhpat.



RABRAKHIYA, LACHMI AND RANABHAI REACH THE SAVLA PIR DARGAH AND BOW DOWN TO THE MURSHID, ASKING HIS PERMISSION TO SELL OFF ALL THEIR KHARAI CAMELS.

THE DEEP AND SONOROUS SOUND OF A SURANDO AND LILTING VOICES CARRY THE LYRICS OF SHAH ABDUL LATIF BHITTAI INTO THE NIGHT AIR. IN THE DISTANCE, THE CAMELS SEEM TO BE SWAYING TO THE MUSIC, THEIR BELLS ADDING TO THE ORCHESTRA OF SOUNDS.

RABRAKHIYA WATCHES THE MUSICIAN STRUM HIS DEFT FINGERS ACROSS THE STRING OF THE SURANDO. THERE ARE VERY FEW WHO STILL PLAY THE INSTRUMENT. OVER THE YEARS THE SOUNDS OF THE SURANDO HAVE BEEN QUIETLY DISAPPEARING IN THE DESOLATE LANDSCAPES OF KACHCHH.

LIKE THE CAMELS, RABRAKHIYA ALSO SWAYS GENTLY TO THE MUSIC, PENSIVELY MOUTHING THE LYRICS OF THE SONG. RABRAKHIYA WORRIES THAT THE WAY OF LIFE THAT HE AND HIS ANCESTORS HAVE FOLLOWED WILL ALSO FOLLOW THE SAME FATE AS THE SOUNDS OF THE SURANDO: DOOMED TO EXTINCTION, AS THEIR COMMUNITY STRUGGLES AGAINST THE RAPID CHANGES BEING MADE TO THE KACHCHH LANDSCAPES.



The ‘surando’, thought of as a folk cousin of the classical ‘sarangi’, is a peacock-shaped, five-stringed instrument. It is fashioned from a single piece of wood and often has intricate carvings of flower and bird motifs and tassels of horse or camel hair. Fakirani Jat musicians use the instrument as an accompaniment to the poems of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai, a medieval Sufi mystic and iconic figure in the cultural history of Sindh. Bhittai’s poetry are deeply spiritual and convey a deep respect for nature and a search for enlightenment through higher truths and divine love.

AS THE MUSIC DIES DOWN, AND THE STARS GET BRIGHTER AGAINST THE DEEPENING SKY, THE THREE REFLECT ON BHITTAI'S LYRICS THAT SPEAK OF RESILIENCE AND COMPASSION. HINDU AND MUSLIM COMMUNITIES IN KACHCHH SHARE COMMON SUFI AND FOLK TRADITIONS AND LOOK AT THE POETRY OF SHAH BHITTAI FOR GUIDANCE.



"JUST LIKE THESE EVENINGS OF MUSIC ARE NOW RARE AND PRESCIOUS – OUR TRADITIONS ARE ALSO FAST DISAPPEARING – AS WALLS COME BETWEEN PEOPLE, BETWEEN LANDS AND WITH OUR PAST."

"LIKE THE SUFIS OF LORE THERE WAS A TIME WHEN WE HAD NO POSSESSION NOR WERE WE POSSESSED, BUT NOW WE ARE IN A BIND."



"BEFORE PARTITION WE USED TO MOVE FREELY ACROSS THE RANN OF KACHCHH TO SINDH. NOW THERE ARE BORDERS, SETTLEMENTS AND NEW RULES THAT BAR US FROM WASTELANDS AND FOREST LANDS, WE ARE STRUGGLING TO KEEP OUR LEGACY OF MIGRATION ALIVE."

"FARMERS HOSTED US ON THEIR LANDS, AND WOULD PAY US TO NOURISH THE SOIL. PEOPLE CAME TO US FOR SKIN, DAIRY PRODUCTS AND WOOL."



"OUR COMMON LANDS HAVE BEEN GIVEN AWAY TO FACTORY-WALLAHS? DON'T THEY CARE WHAT HAPPENS TO US? WHAT DO THEY EXPECT US TO DO?"



A large portion of Kachchh's industrialisation has occurred along its coast, particularly in Mundra, Abdasa and Lakhpat talukas. In all these places, large-scale construction of jetties has led to the destruction of vast swathes of mangroves.

Significant parts of the land inhabited and grazed by the Fakirani Jats are threatened by the excessive industrialisation of Kachchh's coastline. The declaration of some of these tracts as protected forests means the movements of the pastoralists have been restricted.

The Maldharis have long moved in these lands without land titles or contracts – through rights sanctioned by traditional systems of governance. But today, with many cultural understandings eroded, pastoralists have been denied rights to these common lands.

THE SURANDO STRAINS HAVE STOPPED AND THE
PLAYER HAS BEGUN TO SING A BEYT, A PART OF
A MYSTICAL POEM, BY SHAH ABDUL LATIF BHITTAI
OF RESILIENCE AND LOVE:

SIKHO SABHI, SARTIYUN! SIPUNI MULAAN SEERU,
BIYO MATAAYE NEERU, UBHIYUN ABR AASIRE

LEARN STEADFASTNESS
FROM THE OYSTER, FRIENDS
IT REFUSES ALL KINDS OF WATER
AND LIVES IN HOPE OF RAIN

RABRAKHIYA IS OVERWHELMED.. IT IS AS
THOUGH SAVLA PIR WAS TALKING TO HIM...
TELLING HIM AND ALL FAKIRANI AND RABARI
HERDERS NOT TO GIVE UP.. TO FIND WAYS OF
ADAPTING, TO SAVE THE MANGROVES, AND
THE RESILIENT KHARAI... THAT THE WORLD WILL
SOON DISCOVER THE MIRACLES AND WONDERS
OF CAMEL MILK... WHICH HAS PROVIDED
NOURISHMENT FOR CENTURIES...

RABRAKHIYA AND LACHMI BID FAREWELL TO
RANABHAI AND LOAD THEIR PAKHHAS ONTO
THE CAMELS AND START THE JOURNEY BACK
TO THEIR VILLAGE.

BACK IN THEIR VILLAGE, RABRAKHIYA AND LACHMI SIT TOGETHER OVER GLASSES OF CAMEL MILK. A MAN FROM
A NEARBY VILLAGE COMES AND ASKS WHETHER HE CAN GET SOME MILK FOR HIS FATHER WHO HAS BEEN
ADVISED TO HAVE CAMEL MILK AS A CURE FOR DIABETES.

HERDSWOMEN DON'T WEAR SILK
ROUGH GOWNS PLEASE THEM MORE
THAN FANCY SHAWLS OR BROCADE
O SOOMRA, I CHOOSE THE WOOL BLANKET
OVER YOUR GILDED OFFERINGS
LET ME DIE OF SHAME IF I ABANDON
THE LEGACY OF MY ANCESTORS





IN THE SHADOW OF THE MOUNTAINS

Pemba, a young Changpa girl, speaks of inspirations from her childhood in the stark landscapes of Changthang.

IN THE SHADOW OF THE MOUNTAINS



ON A NARROW STREET AWAY FROM THE BUSTLING LEH MARKET ROAD IS A SMALL BOUTIQUE STORE RUN BY PEMBA, THE NARRATOR OF THIS STORY. FROM THE SHOPFRONT YOU CAN TELL THIS STORE IS DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHERS THAT TOURISTS THROG TO - TO PICK UP CARPETS, KILMS, APRICOTS AND ODD 'TIBETAN' GOODS. ANNA, A GARMENT BUYER FROM LONDON STOPS IN FRONT OF THE WINDOW.

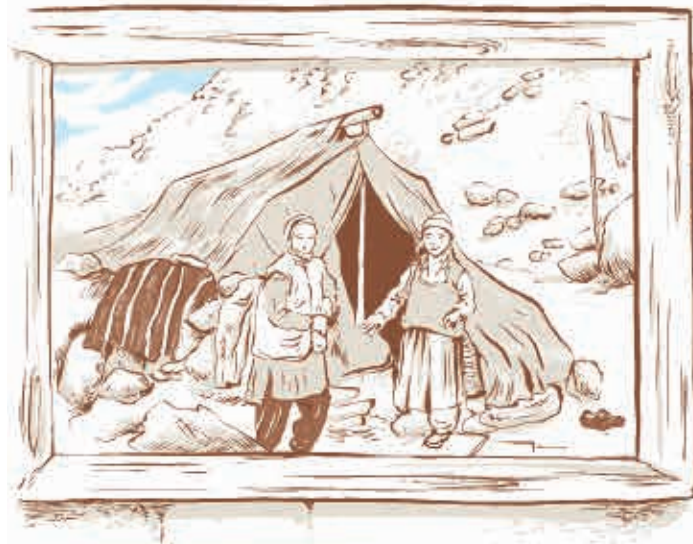


THE DOOR SWINGS OPEN AND A CHIME ANNOUNCES ANNA'S ENTRY.



"AS ANNA RUNS HER HAND THROUGH THE SAMPLES, SHE PAUSES WHEN SHE COMES ACROSS THE ROUGHER PIECES. SHE THEN NOTICES MY COLLECTION OF FRAMED PHOTOGRAPHS ON THE WALL..."





"I TELL ANNA ABOUT LIFE WHEN I WAS YOUNG - OF MY TIME IN BOARDING SCHOOL; OF GROWING UP WITH OUR GOATS, YAKS AND SHEEP; MY BROTHER AND FATHER READYING THE YAKS WITH LOADS; THE MASK DANCES AT THE MONASTERY."

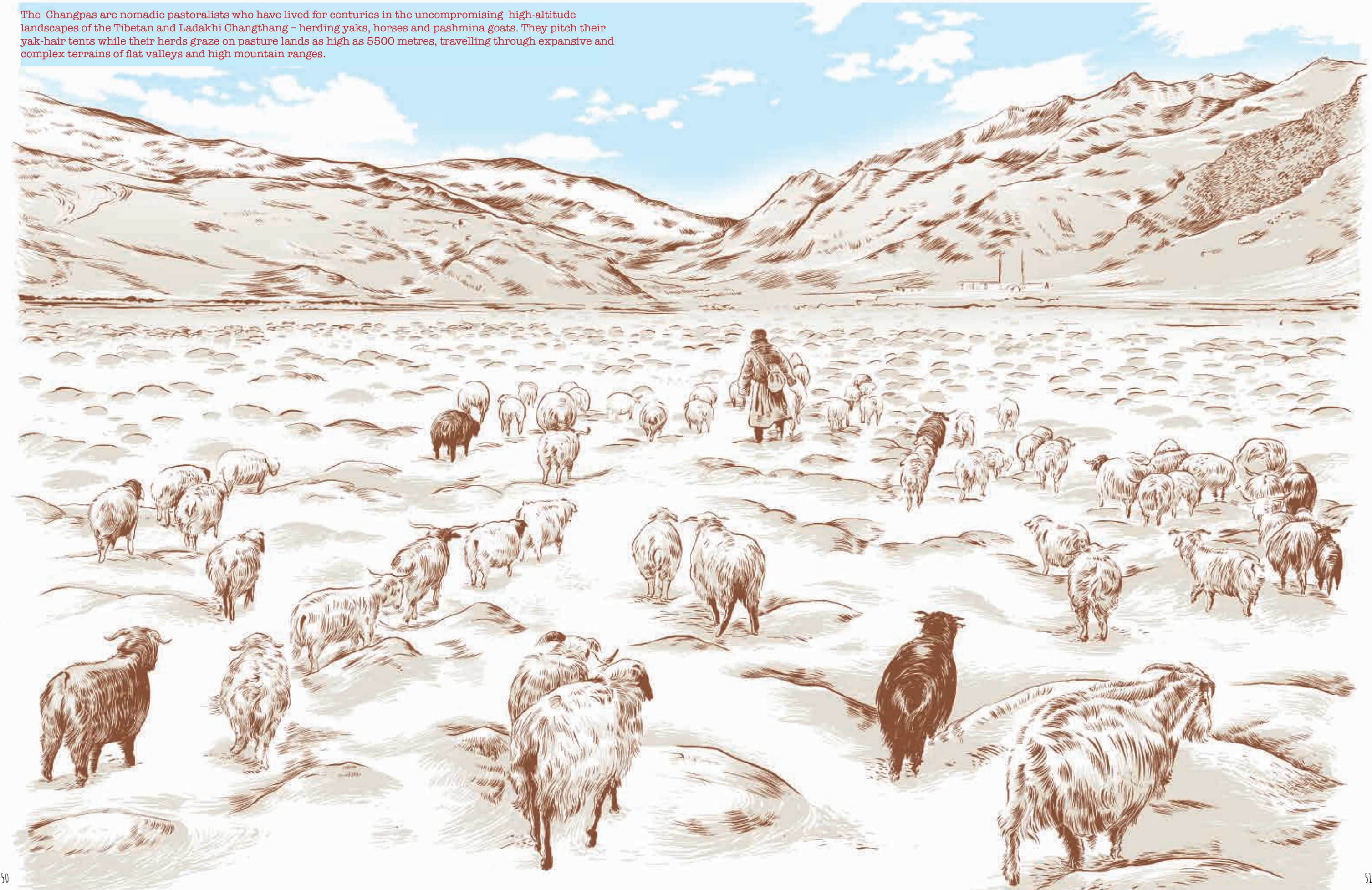


"I TELL ANNA OF A CHANGPA SAYING THAT GOES, 'A WOMAN WHO IS PREOCCUPIED IN WEAVING WILL HAVE LITTLE TIME TO THINK WICKED THOUGHTS.' AND SO IT WAS THAT EVERY HOLIDAY WHEN I RETURNED FROM BOARDING SCHOOL I WOULD SIT AND WEAVE WITH MY COUSINS AND AUNTS."



"BUT, I WOULD GRUMBLE ABOUT IT - I REBELLED - BECAUSE MY THOUGHTS WERE ELSEWHERE. I DID NOT WANT TO FIT INTO THIS ROLE THAT MY FAMILY CARVED OUT FOR ME, NEITHER DID I WANT TO GO GRAZING WITH MY BROTHERS... I WANTED TO GO TO TOWN AND LOOK AT THE SHOPS AND GO TO THE MOVIES..."

The Changpas are nomadic pastoralists who have lived for centuries in the uncompromising high-altitude landscapes of the Tibetan and Ladakhi Changthang - herding yaks, horses and pashmina goats. They pitch their yak-hair tents while their herds graze on pasture lands as high as 5500 metres, travelling through expansive and complex terrains of flat valleys and high mountain ranges.



"MY BROTHER LEFT SCHOOL AND STARTED HELPING WITH OUR HERDS. HE SOON LEARNED FROM MY FATHER HOW TO LOOK AFTER OUR ANIMALS WHEN THEY WERE SICK."



"ONCE, DURING MY HOLIDAYS, MY BROTHER TOLD ME HE HAD STARTED SUPPLYING PASHMINA TO A COOPERATIVE IN LEH THAT ASSURED A BETTER WHOLESALE PRICE THAN WHEN HE SOLD THROUGH MIDDLE MEN. HE WOULD GET AN ADVANCE FOR THE WOOL IN WINTER AND COULD COLLECT THE BALANCE IN SUMMER AFTER THE GOATS WERE SHEARED."



"THAT WAS ABOUT THE TIME I FINISHED SCHOOL. I DID NOT WANT TO GO HERDING, NOR DID I WANT AN OFFICE JOB. I LOVED ART IN SCHOOL AND WANTED TO PUT TO USE THE SKILLS I LEARNED DURING MY HOLIDAYS – WEAVING WALL COVERINGS AND JACKETS. I DECIDED TO START A SMALL BUSINESS, TAKING IDEAS FROM THESE PRODUCTS AND DESIGNING SPECIALISED WEAVES."

MY FAMILY STILL SELLS RAW WOOL IN BULK TO THE COOPERATIVE. THAT GIVES US AN ASSURED INCOME – BUT NOW WE HAVE OUR OWN PRODUCTS TOO.

IN THE SHOP WINDOW ARE MY GRAND-FATHER'S SHOES, AND AN OLD RUG FROM HOME. I REMEMBER EVERY EVENING MY GRANDMOTHER WOULD COLLECT THE WOOL THAT WAS FLYING AROUND THE YARD, AND STORE IT IN A SACK TO MAKE PRODUCTS FOR EVERYDAY USE LIKE THESE."

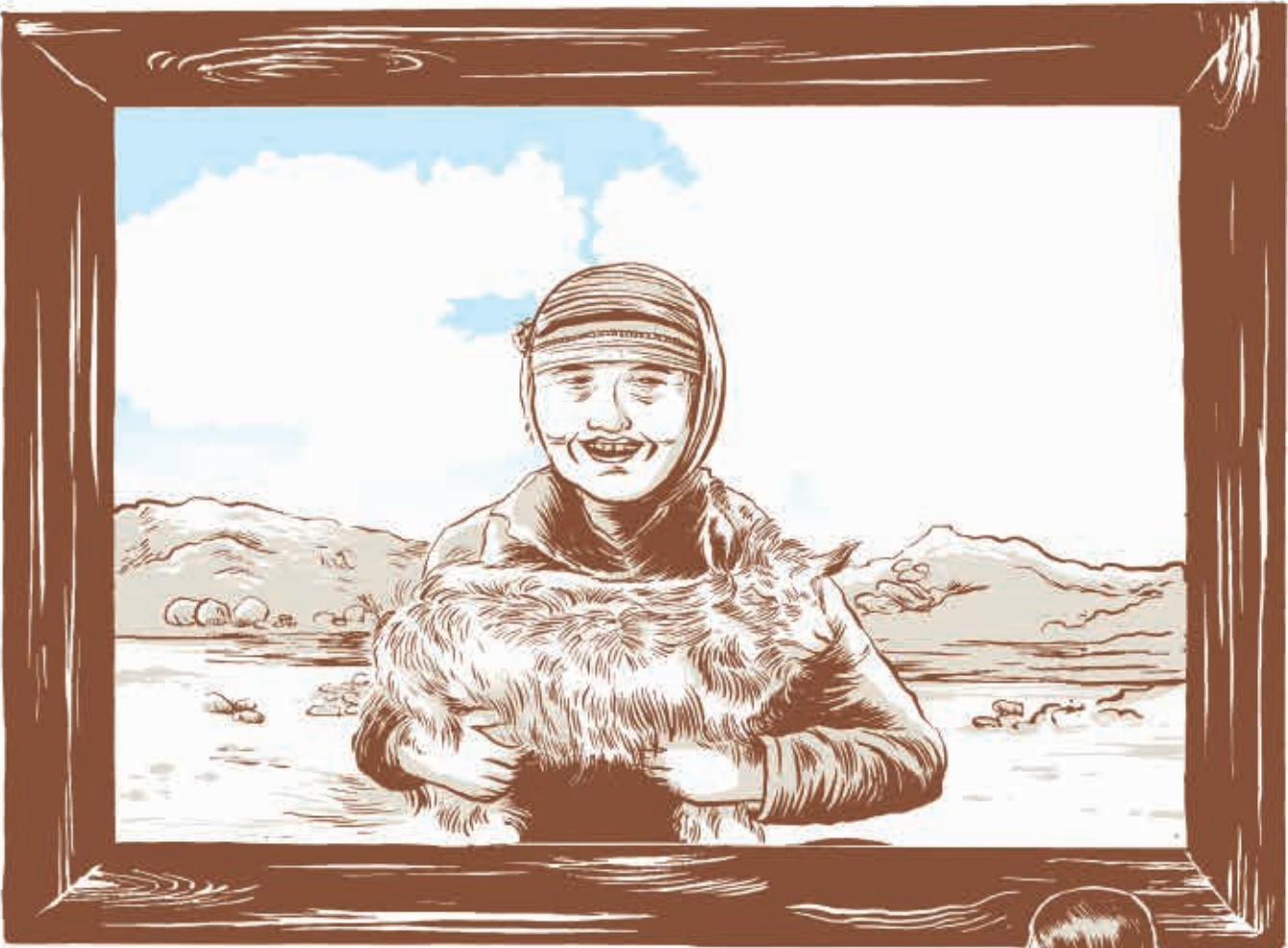


For Changpas, animals are a constant reminder to rever and propitiate gods, demons, and subterranean spirits. Every morning, incense burned at an altar in the tent is offered to consecrated animals. During the annual prayer festival, the chosen animals are taken to the monastery Rinpoche, or religious leader, who blesses them with a 'kha-btags', or ceremonial white scarf, and ties a sacred thread around their necks.



In the past Changpas traded salt and wool for barley. The cash economy has almost entirely replaced traditional barter systems today, and with pashm commanding a high price, the Changpas keep more goats than other animals - much more than they did 50 years ago. As long as pashm prices stay high, the Changpas expect this trend to continue.

TODAY, LIKE THE PASHMINA GOATS, CHANGPA WOMEN ARE ALSO BREAKING NEW BARRIERS. PEMBA IS RESPECTED FOR THE UNIQUE AND TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE SHE BRINGS TO HER TRADE AS WELL AS HER SUCCESS IN NAVIGATING 'CHANGE' AND INTEGRATING INTO MAINSTREAM ECONOMY.



AS ANNA LEAVES, SHE THINKS ABOUT THE NEW PRODUCTS THAT PEMBA HAS CREATED - THE SOFT PASHMINA WEAVES AND ALSO THE RUSTIC RANGE INSPIRED BY EVERYDAY PRODUCTS.



THEIR ROUGH WEAVES, ANNA THINKS, RECALL THE STARK, RUGGED LADAKHI LANDSCAPE - AND A SIMPLER, PURER WAY OF LIFE.

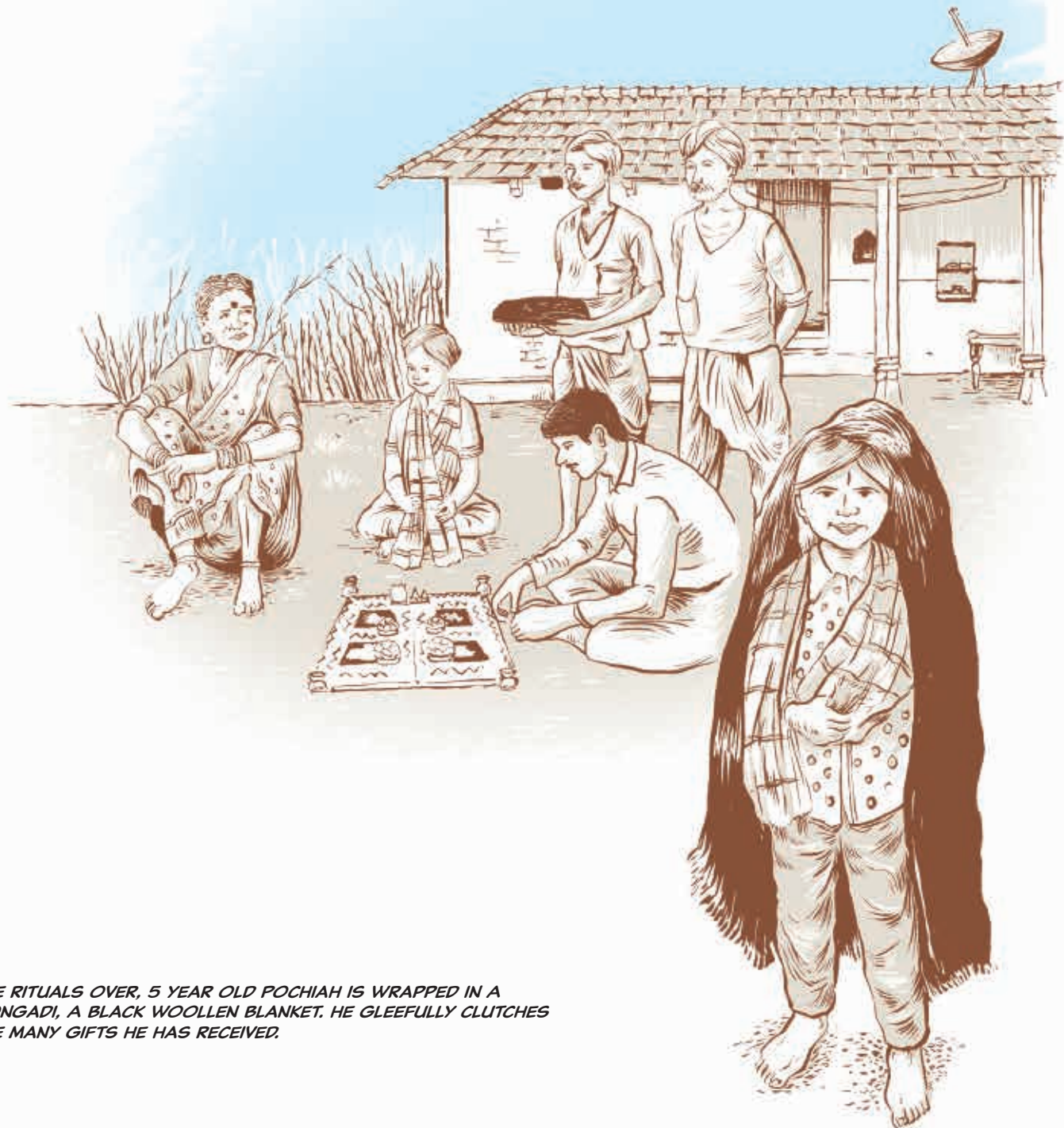


BLACK SHEEP, DECCANI SHEEP HAVE YOU ANY WOOL?

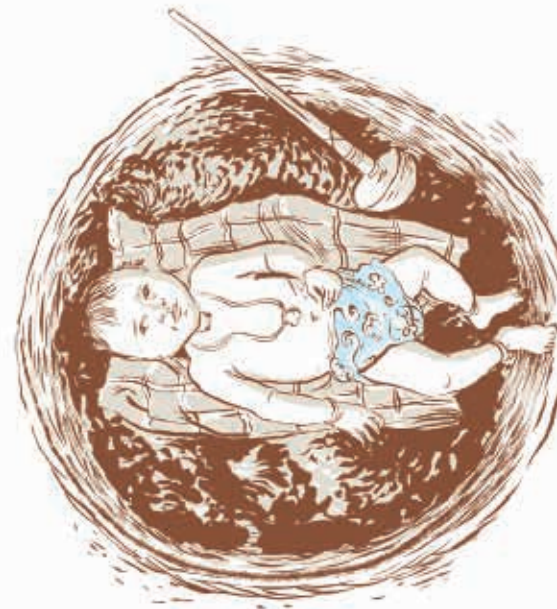
Yellamma, a Kuruma matriarch from Medak district in Telengana, connects people and histories through a length of yarn.

BLACK SHEEP, DECCANI SHEEP HAVE YOU ANY WOOL?

A COURTYARD IN MEDAK DISTRICT IN TELANGANA. THE HOUSE, BUSTLING WITH ACTIVITY, BELONGS TO YELLAMMA, A MATRIARCH OF THE KURUMA SHEPHERD COMMUNITY. MANY GUESTS HAVE COME TO WITNESS YELLAMA'S GRANDSON'S 'PUTTUGONGADI'.



THE RITUALS OVER, 5 YEAR OLD POCHIAH IS WRAPPED IN A GONGADI, A BLACK WOOLLEN BLANKET. HE GLEEFULLY CLUTCHES THE MANY GIFTS HE HAS RECEIVED.



The 'puttugongadi' is a ceremony of the Kuruma shepherd community symbolizing the importance of the 'gongadi', or 'kambali' - the traditional woollen blanket of Telangana, woven from the wool of Deccani sheep. The significance of the Deccani sheep to the Kuruma way of life is woven into various rituals and ceremonies.

While the 'puttugongadi' is conducted for young boys like Pochiah, when a girl is born a 'thattalo pettatham' ceremony is performed. The baby is placed in a basket on a bed of black wool along with the 'kadaru' or spindle - symbolizing its potential to provide livelihood and independence to a girl when she grows up.

THE GUESTS HAVE BEEN FED AND YELLAMMA AND HER SON, YADGIRI, SIT DOWN TO EAT THE FESTIVE MEAL OF JOWAR ROTIS AND MUTTON CURRY.



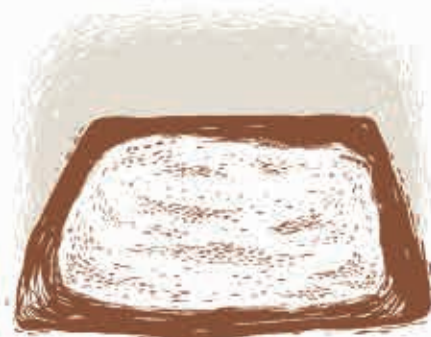
YELLAMMA IS PENSIVE BUT KEEPS A WATCHFUL EYE ON LITTLE POCHIAH AS HE WANDERS OFF INTO THE COURTYARD, PULLING A YOUNG LAMB BY THE EARS, HIS NEW POTTUGONGADI TRAILING BEHIND HIM..



YADGIRI, REASSURES HIS MOTHER, "ARRE, AMMA, DONT WORRY, HAVE SOME SWEET MALIDHA! WE CAN EXPECT GOOD NEWS SOON."



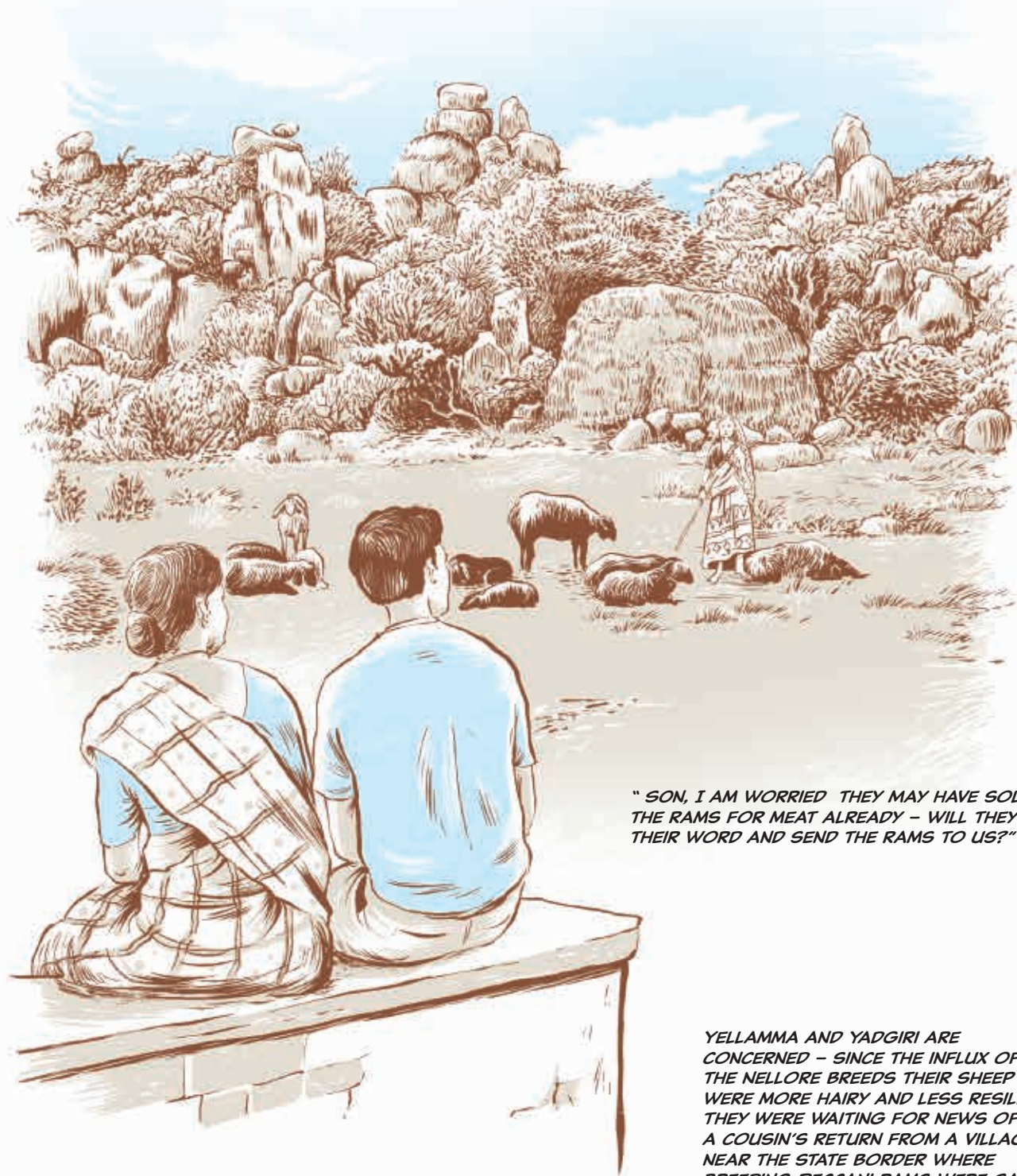
The 'gongadi' is an all-season blanket – a shield from the sun on hot summer days, protection from the rain in the monsoon and a blanket on wintry nights. It is never very far from a Kuruma!



It could be used to pack an afternoon lunch, to dry grains, as a carpet to sit on or a ceremonial floor covering during weddings and other rituals.



The sheep gets its name from the Deccan plateau and is well adapted to the ecology and climate of Telangana. Over the years, the Deccani had become diluted, because of policies introduced in the mid-nineties, to introduce heavier and faster growing hairy less-woolly Nellore sheep from coastal Andhra, into Deccani flocks.



" SON, I AM WORRIED THEY MAY HAVE SOLD THE RAMS FOR MEAT ALREADY – WILL THEY KEEP THEIR WORD AND SEND THE RAMS TO US?"

YELLAMMA AND YADGIRI ARE CONCERNED – SINCE THE INFLUX OF THE NELLORE BREEDS THEIR SHEEP WERE MORE HAIRY AND LESS RESILIENT. THEY WERE WAITING FOR NEWS OF A COUSIN'S RETURN FROM A VILLAGE NEAR THE STATE BORDER WHERE BREEDING DECCANI RAMS WERE SAID TO BE AVAILABLE. THEY WERE HOPING TO REINTRODUCE THE DECCANI STRAIN BACK INTO THEIR FLOCK.



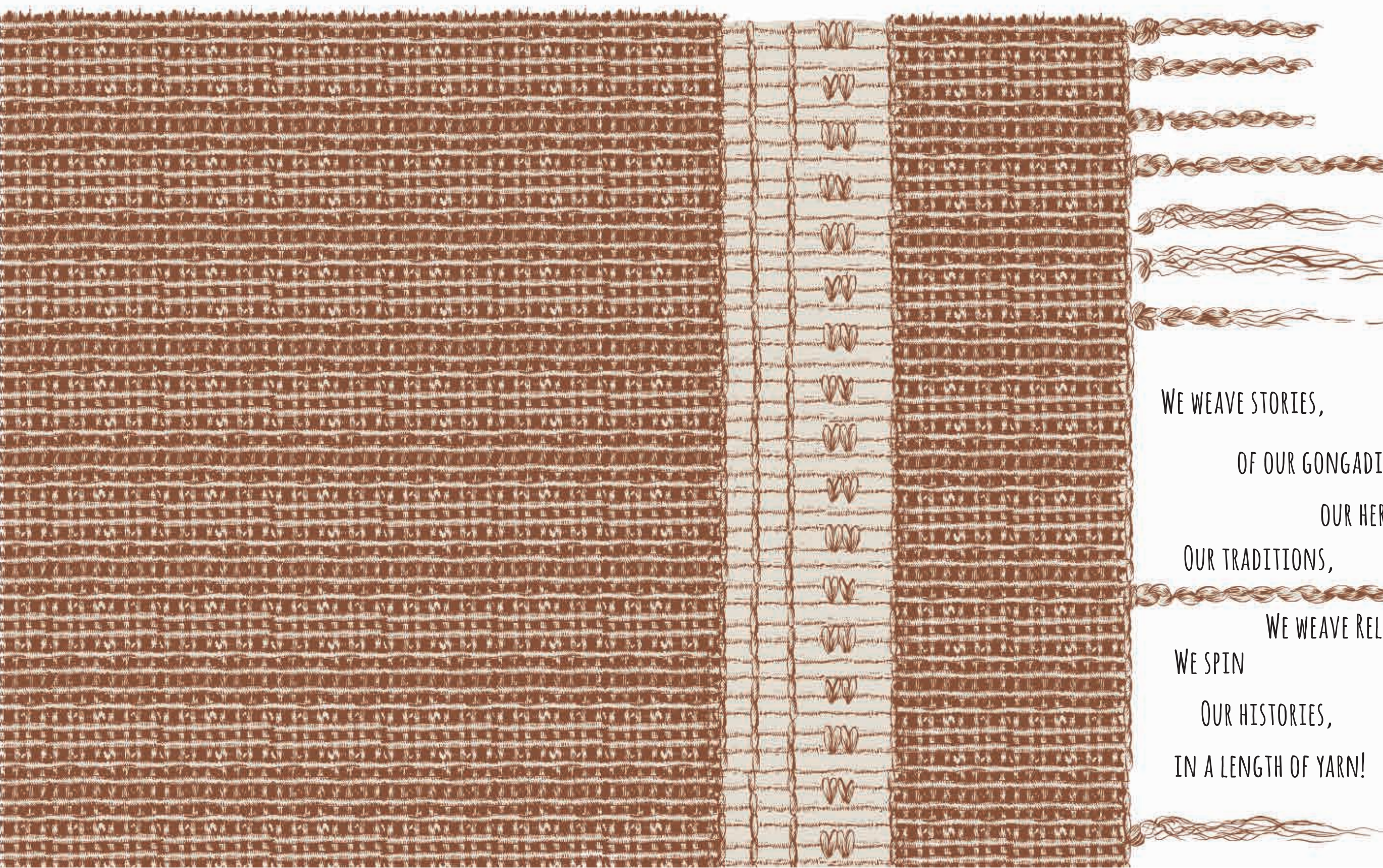
The demand for the 'gongadis' in local markets and by the army, collapsed in the late 1990s under newly introduced liberalization policies in India with cheaper, synthetic substitutes being imported. At the same time, other policies favoured massive export of animals as meat from India. The introduction of the Nellore breed into the Deccani flock were a result of these policies to create a new 'mixed breed' that produced more meat per animal. However, these new sheep were less suited to the climate of Telangana, and also had more hair than wool, that could no longer be spun into yarn.

Yellamma and Yadgiri are part of a 'sangama', a cooperative made up of shepherds, spinners, weavers, herbalists, veterinary scientists, folk artists, ecologists, designers, healers, and farmers. The 'sangamas' have infused new energy and vibrancy into this traditional wool-based livelihood.

They have become a catalyst in stimulating not only the herders' interest in developing the Deccani breed, but also the weavers' interest in creating new designs.



The revival of the ‘gongadi’ has created a niche market that highlights the strong ties the product has with the geography and the people. While the ‘gongadis’ and some off-shoot products are sold through focussed exhibitions today in many metro cities in India, this market has also helped subsidise the sale of the ‘gongadi’ in local village markets – keeping the product alive for the original producers and users of the product.



WE WEAVE STORIES,
OF OUR GONGADIS,
OUR HERITAGE.
OUR TRADITIONS,
WE WEAVE RELATIONSHIPS,
WE SPIN
OUR HISTORIES,
IN A LENGTH OF YARN!

IT IS EVENING AND YELLAMMA AND HER FAMILY SETTLE DOWN AROUND THE DIMLY LIT COURTYARD. A GROUP OF MEN AND WOMEN ARE PERFORMING AN 'OGGU KATHA' AND NARRATING THE STORY OF GONGADI. LITTLE POCHIAH IS HALF ASLEEP IN HIS GRANDMOTHER'S LAP, TIRED FROM THE DAY'S ACTIVITIES.



AMMA, WE HAVE TO HURRY BACK HOME! THEY HAVE COME – FOUR OF THEM. COME SOON!

'Oggutha Kathas', a traditional dance drama tradition of the community, narrate how the gods Mallanna and Beerappa, created the black wool sheep, and assigned the Kurumas with the specific task of its care, and also taught



DURING THE PERFORMANCE, YADGIRI GETS THE CALL HE WAS WAITING FOR ALL DAY. HE SHOUTS OUT ACROSS THE AUDIENCE:

THE MUSIC FROM THE 'OGGU KATHA' CAN BE HEARD ACROSS THE VILLAGE:

IF PEOPLE WEAR BLACK 'KAMBALIS',
EVIL SPIRITS WILL NOT COME NEAR,
PROSPERITY IS ASSURED ALL AROUND.
IF PEOPLE WEAR WHITE 'KAMBALIS',
GOD WILL BLESS YOU,
ALL TROUBLES WILL VANISH.



CONTRIBUTORS

Sushma Iyengar is a social entrepreneur-scholar with interests in crafts development, community rehabilitation and social organization building. She is currently on sabbatical, and the ‘Living Lightly’ exhibition, conference and associated activities, such as this book, are the outcomes of her longstanding passion to highlight the genius – and challenges – of pastoralists. Sushma was research support for the Gaddi story.

Arvind Lodaya helps organisations innovate and communicate. He teaches at institutes in India and overseas, and mentors social impact startups. Part of the creative team for the exhibition, ‘Living Lightly’, it was probably Arvind’s childhood passion for comic books that set this graphic novel in motion.

Sarita Sundar is a graphic artist and researcher involved in writing on heritage, visual culture and design. She runs Hanno, a heritage, interpretation and design consultancy that visualizes and curates diverse narratives with a focus on museum and social communication. Like a favourite children’s book character, she believes that there is not much use of a book without pictures and conversations.

Somesh Kumar runs By Two Design with his friend and colleague, Hazel Karkaria. He is a comic book/graphic novel enthusiast who likes to polish his brush pen usage skills by sketching in his free time. He loves his tea and has many times accidentally dipped his inking brush in it.

Vasant Saberwal was at one time an active academic researcher, with special interests in ecology, development and indigenous cultures. His research on change and continuity among the Gaddis, led to a book, ‘Pastoral Politics’, as well as a film by the same name, co-directed with Sanjay Barnela. He now bakes for a living. Vasant was research support for the Gaddi story.

Monisha Ahmed is an independent researcher whose work largely focuses on art practices and material culture in Ladakh. Other than her book, ‘Living fabric – Weaving among the Nomads of Ladakh Himalaya’, she has written and published several articles on textile arts of the Himalayan Buddhist World with a particular focus on the pashmina. She is co-founder and Executive Director of the Ladakh Arts and Media Organisation (LAMO), Leh. Monisha was research support for the Changpa story.

Sagari R Ramdas is a veterinary scientist and a member of the Food Sovereignty Alliance, India (<http://foodsovereigntyalliance.wordpress.com/>). She has closely worked with pastoralist communities of the Deccan, particularly in Telangana, on issues of food sovereignty, climate change, livestock and livelihoods. Sagari was research support for the Kuruma story.

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Websites:

<http://www.pastoralpeoples.org/>

Youtube links

Papers

Books:

Organisations:

