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MUST READ

The Weaving of Pakhha

A unique form of House-Making by the Fakirani Jat Women of Kachchh, Gujarat

By Dipti Tanna

Historically, Jats are pastoral communities whose roots are in Haleb, Baluchistan. They migrated to Sindh (Pakistan) and Kachchh (Gujarat) around 500 years ago. Jats in Kachchh are of four sub-communities mainly- Fakirani, Garasia, Hajiani, and Dhana. All these communities are known for rearing different animals, such as camels, cows, and buffaloes. Herds are constantly on the move to avoid overgrazing a single location. These communities are eventually settling and are turning into semi-nomads where women and children stay in the periphery of villages while men move around with the herds. They live in hamlets comprising 15-25 families with a lot of scrub foliage. This community is subsequently found on the mangrove forest fringes of Karachi in Pakistan, Lakhpat and Abdasa in Kachchh (Gujarat), Jamnagar, and even Khambhat in Gujarat.

In Kachchh, Fakirani Jats live along the coast, and they have a unique eco-tonal (species on the fringes of two adjoining ecosystems) camel species known as Kharai Camels. These camels are desert animals but can swim through the creeks and feed on mangrove plants. As the men of this community are constantly moving, all the responsibility of caring for the family comes down to women, which even includes constructing houses,



PHOTOGRAPHED BY DIPTI TANNA

a practice which is solely undertaken by the Fakirani Jat women.

Elements of Pakhha:

In various parts of the country, house-making is traditionally a community process, where men and women of the village come together and help construct the house using their individual skills. Similarly, among Fakirani Jats, the women of the hamlet along with their children, come together to weave a house. The community prefers to rebuild their Pakhha (their traditional homes) every year or two post-monsoon based on the damage that is done to the skin of the house.

Pakhhas built by the Fakirani Jat women are a unique form of house-making that avoids using plinths to raise the house since plinths make the house form less transient for their migratory patterns. Instead, they use wooden frames and grass mats as construction materials for homes that move with them. The base of the Pakhha is made of earth or in some cases a thin layer of cement, in which the vertical wooden members of the walls are closely inserted. These vertical members are then tied with horizontal bamboo splits and mats are attached to them in such a way that they can open their walls as we open our curtains. This makes their house cool and breezy. The roof is also made with densely woven grass mats. The repair and

rebuilding process of the Pakhha is planned in advance to accommodate people who can help in its construction/repair.

The existing Pakhhas are made entirely by women. The Jats have extended their excellent embroidery skills to weaving and stitching the Pakhhas together, and pass on their knowledge by training the younger generation. No nail is used in the making of Pakhha, everything including ledges for storage is tied using nylon and plastic threads. The colour palette of the exterior of the house merges with the landscape of Kachchh, while on the contrary, the interior of the house is decorated by painting the wooden skeletons in vibrant colours. 🏠



PHOTOGRAPHED
BY AARATI HALBE

Dipti, a Planner with 10 years of experience, currently runs a design studio in Kachchh. She has worked with multidisciplinary firms that involved working closely with pastoral communities on their housing requirements and water security.

POETRY

रूह की जुबां

By Mādhu Ramaswamy

दरिया के कागज़ पे हवा के कलम से मौजों को छेड़ते लखी दास्ताँ सेहरा के टीलों पे रेती के दबने से छपते ही मटिती हुई दास्ताँ अचल के माथे पे आफ़ताब के पड़ते ही हमि की वो घुल-पघिलती दास्ताँ तारीख़-ए-दलि की कतिबों में यादों की स्याही से भरती हुई दास्ताँ

कुछ ऐसी ही है हमारी दास्ताँ, मालधारी की बोली है रूह की जुबां जसि न पढ़ी न पढ़ाई गयी, बस पीढ़ी दर पीढ़ी बढ़ाई गयी सफ़र पे जगिर से समायी गयी, डगर पे हुनर से नभायी गयी

चरि से चले है जहां के वीरानों में लेते चराते कई हमसफ़र भैसों की भीड़, भेद बक़रों की टोली, मवेशियों का, ऊंटों का कतार बछिड़ने-मलने का है रश्ता हमारा, खुले वे भी घूमे तो हम भी आज़ाद

DID YOU KNOW?

India produces 40 million kgs of wool, out of which approximately **32 million kgs is discarded.**

Read how sheep wool in Kangra has found its application through exports to Europe on page no 3.

Editorial Board

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PHOTO ESSAY

Fenced Out: Pastoral Lives of Bakarwals

There are thousands of Bakarwal families and only a handful of trucks.
Most people are not able to avail these services.



Young Rafiq belongs to a Bakarwal family and is taking his herd back to his tent

By Ritayan Mukherjee
Source: PARI

“Look at those fences.” Sipping on a steaming cup of creamy pink goat-milk tea, Gulam Nabi Kandal adds, “The old times are gone,” he says referring to the unfenced landscape they were used to. Now they carry an uneasiness mixed with uncertainty about being able to access meadows and temporary camp-sites.

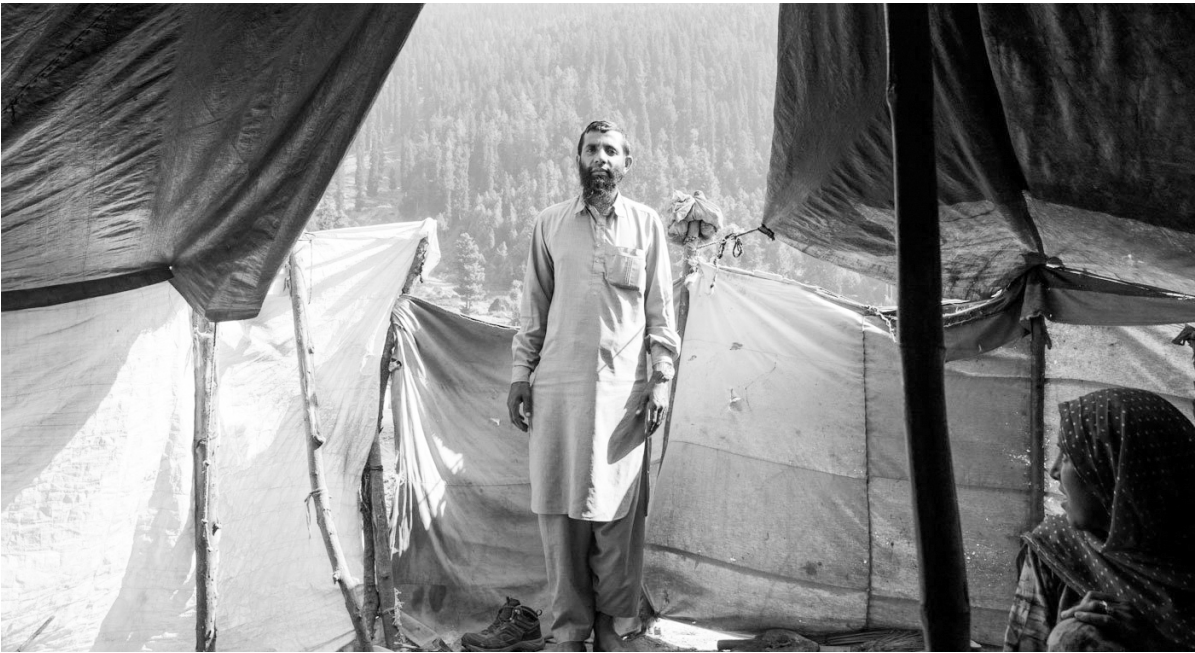
“We have heard that the army is going to take over this place next year,” he says pointing towards a newly erected line of fences on the next mountain. Other Bakarwals seated around us are listening to this community elder, their faces also lined with worry.

That’s not all. Many meadows are being diverted for tourism; popular tourist sites such as Sonamarg and Pahalgam have been overrun with tourists this year. These very sites are important summer pastures for their livestock, they point out.

“See how much they [state] are investing in tunnels and roads. Everywhere now there are going to be better roads, which is good for tourists and travellers but not for us,” a community elder who did not want to be named, told us.

He is referring to the fact that Bakarwals earn from renting out horses in areas with no motorable roads. “It is one of our main sources of income during the tourist season,” he adds. But they must compete with mid-dlemen and locals in not just renting out horses, but when seeking work

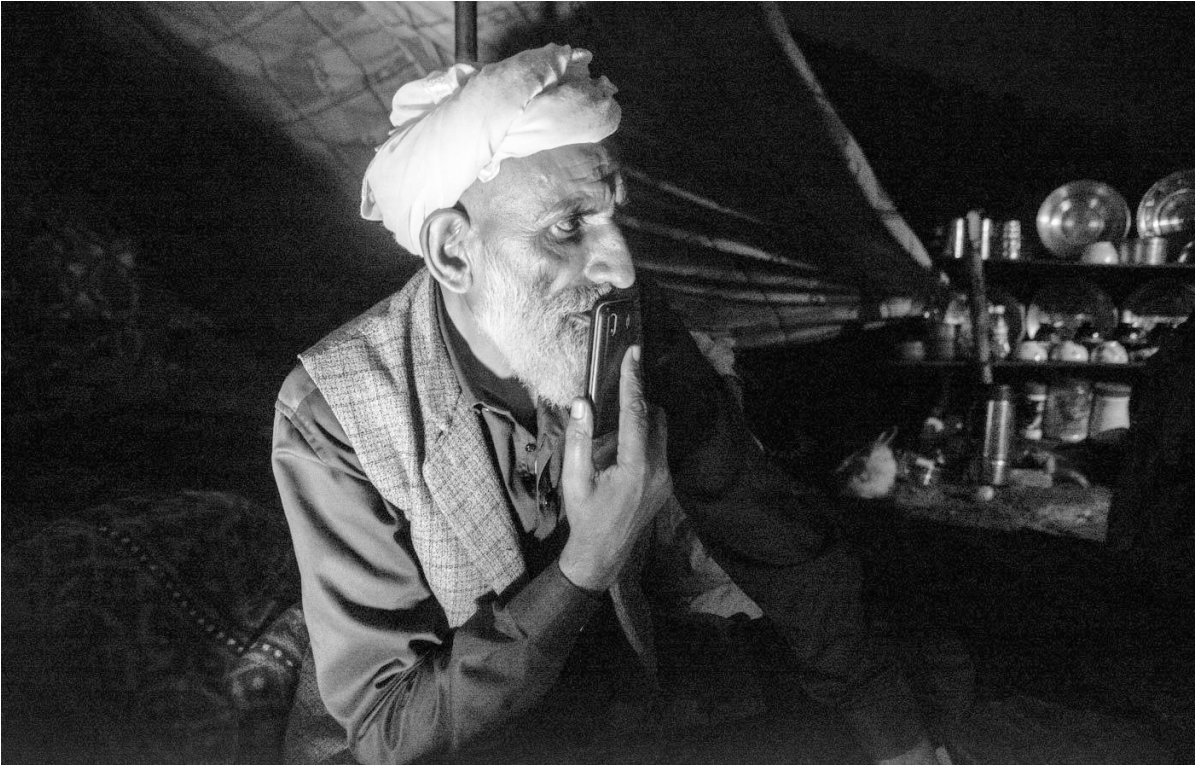
→ CONTINUED ON P.3



Hussain’s group camps near the Zoji La Pass, near Ladakh. He says that teachers appointed by the government at mobile schools don’t always show up.



At Bakarwal camps, a sharing of tea, land and life: women from the nearby villages who come to graze their cattle also join in



Gulam Nabi Kandal is a respected member of the Bakarwal community. He says, ‘We feel strangled because of government policies and politics. Outsiders won’t understand our pain.’



Fetching water for drinking and cooking falls on the Bakarwal women. They must make several trips a day up steep climbs.

as tourist or trekking guides, and in local restaurants. With the average literacy of Bakarwals at 32 per cent according to this 2013 report, other jobs are mostly out of reach.

Summing up the uncertain future for the community and the multiple threats from fencing, tourism and a changing life, Gulam Nabi who has spent all his life moving freely across the mountains says, “How will you know my pain?” 🏠

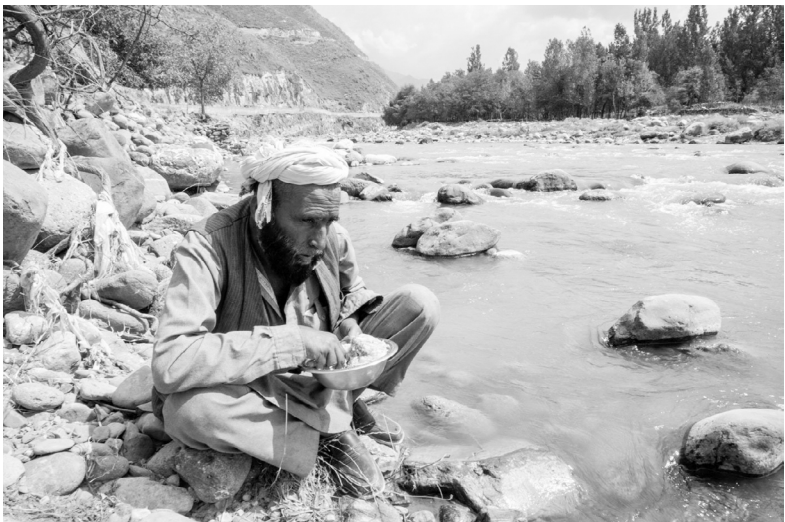
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"We barely have access to veterinary doctors during migration. When an animal gets injured, we use our traditional remedies to fix it" says Mohammed Zabir, seen here with his wife, Fana Bibi.



Arshad Ali Kandal is a member of Shoukat Ali Kandal's camp



Bakarwals often try and camp near a water source. Mohammad Yusuf Kandal eating lunch near the Indus river.

By Lalit Mohan
Source: The Tribune

The wool produced by sheep reared by traditional Gaddi shepherds of Palampur, Baijnath and Multhan areas in Kangra district has been certified as organic by the Uttarakhand State Seeds and Organic Production Certification Agency for sale in national and international markets. It is an international-level certification. These traditional shepherds are now getting about 20 per cent higher rates for their produce than what the government's Wool Federation of Himachal Pradesh offers them. They are selling their organic wool to Indian companies, which are exporting it to Europe and the US where its demand is rising.

The Wool Federation of Himachal Pradesh offers Rs 64 per kg of produce to the shepherds while they are selling wool certified as organic to companies for Rs 77 to Rs 85 per kg.

Pawana Devi, a shepherd of the Bara Bhangal area, says that their organisation Ghumantu Pashupalak Sabha started dealing in wool in 2017. The shepherds of Himachal, who depend on the forests and pastures of the mountains

...shepherds are now getting about 20 per cent higher rates for their produce than what the govt.'s Wool Federation of Himachal Pradesh offers them.

to sustain their sheep and goat, produce organic wool but have not been getting a remunerative price for it.

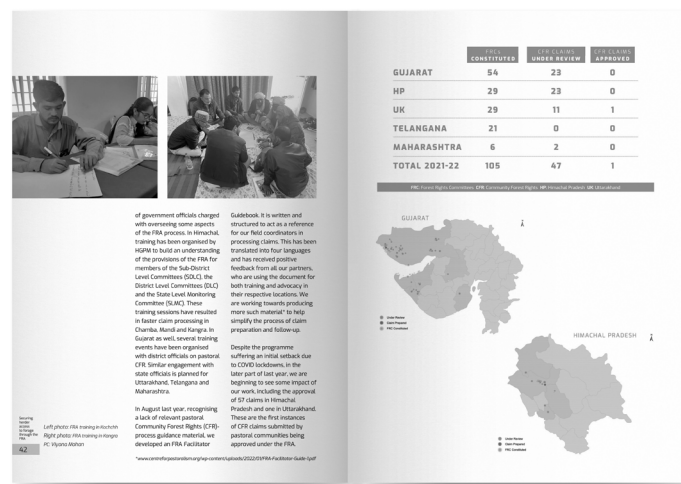
She says that they contacted an NGO, Shikhar Cooperative Society, which helped them get their sheep certified as organic by the Uttarakhand agency. Initially, in 2017, about 50,000 sheep in Multhan and Baijnath areas were certified as organic. About 200 shepherd families, who reared these sheep, joined the movement to get their animals registered as organic. The campaign was successful as in 2018, autumn wool harvested from sheep and certified as organic, fetched Rs 75 per kg, she adds.

Pawana Devi says that in 2018, around 75,000 sheep in Palampur subdivision were certified as organic, thus benefiting 300 shepherd families. In 2019, around 63,000 sheep in the Kullu region were certified as organic. The Ghumantu Pashupalak Mahasabha helped traditional shepherds sell 75,000 kg of certified organic wool to Organic Living Pvt. Ltd for Rs 85 per kg in 2019. In 2020-21, around 1.10 lakh kg of certified wool was sold to the company at the rate of Rs 85 per kg while in 2021-22, 1.43 lakh kg of wool was sold at the same price, she adds. She says that this year, the price of organic wool has fallen to Rs 77 per kg, as the rates of wool in Jammu and Kashmir crashed after the state wool federation was dissolved.

Akshay Jasrotia, who is associated with the Ghumantu Pashupalak Mahasabha, says that there are around 22 lakh sheep and goats reared by traditional shepherds in the state. However, it is sad that government policies have always benefited dairy farmers rearing cows and buffaloes. Traditional shepherds are generally ignored in animal husbandry policies of the state, he claims. 🏠

WHAT'S CFP UPTO?

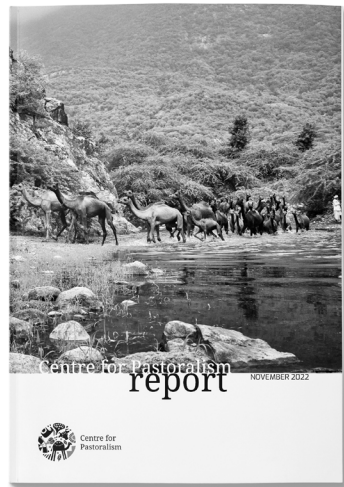
CfP Annual Report November 2022



Excerpts from the report:

We see pastoralism as an adaptive response to harsh climatic conditions, in the Himalayas, in the arid lands of Gujarat and Rajasthan, and in the semi-arid lands of the Deccan. CfP's work is aimed at both visibilising and enabling pastoralism.

It is premised on the idea that while individual herders should have the option of settling, they should be doing this as a choice, rather than being forced to settle owing to curtailed access to grazing lands or the poverty of policy support for pastoralist mobility. 🏠



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Report 2022 [online](#).



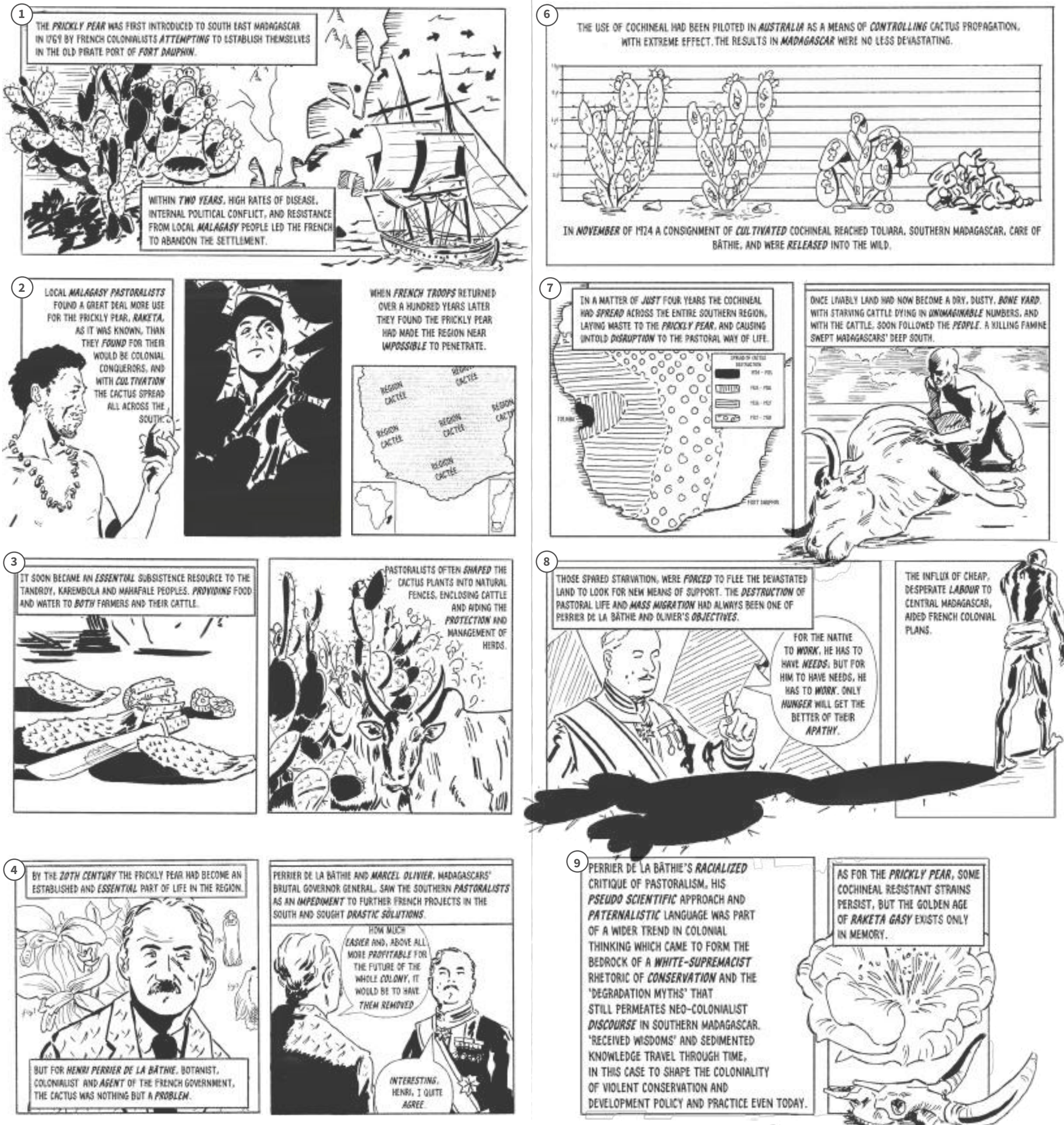
COMIC

The Killing Famine

By Tim Zocco

Source: ESRC STEPS CENTRE

This comic intends to show and explore the fact that contemporary 'conservation' is a function of the colonial apparatus, and is a lie that those in power tell and of which they themselves seem to have become convinced.



MUST READ

PEOPLE

How Far Can Education Take You?

A pastoralist and scholar’s take on formal education

By Taraq Ahmad Chopan

I still remember when my father took me to our village government primary school for the first time in 1994. I was reluctant to study because, before I was admitted to the school, I spent my time collecting vegetables from nearby villages, which is a traditional practice of the Chopan community owing to the profession of sheep rearing and the non-possession of cultivable agricultural land. These vegetables were then dried and stored for winter consumption since cultivation becomes impossible during harsh winters in Kashmir.

However, my father believed that education was essential, and I, his fourth son, should receive it at any cost. The educational careers of all three of my elder brothers had been ruined by the insurgency period in Kashmir in the 1990s and I was their last hope to bring the light of knowledge into the family.

To motivate me to study, the headmaster of the village school assigned a newly recruited teacher to the task. She was instructed



to beat me with a willow stick whenever I showed disinterest to study. Only later did I realise that the drastic need to escape extreme poverty, social injustice, and exploitation relied completely on my being educated.

The Chopan word is composed of two words, Cho meaning “four” and Pan meaning “keeper” i.e. keeper of four-legged animals - which are mostly sheep. The Chopans in Kashmir are landless shepherds who graze the sheep of landlords from March to November and depend exclusively on the agriculturalist class of Kashmir. Despite the constant exploitation that the community faces, the meat sector relies on it to fulfil the food needs of the Kashmiri people, as the region is moun-

tainous and difficult to cultivate for the major part of the year. The Chopans still practice the barter system as they receive their wages in rice, maize, pulses, and wheat from their agricultural clients at the end of the year. My mother used to sing me a folk song about the love story of a Chopan girl with an agricultural boy.

*Pehli Koori Kazaq Teri Malun
Tchoon hi Neeray Loo
Abli Janoo Quran Khano Pahjay
Koruk Dewanoo*


Translation:
*Oh, a Chopan girl is like a rainbow in the pasturelands.
Abli Jaan, a peasant boy, was drawn to her beauty and charm.*

I completed my bachelor’s degree in 2010 from Govt Degree College Bemina, Srinagar and immediately did my Masters in History in Barkatullah University, Bhopal. It was hard to navigate through the dilemmas of moving to a new state for higher education as I was the first one from my community to do so. Being from a backward class I did not have anyone to guide or counsel me but my family was ever supportive of all my decisions. I went on to do my M. Phil in History from Jiwaji University, Gwalior. Given my interest in teaching, I then

enrolled in a B.Ed programme which I completed in 2015. Gradually my parents, being illiterate themselves, became aware of the National Eligibility Test conducted by the University Grants Commission and insisted I clear the same, because they wanted to see me as a professor. With the desire to make my parents proud, I worked hard by staying up all night studying and would sleep only after *fajar* prayers (Dawn prayers). In January 2019, I cleared this tough exam and fulfilled my family’s dreams.

After facing many challenges in my studies, I started taking an interest in the Chopan community’s relevance in modern times. I believe that elders are an ocean of knowledge, and whenever possible, I engage in discussions with the elders of my community to learn more about our culture, profession and social realities. From my grandparents, I have learnt many things about our shepherding culture like maintaining cordial relations with the agricultural class, keeping the flock safe, and so on. These conversations also help me understand the cultural differences of Chopans from other communities of Kashmir. For instance, to have a good relationship with flock owners, the Chopans bring back forest products like *Rheum spp.*, *Polygonum spp.* and *Hydnum coralloides* from high pastures and in return receive a ram, *Dapi tscher* (Gifted Sheep), from the flock owner.

I realized the strength and power of education - that it can transform not only the way a community is perceived/treated but also open a field of opportunities for us. Before the dawn of education in my family, nobody in our village was ready to interact with us. With time, some Chopan community members were even elected to village panchayats, one of the biggest contributions of education. In my family, I have changed the whole backward atmosphere into a literate environment because my younger brother has recently completed a bachelor’s degree in Medical Laboratory technology and all the children are receiving education with great enthusiasm. Therefore, I believe that educational institutions are centres of knowledge that can equip us with means to demand equality and escape exploitative ways of being. 🏠



Taraq Ahmad Chopan, based in Kashmir, represented his community in the Pastoral Youth conclave that was organised in Bhuj in January 2023. He is a passionate advocate for the rights of the Chopan community and is currently pursuing his PhD at the University of Kashmir, under the guidance of Dr Younis Rashid.

Finding Tranquility in a Barren Land

A Quest Through Banni’s Timeless and Enchanting Vistas

Photographed by Rauf Mutva



Amidst the harsh and barren terrain of Banni, this man adds a touch of beauty to his surroundings by carving intricate floral patterns on his trusty camel’s back



As the sun sets on Banni, a group of young friends gather around a warm fire, sharing stories and laughter under the vast expanse of the starry night sky



Banni springs to life after rain, painting the landscape with vibrant shades of green and captivating all who gaze upon its stunning beauty



Discovering the rugged charm of Banni’s barren landscape

EUROPE

Earliest Evidence of Horseback Riding found in ‘Eastern Cowboys’

Wear and tear on human skeletons traces activity back 5000 years

By Andrew Curry
Source: Science

About 5300 years ago, people from the steppes of modern-day Russia and Ukraine expanded rapidly across Eurasia. Within a few centuries these “Yamnaya” left a lasting genetic mark on populations from central Europe to the Caspian Sea. Today, archaeologists call them “eastern cowboys” for their livestock herding and highly mobile lifestyle.

But one part of the classic cowboy picture was missing: horseback riding. Although cattle bones and sturdy wagons have been found in Yamnaya sites, horse bones are scarce, and most archaeologists assumed people did not start to ride horses until at least 1000 years later.

In a new study, published in *Science Advances*, researchers say they’ve found the earliest evidence of horseback riding not in the bones of ancient horses, but in their Yamnaya riders. “Everyone has focused on horse remains to get an idea of early horse riding,” says co-author and University of Helsinki archaeologist Volker Heyd. “Our approach was to look at humans.”

Genetic and other evidence suggests horses were domesticated as early as 3500 B.C.E. Yet the earliest mentions of riding in historical sources or pictorial evidence date from more than 2000 years later, long after the Yamnaya spread across the steppes. The eastern cowboys, many archaeologists thought, were content to walk alongside their herds of cattle. As part of a research project on the Yamnaya expansion, Martin Trautmann, an anthropologist at Helsinki, and colleagues looked at more than 150 skeletons excavated from grave mounds in Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria—the western frontier of Yamnaya expansion. The Yamnaya were well-fed, healthy, and tall; the chemical composition of their bones showed protein-rich diets consistent with herding cattle and sheep. But the skeletons showed signs of distinctive wear and tear.

Many had compression of the vertebrae, which can result from time spent absorbing jarring bumps while seated. They also showed thick spots on the thigh bone consistent with lots of time spent in a crouched position. Healed injuries—broken collarbones, fractured foot bones, and cracked vertebrae—matched the kinds of damage a kicking horse might inflict, or what sports medicine doctors today see in riders thrown from their horses.

Searching for an explanation, Trautmann compared the injuries with those seen in later populations where skeletons were buried



THE EARLIEST DEPICTIONS OF HORSE RIDING, SUCH AS THIS EGYPTIAN GRAFFITO OF THE GODDESS ASTARTE, APPEAR NEARLY 1500 YEARS AFTER THE YAMNAYA EXPANSION, S.STEISS

The Yamnaya were well-fed, healthy, and tall; the chemical composition of their bones showed protein-rich diets consistent with herding cattle and sheep.



BASED ON SKELETAL INJURIES, RESEARCHERS SAY THIS MAN MIGHT HAVE BEEN ONE OF THE EARLIEST HORSE RIDERS, MICHAŁ PODSIADŁO

with riding equipment, horses, or both—strong circumstantial evidence for horseback riding. Of the 150 Yamnaya skeletons he looked at, almost half had changes that were seen in later horse riders.

One Yamnaya man, buried around 2700 B.C.E. in what is today Romania, had all the bone alterations routinely seen in horse riders, plus spinal damage from a hard fall “on his backside,” the authors write. “In a medieval population, it would have been clear this guy was a horse rider,” Trautmann says. “As so often in archaeology,

the coolest finds are the ones you’re not looking for.” Some other archaeologists are reining in their enthusiasm, however. Without horse bones to inspect for telltale signs of skeletal damage from riding, they say, there’s no reliable way to corroborate what the human bones suggest.

“They’re strongly overinterpreting an interesting pattern,” says University of Colorado (CU), Boulder, zooarchaeologist William Taylor. “In isolation, human skeletal data doesn’t have the power to distinguish horse riding from other activity patterns.”

And although archaeologists have found Yamnaya wagons, oxen, and yokes, riding equipment—such as bridles or saddles—is missing entirely. “In terms of trying to identify people riding horses, I think they’ve done the best job possible bioarchaeologically,” says Arizona State University, Tempe, bioarchaeologist Jane Buikstra. “That doesn’t mean it’s perfect, or convincing, ultimately.”

The paper’s authors argue the alterations seen in human bones are powerful circumstantial evidence, especially given hints that the Yamnaya milked horses and the genetic evidence for horse domestication on the Pontic steppe not long after the time of the Yamnaya expansion. The lack of equipment alone “doesn’t exclude the possibility of horse riding,” Trautmann says. “It’s possible to be very active on a horse without specialized gear.” Tack made of perishable leather and cloth, meanwhile, might have decomposed long ago, he argues.

More samples—including horse bones with signs of riding, such as bite marks or spinal damage from the weight of a rider—would help make the case, says CU bioarchaeologist Lauren Hosek. What the group has found “is really interesting,” she says. “But there’s a lot more work to be done when the stakes are as high as the earliest horse riding.” 🏠

SOUTH AMERICA

The Futures of the Pastoralist Systems of Southern Andean Peru

By Cecilia Turín
Source: Pastres

The pastoral systems of the Andean south of Peru, in the regions of Puno and Cusco, are ancestral production systems which have developed in the rangelands of the puna, the high mountains. They are managed by indigenous pastoralists who specialise in breeding mainly alpacas, as well as some llamas and sheep. Just over half of the national alpaca population – around 3.7 million – lives in these areas.

These camelid herders are the biocultural heritage of the Altiplano, the centre of domestication of South American camelids. These socio-ecological systems have developed in very challenging natural conditions at high altitudes (4000-5000 metres), which are intensely cold and dry. Dispersed in landscapes dominated by a diversity of rangelands and bofedales (Andean wetlands), these systems are directly exposed to the effects of climate change on a daily basis. People here also face conditions of extreme poverty, with no options to diversify their livelihoods and limited development opportunities. Transport is difficult, there is poor access to basic services, and people are dependent on connections to other systems for food security.

Seasonal patterns
The management of these traditional systems is organised according to the seasons. This means that the calendar of livestock activities depends on the availability of rangelands and bofedales, which in turn depend on the climate and the availability of rain and water. There are two distinct management periods, one in the shorter rainy season from December to March, and the other in the longer dry season from April to November. From January to March, pastoralists move to the hills, staying in temporary huts. While there, they move around horizontally on the hills on a daily basis, and vertically between higher and lower ground, gaining access to two types of rangelands: dry grasslands and bofedales.

When the dry season begins in April, they move back to the pampa, and stay there in their main residence from April to December. While there, they do vertical movements between pampa and

ladera, and horizontal movements (daily rotations), in their access to dry-grasslands and bofedales.

Making a Living
These pastoralists are primarily devoted to the production of alpaca fibre, and secondarily to the production of meat. Fibre production is mainly important for the textile industry in the neighbouring region of Arequipa, which accounts for 80% of the national production of alpaca fibre. Alpaca meat production is oriented towards local markets. For this reason, it often falls off the radar of national and international development programmes that are oriented towards food production. As a local product, however, it plays an important role in the food security of vulnerable families.

Cultural values
For camelid herders, though, raising camelids is about more than just generating livestock products to sustain their households. Breeding for them has a spiritual meaning, connected to their ancestral culture and their Andean agro-cosmology.

An uncertain future, but with possibilities
With so many changes in the pastoralist systems, several questions arise that shepherds themselves also ask. Who will continue the pastoralist systems if most of the shepherds are old, and younger people do not have the knowledge or interest to continue with pastoral management? The shepherds also wonder what the future of their land and animals will be. Who will look after the rangelands and the alpacas when the shepherds are no longer around? Luis reflects: “The day I am gone, the land and the alpacas will miss me because I am the one who looks after them with great affection, just as I will miss them because they are my life.”

Alpaca herders play a strategic role for the health of the puna ecosystem and the conservation of its ecosystem services. The country and the planet are indebted to these livelihoods because their carbon footprint is minimal, and their contribution to carbon sequestration is important. 🏠

Scan the QR code to read the full article [online](#).



GRETA SEMPLICI

MUST READ

FIELD NOTES

Herding in Thin Air

Can a market for wool bring Yak herding back from the brink of extinction?

By Smriti Basnett & Sartaj Ghuman

Everything that is easy is corrupting; all that is romantic, tough.

Hemmed in by Bhutan and Nepal on either side and by China in the north, lies the tiny Himalayan state of Sikkim. Second smallest of the Indian states, it is also the least populous. We stayed and worked in one of the valleys in the northeast part of Sikkim called Lachung whose inhabitants were mainly nomadic and they would move up and down the valley seasonally. These communities have fields and settlements strewn across the whole valley, but now with a shift towards tourism, they are mostly confined to the village proper.

Yak herding in High altitude pastures

The high altitudes are an inhabitable place. The harsh cold makes for miserable living, the thin air makes it hard to breathe, and the crumbly grit that passes for soil must be coaxed, cajoled with prayers and entreaties more than through human labour to produce enough to sustain life. This is no place for humans to live. And yet, this wondrous landscape, as abominably repulsive as it is attractive, is peopled. What allows humans to exist here, is yak herding. Yak herding is to the high altitudes what agriculture is to the places lower down.

The vast proportion of the land, everything above 3000 m, is rarely visited by the locals. These are harsh but spectacular landscapes. Although agriculture is not possible owing to the extreme cold, these lands produce highly nutritious forage that has been grazed by pastoralist communities across the Himalayas. In Sikkim, it is the Lachung who seasonally inhabit these meadows, grazing their yak on the high-quality forage at high altitudes.

The winter snows melt away to expose undulating meadows of fresh green. The temperature rises by a fraction and the usual precipitation of snow and sleet gives way to rain and mist and all the plants rush forth to put out a leaf or two and then make the most of the short season by quickly flowering, carpeting the ground in all imaginable hues. It is in these dreamlike meadows that the yaks spend whole days grazing slowly and patiently upon this beautiful but meagre offering, in turn reciprocating with precious manure in the form of dung. But yak herding makes for a tough lifestyle and one that is slowly dying.

A small minority of the Lachungpas own yaks. There are a mere 15 families who own herds making up a total of about 500 yaks in the whole valley. Of these 15 families, there are only two owners who herd the yaks themselves, traveling and living with the yaks, while the others have hired herders to look after the yaks for them. The next generation of yak owners, having studied in schools in towns and cities, have little interest in the hardships associated with the herding lifestyle.

Alternate markets for Yak wool

The yak herders currently make a living by selling the cheese, churpi and curd that they make in their high pastures to the villagers in Lachung, with their produce sometimes going as far afield as Gangtok or even Kalimpong in the State of West Bengal. This is supplemented by yak meat in the winter when a few animals are killed and the dried meat is used through the lean season.

The income from these, however, does not offset the hardships of the job and almost no one within



THACHUNG, THE OLDEST YAK HERDER, ATTENDING TO HIS YAKS AT 4800 M IN NORTH SIKKIM

The income from these, however, does not offset the hardships of the job and almost no one within the younger generation wants to take up the practice. If yak herding as a lifestyle is to survive, we need to find other, more lucrative markets that can be tapped.

the younger generation wants to take up the practice. If yak herding as a lifestyle is to survive, we need to find other, more lucrative markets that can be tapped. In the belief that these high-altitude landscapes would suffer ecologically without the yaks, and the region would be culturally diminished without the yaks and the yak herders, we tried to look at other economic options for these yak herders.

Yaks have a thick, rough outer coat - the hair from which is used by the herders to make ropes - and a fine under-wool that they shed every summer. This wool when processed and woven proves to be the best material for a first or inner layer for mountaineers, skiers, and other high-altitude athletes. Exerting at high altitudes, even in sub-zero temperatures, causes the body to quickly heat up and start to sweat. The clothes must therefore be

able to deal with the temperature changes and yet stay fresh. These yak wool clothes were found to outdo even the industry leader merino wool when it came to weight, softness, warmth, water vapour permeability, air permeability and much more.

We got in touch with the leading brand in yak wool clothing, a Europe-based winter clothes manufacturer called Kora, whose philosophy includes trying to bring a positive change to the communities that provide them with wool. We contacted the company to see how we could link them with the yak herders of Lachung, but it turned out that they'd already visited Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh and the logistic challenges and small quantities of wool that could be sourced there had forced them to look for other options. In their reply they mention exactly what it would take for them to source wool out of India:

"For us to be able to source in India we will need a local partner who is capable of managing the sourcing of sufficient quantities of wool (10-20 tonnes at least), all communications and exchanges with the herder families, and shipment of the wool to a wool processing factory. We have not yet identified a wool processing supply chain /garment manufacturer in India. All our production is currently in China."

This is an excellent opportunity for anyone capable of linking up the yak herders in the Himalayan states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh and sourcing wool from them. Being an utterly unexplored area, the economic benefits that the enterprise promises are immense, not to mention the satisfaction of having helped a community on the brink of extinction. 🏠

CARTOON

How many differences can you spot?

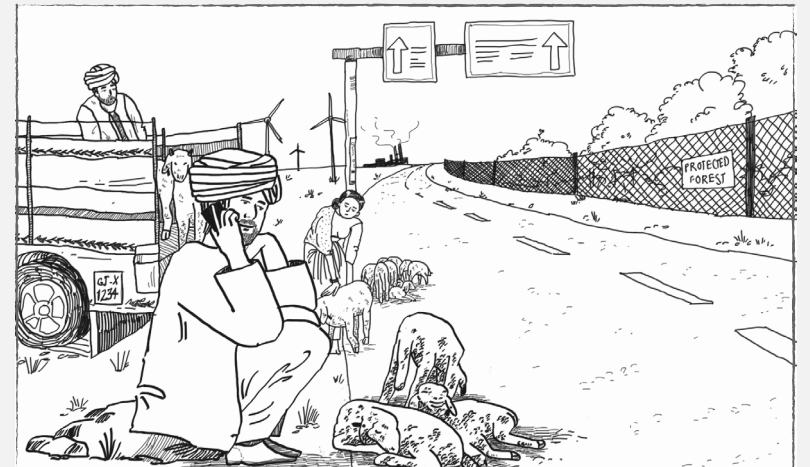
Hint: Enough to make you wonder what a "Future" panel would look like.

Conceptualised by Dhanya
Illustrated by Lavannya

PAST



PRESENT



FASHION

Tang - Self-Expression Through a Dwindling 700-year-old Craft

A braided belt from the camel herders of Kachchh

By Bhavesh Rabari

Source: Karigar ki Kahani

In present times, the region of Kachchh has 960 villages with more than 20 lakh inhabitants. Groups of people from Sindh, Balochistan, UP, Bihar, and Rajasthan migrated to Kachchh in different decades and for varied reasons, making it their homeland. The geological diversity of the land makes it suitable for pastoralism and many communities continue to be agriculturalists and pastoralists, like the Rabaris.

Traditionally, the source of income for a Rabari was through selling camel milk, sheep wool, and/or the animals themselves. Twenty years ago, camels used to be sold at fairs in Bikaner, Rajasthan. The trade is fast declining due to climate change, painstaking effort, lesser demand, and changes in lifestyle. Only 20% of the families in the Dhebaria subgroup's 65 villages are pastoralists today.

As a pastoralist's work demanded travelling long distances, a wooden frame, called a *Kathu*, was fitted on the camel's hump to provide support to the rider. It was tied to the camel with a ply-split braided belt called Tang. Tang, a Rabari camel belt, is a 700-year-old craft that has grown organically over the years through knowledge exchange within the community. Nomadic pastoralists spent much of their year in forests. Thus, the motifs of Tang also evolved with what the makers saw in their surroundings.

Commonly found motifs are camels, panihari (women with water pots on their heads), and scorpions. Scorpions hold a special position in Rabari culture. It is believed that a scorpion is an avatar taken by Lord Krishna, and it protects them during their time in the forest. Tattoos of a scorpion on the finger is also a very popular practice amongst the Rabaris. It should be noted that all Tang motifs are made in a 90-degree angle and look exactly the same from both sides.

Pachan bhai Rabari is one of the few practising ply-split weav-

ers. He was born in the village of Kuday. Pachan bhai, his wife Sajnuben, two daughters, and one son live together now in Kukad-sar. Hailing from the Dhebaria subgroup, the craft is his family tradition and his father taught him the skill.

He, like other Rabaris, was herding camels and sheep to earn his livelihood. In 2015, due to some personal crisis, he could not continue herding and took a job as a gardener for a multinational company. He sold his animals and now farms for the family on a small plot of land along with his job. As a pastoralist, he travelled on foot to Haryana and Chhattisgarh to feed his animals.

The factory where Pachan bhai worked shut down in the last few months, leaving him ample time to pick up the craft again.

He believes that art can help people build their own identities and gain recognition in the world. The

craft of ply-split weaving was used to decorate the camels for festive occasions. Now, only museums can attest to the decoration of camels, as the practice has been completely stopped in the community. As many Hindu communities do not wear leather while praying in the temples, a tang belt called Chiliyo, was in high demand by the regular temple goers. Unlike modern belts with metal buckles, Chiliyo, a belt made of ply-split braiding has an inbuilt lock system. With a hole on one end and an extruding bulge on the other, it can lock itself without any external material.

The threads for the belt are prepared by spinning two different yarns together. Balls of the 2 ply thread are prepared and made ready for braiding. Made out of goat wool, Tang is originally in black and white, which are natural colours. Today, Pachan Bhai gets his threads directly from the market. A few new product ideas that Pachan Bhai has been working on are belts, guitar straps, and bags. He has very recently customised a belt with his name and date on it.

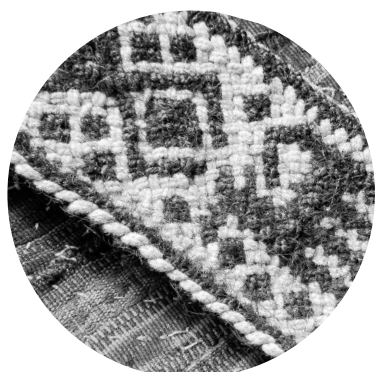
Only the elders practise the craft of ply-split weaving, as it is time-consuming; very few young pastoralists have the skill to make the same. As the practice among the Rabaris declined, it was picked up by other communities. There are still only a handful of artisans from other communities too who have the skill to make a fine Tang Belt. 🏠

...craft that has grown organically over the years through knowledge exchange within the community.

PACHAN BHAI WITH HIS TANG

Camels, panihari and scorpions are some commonly found motifs

Ply split braid (zoomed in)



EVENT

Living Lightly exhibition

Hosted at the Living & Learning Design Centre, Bhuj, from 19th-23rd January 2023



PHOTOGRAPHED BY MĀDHU RAMASWAMY

The Living & Learning Design Centre Museum, Bhuj, hosted the multimedia exhibition 'Living Lightly- Journeys with Pastoralists' which marked a historic moment for pastoralism in India by bringing together for the very first time, young pastoralists from across 17 states who gathered for the 'Rashtriya Maldhari Yuva Sangathan' to address specific issues that their respective communities face and what the future of pastoralism looks like for them.

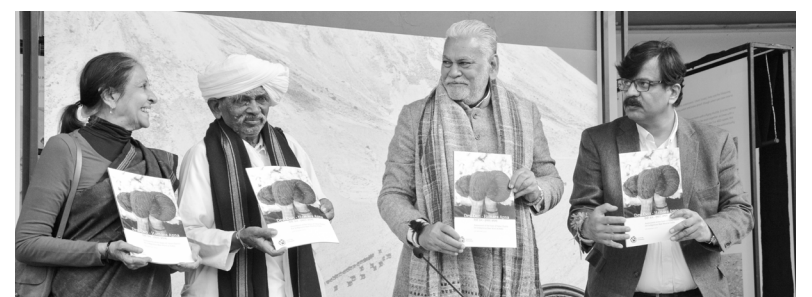
EVENT

Desi Oon – Hamara Apna Fleece and Fibre Festival

Hosted at Triveni Kala Sangam from 16th-20th December 2022

The 4th Desi Oon Festival, at Triveni Kala Sangam, celebrated the crafts and communities associated with Indian wool and highlighted the huge opportunity to use this abundant material in textiles and apparel, as a thermal and acoustic insulant in buildings, and as a packaging material for fragile, temperature-sensitive, perishable goods. Centre for Pastoralism's National Wool Report, a study on India's indigenous wool, was also launched at the festival.

The Desi Oon Festival is an initiative of the Desi Oon Hub, facilitated by the Centre for Pastoralism. The Hub is a collaborative of organisations from across the country's pastoral landscapes that works with shepherds, knitters, felters, spinners and weavers to bring indigenous wool into our lives, homes and wardrobes.



THE HON. MINISTER OF FISHERIES, ANIMAL HUSBANDRY AND DAIRYING, SHRI PARSHOTTAM RUPALA, INAUGURATED THE FESTIVAL AND LAUNCHED THE NATIONAL WOOL REPORT, PHOTOGRAPHED BY KHYATI VINOD



PHOTOGRAPHED BY MĀDHU RAMASWAMY