



# PASTORAL TIMES

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Tales of Living & Herding



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**This is living to me:** Three young women swap city life for herding in the Pyrenees



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# Loss and Grief at 14000 ft:

## A Shepherd's Fight to Save His Dying Flock



Veterinary team reaches Hadsar Dhar at 14,000 feet to treat the infected flock  
PC: Dr. Anurag Sharma

By CfP Field Researchers:  
**Abhinanda Lahiri,**  
**Vidur Datt, Amiya Walia**

As golden sunset turned to night, Rohit sat on a rock where network was sometimes available, and called everyone he could. "Please help us", he repeated. By sunrise, twelve animals had succumbed at 14000 ft. We watched in horror as their keepers picked up the lifeless bodies on their backs, and buried them inside piles of rocks.

An intangible phenomenon of pastoral life is the entwinement of a pastoralist's life force with that of their flock. On 29th June 2023, we witnessed the devastation caused by the PPR virus to a large flock of 1400 sheep and goats at their alpine pastures in Hadsar, Lahaul. This encounter revealed a narrative emerging from the inaccessibility of vaccines, medical aid, emergency relief, and basic knowledge of animal healthcare.

Peste des petits ruminants (PPR), a highly contagious and fatal viral disease for small ruminants, can wipe out almost a third of an unvaccinated flock. To combat PPR, the Government of India and the World Health

Organisation have set 2030 as a target for its eradication. Fortunately, since 1987, India has had an effective indigenous vaccine that offers lifelong immunity against PPR. However, outbreaks continue to occur in several Indian states, with Himachal Pradesh experiencing the second-highest frequency of outbreaks between 1995-2019, as per national surveillance data. Recognising the significant ownership of sheep and goats by migratory pastoralists in HP, the Animal Husbandry Department (AHD) provides free access to vaccines.

### This encounter painted a vivid portrait of the waning vitality of pastoralists as parallel to the health of their flock.

However, on interviewing pastoralists from Chamba, our team found that only 10 of 100 pastoralists had vaccinated their flock. Across other districts in HP, dozens of pastoralists spoke about how medicines, vaccines and veterinary care were difficult to access, particularly in remote locations.

This article stems from our interaction in Lohani, Lahaul, with Rohit, a 32-year-old Gaddi, whose young family lives in Cham-

ba's Churah tehsil. Every year, his dhera, composed of 5-6 pastoralists with 1400 sheep and goats, crosses over into Lahul via the Merowa pass, en route to their monsoon meadows in the remote Hadsar Dhar. This year, shortly after crossing into Lahaul, they were blindsided by a mysterious illness spreading through the flock. By the time we met Rohit, 200-300 of his animals could not walk, eat or see, and over 50 had died from what later revealed itself as PPR.

As we followed Rohit to the ridge, painful sounds of retching, and incessant groans came from all sides. Under massive pines, there were dozens of mostly adolescent goats with sore, bruised lesions on their nose-mouth, thick mucus falling out with each scary breath, eyes sealed shut with a yellowing mucus, diarrhoea, and limited movement.

In a desperate effort to access medicines, Rohit made three trips down to Lohani, a 3-hour trek from his pasture, and then to the nearest veterinary centre in Udaipur, 22 km away. Each time, he returned with just 2-3 vials of medicines from the clinic, without as much as a diagnosis. He finally requested a friend in Killar (Pangi Valley), close to 50 km away, to send him a box of any medication he could find. Despite Lahaul's 25 veterinary centres, it was in goodwill alone that Rohit managed to get his first set of limited medical supplies from the secluded Pangi Valley.

Over many days, Rohit repeatedly tried reaching out for help – from Churah's MLA, to the Lahaul AHD – all to no avail. He was finally able to contact veterinarians Dr Sachin Sood (in Kangra) and Dr Kishor Rana (in Sissu) who were quick in diagnosing PPR and sounded the alarm on the urgent requirement for aid. Once our team witnessed the situation of the flock at Rohit's pasture in the Hadsar mountains, we returned to base and eventually reached out to local activists Pawana Kumari and Akshay Jasrotia of the Himachal Ghumantu Pashupalak Mahasabha (HGPM). We updated them on

the situation and requested them to contact the AHD. Within just a few hours, a team of veterinarians arrived with medicines in bulk, along with a compelling official deployment notice from the AHD. When asked about the flock not being vaccinated, Rohit responded "No vaccines come for us. No medicines are given to us."

By the time Rohit's dhera received aid, about 80 animals had already died. This amounts to a loss of 8-10 lakh INR, which is an under-estimation of actual losses suffered by a herder, since in addition to mortality, PPR is also associated with reproductive failure, reduced milk and wool production, inability to sell livestock for meat, and even diminished body weight in surviving animals.

Pastoralists graze their animals in isolated landscapes, often distant from urban centres, and in areas with poor road access. Under such conditions, pastoralists invariably experience difficulties in availing services such as vaccination and other medical care that we take for granted.

Losses such as these are extremely difficult to recover from and play a vital role in pastoralists' decisions to sedentarise. However, such mammoth losses are avoidable, in this case through the simple preventative measure of PPR vaccinations being made available to all pastoralists. Today we have access to products such as milk, meat, wool and leather due to pastoralists like Rohit. And, they are the ones most in need of responsive veterinary care to safeguard their livelihoods.

The sheer quantum of migratory sheep and goats reaching the districts of Lahaul-Spiti from Chamba demands an allocation of sufficient vaccinations, medicines and veterinary teams in both districts for the duration of the summer and monsoon seasons. While this encounter provided a picture of what an effective state response can look like, it was also a window into a pastoralist nightmare which could be avoided with better planning. Where pastoralists go, medical care should follow.

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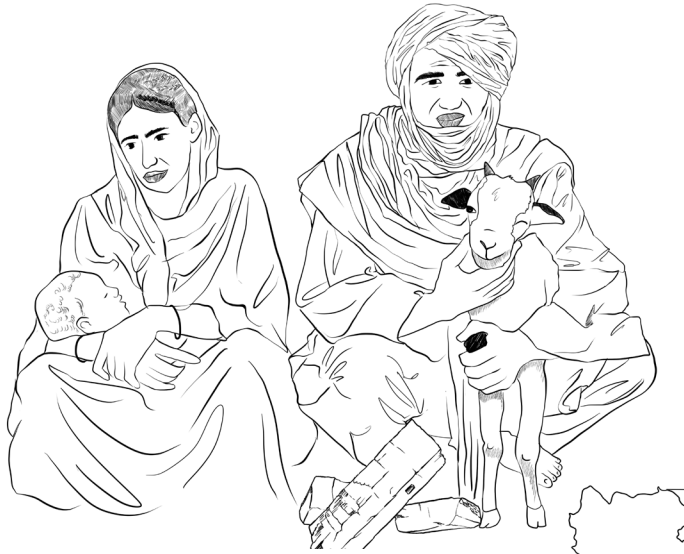


POETRY

# No Better Place to Meet Yourself

Moussa Ag Assarid is the oldest of thirteen children in a nomadic Touareg family. Born in northern Mali in 1975, he moved to France in 1999 to study Management at the University of Montpellier. This poem is excerpted from an interview with Victor Amela.

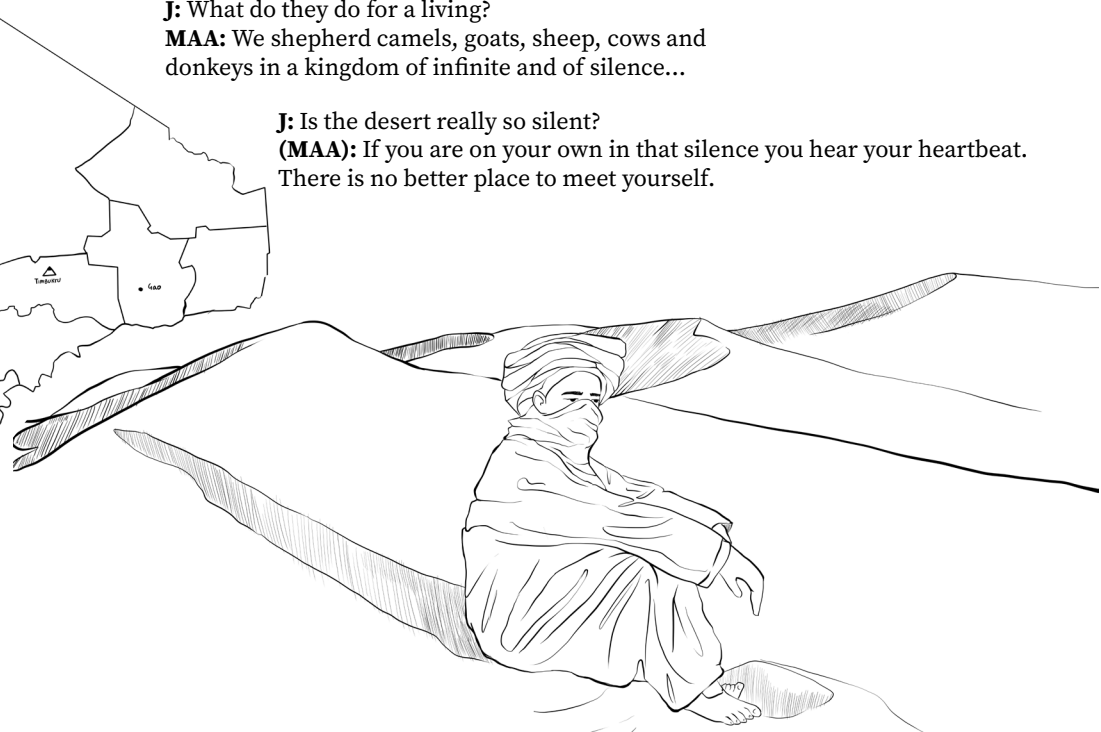
By Moussa Ag Assarid



**Moussa Ag Assarid (MAA):** I don't know my age. I was born in the Sahara desert, with no papers. I was born in a nomadic camp of Touaregs, between Timbuktu and Gao, in the north of Mali.


**J:** What do they do for a living?  
**MAA:** We shepherd camels, goats, sheep, cows and donkeys in a kingdom of infinite and of silence...

**J:** Is the desert really so silent?  
**(MAA):** If you are on your own in that silence you hear your heartbeat. There is no better place to meet yourself.



**J:** What memories do you have of your childhood in the desert?  
**MAA:** I wake up with the Sun. The goats of my father are there. They give us milk and meat, and we take them where there is water and grass. My great-grandfather did it, and my grandfather, and my father, and me. There was nothing else in the world than that, and I was very happy!

**J:** Really? It doesn't sound very exciting.  
**MAA:** It is. At the age of seven, you can go alone away from the camp, and for this you are taught the important things—to smell the air, to listen, to see carefully, to orient with the Sun and the stars...and to be guided by the camel if you get lost. He will take you where there is water.



**J:** To know that is valuable, no doubt.  
**MAA:** Everything is simple and profound there. There are very few things, and each one has enormous value.

**J:** So that world and this one are very different.  
**MAA:** There, every little thing gives happiness. Every touch is valuable. We feel great joy just by touching each other, being together. There, nobody dreams of becoming, because everybody already is.

**J:** What shocked you most on your first trip to Europe?  
**MAA:** I saw people running in the airport. In the desert, you only run if a sandstorm is approaching! It scared me, of course.

**J:** They were going after their baggage, ha ha.  
**MAA:** Yes, that was it.

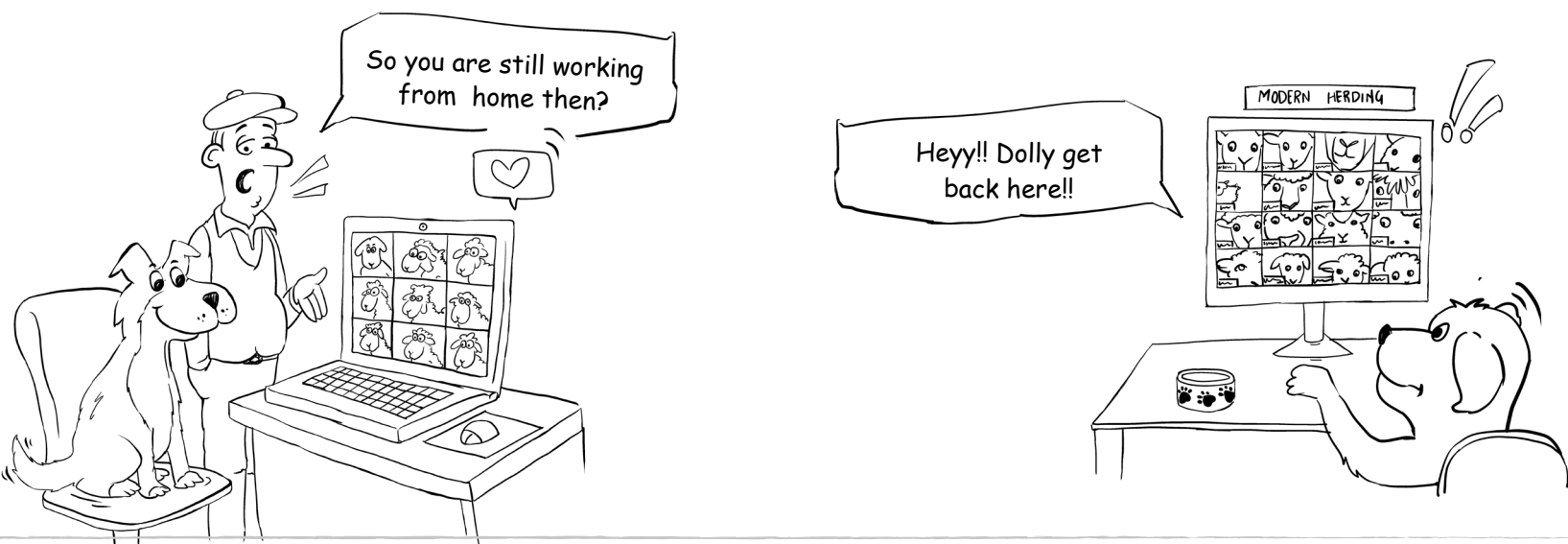
**J:** Tell me about a moment of deep happiness for you in the desert.  
**MAA:** It happens every day, two hours before sunset. The heat decreases, there is still no cold air, and men and animals slowly return to the camp, and their profiles are painted against a sky that is pink, blue, red, yellow, green.

**J:** That sounds fascinating.  
**MAA:** It's a magical moment... We all get into the tents and we boil tea. Sitting in silence we listen to the sound of the boiling water... We all are immersed in calmness: with the heartbeats tuned to the rhythm of the boiling water, potta potta potta...

**J:** How peaceful.  
**MAA:** Yes...here you have watches; there, we have time 🕒

COMIC

By Mira Scharf, Shaun McCallig



NEWS

# Van Gujjars in Peril as Eviction Notices Served in Dehradun's Lachhiwala Range

By Kushal Choudhary  
Niharika Mehra  
Source: NewsClick, 21 May 2023



People from the Van Gujjar community gathered at the Lachhiwala Forest range office in Dehradun on Friday to peacefully demonstrate against the sudden eviction notices served to them. The notice termed these traditional forest dwellers as "illegal encroachers" and was served to many Van Gujjar families in the Lachhiwala range.

ent their side to the concerned authorities through legal means. According to the Indian Forest (Ut-taranchal Amendment) Act, 2001, the person who is termed as an en-croacher must be served notices such that they are allowed to pre-sent their case legally. These notic-es do not have any mention of any legality whatsoever." "According to the working plans of the Forest department itself, the Van Gujjar community has been living here for the past 120 years," he added.

In an ensuing confron-tation between the Gujjars who have gathered and a forest depart-ment official, Ghanand Uniyal, the Gujjars reiterated that the notice served to them is outside the ambit of the law as it violates the rights of forest dwellers under the Forest Rights Act, 2006. Uniyal said, "The anti-encroachment agenda is present in all the departments and ranges of forests as per the or-ders by the state government and the CM. The Lachhiwala range is more sensitive. Gujjars have been allocated land in the range but this allocation has not been imple-mented. Now we see that there is encroachment of large amounts of land. We have taken into consid-eration all the laws and acts includ-ing tribal and forest rights laws."

The Van Gujjar repre-sentatives responded by asserting that the notice of encroachment served encompasses all Van Gujjar house-holds in the range, labelling every dera in the Lachhiwala range as

encroachment. They say that the forest department has the right to remove the encroachers but there is no information provided what-soever about the details of the en-croached area and which persons and families are encroachers.

**“ I fail to understand why our entire community in this forest range is being termed encroachers ”**

Many women from the community who participated in the meeting expressed their con-cerns about the sudden notices handed over to their families. Reshma, a Van Gujjar woman liv-ing in the Lachhiwala range said that her family has been living here since 1910. "Our five gen-erations have lived here and the forest department has repeatedly troubled us with such notices. This land on which we live is also a re-settlement land. They say we need to resettle from the forests, but instead of making arrangements,

they serve us such notices about encroachment. We would happi-ly accept the eviction notices had there been enough amends by the government but as of now, I fail to understand why our entire com-munity in this forest range is being termed encroachers," she said.

Reshma said that such impromptu notices given to the community affect their collective well-being and mental health. "We don't know what will happen to us, the fear of uncertainty looms over. We are living presently based on the permits provided by the de-partment, but we are questioned like this. We would accept any-thing in accordance with the law if it ensures that we won't be served notices like this yet again and we earnestly wish for a solution to our continuous plight. It hurts being termed encroachers in the very forests our generations have lived in," she said.

Commenting on the marginalised status of the tribal community, Reshma added that the community is largely unedu-cated and is cut off from the mainstream. "We are supposed to be given ST status, we live in the jungles but we are denied such sta-tus. But what more can we think of now when we have to live in this constant state of anxiety where even the roofs over our heads are under threat? We are experiencing sleepless nights, these notices are a hindrance to our children's edu-cation as well," she said 🗣️

NEWS

# Return of Pastoralism:

## How villagers fought a long battle to regenerate grazing lands



By Bhagirath, Shagun  
Source: Down to Earth  
Date: 11 April 2023

For generations, arranging fod-der and different forage crops for their livestock has been a way of life for the residents of semi-arid Boojh village in Rajasthan's Udaipur district. With population growth and fragmentation of land-holding, fodder availability gradu-ally reduced.

By the 2010s, the situation became so dire, recalled 50-year-old Sarsi Bai, that most people had to buy fodder from a private beed (pasture) some 7 kilometres away; the price of the fodder depended on the beed owner's will.

In 2016, Boojh residents got in touch with the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES), a

non-profit that works with com-munities across the country on ecological restoration. "FES re-searchers told us that we can over-come fodder crisis by reviving and managing the shamlat or village common land," said Deepak Shri-mali, a resident.

Almost all the house-holds in the village came together to set up a "pasture development and management committee" and decided to revive a 15-hectare pas-ture they share with neighbouring villages.

First, the committee fenced the patch and planted 2,500 saplings of local tree species such as neem, amla, khejri and mahua as well as various perennial native grass species. Then, they built loose boulder check dams to harvest rainwater and ensure that the hilly terrain retains moisture. Within two years, 1-1.5 metre tall grasses filled the patch.

In 2019, the committee allowed harvesting of the fodder grass, but only one person from each household was given the permit to check overharvesting. A fine of Rs 1,000 was imposed on those who let their cattle wander into the revived pasture and Rs 500 for lopping trees. The committee

collects a fee of Rs 20 from each family, which is then spent on the maintenance of the pasture.

Following the successful revival, the residents of Boojh, in 2019, initiated the development of another pasture spanning 16 ha. "Now, every family in Boojh har-vests 90-100 bundles (200-250 kilo-gram) of fodder a year from these two pastures," said Shrimali.

Given that a bundle of 2-3 kg fodder costs Rs 8-10, the pas-tures have helped each family save Rs 1,000 a year. Some residents sell the excess fodder harvested from the revived pasture in the market. In the nearby Tirol village of Udaipur district, the residents have re-ceived a 25-ha pasture with the help of FES and plan to revive another patch of 27 ha. Megh Singh, the 81-year-old chairperson of the vil-lage's pasture revival and manage-ment committee, said that hardly any household in the village has bought fodder in the past four to five years. While the revival of pastures has not been easy in all places, FES researchers say the development of pasture is gaining momentum in semi-arid areas like Rajasthan, where livestock is the most reliable source of income for farmers 🗣️



PHOTO ESSAY

# ‘This is living to me’: Three young women swap city life for shepherding in the Pyrenees

By Paroma Basu  
Source: The Guardian

Photographer Paroma Basu followed three young Spanish women who have left urban careers and retrained through the Escola de Pastors i Pastores de Catalunya, one of many herding schools opening around Spain



Amanda Guzman Mejias briefly worked in marketing in Barcelona before realising she hated office and city life. When she heard about shepherding school, Guzman Mejias immediately applied and has never looked back. ‘It is like I have found my way,’ she says



Guzman Mejias, with the striped umbrella, and Vicky Garcia, look after 400 sheep and goats at high altitudes. Herds are move to cooler, higher pastures during the hot summer months. In early autumn, the animals come back down to the plains



Xisqueta sheep grazing at the top of Mount Bonaigua. The Xisqueta are a hardy, rugged breed, native to the Catalan Pyrenees. A few decades ago they were listed as endangered, but in recent years numbers have recovered



One of the oldest domesticated animals, goats are adventurous eaters with robust stomachs to match. They can navigate terrain inaccessible to other animals and are useful in fire prevention because they clear flammable brush and vegetation



Gaucha, Lizarza Solana’s 18-month-old sheepdog, discovers a newborn lamb that was accidentally left behind when its mother gave birth while grazing in the forest.



Espina Calatayud’s day begins with a four-hour hike through the forests with the goats. Once they are milked, they set off on another four-hour hike, usually returning after dark. ‘This is a way of life and not only a job,’ she says.



Heatwave sparked an unprecedented number of wildfires in Spain last year, aggravated by rising temperatures from global heating. Sheep and goats have been deployed for centuries to clear the land of excess vegetation, and a growing number of countries are embracing them as an important method of fire prevention



Every day, Lizarza Solana walks her hungry herd for up to eight hours, as they seek out fresh vegetation to fill their bellies. ‘I am feeling very healthy because I am walking all day,’ she says. ‘I think it’s good for the body and mind to live like this.’ 🐑



THEATRE

# Aji-lhamu-the nomadic theatre from Monyul, the land of Monpas



Written by **Namrata Tiwari**  
Narrated by **Pema Wange**

Dust circles in the air as young children clean the community ground in Tchangpa village of Chug Valley. There is a murmur that *Chhampas* - the performers have arrived from Kalaktang the night before and will perform the *Aji-lhamu* dance today. It is a moment of honour and pride for the villagers to host the *Chhampas*. Gaon Burah (GB), the village headman, has gone to welcome the dance group. Amma Dorjee, GB's wife, is preparing drinks for the *Dunchhang*, a feast to be hosted at their home tonight to felicitate the dance group after their performance. Rinchin, Amma's daughter, pours some *Nimak Chai*, butter tea, for us. Sipping the chai, we wait excitedly for the dance to begin in a few hours.

Folk dance, traditional opera or theatre, there are many ways to describe *Aji-lhamu*. Some believe it is the Tibetan version of the Hindu Epic Ramayana practised by the Monpas of Monyul - the land of Mon comprising West Kameng and Tawang districts of Arunachal Pradesh. *Aji-lhamu* groups reside in every village of

the *Monyul* region. They are taught and mentored by a '*Lopon*' - a designated teacher. The group travels from one village to another, performing stories and episodes to raise funds for charity work like building bridges, temples, mani and stupas.

*Aji-lhamu*, which can go up to 7 days in a row, represents a miracle performed by the God-king *Ling Gesar Gyepu*, who attempted to distract demons from harming humankind. He distracted the demons by narrating a story to them, his five fingers representing characters from the story. The five performers in the *Aji-lhamu* dance embody *Ling Gesar Gyepu*'s five fingers. The performers include *Nyapa*, a fisherman and *Nyarok*, his assistant, *Lhamu* and *Lham-angying*, the two fairy sisters and *Jhalu*, the king. *Nyapa* and *Nyarok* are demons who kidnap *Lhamu* and *Lham-angying* when they descend on earth for a purification ritual called *Jhaphthru*. *Jhalu*, the king, comes to their rescue and saves them from the demons - highlighting the conquest of good over evil. The *Monpas* believe that the *Ling Gesar Gyepu* reincarnates as the Dalai Lama.

According to another folklore, *Aji-lhamu* was choreo-



graphed 1000 years ago in Mukto village by a Buddhist Lama called *Chakzang Wangpo*, an architect and a disciple of the first Dalai Lama. He choreographed this dance to entertain people and used the donation money to build bridges between villages that were isolated from each other. The dance, performed during '*Losar*', is the most significant Monpa festival, which falls between February-March.

Against the backdrop of the valley, adorned in the traditional Monpa attire, *Chhampas* dance to the reverberating sounds of the cymbals and drums. Ama Dorjee offers us '*Ara*', a local alcoholic drink. Parallely, GB is busy preparing for the felicitation ceremony as the performance comes to an end. Ama Dorjee joins GB to felicitate the young group of *Chhampas* with the *Khada* - a white ceremonial scarf. Soon the ground clears out as the villagers head for their homes. Ama Dorjee insists we stay back for the *Dunchhang*. But we have a long day ahead in Nyukmadung the next day and we must start early. We thank Gaon Burah Ji for his hospitality, exchange pleasantries with the *Aji-lhamu* group and hop onto the car that will take us to our homestay in Dirang.



PC: Namrata Tiwari

FOOD

# Does Pastoralism Have a Place in the Future of Food?

*Civil Eats talked with Köhler-Rollefson about the differences between pastoralism and industrial livestock production, the benefits of the former, and why she believes we can't all go vegan.*

By **Kayla Frost**  
Source: Civil Eats

You talk about the dangers of relying on a select few high-yielding livestock breeds that can only survive in industrialized food systems. Why is breed diversity so important and how does pastoralism support the diversity of domesticated animals?

Humans are always associated with destroying biodiversity. But farmers and pastoralists have created biodiversity by developing strains of seeds and breeds that are adapted to very specific ecological conditions, as well as their own specific utilization patterns.

Some people use camels for milk, others for meat, and some for transportation. It's both certain ecological settings and cultural preferences that come together to create breeds.

It's not just about genetics, it's also about culture: learned behaviour that is passed on from mothers to offspring. [This learned behaviour] means these animals that are locally adapted can make use of a variety of vegetation without any external inputs.

High-yielding breeds [such as those in CAFOs] are also adapted to very specific environments—artificial environments where the temperature very often is controlled. They get a specific diet, usually a uniform diet from monocultures. And they have an incredibly narrow gene pool, so it means they're also vulnerable to shocks or disease outbreaks. Diseases spread very easily in a genetically homogenous population, whereas locally adapted breeds have been selected for resilience for centuries.

Pastoralists also cultivate diversity within their herd. For instance, they'll have some camels who are good milk yielders but are more sensitive to drought, and they'll have others who don't give that much milk, but they're very resilient. The breeds that pastoralists have created over centuries are one of our best, most important assets to adapt to climate change. Again, I have to plug camels because when the temperatures rise even higher than they are now, camels are the best prepared to cope with that.

In your chapter "Feeding the World," you discuss how pastoralism is "by far the most efficient way to produce protein," and argue that it's misleading to use the metrics of calorie output and land use to indicate that herding livestock is an inefficient way to produce food. Can you say more?

There are so many holes in that argument. To start with calories: we have plenty of calories in the world. We do have a shortage of protein, especially high-value protein. The Food and Agriculture Organization studies show that countries like the U.S. feed much more protein to their animals than they get out of them. CAFOs are very, very wasteful, because high-quality feed is given to those animals, whereas pastoralist systems use waste material—

“I want to say something about going vegan and vegetarian. I do think it makes more sense ecologically and ethically to eat some livestock products, but to make sure that they're coming from good sources.”

very cellulose-rich fibres, thorny plants, and all kinds of biomass. And they convert it directly into protein. Countries like Ethiopia and Kenya, which have supposedly backward pastoralist systems, actually produce 20 times as much protein as they feed to animals.

With the land use question, you have to be aware that only one-third of the world's agricultural land can be used for crop cultivation. The other two-thirds can only be utilized by means of grazing because you can't grow crops. It's too dry, too steep, too stony, or too cold. But you can still produce food there with animals.

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

I want to say something about going vegan and vegetarian. I do think it makes more sense ecologically and ethically to eat some livestock products, but to make sure that they're coming from good sources. I think that's better than becoming totally vegan or going for those artificial alternatives. We do need livestock on the landscape, and we don't currently have enough wild species. Pastoralist animals can fulfil much of the role of wild animals. If we accept that animals in the landscape are necessary, it also means at some stage they need to be eaten. My suggestion is to eat less meat overall, but when you do, eat meat that comes from animals that were properly treated, that had a good life.

TEXTILE

# Closing Loops or Opening New Ones?

The changing relationships between Kachchhi herders, weavers and artisans

By **Aarati Halbe**

The handwoven textiles of Kachchh are well known today and command a global market, but the stories of their origins are less widespread. The patterns and motifs that make Kachchhi textiles so distinctive originate in motifs and designs that were created and customized for the different communities that traditionally purchased them. Each community held its own set of preferences - fibre, pattern, even dyeing style - and one look at a piece of textile could tell you who it was made for.

**Community ties:** The two pastoralist communities most served by Kachchhi weavers are the Rabaris and the Bharwads. The Rabaris rear camels, sheep, goats, and to a lesser extent, buffaloes, and cows. The Bharwads mostly raise sheep and goats, while some keep buffaloes and cows.

Historically, the Rabaris and Bharwads formed interdependent close-loop economies between themselves, the weaving community of Vankars, and Khatri artisans who worked with dyes. The herders would shear their sheep and spin their own yarn, which was then given to the weavers who produced cloth from it. From the weavers, the cloth was given to the Khatri who dyed, tie-dyed or printed the cloth before sending the final piece back to the herders.

**A closer look at weaving motifs and patterns:** The motifs that appear in traditional weaves are woven into patterns specific to each community. These designs continue to inspire varieties of new patterns that weavers create for different audiences today.

In the village of Bhujodi in central Kachchh, the weavers worked closely with the Rabari community. The distinct patterns associated with Bhujodi weaves today draw strong inspiration from the patterns favoured by Rabaris.

The Bharwads historically had closer ties to weavers in Aadhoi in eastern Kachchh. Aadhoi is well known as a hub for tangaliya weaving, a complex style featuring patterns of dots that are favoured by the Bharwads.

In both villages, the artisans created weaves that drew inspiration from the herds, the local landscape, and their shared Hindu faith which also drew the communities together. While this article cannot possibly encapsulate the breadth and depth of weaving motifs and patterns, here are a few highlights from each style of weaving.

**Kachchhi weaving:**

**Dhaanda Muthenu:** Dhaanda Muthenu, literally translated from Kachchhi, means cow urine. In recent years the motif

has been more commonly referred to as Vankiya, however many Rabaris still only know it by its older name. This familiar zig-zag motif represents the trail left on the earth when a bull walks while it urinates.

**Jhad:** The tree motif. This is seen in much Kachchhi weaving and is closely linked with the weaves worn by Rabaris.

**Ubhad-Khabhad:** The name loosely translates to 'up and down'. This pattern is a representation of the uneven terrain of the land in Kachchh. While weaving, it is not achieved through a specific count. It is by definition uneven and achieved through the use of raw unspun cotton, which is incorporated into the straight-lined pattern creating uneven lumps in the lines.

**Tangaliya weaving:**

**Pichu:** A depiction of a scorpion, this motif is prominent in tangaliya weaves made for the Bharwad community

**Kangsi:** This depicts four peacocks facing clockwise on the points of a small diamond shape.

**Jhad:** This is a Bharwad-specific design of a tree formed with five peacocks. It typically appears in textiles produced for Bharwad weddings.

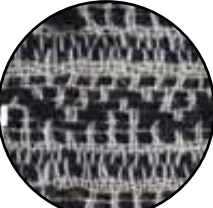
**The evolution of weaving patterns and traditional relationships:** Traditional relationships have experienced a shift in recent years. While weavers still sell to many of their traditional local customers, they increasingly look outward to a much larger domestic and international market that brings increased economic opportunity. While once the herders employed the weaver, today the weaver is often far better off financially.

Both the Rabaris and Bharwads increasingly purchase acrylic, printed cotton or polyester for everyday use, and the closed loop of spun wool, weaving and dyeing has largely ceased.

Despite this, the communities continue to hold each other

er in high regard. Artisans often stock a range of fibres to cater to all markets, and herders will purchase directly from artisans for special occasions like weddings. Both Rabaris and Bharwads still choose to purchase woven woolen blankets called *dhabdas* directly from the weaver. Traditional social ties in Kachchh are such that neither community will allow their links to fade. Their relationships remain indelible, much like the motifs and traditional patterns that speak clearly to their origin, yet evolve and change with time.

Dhaanda Muthenu



Jhad- Kachchhi weaving



Ubhad-Khabhad



Pichu



Kangsi



Jhad- Tangaliya weaving



FASHION

# Telangana's woollen gongadi shawls refashioned into shoes for farmers

By **Serish Naniseti**  
Source: The Hindu

“It was a moment of joy as we could see our designs helping people. The woollen fabric appears natural when worn. It doesn't require socks and is waterproof.”



company, and Vidyadher Bhandare, who was designing seats for Indian Railways, also pooled their resources and enthusiasm to listen to farmers and understand their needs. “I learnt to crochet in nine hours and managed to stitch this shoe,” says Mr. Lathkar, showing off one of the prototypes. When they learnt about the gongadi and its waterproof qualities, Mr. Kocherlakota and Mr. Bhandare put the shawl over Mr. Lathkar's head and poured water on him to prove it.

For generations, the rough wool of the sturdy Deccani sheep has been handcrafted by the Kuruma and Kuruba -- pastoral communities spread across the Deccan plateau -- into a tough, all-weather shawl called a *gongadi* in Telangana. Now, this resilient fabric has been repurposed into all-weather shoes for farmers by three alumni of the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad.

“The romantic notion of being barefoot is very dangerous. When we met farmers, cracked feet, fungal infections and snake bites were the norm for them. We wanted to do something about it and the result is this shoe,” says Santosh Kocherlakota, who started his career as a transportation designer aspiring to work for the likes of Ferrari and Lamborghini before he turned to an exigent problem faced by farmers.

“For a short time, I worked to design an indigenous wheelchair. Then my friends and I realised that design thinking can be used to solve real-world problems and not just to design Ferraris and Lamborghinis. We spent 1.5 years in various places in rural Maharashtra to understand the problems faced by farmers. We shortlisted the problem of shoes and started working on it,” says Mr Kocherlakota.

**Waterproof footwear** Nakul Lathkar, who worked on an electric car design for a European

Their first batch of 30 shoes sold out in just five days in Mr. Bhandare's Kolhapur village. But once they got ₹10 lakh as incubation funding from the Indian Institute of Technology, Madras, the team got to work in earnest and the result is footwear that would not be out of place in any shoe boutique in the world.

**Cross-subsidised pricing**

One of the problems the designers faced was in making the polyurethane sole stick to the woollen upper. “It is a rough fabric and we found it difficult to find an adhesive to make the two materials stick,” says Santosh. Their work-around solution was to mould the upper to the sole. The shoes are now being cross-subsidised, with a price tag of ₹2,500 for coloured models sold in urban areas, allowing farmers to buy the undyed black version for just ₹900.

While many designs stay on paper or reach the prototype stage with great difficulty, the trio is currently manufacturing a batch of 10,000 shoes in Agra, with 2,500 already in the market under their ‘yaar’ brand name.

ITC bought a large number of shoes from the initial batch for distribution among tobacco farmers in Guntur in Andhra Pradesh. “It was a moment of joy as we could see our designs helping people. The woollen fabric appears natural when worn. It doesn't require socks and is waterproof,” says Mr. Kocherlakota.



EDITORIAL

# Supporting resilience, for its sake and ours

14 editions of Pastoral Times have passed. Each with a cover article celebrating pastoralism and revealing the complexities that make it so remarkable. For the 15th edition, we have deviated from this tradition. The cover article by CfP field researchers demonstrates that even with veterinary care and livestock insurance in place, timely medical support remains untackled since many government services tend to factor out a key feature of pastoralism - mobility. We want to continue celebrating pastoralism while asking our readers: How far can a community's resilience be expected to substitute for the services the rest of us routinely take for granted?

Over the years, there has been plenty of debate on the extent to which pastoralists see themselves as citizens desirous of accessing state services. There is, for example, the suggestion that these communities are comfortable functioning under the radar, with limited if any engagement with the government. Their adaptive way of life is a definitive characteristic, predicated on dispersion and mobility, and making attempts at institutional provision of state services challenging. Yet, these communities aren't isolationist. They're part of a web of larger economic exchanges, including symbiotic ones, through their produce and skills. Their contributions to our dairy, wool, leather, meat and dung economies attest to this, as does the mutuality of pastoralist herds grazing on fallow agricultural land in the Deccan in return for the manure they leave behind. Alliances of this nature exist because pastoralism exists. But as conservation and development projects occupy traditional pastoral zones, the need for state intervention to re-establish its viability, to recognise the systems and resources that sustain it - or provide new support-

ive environments - can no longer be ignored. Pastoral communities are resilient in the face of adversity and their adaptive capacity contributes to their skilled livestock management. "The breeds that pastoralists have created over centuries are one of our best, most important assets to adapt to climate change", says Ilse Köhler-Rollefson in the interview with Civil Eats on page 6. But increasingly, pastoralists are relocated from forests, and their access to resources is curbed. On page 5, the article by NewsClick addresses the Van Gujjars' collective state of anxiety over being termed as "encroachers" in light of their relocation from the forests. Reshma, a Van Gujjar woman whose family has lived in the region for five generations, says, "They say we need to resettle from the forests, but instead of making arrangements, they serve us such notices about encroachment." In contrast, there is evidence that pro-pastoralist policies ensure that pastoralists are equipped to continue responding to adverse conditions, allowing them to continue to *equip us in turn* with their produce and services. In 2022, the Kashmir government provided trucks to transport Gujjar and Bakarwal animals during their annual migration. The HP government's responsiveness to the growing incidence of theft experienced by pastoralists and Amul's decision to install bulk chillers to buy milk from pastoralists in the Banni grasslands of Gujarat illustrate the same thing. Undoubtedly, pastoralists are experts in managing livestock in adversity; but we owe it to them to do our part in sustaining the productive adaptation that is pastoralism through timely assistance in the face of new challenges. We owe it to our milk, wool, leather, meat and dung economies as well

AROUND THE WORLD

# Kenyan pastoralist women build up adaptive capacity amid climate crisis

As the drought crisis gets worse in northern Kenya, women in the East African country initiate projects like reforestation and conservation of watersheds.

By Huaxia  
Source: Xinhua

“It is us girls who are dropping out of school or trekking many kilometres in search of water and have therefore resolved to be champions of a climate-resilient future”

Nuria Gollo, a livestock keeper and gender rights advocate from the vast northern Kenyan county of Marsabit that neighbours Ethiopia said that losing nearly all her cows and goats to the raging drought in her backyard has been traumatizing. The 50-year-old mother of five said that the worst drought to hit a large swathe of northern Kenya in four decades has upended the livelihoods of herders and subsistence farmers, pushing them to the brink of starvation and financial ruin. She described the devastation that the climate crisis has brought to the nomadic communities in Marsabit, Kenya's largest county, saying that women, despite being the victims, have also taken the mantle to confront the phenomenon. According to Gollo, as nomadic women and girls face a bleak future due to climate change, a good number of them have also risen to the occasion to offer solutions by leveraging indigenous knowledge to help boost the resilience of grassroots communities and their ecosystems. Gollo said the tenacity and resilience of pastoralist women in the face of the climate crisis has manifested itself prominently as they initiate projects like reforestation and conservation of watersheds to boost the adaptive capacity

of households. She added that women and girls in Kenya's northern frontier districts have been on the frontline of climate response, motivated by the desire to bequeath a green, hopeful and prosperous future for their children. Rehema, a 19-year-old gender rights advocate from Kenya's coastal county of Kwale, said that young girls in her backyard have taken up the search for climate justice, having borne the brunt of food insecurity and water scarcity that has worsened in the current drought season. "It is us girls who are dropping out of school or trekking many kilometres in search of water and have therefore resolved to be champions of a climate-resilient future," said Rehema



A dry river bed serves as a waterpoint for both humans and livestock. PC: Kennedy Okoth



A woman and several children are seen in a drought-affected village in the town of Laisamis, Marsabit County, Kenya. PC: Dong Jianghui

EVENTS

# "Why do narratives tend to skip women?"

Highlights from a workshop titled Gender and Livestock: Evolving Research Strategies at IISER, Pune

Ovee, Nitya, Malaika, Nayantara, Rujuta



42 Participants from diverse fields gathered for the workshop in Pune

A workshop titled Gender and Livestock: Evolving Research Strategies was jointly held by Anthra, Indian Commoner, and the Indian Pastoral Network from March 6th to 8th in Pune. The workshop brought together 42 participants from diverse disciplines: researchers, NGO representatives, and practitioners from the fields of gender and livestock-rearing communities with a focus on pastoralist communities in contemporary India.

The conference began with sessions summarising the current understanding of gender relations in livestock-rearing communities followed by a discussion on why narratives often tend to miss women. The absence of a regional word to describe gender was discussed in relation to the narrowness of disciplines that shape the questions we ask and the outputs we create. Some of the main reasons for the invisibilization of women were identified as - women's lack of ownership of livestock, their association with small livestock and poultry which leaves them out from surveys that focus on large livestock, and biases in large-scale quantitative data.

There were focused discussions on alternate research methodologies in the field of rearing livestock and research methods to study gender which led to raising pertinent questions about the challenges of ethics, collaboration, and co-production with the communities and the limitations of methodology and outcomes. Visibility, by who and for who, during and after research, was identified as a challenge that all the panelists grappled with in their own work. Along with larger structural solutions, the panel also concluded that it is crucial for individual researchers to have the training and skills to practise empathy, ethics, and reflexivity.

The most apparent understanding that the workshop generated was that it is challenging to work on gender, and especially to work with women, because of limitations of traditional "textbook" methods such as FGDs, cultural norms, the immense role played by the subjectivity of the researcher, and lack of existing good quality data on gender relations in pastoralism and livestock-rearing. Getting women together in one place, especially where migration is involved, gets difficult. It is very difficult to get safe spaces for women where they can speak freely. However, even after finding a space where they are comfortable to meet them, women find it difficult to open up about their lives. "Many participants found kitchens to be spaces where interactions with women flowed smoothly; one of the participants named this the "kitchen method".

Quantitative methods fall short due to issues and biases present during data collection. Methods such as time surveys result in inaccurate data with underestimation of women's work. It was also discussed that the existing frameworks of qualitative methods are oriented toward Adivasi communities, which might not be applicable to many of the pastoralist livestock-rearing communities.

Participants of the workshop agreed that many such discussions are required to touch upon relevant topics such as patriarchy in pastoralist households, child marriage, dowry and bride price, child labour, the role of men, feminization of pastoralism, gender fluidity, class, caste, and untouchability