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PASTORAL TIMES

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website: pastoralism.org.in
info@pastoralism.org.in
Editor: Bhawna Jaimini
Editorial Board: Sushma Iyengar, Vasant Saberwal & Arvind Lodaya

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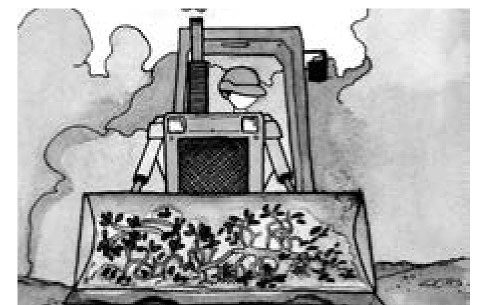


Theft of Animals Threatens Livelihoods of Pastoralists
By Monika Agarwal & Bhawna Jaimini
EDITORIAL

A Nomad's Journey to the World Cup

In the recently concluded FIFA World Cup that left most of us on the edge of our seats, there were a few players whose stories inspired millions across the globe. Alireza Beiranvand, is one of them. Beiranvand was born in Sarabias, Lorestan, to a nomadic herding family always on the move around the countryside to find grassland for their sheep. Alireza was the eldest child so it was normal that he worked from an early age to help his family. His first job was shepherding and in his free time he played football and Dal Paran, a local game, with his friends. Dal Paran involves throwing stones long distances; you would not think that has much to do with football but years later it helped Beiranvand become who he is today.

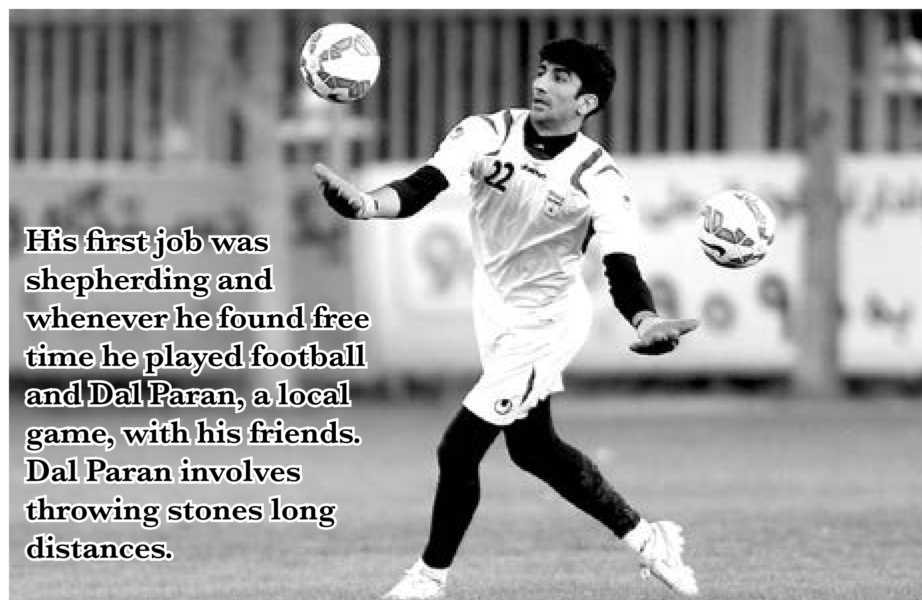
When Beiranvand turned 12 his family settled in Sarabias and he started training at a local club. He started as a striker but when the goalkeeper got injured he stood between the sticks and a brilliant save was enough to keep him there. Beiranvand decided he would be a goalkeeper but his father strongly objected.

He preferred Alireza to be a simple worker. "My father didn't like football at all and he asked me to work," Alireza said. "He even tore my clothes and gloves and I played with bare hands several times." The young goalkeeper decided to run away and went to Tehran in search of a chance at one the bigger clubs in the capital.

After playing for a few clubs, Beiranvand began to shine. He joined Naft, one of the best football clubs of Tehran. He was selected for Iran's under-23s and then became Naft's, first-team goalkeeper. But it was his childhood game Dal Paran that made him famous abroad in 2014. Throwing stones for several years enabled him to throw the ball much further than many other goalkeepers and his 70-metre assist against a rival club caught the eye of foreign media.

In 2015 Alireza finally became Iran's first-choice goalkeeper and, with 12 clean sheets in qualifying, he helped Team Melli cruise to Russia 2018. "I suffered many difficulties to make my dreams come true but I have no intention of forgetting them because they made me the person I am now," he said.

Now he has made another dream come true; playing at a World Cup and perhaps realise another one of moving to a European club. After all, for the nomadic people, the journey never ends.



His first job was shepherding and whenever he found free time he played football and Dal Paran, a local game, with his friends. Dal Paran involves throwing stones long distances.

The article is adapted from the story first reported by The Guardian. It can be read on the link below:
https://www.theguardian.com/football/2018/jun/01/alireza-beiranvand-sleeping-rough-world-cup-iran-goalkeeper

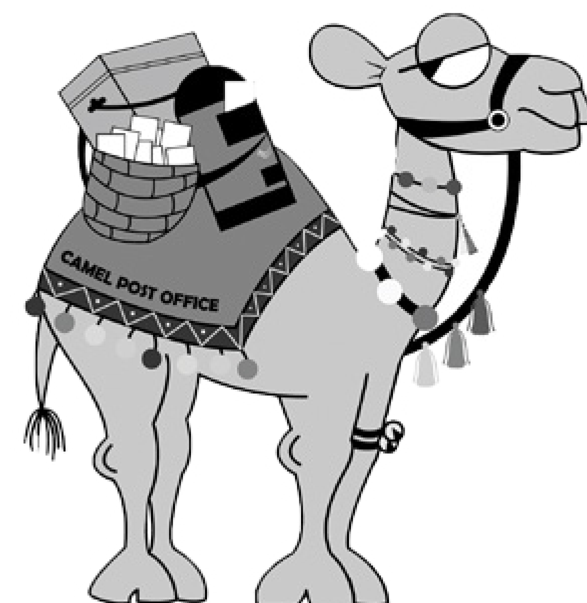
A Camel Post Office!

While you stare at your emails, camels are still delivering letters in the Thar Desert.

In Jaisalmer district of Rajasthan, India, camels are still used by post offices to deliver mail since 1957. The camels bear postal articles on their back and wait in a particular time of a day at different locations of the desert, from where people collect and post their articles. Kishan Singh, one of the camel messengers, who is now in his sixties, is the last few bearers of this dying tradition.

The desert's acute climate makes camel the only reliable source for mailing and transportation. Camel carts are used to deliver goods, in banking and to draw water

out of deep water wells. The Raikas (*camel breeding community of Rajasthan*) are paid to maintain the health of the camels. In 1986, India Post also issued a stamp to commemorate the services of this iconic animal.



Illustrations by Harpreet Sokhi

Photo Essay

Meet the Pugees: Pastoral Detectives of India

By Nipun Prabhakar

Amongst the *maldharis* of Kutch and Rajasthan you will find some unique men - the Pugees. Believe it or not, a Pugee can catch your crime by the tell-tale foot prints you leave behind at the place of crime! Respected, feared and with many enemies, the Pugees, or foot trackers of Rajasthan-Kutch ensure the safety of *maldharis*' animals in the vast arid landscapes they traverse. Just the presence of a Pugee acts as a deterrence for potential thieves. Many many stories of Pugees and their exploits travel from generation to generation!

A footprint tells many stories; the weight, gait, disposition, even family inherited features, all of these get transferred onto the footprints you leave behind! This unique art and science of the *maldhari* Pugees is used on the borders of India and Pakistan even today - with border security agencies of both countries inviting Pugees to trace the footsteps of infiltrators across the desert!

Here, you see the veteran Pugees from village Jura in Kutch.

This photo-essay was done for Living Lightly, a curated exhibition on the lands, lives and livelihoods of Indian pastoralists.

LEFT: Netaji Sodha is tying his turban before going out for work. He says that impressions can reveal a lot about people; how they walked, their gender, their weight and even the time of the day they were walking.

It takes less than a minute for a Pugee, to identify footprints different animals and humans.

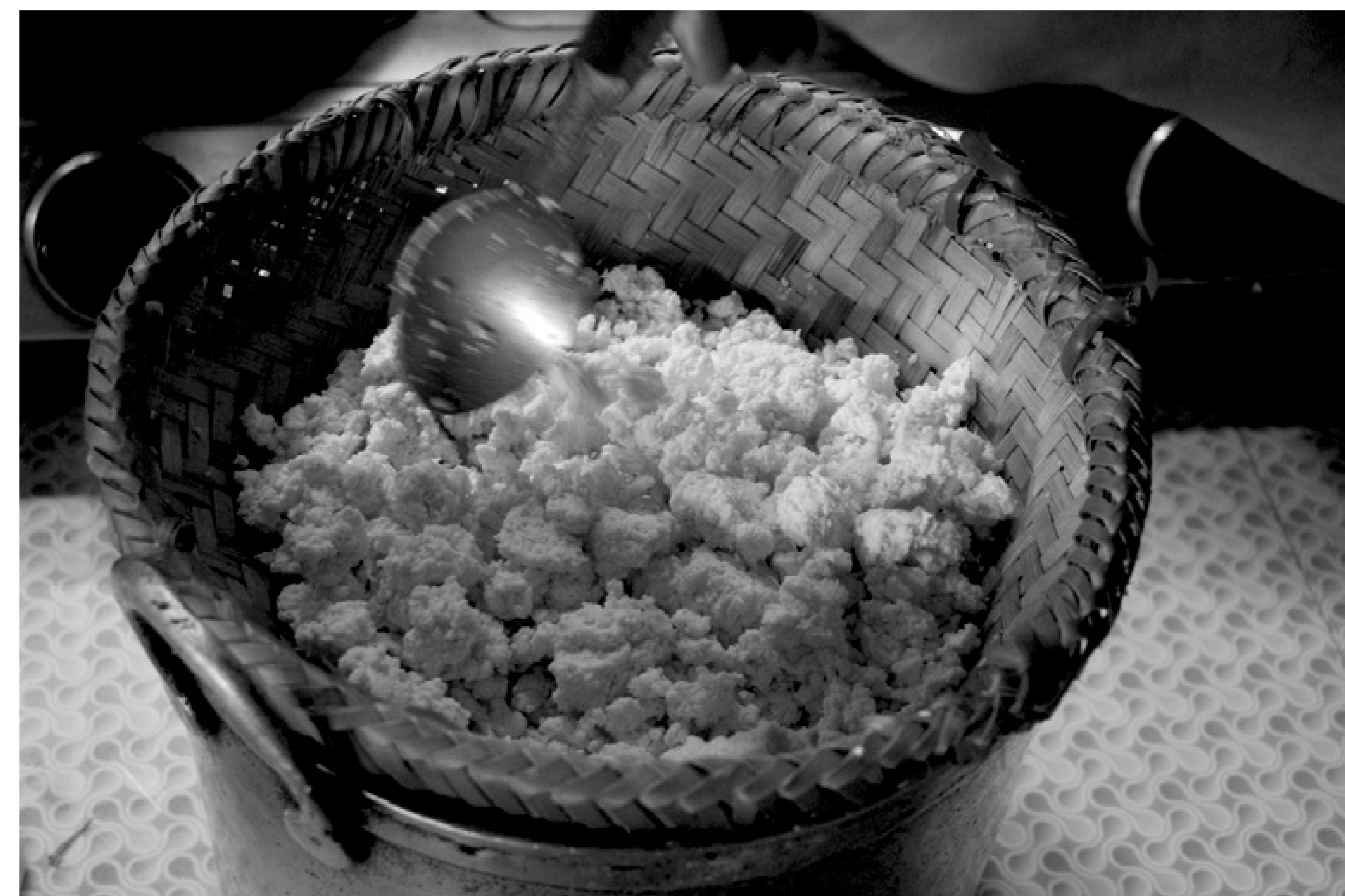
The young boy is being trained in the art of identifying footprints by his grandfather.

Netaji Sodha, one of most celebrated and accomplished Pugees.

Netaji Sodha pointing to the imprint of a snake. He recognised the species of the snake from its imprint.

The Pugees are no longer able to pass their skills to the next generation, mostly because of the lack of work. However, a few young children are showing interest in this art.

Nipun prabhakar is a photographer and a practicing architect. He has done several photo-essays on communities, landscapes and architecture. When not with his camera, he loves to sketch cityscapes.



The Two Lives of Chhurpi

Soft and creamy, or hard and aged, Sikkim's cheese is a revelation.

By Aditya Raghavan

Some dairy scientists and food anthropologists believe that the Portuguese brought paneer to India. There is a strong vein of dairy traditions that exist among several pastoral communities across Central Asia and the Himalayas, that showcases a clear indication that soft cheeses, like paneer, which are made by heating and collecting acidic milk into a solid mass, is an ancient dairy tradition of India.

The makeshift highway stalls, bustling market shops, and ad hoc village stands of Sikkim carry *maalas* of bite-size pieces of *chhurpi* strung together on twine for the eager trekker. These Nepali-Sikkim hard cheeses, traditionally made with yak or cow milk, cannot be chewed down easily. Pressed and aged dry to a bone, *chhurpi* is a form of preserved milk that is meant to last for months, if not years. And, it is usually chewed for minutes, if not hours. The protein-rich cheese makes for a great nibble for nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists as they traverse mountainous terrains for days.

Chhurpi is an umbrella term for several Himalayan cheeses made with buttermilk (or fat-removed milk) and has, over the centuries, become a tradition in several non-pastoral villages as well as transhumant tribes. In Darap, West Sikkim, Lall Bahadur Kafley has one milking cow in his modest dwelling made up of wood and hay. After a portion of milk is consumed fresh, the remainder of his daily ration is collected in an aluminum pot, and kept in a warm place. The milk ferments through the day, turning into runny yoghurt. Every day, fresh milk is added to this fermenting pot, giving bacteria fresh food and producing a piquant quality with intricate flavours. Eventually, about six days later, Lall Bahadur churns his large volume of yoghurt in a wooden churner for at least an hour before bright yellow butter disengages from the watery medium. This beautiful butter bears a distinct, stimulating, lactic and mildly cheesy dairy taste that always takes me back to the mountains.

Most of this butter will soon be converted into *ghee*, as a means to extend its life. The remaining buttermilk, known as *mahee* in the local dialect, is the source of *chhurpi* and is handed over to my hosts, Shiva and Radha Gurung, who run a charming homestay called Daragaon Village Retreat. Memories of my residence there summon up views of Kanchenjunga at sunrise, walks through black cardamom fields, the taste of freshly brewed *chang* (millet beer), and Radha's scrumptious, home-cooked food using organic ingredients from their garden.

To make *chhurpi*, Radha begins to stir the *mahee* over a stove. As it reaches a boil, the buttermilk splits into curds, with vacant, clear whey around them. The curds continue to simmer aggregating into a giant mass of solid paneer-like cheese, floating over gently bubbling whey. When Radha feels the cheese has released enough moisture, she turns the gas off, allowing the dense mass to settle to the bottom. After an hour or so, the springy cheese curds are strained into a bamboo container.

This lesser-known young *chhurpi* can be consumed fresh. Stored in a container, in a cool place, it has a two-week shelf life. It is soft, crumbly, and bears an enjoyable, tangy bite. The Bhutanese pastoral cheese Merak Sakteng is made in a similar way. To increase its shelf life, the fresh cheese is wrapped and fermented in yak or cowhide. The lack of oxygen exposure helps for slow and gentle fermentation, given the amicable ambient temperatures. This technique of aging dairy products in animal hide is seen among pastoral communities all over India, Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa and gives credence to pastoralists' strive to use every part of the animals they care for. The famous goat cheese called Tulum from Turkey is aged in goat-hide.

The chhurpi being strained by Radha Gorung, the author's host in West Sikkim

"A cheese may disappoint. It may be dull, it may be naive, it may be oversophisticated. Yet it remains cheese, milk's leap towards immortality."

Similarly, there is a dairy tradition in Spiti valley of aging butter in calf hide.

Radha enjoys using young and soft *chhurpi* to add creaminess to her delectable chutneys. She boils a tomato till it is fully cooked and mashes it up with raw garlic, dalle chilies – extremely spicy local chilies that have a noticeable citrus fruitiness – and generous chunks of soft *chhurpi*. The Sikkim and Nepali hard and aged *chhurpi* is also made from these chunks. It bears little resemblance to the complex flavours of soft *chhurpi*.

I have tried several ways to fall in love with it. It is definitely a breakthrough when you allow saliva to slowly soften the cheese, so you can finely pestle it into a creamy froth with your teeth. Unsurprisingly, some people call it *doodh supari*. I did swell with pride when I discovered that the American pet supplies store, Petco, carries yak "*Chhurpi* chews" as dog treats for heavy chewers and teething puppies. Oblivious dog owners in the U.S. have now heard of *chhurpi* and are willing to pay the equivalent of Rs. 450 for 150 grams of this cheese.

Hard and aged chhurpi tastes nothing like soft chhurpi.

The versatile soft *chhurpi*, however, has found a special place in my heart. It was a chilly evening in the Bhutia tribal village of Kewzing, in South Sikkim, when I fell in love with it. The lady of the house offered us creamy, soft *chhurpi* cooked in *ghee*, to be eaten with rice. It was an elegant manifestation of milk. Milk that was fermented, then separated into butter and buttermilk, each of which were further cooked in different ways to remove moisture, and brought back together in a dramatic confit.

Whether it is chewy hard *chhurpi*, rich emadatsi, Radha's spicy-cheesy chutneys, or flowing, warm cheese fondue in an alpine village in Switzerland – the story remains the same. Milk takes on several manifestations and almost always there is a connection to the pastoral way of life: That incessant collection of valuable milk along with the pressing need to make it last longer. Or, as American author Clifton Hadiman puts it, "A cheese may disappoint. It may be dull, it may be naive, it may be oversophisticated. Yet it remains cheese, milk's leap toward immortality."

A cheesemaker who was a physicist in his past life, Aditya Raghavan is motivated by discovery, technique and understanding when it comes to food.

Theft of Animals Threatens Livelihood of Pastoralists Across India

By Monika Agarwal & Bhawna Jaimini

Photo by Sankar Sridhar

In April this year the Kathua case brought the Bakkarwals of Jammu and Kashmir into the national spotlight. Was it an isolated case or a manifestation of the increasing incidents of systemic violence that migratory herders are facing? Is violence new for pastoralists who are almost always on the move and present in 14 states of India?

Mahendra Khatal and his family, sheep herders from the Dhangar community in Ahmednagar, Maharashtra move with their 900 sheep through a number of villages during their yearly migration and often attract thieves and burglars. "There are gangs who come and pick up our sheep and if we resist, they beat us up" says Mahendra. "Just a few days back, a group of 4 men came armed with knives and sticks. One of them picked up a pregnant sheep. My wife objected and requested him to leave her and take another one instead. But they didn't listen and instead thrashed my wife!"

Khatal and his family are not the only ones in this plight. The preliminary findings of an ongoing survey conducted by the Centre for Pastoralism in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh reveals that theft of livestock is one of the most pressing problems for shepherds. Cattle rustling or sneaking away sheep and goats is not a new phenomenon, and shepherds have, traditionally, never been too disturbed by this. However, their otherwise equanimous attitude to the losses and gains of life, has taken a severe jolt with the organised crime they are facing today, across the country. The modus operandi of livestock 'bandits' has changed in recent years and is taking dangerous proportions.

A few weeks ago, a herder *dera* (campsite) in the Dharamshala region of Himachal Pradesh was attacked by 10-12 armed people[1]. Two of the herders were tied, while a third one was badly beaten when he tried to escape and had to be hospitalised for few days. The gang took away 40-50 sheep and goats in a mini truck.

Himachal's herders have always reported the occasional loss of a sheep or goat — but in recent times, they are having to confront armed gangs who do not hesitate to use violence. The theft of even 50 sheep or goats could mean a complete wipe out of a couple of year's earnings wipe out of a couple of year's earnings for an extended shepherd family. Women and the elderly are no longer encouraged to join the seasonal migration, and herders are now incurring extra costs to hire labour who can protect the livestock from theft.

"There are gangs who come and pick up our sheep and if we resist, they beat us up. Just a few days back, a group of 4 men came armed with knives and sticks. One of them picked up a pregnant sheep. My wife objected and requested him to leave her and take another one instead. But they didn't listen and instead thrashed my wife!"

Herders report that it is not just small ruminants, but even cows and camels are taken by force and hoarded away in trucks. Similar stories have poured in from other parts of the country. In Madhya Pradesh, the Dewasi Raikas of Rajasthan have been taking their sheep and goat for grazing in and around Dewas in since decades. In the past year alone, different *deras* have been attacked and their herds stolen with alarming frequency. (See interview).

Pastoralists have customarily relied upon, and enjoyed the support, hospitality, and protection of the settled communities and villages they pass through. It is a mutually beneficial relationship with farmers inviting them and their herds into their farms for animal droppings that serve as manure and pastoralists, in turn, earning both in kind and money, while also managing to sell their animal while on the move. However, this is changing rapidly.

Mohan, another shepherd from the Dhangar community in Maharashtra was turned away from a cremation ground after his mother passed away. "When my mother passed away on migration, we took her body to a cremation ground in a nearby village. A few minutes after her pyre was lit, some villagers came and told us to leave their ground quickly with the body. They said that we could only cremate in our own village.

They threatened us with violence when we pleaded with them. So we doused the fire, carried my mother's body in our *gongadi*[3], and left. We have been going through so many villages for generations. This is the first time we have been treated like this". Mohan's account is a testament to the changing social dynamics between herders and settled communities.

Pastoralists now live in contested spaces, especially in a fast changing human and ecological landscape. This has sharpened their conflict with settled populations and they cope with multiple pressures - from encroachment of the commons, conversion of their native tracks to national parks and sanctuaries, development of land for highways, industrialisation of 'wastelands', proliferating cities, worsening traffic on their routes, and so on. We have failed to provide an institutional or regulatory response to the increasing pressure on these communities. This has implications for meeting the rapidly growing demand for meat and milk in India.

This is a new unchartered territory for a population which often journeyed in remote areas and over hostile terrain. The social security they have enjoyed for generations from their bonds with settled communities seems to be diminishing. And they must now rely on the protective machinery of the State, which, they lament, is apathetic and unresponsive. Thefts are reported but not acted upon. And even as successive governments continue in their failure to recognize the rights and needs of nomadic herders, pastoralists are struggling to learn a new skill - how to file an FIR.

Monika Agarwal is a management graduate who has worked with various national, regional and global alliances on pastoralism.

Bhawna Jaimini is an architect and an aspiring writer. She is the editor of Pastoral Times.

"When my mother passed away on migration, we took her body to a cremation ground in a nearby village. A few minutes after her pyre was lit, some villagers came and told us to leave their ground quickly with the body. They said that we could only cremate in our own village."

Rise of Cow Vigilantism

In May 2017, Centre prohibited sale of cattle for slaughter as part of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Regulation of Livestock Market Rules). This ruling was later withdrawn but it unleashed an unprecedented rise of cow vigilantism and attacks on people involved in livestock business[2]. The shepherds across the states have shown caution and concern over increasing number of gangs operating as *gau-rakshaks*.. Some even say that there is uncanny coincidence in rising lynching attacks and increasing violence in theft cases in last two-three years in our country.

How Cattle-Lifting started the Great War of Mahabharata

Cattle-lifting was a common practice amongst the kings of ancient India, and the chiefs of ancient Greece. During the period of Mahabharata, the king of the Trigartas and the king of the Kurus combined their forces and attacked the king of the Matsyas, to steal numerous herds of fine cattle. The Trigartas entered the Matsya kingdom from the south-east, and Duryodhan with his Kuru forces fell on the kingdom from the north. Virata, the Matsya king could only defend his kingdom from the south-east.

When the cowherds went to the palace for protection, they found the young son of the king, Uttara Kumara. "Come to our rescue young prince" cried the cowherds. Uttara answered, "Certainly I will come, but I have a problem. I have no charioteer fit to steer my horses through the ranks of the enemy." Arjuna overheard this conversation and said, " I am Sairandhi. I am a good charioteer."

"You are a woman," yelled the prince. "Yes, but this is an battlefield," Arjuna replied. Uttara got frightened and his knees began to tremble. "I am too young to do this", he quivered. "I will lead you", said Arjuna. However, Uttara was so scared that he started running back to the city. Arjuna caught him and told him to be his charioteer. "I will do the fighting", Arjuna proudly exclaimed.

From afar, Duryodhana and Radheya watched this scene with interest. They both realized that the woman who is fighting is Arjuna. After defeating the enemies and saving the cowherds, Arjuna told Uttara about his real identity. "I am Arjuna, my brothers are with your father. Do not be afraid". The Kauravas however, had found the Pandavas and were happy to flush them out in the open.

Later, Duryodhana sent a note to the Pandavas. "Prepare for another exile!" It said. Yudhisthera laughed and sent back a note replying "Ask our grandfather Bheesma if our exile of 13 years is over." Their grandfather indeed declared that they were out of exile. After the declaration of their exile, Yudhisthera wrote one final letter.

"It is not possible to avert the war. But, as a final request, He asked for 5 villages:
1. Varanata, the city of the House of Lac where Duryodhana almost burned them alive.
2. Indraprastha, the wasteland that was given to them as their new capital city.
3. Vrikapastha, where Bheema was poisoned and thrown in the river with snakes.
4. Pramanavata, where they spent the first year of exile in the forest.
He left the 5th village for him to decide.

Duryodhana replied, "Go back to the forest and renounce the world!"

During the period of Mahabharata, the king of the Trigartas and the king of the Kurus combined their forces and attacked the king of the Matsyas, to steal numerous herds of fine cattle.

1. https://www.thestatesman.com/cities/thieves-take-away-goats-sheep-hp-1502614751.html
2. https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/in-kashmir-nomads-battle-cow-vigilantes-to-keep-alive-traditional-practice/story-iB8JnnAfx97xiH0CI8lFIM.html
3. The traditional woollen blanket of Telangana woven from wool of Deccani Sheep

Pastoral People

"Thieves have taken the livelihood of so many of our community members"

An Interview with Harthingaram

By Bhawna Jaimini & Mahendra Bhanani

"How can we not belong here when we have been coming here for centuries?"

We meet Hartingaram outside a Bus Station in Satwas, village located 120 kilometres away from Indore. We locate Hartinga from a distance, with his bright red turban and crisp white Kedia. He slips into the car and guides us to his 'dera' in the Indra Sagar Dam. He informs us that it is another forty kilometers away. After driving for a short distance, the tarmac ends, and we struggle to find some semblance of a road which can take us to our destination. We wonder how Hartinga makes this journey so many times in a month.

Harthingaram, a pastoralist and an activist-in-the-making, belongs to the Raika community. He along with his extended family of 50 human beings and 3500 sheep is on his seasonal migration from Rajasthan to Madhya Pradesh. In the past few years, incidents of organised loot, thefts and attacks on the Raika pastoralists have increased sharply. They suffer huge economic losses due to ongoing dacoity, they are regularly beaten up by mobile gangs and are harassed by a seemingly apathetic government.. Harthingaram, has been running relentlessly from one authority to the next, trying to get them to act on their plight. Nothing. No response. No action.

An excerpt from the conversation with Harthingaram.

Harthingaji, I remember you mentioned cases of loots and thefts in Madhya Pradesh when we last met in Ahmedabad. Do you continue to face the same issues?

Yes, and they are increasing day by day. We feel more at risk with each passing day. Only yesterday, a gang of robbers attacked our kin in another *dera*, some 10 kilometres away. They stole all of their 200 sheep and even attacked the women. These thieves have taken the livelihoods of so many of our community members in the last few years but we see no end to this menace.

Did you report to the Police?

Yes, we did. The police came for an inquiry but did not follow up with the case. We have reported so many cases in the past and none have been solved. Once we even caught and took the thieves to the police station. And do you know what happened? They slapped charges of abduction on us! They questioned us for more than four hours and stopped only when we agreed to withdraw the complaint.

Why do you think the Police is so unresponsive to these crimes which they are so fully aware of?

I feel the problem is not the thieves or the police. These things happen everywhere but the reason why this problem has become a full blown menace is because we are soft targets. We don't own land here, and we definitely don't have any political clout. We care about our animals and take them where we find grass for them. You tell me, is it a crime to lead such a life?

Kehte hai ki hum pardesi hai. Hamara is zameen par koi adhikar nahi hai. (They tell us that this is not our land, and we don't belong here) How can we not belong here when we have been coming here for centuries? Why is owning land a prerequisite for belonging?

You said that you Raikas have been coming here for centuries. But surely, this was not so unsafe earlier, otherwise you would not be coming here!

No no, this has begun only since the last decade. There were a few problems but no major threats to our lives or livelihoods in those days. We moved without fear then, but not anymore.

Why has it increased so sharply in the past few years?

It is mostly to do with the increased value of sheep. A sheep, which used to sell for less than a thousand rupees, now fetches more than seven thousand. It is a no input but huge output business for the thieves who sell our animals in big cities like Mumbai.

"It is mostly to do with the value of sheep that has increased dramatically. A sheep which used to sell for less than a thousand rupees, now fetches more than seven thousand. It is a no input but huge output business for the

In cities like Mumbai, they must be getting really good prices for these free grazing sheep, even more than what you sell them here for. But do you know who these livestock bandits are? Where do they operate from?

All along our migration route from the Rajasthan-Madhya Pradesh border, to Indore, there are villages where these gangs of robbers live and operate from. This is like their occupation, just like ours is herding (laughs). Earlier, we used to take permission for passing through their villages. In gratitude of the passage, each *dera* used to give them two animals. They never attacked us after this arrangement was made. You see, even thieves had ethics earlier! We still seek their permission for the right of passage, but now they ask for a huge number of animals from each dera, and still loot us.

So do you feel they are protected by the authorities?

Yes, absolutely. Till the eighties we used to pay a small cost per animal, something around 2-3 rupees for a sheep, and 8 rupees for a camel. The forest department collected this as a grazing fee. And we faced no problems - from the authorities or from the people here. However, they stopped collecting the grazing fee in the nineties and we were asked to not come here. However this is the native track for our animals and we have to come here for grazing them. But now we get harassed by the forest guards.

We have a long standing relationships with farmers here who invite us to sit on their farms because they know that our sheep enrich the soil with manure. They pay us for coming here, but the forest department continues to fine us, even on these private farmlands. We do not even get receipts for the fines they collect. We ask them to start collecting a grazing fee once again, instead of fining us all the time!

Dacoit gangs on one hand and forest department on the other! There seem to be no respite for all of you....I laugh.

It has become really hard but we do have support from farmers and other villagers who take no objection towards us and our animals. Few days ago, some people started spreading rumours about us.....that we are indulging in black magic to stop the rains! Some of the villagers grew very suspicious of us. So we went to them and explained that all our animals will die without rains, and there is no way we will wish for such an unfortunate event when we will be the first ones to bear the brunt of it. They trusted us and the matter was resolved quickly! Some of them even go out of their way to help us. For instance, a grocery store owner is our well-wisher and when he sees we are not safe, he calls and alerts us.

In the middle of our conversation, Harthingaram's phone rings. He looks at the screen and tells us that his friend Prem, the grocery store owner is calling him. He walks a few meters away to catch better signals. When he returns after several minutes, the peace in the dera was gone. Prem had seen four forest rangers coming riding towards their location. And as we left, the hapless Harthinga and his kin got ready to move several kilometers away to avoid another round of fines and harassments.

Mangroves and Kharai Camels are paying the real price of Salt

Illustrations by Harpreet Sokhi

The maximum retail price is not the only price we pay to add salt to our food. *By Shelly Singh*

In the arid landscape of Kutch, the largest district of India in the state of Gujarat, there exists a gigantic network of islands and mangrove forests. The mangrove forests of Kutch are the second largest in India after the Sunderbans. These inland mangroves are the favourite feed for the *Kharai* Camels, the majestic and native inhabitants of Kutch. *Kharai* literally means 'salty' in Gujarati. They can swim up to 10 kilo meters. To reach and feed on mangroves. However, they also feed on various plants and shrubs found in this arid landscape. It is their ability to sustain both on land and on sea which makes them truly adaptable to the harsh climate. In fact, camels and mangroves share a symbiotic relationship. Pastoralists travel long distances with their camels, so that they can graze on their favourite feed; and in turn camels help in the regeneration of the mangrove forests by acting as a pollinating agent.

As you drive through the coastal region of Bhachau, and even as you approach the mangrove forests, you might run into herds of *Kharais* walking along, with the '*Maldhaaris*'. (*Maldhari* is an overarching term used for pastoral communities in Gujarat. In Kutch region, camel breeding communities are mostly Fakirani Jats and Rabaris.) Within a few kilometers, the landscape changes to an endless expanse of salt beds, interspersed with humongous machines, temporary shacks, and a few emaciated human beings working under scorching temperatures of 45 degrees Celsius.

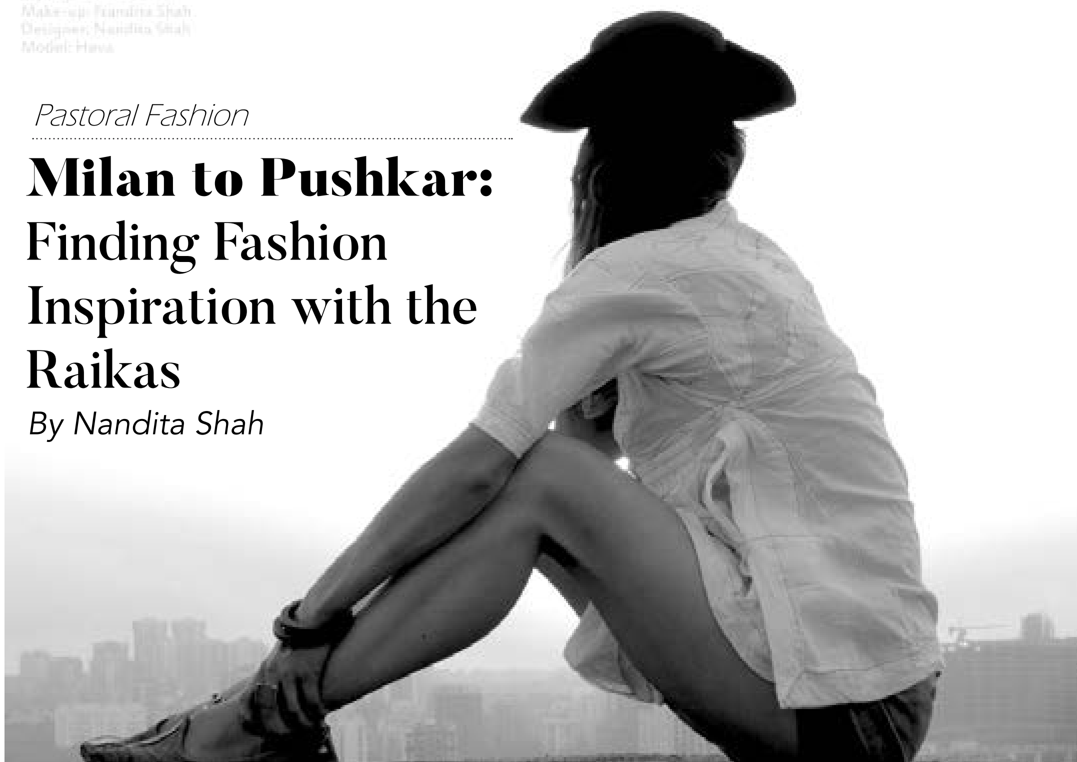
These salt beds were once dense mangrove forests with abundant marine life. It attracted not just the *Kharai* camels, but also many species of birds which are now endangered. However, these species are reeling under the devastating consequences of a fast shrinking mangrove forest. It is common knowledge now that mangroves also protect human habitation from destructive cyclones and reduce deaths[1]. The forest department acknowledges the destruction, and has undertaken aggressive plantation of mangroves throughout the region. But grazing they will not allow and argue that grazing will destroy the mangroves, completely negating the crucial role *Kharai* camels play in the regeneration of mangroves. A simple acknowledgment of this symbiotic relationship will not only help the ecosystem but will also help the Forest Department save huge amounts of money being spent on planting exercise.

Salt as a commodity has historically, played a critical role in determining political power and in the location of world's great cities. It has waged wars, sparked revolutions and destroyed empires[2]. India had its own salt revolution 88 years ago, when Mahatma Gandhi marched to Dandi, a small coastal village, against the heavy taxation of salt by the British empire. Even as we celebrate Mahatma Gandhi's 150th anniversary, I wonder how Gandhiji would have responded to the present context, where the right to make salt has manifested itself into salt industries whose location and approach now threatens the very survival of camel herders and other species?

This year, salt manufacturing companies deployed a large fleet of extraction machines and tractors to illegally plunder more than four square kilometres of thriving mangrove forests. Huge creeks were blocked first, to cut the tidal water out, and once the mangroves were dead, they were all uprooted. Within no time, bunds appeared and salt-making began, as if there were no mangroves ever to begin with! This brutal destruction was first noticed by the some of the Jat camel herders, who raised an alarm and objection to these illegal activities. The Camel Breeders Association of Kutch (Kutch Unth Ucherak Maldhari Sangathan-KUUMS), launched protests against this unlawful and inhumane act of salt companies. Media attention, support from the District Collectorate, civil society action, and a National Green Tribunal (NGT) Stay Order, followed by an order to remove the creek blockages, not only stopped the entire forest from being destroyed, but has also made way for the replenishment of lost mangroves across the 4 square kilometer area. The lost mangrove trees will take up to 15 years to grow to their full, however, it is a huge victory for the *maldharis* who stood against the might and power of salt manufactures.

Shelly is an engineer and entrepreneur who wants to solve critical challenges of sustainable development through data intelligent platforms.

1. https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2009/apr/22/mangoves-offer-cyclone-protection
2. http://www.atimes.com/article/brief-history-chinese-salt-worlds-oldest-monopoly/



Pastoral Fashion

Milan to Pushkar: Finding Fashion Inspiration with the Raikas

By Nandita Shah

Photo : Wikipedia Commons

Pushkar: Having lived & breathed fashion in the fashion capital of the world, I returned to India from Milan in 2010 to look for inspiration that eluded me in the west. I started to cool-hunt in Mumbai but there was not much to whet my appetite. There was nothing new or unique. People were looking like clones, dressed in Zara and its ilks. Then I traveled to Pushkar, a cauldron of cultures that reintroduced me to Indian fashion which is deep and rich in history. Pushkar taught me that fashion, as understood in rural India, is not about changing trends or fads, but a strong and essential form of communication.

Finding culturally sensitive fashion: We are becoming culturally numb. We either want to imitate all the latest trends or be completely unique, never feeling at ease anywhere. Urban fashion as understood and taught today, is a language where quick change is the only constant. Culture and tradition on the other hand are long lasting and evolve gradually.

Rural India taught me to look at fashion as a form of communication and not just consumerism. For instance, for the Raikas, The Pushkar fair is an occasion when they get a new set of clothes for the year ahead. Their clothes are carefully custom made by specific communities of *darzis* who service the Raikas.

Photo : CAZRI

Learning from the 'Darzi': We often hear, "Do you know of a good doctor?" Just as we have a family doctor or a personal dentist, a tailor is de rigueur, in rural India. The *darzis* have practical know-how & enough practice, given the multitudes in India. They understand the Indian body dimensions well enough to fit both, a pot belly or an emaciated physique! Most of the time, a male tailor sews clothing for menfolk whereas women sew clothes for women.

Trained in precise design with standard measurements, dress forms and patterns, it was hard for me to appreciate the beauty of certain imperfections that came with hand sewn clothes.

However, I gradually began to work with traditional pattern-making by letting the *darzis* work with minimum instructions from me. They followed their method of using just 3 measurements. They stitched irregular seams and motifs, and therein lay the beauty of it. And I learnt from them without feeling the need to change anything. All I did was re-contextualise.

I re-adapted the traditional garment, worn only by men and made it more feminine, more urban, without taking away its unique identity. My *angrakhis* are stitched only by the local *darzi*, who remains a maker and an artist, creating from his own context.

Nandita Shah is a fashion designer and educator who works on sustainable fashion. When in dearth of inspiration, she spends time with pastoral communities. She is currently associated with NIFT, Istituto Marangoni & UID.

Movie Review

The Shepherdess of the Glaciers

A film by Stanzin Dorjai Gya and Christiane Mordelet

Film Review by Deachen Angmo

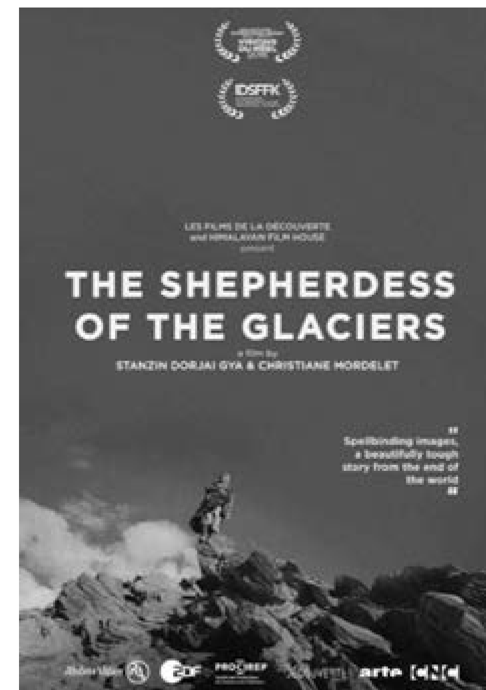
This film is a glimpse into the life of Tsering, a shepherdess from the far-off village of Gya, 70 km from Leh, in Ladakh. Shot at an altitude of 6,400 ft over a span of many years, Shepherdess of the Glaciers is an award-winning film by Stanzin Dorjai Gya and Christiane Mordelet. A first of its kind from Ladakh, it has received several national and international awards.

Amidst the vast stretches of rock and snow, across the remote valley of Gya-Miru, Stanzin Dorjay has documented the unusual life of his sister Tsering. At the age of 50, she is one of the last shepherdesses to graze her 300 sheep and goats, in her village. After the early death of her father, Tsering being the second eldest among her siblings takes on his job at an early age. She is the sole breadwinner of the family which depends on the sale of *pashima* wool from the goats.

She walks for days from her village Gya to the mountains to find greener pastures for her herd, when the temperature drops below -30°C. She stations herself in a tent in the lonely and dry desert for several months during the grazing period. The bond that she shares with her animals is more than a maternal bond, for she is a midwife, a friend and a guide to them. In one of the scenes when she comes back to her village with the herd, we see her in grief after she loses many of her animals to the harsh cold weather.

What keeps her connected to the outside world is her radio; tuned in to AIR. In the empty valleys, she seeks refuge in a radio – "The best friend is like my father, my mother, and my siblings to me. When it doesn't work, I feel empty, as empty as if I've lost someone. Radio is useful too; if a wild animal comes along I turn on the radio very loud, and I see the leopard hesitate because he thinks there are a lot of people. I learn everything through the radio, how to keep your animals healthy, how to respect different traditions."

The film also portrays the many dichotomous lives that Tsering is living. She lives with her herd away from modern comforts with bare minimum sustenance, whereas her produce is fundamental in running of the cashmere cash-oriented industry. She is an unsung figure in the vast narrative of cashmere wool.



"In these empty, empty, empty valleys, I am the only woman and the only shepherdess, but if there is a will there is a way. It's really tough going in all these sharp edges and ridges; if you focus your energy in the heart and your head you can get there, There is no one to guide, you have to learn everything on your own."

She belongs to a pastoral economy which is self-sufficient on animal and land produce. Each and every being in this economy is dependent on each other for their existence and one is incomplete without the other. It is this tradition which is in threat. Due to various changes in the climate, economy and people's living standards, very few people want to continue shepherding. What will happen to her and others like her who are in this tradition, whose only skills lie in herding, is one question among many that this film raises beautifully. In her own words – "No one wants to be a shepherd anymore, people are so fragile now that it's very difficult".

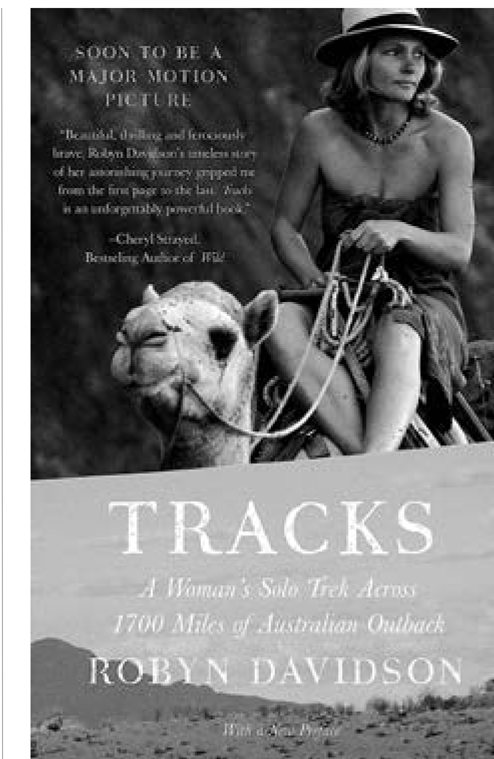
The review first appeared on the feminist collective, "Feminism in India". A longer version of the review is available on the link below: https://feminisminindia.com/2018/04/24/shepherdess-of-the-glaciers-review/

Tsering with her goats.

Books

TRACKS

A woman's solo trek across 1700 miles of Australian outback by Robyn Davidson



I arrived in the Alice at five a.m. with a dog, six dollars and a small suitcase full of inappropriate clothes. . . . There are some moments in life that are like pivots around which your existence turns.

For Robyn Davidson, one of these moments comes at age twenty-seven in Alice Springs, a dodgy town at the frontier of the vast Australian desert. Davidson is intent on walking the 1,700 miles of desolate landscape between Alice Springs and the Indian Ocean, a personal pilgrimage with her dog—and four camels. Tracks is the beautifully written, compelling true story of the author's journey and the love/hate relationships she develops along the way: with the Red Centre of Australia; with aboriginal culture; with a handsome photographer; and especially with her lovable and cranky camels, Bub, Dookie, Goliath, and Zeleika. Here is an excerpt from the book.

Some string somewhere inside me is starting to unravel. It is an important string, the one that holds down panic. In the solitude of the desert night I feel the patter of rain on my sleeping bag – too light to lay the dust, too heavy for normal sleep. Sometime before midnight I come fully awake, and I do not know where, or who, I am.

Inside me I hear three different voices. The first says, 'So this is it, you've finally lost it.' The second voice urges, 'Hold on, don't let go. Be calm, lie down and fall asleep.' The third voice is screaming. At dawn my dog, Diggity, licks me awake. The sky is cold and pitiless.

My four camels stand hobbled nearby – welcome, familiar shapes. Instinctively I start the morning routine – boil the tea, pack the gear, saddle the camels – and head south once more.

For nearly a century, from the 1860s until recent times, camels were commonly used in the outback. The animals, imported from Afghanistan and India, proved highly successful until cars and trucks began to replace them in the 1920s.

It is my 71st day of travel across Australia's western desert. Slowly, as we get under way, the strings inside me knit together and I know who I am again. During the following four months on the trail the voices never returned, and in time I came to enjoy the silence and solitude of the desert.

Australia's arid western region, from the town of Alice Springs to the Indian Ocean coast, is a beautiful, haunting, but largely empty land. Dominated by the harsh, almost uninhabited Great Sandy and Gibson deserts, the region is known only to Australian Aborigines, a handful of white settlers, and the few travelers who motor across it.

Why cross it by camel? I have no ready answer. On the other hand, why not? Australia is a vast country, and most of us who live there see only a small fraction of it. Beyond the roads, in the area known as the outback, camels are the perfect form of transport. One sees little by car, and horses would never survive the hardships of desert crossings.

At the age of 25, I gave up my study of Japanese language and culture at university in Brisbane and moved to the town of Alice Springs. I planned an expedition alone from Alice Springs to the Indian Ocean, a distance of some 1,700 miles.

For nearly a century, from the 1860s until recent times, camels were commonly used in the outback. The animals, imported from Afghanistan and India, proved highly successful until cars and trucks began to replace them in the 1920s. Many camels were then simply turned loose to roam the outback, where I was to find they can present problems for travelers. Camels are still trained in Alice Springs for tourist jaunts and for occasional sale to Australia's zoos. Sallay Mahomet, an Australian-born Afghan and a veteran handler, agreed to teach me something about the art of camel training.

I worked with Sallay nearly three months, for camels are not the easiest of beasts to train. To begin with, they can kill or injure you with a well-placed kick, and their bite is as painful as a horse's. Patiently Sallay taught me to understand camel behaviour – how to feed, saddle, doctor and control the animals, the last by kindness, discipline and use of a noseline attached to a wooden peg inserted through the animal's nostril. Camels are similar to dogs; a well-trained one answers best to its accustomed handler.

For an expedition such as mine, it was essential that I did most of the training. Through part-time jobs, loans from friends, and finally with support from the National Geographic Society, I acquired the necessary equipment and four good camels: a mature, gelded male whom I named Dookie; a younger gelding, Bub; a female, Zeleika; and her calf, Goliath. Training and preparations took more than a year, but finally in early April 1977 I was ready to leave.

Robyn Davidson is an Australian writer. The film Tracks is based on Davidson's memoir of the same name. She has written more than a dozen books on her travels in a career that has spanned 30 years.

Maldharin & Unt-Gyaani

By Arvind Lodaya & Harpreet Sokhi

How J&K reduced snow leopard attacks on livestock

Herders in villages on the outskirts of Ladakh's Hemis National Park were involved in initiatives that helped reduce attacks on livestock and make the snow leopard a symbol of fortune.

By Preksha Sharma

"Human-wildlife conflicts can be mitigated only through an integrated approach. Here is no one-stop solution to conservation. Everyone has to be involved, and most importantly, the community."

Tsering Pani still shudders at the thought of what had transpired in her backyard that fateful night in 2014. It was peak winter. The wind was freezing as the mercury had dropped to -40°C in her village Matho on the outskirts of the Hemis National Park in Ladakh. Suddenly, she heard a commotion in the livestock pen. She rushed out to see the thick blanket of snow outside her house covered with blood. "A shan had broken into the pen and killed all the seven Pashmina sheep. There was one missing, but the shan had probably taken it away," she recalls. By shan, Pani refers to snow leopards that inhabit the park, spanning 4,500 sq km at an altitude of 3,200-6,400 metres. "It took us years to recover the losses," says Pani, adding that the animal's ultra-fine cashmere wool is a major source of living for people in the cold desert. Such stories abound in the 20-odd villages inside the park as well as those on the outside.

The park is believed to have the highest density of the animal, categorised as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. But, indiscriminate grazing by the increasing number of livestock across the park is fast driving out its natural preys like the Himalayan blue sheep (Pseudois spp) and ibex (Capra spp), says Pushpinder Singh Jamwal, wildlife biologist, pursuing a PhD at the University of Molise, Italy. This is the reason the shy animal is venturing into human settlements and killing live-stock for food, he says. The conflicts particularly increase in winter months when the high-mountain cat descends to lower altitudes in search of prey, and herders persecute it in retaliation.

To curb the conflicts, the Jammu and Kashmir government in 1992 introduced a scheme to compensate herders if their livestock were killed by a snow leopard. The amount was just 10 per cent of the livestock price, which did not help alleviate the situation. However, it did have an advantage. Officials started maintaining records of livestock killed by snow leopards. And this offered a sneak peek into the reasons and the extent of the conflict.

Recently researchers, including Jamwal, analysed this data and found at least 1,624 instances of livestock depredation between 1992 to 2013. Surprisingly, the number of attacks has reduced drastically post-2002 and only two mass livestock killings have occurred since then, the researchers note in the April 2018 issue of Oryx, an international journal on conservation.

Post-2002, things started looking bright as various non-profits and the state's Wildlife Protection Department (WPD) rolled out a few initiatives to help herders. One of the most important measures was to make pens predator-proof.

Pani's pen now has an iron mesh roof and an iron gate instead of the usual mud and brick structure covered with tarpaulin. "The shan was here a few weeks ago. It walked around the livestock pen for a while looking for an inlet but could not enter," she exclaims.

Taking a step towards conservation of the species, the state government has for the first time decided to conduct snow leopard census. So far, a study published in Snow Leopards—Biodiversity of the World: Conservation from Genes to Landscapes estimates 516 snow leopards in the country. "For any conservation effort to be successful, we need a baseline data of the species, its number and the number of its prey base," says Pankaj Raina, wildlife warden of Leh, adding that an improved prey base will help improve the number of snow leopards. The department is

One of the most important measures was to make pens predator-proof. Pani's pen now has an iron mesh roof and an iron gate instead of the usual mud and brick structure covered with tarpaulin.

also working towards connecting villages inside the park which, according to Raina, "will help improve our response in case of any conflict".

WPD has also revived Project Snow Leopard, that was launched in 2009, to promote conservation of high-altitude wildlife populations and their habitats through participatory policies and actions. Takpa, now joint secretary at the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, was instrumental in designing the project, which was lying inactive since 2011. Takpa says human-wildlife conflicts can be mitigated only through an integrated approach. "There is no one-stop solution to conservation. Everyone has to be involved, and most importantly, the community."

This story has been adapted from the article, first published in the 1-15 July'18 issue of Down To Earth under the headline "On path to glory'. https://www.downtoearth.org.in/news/how-j-k-reduced-snow-leopard-attacks-on-livestock-61034

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SOLVE THE PUZZLE!

How many pastoral communities of India can you find here? Refer to the clues below to find them.

1. They are cattle herders who live around the Gir National Park.
2. Their goats give us exquisite pashmina wool. They live in Ladakh.
3. Sheep herding community of Maharashtra. They also worship the wolves.
4. Former Chief Minister of Karnataka, Sri Siddaramaiah belongs to this community.
5. Believed to be soldiers from Alexander's army who later settled in Ladakh.
6. Camel herders from Gujarat, known for their intricate embroidery patterns.
7. Goat herders from Himachal Pradesh, often seen with their *chola, topa, and dora*.
8. Buffaloe herders from Uttrakhand who live near Rajaji National Park.
9. Shepherds from Tibet, residing in the Transhimalayan region.
10. Shepherds from Jammu & Kashmir who won the Ashoka Chakra for their contribution to Kargil War.
11. They are skilled mountaineers from Nepal, with their largest population residing in New York.
12. Pastoral bards from Rajasthan and Gujarat, who get their name from the Hindi word for fodder, 'Chara'.
13. Major pastoral community of western U.P and Haryana. Also known by other names like Yadav and Gaoli.
14. Bhaichung Bhutia belongs to this community.
15. Buffalo herders of Niligiri mountains who reside in their beautiful bamboo huts.
16. Cattler herders in the deccan, originally from Rajasthan.
17. Camel herders of Rajasthan.

1. Bharwad, 2. Changpa, 3. Dhangar, 4. Kuruba, 5. Drokpa, 6. Rabari, 7. Gaddi, 8. Gujjar, 9. Bhotia, 10. Bakkarwal, 11. Sherpa, 12. Charan, 13. Ahir, 14. Bhutia, 15. Toda, 16. Lambada, 17. Raika