

Pastoralists of the Himalayas: Gaddis of Bharmaur Tribal Region in Himachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT: This research paper discusses about the Gaddi, a pastoral community of the Bharmaur region, a tribal dominated region of Himachal Pradesh. The author presents the historical and the religio-mythological aspects of the community, their ecosystem practices, traditional myths and beliefs that have influenced their life style. The Gaddi is a semi-nomadic agro-pastoral community engaged in pastoralism and agricultural activities on varying seasons. The author has looked upon the socio-economic structure of the society with special reference to caste structure, religious mythological practices and occupational patterns of Gaddis that is very close to their ecosystem. The study was conducted in the Bharmaur tribal region of Himachal Pradesh from the different villages including Bharmaur, Holi, Quarsi, Malkota and Kugti and others. The focus of this paper covers how they influence or are influenced by the traditional belief systems in the present state of government run development programmes for transformation and modernization. The established knowledge system of Gaddi pastoral cycle which is very close to their deity institutions make them live with the mythological beliefs governing pastoralism.

INTRODUCTION

Pastoralism is virtually the sole form of livelihood for a large proportion of the Indian population residing in the western to eastern Himalayan range. Pastoralists are largely migratory in nature as they move from one place to another depending upon the climatic changes, which are frequent in the region as also the availability of suitable pasture grounds for their herds of sheep and goats. It is one of the most important occupations among the tribal people of Himachal Pradesh namely the Kinnaura and the Gaddi. Both of them are agro-pastoralist, semi-nomadic people engaged in pastoralism and agricultural activities during varying seasons. Their cultural heritage and social structure are unique and exclusive.

The ancient rituals regarding their marriage ceremonies, religious beliefs, rituals of birth and death and related festivities are observable. Most of their everyday activities are embedded in their age-old lifestyle that revolves around their livestock and pastures. Living far from their homes in the mountainous highlands and lowlands, they live in close relationship with the forest and its ecosystems. They dwell in the dense forests lands with their livestock in makeshift sheds and hollows in hostile terrain. They adhere strictly to the rules and regulations laid down by the deities whom they address as 'devta' for their daily well-being. Their deep faith in 'devis' (goddess) and 'devtas' (god), shows that they staunchly believe that their deities make their journey through life easy and trouble free.

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This paper is based on a field survey. Empirical field data collection was directly done among the local people of the Bharmaur region. The sample was taken from different social strata including different Gaddi castes namely, Rajput, Brahmin, and Sippi etc. Their social segregations also include the Chelas (devotees) and priests of local deities, shepherds tending to their livestock and panchayat members. All these were considered 'key persons' and were interviewed during the fieldwork. The ethnographical approach was followed to examine and understand their relations within and with other castes, which tend to influence their social lifestyle. The focus of this paper on the pastoral practices in the region and how they

influence or are being influenced by the traditional belief systems in the present era of government sponsored development programmes for transformation and modernization. The author also attempts to understand the balance maintained by the pastoralists socio-cultural life of Gaddis and their smooth relations with the forests and the ecology of the region.

PASTORALISTS OF THE INDIAN HIMALAYAS

The Himalayan pastoralists of India move seasonally from one place to another according to the availability of pasture. Some of the transhumance practicing communities are listed below.

TABLE 1
Pastoralist communities practicing transhumance

Pastoral communities	Livestock	Geographical location
Bakrawals	Goat and sheep	Jammu and Kashmir
Kinnaura	Goat and sheep	Himachal Pradesh
Gaddis	Goat and sheep	Himachal Pradesh
Gujjars	Buffalo herding	Sirmaur, Shimla, Mandi, and Chamba of Himachal Pradesh
Monpas	Yak herders	Arunachal Pradesh
Kanet	Sheep and goat	Himachal Pradesh
Bhotiyas	Sheep, goat, and cattle	Kumaun (Uttarakhand)
Sherpas	Yak herding	Khambu, Nepal
Less known communities	Mixed herds	Bhutan, Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh

The herders adhere to a long-standing tradition of migrating up to the alpine heights for fruitful pastures on the lofty Himalayas for the summer and descending to the low-lying Himalayan foothills during the cold winters (Sharma *et al.*, 2003: 2).

In Himachal Pradesh, the Kinnaura and Gaddi are the two major communities of pastoralists who are considered tribals and inhabitants of geographically backward regions that lived traditional lifestyle. In summer the Kinnaura shepherds graze their sheep and goats on the higher reaches of Kinnaur, a tribal district of Himachal Pradesh and the Kumaun and Gadhwal hills of Uttarakhand. They move to the plains of Kangra and Sirmaur districts of Himachal Pradesh during the winters. The past decades have seen a marked transformation setting in among the Kaulis (Koli) and Kanets. They have discontinued their traditional pastoral occupation because they live at the lower heights of Sirmaur district where the transformation has escalated within the pastoral

society. The people are increasingly enjoying newer modern occupations for their livelihood. The buffalo herding Muslims Gujjars are pastoralists found in Sirmaur, Shimla, Mandi, and Chamba districts of Himachal Pradesh. They migrate seasonally to higher pastures with their herds. Pastoralists are of various compositions on the basis of life touch. There are shepherds, buffalo herders, and yak herders, etc and are distributed either over different areas or may even inhabit similar territorial regions. These facts have been depicted in Table 1

GADDI OF THE NORTHERN HIMALAYAS

Bharmaur is a Tehsil of District Chamba having approximately 50 villages. O. C. Handa (2005) describes 'Gadderan', as an 'enchanted homeland' inhabited by Gaddi tribals. They live deep in Chamba, the Ravi valley of Chamba is among the 'most rugged terrain' of the Western Himalayan mountains Chamba district has been declared a tribal area by the

Government of India keeping in view its geographical remoteness and backwardness. Gaddis were notified as the Scheduled Tribes vide the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order (Amendment) Act, 1991 in 2002. Their populations reside normally in Mandi, Kangra, and Bilaspur districts while a majority is concentrated in Kangra district.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF GADDI COMMUNITY

Linguistically the term 'Gaddi' evolved from the Sanskrit root word 'gadar'. It is literally translated to mean sheep. Alternatively, the terms 'Gadhern' or 'Gadern' or 'Gadaren' is used colloquially to represent either 'sheep country' or the 'land' of the 'Gaddis'. The region is also called Shivbhoomi (Verma, '96). It was Verma ('96) who classified the 'Gaddi' as a territorial group. They are distinctive in dress, language, cuisine etc. They form an exogamous union of different caste groupings like the Rajputs or Khatri, Rana, and Thakur.

In Hindi, the word 'Gadariya' means shepherd, therefore, it is presumed that the word the root word 'Gaddi' is derived from 'Gadar' meaning sheep or a herd of sheep. 'Gadar' also refers to the string made of intestines of sheep used in musical instruments. Thus, the original terminology of Gadri or a person engaged in tending to sheep could probably have evolved word as such-Gadar-Gadri-Gadri-Gaddi-Gaddi. Panini the great Grammarian of 5th century B.C. had referred them as the 'Gabdik' of the territorial entity Gabdika.

Hutchinson and Vogel ('82) had observed that there was negligible information available on the original inhabitants of the Brahmaur region. Most of the low caste tribes which are referred to as Scheduled Castes are named, the *koli, hali, sippi, chamar, dumna, barwala, megh, darain, rehara, sarasa, lohar, bhatwal, dhangari*, etc. They have been reported to be of non-Aryan origin. *Sipis* inhabit the best lands and according to W. H. Newell ('57), the *Sipis* lived in the Brahmaur valley much before the Gaddi Rajputs and Gaddi Brahmins. According to other assumptions the Gaddi Rajputs had migrated from the plains to the mountainous region. There are also some scholars who say that they have migrated from Rajasthan.

Traditionally their origin has been documented to have been traced to those Hindus who took refuge in the western Himalayan mountain ranges in a bid to protect themselves from invasions, war and religious persecutions in the plains of erstwhile Punjab (Handa, 2005). Therefore, there is no singular consensus on the views about the place of origin from where the Gaddis migrated to this hill state. The absence of the Gaddis in mainstream history adds to their subaltern existence and asserts their cultural identity through symbols, myths, and rituals. Vogel ('82) described the three sections of the Aryan community namely the Brahmin, Kshatriya (Thakurs and Rajputs) and Vaishya (Rathis). All these Gaddi Rajputs, Gaddi Brahmins, and Gaddi Khatri originally came from the plains due to various reasons. The most predictable one was the battles under the Mohammedan rule. The Gaddi also have the generic names of Brahmin, Khatri, Thakurs, and Rathis.

Antonio Gramsci ('71) had defined the subaltern as being a subjected underclass in society on whom the dominant power exerts its hegemonic influence. This could probably be an apt definition of the Gaddi settlements of the Himalayan niches.

RELIGIO-MYTHOLOGICAL BELIEF OF THE GADDI PASTORALISTS

Siva is the main deity of Brahmaur. The population is of the belief that Lord Shiva, their ruling deity lives on Mount Kailash for half of the year. Belief has it that he stays at Piyalpur till the night of *Maha Shivratri* that falls in the month of *Phalgun* or February-March according to the *Vikrami* calendar. He then goes to Mount Kailash that is considered Lord Shiva's summer residence (Sharma, 2001). Another myth deeply believed among Gaddis is that Jaistambh had been a cadet of the ruling house of Rajputana who later became a 'sadhu' or mendicant on being banished from his home. The story goes that he reached Kharamukh and sat in meditation to propitiate Shiva. Moved by his penance Shiva gave him three articles namely the '*topa*' or hat, *chola* or long cloth or wrap and the *dora* or rope. It is widely believed among these people that a women's '*chonk*' (an ornament was worn by women on the head) and a man's hat represents the '*Kailash parvat*' or mount Kailash. To this day the above three articles are an

indispensable part of the Gaddi dress.

A common saying among them is: '*Chanal jetha, Rathi kanetha*'. In this little idiom the sense is that the *Chanal* is the elder brother and belongs to the lower caste, whereas *Rathi* is the younger brother but belongs to the upper caste and yet is always dependent upon the *Chanal* for all significant ceremonies and socio-religious events.

PRACTICES AND TRENDS IN OCCUPATION

Minoty Chakravarty Kaul ('98) reported about the pastoral rights in which he claimed the high pastures of Himachal Pradesh for the Gaddis through which they maintained the ecological balances of the environment. They make a variety of traditional medicines. Kaul ('98) gave three steps for continually maintaining the ecological balance among the high pastures. The increase in the number of shepherds and their flock of sheep is gradually increasing. To affirm the institutions of common property rights for the alpine pastures and thereby reduces the generation of several uncertain, natural and manmade conditions. The next imperative step for these nomads would probably be when they register themselves in 'trade unions' and buy land in villages.

Richard Axelby (2007) conducted a study on Gaddi shepherds and attempted to document how they regulate their access to grazing pastures in the Indian Himalayas. By describing the 'living space' of Gaddi shepherds across the annual cycle of nomadic migrations with their flocks he explored the ways in which they have been able to creatively reinterpret external interventions. Axelby (2007) suggests how contemporary arrangements for accessing pastures at different stages of the annual cycle involve complex combinations of the formal and the informal, as well as the 'traditional' and the 'modern'. According to Veena Bhasin (2011), the Gaddis are agro-pastoralist and they maintain immense quantities of institutionalized knowledge to maintain the biological diversity their traditional lifestyles. This is also the reason why the government of India is obliged to consider recognizing and protecting the role of pastoralists and conferring upon them the rights to support their livelihoods. The crux of her findings was that the government should restore traditional grazing rights of the forest areas to these indigenous

peoples. Gaddis are not nomadic in the strictest of senses since they have villages where they reside. Thus, the origins of the Gaddis, are rather unclear. The Gaddis themselves believe that their ancestors fled from the plains in a bid for survival while the main occupation of Gaddi tribals is shepherding, they usually have large quantities of good quality wool that is rare among the animals grazing among the lofty Dhauladhar ranges with exotic plantations in their highlands as compared to the lowlands.

The Gaddi community is engaged in pastoralism ever since they migrated to the Himalayan of Himachal Pradesh region. During monarchical rule, the Gaddis were allowed to graze their goats and sheep freely because the vast area of forests came directly under the jurisdiction of his kingdom during the 18th and 19th centuries. The historian Chetan Singh ('98) documented that the reigning king allowed them to herd because they collected and deposited land revenue of those lands which were otherwise of no use to the king. The specific tracks of land in the forests where the Gaddi settled their herd were called the '*ban*' or forest and the '*dhars*' or mountain sides. The shepherd had to pay revenue tax for use of the grazing lands (Saberwal, '96).

PASTORAL CYCLE OF THE GADDIS

The Gaddi shepherds of the Himalayan ranges in Himachal Pradesh have exercised a unique and systematized pastoral cycle throughout the year. They are closely associated with the natural environment and have carefully ensured that the natural wealth of their surroundings is not depleted nor lost due to overuse or exploitative use of the natural pastures. The significance of this institutional wisdom is reflected in the words of Nori and Davies (2007).

"Pastoralism is a complex form of natural resource management, which requires maintaining an ecological balance between pastures, livestock, and people, and it is an adaptive strategy to a stressful environment. This adaptation faces a myriad of challenges, of which climatic change is but one. Indeed, the challenge of climate change seems insignificant to many pastoralists who are faced with extreme political, social and economic marginalization. Once these constraints are relaxed pastoral adaptive strategies might enable pastoralists to manage climate change better than

many other rural inhabitants” (Nori and Davies, 2007:7).

The Gaddis’ pastoral cycle is based on their seasonal migration over a large geographic area. They spend four months of the summer grazing the highly nutritious foraging grounds of the alpine meadows located on the upper reaches of the Himalayan Mountains including the Great Himalayan, Pir Panjal, and Dhaula Dhar ranges. They then descend to the lower heights to spend four months grazing the post-monsoonal flush of vegetation. They descend further to the low-lying Siwalik foothills during the severe winters (Saberwal, ’96). They take up to two months each in the autumn and spring migrations to cover over 250 km distance to reach from one location to the other.

The Gaddi community has been subjected to unmitigated official rhetoric that sees their grazing practices as responsible for the large-scale natural forest and land degradation over the past century. As a result, there has been a sustained effort to restrict the Gaddi access to forests and grasslands that they have traditionally grazed according to their institutional wisdom (Saberwal, ’96).

MYTHS AND BELIEFS GOVERNING PASTORALISM

There are a number of myths and beliefs that revolve around the Gaddis deep-rooted faith in various *devis* and *devtas* in the Bharmaur area that is the main environs of the Gaddis. The community’s traditions and culture add vibrance to the beautiful hill state of Himachal Pradesh. The population holds great faith in various Gods and Goddesses but is especially reverential of Lord Shiva.

The myth is a story institutionalized by a people over time that usually explains something about the world and involves gods, goddess and other superhuman beings. A belief can be described as a manner of trusting and taking an account to be true without looking for any evidence supporting it. Myth and belief tend to overlap each other in any culture. Myths strengthen the community and are oriented towards providing a common understanding of ordinary and extraordinary phenomena as well as behavior. Stories often reflect the beliefs of people

who tend to tell them. “Myths are stories, and we find meaning in our lives through the stories we tell. Myths are not true or untrue—they’re living or dead” (Phil Cousineau, 2001). There is no religion without myths. They are an indelible part of a people’s folklore.

Most Gaddis know of and believe these myths deeply. Molly Kaushal (2001) described that the Gaddi stuck to their belief that Shiva had created them from a speck of his dirt. He gave it life with water and blowing air into the nostrils. She said that Lord *Shiva* gave to the Gaddis the duty to herd goats and sheep. She also talked about Gaddi mythology where Bharmaur was compared to *Brahmalok* which is believed to be situated between Shiva’s *Mount Kailash* and the netherlands. During the *Manimahesh Yatra* or pilgrimage the *Sipi* (Scheduled caste) *Chelas* cross the *Dal* Lake first and are then followed by the other *Chelas* or followers. There is a local term ‘*Dal-bhanana*’ whereby the *Chelas* crossed the lake by entering it from one side. If any person other than the *Chela* tried to go inside the *Dal*, he would be drowned and even his body would not be found. Earlier, only the Rajput *Chelas* were allowed to enter the *dal* lake. However, Lord Shiva has blessed them (because of their devotion towards rearing goat and sheep) and maintained that they will obtain the spiritual benefits of the *yatra* by sitting at their homes only if they offered this sacred duty to any other community. Thus, the *Rajput Chelas* endowed the *Sipis* with this great opportunity. Till date, the Rajputs can start their journey for lower pastures or towards the lowlands without undergoing the *Manimahesh Yatra* or procession which seems to be a most important occasion having great ritual significance for the local people.

The role of the *Chela* is very important on every occasion in the region. The *Chela* is a person or devotee who has been chosen by the *devta*. He can be of any caste. On such occasions, the *Chela* offers incense and water to the *devta*. Soon he begins trembling, and later when the *devta* enters his body he starts hitting himself with a ‘*shangal*’ or metal chainstrip. The reason the *devta* enters the body is to give a message or to cure the patients. Pastoralists hold the strong belief that they cannot cross the passes in high mountainous regions without the permission of their local deity which is generally taken through the

Chela. They are honour bound and ritual bound to fulfill the requirements of their deities. One of their deities demands that the first sheep or male goat that crosses the *dhar* or mountain range has to be sacrificed. During most occasions, animal sacrifice is conducted by the local people as a ritual offering in front of the *Chela* to please a particular deity for fulfilling a particular objective. Years ago such sacrifices were made by pilgrims in large numbers inside the temple, especially by the *Bhadarwahi* community from Jammu. However, recently this form of animal sacrifice has been banned by the government. They offer these goat or sheep sacrifices to *Devi* or *Devta* according to the demands of the *Chela*.

The detailed procedure of the sacrifice is as follows:

1. Sprinkle water on the animal for 2-3 times
2. Closely- examine the animal to see if animal shivers or trembles at all?

In case the animal shrugs off the water, shivers or trembles when the water is sprinkled on it then it is considered that the *devta* has accepted the offering and is ready to receive the sacrifice. It is only then that the animal is killed. If the animal stands still and does not show any reaction to the water being sprinkled on it then it is believed that the *devta* or *devi* has declined the sacrificial offering.

Any particular '*devta*' or '*devi*' or ruling deity in ascribed with the protection of the 'Gaddi livestock'. Some of these deities are *Guwalu Devta*, *Murali Mata*, *Kartik* and *Nag Devta* etc. It is the ruling deity that gives the rules of where to eat, carry out everyday procedures even where to go for toilet. Any mistake or disobedience of the deities' instructions results in the loss of livestock of the offenders or incurring the wrath of the gods or '*devta*' in the form of the disease. Thus, this is the cause of the conflict between the pastoralists and the Government because currently, the Gaddis live in confusion as to whose rules should they follow to maintain their well-being and security. They suffer on both sides. Either paying fines to the government for conducting animal sacrifices or by suffering the loss in numbers of animals due to the Gods being angry.

CALENDAR, FESTIVITIES AND RITUAL HEALING

Every year on the 16th of August the Gaddis

celebrates a festival called 'Patrodu'. On this day they prepare *khichdi* or gruel made of rice and lentils in the morning to be eaten with *ghee* and '*Babru*' (a traditional food) in the evening. Married women go to their parent's home on this day. From this day onwards the new month starts according to the Hindu calendar. This month is also called '*Kala Mahina*' and no marriages can take place in this month.

Gaddis consult the *Chelas* in sickness and illness as well as conditions that they describe as spirit possession. '*Kul devta*' is the deity of a particular lineage or caste following according to their caste. People from Lahaul and Spiti, Chamba and Kangra consult the *Chela* regarding the problems they are having in their home. The *Chela* carries a *trishool* or '*shangal*' (chain) as a symbol of the '*devta*'. During his performance he hits the person having some problem. Hitting the person does not symbolize any anger but it is considered the blessing of the *Devta* that is showered upon his devotee. Ordaining of the '*Chela*' is also done under a special process. After conducting a number of rituals and shaking or shivering he has to sacrifice a goat. The *Chela* is then expected to drink the *loor* or blood of the sacrificed animal.

There is an instrument called the '*Hali*'. It is used while singing folk songs during various ceremonies like marriages or any other festivals. It comprises a pot (made of metal) which is filled with water and then is covered with a '*thali*' or steel plate. This pot is repeatedly and rhythmic hit with a wooden stick while singing. The reason for filling the water is the belief that if they left the pot empty while playing then the person will suffer from persistent shivering problems in their old age.

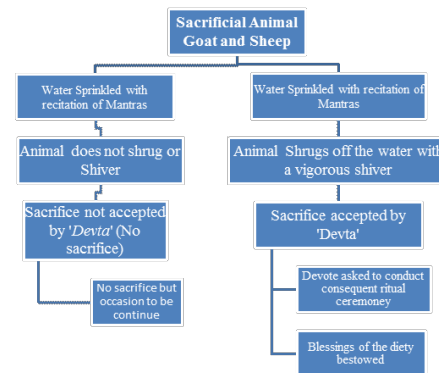


Figure 1: Rituals, animal sacrifices and their significance

There is another important and interesting festival celebrated among the Gaddis. It is called Nuwala. It is celebrated to please Lord Shiva by offering animal sacrifice or coconuts which replace the animal sacrifice as it has been banned these days. 'Nuwala' denotes 'nav mala' or nine garlands. This ceremonial ritual is compulsory for each and every Gaddi. At least once in their life, they have to offer Nuwala to Shiva. There is virtually no religion without myths and or folklore. For Gaddis, their world revolves around myths and beliefs. They maintain a deep-seated belief in these myths throughout their life. In fact, the Gaddis construct their identity on the basis of this mythological bonding. Their environment their natural surroundings and the supernatural on the basis of these myths is their life their natural surroundings and the supernatural.

RELIANCE OF PASTORALISTS ON THEIR ECOSYSTEM

For decades the Gaddis have been carrying on this particular kind of semi-nomadic pastoralism. Gaddi pastoralists move for about 2-3 months a year on foot without the assistance of any forecasting devices. They face the harsh climate in the forests, be it rain, or snow. They use tents as shelters when they have to stay for several days tending to their animals. No doubt, some of the Gaddis have given up their nomadic ways and are now settled. However, most of them have not forgotten their traditional lifestyle and value system.

The Gaddi culture is rich in traditions, rituals, and customs. From their traditional dress, the *Chola* (clothes made of wool), *Dora* or rope which they tie around the waist to their simple way of everyday living, it seems as if they have resisted change all these years. Gaddi pastoralists move as a group with their family members and 'puhal' or helper and Gaddi dogs to protect animals from predators as well as finding them when they go astray. They continue to follow traditional rules and regulations. These rules have been prescribed by their respective deities, for distribution and management of forest resources among themselves as well as other aspects of life.

According to Gupta ('90), pastoralists are well known to the region they have an ages-old affinity

with the forests. They have several systematized norms of consumption that teaches them how to consume the forest's resources as well as aid in its conservation in a phased manner of existence (Gupta, '90). Their religious and cultural orientation guides them through biodiversity conservation. The Gaddis are well versed in their knowledge of flora and fauna as well other resources, and areas having special features of the forests like a natural spring or a clump of medicinal plants etc. They are primarily conscious about forest protection as well as how the rich resources of the forest can be used for various purposes. In the West Himalayan cold deserts, it is a usual practice to protect the small growing trees and tree trunks against foraging by animals. They do this by wrapping gunny bags around them. There is no evidence to support the notion that the Gaddi practice of grazing continually leads to land degradation' (Saberwal, '96). Despite these facts, they were being constantly blamed by the government officials for the successive degradation of the forests in the past decades.

The harsh climate in Bharmaur leads them to adopt transhumance as a way of life. "The principle of the practice of transhumance is the coordination between pastoralists and communities of cultivators on the way and foothills" (Bhasin, 2013: 93). They are dependent upon the forest totally as they were involved in taking their herds to pasture, collecting fuel and fodder, practicing agriculture in Bharmaur and Chamba region. The pastoralists move from the highlands to the lowlands during the months of August and September and from lowlands to highlands during the May-June months. They follow a cyclical migratory pattern from the cool highland valleys during summer to the warm lowland valleys in the winters. They have constructed permanent houses in Bharmaur where their families survive during the winters while also caring for the domestic cattle. Some of them are settled in other areas like Kangra, Palampur, and other areas. While migrating, they take along with them their flocks of goat and sheep. They are totally dependant upon their animals as they obtain their very sustenance from these animals they get their meat and milk as well as wool for clothing for themselves. The surplus earns them a steady cash flow and income through sales of the products. They

collect good quality wool from their animals while going through the Dhauladhar range from the highlands to the lowlands.

Their traditional routes are marked along specific villages. They have followed the rules of their deities for generations regarding the routes to be taken during the transhumance cycle. Currently, the government has stopped them and is conducting several restrictive measures that deter the pastoralists from accessing their traditional grounds. Anthropologists can ameliorate this situation through their participatory intervention in forest management through their traditional knowledge as well as religious knowledge. It can be observed that here the social structure of society details the communal system of property sharing and division. They divide the land among themselves to cross the Dhauladhar range. Local people have a great knowledge about the plants, resources, and areas in forests. They are conscious of forest protection as well as how a forest can be used for various purposes. In the West Himalayan cold deserts, it is a usual practice among the Gaddis to protect saplings and small growing trees. They use some of the dying or dead wood from the trees for construction of houses besides also gathering fruits and other forest products for medicinal purposes along with wood for fuel, fodder, and other uses.

Villagers collect dry grass for the livestock in winters as the entire area is snow covered leaving no vegetation. Local people rely totally on the forests. Forests are their home and they know how to use them best to keep alive in the severe hilly conditions. There are traditional healers who have knowledge of the medicines as well as plants. When pastoralists go through the Lahaul-Spiti route, they collect amount of flora and fauna for their traditional medicines according to their knowledge which they use for trade with other communities or cultivators while moving from one place to another. Irrespective of veterinary facilities provided by the Government, the Gaddi use traditional medicines for curing common ailments of their livestock such as long grasses, *zira* (cumin) and garlic to cure stomach problems, and mustard oil to cure constipation. If a predator attacked the animals, then red chili powder was applied on the wound to cure it. Bee-keeping for honey at their homesteads was an age-old tradition. This indigenous traditional knowledge is a

special attribute of the Gaddi population. It gives them pride of place among other hill communities as they do the maximum to conserve the environmental biodiversity while enjoying its multiple benefits.

CONCLUSION

While pastoralism has declined over a period of time in most parts of the world it survives only in a few niches. One of them is preserved by the Gaddis till the present day. However, currently, most Gaddis are well educated, well settled and have adopted alternative occupations like government jobs and even some jobs in private organizations. Interestingly all these changes have occurred after a large part of the population attaining scheduled tribe status. Most of these pastoralists are politically marginalized. The process of marginalization at cultural and political levels has also discouraged the upcoming generations from taking over their traditional occupation of pastoralism (Sharma *et al.*, 2003).

The government has implemented several interventions that directly impact people's lives. It should also plan interventions, policies, and schemes to upgrade the lives of these Gaddi pastoralists. This should be done along with building dams, canals, and roadways. Thought should be given to the fact that these progressive. All this progress can endanger the ecological balance. It is also upset by increasing pastoral needs of the larger number of animals. There must be some policies or schemes to restore their pastoral rights in the forest areas. Afforestation of wastelands could be the way out for improving the biodiversity. Pastoralists are committed by their code of conduct as ordained by their devtas to regulate the balance of the mountain vegetation. Sheep and goats provide manure to the forest area and grazing helps in regenerating some of the tree species like deodar and oak. It cannot be generalized that the current situation is such that their presence has degraded the biodiversity and ecosystem. The consequences of the problem even post pastoralism keep declining. Pastoralism as a lifestyle that respects the societal values of other forms of diversity deserves to be preserved in most ways. The Civil Society along with the support of the government can be motivated to work out a people's oriented initiative to facilitate the continuance of the ancient Gaddi way of life and preserving their rich cultural traditions.

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