

**REPORT FOR THE KRISHNARAJ SUMMER TRAVEL
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TOPIC:

**THE GADDI SHEPHERDS: NEGOTIATIONS WITH
DEVELOPMENT**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3. SECTION 1: DE-ROMANTICIZING THE SHEPHERDS

4. SECTION II: THE SHEPHERDS AND THE STATE

5. SECTION III: ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

6. CONCLUSION

7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

INTRODUCTION

The Gaddi community of Himachal Pradesh has traditionally practiced transhumant pastoralism, travelling with their flocks between the upper reaches of Chamba and Lahaul valley in summer and areas of the Kangra, Bilaspur, Mandi and Kullu districts in the winter. Most of their settlements are spread across the Chamba and Kangra districts, parts of which were our area of study. The organization of this paper reflects the important concerns surrounding the continuance of the Gaddi way of life.

This paper seeks to understand how Gaddis negotiate with development activities taking place around them by recording its effects on their lives. Previous writing on the Gaddi shepherds have focused on the daily strategizing necessary to their livelihood (Axelby 2007), the risk-mitigation rationale underlying it (Chakravarty-Kaul 1998), its environmental sustainability (Sarkar 1998, Saberwal 1996), the shepherds' own experience of it (Noble 1985), or their vivid religious and cultural practices (Kaushal 2001). Our purpose instead is to show how the possessors of this rich transhumant culture mediate between the demands of its preservation and the possibilities and compulsions of 'modernity'.

The first section is concerned with the changing socio-economic factors affecting their practice of transhumant pastoralism. This takes into account changes in sedentary society, in natural conditions, and in their own perspective, that have a direct impact on shepherding. Anyone seeking to study their way of life would first have to understand the operation of their profession.

The shepherds in the Gaddi community travel with a sizeable number of sheep and goats throughout the year, which is their major source of livelihood. Their nomadic cycle is timed to complement the seasonal cultivation, the weather patterns, and the availability of good fodder. In the summer, they move up to graze their flocks in the alpine pastures of the Dhauladhar. As winter approaches, they move to the lower ranges of the Himalayas. Here, they provide for their flocks using a combination of *bans* or *jangal* (forest land) to which they have a claim of customary usage, and contractual agreements to use fallow land. The question it seeks to address is that of how the Gaddi shepherds continue to practice their profession, and the conditions that enable or disable them from doing so.

The second section deals with their interactions with the state, in terms of policies and provisions already in place, as well as channels used by the Gaddis to communicate their needs to the government and obtain them. It has also accorded them the status of Scheduled Tribe. The state carries out developmental activities that inevitably affect the environment, to which shepherds are closely linked, and also provides new opportunities to local populations. It is through the State's activities, then, that the Gaddis are being drawn into the 'modern' world. When we consider the Gaddis' present way of life, it consists of a negotiation between these new possibilities and their traditional ways. Therefore it seems important to ask about the role of the State in the continuance of this traditional occupation, and its relevance for the shepherds themselves.

Both the Gaddis' practice of pastoralism as well as agriculture in Chamba district continues to be dependent on the vagaries of the environment. However, the areas which they inhabit are targeted by the larger society for the fulfillment of different objectives: infrastructural development, as in the building of large hydroelectric projects in the river valleys they call home, or practices of environmental conservation, which exclude those who have lived harmoniously with those environs since time immemorial. Therefore for Gaddis, both as shepherds and as occupants of these remote areas, the question of the environment is an immediate and important one. This is discussed in the third section of the paper.

The overarching question with which this paper is concerned is that of the recent changes in the Gaddi community as seen by the Gaddis themselves.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Framework

The goal of this research is to understand the Gaddis of Himachal Pradesh, especially the shepherds, and to know how they negotiate with the developments that are taking place in and around their community.

Applying qualitative research methods and incorporating basic quantitative analysis, the findings of this study are based on data collected in four panchayats in two districts of Himachal Pradesh over a period of 23 days. These are supported by secondary literature and analysis of government policies for the welfare of the shepherds in the state.

Data collection methods

The research instruments used to understand the background of the shepherds in the two districts of Kangra and Chamba in Himachal Pradesh are:

i. Review of literature and documents pertaining to the culture of the Gaddis and their lifestyle.

Sources providing information on the traditions of the Gaddis and their occupation. Content analysis of various government policy papers, study reports, newspaper clippings and magazine articles on the subject has been undertaken to understand the diversity within the community and their relationship to the state which in turn helped identify the stakeholders for the study.

ii. Ethnographic fieldwork

Observation of the field site and interviews with the key stakeholders in the villages and government offices provided an insight into the different perspectives on each of the issues that we planned to look at in this study, thus enriching the findings from the field study.

iii. In-depth semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews have a broad framework of themes which can be explored through interactive sessions with the participants. In the semi-structured interviews conducted, open-

ended questions were used to gain a holistic overview of the situation in the rural areas of Himachal Pradesh, while closed-ended questions were used to obtain specific pieces of information, giving a concrete research finding. Semi-structured interviews encouraged two-way communication, making the process of understanding and reciprocating with the community members easier.

4.2 Research methods and sampling

The districts selected for study were Chamba and Kangra districts of Himachal Pradesh. Within these districts, we visited Bharmour tehsil and Baijnath tehsil respectively. The criteria for selecting these blocks were as follows: i. they were rich in Gaddi population, especially shepherds, ii. they held a culturally important place in the lives of the shepherds and iii. were accessible.

Purposive sampling was conducted of (i) Government officials (6); and (ii) Shepherds and ex-shepherds (16). Snowball sampling method was used for (i) family members of shepherds (5); (ii) Primary and High school teachers (7); and (iii) Political leaders of semi-formal organisations (4). Snowball and convenience sampling was conducted with Gaddi non-shepherds (14) The total sample size was 52.

Purposive sampling was used to categorise participants for in-depth interviews because of the nature of the study and with an objective to understand the culture of the Gaddis and the impact of developmental activities on their livelihoods. Some of these key informants directed us to other shepherd families, thus enabling a snowball sampling technique. The social context of the interview and the relationships of the participants can be very critical in conducting fieldwork, but the respondents were friendly and willing to share information freely with us.

Data analysis

Once the data were collected from primary and secondary sources, the qualitative data were coded into different thematic categories according to the general responses received. Examples

of coding categories include: perceptions on permits, impact of thefts, and developmental projects. Findings from primary data collected during the fieldwork in Chamba and Kangra districts were corroborated with secondary data from the review of literature and documents pertaining to the Gaddis.

Confidentiality and voluntary participation

Participation in this study was voluntary and respondents were allowed to withdraw from the study at any point if they decided to no longer participate. Prior to commencing the interview, the objectives of the research were explained to potential participants. A consent form was presented to them in English, but was translated into their language and interviews began only after they agreed to take part in the study and had signed the form, or had agreed for us to sign on their behalf.

4.3 Limitations

The study was limited in the following ways:

- Some of the research participants had little knowledge of Hindi. This linguistic situation created communication barriers between the interviewer and the research participant.
- Existing power dynamics between i. participants and researchers and ii. within participant groups (when families or bystanders intervened in questions directed at the initial respondent) may have led to the suppression of certain viewpoints. This, however, was avoided to a large extent by making participants feel comfortable and by asking neutral questions.
- The small sample size of the stakeholders in the villages limited the use of quantitative analysis through research tools such as correlations and causal relationships. This is because even during the season when shepherds visit their homes, they stay very briefly and each at a different time. The study therefore left little scope for quantitative evaluation and largely relied on qualitative technique.

SECTION 1: DE-ROMANTICIZING THE SHEPHERDS

The bus drops us off four kilometres from Holi, and we set off up an interminable stairway to Upper Deol, or Deol proper. Arriving panting and puffing, we are met by a loud and hungry cow standing in front of a large peach-coloured house from which two men regarding us with placid curiosity.

Nathuram and Gopal fetch us ice-cold stream water to drink, ask us to sit and then go back to sitting quietly. We discover that Nathuram himself owns flock and are beside ourselves with excitement—until his indifference pours a rather different sort of cold water on it. He sold off some of his flock recently—he doesn't remember how many—and the rest have been sent off to the pastures with acquaintances of his. When one of them comes home, he'll go up to take his turn. In the meantime, he has fields to sow, and a couple of orchards to see to as well.

For Nathuram—and every other shepherd we spoke to—herding sheep and goats is their work, not their way of life. For those who own land, there is also agriculture to be seen to, or perhaps horticulture if they own orchards. For those who do not, the lifestyle associated with the profession itself causes them to mentally distance themselves from it—there is little cause for romanticisation here.

Gaddi shepherds travel between the high pastures of Lahaul and Spiti in summer and the foothills of the Siwaliks in winter. Home, for most, lies somewhere in between, to be visited briefly twice a year, during the migrations. Except for those brief spells, shepherds must spend all their time outdoors, exposed to whatever weather prevails. They cook chapattis on fires built from the wood they can find, Denga Singh, a resident of Holi, tells us. If the wood is wet and fails to ignite, they go to sleep hungry, waking by turns in the night to keep watch.

Two or three shepherds typically look after a flock of three to five hundred sheep. It is only recently, some shepherds say, that the trend of hiring shepherds ('puhals', or 'naukars') from among the unemployed young men in the village has begun. And even this is only practiced when the shepherd-owner himself is ageing with no family member to succeed him in the profession, or where his flock, and the income from it, is large enough to support such a luxury.

In most cases, the educated youth express strong preferences against following this profession. Rajesh, an undergraduate at Baijnath said it would be better to be a 'mazdoor' than a shepherd. At least you come home and sleep at night if you're a mazdoor, he said.

The task of a shepherd is not merely to accompany the flock, but to ensure sufficient fodder daily. This requires, in the summer, making the all-important decision of when to cross the high pass (Kugti, Chhobia or Kalicho) so as to cross in safety and yet soon enough not to deplete the scrub below. With change in climatic patterns, this decision has become harder to make each year. For instance, in July 2005, unseasonal snowfall caused Gaddi shepherds travelling in Lahaul valley and crossing the Bara Lacha pass to be trapped under snow for over four days, leading to the death of hundreds of heads of flock. (The Tribune, July 10, 2005) During the summer months, shepherds also have to handle frequent threats from brown bears and leopards, and from diseases contracted in the plains or the crossing through high passes. Even storms are a source of danger, as sheep are known to take fright at seeing lightning and rush headlong into ravines and rivers out of panic. One shepherd we were told of had lost a flock of five hundred in this way.

In monsoon and winter, the task of finding forage is already made difficult by the fact that 'gots', or monsoon grazing grounds, and 'jangal', common land covered with scrub forest, are small areas and shrinking. The Forest department fences off tracts of land for tree plantations, without compensating shepherds for the loss of their traditional usufruct rights to pasture. Those with long-standing arrangements with farmers to pen flocks on fields in exchange for the manure the flocks provide now find themselves at a disadvantage because of the change in cropping pattern of the farmers and the introduction of chemical fertilisers, and increasing competition among shepherds. Village common lands too are shrinking and villagers are increasingly reluctant to allow 'outsiders' to graze animals there. Those shepherds with some landholding in Kangra and other lower districts have an advantage in this regard, but it is undone by the degradation in quality of fodder available. While the authorities acknowledge the problem, for instance, of massive spread of weeds that endanger the health of shepherds, such as *Lantana camera* and 'kali basuti' (*Chromolaena odorata*) they are unable to do much to help. The Forest Department has, however, initiated projects for Lantana eradication [The Tribune, April 23, 2013; April 29, 2013]

Each year, shepherds earn most of their income by selling a part of their flock for meat. Meat prices have been rapidly increasing in recent years, and now an adult sheep or goat is worth between 5000 and 8000 rupees. A small-sized flock of 150 animals is therefore potentially worth between 7.5 and 12 lakhs. It is this consideration that has brought the shepherds the appellation of ‘dhanwaley’ (those with wealth).

The other source of income is from wool. One sheep can be expected to produce an average of one kg of wool in a year. However, wool prices are low—Rs. 35-38 for the summer shearing and Rs.25-28 kg for the winter shearing in 2012 (Source: H.P. Wool Fed website, accessed August 30, 2013). Moreover, as the ex-Wool Federation chairman said, the quality of wool produced by the Gaddis’ flocks is only short- to medium-staple, and not as such suitable for use in the wool industry. It is mostly used to make crude woolen things like carpets, as is the case with most sheep wool in India. Gaddis know this is so but say that their breed of sheep is the only one capable of withstanding the rigours of the migration. As the case may be, wool has ceased to be an important source of income, and many Gaddis use their wool to weave at home, rather than attempting to sell it at all.

The high and rising value of meat in the market has, however, had one unforeseen consequence: a recent spate of livestock theft during the winter months. Nathuram relayed to us one popular description of the incident: ‘The flocks are penned by the roadside in the night, with the men taking turns to keep watch. Suddenly the shepherds find that 8-10 men have them at gunpoint, and are choosing the best 20 or 30 out of the flock and loading them onto a truck. They feel unaccountably sleepy, the goats are quiet, and even the dogs, usually so alert, are asleep—some people say they spray something into the air. Then the men get back into the truck and drive away. The shepherds can do nothing; their only weapons are sticks, and if you struggle they will just shoot you and take the whole flock and go.’

While some parts of this story are suspect, there was corroboration in Chamba and Kangra of the one case where the shepherds were murdered. While the lower level Forest department officials (Forest Guard, Holi and Block Officer, Bharmour) that we spoke to were aware of the problem and reassured us of forthcoming government help—in the form of more stringent permit rules,

gun licenses, and police protection. At higher levels of the administration, though, the reaction was much more dilute: the DSP at Palampur said he was not aware of it being a widespread problem, and the DFO, Chamba, said that shepherds exaggerate their losses to get claims from the government. An influential member of the Tribal Advisory Committee and ex-Pradhan of Holi panchayat said that it was believed that the police were probably hand-in-glove with the criminals. The conviction of complicity was strengthened for many by the lack of police action in apprehending those responsible.

The actual number of these incidents is unknown because the shepherds do not file reports with the police, citing the need to move on in search of more fodder, the desire to put as much distance as possible between themselves and the site of the crime, and the difficulty of access to police stations.

However, more significant than the number of incidents is the effect of popular perception: many shepherds and their families we met had either already sold off their flock or were planning to do so. “Jaan ka khatra” (threat to life) was the most immediate and convincing argument among the plethora of risks they face from day to day. This, in addition to the expansion of education and employment opportunities for young men, were the inevitable response we received from Gaddis when asked about the profession by which their community continues to be defined.

SECTION 2: THE SHEPHERD AND THE STATE

Kamlesh, a shepherd from Kanarthu village in Kangra district, sat side by side with his brother, who was serving in the army, talking to us about how he goes about his life and work. Proud owner of a flock of 300, he told us that none of his sheep and goats was insured. One of the reasons he cited for this was that it was extremely inconvenient for him as one needed to show a photo of the dead animal with the insurance tag on its ear in order to claim the insurance. He did not own a camera, like most shepherds, and thus could only rely on a mobile phone to click a picture. On being asked why he could not provide a photo, he replied, “ab phone koi bakri pe laga ke thode hi charge karenge!” (We can’t charge the phone through a goat now, can we?).

This statement brings home the fact that policies made by the state or state-run organizations for the welfare of the shepherds need to be reasonable and practical. There are many provisions made by the state that are aimed at benefiting the Gaddi community, and some in particular for the shepherds, reflecting the state’s desire to protect and preserve their traditional occupation.

What needs to be kept in mind is that the state and the community are not placed in opposition to each other. Different sections of the local populace relate differently to the state. They are also internally differentiated and do not exist as homogenous blocks, as noted by Vasani and Kumar (1997). Therefore any attempts to lay out an all-encompassing policy by the State will not gain much credence on the field.

I.

The initial rights of grazing were given to the shepherds in as early as the 1870s by a British official, J.B. Lyall, who sought to divide pasture land to suit everybody’s needs. These rights to pasture land were concretized by issuing permits to the shepherds. These hereditary permits assigned to them specific “dhars” (pastures), where they had rights to graze their flock.

Shepherds today lay claim to a dhar in accordance with these traditional rights. This then implies that no new people can receive rights to grazing land. This, according to some respondents, by limiting the number of permits favours the traditionally well-off and helps maintain the status-quo. This creates a kind of hierarchy in society, where those without permits have to depend

upon the permit holders in order to take their flock to graze. This makes them indebted to the rights holders and lowers their socio-economic status.

“...grazing rights at many places in Himachal Pradesh were in proportion to the agricultural land owned. This contact with state was thus both a harbinger of internal social differentiation as well as providing a new legal bases to extant inequalities.”(Vasan and Kumar 1997:3295)

It was brought to our notice during the research that many shepherds who have now left this occupation are still renewing their permits in order to maintain their rights to the land, even though these are not ownership rights. The shepherds can get away with this as there is no check on the actual number of flock a shepherd has, even though the stated policy is of taking a headcount while renewing permits. In its place, the policy that is actually followed is of giving the grazing permit on the same number of sheep and goats as there were when the permit was initially made. This then leads to a faulty count of sheep and goats in an area. This can also result in the payment of a heavy fine by the shepherd, in case he is caught with more flock than permitted. But such occurrences are rare as there is no indication of anyone to count their flock up in the mountains.

It was also noticed that the permit can be allowed to lapse for a few years at a time, and that shepherds are always freely adding to their flock, without much heed to the numbers on their permits. So the actual impact of the numbers of flock on the higher pastures is largely unknown.

These permits, apart from the number of the flock, are also supposed to have the photograph of the shepherd who will be traveling with them. This changed subsequently and now there is a provision for having the permits without any photograph. There is also ambiguity regarding the time in which a permit can be renewed. There is a new policy, as told to us by the officials in the forest department, under which they are supposed to issue permits for a span of 3 years, as against the one year span which is currently prevalent. The order has apparently come from the government, but this policy has not yet been implemented on the field. Even at present the shepherds do not get their permits renewed every year, but do it according to their convenience.

“The three year permits were supposed to be implemented from 2012, in which there would be no need of a photo id, but they are still under process. There is no facility for

new permits. Moreover, even if they do not renew their permit in a particular year, they still have to pay for it in the next. If the number of goat and sheep increase, we take damage.” -Block Officer, Bharmour

This ambiguity in policies and structure leads to a loose system in which it is difficult to keep an actual account of the happenings on the field. This is also one of the reasons that most of the shepherds do not benefit from the policies that are framed for their support. As told to us by our respondents, only the rich and the corrupt benefit from these policies as they get to know of them through their connections in government institutions.

II

Many institutions of the state are engaged in continuous policy making to benefit the shepherds. The Himachal Pradesh Wool Federation is one such institution, which helps shepherds by providing them with facilities of sheep shearing and also procures their wool in case they cannot sell it in the market. The Wool Federation provides a minimum procurement price to the shepherds, which is supposedly in accordance with the market. However, this measure is not of much value to shepherds now, because wool prices have dropped considerably in the last decade. According to the records of the WF, the procurement prices for wool in the year 1999-2000 were Rs. 25–45, Rs. 43 and Rs. 58 for winter cut, summer cut and autumn cut respectively. These then dropped by 20% in the year 2001-02. The prices in 2012 were Rs. 25–28, Rs. 35–38 and Rs. 45–60 for WC, SC and AC respectively (Source: H.P. Wool Fed website, accessed August 30, 2013). Although this seems like the wool prices have remained somewhat stable, if one takes into account the changing economic scenario over this period one can see that the shepherds do not stand to gain much from such prices. Thus selling of wool, which was one of the prime sources of income, has now become non-remunerative.

Furthermore, in order to improve the quality of the wool procured from the native sheep variety, the government decided to give the shepherds a “bhedu” (ram) of the Australian Merino variety. This is supposed to be the best wool-producing variety in the world. This measure has its own disadvantages—the shepherds allege that this sheep is too heavy and thus not fit enough to walk on the mountains. The size of its hoofs is also bigger than that of native sheep, causing

degradation of pasture land that it treads on. Thus the introduction of this variety of sheep does not seem to be a good option.

Apart from this, the government has introduced a scheme that seems to have captured the shepherds' attention. This is the Bhed Palak Samriddhi Yojana (BPSY), which was introduced in 2010 to facilitate the shepherds to keep more sheep. Under this scheme, shepherds can procure 40 sheep with a loan of Rs. 1 lakh, which is given on a minimal interest rate. All these sheep are even insured by the government, which is very rare otherwise. This, according to the government would encourage shepherds to keep flock and keep their traditional occupation alive. Almost all the shepherds seem to know about this scheme, but only very few had actually utilized it. The ones who did use it were shepherds who were well-off and owned a large flock. They themselves also acknowledged that this scheme was only being used by the rich for their benefit and was not reaching those who actually needed it. According to certain shepherds, this yojana was aimed at making the people debtors of the government.

Kamlesh: "BPSY is working only for the rich. If we took this and something was to happen to our sheep, then it's twice the problem- we have to pay the loan and there are no sheep also."

This leads us to see that the government does make schemes for the shepherds but they do not focus on its implementation. The conditions on the field need to be taken into account and it needs to be seen that these schemes reach the right people.

III

Another major institution that is in direct contact with the lives of shepherds is the Veterinary Department. This provides the shepherds with major services such as the vaccination of their flock, medical attention to the flock in case of illness and giving claims when the sheep and goats die due to illness. The vaccination of the flocks is one of the major services offered by the department and it is provided free of cost. When vaccinations were initially provided, the shepherds did not get it done. Thus, camps were set up near passes the shepherds would necessarily cross and "tikas" (vaccination) were administered there. Now the shepherds get it done almost regularly.

An important function of this department is to also provide medical help to the shepherds in case some of the sheep or goats fall ill. In certain cases the diseases acquired by the animals are contagious and can spread to others in the flock very fast. In such a situation, this can lead to many fatalities if medical help does not arrive on time. On being informed by the shepherds, the medical team comes to where the flocks are penned and administers the necessary treatment. This has proved to be a big support for the shepherds.

Then there is the question of insurance. As told to us by officials in the veterinary department, most of the shepherds do not get their sheep insured. Only those sheep are insured which are purchased under BPSY as the scheme provides for it. The claims given are also only 75% of the actual value according to the respondents.

IV

Central to the lives of the shepherds is the Forest Department. This department is responsible for the various policies that are made with regard to grazing, forest rights and enclosures, which are intimately linked to the way shepherds organize themselves. There are various administrative functions that the forest department performs with regard to the shepherds like the issuing of permits, designating grazing areas, collecting fines, allotting enclosures and environmental assessment, protection and reclamation of forests and pastures, and providing claims in case of animal attacks.

This department keeps a record of the number of shepherds in various ranges. Most of the grassroots work is done by the field functionaries- the Forest Ranger, Deputy Forest Ranger, Block officer and the Forest Guard. Most high-level functionaries like the Conservator of forests and the Divisional Forest Officers do not interact with the local people on a regular basis. Public policies meant for local communities are, therefore, more often negotiated in the field than the office. It is mainly the forest guard who is responsible for overseeing how things function on the ground. These forest guards are entrenched in the rural society and their identity is shaped by their professional position as well as their role as locals. They acquire a significant amount of power and authority in the local structure. But there are hardly any facilities provided to these guards and the beat they have to cover is very large. But this is still a very sought after profession among the villagers as it is also a permanent job. Most of the forest guards, as noted by Vasan,

also do not receive any training when they are recruited (Vasan 2002). Since policy implementation is crucial at the ground level, and these forest guards are not efficiently trained, policies are not aptly implemented and there is always the risk of benefits being lost to the people.

One of the other tasks of the forest department is to provide claims in case of attacks by animals such as the black bear, the brown bear and the leopard. The brown bear is mainly found in the Bara Banghal area and is known to kill almost 15-20 animals at once. The others kill about one or two. The claim given for such incidents is not much and also difficult to procure as the body of the animal is usually not found. The bear can on occasion also attack humans. As told to us by Gobind Lal ji of village Sutkar:

“many years ago I had taken my flock up in the mountains to graze. Suddenly I heard a loud noise. By the time I could figure out what it was, a big black bear came charging towards me and smashed my face with his huge arm. I fell unconscious. When I gained some sense, I could feel blood gushing out of my face and I felt that my jaw had been ripped apart. I was rushed by my fellow shepherds to the nearest hospital which was in Baijnath. There they could not do anything about my condition and I was then taken to Palampur where the doctors expressed a similar helplessness. They then took me to Dharamshala where I stayed for three days trying to gain some strength. After much effort, I was shifted to Shimla where I spent another 11 days undergoing treatment. But unfortunately, none of these places could treat me completely. Finally I had to go to Chandigarh to get my complete treatment done and had to stay there for three months. I still cannot eat properly because half of my jaw is missing. The forest department only gave me Rs. 30,000, whereas they say that their policy is to give Rs. 70,000. This is a very small amount. I had to spend almost Rs. 3,00,000 to get my treatment done.”

Gobind Lal's story also brings out the loopholes in the system of providing claims to the shepherds. They say that this occupation has now become tough and one cannot look to the government when things go wrong, as support is not forthcoming. In such a situation then, many of the shepherds are leaving this occupation.

The issue of flock thefts has reinforced this opinion. Shepherds say that police apathy is evident in that they have not yet caught a single thief. The police have a somewhat different stand on

this, and claim that not many thefts have taken place. They say there are provisions like a dedicated helpline in place to facilitate the shepherds to register complaints. They also claim that they provide immediate assistance to the affected shepherd when informed. The shepherds, on the other hand, believe that the police do not do anything to help them and are sometimes themselves involved with these thieves. They also say that they do not make complaints because they travel in small groups of 2 or 3 shepherds, and it is inconvenient for one of them to leave the flock to go inform the police. They fear that while they are gone, further thefts might take place and they might lose everything.

V

In order to address their concerns and present them before the state, the Gaddis have organized themselves in semi-institutional bodies like the Gaddi Kalyan Board, as well as associations such as the Janjatiya Gaddi Vikas Samiti. Furthermore, they also have representatives in the State's Tribal Advisory Committee and Grazing Committee who articulate their concerns to the state and also help the Gaddis obtain benefits from it.

Ex-Wool Federation chairman and Grazing Committee member affirmed, "political mobilization is very important for the Gaddis. We are not asking for reservation, but for facility."

Political mobilisation among the Chamba Gaddis seems mostly within the existing government institutions, not against them. The influence of, and respect accorded to, Thakur Singh Bharmouri (and the pride in his becoming Forests and Fisheries minister) show the importance of having a 'man on the inside'. The member of the TAC evidently occupied an important place in Holi, with the current Pradhan sitting attendance on him, and all the major male figures congregating in his shop. It seemed that there was a Congress bias in Holi town itself, though in the villages ire is directed at 'The Company' and the corrupt (local) politicians who aid it. The TAC member made clear that he thought the continuing protests against the project either silly or politically motivated, as the thing was a done deal, and the 'higher-ups' responsible.

In comparison, the Mahila mandals in the villages around Holi, protesting against the setting up of the Holi-Bajoli Hydro Power Project, held local leaders squarely responsible for the problems they had. They alleged that the pradhan had taken bribes to give his assent (NOC) and had sold off village or individuals' land on their behalf and without their consent. At the very least he had

failed to voice the concerns they had and would be shown what they thought of him at the next election. Meanwhile they would do anything possible to prevent the project from coming up. They tried local morchas, and collected or coerced consent out of all the village women. Some men had tried to use the courts, but had come off worse. But what else can we do, they asked us.

SECTION 3: ENVIRONMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

I

In the pursuit of their profession, Gaddi shepherds remain as dependent on what the environment provides as ever before. As Chakravarty-Kaul (1998) indicates, however, this dependence has traditionally been viewed by the state as a form of ‘free-riding’ in which each shepherd tries to enhance his own flock size and profit at the cost of the commons, cumulatively resulting in the widespread erosion of the western Himalayas. Saberwal describes how State policies have articulated this belief, attempting to control the number of animals grazed, camping and movement and access to land, albeit unsuccessfully. But this did not seem to be the dominant perspective among those involved in our study. The forest officials did not adhere to this view which is seen to have been adopted by the state traditionally.

While the bias has been managed at the level of practice by the Gaddis’ political mobilization, the debate about the environmental viability of their work goes on.

In the view of the critics, overgrazing by the Gaddi shepherds is to be held to account for the vastly accelerated rate of soil erosion in the western Himalayas. When this erosion occurs in the high pastures—which are catchment areas for the great rivers of the region—it impacts water availability downstream, particularly for large irrigation and hydroelectric projects. Furthermore, human-wildlife conflicts lead to hunting of large-mammal predators such as leopards, black and brown bears to save livestock and protect human life.

Saberwal takes on these views in his study, pointing out lacunae in the procedure used to identify cause from observed effect. Furthermore, in the absence of proper long-term data on various indicators of environmental health—species diversity, soil quality, area under forest cover—predictions were made about possible effects of allowing grazing to continue, which have not been borne out by history: such as that the scrub in the foothills of the Siwaliks would vanish entirely (1996: 745). He suggests instead that the soil erosion, threat to forest plantations, and to vegetative cover, are better explained by the increase in cattle populations than the relatively constant sheep and goat ones, or by larger factors, such as climate change. (1996:745)

Chakravarty-Kaul adds that the ‘complementarity, rather than competition’ between the resource needs of their subsistence agriculture and market-oriented pastoralism has enabled the survival of

both in an ecologically sensitive way. The linking of agricultural and pastoral cycles, such that livestock manure is provided in a timely way before each planting season in the course of allowing shelter for the flock during migrations, enables the people to most efficiently use the scarce resources of this terrain. Conversely, she suggests that increase in flock size can be seen as a result rather than a cause of growing environmental uncertainty (1998: 8–9). But as was seen from the data provided by the Forest Department, the actual number of sheep and goats has not increased, and this is due to reasons other than uncertainty in environmental conditions. Also, the complementarity between farmers and shepherds has changed due to changes in the cropping patterns of the plains, which add to the worry of the shepherds.

Saberwal goes on to suggest that the presence of the pastoralists, rather than being a source of harm, actually contributes to species diversity and helps sustain the big-mammal predator population. During 2002-04, there were 1539 livestock casualties in the Kugti wildlife sanctuary caused by brown bears (Rathore, 2008:118). These took place in the months of April to October, during which the pastoralists are in the *dhars* and bears are active and not hibernating, indicating the potential for productive coexistence between domestic stock and wildlife.

Contradicting the prevalent belief that sharp goat-hooves cause topsoil to loosen and be more easily eroded, a forest official we spoke to said that the light weight of sheep and goats prevent them from causing any serious damage to grazing grounds. Keeping the numbers in check was a concern, but even if a pasture was found to have sustained damage it would be temporarily cordoned off and pasture development schemes carried out to restore it. These schemes would include planting of edible grass, removal of weeds and construction of water harvesting structures.

And even though shepherds may be seen as a source of human encroachment on and degradation of the environment, it is important to note that environmental degradation affects the shepherds' livelihood in turn. Sunil Kapoor, of Phtahar, told us that weeds such as Lantana (*Lantana camera*) and 'kali basuti' (*Chromolaena odorata*) in the winter grazing grounds can even be fatal for the livestock, and that their spread is therefore a cause for great concern. The degradation of the blue-green grass of the pastures of Lahaul-Spiti affects the health and productivity of sheep and goats. As another shepherd Kamal said, "Where we were earlier able to graze for a month, now we cannot graze for a week."

Other changes in environment, such as the change in methods of agriculture promoted under the ITDP, too affect the shepherds' livelihood. The introduction of chemical fertilizers particularly disrupts the organic relationship between farmer and shepherd, by invalidating the previous demand for manure.

As a result, shepherd we met from Thalli village, Kangra, said that where once he had compensated for his lack of monsoon grazing grounds by a standing arrangement with a farmer, now the farmer had struck a deal with another shepherd, leaving him with no place to go for the entire period. When he came to the Forest department for help, he was told that nothing could be done as the department through its permits only codified 'traditional' rights, and was not authorized to institute fresh rights of access.

II.

“The question is not of the intrinsic value of stability in ecosystems, but of the inevitably engendered risks that modern technology brings in its wake....the effects are rarely predictable and foreseen” (Reddy 1998:323)

Thus the environment, which is so integral to the life of the Gaddis gets affected by developmental activities of the state. These are carried out for the welfare of the people but there are also certain costs attached to them, the burden of which is mostly borne by the local community. The Chamba District has seen a number of these activities especially those involving hydel-power projects on the river Ravi which flows through the area. There are projects on practically every part of Ravi-the Chamera Project is one of the big projects involving Chamera I(1994), Chamera II(300 mW-2004) and Chamera III(2012). The other important project is the Bada Bhangal hydro electric project which falls within the Dhauladhar Wildlife Sanctuary. Another project that is coming up is the Holi-Bajoli Hydro Electric project, which has been newly sanctioned. While in Holi, we witnessed the resistance that the people put up to the setting up of this Bajoli Holi project, the tender of which had gone to GMR, a private company.

The above mentioned projects are a few in the system of many which are present as one moves along the course of the Ravi. These projects are placed at very short distances from each other. For example, the distance between Chamera II and Chamera III is only a meager 1.5 kms., according to a June 2013 report of the South Asian Network on Dams, Rivers and People,

“The distance between upstream Chamera-III Power House and downstream Chamera-II Dam is only about 1.5 KM with no major tributary or water source contributing in-between. The storage capacity at Chamera-II reservoir is very low. The generating units at Chamera-II Power Station are almost fully dependent on the release from Chamera-III Power Station. The agenda note from NHPC for the NRLDC meeting, scheduled for May 16-17, says: “It is observed that schedules given by RLDC for the month of May 2013 for Chamera-II & III are not in a coordinated way. At some occasions, power station in the downstream plant is being asked to maintain maximum generation while the upstream power station is asked to generate minimum or zero.”

(energylineindia.com 160513) This also raises the issue of optimizing of peaking power from these stations, which is clearly not happening with such scheduling by the NRLDC.”

The projects being placed at such short distances thus have a significant impact on the surrounding environment which needs to be assessed. The placing of two projects in close vicinity leads to the dependence of one on the working of the other, which can cause changes in the immediate as well as downstream areas. This assessment is done by the MoEF, which constitutes different committees for the appraisal of various developmental projects including River Valley & Hydroelectric projects. The committees are called as Expert Appraisal Committees (EAC). These are the ones then responsible for providing environmental clearance to the various projects, based on their feasibility. They have certain Terms of Reference which are the standards by which aspects of the proposed project are judged. According to the February 2013 report of the South Asian Network on Dams, Rivers and People;

“...the Model TOR does not look into the impacts of the various integral components of the hydropower projects like colonies, roads, mining, blasting etc that the hydropower projects invariably have. Model TOR does not look at the social, environmental, economic or cultural services that a river provides. On downstream impacts, the model TOR says under Impact Prediction, “Downstream impact on water, land & human environment due to drying up of the river in the stretch between dam site and powerhouse site.” This completely negates the impacts

that the project would have either on the upstream or in the river downstream from the power site or along the tributaries both upstream and downstream of the projects.”

There are also allegations by the SANDRP (supported by statistical facts) that the EAC has not refused any project in the last six years and has granted clearance to all except two, which are placed on waiting. Even the 200 MW Bara Bangahal HEP in Kangra district in Himachal Pradesh was accorded TOR clearance in 21st meeting of EAC in Dec 2008, even as the minutes recorded, “The project is located within the wildlife sanctuary”.

The Bajoli Holi Hydro project: Case Study

The Ravi is one of the most prominent rivers in the Indian River system, which in its latter part, flows into Pakistan. A new project which recently acquired consent from the government is the Bajoli Holi Hydro Project, which is a 180 MW run off the river project, extending from village Holi to village Bajoli in the Chamba District of Himachal Pradesh. The project was initially supposed to be on the right bank (as it was relatively barren) of the Ravi but was subsequently shifted to the left (which is densely populated). This led to an outbreak of protests by the local people who claimed that this had been done without their approval. A few locals filed a petition in court challenging the action of authorities to permit GMR to shift the alignment of the project from the right to the left bank of the Ravi. They contested that this was against the interests of the people and also the recommendation of the Himachal Pradesh state Electricity Board (HPSEB). The final approval of the MoEF has stated that, “environmental flow should be 20% of the average lean season flow of 90% dependable year for four consecutive leanest months” (MoEF Final Approval 24th Jan 2011). According to SANDRP, this number has no scientific, ecological or sociological basis but is entirely arbitrary. This would also significantly alter the climate of the place, as there is another power project only a few kilometers down the Ravi- Chamera III, followed by Chamera II and I.

Soon after, the High Court, after reviewing the petition, granted approval to the GMR project to continue as planned. Furthermore, a fine was imposed on the petitioners and this led to a general loss of enthusiasm among the villagers and the protests fizzled out. Particularly active in carrying out these protests are the Mahila Mandals of the surrounding villages. The Mahila mandals held

local leaders squarely responsible for the problems they had. They alleged that the pradhan had taken bribes to give his assent for the project, he had sold off village or individuals' land on their behalf and without their consent, at the very least he had failed to voice the concerns they had and said he would be shown what they thought of him at the next election.

Meanwhile they would do anything possible to prevent the project from coming up. They tried local morchas, and collected or coerced consent out of all the village women. After the order of the high court, they seemed to have lost hope which was reflected in the fact that they asked us as to what they should do now. It is thus evident that this project was seen as a huge threat to the local people. The people in village Deol in Chamba District were concerned about the loss of ground water that would take place if the tunnel went from inside the mountain on which rests their village. They believe that the springs will dry up and their equation with their environment will be drastically changed.

One of our respondents, while talking about the project said, "jald hi machliyan ter rahi honghi yahan pe" (soon you will find fishes swimming here). They also expressed concern over the lake, known as Dal, which is much above the village Deol. This lake has been accorded to Lord Shiva and thus has a special place in their lives-both religious and material. As Karan said, "The new project could dry up the Dal. It is also an earthquake prone area."

What seemed to us to be the issue of concern was that the villagers were not informed about the impacts of the project and what it would provide. They thus came to their own conclusions about what was to happen. This brings us to the important issue of the public hearing which is mandatory for the project approval. According to one of the petitioners, this public hearing never really took place when it was decided that the project be shifted to the left bank.

III

On one side are the above mentioned development projects, and on the other, the government is also putting into place some measures to protect the environment. One of the ways it does this is by creating national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. The Dhauladhar Wildlife Sanctuary is one such measure. It was notified in 1994 and falls in the Bada Bhangal area of Kangra District in Himachal Pradesh. The area covered by this sanctuary also includes the "Gots", the monsoon pastures of many shepherds. The rules of the sanctuary do not permit the shepherds to graze their

flock within its boundaries. This is a major concern of the people who have pastures there because they are not being issued their monsoon permits and have also not been given any new pasture land. Most of the shepherds seemed vaguely aware of the sanctuary's existence.

This is the same place where the Malana Power Company Limited wants to set up a 200 MW hydro-electric project. They had applied for environmental clearance which was rejected in 2010, but this project is still due for consideration. If cleared, this will be right above the Bajoli Holi project. The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests expressed concern over the sanctioning of the project in the Supreme Court stating that it would be a huge risk and would lead to widespread pollution.

Thus on the one hand, the State is considering the sanctioning of a hydro-electric project in an area which falls within a sanctuary and on the other hand, they are excluding the shepherds from accessing this area, even though shepherds have been doing so for many decades. Thus if the shepherds constitute a threat to the environment, there is a contradiction if one believes that the project does not. Therefore the state needs to rethink what is important to conserve and protect the environment, which is so intimately linked to the life of the shepherds.

CONCLUSION

We have described the difficulties faced in nomadic migrations in a society with sedentarist assumptions. The distance between the state and shepherd, reinforced by difficulties in communicating information accurately, and the lack of knowledge about the institutions and processes of the state, result in a mismatch between their needs and state action. The struggle to maintain their usufruct rights against growing commoditization of land, of the ecosystem upon which they depend against infrastructural development and conservation practices that exclude them from it, and the uncertainty that results from so propelling them into alien ways of life, all mark their entry into the wider economy.

The effect on Gaddi youth is most telling in this regard. Products of the newly set-up schools under the ITDP in Chamba, the youth there are certain they no longer wish to follow the trying lifestyle of their fathers. Many attempt to enter the tourism industry in Himachal, with some even making the migration to Goa in the winters to continue it. (The Tribune, 24.04.13) However, the 11,000 applications for the 205 positions of Forest Guard falling vacant in 2013 indicate, at the very least, the preference for government employment, and probably also the level of educated unemployment in the State—since the educational qualification has recently been increased to Matriculation.

If Gaddi culture is so closely bound up with their profession, then the shift away from it would greatly affect their sense of identity and community. But Gaddis are now emerging as a political community based on the same cultural referents, replacing the older, occupational commonality that united them. One effect of this we have reported is the gap between Kangra and Chamba Gaddis, based on their proximity to the centers of political mobilization around Palampur.

Another is that while their mobilization has helped them influence government action on certain issues, such as wool prices and restrictions on grazing, other issues such as lack of public consent for the hydroelectric project have not been taken up.

These projects are a source of potential damage to the environment. Consequently, they are also harmful for the lives of the shepherds, who themselves are environmentally benign. They operate in a way so as to suit the seasonal crop cycles, as already mentioned, thus establishing a complementary relationship. Thus the claims made by some that their profession causes major

damage to the environment does not stand up to scrutiny. Even some of the forest officials agree that this is indeed so and no harm is being brought about by the shepherds.

For the State's part, the competing priorities to execute development projects and to conserve its precious natural resources leads to gaps in its handling of both. The shepherds, as a less visible community, are frequently under threat of slipping through these gaps. The State's policies can therefore be measured by their impact on those who are not best placed to take advantage of them. Conversely, they are also the best placed to help the government recognize what these gaps are, and what is required in order to bridge them. This gap is a result of the lack of information among shepherds regarding the policies of the State. This happens because the shepherds are continuously moving through the year and are thus not in one place long enough to know what, and whether, schemes are for their benefit. The only situation in which they do know is when one of the male members of the family stays at home.

For those shepherds for whom livelihood risks continue to be what they were, or worse—in terms of dependence on uncertain environmental conditions, threats from wild animals, infections and dangerous weeds, the deteriorating relationship with sedentary communities, and now thefts and threat to life—the question may arise of whether the old profession remains for the individual viable or important. And yet the life that results from abandoning it has its own grave risks, and is, worse still, largely unknown. The daily negotiations that they perform, then, are as much between these two competing perspectives, searching for a middle ground between them.

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