Every year, the nomadic Gujjar and Bakkarwal communities migrate to the upper reaches of the Kashmir valley in summer. Gujjars are buffalo herders and Bakkarwals are keepers of sheep and goats. They rear their animals, between high and low altitudes, in the Western Himalayas. The Bakkarwals saw turbulent times at the beginning of the year when an eight-year-old girl from their community was brutally raped and murdered in Kathua, Jammu. Though their fight for justice continues, the children of Bakarwals and Gujjars are now looking towards a brighter future where they won’t have to choose between their traditional occupation and education.

Ahead of the annual migration of nomadic Gujjars and Bakkarwal families this year, authorities in Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir made arrangements for over two dozen schools to move with them to ensure proper educational facilities for students.

A total of 25 schools having an enrolment of 801 students - 410 boys and 391 girls - moved with the migratory population.

“These schools were provided 45 teachers for ensuring education in higher reaches during the annual migration in Kashmir,” an official spokesman said. He said district development commissioner, Rajouri, Shahid Iqbal Choudhary finalized the plan at a meeting of senior officers from various departments and heads of migratory schools along with staff.

The annual migration of nomadic Gujjars and Bakkarwal families began end of April this year. Choudhary directed that books and uniform were also provided to students before the migration.

Apart from educational aids, the department also provided sports equipment and first aid kits for each migratory school.

A comprehensive plan for self-defence training was also discussed and finalized. The students have been provided scholarship by the Tribal Affairs Department, the spokesman said. He said the Chief Education Officer was directed to regularly monitor attendance in migratory schools during the period and it was impressed upon the heads of schools to hold mandatory parent-teacher meetings twice a month during the migration period.

“Ahead of the annual migration of nomadic Gujjars and Bakkarwal families this year, authorities in Rajouri district of Jammu and Kashmir made arrangements for over two dozen schools to move with them to ensure proper educational facilities for students.”
World Nomad Games

The World Nomad Games dubbed as the ‘Olympics for Nomads’ are the quintessence of nomadic spirit and strength. This year, over 2000 athletes and performers from 82 countries came together to celebrate and champion the global movement of ethno sports and culture.

The biennial games were held in the first week of September for the third time in the town of Cholpon Ata in Eastern Kyrgyzstan. Cholpon Ata lies on the Northern shore of the second largest saline lake Issyk-kul which means ‘warm lake’ because it never freezes even though surrounded by snowcapped peaks. This region is historically significant, Issyk-Kul Lake being a stopover on the Silk Road.

Kyrgystan is a mountainous country with little scope for agriculture. It is said that there was a time when all Kyrgyz were nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists, which changed with the Soviet era. One of the main purposes of the games is for the revival and preservation of the region’s nomadic culture.

The entire week was a grand spectacle of heroism, dexterity, and inexhaustible physical and mental agility. Each day was an experience bouncing across multiple venues and discovering the spirit of games. The ethno village set up in the meadows of Kyrchyn gorge (40 kms from Cholpon Ata) evokes special memories of beautiful horses, yaks, camel, eagles and falcons; innumerable theatrical, musical, and dance performances, men and women in colourful costumes randomly dancing and singing, musical instruments I have never seen; art installations of nomad tools and instruments, an ethno-bazaar for buying memories and so much more.

Kok Boru

Kok Boru is undeniably the highlight of the Games, and easily the most dangerous game I have ever seen. Insane actually! It combines elements of polo, football and rugby. Players on horses wrestle and jostle with their opponents to take possession of a headless, 30 kilogram fresh carcass of goat, which they then hold onto as they gallop towards the end of the field, with the hope of throwing it into a round goal the ‘taikazan’. It gets rough and ruthless; Kok Boru is definitely not for faint hearted. The winning team gets to eat the goat. It is not uncommon for wolves to attack herds belonging to nomadic shepherds. To protect their livestock, shepherds hunted wolves. It is believed that nomadic shepherds eventually developed Kok Boru (Blue Wolf) to pass the time while returning to camp with the prized dead wolf. Now the wolf is replaced with a headless carcass of a goat. Kok Boru is the cultural symbol of sport in Central Asia, and the national sport of Afghanistan where it is called Buzkashi (literally goat grabbing).

The Kyrgyz hospitality and generosity was at its best in the hundreds of yurts at the Kyrchyn gorge, offering a range of traditional food and delicacies. There was also a competition for the best decorated Yurt.

Musical performances at the games

It needs strength to lift the goat off the ground, hold it, and gallop towards the goal. Some of the players could not even pick it off the ground.

Monika Agarwal is a management graduate who has worked with various national, regional and global alliances on pastoralism.
We have always struggled to separate fat from milk, whether it is by the laborious churning of yogurt or by collecting small portions of malai. This struggle has inadvertently led to a far superior flavour.

By Aditya Raghavan

Malai ghee has a gentle fermented dairy flavour on a backbone of notes of toffee that come about by caramelisation of the residual sugars in malai. Remind them of ghar ka ghee.
Coping with the real world: Animal Intelligence versus Artificial Intelligence

By Ilse Köhler-Rollefson

A large proportion of humanity now spends much of its day in the virtual world, hooked onto computers or smartphones, answering emails, reading news in the internet, watching movies, or playing computer games. We press buttons instead of engaging in physical activity. In a way, our body has already become superfluous. But the next trend is just around the corner, or has already arrived: our brains are to be replaced by artificial intelligence. Robots, programmed by humans, are expected to take over not only many of our daily chores but also to be entrusted with buttons instead of engaging in physical activity. In movies, or playing computer games. We press onto computers or smartphones, answering else and provides additional benefits such as camel

“In pastoralist systems, the animals are respected partners, not just objects.”

India’s camel population is plummeting rapidly, down from over one million in the late 1980s to about 200,000 currently. This development is due to loss of its transport function and lack of appreciation for its food potential, among other factors. The endeavour by the Rajasthan government to save it by declaring the camel “state animal” only made the situation worse. Although there have been frequent announcement by government cooperatives about their intentions to support camel dairying, these plans still have to materialize. Because of the dire situation, the Kumbhalgarh micro-camel dairy was recently set up on the campus of Lohit Shakti Pashu Sansthan (LPPS) near Sadri in Rajasthan’s Pali district. It is operated by the social enterprise Camel Charisma Pvt. Ltd. and has received support from private donors in Germany and Australia to set up a state-of-the-art pasteurization and chilling facility. It ships pasteurized and frozen camel milk in 200 ml bottles, packed in ice, directly to end consumers. The camels of the associated Raika pastoralists are sustained exclusively on bio-diverse natural vegetation providing micro-nutrients absent from modern diets. The products are pure and traceable – of genetic resources, of production systems, of the ones that have, until now, ensured diversity of genetic resources, of production systems, of pastoralists are respected partners, not just objects.”

The Kumbhalgarh Camel Dairy

By Ilse Köhler-Rollefson

The first edition of the Living Lightly: Pastoralism in a Changing World conference took place in New Delhi in late 2016 on the sidelines of the Living Lightly exhibition. The second edition of the conference is scheduled for the 15th-16th February 2019, to be held in Pune, Maharashtra.

While the broad theme of the conference remains the same, we are inviting presentations by young scholars including advanced graduate student research, recent PhDs or fresh work by young faculty. We invite abstracts of papers from anywhere in the world, as long as the research itself has been carried out in India. Partial support for travel within the country can be provided.

The conference is a collaborative effort by Ambedkar University Delhi (http://www.aud.ac.in/index.html); Centre for Pastoralism (http://pastoralism.org.in); Institut de Recherche pour le developpement (https://en.idfr.fr); and Indian School of Business (www.isb.edu). Each of these institutions is represented by an individual on the organising committee, as listed below. Please reach out to any of us for clarifications.

Call for papers

Living Lightly: Pastoralism in a Changing World
Pune, India, February 15th-16th, 2019

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Abstracts may be submitted via https://goo.gl/q5nueV

Deadline: 10 December 2018.

Organising Committee:
Ashwini Chhabra, ISB (ashwini_chhabra@isb.edu)
Roht Negi, AUD (roht@aud.ac.in)
Vasant Saberwal, CIP (vasant@pastoralism.org.in)
Matthieu Salpeter, IRD (matthieu.salpeter@ird.fr)
Pastoralists may have delayed the formation of the Sahara desert by half a millennium

By Brooks Hays

According to a new climate model, the Sahara desert should have formed 500 years earlier than it did. The influence of hunter-gatherers and pastoralists may explain the delay in desertification.

The Sahara only became the desert it's known as today some 5,500 years ago. Some 8,000 years ago, the band stretching across North Africa was green, home to diverse vegetation and populations of hunter-gatherers. Changes in the tilt of Earth's orbital axis cause paths of seasonal monsoons in Africa to change, which could have accelerated the Sahara's last transition from grassland to desert, but the latest findings -- published this week in the journal Nature Communications -- suggest the opposite is true.

The possibility that humans could have delayed the region's transition to desert. “The fact that societies practicing ‘pastoralism’ persisted in this region for so long and invested both economically and ideologically in the local landscape, does not support the scenario of over-exploitation,” Brierley said. “Our study shows that increasing human population and sustainable pastoralism did not accelerate and may even have delayed the decline of the Green Sahara.”

Around 1,000 years before the Sahara turned to desert, the region experienced an increase in the number of pastoralists, nomadic or semi-nomadic cattle-herders.

Research suggests the Sahara’s herders were adept at adapting to environmental change and managing scarce natural resources.

“The spread of domestic animals across the Sahara occurred at a time of increasing climatic instability, and yet, these pastoralist populations thrived,” King’s College London researcher Katie Manning said. “It is likely that strategies used by contemporary traditional herders, such as seasonal movement and selective grazing, were also used by these early pastoralists, helping to maintain an otherwise deteriorating ecosystem.”

This story has been adapted from the article that appeared in The European Sting: https://europeansting.com/2018/8/23/pastoralists-delays-formation-sahara-desert-half-millennium/

With field schools in Kenya, FAO teaches techniques to combat drought

T

With field schools in Kenya, FAO teaches techniques to combat drought

The field schools, participants study each stage of feed production and preservation from preparing the land to planting seeds and whether to water by rain or irrigation – right up to grazing, and preserving and storing pasture seeds and hay bales.

The learning cycle takes four months to complete and is offered twice a year. Farmers are also taught the best ways to remove invasive weeds, notably “Prosopis spp,” which is accelerating the rate of degradation of rangeland ecosystems.

The field schools use comparative experimentation as a key learning method. For example, participants observe how two similarly planted plots treated in different ways develop over various stages. They also analyze and discuss innovative problem-solving techniques and explore new methods to improve breeding and animal husbandry practices.

“Future pastoral families, food security is improved and incomes are higher,” he added, concluding: “In short, communities have become a lot more resilient.”

Camel Wool Stoles

Stay warm and look chic at the same time this winter. They come in lovely colors and patterns that suit everyone’s style.

For more information, log on to www.camelwoolsa.com
The Brokpa of West Kameng and Tawang districts in Arunachal Pradesh are a community of reclusive herders of the Monpa tribe. They are nomadic, move around in fixed patterns, and live in the mountains at altitudes ranging from 9,000 to 15,000 feet. They migrate to lower areas during the long winters from October to April, and move to the higher ranges during the summer and rainy seasons, from May to September.

One morning in November 2016, I started on a journey to Thembang village in West Kameng. Thembang is located at an altitude of around 7,500 feet. It is an entirely Monpa village of some 60 occupied houses. The nearest town, Dirang, is 26 kilometres away.

The next day I went to Lagam, a winter settlement of a group of Brokpa. To reach Lagam, located at 8,100 feet, I walked for around 11 kilometres for more than eight hours through dense forest. When I reached at 6 p.m., Pem Tsering, a 27-year-old Brokpa herdsman, welcomed me with a warm smile.

The next day morning, I saw that Lagam is actually a tiny winter-time hamlet of Brokpa pastoralists. It has one small monastery. Around 40-45 people live here in 8 to 10 stone-and-bamboo houses with tin roofs. In November, the hamlet is full as the herders descend to this lower pastureland. From May to September, Lagam stays mostly empty as the young herders move out with their herds of yaks and horses to higher ground, such as Mago village. The elders usually stay back.

Mago, at 11,800 feet, is located along the disputed McMahon Line which demarcates northeast India and Tibet. To reach Mago in the summers, the Brokpa walk through mountain ranges and passes that are even higher – their route includes Lagam, Thungri, Chang La, Nyang, Potok, Lurthim, and then Mago.

Others can reach the area by road only from Tawang. Indian nationals from outside the region are allowed to stay here for just one night with special permission from the Indian Army. Because of the border dispute, even Brokpa who migrate to Mago have to carry government-issued identity cards.

The daily lives of Brokpa centre around simple rhythms. Their major source of income is yak. They collect its milk for cheese and butter, and sell these items in the local market. A barter system also exists within the community. “They exchange yak and milk products with the people staying in lowland areas, where agriculture is the prime occupation,” says Bapu Pema Wange, a Monpa from Thembang village, and a project officer with WWF-India’s Western Arunachal Landscape Programme. “We (his clan, the Bapus) barter trade with them; we exchange our maize, barley, buckwheat and dry red chilly for their butter, chap里斯 and yak meat. Basically, they depend on us for food and we depend on them for food.”

Later this year, by mid-October, the Brokpa will make the descent from their summer pasture. “We walk through the jungle, find resources for grazing and firewood from the jungle,” Pem says. “This jungle is our mother.”

A fire is always lit in the Brokpa kitchen. It helps them to stay warm during the harsh winters.

Old women generally do not go for grazing. They stay back in their villages. However, if needed they join their families to help them during summer season.

The Brokpa mostly eat rice (bought from markets at lower altitudes) and yak meat. They eat only a few vegetables like potatoes because the land here is not fertile enough to cultivate vegetables.
The Gold-Laden Shepherd and the Sacred Mountain
Directed by Rijidane

During a routine technical check before the screening of his film, The Gold-Laden Shepherd and the Sacred Mountain, at the Mumbai Film Festival, director Rijidane Janve realised there was something wrong with the projection. The visuals appeared darker than what he had originally created. This was during the third screening of the film at the recently concluded festival. Janve, a 2013 graduate from the National Institute of Design, who gradually veered towards filmmaking, had only two options to cancel the screening or go ahead with it as it is. He did not consider the first option at all, neither did he want to go ahead with the second option. Rather, he improvised—he reduced the temperature in the auditorium to an extent where it became slightly chilly to add an effect and elevate experience of the audience as they watched his Gaddi-dialect movie, set in the Cambal and Kangra hills of Himachal Pradesh.

Improvisation has been his mantra even during the making of the movie. Shooting in the hills came with its own challenges. There were some genuine problems, the most pressing one being the lack of resources like electricity to charge electronic gadgets. Carrying a generator to the high altitudes did not make sense because it would have come with its own cost and challenges. So, he turned to solar power. And then it rained, and the shoot had to be halted.

At the centre of the film is an elderly shepherd Arjun (Bhupali Arjun Pant) and his Nepali assistant (Lokendra Gurung). As much as the film is about the life of these two on the hills, focusing on their daily grind of taking the sheep and goats to graze and their banter, it also captures the folklore of the area. There is a plane crash in the region, followed by speculations of what may have happened to the people and the rumoured gold and silver the plane was loaded with. And then begins Arjun’s adventurous journey.

It was important for Janve to cast people from the area to bring out the simplistic elements in the story. While Lokendra, who organises trips in the area, was an easy find, it took him days to find the perfect person to fit the role of the shepherd Arjun. He had met almost every shepherd in the region, but could not find that one person in whom he could see his character. “The pastures where they take the herds to graze is up in the hills,” he says, “and quite daunting to climb those. Plus, most of these places are a day apart from each other. Every time we decided that we need to go looking for a shepherd, it meant organising an extensive trek. There were times, we returned from half the way to the village.”

Janve confesses, sitting at a café in the western suburbs of Mumbai amid the lead actors as they narrate the story from their point of view. “It was challenging to work with non-actors. But he couldn’t imagine characters being played by actors from elsewhere. ‘We wanted to retain the sense of the mountain and its people who are devoted to the mountains,’ he says. Since these non-actors were completely unaware of how a camera works, there would be times during the shoot that the actors started talking to each other, giving them instructions. ‘The spontaneity of actors, times, worked in the film’s advantage’, says Janve.

The director did not know the Gaddi dialect either. It was only because of familiarity to the area because he had done many treks earlier that he understood the language pretty well. "The genesis of the film happened long back when a friend, Akshay (also the writer of the film) and I were writing something totally different and looking for a story. This idea of going to the Gaddi villages, not ever thinking about making a film or about the people there. But we indulged in their stories and anecdotal experiences and walked about the ingrained violence, alcoholism and suicide of us are ever going to witness. He does not gloss over the ingrained violence, alcoholism and suicide which have plagued theEveny and other Siberian peoples for generations, especially the young men, but neither does he glorify nor wig his hands pitilessly over their tragedies. In fact he is discreet almost to the point of detachment about his own emotions, but the sad comment about missing his family at home in England. Occasionally I longed for him to cut loose just a bit and tell me how he was finding this exhilarating harsh experience, but the anthropologist in him was the day almost every time. The one occasion Vitebsky is challenged by an Eveny friend, who tells him ‘I don’t always like the way your people treat each other. It is quite daunting to climb those. Plus, most of these places are a day apart from each other. Every time we decided that we need to go looking for a shepherd, it meant organising an extensive trek. There were times, we returned from half the way to the village.’"

The article first appeared in The Week on the following link: https://www.theweek.in/features/society/2018/11/03/presenting-the-men-of-the-mountains.html

The Gold-Laden Shepherd and the Sacred Mountain, to film festivals, is still discovering his language of filmmaking by venturing into new genres. One of his next projects would be set in his home state, Rajasthan, close to Udaipur. “It is a psychological thriller, with a lot of local people acting,” he says. “But along with a few trained actors, too, this time,” he says.

Janve says, “The Gold-Laden Shepherd and the Sacred Mountain to film festivals, is still discovering his language of filmmaking by venturing into new genres. One of his next projects would be set in his home state, Rajasthan, close to Udaipur. “It is a psychological thriller, with a lot of local people acting,” he says. “But along with a few trained actors, too, this time,” he says. The Gold-Laden Shepherd and the Sacred Mountain, to film festivals, is still discovering his language of filmmaking by venturing into new genres. One of his next projects would be set in his home state, Rajasthan, close to Udaipur. “It is a psychological thriller, with a lot of local people acting,” he says. “But along with a few trained actors, too, this time,” he says. The Gold-Laden Shepherd and the Sacred Mountain, to film festivals, is still discovering his language of filmmaking by venturing into new genres. 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Did you know?

Nanda Gaoli is a pastoral community that keeps the Gaoli cattle and the Nagpuri buffalo. They herd their cattle in deep forests of Wardha district in the state of Maharashtra, India.

Herding in the forests comes with many challenges and threats faced by the community and their animals. Tiger attacks are especially common in the region. However, tiger attacks are not a new phenomenon but is just an occupational hazard for which, the Nanda Gaolis have depended on a centuries old tradition. They burn beehives of wild honey bees and feed the ashes, mixed with the fodder to their animals. The community believes that by doing so, whenever a tiger or any other wild animal attacks, the animals unite themselves to form a protective shield around the herder.

The bee hives are burnt just before the monsoons, so that the honey bees rebuild their hives in time to benefit from the monsoonal flower bloom.

Story by Sajal Kulkarni
Illustration by Tapas Upadhyay

Find them out!
How much do you know about breeds of domestic animals in India?

Clues!

1. Buffalo breed named after the grassland in Kutch.

2. Named after a famous lake in Orissa. Milk from the buffalo can last up to 3 days without refrigeration.

3. This breed of sheep came from Spain and is known to give the finest wool.

4. Imported cow breed known for giving up to 22 litres of milk in a day.

5. The exquisite pashmina shawls come from this goat.

6. Hybrid of a yak and domestic cattle, this breed is used in the regions of Spiti and Ladakh.

7. The only breed of black sheep found in India and is used for weaving Gongadi.

8. The breed of pig named after an island in the Indian Ocean.

9. This breed of buffalo is named after its herding tribe that resides in the Nilgiri mountains of Tamil Nadu.

10. First recognized Indian breed of donkey named after a district in Himachal Pradesh.

11. The only breed of camel that swims.