

Living Lightly: Journeys with Pastoralists

A Curated Exhibition of the Life and Livelihood of Pastoralists in India

1. Introduction: A Curated Exhibition and Conference

While pastoralism continues to provide a valid livelihood for millions of people, this livelihood is at a critical cross road and requires urgent attention, investment, legitimacy and appreciation. This requires a range of conversations amongst pastoralists themselves, between pastoralists and the external environment, and amongst a range of actors influencing the sphere of pastoralism.

It is in this context, that, for the first time in India, a curated exhibition on the land, lives and livelihoods of Pastoralists in India is proposed. The exhibition will capture the lives of Indian pastoralists - their remarkable history of mobility, the eco systems which nurture their life-worlds, their culture, science, art, spiritual moorings and the economics of herding. It will focus on their remarkably sustainable economies that exist completely in sync with their local environments, and highlight the ways in which these can be supported and improved. Even as discourses on climate change search for earnest shifts in lifestyles, and the growing urgency to re-evaluate the sustainability of our own livelihoods, it becomes ever more important to understand pastoralists, and their ability to live lightly on the land.

The exhibition is conceived and designed to eventually travel and cover stories and narratives of all the main pastoral communities of India. However, this educational multimedia exhibition will begin with the spotlight on the pastoralists of Kachchh, Gujarat (where live stocks outnumber humans and 20% of the population still survive on pastoralism), even as it looks at pastoralism across India. This microcosmic lens on one region will serve as a catalyst to gather other regional narratives on pastoralism, and generate an understanding on this livelihood as it travels into India. The exhibition is envisaged to travel nationally and internationally. The exhibition is planned for December 2-18, 2016. While the exhibition will be launched in Delhi (IGNCA) and will run for 17 days there, this is not a one-time exhibition, and will eventually cover all the pastoral regions of the country and encourage grass root initiatives linked with pastoral livelihoods.

The Exhibition is accompanied by an academic conference which brings together multi-disciplinary researchers from India and abroad to encourage and trigger a more sustained enquire into Indian pastoralism. This will also be followed by a separate stakeholder consultation which will bring together practitioners, researchers, pastoralists and policy makers together for the way forward in pastoralism.

2. Background and Context

India has 34 million pastoralists managing a livestock population of more than 50 million. Apart from producing milk, meat, leather, wool, this sector provides animals for traction and manure for agriculture. More than 200 communities and tribes comprising 6% of the population in India are engaged in varying forms of pastoralism. They belong to "ethnic groups with a strong traditional association with livestock keeping, where a substantial proportion of the group derive over 50% of household consumption from livestock products or their sale, and where over 90% of animal consumption is from natural pasture or browse,

and where households are responsible for the full cycle of livestock breeding” (Khurana 1999).

In India, nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoral communities of the arid, semi-arid and Himalayan regions have been prime contributors to the development of livestock breeds that have been the back bone of our dairying economy. These animals are bred by pastoralists and supplied to farming communities, who in turn grow fodder and earn their livelihood from selling milk to their dairies. Traditional practices of farmers inviting pastoralists to graze on the stubble of fallow farms and share fodder in lieu of fertilisers also continue across these regions. Pastoralists, particularly those keeping small ruminants (goats and sheep), also contribute significantly to the wool and meat economies.

Pastoralism has, in fact, existed for millennia. It has coexisted with many other human strategies for capturing Earth’s primary productivity. In this coexistence, pastoralists have developed deep synergies with agriculture and contributed to the diversification of production activities, while at the same time evolving and maintaining distinct cultural expressions. Mobility of pastoralists is an important adaptive response – within the context of rural livelihoods and climate variability, the ability to move across the landscape provides insurance against risks spread across space, by negotiating access to forage and water resources distributed across a large landscape.

However, the science, economic efficiency and potential of pastoralism as a resilient and sustainable livelihood has been hugely underestimated and ignored. And pastoralists are accustomed to being undermined. Conventional wisdom has long argued that pastoralists disrupt the arid/resource scarce environments they reside in by overgrazing. Considered to lead ‘primitive’ lifestyles, pastoralists are perceived to be barriers within the progressive corridors of development populated by settled or landed communities. Consequently, policy making for pastoralists' access to grazing paths as well as primary services (such as health and education) has also not been adequately aligned to their mobile lifestyles.

In India, in recent times the limitations of modern modes of production, and the growing vulnerability of intensive agriculture in the context of climate variability and high carbon emissions, is bringing back attention on pastoralism's resilience and contribution to the world. Pastoralism offers a space of hope, an area of opportunity, where livelihood opportunities could be created without increasing pressure on degraded ecosystems or emitting more greenhouse gases. The immense variety of relationships between pastoralism, agriculture, water and land use, provides avenues for identifying synergies at the intersection of the food-water-energy nexus, and enable more efficient flows of nutrients, income, and materials (e.g. wool and meat). Also, the internal social structures that pastoral societies have evolved, through elaborate rituals and artistic expressions, successful strategy for social resilience against great odds.

If public policies were to be designed to support the synergies between pastoralism and agriculture, it is possible to envision low-carbon rural development strategies where pastoralists contribute a fair share. The future of pastoralism, thus depends on the ecological restoration and sustainable utilisation of rangelands, the improvement of livestock productivity from traditional breeds, and the resolution of resource conflicts in ways that facilitate the integration of pastoralism, agriculture and silviculture.

This proposal is a timely effort to generate a better understanding of the potential of pastoralism, draw attention to the challenges it faces, encourage support for it at all levels, and enable an informed engagement with pastoralists by different sections of our society.

3. Project Vision, Aims and Objectives

The overall vision for the exhibition is to highlight the pastoralist livelihood and its unique potential, to create avenues not only for wider understanding of this way of life, but also new paths through which pastoralist livelihoods can be supported and promoted.

There are a number of questions that demand a sustained enquiry and closer look at pastoralists in India. Such as how can we better understand the evolving nature of the pastoralists' cultural identity? How do pastoralists adapt to changing moisture regimes? What does 'home' mean to these guardians of the environment whose notions of movement and mobility defy our own allegiance to 'attachments'? What is the emerging reality of these communities who live with multiple inequalities and constantly evolve strategies to validate themselves in a society that finds it difficult to comprehend the choices they make? What are the multiple and invisible way in which our lives are touched by the pastoralists? Why is pastoralism resilient in the face of climate change? And what would our future be were we to further neglect this livelihood?

By integrating the input of a range of stakeholders, the project aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Enable a significant engagement and meaningful discourse on the relevance of herders and herding for the sustainability of this livelihood, sustenance of our environment, and governance of our biotic resources.
2. Provide centrality to the emerging discourse on pastoralism, the Commons, and critical aspects of their livestock, natural resources, life and livelihood.
3. Create an expressive and educative platform for the pastoral people by which they 'speak' to decision makers, the state, civil society, citizens, particularly students from schools and universities, through this exhibition.
4. Highlight the trials and triumphs, challenges and co-existences of pastoral life in India.
5. Generate an incremental and expanding narrative on the past, present and future of pastoralism in India. The exhibition, as it travels, will invite and integrate voices and stories of other pastoral and herding communities, from other ecological terrains of India.
6. Through a process of cultural mapping, unfold the rich tapestry of their cultural identity - the journeys, experiences, knowledge systems, and skills of indigenous herders and breeders - through sound, word, image and objects.

4. Exhibition Content

Encompassing a long history of mobility and indigenous practices, the exhibition will symbolically recreate the landscape of the *Maldharis* of Kachchh, and through that, the life-world that pastoralists in various regions of India inhabit. This will be achieved by following several trails through stories:

- The histories of their movement across geographies – from fully nomadic, to seasonal nomadism, to village based pastoralism, to transhumant settlements.
- The range of traditional resource management practices which continue to exist, but not recognized as sustainable wisdom/knowledge and practice for the future.
- Thriving practices of breeding, and conservation of animal breeds, seeds and grasses that are embedded in their intimate relationship with animals.
- Disturbed migratory routes and nomadic trails as *Maldharis* are displaced by expanding developmental infrastructure.
- The evolved forms and systems of local governance of the grasslands.
- The poetry, music, art and craft that bind the communities together.
- The visible and invisible knowledge, voices and vision of women pastoralists, and their integration in the policy context.
- The sensible economics of nomadic pastoralists and why it transits into sedentary settlements and lifestyles.
- Rich stories of interdependencies and relationships between *Maldharis* and farmers.
- The spiritual faith and world-view of the *Maldharis*

The warp and weft which will lend this project its texture, will be the poetry, music, art and craft of the *Maldharis*. Their lightness of being resonates in poetic texts across the grasslands of Kachchh. The evocative poetry of Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai, the Sufi of Sindh, and his soulful offering of poems called Shah Ji Risalo is revered and sung in every home of the *sindh Maldharis*. Music has always roamed the pastures with *Maldharis* and their animals, and they give expression to the fluidity of their syncretic lives through a rich range of musical forms – instrumental and vocal – such as Bhets, Kafis, Mauluds, Bhajans, Vae, Surando, Jodiya Pawa (a dual flute) etc, while the Dastaans (stories) capture the art of storytelling through song.

Kutch is host to a continuum of crafting traditions and pastoral interdependencies. Myriad herding communities from various parts of Central Asia, Afghanistan and Persia migrated to the grasslands of Kachchh, and into the Himalayan terrains. They brought with them the skills and semiotics of colour, craft, dyes, yarns, embroidery skills, techniques, material, taste, embellishments, calligraphy, and crafted products from their daily life. They brought some when they migrated, and some evolved, as they do even today. All of which signify a continuum of craft and pastoral interdependencies.

Thus, through a fusion of testimonies, ethnographic material, archives, poetic forms, music, storytelling, crafts, material, crafted narratives on quilts, (rallees as they are called), film and performance – the pastoralists shall speak.

5. Exhibition Core Components

5.1 Audio Visual Narratives

The exhibition is built around audio visual narratives and tactile exhibits on the life world of pastoralists, the pastoral ecosystems, their indigenous knowledge systems, responses to climatic variabilities, their migratory trails, economy, the science and art of indigenous livestock breeding. This will be the heart of the exhibition which unfolds the stories of pastoralists.

5.2 Music and Poetry

The exhibition will unravel the emotional and spiritual world of pastoralism through its poetic narratives. Some of the most evocative folk music and poetry has sprouted from the pasturelands of our country; with pastoralists expressing their love and entwined relationship with the grasses, shrubs, rain, animals as they roam the land in search of food and water. Pastoralists have also emoted through a range of musical instruments - especially wind instruments. The music traditions of the herding communities and poetic renderings have been archived for the exhibition, and curated as a special music and poetry installation. These will also be embedded in the overall content of the exhibition. The curators will identify musicians and artistes whose musical renderings can bring alive, the physical, emotional and spiritual life worlds of the pastoralists. The curators for this section will be Shabnam Virmani and Vipul Rikhi - musicians, archivists and curators of folk music and mystic poetry traditions in India.

We will also curate a live presentation/performance of artistes who would represent the plural pastoral forms of music during the exhibition.

5.3 Board Game Installation

Fields of View, an organization based in Bangalore has been commissioned to research pastoral systems and develop a game installation that presents the complexities of pastoral systems to its players. This game will be designed so that it can be adapted into a physical board game. The game will draw on the multiple relationships pastoralists share with their eco system, other livelihoods, other pastoral regions and a range of stakeholders, including the State. The core objective of the game would be to engage exhibition visitors/participants so that they can engage with the values of pastoralism and life of pastoralists. It will focus on the economic and trade relationships within pastoral communities as well as between pastoral and other communities. Fields of View will use data, research and stories of pastoralists from all the pastoral regions of India - the Himalayas, semi-arid western Indian regions, the Deccan plateau and the plains of India. Fields of View will conceptualize the game based on their own research and inputs from experts. Sahjeevan will be responsible for making relevant information available and providing knowledge support. Field of View will also consider the exhibition design team's inputs for developing the installation, and the graphics for the game.

5.4 Dastaangoi

The exhibition will have a live performance of 'Dastaangoi' - an ancient form of storytelling from Persia which was widely prevalent in India till 200 years ago. It has been revived in India since a decade with only 12 practitioners of the art in the Country. The Dastaangoi now expresses contemporary themes and issues through the art of storytelling. Ankit Chatham, a well-known Dastaangoi artiste, has been contracted to research, develop and

write a 'daastan' that draws on the history, folklore, and oral traditions of the pastoralists. The story will, in particular, explore the dynamics of movement and sedentarization amongst pastoralists in general, and India in particular. In this regard, it will capture the dynamics between these two vastly different world-views of mobility and sedentarization - of belonging to the commons, versus the idea of land belonging to individuals. The comic dissonance of these world-views, and the serious consequences for the ecology and culture of pastoralists will find satirical utterance through the Dastaangoi performances. There will be 6 performances during the exhibition period.

5.6 Craft Narratives

The craft narrative will trace the social and economic relationships between the herding and artisan communities. It will look at a range of crafts in Kachchh, with special focus on the following.

- Hataar – the system of patronage between the Muslim *Maldharis* of Banni and the Hindu Meghwal leather artisans – it's persistence as a social relationship despite the latter community shifting out of their traditional livelihood.
- The links between potters and *Maldharis*. The potters made a range of vessels for different milk products, each with a different use, highlighting the centrality of milk to *Maldhari* life and livelihood. In the Dhebaria Rabari community, the relationship between the potters and *Maldharis*, was unique because it exists between the women rather than the men.
- Copper bells as indicative of a very live trade relationship – the highest quality is still sold to *Maldharis*. It is interesting to consider why this is – each *Maldhari* tunes his bells to a particular sound. Navigating grazing lands is possible through sound, and it is the sound of a bell that keeps a herd in check and tells a *Maldhari* when an animal is lost.
- The dissolving ties between the *Maldharis* and block printing Khatri community. Whereas the *Maldharis* once bought their ajrakh in Kachchh, today they source it from Sindh. The Khatris in turn have shifted their focus to the expanding outside market
- The slow return to use of local wool by local weavers, who have used yarn sourced from outside for many years. In the past, weavers and Rabaris existed in a neat closed loop economy, while today this once clean link is beset by middlemen. Also, where the Rabaris were once patrons of the weavers, the economic balance has now shifted in the weavers favour- the economics of the value chain will be analysed and presented
- Embroidery panels: Women embroidery artisans from pastoral communities are creating embroidered panels that reflect the natural environments of camel herding communities of Kachchh. The panels will draw on the resource maps, and on the experiences and natural environments of the embroidery artisans engaged in the project. Qasab, the embroidery women's producer company will be responsible for this

This section has been curated by Carole Douglas, art and craft curator from Australia with over 15 years' experience working with the crafts and artisans of Kutch.

5.7 Artistes Celebrating Pastoralism

This section will see a range of artistes - photographers, film makers and a painter - who have captured the changing world and landscapes of pastoralism through their art, their lens, their gaze. This section invites the visitor to many pastoral communities in the world who live lightly on the land; who today also struggle to do so. These artistes will walk us through geographies which continue to conserve and nurture pastoral practices even as pastoralists lurch between the practicalities and seeming comforts of a globalised world and the diminishing returns of their more sustaining livelihood.

A) Photo Essays

The following photographers have been contacted and they have agreed to let their work be curated and displayed in the exhibition:

- Kalyan Varma (essay on Dhangars)
- Michael Benanav, US (essay on Van Gujjars)
- Cristina Nobel, UK (On Gaddis)
- Photographers from Ladakh
- Ishaan Raghunandan (Kutch)

B) Sketches

The Australian High Commission has sponsored Jo Bertini to exhibit some of her art works on camel herding. Jo is an artist on the move - she has been living and moving amidst camels for the last two decades. Her work in Rajasthan and Kutch will be exhibited here.

C) Film Screenings

Sanjay Barnala, from the Srishti School of Design, Art and Technology, Bangalore will curate a film festival on pastoralism during the exhibition. The selected films - national and international - will show works of filmmakers who have investigated the culture, livelihood, and science of pastoralism through the lenses of their film cameras; and more films are being added to the list. This section will be managed by Srishti school of design.

5.8 Talks

During the 17 days of the exhibition, talks on different aspects of pastoralism will be organized. Two talks will accompany the photo exhibition. These will be by -

- Talk by Kalyan Varma on his experiences with Dhangars
- Talk by Micheal Benanav (on Van Gujjars)
- Talk by Mr. G B Mukherjee, whose book on pastoralism 'Shrinking Landscapes, Fading Lifestyles' will be launched in the inaugural of the stakeholder consultation.

5.9 Craft Store

As buyers of handicrafts we have no inkling of the gifts we receive from the pastoral world! Many of our handmade craft traditions have emerged from the indigenous livestock breeds that are herded and bred by pastoralists, or have been drawn from the material cultures of pastoralists. Our craft consumption and appreciation is intimately connected to the Eco system, breeds and skills of the pastoralists. This space in the exhibition will enable buyers to connect with the life style, life world and eco system of the pastoralists through the craft product. The pastoral bazaar will have products from different pastoral regions of India. The craft store will have products that draw on traditional *Maldhari* products, textiles, and ways of production. This range of products is aimed at the new age *Maldhari* and being

developed in Kutch by a team of designers including renowned designers Archana Shah of Bandhej and Jogi Panghaal. Additionally, this range will be developed as a differentiated product line by Khamir craft society, and look to revive traditional materials such as desi wool, camel hair weaving techniques such as hand spinning, and the herder-weaver interrelationships. This range will particularly add to the potential of camel hair weaving in Kutch and Rajasthan.

5.10 Pastoral Food

Food is one of the most visible and accessible elements of any culture. Cuisines and food habits are a result of an interplay between dietary requirements and availability of resources. The exhibition, through food workshops and a pastoral food store aims to highlight the potential of pastoral food, especially camel milk which is rich in medicinal properties, and is yet ignored due to the lack of recognition from FSAI. The food space in the exhibition will also put the spotlight on the information relating to these pastoral products and its market potential. The following, specifically, have been planned:

1. Camel cheese-making workshops: Anne Bruntse, a Camel cheese making expert based in Kenya has agreed to conduct a series of workshops for visitors within the exhibition space. LPPS from Rajasthan will organise the range of products made from camel milk.
2. Thali from Kutch and 'Mawa' from Banni – Mawa, a very popular dessert in Kutch, will be sold as a part of a *Maldhari* thali and also separately. The thali itself will have typical *Maldhari* food and will be available during lunch and dinner times
3. Camel milk dessert bar - ice cream, cheesecake, *kulfi*, camel milk chocolates will be available for sale.
4. Cheeseburgers and sandwiches - cheese from camel, yak, sheep and buffalo with variety of breads

5.11 Beginner's Book

This is an illustrated book which will bring out the essence of pastoralism - the varied ecosystems it inhabits, its evolution through time and ages, the livelihood practices, the cultural world of pastoralists, and its economic significance, the book shall also explain different forms of such systems as they exist in India and overseas. Sarita Sundar, a researcher and graphic artist, is developing the textual & visual content for a beginner's book on pastoralism. Arvind Lodaya, a design educator will work with her in designing the book. An illustrator will also be hired to assist Sarita. This book will be launched in the exhibition.

5.12 Promotions

One of the objectives of the exhibition is to unlock the world of pastoralism in India for young hearts and minds. The youth, for whom climate change is a very palpable concern, and for whom there is a growing interest in the conservation of our natural and cultural resources, an exposure to the resilience, practices and unique world views of nomadic pastoralism can nurture an alternate vision of coexistence. Thus, Flow India, an organization which works with schools is being commissioned to deliver ten 3 hour workshops which will introduce school students and young adults (13-16 years) to the subject of pastoralism and inspire them to engage deeply with the subject. Flow India will leverage their networks to ensure that each workshop has a minimum participation of 25

students/young adults. While some of the workshops will be conducted at IGNCA, which is the events of the exhibition, the preliminary workshops will be held at Flow India's partner institutions (schools).

Modules will be customized according to participant age group. Each module will weave narratives that demonstrate the interrelationships of the science and economics of pastoralism with our immediate environment, climate change, life products etc.

Social media channels will also be used to promote the exhibition and connect to audiences. The social media sites will aim to both introduce the visitors on the subject of pastoralism as well as leave hooks that draw them into the exhibition space to enable a deeper engagement with the wonders of the pastorals worlds.

Branding and Graphics

Consistent and well thought branding is crucial to the exhibition's success in communicating its core philosophy and its objectives. Arvind Lodaya, a noted design Educator, and Smriti Chanchani, an independent graphic designer and visual strategist based in Bangalore, will lead the branding and the graphic design activities. The Branding and graphics team will design exhibition and conference logos, official letterheads, websites, ID cards, banners, signages, Press-kits, promotional posters and handouts, conference kit, and items for sale (t-shirts, bags, stationery etc.)

6. Exhibition Side Events

6.1 Stakeholder Consultation

For the first time, a national stakeholder consultation will be organized to accompany the exhibition. The consultation will bring together practitioners, policy makers, academicians and pastoralists to look at the way forward for pastoralism in India. The consultation will cover discussion on four critical aspects which carry the potential to transform the potential of pastoralism - Conservation of indigenous livestock breeds, Conservation and development of the Commons, Facilitation of bio-cultural protocols with pastoral communities, and Livestock health. The consultation will be anchored by the Rain-fed Livestock Network and Kamal Kishore the lead co-ordinator.

6.2 Conference

A three-day academic conference is being organized to initiate a discourse, share existing research and forge new directions for multi-disciplinary research on pastoralism in India. The announcement note, which has been embedded below, gives details of the conference.



[Living Lightly Conference Announcement.pdf](#)

6.3 Round-Tables

The exhibition seeks to create a more informed engagement with pastoralism with university students. Interactive spaces in the form of round-tables will be offered to Universities or interested institutions in the Country. Department of Planning, CEPT, Ahmedabad has requested for a round table on 'Mapping Movements'. This will be open to select architecture/planning students from the Country. Discussion are ongoing with the Centre for Social Justice for a round table on IPRs and indigenous knowledge Systems of

Pastoralists, and Ambedkar University, Department of Social Design for a possible workshop/round table.

7. Project Holder, Curators and Partners

This multi curated exhibition has been conceived by Sushma Iyengar who is the lead curator of a multi curatorial team comprising Ms. Carole Douglas (Sydney based artist and curator of crafts), Shabnam Virmani (filmmaker, singer and curator of mystic poetry and music), Ankit Chadha (Daastangoi Artiste), and herself (development educator). The exhibition design will be developed and executed by Delhi based Design Habit led by Mr. Amardeep Behl, well known exhibition designer.

This project holder is Sahjeevan, a Kutch based organization working on land based livelihoods and management of natural resource since its inception in 1991. Sahjeevan has worked closely with pastoralists in Kachchh for many years, piloting a number of projects aimed at reviving the livestock economy here. They have been instrumental in organizing the pastoralists and livestock breeder associations of the district, and has been instrumental in the research and recognition of the unique livestock breeds in the region. Sahjeevan is involved in supporting different States of India in identifying and conserving the animal breed species.

Partners: This project will draw upon multiple partners and sponsors. We seek significant partners who can contribute towards the costs to this project while also helping shape the policy discourse and investment into this sector.

8. Audiences

The exhibition and accompanying events will initiate conversations amongst pastoral communities in rural areas – primarily in India, but also in other parts of the world - especially those with robust traditions of herding, pastoralism and livestock breeding. It is hoped that national and global networks of pastoralist communities will enable other pastoralists to access the exhibition and exhibits, and serve as a catalyst to kick starting specific discourses surrounding the commons, common property resources, biodiversity protocols and the rights of pastoralists.

The project is intended for access by student communities within the country, and will bring in students from schools and universities while parts of it will also travel into university spaces. Opportunities will be created and/or capitalised wherein policy makers at the State or National level can view the exhibition alongside members and institutions of civil society. The exhibition will also tour traditional exhibition spaces such as museums and galleries for wider viewership and citizen access.

The exhibition, conference, and stakeholder consultation is planned for December 2016, and an attempt is being made to ensure a maximum of geographic, institutional and thematic diversity in those participating in both events. Thus, it is expected that experiences will be presented from agro-pastoralist systems across the country, including Rajasthan, Orissa, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, the Himalayan region; there is also a hope that individuals from a range of institutional backgrounds – academics, policy makers, practitioners and pastoralist communities – and a range of thematic perspectives -- will participate in the exhibition and stakeholder discussions.