

Commission on Nomadic Peoples

“Transhuman Pastoralism in Northern India: The Gujar Case”

Pernille Gooch

Nomadic Peoples, Number 30, 1992

The Commission on Nomadic Peoples of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) is collaborating with the Ford Foundation to digitize, preserve and extend access to the journal of *Nomadic Peoples*. For more information regarding the journal *Nomadic Peoples* visit the Commission on Nomadic Peoples website at www.nomadicpeoples.info and the Berghahn Books website at www.berghahnbooks.com

Transhumant Pastoralism in Northern India: The Gujar Case

Pernille Gooch

The pastoral Gujar of northern India practise transhumance and migrate with their households and livestock between summer and winter pastures. The basis of their economic activities is buffalo herds and they are specialised producers of dairy products which are sold in local towns. The Gujar do not themselves own any land and do not practise agriculture, and are therefore dependent upon access to state forests where they live for most of the year. Their lifestyle has come into collision with the state through the regulation of the traditional use of Indian forests. This has meant a remarkable impoverishment for the Gujar who are rapidly losing their traditional pasture land and falling into debt. Their position as outsiders in Indian society is putting a lot of pressure on their traditional society and internal solidarity.

In the Himalayan region of the provinces of Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh in northern India live groups of Muslim Gujar that have persisted as pastoral nomads to the present day. The majority of them are still performing the annual cycle of transhumance, migrating between winter pastures in the foothills and summer grazing areas in the upper ranges of the Himalayas. As is the case for most pastoral nomadic communities in the world, it is a lifestyle that is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain as the context in which they perform their traditional pastoral management is rapidly changing. Salzman (1988:1585) points out that many pastoral "castes" in India have been able to take advantage of attractive socio-economic changes in society. One pastoral community that, for a variety of reasons, has not been able to take advantage of an expanding market for its produce, is the group of pastoral Gujar who have their winter camps in the forests of western Uttar Pradesh. They have become caught up in modern development; a development which threatens their survival without offering them any practical opportunities for integration.

Even during the British colonial rule, the vast Himalayan forests, which form the foundation for the Gujar's pastoralism, were

seen as a potential resource for large-scale logging enterprise, and as a base for obtaining revenues from local people who used the forests. Forest management started during the period of colonial rule and has continued after independence. The Indian state has a growing interest both in the commercial use of the Himalayan forests and in their conservation. Other features of "development" which have negatively affected the pastoral Gujar include the penetration of the market economy, competition with other—and often much stronger—interest groups over diminishing resources of pasture and fodder, and environmental changes. The pastoral Gujar are people without fixed addresses; therefore they are not registered anywhere as Indian citizens and so do not have any voting rights, which adds to their vulnerable position in Indian society.

All this has left the pastoral Gujar with a feeling of powerlessness over their own existence; they feel that their lives in the forest are now empty, and they are getting increasingly ready to settle down. But while the Gujar are quite aware of the changing world and willing to adapt, they find themselves caught in a system where there is little possibility of changing the present state of affairs, no viable ways out of the

tangle. On one side the authorities are blaming the Gujars for not being willing to participate in development and give up their nomadic habits but at the same time they are not offering them any practical alternative. On the other side the Gujars claim that they are indeed willing to give up nomadism if they are provided with an alternative which will allow them to survive and to continue with their traditional milk business, something which so far has not been forthcoming. All offers of "development" have incorporated giving up pastoralism and trying to survive on tiny plots of marginal, agricultural land.

What so far has made it possible for the Gujars to continue as pastoralists and keep their identity and community intact is to a great extent their strong internal social solidarity. This solidarity has been facilitated by the absence of more serious forms of economic differences, even large herds may be struck by disease and diminished within a short period, and the fact that the whole community, because of endogamy, is enmeshed in a kinship network. But even this solidarity shows signs of slowly breaking up as the market economy with its possibilities of accumulating cash interferes with a traditional system in which resources are circulated within the community.

These Gujars are known to outsiders under different names; as *dudh* (milk) Gujars (Negi 1982:43) because they make a living from selling milk and milk products or as *Jammuwallah* (people from Jammu) Gujars as they came originally from Jammu in search for pasture for their herds. A third name used for them is *bana* (forest) Gujars (Hasan 1986:119) because they are forest dwellers. The pastoral Gujars themselves simply use the name *Gujjar*, *hamare Gujjar ya Gujjari* (we Gujjars, men and women).

The base for the economic activities of the pastoral Gujars is their herds of buffalo which they utilize for milk production. The economic unit is the camp (*dehra*) and each herd is managed by an individual family. The Gujars practise an intensive form of cattle-rearing involving all members of the

family. For them the milk or milk products represent not an item mainly for subsistence but a money value in rupees and paises or a barter value. The milk is sold to middlemen who distribute it to markets in local towns. The price paid to the Gujars for the milk is below the market value, but apart from buying the milk the middlemen give loans to the Gujars with future milk deliveries as security. This means that the Gujars get caught in a debt trap and they are not in a position to demand more money or change to other forms of milk distribution. Apart from buffalo some families also keep a few cows or goats but these play a minor role in the economy.

The pastoral Gujars are specialised producers of dairy products and in this context the Gujar community should be seen, not as an isolated society, but as an integrated and specialised part of Indian society or even as a professional "caste" in the Hindu sense of the word. They are the milkmen. In the traditional economy, the Gujars have lived in a form of symbiosis with the surrounding society, but when it comes to culture and social organization they have maintained an identity of their own. Conflicts with sedentary populations have been frequent and the Gujars have mainly kept to the interior of the forests except when migrations have forced them to venture out.

In the local system of division of labour, the pastoral Gujars utilized a "niche" as producers of milk and dairy products on marginal lands. In this they were complementing agricultural activities, which could be concentrated on producing crops for human consumption. In the larger towns at the foot of the Himalayas, there is now a growing market for milk products. Here, an expanding middle class that can afford to buy milk, is developing new patterns of consumption. However, the Gujars' part in milk production in the area is declining as new entrepreneurs enter the scene and start dairying enterprises utilizing capital and technology in a way that is far beyond the power of the pastoralists. The new ways of dairying may be seen as part of "Operation

Flood", the Indian official programme for dairy development (George, 1985).

The Gujars are still very important as producers of dairy products in the mountains during summers. Their stay coincides with the most labour intensive period in the area and they play an important role in providing milk for seasonal labourers. But here as well a tendency can be noticed for other groups to start dairying enterprises that can provide milk all the year round.

Pastoralism with milch buffalo is for these Gujars both a business—and as yet the only business they have—and a lifestyle. The buffalo have a symbolic and an emotional value, as well as a value for production and accumulation of wealth. They are used as *Mehr*, as gifts at circumcisions and to married daughters. Traditionally they have also been used as bridewealth. The buffalo that the households now keep are descendants of stock kept by their ancestors and the animals are considered as friends with histories and personalities. Female buffalo are kept until they die of old age, bulls are sold as draught animals. The animals are never slaughtered. The Gujars represent a traditional, local form of milk production and herd management, a combination of lifestyle and production. Under present circumstances they can be seen to be the losers in the development process.

Pastoralism in the State Forest

The foundation for the livestock rearing of the pastoral Gujars, as for all pastoralists, is the availability of pasture or other natural sources of fodder. As they do not themselves own any land and do not practise agriculture, the Gujars are completely dependent upon access to state forests.

In earlier times the Gujars had no difficulties in utilizing the forest space. Before the advent of the British the only regulation of peoples' rights over the forest and its produce was by custom, but during the latter part of the colonial period (from the second half of the 19th century onwards) the status of the Indian forests changed. The con-

struction of the huge railway network in India demanded a large amount of timber and the extraction of this caused serious depletion of Indian forests. To administer the use of the forest and secure the supply of timber, the Indian Forest Department was started in 1864, and in 1878 a new Forest Act was made which regulated the traditional use of the Indian forests. From being marginal areas used mainly by local people, jungle and forest became a national asset and as such its use was regulated and controlled by a state monopoly (Guha, 1989:37f.).

For the pastoral Gujars this meant that customary rights to the forest and its products became legalized in the form of grazing and lopping rights. While earlier they roamed around freely, they were now given the use of designated parts of the forest. Grazing and lopping rights were given to individual heads of households, instead of to whole communities, an important strategy on the part of the colonial power. As Guha writes in his study of ecological change and peasant resistance in the Himalayas (*ibid.*:55), this transition from collective to individual use of the forest meant that the link between humans and forests was effectively broken and it created a feeling of estrangement between nature, now under the power of the state, and the people living in and using this nature for their daily subsistence. This was true for the pastoral Gujars as well as for the hill peasants described by Guha. The permits for the winter pastures in the foothills were given to the Gujars directly by the colonial power through its Forest Department, while the rights for grazing in the upper ranges were given by the rajas of the hill states. For the rajas the Gujars provided important services in the forest. With their intimate knowledge of the forest they could act as guides and they could also supply British travellers with milk and milk products, a service which the local landlords were requested to provide.

The agreements made during British rule have regulated the access to the forest. The Gujars say, "we were given our land by the British. It was they who made us "settle

down". By the term "settle down" the Gujars refer to their camps in the winter quarters, for they still see their winter grazing land in the foothills as their "family land", while in the summer ranges they are just utilizing their grazing rights, and do not feel that the land belongs to them.

Collective resource control is the norm among pastoralists and counterbalances individual management of livestock (Gefu and Gilles, 1990:37). In the case of the Gujars, the resources used by the pastoral community are controlled and regulated by the state according to the forest code, while the use of the land is individualized, given as permits to individual heads of household, and restricted to designated areas. In this way mobility, one of the most important factors in herd management has been severely restrained. The confinement of herds to restricted areas managed by individuals is more likely to result in overgrazing and does not provide the same scope for efficient land use as collective ownership or management where herds can be moved according to immediate needs. In this way the Gujars have lost important means for the strategic use of herd mobility. It will be shown below that another important tool in the pastoral management has been lost as well, that of choice of the time for migration according to the availability of fodder.

According to the agreement which the Gujars have with the forest authorities they are allowed to lop the smaller tree branches for feeding their buffalo, they can use the grass for fodder, they can take water and dry wood for their fires and they are also allowed to erect temporary shelters for themselves and their animals. They are not allowed to grow any crops apart from small kitchen gardens, erect permanent houses or extract forest products for sale. They are mainly vegetarians and do not hunt. The Gujars are the only people to have their dwelling places in the forests, but local people from adjacent villages possess certain stipulated rights to the forests as well. They have rights to graze their animals, fetch firewood and to fetch leaves and grass for

fodder, building materials and ropemaking. This multiple use of a shrinking resource gives rise to conflicts between the villagers, who see themselves as part of the permanent settlement of the region, and the Gujars whom they see as strangers and intruders. Besides this use of the forest by local people a large amount of forest produce is taken out by entrepreneurs and sold at national level.

The representatives of the state with whom the Gujars mainly deal are the foresters, especially officials of the lowest level such as the forest guards. There is a great deal of antagonism between the Gujars and these representatives of decisions made at higher levels, decisions with tangible daily consequences for the lives of the forest-dwelling Gujars. The Gujars who have been using the forests for generations are now considered the "enemies" of trees. This epithet comes from the lopping of trees for winter fodder and the fact that the buffalo trample up the ground during movements and so are supposed to inflict erosion. The Gujars on their side lament the fact that the Forest Department limit their daily use of the forest with, what they feel, are suffocating regulations. The Gujars see the forest as a free commodity, a gift from Allah which does not belong to anybody in particular, and they have difficulties understanding why its use should be regulated and codified. The latter is a great problem because the interpretation of the forest codes is made entirely according to the whims of the forest officials with whom the Gujars have their daily encounters. The Gujars do not go to school and cannot read so they are not able to consult the original documents to obtain a correct reading of the rules. Consequently the regulations are used in a very arbitrary way and fines of varied sums may be levied for a variation of practices. This adds to the Gujars' feeling of powerlessness and alienation. The fact that it is individual Gujars who have the permits for using the forest further weakens their position during negotiations. One illiterate Gujar cannot do much against the mighty Forest Depart-

ment, even if it is only represented by the forest guard. The ultimate threat is eviction from the forest, and as there is nowhere else to go, nowhere to take the buffalo, the Gujars comply, which usually means that they pay whatever is demanded of them.

The pastoral Gujars spend the main part of their lives in the forest. Only during migration do they venture out of it and then only to wander from the forest of the foothills to the forest in the higher ranges of the mountains. Forest makes up the largest part of their world; their existence is dependent on it and they identify themselves according to it, as, "we, the Gujars who live in forests and keep buffalo". Threats of eviction from the forest consequently give rise both to anxiety and feelings of insecurity, of not really belonging anywhere, and the feeling of being a community doomed to roam around endlessly without a proper home. They are not in a position to participate in any form of open revolt because their position is all too weak to engage in any direct conflict. Resistance may consist in breaches of the forest code, in misrepresenting the number of family members during census or just in keeping to themselves, fleeing to the interior of the forest where their lives cannot be kept under surveillance all the time. In this they resemble other weak sections of society who use unorganized, covert and often individual forms of resistance against dominant forces (Scott, 1985).

What mainly gives the foresters such power over the Gujars is the system of needing a permit for every head of cattle kept in the forest. In the case of the Gujars most of their permits are very old dating back to the colonial period, and there is at present no updating of the number of animals covered by the permits.

Yusuf, Mir Ali and Dullah are three elderly brothers who inherited a permit to keep 30 buffalo in the Sal forest of the foothills from their father Fakira. All of them now have grown sons and their grandsons are growing up and starting new families. Today the group consists of 51 people living in seven individual camps each with their

own herds, and the number of buffalo has grown to approximately 70 head, excluding young stock. The number of livestock has been larger but recent epidemics among the buffalo have reduced the numbers. In one camp most of the herd of 30 buffalo has been lost. But in spite of the increase in both people and animals no new permits have been issued. The group still has the original permit for 30 buffalo. Old Dulla's part of the permit is for five and a half buffalo, but he has now got 18 adult buffalo and about 12 younger stock. His eldest son, who has a separate camp, has a herd of five adult buffalo and a few calves.

The pasture land at the group's disposal is the same as was Fakira's, but part of the land is now denuded because of earlier logging enterprises with fewer fodder trees for lopping. The land has been divided so that individual camps each have their "own" area. While density of livestock has increased, and conflicts do arise when the members of one family cross the "borders" and lop trees on the land of another family, most families still report that there are sufficient trees for lopping in the winter pastures, but that the quality of the natural fodder has deteriorated and they have to supplement it with oilcakes and bran. An increase in cattle has in this way been partly balanced by the purchase of supplementary feed from outside. The livestock population has not increased as much as the number of people, making survival on pastoralism increasingly difficult. Fakira kept a herd of about 30 adult cattle for his family of four sons, and his two surviving sons Yusuf and Dullah have 16 and 18 adult animals respectively. Of Fakira's eleven grandsons five have separate camps in the forest and their herds are all very small, between three and ten adult buffalo. The future seems very insecure for the youngest generation, which so far consists of 25 boys of whom none have expressed any wish to leave the life in the forest and take up alternative forms of livelihood. Under the present management these 25 boys and their hitherto unborn brothers and cousins would have to divide

the land and the buffalo at the group's disposal leaving most of them without sufficient means for survival.

In order to prevent the foresters from reporting them to their superiors, and under threat of eviction from the forest, all seven camps have to send milk daily to the forest officials. They also deliver seasonal gifts of ghee (clarified butter) and butter and arbitrary sums of cash might be demanded from them at any time. This practice is now very old and well established and ghee and butter is being demanded even from Gujar households which have very little or no milk, in which case they are requested to buy milk in order to pay their "due".

It is usually the poor and weak sections of the society who suffer when modern development takes over and transforms natural resources. Another common feature is that the poor, like the pastoral Gujars, are blamed for the destruction of nature. As in other parts of the world there are conflicts between conservation and pastoralism. The exhaustion of natural resources is attributed to livestock pressure and overpopulation. But in the Gujars' case this pressure is caused by limiting their freedom of movement and pasture lands. The change from communal resource utilization of the forest to individual management in return for revenues and under supervision of the foresters has effectively broken the bond between nature and man. Aggarwal sees two sets of pressures as responsible for environmental destruction in India:

"The first (set of pressures) generated by population growth and thus increased demand for biomass resources, has been widely talked about. The poor often get blamed for the destruction of the environment. But the second set of pressures, generated by modernization, industrialization and the general penetration of the cash economy, are seldom talked about..... Now, if in the name of economic development, any human activity results in the destruction of an ecological space, or in its transformation which benefits the more powerful groups in society, then those who were earlier dependent on that space will suffer. Development in this case leads to a displacement and dispossession and will inevitably raise questions of social justice and conflict. The experience of microlevel groups shows clearly again

that it is rare to find a case in which environmental destruction does not go hand in hand with social injustice, almost like two sides of the same coin." (in Anderson and Huber, 1988:135).

A similar gradual loss of traditional rights to the forest has happened to the Bastars, a tribe in central India. The Bastars are threatened by a reforestation programme funded by the World Bank, which is described by Anderson and Huber.

"In the history of tribal use of resources, there is no strong evidence of rights of ownership in the modern exclusionary sense. Every situation of use was a negotiation between interested parts.... This absence of clear and simple rights was ambiguous to outsiders as well. It also offered full scope for exploitation....." (*ibid.*:125-126)

Continuity and Change in the Pastoral Cycle

Most of the pastoral Gujars among whom my fieldwork was conducted are still practising transhumance and migrate with their households and livestock between summer and winter pastures. The winter camps are dispersed in the state forests of the Shiwaliks, foothills to the western Himalayas. During winter there is a great concentration of pastoral Gujars in the parts of the Shiwalik which are situated within the adjoining districts of Dehra Dun and Saharanpur in western Uttar Pradesh. A large number of the Gujars from these districts cross into Himachal Pradesh during migration and spend the summer in the upper hills of Shimla district, others stay within the borders of Uttar Pradesh and migrate to the mountain areas of Uttarkashi and Tehri Garhwal.

The wheat harvest in the valleys between the outer and the inner Himalaya is in the middle of April, just after the festival of Baisakhi. This is also the traditional time for the Gujars to break up their winter camps and start the annual migration. At this time the leaves of the broadleaved trees in the Shiwaliks, used as fodder, have dried up and fallen, the waterholes are drying up, and it is no longer possible for the Gujars to provide for their animals. The first stops after

leaving the forest are at the banks of rivers, away from the villages, where a small group of families pitch their tents together. Here they can graze their animals in the newly-harvested wheat fields. For this they pay in milk and help with the local harvest. The grazing is not sufficient for the relatively large herds brought by the nomads and has to be supplemented with rice and wheat straw bought very expensively from local peasants. The Gujars also might bring dry grass with them from the forest. The land along rivers and ditches is common land and it is open for migratory herdsmen as well as locals but the villagers keep the lush grass for themselves, and the Gujars have to make do with highly overgrazed areas. A whole day of walking with the herd in search of good pasture often gives very meagre results and milk yields drop drastically during this period. The Gujars avoid conflicts with villagers fearing that any minor controversy might result in a full-blown Muslim versus Hindu riot in the very infected relations between the two religious communities which exist at present in northern India.

The Gujars wait in these transition camps, in the agricultural area between the outer and inner Himalayas, for up to 5 or 6 weeks until their migration order comes from the provincial government. This is a period of transition in more than one way. They are out of their ordinary habitat, they have left the forest which they see as their home and the real wanderings are still ahead of them. It is hot in the plains and they long for the cool of the mountain forests. Apart from strict business dealings they have very little contact with the local population, Muslim or Hindu. The locals see them as strangers and intruders, people who come and go, and they are stigmatized as a "gypsy tribe". Being Muslims they are also considered polluted by Hindus. This is a time of waiting and the decision as to when to start for the upper ranges is out of their control. The decision is made by the authorities far away in the provincial capital of Lucknow and it is made when checkpoints, to count the

number of buffalo and other livestock taken to the mountains, have been erected and when the pastures are considered sufficient to take the added pressure of the nomads' animals. Here again the Gujars are rendered powerless and an important part of their autonomy in management of the herds has been taken from them. The power over their movements has been shifted from the Gujars themselves to the state. As a result of this the Gujars, for whom the power of movement, as for all migratory pastoralists, is of vital importance, are made dependent on the administrators, not only for the winter pasture in the foothills, but also for the number of cattle taken into the hills and the time of migration. The Gujars have lost their position as autonomous agents with control over herd management. The expenses for fodder during this period can be very high and individual families may be forced to take additional loans in order to cover the costs.

In the latter decades of the 19th century, the British decided to set up checkpoints along the migration routes of the Gujars. They wanted to control the number of buffalo which the nomads brought into the hills. Prior to this there had been complaints from villagers on several points concerning the sojourn of the Gujars in their region during the hot season. One point of conflict was the fact that the buffalo trespassed into fields and destroyed crops, another that the carrying capacity of the pastures in the hills could not sustain the added pressure of the Gujars' buffalo and a third was that the Gujars' cattle brought diseases from the plains into the hills. Even during this period the Gujars and their cattle were seen by forest officials on the one hand as a "great nuisance" and on the other as a "kind of necessary evil" because they supplied the hill stations with commodities such as butter, ghee and fresh milk (letter from Forest Conservation Officer, Jaunsar Division to the Superintendent of Police 26th May 1892). It was therefore decided to issue passes to the Gujars according to the availability of pasture for their cattle in the mountains. A police

guard was stationed at the entrance to the hills to prevent entry without a permit (*ibid.*). This practice has been continued after independence.

All this gave ample abuse opportunities to the officials appointed to control the Gujars. More buffalo could slip through than the number stipulated by the permits if bribes were paid to the officials. Additional checkpoints might be put up and the Gujars would have to pay more than once. If the Gujars refused to pay, the officials might seize a couple of buffalo and not release them until the money was received.

The migration routes are the same from year to year and small groups of families, relatives, and friends travel together. Some of the members of each family move with the faster pack animals, bulls or horses, and others follow with the much slower buffalo; meetings are at pre-decided stopping places. Small children and old people travel by bus for part of the way. Most of the fodder has to be bought from local people and it consists of straw or hay. It is paid in cash, not in kind, and often at prices above the ordinary market price. The Gujars are in no position to negotiate. They are in a hurry, the animals are hungry and they have to pay whatever is demanded. The buffalo give very little milk and most is consumed by the household or given to the calves. During migration the Gujars sleep directly under the sky and only in case of rain do they put up black plastic sheets as shelter.

The summer pastures which are reached in about 15 to 20 days are in the temperate mountain forests at an altitude of up to 8,000–11,000 feet. Semi-alpine and alpine forests with their greater abundance of good quality grass are out of reach for the buffalo. The Gujars erect stone or wooden huts in the interior of the forests where each family has an individual grazing permit. They return to the same piece of land year after year and the permits are inherited from fathers to sons. The huts are scattered and each family, whether joint or nuclear, lives by itself. In the hills the Gujars may be able to obtain an additional income by grazing dry

cattle owned by villagers together with their own. They also might bring extra cattle down with them when they return to the foothills in winter. The summer pastures are covered in snow in winter and the hill peasants are happy not to have to keep their dry stock fed and housed. One problem is that the local cattle walk much slower than the Gujars' buffalo and there is extra work in feeding them so it is only an alternative for families which have labour to spare and even then they can only take a limited number because otherwise the migration will take too long.

The Gujars are now rapidly losing part of their traditional pasture land in the upper ranges in the Himalayas. One serious threat has been the encroaching of apple orchards on former state forest land. Apple orchards have proved to be a very lucrative business in the temperate zones of the state of Himachal Pradesh. This has resulted in an insatiable demand for land and apple growers clear the forest adjacent to their orchards and replant it with fruit trees. This happens in a subtle but continuous process and is of course illegal but nonetheless quite possible by bribing local foresters. The Gujars complain that many of their best pastures on the lower slopes have disappeared in this way. Another way in which grazing land has diminished is in reforestation programmes. Forest meadows traditionally used by the Gujars are fertile and easy to replant. This causes conflict between Gujars and forest officials when the Gujars arrive for their summer stay in the mountains and find their favourite meadows full of tiny spruce, fenced off, and out of bounds. Lopping for fodder is constrained to broadleaved varieties, conifers such as spruce and fir are useless from the Gujars' point of view; in addition, the forest ground beneath them does not provide any facilities for grazing. In the upper ranges lopping is restricted to one or two varieties of trees and it is mainly a feeding source during periods of emergency, such as drought. Otherwise grass constitutes the bulk of the fodder for the livestock. The summer of 1991 was

unusually dry, the monsoon came late, and many Gujars experienced great difficulties in obtaining sufficient fodder for the livestock as the grass did not grow and consequently they had to return to the winter pastures in the foothills earlier than usual.

Pastoral Economy

The Gujars produce milk for two types of local market: the large towns in the plains at the foot of the Himalayas in winter and the small towns and villages in the upper ranges in summer. These localities constitute different kinds of market opportunities. In the hills, most peasant households keep a cow or two for milk and milk products for themselves, not for the market. Therefore, the Gujars have played a very important role in supplying milk to seasonal labourers, to teashops, small hotels etc., and earlier they have had a monopoly on fresh milk production for the market during the summer stay. They are still very important for the milk trade and many teashops have to make tea with powdered milk after the Gujars have left. But other dairies are now starting in the area, and even if their milk is of inferior quality they have the advantage of being able to produce throughout the year and can, because of that, put pressure on the shops to buy from them. This is likely to increase in the future, threatening the business of the Gujars.

In the large towns on the plains, such as Haridwar, Saharanpur, and Dehre Dun, new consumer categories are developing with a growing middle class whose members can afford to buy milk and other dairy products. This change has created new opportunities for dairy enterprise, but the Gujars have not been able to benefit from this development because this demands a knowledge of market and market powers which they do not possess. They are still selling their milk for prices far below the current market price to middlemen who distribute the milk to the town markets. Instead of benefiting from development, the pastoral Gujars are sinking deeper and

deeper into debt as the middlemen forward loans against future milk deliveries.

The consequence of this is that it is new categories of dairy entrepreneurs with capital and market knowledge who take advantage of the new possibilities, and the Gujars' share in the milk trade is diminishing. Their indebtedness and dependence on the middlemen have made it very difficult for them to shift to other more lucrative milk trading forms. This is mainly a problem in the plains. In the hills there are no middlemen and the Gujars sell their milk independently or make it into ghee or *khoya* (the base for traditional Indian sweets). In the plains the Gujars are dependent on the market economy for both the price of milk and the prices of oilcakes and bran—they are forced to buy from the dealer who offers credit when they have exhausted the middlemen possibilities—but they have little power either over the prices or over the way the accounts are kept.

The disappearance of pastures and fresh green fodder have produced dropping milk yields during recent years and this also makes it more difficult for the Gujars to compete. The Gujars are well aware of concentrate feeds will give better yields, but most of them are beyond their means.

As may be seen from the above there are many factors negatively confronting the traditional migratory pastoralism of the Gujars as they become entangled in the market economy and as the state encroaches on the traditional rights which the Gujars have exercised over pastures and movements. This encroachment started during the colonial period and has continued along the same tracks after independence. The Gujars now have a deep distrust of the state and its possibilities—and willingness—to solve their problems and integrate them into the development process. At the same time there is a feeling of nostalgia both towards the British rule and towards the rajas, both of whom the Gujars felt were much more "caring" and benevolent towards them. After all it was the British and the rajas who gave them their permits, and they claim that

no new permits have been given since then. The whole existence of the Gujars is becoming increasingly dependent on a state power in which they have no trust and the only discourse which takes place between the state and the Gujars is that taking place between the foresters and the nomads in the forest or in the local offices of the Forest Department. The forest officials with whom the Gujars deal are low down in the state hierarchy but their power over the daily lives of the Gujars is paramount. As one Gujar commented, "it is as difficult for us to approach the ranger as it is for other people to go to the chief minister of the whole state". The Gujars' status as migratory herdsmen has left them outside the democratic process. Having no fixed addresses they are not registered on the voting lists. This has meant that their present problematic position has been of no interest for local politicians who might otherwise have worked for their case in order to get their votes.

The Gujars are now expressing a wish to settle permanently, which is largely due to a feeling of exhaustion. This was also found by Hasan in his study of the pastoral Gujars in Uttar Pradesh. He states, "if the Gujars are today agreeable to lead a settled life, it is under compulsion of circumstances and in disgust and desperation" (Hasan, 1986:53). Most of the Gujars feel that there is no future for them in the forest. The main reasons given for this are conflicts with settled populations over pastures, suffocating forest regulations, and the payments in kind and in cash which they have to give to the foresters over and above the grazing fees. They say that this prevents them from saving money, which could be used to organize the economy of the household, develop new forms of dairying or to purchase land privately and go into agriculture.

Most of the families are heavily in debt, mainly to the dairy owners to whom they sell milk. As pastures are getting more scarce and of poorer quality, the Gujars have to purchase oilcakes and other concentrates for the buffalo because without them the already weak milk yields will decline even

more. Concentrates are bought once or twice a year from the feed dealers in the surrounding market towns and they are expensive. The Gujars, who have no money saved up, have to borrow the money and they often experience difficulties in paying back before it is time for the next purchase. This problem is the same for poor families with a few buffalo as for more well-off households with herds of between 20 and 30 animals (most of the households in the present study area lie within this range).

Other occasions when larger sums of money are needed are for the payment of bridewealth and the payment of fines for daughters who refuse to stay with their husbands (something which happens quite often). In both cases substantial sums of up to Rs 30,000 (the price of five or six good buffalo) have to be paid and most families do not possess this kind of cash. The people earning in this business are the families receiving bridewealth for daughters. However, taking money for a daughter is not considered a good and proper thing to do. It is "eating the money" (the same expression is used for the forest guards taking bribes). The traditional way of arranging marriages is by a quite complicated system of exchange which might involve not only existing sisters but also unborn sisters and even potential female children in the next generation. Families which adhere to tradition are proud that they have given their daughters freely without demanding bridewealth. Here tradition stands in opposition to the modern money economy which is penetrating the community. Now many families who do not need all their daughters for exchange to obtain brides for their sons, demand bridewealth—and what is considered even worse for righteous Gujar Muslims, they might put the money in the bank and receive interest on it. The families with many sons and few or no daughters therefore face considerable difficulties and expenses with subsequent indebtedness in getting their sons married.

The Importance of Internal Solidarity

So far what has helped to keep the Gujar community in the forest and made it possible for them to continue their life with buffalo and annual migrations is in a great part their strong internal solidarity. It is not the author's intention here to claim any direct relationship between pressure from the outside and internal solidarity, but rather to indicate structures within the community which have enabled the pastoral Gujar to continue as migratory pastoralists in the state forests of the Himalayas.

The pastoral Gujar are endogamous and kinship ties constitute important networks for mutual assistance. A nuclear family maintains strong bonds with the husband's agnatic kin as well as with his mother's lineage and with the relatives of the wife. A woman's affiliation to her natal group remains strong all through life. The community is organized in exogamous clans (*gotras*) which also constitute important means for internal solidarity. Leadership is in the form of leaders called *lombardars* and traditional *panchyats*. While the *lombardars* are elected, often because they are considered clever and have some contacts with people outside the Gujar community, the *panchyats*—made up of varying numbers of respected men—are more loosely created to solve conflicts and problems of a social or judicial nature.

In cases where individuals or households are hit by disaster threatening their survival, assistance will be given to ensure that they can continue as members of the group. This means that they have to have the basic means for survival within the complex of nomadic pastoralism: buffalo and access to pastures both in summer and winter, and the necessary household items.

The household of Yusuf Ali consists of himself, his wife Tajbibi and their five young children. Their small herd of four milch buffalo, two heifers and two calves was hit by disease and five animals died within a couple of days leaving one pregnant buffalo and the two calves. Survival with so few

animals was not possible and the family had no milk either to sell or for the household. One cousin came with a cow and calf so there would be milk for the children, and other relatives donated buffalo and heifers. The herd of the family was reconstructed and they could take part in the migration with the rest of their group. With the reconstruction of the herd came a reassertion of Gujar identity as the family was kept within the context of pastoral management and not allowed to drop out. Apart from epidemics and other diseases, calamities which threaten survival are fires, thefts and attacks by wild animals.

Dropping out from this Gujar community has been a historical process and in many cases only partial. During colonial rule some families were given tracts of farming land and pasture by the British or by local rajas. This land has now been divided up into smaller pieces as sons have inherited their fathers. Earlier access to pasture in adjoining forests has been curtailed as forests have disappeared or become part of modern forest management schemes. The families who are settled, now obtain part of their income from agriculture, but most of them still keep buffalo and sell milk. Many of them still migrate to the summer pasture in the higher ranges each year even after having been settled for several generations. As pastures around the settlements diminish and as population grows beyond that which the land can support, buffalo and people may return to the state forests in the lowlands in winters as well. This sojourn in the forest is sometimes only for part of the season or it might be used during periods of drought, but at other times when many sons have to share a piece of land, some of the sons might find their part too small to support a family, and they will have to return to the forests more or less for good. These families will have lost their customary rights to pasture in the forest and they will have to move in with relatives and share the already all too few buffalo permits. The buffalo will always be accompanied by a family from the owners' household. They

are never just given to relatives or herders for care. Here again the resources are shared and additional families and animals moving in requires the payment of additional grazing fees.

Other ways of keeping the community intact are by allocating cattle to married women and by sending surplus sons to help in households short of manpower. Among Gujars only sons inherit their parents, but cattle are given as gifts to daughters. When a woman has moved to her husband's camp and she has had children and it seems clear that the marriage will hold, her father, mother or brothers may give gifts of buffalo if they have any to spare. If a family has large herds they will give more buffalo to a daughter married into a poor household than to a daughter living in a household which already has many animals. These buffalo are not considered as a dowry; whether to give cattle or not is completely up to the woman's family. They are gifts of love to a daughter or sister, and they are meant to secure the future for her and her children. These buffalo and their offspring are the property of the wife and she can take them with her in the case of divorce. In addition to this, a woman receives a buffalo as *Mehr* from her husband's family at the wedding and this buffalo as well belongs to her. Among Gujars, ownership of livestock is exercised independently by both men and woman. Control of livestock is a joint venture, but a wife may demand the milk from her buffalo for herself and her children. The economy of the family and the keeping of cash is usually controlled by the wife. In an extended family the mother manages the economy for her sons as well as for her husband until she is too old when she is replaced by the wife of the son in whose camp she stays. A woman who manages the economy of her family well will be highly respected within the community.

The form of pastoralism practised by the Gujars is intensive and very labour intensive. This is especially so in winter when all fodder is in the form of leaves that have to be cut by climbing the trees, and then carried

in large bundles to the animals. This work is mainly done by youngsters, both boys and girls, and households having large herds and few or only very young children have problems getting the work done. A few families keep Nepalese servants who have in many cases lived with the Gujars for a long time, adopted Gujar dress and way of life and have become like family members. Most commonly young sons from families with few animals go to work for richer Gujars, mainly close relatives. Sometimes this is just done to lend a helping hand in an emergency and at other times the boy's family will receive payment for his services, something which helps his family to survive in an environment where it is otherwise very difficult to get any outside work. Grown sons from the settled families might also work with relatives in the forest during winter when there is not much work to do in agriculture.

Within the framework of social life in the forest the Gujars attempt to reaffirm their identity, an identity which is daily threatened in meetings with alienating forest regulations and the need to (literally) throw oneself at the feet of forest guards begging for mercy. The forest officials control the forest but the forest is still the home of the Gujars, their knowledge of it is intimate and they try to reassert themselves by controlling the social space which still belongs to them.

Conclusions

The official view presented of the pastoral Gujars was contradictory even during colonial rule. The British administrators characterized them as a "sort of necessary evil" and the present administration sees them as a "great problem" in the forest. They and their buffalo are considered as an "anachronism" in modern forestry management. The Gujars have never been completely denied access to the state forests but their use of the forest and their movements have been regulated and restricted. The "rules" have been negotiable to a certain extent in the local context, but breaches of

the forest code have had their price and the cost has been expensive. This has made it increasingly difficult for the Gujars to continue with their traditional life as migratory pastoralists. For them "development" has not been any forward movement but more of a mass of diffuse and meaningless signs in the form of forest codes and regulations which they do not understand, arbitrary treatment and exploitation by forest staff, and market forces regulating the milk trade and breaking up traditional patterns of production and distribution. All this is affecting the everyday life of the Gujars; it is not just part of "the world out there", outside the forest. It has created sentiments of alienation and anxiety among the Gujars as they feel that they are losing control over their own destiny.

What the Gujars now want in return for relinquishing their permits in the forest is enough land for each family both to keep their buffalo and to grow their own food in order to end the present exploitation. It also seems clear that a purely pastoral economy cannot continue under the prevailing management practices. But discourse by state administrators about development for the pastoral Gujars has so far been vague and diffuse and proposed projects have mostly turned out as paper schemes that have never materialised. When land has been offered it has been small plots of marginal land on which it is not possible to pasture the cattle and this has not been accepted by the Gujars.

Note

This paper is based on 13 months of fieldwork in 1987 and 1989-91 (still in progress) in northern India funded by SAREC (Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries). Data have been collected whilst living with the pastoral Gujars in their camps in the forest in the four adjoining districts of Dehra Dun and Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh, and Sirmour and Shimla districts in Himachal Pradesh.

References

- Anderson, R. S. and W. Huber 1988, *The Hour of the Fox. Tropical Forests, the World Bank and Indigenous People in Central India*.
- Gefu, J. O and J. L. Gilles 1990, "Pastoralists, Ranchers and the State in Nigeria and North America: A Comparative Analysis", *Nomadic Peoples*, 25: 27:34-50.
- George, S. 1985, *Operation Flood. An Appraisal of Current Indian Dairy Policy*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Guha, R. 1989, *The Unquiet Woods. Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalayas*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Hasan, A. 1986, *A Tribe in Turmoil*. New Delhi.
- Negi, R. S. 1982, "Population Structure of a Pastoral Nomadic Community of the Himalayas", in P. Misra and K. C. Malhotra (eds.), *Nomads in India*. Anthropological Survey of India.
- Salzman, P. 1988, "From Nomads to Dairymen: Two Gujarati Cases", *Econ. and Pol. Weekly*, 31.
- Scott, J. C. 1985, *Weapons of the Weak. Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Yale University Press.

Pernille Gooch is a Ph.D. student at Lund University, Sweden and has done fieldwork among the pastoral Muslim Gujars in India in 1987 and 1989-91. She has had practical experience of animal husbandry as a goat milk producer in the hilly regions of northern Sweden. She will be returning to India in June 1992.