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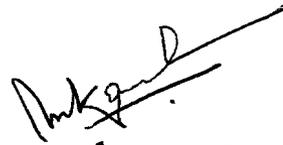
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UPHEAVAL IN THE NOMAD'S TRAIL

Survival in the Forest Commons
of
Northern India

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THE GADDI HOMELAND



ABSTRACT

UPHEAVAL IN THE NOMAD'S TRAIL

Survival in the Forest Commons of Northern India

The Gaddi shepherds of the alpine tracts are in the eye of a storm brewing in the foothills of the Himalayas. Dams, National Parks and expanding infra-structure are changing the nature of nomadic trails. At stake is the survival of both indigenous "managers" and their self-governing systems of customary rights in natural resources.

The paper attempts to establish that transhumance has been an occupational technique to make possible the optimal use of the geo-morphological relation of the Himalayan range to the riverine plains of north India. Such has been the character of nomadic pastoralism practised by two distinct people - the Gujars and the Gaddis.

History traces the origin of the Gujars to Central Asia, while the Gaddis claim to belong to the ancient Himalayan kingdom of Chamba. Nomadism enabled them to minimise uncertainty and share risk with others on the Himalayan commons. They could vote with their feet against any political danger; and in case of the seasonal uncertainties it enabled them to adjust spatially and temporally. They could do this because the other actors in the northern plains -- the cultivators -- agreed to share the pastoral commons. Such symbiosis was possible because the nomad's scale of operations complemented those of the cultivators. This in its turn was feasible because the pattern of property rights provided incentives to reciprocate.

The situation in the last one hundred years has changed radically. A new actor entered - the State Forest Department of a modern Government which makes the whole issue not just one of survival of the commons but that of nomadism itself.

in the forests of the Lower Siwaliks needed valuable manure and herding services were able to reciprocate with grazing in post-harvest stubble, leaves from trees, hay from kharetars or hayfields and grazing on common long fallows. Together they have tackled risk from uncertainty of the geomorphological conditions of the Himalayas. There was therefore a system working here.

The farmers:

This was and still is true of the sedentary farmers in the Dhaula Dhar region who have trained rapid streams and glaciers with kuhls to irrigate their terraced mountain-fields and invite nomadic graziers to pen their herds of sheep and cattle to fertilise the crops which otherwise would have been impossible to grow on poor soils. (The institution of the common of shack in medieval Europe) After harvest the stubbles form an important means of grazing. Farmers had to organise property rights mix of private strips with primunal grazing in the openfields and long fallows held in common. [B8] In turn, Gaddis have reciprocated by adapting their movements to match the rhythm of the agrarian season in the forested tracts.

This pattern of sharing private resources gave both the farmers and the pastoralists the basis of trust which is what they needed to draw up rules for the commons - that is, for the use of forests and alpine pastures. This task needed great ingenuity and perseverance, without which they could not have prevented the over-use of natural resources which were by nature openly accessible to all users. Thus it is that we find in operation (now much less than before) jointly devised and endorsed institutions or rules of access to these "open access" natural resources. [B9, B10]

Institutions of property rights provided incentives to co-operate and sanctions to prevent cheating. For example, the costs of policing the Siwalik forests and pastures would have been enormous with such a large number of users; and clearly this was much beyond the capacity of any single user, so that collective governance as against private and individual control, was an enforced condition for the system to work. Besides, all the actors by experience knew that free-riding would be self-destructive in the long run. This induced co-operation.

Evidence of this is available even today. In recent years pressures on the pastoral resources have increased, yet in my field trips to the Siwalik forests I seldom heard farmers complaining against the large number of nomadic herds in forests like Shahpur Kandi.² In fact if the farmers had done so, the Forest Department would have gained support in their move to keep the nomads out from protected forests. This spoke of continued dependence on the services of herders. Anything which destroys the basis of this trust and co-operation will be an irreversible damage.

The Upheaval

We now come to the last actor in this story - the State. It appears from the historical evidence in north India that a strong modern State weakens institutions of ground level governance.

Administrative institutions like the revenue and forest department set up in 1868, legislation like the Indian Forest Act of 1878 & 1988 and the Land Reforms Act of 1947 were demonstration of State power over rights in natural resources. Irrigation canals and dams constructed in the last one hundred years in the plains of Punjab and in the Himalayas have resulted in patterning land-use. These have affected the circumstances of the different tracts unevenly; consequently altering the relative position of communities who had organised and governed natural resources. External intervention creates an air of uncertainty and even suspicion. For instance, the recent move by the Punjab Government to encourage joint forest management failed to enthuse either the communities of the 30 villages in the Shahpur Kandi forest or the Gaddis. The nomads have not even been officially recognised as joint users in the grazing resources of the forest. Communities, once vigorous performers, feel powerless and incapable of reversing the breakdown of their institutions of mutual aid and self-governance.

In an earlier work on " Two Centuries on the Commons " I have traced the major contributory factors mentioned above to explain the erosion of institutions of collective governance in the commons. Here we will take up only those which directly affected the transhumancing Gaddis. The State in the last two centuries has played a key role in securing both private and communal property rights of farmers; but such rights have been decided on notions of "prescriptive" and "sedentary" use by those who paid taxes or revenue to the despotic states which gave them protection. Gaddis cannot claim such recognition. Therefore it has increasingly added to the degree of uncertainty to the lives of the shepherds of Chamba. For example, a cultivator in Punjab had a share in the right to land in a village which had appended rights to the pasture in the common fallows of the village and also recorded rights in the forests as it is in Shahpur Kandi. Nomadic herders may have used and shared the pasture both in the long fallows and in the forests, (may be long before there were any settled agriculture in the forest) and the fact may have been recorded in the Village Administration Paper; BUT now when the Thein Dam needs to submerge the surrounding catchment area only the farming community can seek compensation for the loss of land and pasture. Not so the Gaddi shepherd. This effectively put in a wedge between the two communities. I have evidence to show that once upon a time the farming community would have protested such injustice, not now!

Take another instance. When the Pong Dam was built near the Brindaban and Karanpur forests in the Hoshiarpur district, compensation was not provided to all nomadic herders who transhumanced in the tract for grazing. As if this was not enough, the herders were hemmed in by restrictive policies of the forest department, which protective as they may have been of the reserved forests of bamboo, nevertheless pushed the alpine herders further into the upper regions of the Himalayas against norms of innate sense of conservation. Injustice of this kind can push even hesitant free-riders to become one.

Likewise, when for reasons of administrative expediency the rights of one has been recognised, it gives rise to exploitation of

others not in the same position. This has happened in the case of tenancy rights in the alpine pastures given to particular families who had helped in collection of tirni or grazing tax in the nineteenth century in Lahul. The auction of the dhar is held as an annual institution in Palampur which the herders use as to organise themselves but, there are signs of resentment which has the potential of dividing the ranks of the Gaddis. I attended the meeting last year and several shepherds complained against such rights over pasture granted to some as against others. Once again, tenancy rights have been secured by sedentary farmers against arable land owners in the plains this is not the case of the alpine pastures.

Timing and duration of Gaddi routes are intimately tied with vegetation and expectations of sudden change in weather conditions. Such flexibility is the hallmark of their accumulated knowledge of the country-side. State appropriation of forests and pasture lands has altered these trails of the Gaddis. The original purpose was to keep them away from forest plantations. But not all grazing is destructive. Sheep grazing helped in the re-generation of certain tree species like the deodar and the oak at certain heights.³ Also herds went through a forest when it was scarcely the time for scantlings to come up. Expert forest officials themselves admitted this and even today forest scientists in the Forestry School at Dehra Dun will admit such wisdom.

In the last part of the nineteenth century, the forest department imposed restrictions on Gaddi routes, the number of miles they could march a day and the number of days they could halt etc was also laid down. Such prescription could not take into account either the manuring service which the Gaddis performed enroute to the upper regions nor the uncertain change of climate like rain, storms and snow-bound passes. Archival files of the forest department indicate that these rules created a considerable degree of hardship for the both the nomads and the communities which depended on them. Besides it led to departmental acrimony over nomadic affairs.

Today matters should have been different. Even with in the forestry department there are tensions over positions taken up. One would expect an environmental sensitive Government at the centre to appreciate this and seek to resuscitate local self-governance. But recent Government proposals to set up natural sanctuaries like the Rajaji National Park, in the tract adjoining Himachal Pradesh will only help destroy resources at an enormous policing cost. And what is more the prospects will be bleaker still, if one has to go by the Narmada dam experience. Even if some compensation is provided, rootlessness can scarcely help revive conditions in which people learnt to live by the rules of the game which they themselves had devised to manage natural resources. Policing costs for such ventures will be high and provide a basis for corruption. In the process too an important human skill i.e to live with nature will be lost.

The Forest Department on the Gaddi's trail:

Gaddis had attracted attention as early as the last part of

the 18th century; then in 1850 the Colonial Settlement Officers like G.C. Barnes in Kangra and Traill in Garhwal noted the careful institutions of boundary rules in the grazing runs on the Himalayan country-side. The Forest Department was set up only in 1868 because it was too costly to do so earlier. This co-incided with the demand for wood from the railways. Reservation of forests became a means to procure the supply. At the same time communal organisation had been recognised in the forests of the Siwaliks, Shahpur Kandi in Gurdaspur in particular, where the Forest Department kept only a light control. In the decades of the 1860's and 70's began the erosion of the Hoshiarpur Siwaliks [B 11] which destroyed thousands of acres of cultivated land in the foothills of the Siwaliks and at the same time the number of sheep and goats declined in the Kangra. The Secretary of State made an enquiry and was told that erosion had been caused by the rights of cultivation given to the hill people in the forests which denuded the watersheds. There was no mention of nomadic grazing being the cause. At the same time the report showed that shrinkage in areas of pasture had been due to closure of forest which had contributed to the decline in cattle numbers!

It was only in the late nineteenth century that the Forest Department started to complain about the increasing numbers of cattle and then too as an article written in the Indian Forester identified the concern in the district of Kangra was for "half-starved herds of a quarter of a million animals devastating some 600,000 acres of land while a potential but usually wasted hay crop of over perhaps 150,000 acres in the same district is waiting for a little organisation!"⁴

Creation of state ownership drove a wedge in the arrangements between the herders and farmers. The Government took over the management of the grazing of the sheep and goats of Gaddi shepherd and the right to realize dues from them were entirely in the hands of the government. "These shepherds are the (asamis) of Govt. & not of the village proprietors. the shepherds and the zamindars must make their own arrangements in regard to manuring field; but the samindars may not interfere with the Gaddis, even though they refuse to manure fields."⁵ Disputes over grazing arose as a consequence. Significantly grazing disputes fell whenever more grazing areas were available. As in 1919 the court cases of grazing disputes fell from 9% to 6% of total as largely due to the opening of old trihais in Kangra, in 1919.⁶ The Forest department⁷ demarcated the Shahpur Kandi tract in 1904, creating a protected forest which was 1/8 th of the forests in the hands of the villagers, (about 27,850 acres) and not demarcated. The rules for the protected part separated the forests. Two things happened : first, the undemarcated part became overwhelmed with both nomadic herds and those of the forest villages; and second, the Gaddis found themselves faced with two masters, where they had been co-organisers. The colonial government always gave preference to taxpayers⁸ so the farming communities in the Shahpur Kandi tract were given the right to collect grazing dues from the Gaddis, in their common forests. Another come down for the nomad from being a co-sharer of the forest commons to a subordinate position. Gaddi sensitivity to this treatment led them to seek the protection from

the district administrators instead!⁹ Even here they sense the difference between one department of the government and the other, which helps to exacerbate uncertainty.

The situation has not improved by post-independence trends in shifting boundaries of neighbouring countries which froze transnational movements of these people; forest enclosures further shifted the grazing tracks and then came the dams across the Himalayan rivers which deluged their grazing grounds. Anywhere in the world such a situation would have drawn sharp attention; not in India.

A beleaguered people:

The nomads seem to be nobody's business. They have now begun to recognise this. They are convinced that their ancient practice of transhumance cannot continue on the basis of trust nor on the principle of reciprocity. As a consequence they have begun to take uni-lateral steps to get a foot hold on the Himalayan range. As a first step some of the nomads have taken the initiative to gain visibility. The Gujars in Himachal Pradesh asked an anthropologist like David Turner to examine their ways of functioning; which he did and then published what he saw. In the Dun Valley there was another scholar, Pernille Gooch and some activists like Avdesh Kaushal have taken up issues on their behalf. For example there is an ongoing battle between the graziers of the Dun Valley and their grazing tracts in the upper Himalayas in Kinnaur which fall into the region of another State. A television programmer in New Delhi espoused the cause of the Bakkarwals here as well.

The Gaddis have just also started organising. As a first step they registered themselves as a trade union in Himachal Pradesh on the 15th of August 1993. Increasingly, both individually and collectively they have taken to "hedging" against insecurity of another kind. Their action is reminiscent of the method - "When you can't beat them join them". Some of them individually had tried buying up land in the villages which had grazing resources. A step which they had imagined would give them a legal access to the common lands of those villages. Such is a story illustrative of the trauma about to begin. The details of this come out of a field trip to the Shahpur Kandi. Mohan Lal, the shepherd with whom I trekked last summer has bought agricultural land and built up a house in Shahpur Kandi forest and expects the Government will compensate him when the waters of the Ranjit Sagar laps at his door-step! Or perhaps Mohan Lal should take tips from camel graziers who had been forbidden to graze in the forests of Hoshiarpur in 1917.¹⁰ In November 1917 Rs 5,000 compensation had been paid to 126 villages to which section 4 & 5 of the Chos Act had been applied. In his report Dy, Commissioner of Hoshiarpur says that the number of camels actually increased since the closure since the camel men argue that they were kept to get more compensation.¹¹

On the other end of the spectrum, the Sarpanch of Kilar in Pangri valley, which hosts herds from Lahul, Kangra and Chamba made sure when I was there, that I knew the distinction between the Pangiwalas and the Gaddis. In their attempt for distinct identity they seek "freedom" from the nomadic shepherds services by devices

like cross-breeding animals such that they can remain in their houses through the winter without transhumancing. On similar lines, the Lahulis who were once dependent on the Gaddis are now taking to the new crops of hops and potatoes.

The Dam has thus succeeded in creating an "institutional" diaspora. The Gaddis can no longer depend on the residents of the Shahpur Kandi villages to support their transhumancing life-style. The cultivators have succumbed to "money illusion" and fear their own chances to secure jobs on the dam(n) project will be jeopardised in case they honoured their reciprocal commitments to the Gaddis. Nor can they hope for support from the Forest Department.

At stake here is a whole system of property rights. In question here is not just the material loss to people but the ruination of a form of joint governance - a political system. As the dam engulfs the pastoral resources it will also terminate a long-standing relationship between those who can best be described by a term - which Gandhiji used - "trusteeship" of the Himalayan environment. How else can one define a group of people who have jointly battled with natural disasters like flood, famine, earthquakes and plague?

In the last resort they can go to court. However, while the cultivator's rights are prescriptive and therefore "legal" in a court of law; such is not the case of the user rights to communal resources which is all that the nomadic graziers can possibly claim. Their use of the Himalayan pastures has been treated as "tolerated" customary usage with no existing "legal" record.¹² Hence no court need take cognisance of these customs, leave alone compel a Government to compensate the Gaddis for their loss of grazing resources in the forest. Their political consciousness does not match with their ability to organise on any scale which could effectively put their case in full view. Besides, the Gaddis near the Thein Dam have been more involved with the cultivators of the Shahpur Kandi tract than with their own people who have formed the Trade Union. While the latter are very vulnerable and have in any case too much to handle. With the situation as it is today, the shepherds realise that they are but naive pawns in power struggles inherent in a democracy; and that majority votes can "drown" minorities. Presently, a hydro-electric project which on the face of it is intended to empower people will actually strip the nomads of even their basic right to choose a way of life.

1. The disbursement of the Shahpur Kandi Forest fund was done accordingly in the following years from 1975-76 onwards -
From the DFO's office Gurdaspur, 15/10/1992.

Shahpur Kandi Forest

Village Total Forest

Village		%
Nagrota	252 acres	0.99
Bungal	24 "	0.09
Hara	4,550 "	16.34
Narainpur	1,273 "	4.57
Trehti	14 "	0.05
Kot	1,051 "	3.77
Thara & Thara	6,359 "	22.83
Upperla:		
Jalar	201 "	.72
Phagli	651 "	2.33
Dhar Khurd	525 "	1.89
Hardosarn	103 "	0.36
Dhar Kalan	1371 "	4.92
Langeria	892 "	3.20
Bakhatpur	54 "	0.19
Dunera	1144 "	4.11
Ghar	897 "	3.22
Bar Sudal	305 "	1.10
Naloh	1248 "	4.48
Lahrun	1823 "	5.11
Bhamlada	368 "	1.38
Phangota	645 "	2.32
Chamror	220 "	0.79
Banglah	369 "	1.32
Sarti	856 "	3.18
Bhangori	42 "	0.15
Kough	51 "	0.18
Dukhniali	366 "	1.31
Darban	585 "	2.46
Tirhari	1,892 "	6.79
Total	27,850 "	100.00

From: DFO Gurdaspur in reply to: C.F. Bist Jalandhar, No 1278
23/5/85, Subject : Kandi Watershed and area Development Project
Punjab Phase II - Extension to Shahpur Kandi tract in Gurdaspur
District (Forestry Component)

There are about 30 village in the Dhar Block and number of
cattle population is as under :-

Village	Population	Cows	Buff.	Sheep	goat	others	Total
Nagrota	98	260	50	50	250	20	630
Bungal	750	400	200	150	1,200	50	2,000
Hara	3,598	2,500	600	7,000	10,000	60	20,160
Narainpur	546	2,260	200	5	1,300	10	3,775
Treheti	1,034	90	30	800	700	-	1,620
Kot	2,948	1,500	250	1,000	900	60	3,710
Thara	2,907	1,500	700	2,000	3,200	30	7,430
Thara Upperla	200	100	600	1,500	1,800	15	4,015
Jalar	421	143	81	6	130	4	364
Phagli	289	135	65	75	91	2	368
Dhar Khurd	229	250	90	135	334	5	814
Hardosarn	144	150	75	600	700	20	1,545
Langeria	1,174	292	125	35	65	10	527
Bakatpur	47	60	11	17	56	2	146
Dunera	1,213	446	173	96	380	5	1,100
Ghar	401	231	47	25	303	9	615
Bar Sodal	621	474	126	80	25	11	716
Naloh	1,145	610	280	901	1,205	40	3,036
Lahrin	922	705	302	805	313	20	2,145
Bhamlada	1,133	750	250	701	1,100	5	2,806
Phangota	2,000	700	250	50	150	10	1,160
Chamror	41	100	30	10	100	4	244
Banglah	595	350	121	333	33	6	843
Sarti	1,773	1,100	200	400	500	20	2,220
Bhangori	300	740	232	480	18	18	1,488
Kough	592	306	81	25	70	5	487
Dukhniali	396	190	77	120	406	5	798
Tirhari	5,148	3,100	800	3,100	6,500	150	13,650

- There were 30,000 heads of cattle of the nomadic herders in winter in addition to those owned by the 30 odd villages of the Shahpur Kandi forests, which made a total of 1 lac. From DFO Gurdaspur, reply to letter No. 1278, 23/5/85 of Conservator of Forests, Bist Jalandhar regarding Subject : Kandi Watershed and area Development Project Punjab Phase II-Extension to Shahpur Kandi tract in Gurdaspur District (Forestry Component).
- Para 6: Notes para 46 & 47 of Report in which it shows : "That light grazing is actually beneficial in connection with the reproduction of deodar in the hill forests." Review of Forest Report 1892-93, Progs 11 A, Jan 1894.

4. J.W.A. Grieve, "Note on the Economics of Nomadic Grazing as practised in Kangra District," Indian Forester, 46 (July, 1920) : 332-340, 332.
5. Shahpur Kandi Forest Record of Rights prepared for the purpose of Section 28 of the India Forest Act of 1878, under Notification No 151 dated 25/3/1885, Progs 29 A, Jan 1904, (forests) Punjab Govt.: 41.
6. Review of the Forest Administration for 1917-18, No 23621, 21/12/1918, Progs 33A, Department of Forests, April 1919 : para 4.
7. Sir, In accordance with the provisions of Section 77 of the Indian Forests Act, 1878, I am directed by the Lt.governor to submit, for the sanction of the Governor-General in Council, a draft of the rules which it is proposed to issue under section 31 of the Act for the protected forests of the tract known as Shahpur Kandi in the Gurdaspur District. Copies of the Notification Nos 3 and 4 of this date, declaring these forests to be protected, are also enclosed. From: J.A. McNolly, Esq. Offg. Revenue and Financial Secretary to Govt, Punjab and its Dependencies, To, The Secretary Govt. of India, Revenue and Agriculture Deptt. Lahore, 6th Jan, 1904
Forests.
Shahpur Kandi Forest Record of Rights prepared for the purpose of Section 28 of the India Forest Act of 1878, under Notification No 151 dated 25/3/1885, Progs 29 A, Jan 1904, (forests) Punjab govt.
8. Section B:
Para 10: All the rights of bartandars are appendant to cultivated land assessed to revenue & to land liable to assessment which has since last settlement been brought under cultivation with the permission of the competent authority... This is also for bona fide agricultural and domestic purposes ... and not for ... purely pastoral as distinguished from agricultural purposes.
Shahpur Kandi Forest Record of Rights prepared for the purpose of Section 28 of the India Forest Act of 1878, under Notification No 151 dated 25/3/1885, Progs 29 A, Jan 1904, (forests) Punjab Govt.
9. Para 16: the management of the grazing of the sheep and goats of Gaddi shepherd and the right to realize dues from them are entirely in the hands of the government. these shepherds are the (assamis) of Govt. & not of the village proprietors. the shepherds and the zamindars must make their own arrangements in regard to manuring field; but the zamindars may not interfere with the Gaddis, even though they refuse to manure fields. (p 41)

10. Letter no. 291-22-H-4, Lahore 26/3/1917, From V. Connolly, Senior Secretary to F.c. Punjab To the Revenue Secretary to Government Punjab, Prgs 29-30A, Deptt. Forests May 1917.
11. No. 276. 8/9/1917, From A. Langley Dy. Comm. Hoshiarpur To the Comm. Jullundur, Deptt. of Forests Progs15-17 A, Nov 1917.
12. Section C: Para 18: "Gaddi shepherds are not entitled to any forest rights unless they are khewatdars and bartandars". Shahpur Kandi Forest Record of Rights prepared for the purpose of Section 28 of the India Forest Act of 1878, under Notification No 151 dated 25/3/1885, Progs 29 A, Jan 1904, (forests) Punjab Govt:

Thus are preserved the lush pastures above the tree line all along the middle Himalayas and on the steep slopes which only nimble footed animals and their equally agile shepherds can tackle. The access to these are guarded by snow cover on the passes and the treacherous storms which blow over them for greater parts of the year, but can afford summer pastures.

Such conditions of risk are daunting and if Gaddis can tackle them it is only because of the assurance that they have the possibilities of alternating their use of dhars or alpine pastures in the upper regions with those in the long fallows of the sedentary farmers in the forests below. [B2] This indicates the importance of communally controlled access to the Siwaliks in general and Shahpur Kandi tract in particular. Fragile eco-systems need care in use rather than being preserved as esoteric wildernesses within the ecology of the Himalayas.

The Actors

The nomads:

Gaddis are alpine shepherds who belong to Gadderan with its ancient capital of Brahmour; [B3] it then became a part of the ancient kingdom of Chamba, [B4] with a history which shows royal governance by one single family since 700 AD, a distinction not shared by any European reigning house in the nineteenth century. The shepherds were thus not subjects of British India. It is only after 1947 that the State became a district of Himachal Pradesh in India.

Nomadism is a skill of the survival artist. Gaddi shepherds adopted it because sedentary agriculture was limited in scope and could not have supported them through the year in their homeland, [B5,] and herding required a scale of operations much beyond the pastures available in Chamba.[B6] Besides storage of food and fodder and preserving animals during winter would have involved high costs. Gaddi nomadism thus involved skilful balancing of numbers in their herds with appropriate pastures minimally exposed to different degree of risks over the year, such that some returns of scale could be achieved with minimum transaction costs. This was possible only with rights to pastures guaranteed over different seasons and with minimum bargaining costs. Towards such arrangements farmers and herders invested time and resources in working out institutions of communal access and withdrawal of resources from arable, pastoral and forest resources. Dependence was so critical that fear of loss acted as a natural deterrent against misuse.

Given such institutional possibilities, the nomadic effort became viable, because of the saving of transaction costs achieved. Such was the case when Gaddis moved down from their homeland during winter to the pastures of Kangra and the communally held forests of the Siwaliks like Shahpur Kandi tract. [B7] They were enabled to do this at two levels : first, because flock owners in the upper Himalayas required the Gaddis to protect their herds in winter in return for which they provided alpine pastures in summer to the Gaddis, in Lahul for example; and second, when the farmers in the valleys, terraced hill-sides of the Middle Himalayas like Kulu, and

Minoti Chakravarty-Kaul
Berkeley, Feb 1995.

UPHEAVAL IN THE NOMAD'S TRAIL

Survival in the Forest Commons of Northern India

A Prologue:

This is asanisanket - the sound of impending upheaval. It concerns a Dam, a Forest and a People - in that order of importance in which they have been placed rather misplaced by events and circumstances of the last few decades. The Thein Dam on the river Ravi, the forests of Shahpur Kandi in the foothills of the Siwaliks and transhumance - are communal constructs, but their boundaries overlap. The situation could be explosive; but is not. Such a non-event bears testimony to the marginalisation of local communities from effectively participating in organising and governing common pool resources by weaning away or sidetracking the constituent parts. This happened to communally managed forests elsewhere too, and in north India generally over a period of a century and a half. But, here the victims of the tragedy are also the condemned.

Presently the fate of the Gaddis and other alpine shepherding people is inextricably tied up with a growing conflict between increasing need to exploit natural resources *and* to conserve them at the same time as well. The Thein Dam illuminates. It is being constructed at a point on the Ravi where it pierces through the Siwaliks on its way to the plains. Just at this point on the left bank of the river lies the Shahpur Kandi Forest. [B1] The reservoir - Ranjit Sagar - will consequently submerge parts of it and serve as a catchment for all the small hill rivulets like the Karnal which runs through the forest tract. In the process it will drown not only valuable croplands of sedentary cultivators in large sections of some thirty odd villages¹ in the tract, but will also put an end to the grazing resources of a transhumancing people - the Gaddis. At the same time the Punjab will lose a part of its most important forest which comprises 52% of its total forest resources.

This forested tract, along with similar forests in the Siwaliks complements resources of two pastoral regions at two different times of the year. This is because the tract gets sufficient rainfall to support agriculture and yet is comparatively frost free and dry in winter. Therefore the tract can give refuge to herds of sheep and goats in winter which cannot survive the frozen alpine regions in the Upper Himalayas; while it can take on the heavier cattle of other nomadic groups like the Gujars after the rains. Both these features contribute towards relieving pressure on the more fragile eco-systems of the Upper Himalayas.



Fig. 10. Kilar in Pangi.