



## **Pastoralists in a Colonial World<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Long-distance nomadism**

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Much before the nineteenth century, India was linked to Afghanistan through an important annual migratory flow between the two regions. *Powindah* was the term of reference for all the migratory Pathan tribes who came down to Punjab every year from their base in Central Asia. They came to India not only to trade but in search of pasture, work, and a life away from the snowy uplands of Central Asia. Determined by geo-ecological conditions, their movements had a seasonal cycle. They assembled every autumn in the plains east of Ghazni with their families, flocks, herds and long strings of camels laden with the goods of Bokhara and Kandahar. The caravans traversed the Gakkar and Waziri country, crossed the Suleimans through the Gomal and Zhab passes, and entered Dera Ismail Khan. Here they left their families and flocks on the great grazing grounds on either side of the Indus. While some looked after the flocks and some wandered around in search of employment, others proceeded with the caravans and merchandise to Multan, Rajputana, Lahore, Amritsar, Delhi, Kanpur, Benaras, and sometimes up to Patna. In spring, they gathered again and returned by the same route to the hills around Ghazni and Kelat-i-Ghilzai. As the summer approached, the men moved off to Kandahar, Herat and Bokhara with Indian and European goods acquired in "Hindustan". In October, they would return and prepare once more to start their journey to India.



Militarisation was essential for long-distance nomadism. Powindahs had to pass through regions settled by tribes for whom feuding and raiding were an integral part of life.<sup>2</sup> The persistent fear of attack and plunder necessitated the formation of *kafilas* (caravans) and arming of the people.<sup>3</sup> The daily march of the *kafilas* was 'like that of an army through an enemy's territory.' The main body of the *kafila*, the camels carrying families and merchandise, was continuously guarded from all sides:

A few armed men with knife, sword and matchlock, guard the main portion, but a few hundred yards ahead may be seen a compact body of fighting men of the clan, mounted and dismounted, all armed to the teeth [...] On their flank, crowning the height with greatest care, and almost military exactitude, move a similar body of footmen, whilst in rear follows an equally strong party, all on the watch for their hereditary enemies, the Waziris. (Andrew cit. in Ross [1883] 1970)<sup>4</sup>

What we have here is not the movement of individuals and small groups, but the mass migrations of humans and animals. Powindahs moved with their families and children, with their herds and flocks, with arms and merchandise. In the cold weather of 1877-78 an estimated 78,000 powindahs crossed the passes. Two years later about 42,000 entered Dera Ismail Khan. Animals outnumbered humans. Every year the powindahs were reportedly accompanied by about 70,000 camels laden with merchandise, and more than 100,000 sheep, besides other animals (SR: Dera Ismail Khan 1883-84: 76).<sup>5</sup> The powindahs were not a homogeneous community. They combined various forms of economic activities. They were internally differentiated on the basis of property and wealth, occupation and function. Those who had fixed camping grounds known as *kirris* (camp village) could bring their families along to Derajat.

The rights over the *kirris* were mutually recognised and the same camping ground was resorted to year after year ("Punjab For." Frontier 08/1895: Ch. A 67-76).<sup>6</sup> Many powindahs had no fixed camping rights, and they came down without their families. Others, the *charra* folk, had no belongings and came as labourers, wandering about in search of work. Among the various powindah tribes (mostly Ghilzai and Lohani Pathans), Mian Khels were the richest, dealing with luxury commodities; Kharotis were the poorest, many of them were labourers; Suleiman Khels brought little merchandise to India, but acted as *dalals* between powindah traders and Indian merchants; Nasers, Dawtanis and Tarakis were primarily pastoralists.<sup>7</sup> Within each group there was



both a combination of different activities as well as sub-specialisations. Nasers, for instance, were said to be the 'least settled of all powindahs'; they had no home of their own. While living primarily as pastoralists, they also traded (Rose [1883] 1970: vol. III, 244).<sup>8</sup> Their activities combined in a variety of ways. Among the Naser Ushwals (camel folk), the poorer faction brought salt from Kohat mines, Multani *matti* from the hills, and were employed in India at small jobs. The richer Ushwals brought grapes, madder and almonds for sale and had their own kirris. The Naser Gayewals (ox-folk), Kharwals (ass-folk) and Goshfandwals (sheepfolk) had no kirris and usually took up odd jobs in India—carrying earth or bricks.

How did this nomadism change over the colonial period? At one level, the colonial state attempted to encourage and sustain the trade, which flowed through this network. It hoped to capture by this means the Central Asian market, displacing the Russian presence there. After the British annexation of Punjab, passes were opened, trade posts established at different points, and control over 'banditry' as well as the pacification of frontier tribes were taken up as serious projects.<sup>9</sup>

Yet British policies undermined the very basis of powindah nomadism. British intervention in the frontier created a prolonged crisis of tribal power relations, accentuating tribal feuds and banditry. High grazing taxes (*tirni*)—these trebled between 1870s and 1920s—adversely affected pastoralism, already under pressure from vanishing grazing grounds.<sup>10</sup> Collective tribal rights on camping grounds were disturbed in many areas when the British granted proprietary rights to loyal tribal groups. The disarming of powindahs on the British border exposed the camps (kirris) to Waziri raids, which the British border posts were incapable of resisting.<sup>11</sup>

Despite these pressures powindah nomadism continued. The powindahs regularly changed their migratory routes to avoid border posts; they resisted the collection of *tirni* tax; they forcibly recovered animals requisitioned by the colonial state. When railways and lorries threatened to displace their trading activity in India, powindahs sometimes combined caravan journeys up to the frontier with railway travel within India. It was the combination of different forms of economic activity, which allowed powindahs to survive the strains of changing times. In the long run, some forms of economic activity were more adversely affected than others. Powindah fortunes seem to have suffered more from the constraints on moneylending in India and from the decline of the Central Asian trade than from the problems of



pastoral grazing. This was reflected in the composition of the migratory flow from Afghanistan. The Lohanis and Suleiman Khels, who were most actively involved in trade, stopped coming to India by the 1940s. Members of the Dawtani and Tarkai tribes, who were primarily pastoralists, continued their annual migration in large numbers. Indian markets were finally lost after the Partition of India in 1947, and the grazing grounds of Dera Ismail Khan were closed to powindahs after 1961 (Balland & Kieffer 1979; Balland 1991).<sup>12</sup>

### **Alpine pastoralism**

*Gaddis* were the shepherds of the hills, and *Ban-Gujars* were cowherds. In Kangra sheep and goats together numbered over six lakhs in the 1890s, constituting about half the animal population. On the hills, flocks of sheep and goats could be more easily maintained than cattle. Alpine pastoralism is usually sustained by a vertical movement between the summer pasture in the high mountains and the winter pasture in the low hills. Buffaloes—even hill buffaloes—found the climb to the high ranges difficult. By the 1880s, the gaddis and gujars of the hills felt the pressures of colonial change. They found their access to forests closed, their rights redefined, the rhythms of their movements controlled, their spatial mobility restricted. The relationship between pastoralists and their grazing runs, and the social relationships which sustained their herding activities, changed in complex ways. This was not a simple shift from a regime of unrestricted grazing rights to one in which such rights were denied.

In the period before colonial laws were enacted, access to grazing runs was regulated through a combination of collective and segmented rights. In Kangra, pastures in the low hills were all divided among the shepherds. Each division or circuit was called a *ban*, and each ban was claimed by some gaddi family as its *warisi*.<sup>13</sup> A prefix was attached to each ban to distinguish the *warisi* of one family from another. A *warisi* usually originated with a *pattah*, acquired from the raja by a gaddi family to graze in a particular run. The family which acquired the *pattah* jointly used the run with five or six other families. Usually a flock of 800 to 1,200 grazed in one ban. The *waris* who held the *pattah* had some powers and functions. Grazing in the runs had to be managed and conflicts over rights resolved. 'The holder of the *pattah* directed the course of the flock, and acted as the spokesman and negotiator in the case of quarrels or dealings with the people along the line of the march.' He was recognised as the *mahlundi* or *malik kanda*,



i.e. the master of the flock; the other shepherds were *assamis*. The relationship between the waris and the assamis was forged through reciprocal claims and obligations, and sustained through the collective use of bans. The waris held the pattah, but he could graze his sheep only with other families. They had to move together through the forests and up the high mountains, protecting their flock from attacks and accidents. So the waris charged no dues from assamis for their right to graze; he did at times claim the *mailani* paid by zamindars for sheep dung.

Summer pastures above the limit of forests in the high mountains were similarly divided. Each run, a *dhar*, belonged to a waris with a pattah but was collectively used by a number of families. The association between families was said to be 'a brotherly one, no rent or fee being given or taken.'<sup>14</sup>

In Kulu, again, individual rights and collective rights coexisted. But here the nature of rights in the summer and winter pastures was different. Till spring, up to mid-June, sheep grazed in *rirs*, the grazing areas near the hamlets. From here they first moved up to the *gahrs*, the forest grazing grounds just above the limits of cultivation, and then up to the *nigahrs* or grassy slopes above the limits of the forest. After two months at the nigahrs the flocks descended back to the gahrs, grazed there for six weeks, and then moved further down to the low hills.<sup>15</sup> In each nigahr a hereditary title was claimed by a rasu, the person who held the pattah. To each nigahr was attached a gahr. But exclusive rights of a flock to graze in the gahr operated only during the descent from the nigahr, not on the way up in spring. The rasu in Kulu, like the malundhi of Kangra, was a waris of a nigahr. In the lower hills, however, no warisi was claimed by anyone. There were no exclusive hereditary rights over the winter pastures.

Warisi thus marked and segregated the right of a group of gaddi families from that of others, but did not define any exclusive right of the waris within the ban or nigahr. The waris did enjoy some power and privileges, but his right to his ban was no different from that of the other families who formed a part of the group he led. His power was premised on the role he performed. He could even lose his power and rights if he was not in a position to lead the group. Segregation of rights between the bans restricted competition and conflict between pastoralists, while collective, non-individuated rights within the bans ensured co-operation among each herding group.



When the colonial state claimed forests and 'wastes' as state property, and prepared the record of rights, the framework of rights was redefined. Having appropriated the forests as state property, the state could see gaddis only as lessees. So assamis became tenants who could graze only on the payment of a fee to the proprietor—the state. The tax was to be collected by the *muqaddam*.

The right of the muqaddam was now premised on his role as a revenue collector of the state, not on his participation in the collective pastoral activity of a group.<sup>16</sup> This legal redefinition of rights led to a complete transformation of the relations between assamis and muqaddams. Many muqaddams began calling themselves maliks.<sup>17</sup> The assami now had to pay four annas to one rupee per hundred sheep to the muqaddam as his due. To increase his income, the muqaddam brought in 'outsiders' to graze in his run. As the flocks of the muqaddam expanded and the grazing area was restricted, assamis were dispossessed. At the end of the nineteenth century it was reported: 'in many areas there are no assamis, and the grazers are the descendants of the first mukaddams.'<sup>18</sup> This in turn sharpened competition and conflict among assamis, and between them and the muqaddams.

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The grazing dues charged by the state increased rapidly. Very often, the tax had to be paid separately on each of the runs through which the gaddi flocks moved. Between the summer and winter runs there were many small patches of forest where the gaddis had to spend a few weeks. In each place they now had to pay a tax to the muqaddam.<sup>19</sup> The increasing shortage of pastures complicated the problem. Unable to find sufficient grass in one or two places, the shepherds had to move over a wider area, multiplying the number of times they were taxed. The state sought to redefine the temporal rhythms of pastoral activity. While the gaddis could graze their flocks in the summer and winter pastures in which they paid grazing dues, they were allowed only a 'right of way' through the 'unassessed waste', which they had to pass on their way up and down. Dates for the arrival and departure of flocks in each place were specified. In Kulu the gaddis could not come in before 15 Jait (the beginning of June) on their way up, and they had to leave Kulu by 20 Assauj (the first week of October) on their way down to the low hills.<sup>20</sup>

Fines were imposed if they arrived too soon or delayed their departure. This created problems for the gaddis. The temporal rhythms of their pastoral activities were defined by the seasons and were



subject to seasonal fluctuations. Clock time and fixed calendars had no meaning for them. When the winter was severe the gaddis could not move to the high pastures in Lahul within the time fixed. They had to wait for the snow to clear. Moreover, the gaddis needed time in Kulu if they were to sustain their relationship with the zamindars. Gaddi flocks manured the rice fields. So great was the demand for manure that the zamindars offered food, grain and even money to have sheep penned in their fields.<sup>21</sup> But in the official calendar there was no time for all this. The reservation of forests, the restrictions on the lopping of tree branches—crucial for winter pasture when grasslands were dry—and the ban on the firing of grass, all added to the constraints within which the gaddis now had to operate. They protested against these new constraints, thus forcing changes in official policies. At the same time they altered their ways; they too adjusted to the changing times.<sup>22</sup>

### **Pastoralism on the semi-arid plains**

The nature and rhythms of alpine pastoralism were very different from the form of pastoralism dominant in the semi-arid south-east of Punjab. This region was largely uninhabited in the early nineteenth century. When Karnal pargana was annexed in 1803, about four-fifths of it was estimated to be covered with forest.<sup>23</sup> Almost the whole of Sirsa was 'an uncultivated prairie with few permanent villages.'<sup>24</sup> Here, in Sirsa, settled agriculture was unknown. Pastoralism co-existed with shifting cultivation.

The pastoral Musalman tribes who were its only inhabitants drove their herds of cattle hither and thither in search of grass and water and had no fixed dwelling place. There were no boundaries and no defined rights. Some families of herdsmen had certain ponds and grazing grounds which they were in the habit of visiting in turn [...] Sometimes when grass was scarce, a family would roam long distances in search of pasture and settle down in some place far from their former haunt until grass or water failed them, or until they were driven from their encampment by some stronger family who covered it.<sup>25</sup>

Over the nineteenth century, the open fields in the region were colonised and the limits of cultivation extended. Yet pastoralism continued. Pastoral groups like the Bhattis, Joiyas, Wattus and Bodlas, who earlier grazed their large herds in this tract, felt the pressures of nineteenth century colonisation. But the pioneer colonisers—the Sikh Jats from the north, the Bagri Jats from the south, and the Muslim Jats and Rajputs from the neighbourhood of Sutlej—had to operate against



the ecological constraints of the region. They settled villages, cleared forests and ploughed the soil, but accepted pastoralism as an integral part of their economic activity. Agriculture could not displace pastoralism; they co-existed. The relationship between the two modes of life was both complementary and opposed. And this interrelationship defined the very nature of pastoralism in the region. To understand the dynamic of pastoralism in this region, we need to look at another interrelationship: that between this semi-arid tract and the intensively cultivated tracts of Central Punjab. These two areas formed two distinct geo-ecological zones, intimately related in complex ways.

The soil over large areas of Central Punjab was fertile alluvial loam. As one moved south, the soil became lighter, the proportion of sand increased, and near the southern extreme of the province firm loam was not to be found. Central Punjab was intersected by numerous river—Sutlej, Beas, Ravi—and drainage lines. The south-east had fewer rivers. The Jamuna, which formed its eastern boundary, deposited more sand than fertile loam. Water supply in the two regions varied. The level of precipitation declined in relation to the distance from the Himalayan range in the north. In Central Punjab it was a good 20 to 30 inches; but in the south-east it fluctuated between 10 to 20 inches, falling to less than 10 inches in the southern extreme of Hissar and Ferozepur which bordered the deserts of Rajasthan. The concept of an average rainfall is therefore misleading. In the south-east a year of heavy rain was followed by a cycle of bad years. The few natural inundation canals which existed in the south-east flowed only during the monsoon, and their water flow was much less certain than the perennial canals of Central Punjab, which flowed with even speed and volume through the year. Central Punjab was also a region of well irrigation: the ground-water level was only 10 to 30 feet below the surface. Towards the south-east the water level sank in places to below 150 feet, making well irrigation difficult.<sup>26</sup>

The south-east was, in short, more sandy, arid and insecure than Central Punjab. Recurring cycles of famine were an integral part of the life of the region. In the nineteenth century, a series of fifteen famines culminated in the two major famines over the tragic closing years of the century.<sup>27</sup> Even after 1900, scarcities continued to plague the region, though the areas affected by distress contracted. The 1905-06 famine was immediately followed by one in 1907-08, and then after a long gap came the famine of 1920-21.<sup>28</sup> In Sirsa, five out of six harvests failed between 1919 and 1921; and in Gurgaon, Rohtak and





Hissar most harvests between 1928 and 1935 failed partially or totally.<sup>29</sup>

Within this geo-ecological context, intensive agriculture could be sustained in Central Punjab, but not in the south-east. While double cropping (*dofasli harsala*) was common in places like Jullundar, it could not be practised in a region like Hissar. When there was rain, the semi-arid south-east could produce one crop a year (*ekfasli harsala*) or two consecutive harvests in two years (*dofasli dosala*). Here agricultural expansion could not easily displace pastoralism: the two activities did not always compete for the same land space or for the labour time of communities. Each activity supplemented the meagre and insecure income from the other, allowing a more optimal use of land and labour resources. In the language of political economy one might say that multi-resource nomadism is a way of optimising resource use and spreading risks; except nomadic societies cannot be conceptualised through this language. The calculations of pastoralists and their notions of work and time are not necessarily determined by a desire to maximise utilities.

The pastoral and agrarian zones were tied through myriad structures of interdependence. The agrarian communities of Central Punjab, and later of the Canal Colonies, provided a market for cattle reared in Hissar, Rohtak, Karnal and Gurgaon. At the famous Hissar cattle fair, an average of 12,000 to 20,000 cattle were sold every year in the 1870s and 1880s, and the total value of annual sales was over three lakhs of rupees.<sup>30</sup> Buyers came from different districts of Punjab and beyond: from Lyallpur, Ludhiana, Ferozepur, Jullundar, Meerut, Aligarh, Muzaffarnagar, Farukhabad, Bijnaur, and from as far away as Kanpur.<sup>31</sup> Over 10,000 bullocks were annually imported into Jullundar. There was a reverse flow of foodgrain and fodder from the agricultural to the pastoral zones.

This relationship of interdependence is reflected in the composition of agricultural stock. In the agricultural districts, bullocks outnumbered cows and calves; whereas the pastoral tracts present a reversed picture (see Tables I and II). Agricultural zones required bullocks for ploughing and the working of wells, but they could not internally reproduce their agricultural stock. Pastoralists sold their bullocks but retained their cows for breeding, and for the supplies of milk and ghee which formed an important component of their family income. Young calves, carefully tended, were ultimately sold at cattle fairs. More than 90 per cent of the cattle sold at these fairs were bullocks.



TABLE I  
Variations in Cattle Population (in thousands)

Years	Bulls & Bullocks	Cows	Buffaloes		Young Stock
			Male	Female	
<i>Pastoral Tracts</i>					
HISSAR					
1893	137	180	5	65	164
1898	116	130	4	58	151
1904	85	79	5	59	132
1935	103	121	2	91	251
ROHTAK					
1893	131	119	2	60	163
1898	115	107	2	58	136
1904	88	63	1	54	127
1935	128	87	1	92	226
<i>Agricultural Tracts</i>					
JULLUNDAR					
1893	183	79	29	41	91
1898	175	76	32	47	108
1904	194	76	31	55	112
1935	152	48	27	94	163
LUDHIANA					
1893	142	73	4	48	73
1898	130	81	4	53	95
1904	131	55	3	55	95
1935	108	47	1	80	146



TABLE II  
Composition of Cattle Population (percentage distribution)

Years	Bulls & Bullocks	Cows	Buffaloes		Young Stock
			Male	Female	
<i>Pastoral Tracts</i>					
HISSAR					
1893	25	32	1	12	30
1898	25	28	1	12	33
1904	23	22	1	16	37
1935	18	21	1	16	44
ROHTAK					
1893	27	25	1	12	34
1898	27	25	1	14	32
1904	19	14	0	12	27
1935	24	16	0	17	42
<i>Agricultural Tracts</i>					
JULLUNDAR					
1893	43	19	7	10	21
1898	40	17	7	10	25
1904	41	16	6	11	24
1935	31	10	5	19	34
LUDHIANA					
1893	42	21	1	14	21
1898	36	22	1	14	26
1904	39	16	1	16	28
1935	28	12	0	21	38

Source: Up to 1899 the statistics of Punjab cattle censuses are reported in *Punjab administration reports* and *Punjab land revenue administration reports*. The 1904 and 1909 Censuses are reported in *Punjab seasons and crop reports*. Subsequently there were separate volumes of Punjab Cattle Census. Some of these census statistics are also reproduced in the *Agricultural statistics of British India*.



The cycle of pastoral activities was structured by the seasons. But the nature of the cycle in the semi-arid plains was different from the one in the hills. As long as grass was available, village herds were sent out under the charge of a cowherd to graze in village commons. And where there was water in village ponds cattle were allowed to drink and wade about.<sup>32</sup> By the beginning of April the grass in the *barani* tracts withered, the pools in the jungles dried up. Then, pastoralists had to move in search of pasture and water. From the Karnal *nardak*, cattle were driven to the hills and riverine tracts. With the beginning of the monsoon the herds were back on their return journey.<sup>33</sup> But there were tracts where rainfall was always inadequate and grasslands rarely greened. In such tracts the monsoon did not bring the herds back home. In the rainy season, we are told, when the Bikaner grasslands were lush, cattle from the dry parts of Sirsa, Patiala and even Ludhiana were driven south to graze.<sup>34</sup> They returned north only after the grass there was exhausted.

These cyclical migrations were of two sorts. One: a regular annual movement between uplands and lowlands, between the dry tracts and the green. Two: a more irregular movement conditioned by cycles of good and bad years. In years of drought, migrants from *barani* tracts went to irrigated areas, within the district and outside, in search of pasture and work, returning home after the drought was over.<sup>35</sup> These migrations were 'in proportion to the dryness of the season amounting to an entire exodus in times of famine.'<sup>36</sup> Such movements set up relationships of interdependence between different regions and communities.

The history of droughts left a very deep mark on the life of pastoralists who were affected. Cattle are a volatile resource: they perish in large number during times of famine. Enervated by hunger, they succumb to cattle disease and the winter frost.<sup>37</sup> The famous cattle breeds of Hissar were periodically decimated by fodder famines which recurred in the region with tragic regularity. When the rains failed in 1863-64 and the year after, large herds were driven towards Karnal. Only two-thirds of that number returned. Between 1866-67 and 1867-68 over half the cattle in the district perished. Those that survived were 'tottering and emaciated': they could not even be driven out to graze.<sup>38</sup> In 1868-69 both harvests failed again. Of the estimated 202,327 horned cattle in the district, only 53,737 survived. In the disastrous years of 1896-97 Hissar cattle-owners moved to the native states in the hope of fodder. When they returned after the *kharif* sowings were over, only a fifth of their stock was left. An estimated



77,000 cattle died.<sup>39</sup> After the famines, when bullocks were scarce, buffaloes were used to plough the fields and work the wells; at times women were to be seen pulling the plough.

Pastoral and agricultural zones experienced good and bad years in different ways. A look at Table II will show that when Hissar lost its herds, Jullundar did not. Between 1893 and 1904, a decade of acute scarcities, there was a sharp decline in the cattle stocks of Hissar: as much as 36 per cent in the case of bullocks and 56 per cent in the case of cows. Over the same years the cattle stock of Jullundar continued to increase. Peasants in Jullundar did not suffer scarcities.

In fact, a bad year for Hissar was a good year for Jullundar. When the pastoral zone was affected by famines, peasants in Central Punjab gained. The failure of local harvests forced the pastoralists of the south-east into a greater dependence on the market for fodder and grain. As the demand for grains and fodder increased, their prices soared, inflating the incomes of peasants in the agricultural zones and pushing up the expenses of pastoral and other buyers. When expenditure increased, income dipped. The volume of transaction in cattle fairs and the level of bullock prices depended on the seasons. The prospect of a drought led to a rush of anxious sellers.<sup>40</sup> While supplies increased, demand fell. Many cattle fairs could not be held in the famine years of the late nineteenth century for want of buyers. The price of bullocks therefore had a direct relationship to the harvest: it was low in years of drought and high in years of plenty. In 1895-96, when a dearth of fodder led to high rates of cattle mortality, bullocks which ordinarily cost Rs 60-80 could be purchased for Rs 25.<sup>41</sup> Cycles of bad years benefited nomadic cattle dealers, who bought their cattle cheap in the arid cattle-breeding zone and sold them dear in the agricultural tracts. A part of the benefit also went to those peasants who acquired agricultural stock in these years.

Within such structures of a skewed interdependence, impoverishment of pastoralists in the arid zone and peasant accumulation in the agrarian zone were tied processes. The symbiotic relationship between agriculture and pastoralism provided both the basis and the limits within which the pastoral economy could reproduce itself. Different groups of pastoralists confronted these limits in different ways. Some effectively redefined the ecological constraints within which they had to operate, others could not. Mobility was a pastoral strategy to overcome seasonal scarcities of grass and fodder. But all groups could not be equally mobile. Mobility itself had to be sustained by other



strategies. In Karnal, intermarriage between people of nardak (an upland) and the riverine tract provided a mutual guarantee of grazing rights: 'In years of drought they [the people of Nardak] seek pasture with riverine countries, and in years of flood and heavy rainfall, when the grass in the riverine countries is rank and of inferior quality, they allow their relations to bring cattle into the grasslands of the Nardak.'<sup>42</sup> Not every one could establish such reciprocal relations of mutual rights and obligations.

Pastoralists had to live with high rates of cattle mortality during scarcities; but they sought to devise strategies of minimising long-term losses.<sup>43</sup> When grass and fodder were scarce, supplies were reserved for calves. Older animals were allowed to die of starvation, or slaughtered if they could not be sold. Table I shows that during famine years the number of calves did not decline as rapidly as the number of cows and bullocks. This led to a change in the age structure of herds. After the famines, 'young stock' constituted a larger proportion of the cattle population (Table II).

In the longer term, the pastoral economy in the dry tracts did suffer a crisis. The extension of arable and the enclosure of forests meant an overgrazed, shrinking pastureland. This led to soil erosion and the deterioration of available grazing lands. Migration to wet tracts became difficult as pastures disappeared from there. Even the *shamilats* were partitioned by agriculturists. The pressure on pastures reflected itself in the decline of agricultural stock. After the sharp decline in the late nineteenth century there was a recovery, but not to earlier levels (Table I). This decline, in turn, affected agriculture. The supply of manure and plough cattle could not keep pace with the demand, creating barriers to agricultural expansion.

### **The discourse of property**

The colonial debate on the rights of pastoralists, forest dwellers and peasants was framed within a specific discourse of property. This discourse celebrated proprietorship and viewed all forms of society through two important categories: proprietor and tenant. The framing question of this discourse was always the same: who has the right of property? The rights of all groups were conceived, classified and fixed in terms of such categories; they were defined in response to such questions. From this initial framing question, others followed: who owned the grazing runs? The uncultivated land? The open pastures? The forests? How were the rights to these lands to be defined?



Within the Punjab tradition, coparcenary village proprietors were seen as the core of the agrarian order. The proprietary body was linked together through ties of kinship and a claim to common descent. Within such a *pattidari* community, village land was to be divided among the proprietors according to ancestral shares. At the time of the settlement a part of the open grazing land was allocated to each village as *shamilat deh*. The ancestral shares of agricultural land were to determine each proprietor's claim to the *shamilat*. Only proprietors could have a right to graze their cattle in this common land. Within this framework, nomadic pastoralists—people without property—could have no access to the *shamilat*. The right to pasture was appended to the right to revenue-yielding agricultural land. Later, pastures claimed for the agricultural community were assimilated into agricultural land: they were partitioned and cultivated.

The logic was caught in the contradiction which it generated. Access to the *shamilat* was first made dependent on membership to the coparcenary proprietary community, but then the very identity of the *pattidari* community was defined in terms of its relationship to the *shamilat*. Revenue officials of the nineteenth century realised that the actual area of land held by proprietors had no relation to their notional ancestral shares. The size of holdings changed continuously through a complex process of land transfers. What then was the *pattidari* tenure? Having invented the tenurial term, officials now sought to save it by redefining its meaning. In a *pattidari* community, argued some officials, ancestral shares may not define rights in the village but were to be the absolute basis of rights on the *shamilat*. By a peculiar logic, rights to pastureland became the defining basis of the agricultural community.<sup>44</sup>

But grazing lands given over to village communities were for agricultural use, not pastoralism. The record of rights categorically stated that the rights to *shamilat* were to be 'exercised only for the bona-fide agricultural and domestic purposes of the *bartandars* (right holders in protected forests) and only on behalf of their own cattle, not for [...] purely pastoral as distinguished from agricultural purposes.'<sup>45</sup> Cattle could be kept for agricultural and domestic use, not for trade. It was repeatedly emphasised in official discussions: 'it is to be distinctly understood that the Government of India do not desire that grazing should be looked upon primarily as a source of income.'<sup>46</sup> Not only were the rights of nomadic pastoralists denied, but so were the rights of those who wished to practise agro-pastoralism. Within this regime of rights, proprietors could not allow pastoralists to graze in the *shamilat*.



Orders specified that even 'lambardars and other influential villagers have no right to grant leases of the grazing.'<sup>147</sup> Only by becoming a proprietor and an agriculturist could a pastoralist graze his cattle on a village common.

This framework of thought could not tolerate open access to pastures and forests. Vast stretches of grazing tracts in West Punjab were taken over and partitioned, and property rights were given over to individuals for cultivation. It was officially stated that 'hopes should be held out to cultivators that if they fully cultivate the land (earlier used for grazing) they would be treated as proprietors, and that if they sank wells the land would be assessed at barani rates only.'<sup>148</sup> In many areas, permanent leases on grazing lands were given to individuals on the condition that the lessees cultivate the land instead of using it to graze their cattle.

The rights of gaddis were not linked to rights to agricultural land. But within colonial discourse, all rights were recast in the image of agricultural property rights. As regards the rights of gaddis, it was stated: 'their rights are personal and not attached to land; but they are hereditary and descend like property in land [...].'<sup>149</sup> On the grazing runs of gaddis, colonial officials continued their search for assamis (tenants) and muqaddams (headmen). After claiming grazing runs as government property, the state classified shepherds as lessees who held their right direct from the government. Like village headmen who collected land revenue from villages, muqaddams were appointed from among pastoral gaddis to collect grazing dues. Landed tenures provided the frame through which the pastoral tenurial structure was conceived. Within this regime of property, all rights to land were segregated, fragmented, classified and fixed. Within it the rights claimed by nomadic pastoralists appeared unintelligible and illegitimate.

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### **Culture and nature**

In colonial descriptions, pastoralists were objects of contempt. They were inevitably represented as lazy, improvident, 'wretched' as cultivators, lawless, wild, and even mean and cowardly. They were associated with all that was considered evil, ugly and miserable.<sup>50</sup> Brandreth wrote of the Gujars, Oogars and Bhattis of Ferozepur:

They are utterly devoid of energy and are the most apathetic, unsatisfactory race of people I ever had anything to do with. They will exert themselves occasionally to go on a cattle stealing





expedition or to plunder some of the quite well-conducted Arains [...] but their exertions are seldom directed to a better end. They take not the slightest interest in any agricultural pursuit; their fields are cultivated in the most slovenly manner; you see none of the neatly kept houses, well-fenced fields, fat bullocks, and wells kept in good repair which distinguish the industrious castes; but the hovels in which they live are generally half in ruins; no fences ever protect their fields. Their cattle are half starved, and their walls often in the most dilapidated condition.<sup>51</sup>

This statement, made in the first decade of British rule in Punjab, was endorsed by Malcolm Darling in 1925.<sup>52</sup> 75 years of pax Britannica had failed to transform the pastoralists. Embodied in such statements is a range of cultural notions about work and leisure, good and evil, order and beauty. The statements express a specific understanding of the relation between nature and culture.

The 'lazy' pastoralist was inevitably defined in opposition to the 'sturdy industrious' Sikh peasant, cultivating his field with care and yielding revenue to the British. Pastoralism was not a worthwhile enterprise, cultivation was. Lack of interest in cultivation was a sign of 'apathy'. Land that had not been cultivated was considered 'waste', 'barren', a 'wilderness'. Through cultivation, through human enterprise, barren land could be made productive and fertile. The labour involved in this project was 'productive', to be classed as more valuable than that which added nothing to the fertility of the soil. Those involved in this human endeavour were superior to those who did not participate in it. Nomadic activity, in fact, was not purposive action. Pastoral nomads were always described as roaming or wandering 'hither and thither'. So, pastoral activity was spurned and pastoralists stigmatised.

Like other natural resources, land was seen as scarce. Since its supply was limited, its use had to be ordered and controlled, its productive capacity augmented and reproduced. Proceeding from this perspective, pastoral practices were condemned. They used scarce resources indiscriminately, it was said, and contributed nothing to augment or regenerate the productive capacity of the soil. The uncultivated countryside was not only barren and desolate but also dreary and ugly. Tamed, ordered, inhabited and productive landscape was beautiful. Shrubs were dreary, wheat-fields were not. The 'well-fenced field' was a sign of industry and order, as also a picture pleasing to the eye. The clearance of 'wastes' and the colonisation of land were therefore processes which transformed dreary landscapes



into beautiful ones, activities by which 'wild' nature was tamed and ordered.

The extension of cultivation was synonymous with progress, and the 'reclamation of waste land' was a civilising project. Uncultivated tracts where pastoralists grazed their cattle were outside the pale of culture: they had to be 'claimed' or 'reclaimed' for humanity through cultivation. Agricultural colonisation, a metaphor for the expropriation of pastoralism, was represented as a process of civilisation. Pastoral tracts, in fact, appeared physically segregated from the realm of culture. 'Cut off from the rest of the world by desert and hill, the people [the pastoralists of west Punjab] are caged in the surroundings, and like birds born in captivity, have small desire for anything else.'<sup>53</sup> Enclosed and trapped, these pastoral regions had no link with the wider, civilised society. To be civilised, they had to be physically integrated with the peasant world.

In a way, this ideology of improvement was not specifically colonial: it was rooted in a long tradition of western thought. The drive to dominate nature began with the desacralisation of the world and asserted itself with cold vigour in the post-Enlightenment Age of Reason. Christianity was deeply anthropocentric: the function of nature was to serve man's needs. Nature was seen as predatory and as a possible source of demonic threats.<sup>54</sup> Subsequently, rationalist post-enlightenment thought conceived of nature as a quantitative, mechanistic mass, a resource to be exploited. Its utility could be maximised through scientific, rational control, through productive labour. The concept of ordering, domination and the conquest of nature was integral to the ideology of improvement which developed in eighteenth century Europe.<sup>55</sup>

In England, this ideology of conquest was questioned by the romantic tradition.<sup>56</sup> For the romantics, nature had an inner life, an organising principle, an innate beauty. This natural order had to be discovered, and a communion with nature had to be re-established. India played upon this European romantic imagination.<sup>57</sup> Reacting against the monotony of ordered landscapes in the age of agricultural and industrial revolution, travellers voyaged to India in search of wild nature unspoilt by human intervention.<sup>58</sup> Through this communion with nature, travellers hoped to understand the 'true' meaning of life, in part via psychic experiences, which their own country denied them.<sup>59</sup> This romantic spirit found expression in literary texts, sketches and



paintings. Yet this romanticism did not throw overboard the official ideology of improvement: rather, it was wedded to this ideology.

The romantic generation of British Indian officials reacted against the flattening uniformity of western laws, against the impersonality of Cornwallis's system of government. They wanted indigenous systems to be preserved in all their variety.<sup>60</sup> They dreamt of a personalised, paternal rule over the countryside. But they were concerned primarily with peasant institutions and customs. And their filial care extended to peasants, not pastoralists. Lawrence's ideal was of a 'country thickly cultivated by a fat, contented yeomanry, each riding his own horse sitting under his own fig tree [...].'<sup>61</sup> In this pastoral imagination, the pastoralists did not figure. Punjab was seen by officials as a land of peasant proprietors. The great debate in Punjab over protective measures concerned only the peasants.<sup>62</sup>

These notions inform even the most sensitive colonial accounts of rural Punjab. Consider Malcolm Darling's *The Punjab peasant in prosperity and debt*. Perceptive and brilliant in many ways, the book is emphatic in its celebration of peasant culture in opposition to that of the pastoralist. And it is an account in which the story of colonisation becomes a narrative of progress. In the Canal Colonies over twenty lakh acres of grazing lands were taken over by the state, pastoralists were expropriated, agricultural colonies were set up, canals were constructed, and blocks of land were granted to the 'sturdy peasants' of Central Punjab. Darling's chapter on the Canal Colonies is preceded by one on the pastoral tracts of West Punjab, a narrative strategy meant to heighten contrasts between the two regions. The arid pastoral region represented a picture of 'poverty, ignorance and oppression,' a life 'dominated by relentless nature.' For Darling, life here was 'the immemorial life of India, primitive, isolated and fatalistic;' while that in the Canal Colonies was 'the new life brought in by pax Britannica, prosperous, progressive, and modern.' The colonisation which modernised the region also transformed the landscape:

Ten years ago it was a country of rolling sand dunes patched with grass, and of hard, unfruitful plains glistening with salt. In the early nineties, a man journeying south from the Jhelum to the Sutlej would have had to traverse 150 miles of some of the ugliest and dreariest country in the world. Here and there round scattered wells [...] his eye might have been gladdened by a smiling oasis of wheat; [...] his way would have probably have lain through an endless waste of bush and scrub, with little sign of life beyond the uncertain footmark of camel, buffalo, and goat, and the moveable dwelling of the nomad grazer, with its roof of thatch



propped upon wooden poles. [...] most people would have agreed with the deputy commissioner of Jhang who described it as 'unrivalled in the world for its combination of the most disagreeable features a landscape is capable of affording.'<sup>63</sup>

Darling could never forget the 'impression of desolation made upon his mind' when, 'fresh from the verdure and beauty of England,' he found himself in this West Punjab scrubland. His description repeats all the stereotypes of colonial discourse. We have the contrast between pastoral land-subject to uncontrolled, untamed nature—and agricultural colonies where we 'feel everywhere the beneficent hand of man.' One region epitomised poverty, misery, ugliness, a primitive state of being; the other prosperity, well-being, beauty and progress. Darling reacted against the Utilitarian ethos, but his writings are saturated with much the same Utilitarian attitude to nature.<sup>64</sup>

Darling loved the Punjab countryside and hated the 'uncleanly aroma of Indian city life.'<sup>65</sup> Yet he clearly did not discover any innate beauty in nature. During what he calls his 'rural rides', he was not in search of unspoilt nature or the beauty of the wilderness. Almost invariably, an ideology of improvement is woven into his lyrical descriptions of landscapes:

the hills were veiled in the chick mist of a drying earth. But the earth itself could not have been lovelier—young wheat, ripening cane and dark mango grove all showing man's cunning hand in complete harmony with nature's, and not, as so often in India, struggling half heartedly against her callous caprices.

Only labour yields the desired harmony with nature. Beauty is a productive landscape marked with human toil.

From such a framework of thought flowed a specific measure of civilisation. The level of control over nature and the level of efficiency in using natural resources here define the status of a society.<sup>66</sup> Those who master nature are advanced; those subject to the rhythms and dictates of nature are primitive. This argument legitimises the power of the West and sanctions its 'civilizing' project. It sustains the critical attitude of officials towards nomadic pastoralism.<sup>67</sup>

The evolutionist ideas of the late nineteenth century strengthened this association between the pastoral nomad and the primitive. The evolutionist scheme saw the movement from savagery to civilisation as an evolution from tribe to state. Family, property and territory were established at different stages of this unilinear movement. Once the signs of civilisation were fixed, different groups could be ranked within



a single evolutionary scale. Social groups such as the pastoral tribes—which were assumed to have no association with property, territory and state—appeared on the lower rungs of the scale. And once characterised as primitive, property, territory and state were always seen as alien implants on pastoral nomadic society.

### **From nomads to vagrants**

How were the pastoralist and the nomad perceived within popular culture?

There is no doubt that at one level the social and cultural world of nomads was opposed to that of settled peasants. Powindahs considered mobility as their defining characteristic: the very term powindah, as I said, means 'one who travels on foot'; the alternative Persian term 'kochi', used in Afghanistan, has a similar meaning: 'one who moves.' Powindahs saw nomadism not only as a legitimate way of life but as the very basis of their status and pride.<sup>68</sup> Those who settled, lost this identity. But the settled Pathans of the plains distanced themselves from the mobile hillmen. For them, 'a hill man is no man.' And they commonly said: 'don't class burrs as grass, or a hill man as a human being.' (Ibbetson 1916: 58)<sup>69</sup>

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Each group, the settled and the mobile, looked down upon the other. Pastoralists were frequently the subject of peasant ridicule. In the dry tracts of the south-east, a gujar was suspect as friend and neighbour. There was a common saying: 'befriend a gujar only when all other communities die' (*sabhi zat marjae jab, kar gujar se dosti*).<sup>70</sup> One could sleep with ease, it was said, only when dogs, cats, ranghars and gujars were not present (*kutta billi do; ranghar gujar dol ye charon na ho, to pair phelake so*).<sup>71</sup> Ahirs were similarly stigmatised: they were faithless (*ahir be-pir*); they were as ruthless as the baniya, as treacherous as the jackal.<sup>72</sup> In their self-conception, represented in the myths of their origin, ahirs contested such terms of censure.

The mobile and the settled, nomads and peasants, were thus locked in continuous conflict. But they also co-existed through conflict: nomadism was not yet repressed. Nomadic activity operated not merely within the pores and interstices of society but was an integral part of it. And social attitudes towards the wanderer, the outsider and the nomad were complex, contradictory, ambivalent.

The wanderer was not univocally or universally censured. The theme of travel or wandering appears insistently in Punjabi kissas. In the



kissa of Raja Rasalu, for instance, the prince is banished from the kingdom for violating social propriety.<sup>73</sup> As Rasalu wanders from one region to another, he faces new problems, new tests. He confronts them all and in the process reveals himself—his valour, determination, intelligence, kindness. At the end, he returns to his kingdom.

This narrative structure recurs in other kissas. The prince becomes a commoner, wanders into unknown land, and later the commoner becomes the king. It is usually a journey which mediates between the double transformation from king to commoner and back from commoner to king. In such popular narratives a life of wandering is seen in opposed ways: it is both a punishment for social transgression as well as a quest for knowledge, an act through which the norms of society are re-established. The journey reveals the innate nobility of the prince who is in commoner's clothes. The journey becomes a method of self-discovery, a process by which experience and knowledge are acquired, a passage through which the self is constituted in confrontation with the world. The individual moves out of society to demonstrate his right to be reintegrated within it.<sup>74</sup>

This notion of journey as a mode of self-realisation and self-constitution was premised on a specific conception of knowledge and experience. It is implicit here that knowledge comes from experience, that experience is spatially limited, that a specific experience is contained within a particular space. So, spatial mobility is necessary for the expansion of experience and knowledge, for self-realisation. The journey marked the movement from one enclosed world to another, one realm of experience to another.

In many popular Punjabi kissas the 'outsider' is romanticised. The hero is very often a *pardesi*. Izzatbeg, the hero of the kissa of Sohni-Mahiwal, is an *amirzada* from Bokhara who comes to India with a kafila of *saudagars*. Izzatbeg moves with the *saudagars*, helping them sell horses and spices, and falls in love with Sohni, the daughter of a potter. In the kissa of Hir-Ranjha, Hir's passionate romance unfolds with Ranjha, who comes from across Chenab. In the kissa of Sassi-Pannun, Sassi falls madly in love with a *pardesi*, a Biloch, whom she has never even met. When Pannun comes to meet Sassi, he accompanies the *saudagars* from Afghanistan and is dressed as one of them.

Yet relationships with outsiders were in a sense problematic. A stranger could never be trusted. In the kissa of Sassi-Pannun, recorded in the early nineteenth century,<sup>75</sup> Sassi is fated to love a



stranger who will desert her. Her love for Pannun ends in tragedy for both. This *kissa* powerfully expresses the popular fear of relating to outsiders. The stability and security of the knowable community appears in contrast with the instability of the outside world.

Pastoral themes recur in the *kissas* in a variety of ways, revealing a complex of ambivalent and conflicting attitudes. In the *kissa* of Hir-Ranjha, Hir falls in love with a zamindar's son who becomes a cowherd.<sup>76</sup> In the *kissa* of Sohni-Mahiwal, an amirzada from Bokhara becomes first a traveller and later a *mahiwal*, the cowherd with whom Hir's passionate love develops. Both Ranjha and Izzatbeg have to renounce their material, social inheritance. Only as *mahiwals* can they act out their romantic roles. This transformation from a person of social standing to a wanderer and then a cowherd is not represented as a fall: social transgression does not produce a feeling of guilt among those who transgress.

The pastoral theme has a spatial imagery. Romance in these *kissas* usually develops on the grazing runs and in the forests. It is in these open spaces that Hir-Ranjha and Sohni-Mahiwal meet each other. They move out of the village, away from the constraints of society, into a realm of freedom, a world of passion and dream.<sup>77</sup> Their return to the village marks a return to the sphere of constraints. In these *kissas* the flute appears as a metaphor for romantic love and freedom from society's norms. In the popular imagery here, as in some of the pastoral forms which developed elsewhere, the flute is associated with the pastoral nomad. Ranjha as well as Mahiwal wander about in the grazing runs, playing the flute, much like their literary counterparts in British or Italian Pastoral poems and eclogues.<sup>78</sup>

The flute is in fact associated with an entire way of life. Ranjha and Izzatbeg delight in a life of ease, untroubled by work. Even when compelled to work, they only end up playing the flute and grazing cattle. The *kissas* set up a rhetoric of contrasts: a good life without work and pain is opposed with a life of toil and labour; nomadic life appears in opposition to the norms of settled society. Pastoral life appears, in the Indian context as in the Western, as the romantic other; and so the object of the romantic imagination comes into being coterminously with the social censure of a peasant society.

The *kissas*, it could be said, reveal a tension between the necessity of social codes and the urge to transgress them; between the conjugal norms of society and the dream of passionate extramarital union. Norms are represented as constraints on freedom as well as the basis



of order; transgression is celebrated as well as damned. The pardesi, the wanderer and the cowherd appear as romantic heroes, but they are also transgressors of norms. They enact their romance but, in the end, move out of society: they have to renounce the world or die. The lovers reunite through death: Ranjha enters Hir's grave and Pannun enters Sassi's.<sup>79</sup> And once dead they are deified: there is a shrine of Hir-Ranjha near Jhang where, in the late nineteenth century, a fair was held in February.

The pastoral heroes of the kissas are deified in a variety of ways. In the version of Hir-Ranjha's marriage narrated by the Patiala Jatts in the late nineteenth century, the character of Ranjha the cowherd fuses with that of a yogi with miraculous powers. Ranjha does not become a follower of Balnath after Hir is married to Khera. The powers of a yogi inhere in him.<sup>80</sup> In the kissa of Abdullah Shah of Samin narrated by Ghulam Muhammad Balachani Mazari, the story of Hir and Ranjha reappears, emplotted in a narrative which sanctifies Ranjha.<sup>81</sup> In this, Abdullah Shah sets off on a pilgrimage to Mecca. His ship having run aground, Abdullah disembarks to make the ship move. In the process, the ship sails off, leaving Abdullah upon a desolate shore. Abdullah then discovers Hir and Ranjha. Ranjha takes Abdullah to the Prophet and brings him back to earth. In this kissa Ranjha has direct access to the Prophet, for he is the cowherd who supplies the Prophet with his daily requirement of milk. Hir and Ranjha inhabit a liminal space between the human and the divine: the seashore where Abdullah's ship is stuck, and where no other human lives, represents that liminal space. Ranjha, rather like Virgil in Dante's *Divine comedy*, has the power to move between spaces, between different worlds. Abdullah's journey between the human and the divine world is made possible by Ranjha. Abdullah was a Sayyid and was known for his sanctity. But it is Ranjha the cowherd who has closer proximity to the Prophet.

Nomads, pedlars and pastoralists faced a more univocal opposition under the colonial regime as the state attempted to discipline and settle them, and as the institutions of disciplinary power crystallised over time. The conflicting images, with all their ambiguities and possible variations in meaning, fused into one stereotypical image of the nomad as vagrant. Watched, hounded, harassed and frequently prosecuted by the police, nomads henceforth lived a life of eternal persecution.

The *Criminal Tribes Act* of 1871 gave legal sanction to official actions against 'wanderers.' By the act of 1871, wandering became a





crime. Tribes classed as 'habitual wanderers' were now expected to stay confined to their villages. Licences of leave were to be issued, but only to those who pursued an 'honest livelihood.' Anyone found wandering without a licence was to be prosecuted, fined and arrested. Pastoralists in the Canal Colonies ('*janglis*') were classified as criminal; in many districts gujars, *bhattis* and other pastoral groups appeared in the list of criminal tribes.

Through other acts, the state extended control over the pastoralist's animal stock. All animal—camels, ponies, horses, mules—were to be enumerated, registered and branded. In each district, the number of animals had to be ascertained, and in times of war they were pressed into the service of the state. These measures provoked continuous conflict as well as frequent confrontations between pastoralists and the state. When in 1878 powindah camels were forcibly requisitioned for military carriage, the powindahs rebelled. In a massive operation, celebrated later as the great rescue, armed bands of powindahs fought the police, stripped them naked, burnt several *thanas* and recovered their animals. Such confrontations were common. Yet the *Punjab Military Transport Act of May 1903* was passed, legalising government rights over all transport animals. To exercise more effective control over animals, nomadic pastoralism was discouraged in favour of settled animal husbandry. Willing breeders could get large land grants in the Canal Colonies.

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Nomads, vagabonds and wanderers were thus to be disciplined and settled. Their identities had to be fixed. They had to belong to a marked territory—a village, a district, a province. To exercise power the state *had* to know the identities of those over whom power was to be exercised, and confine them within controllable, delimited spaces. Nomads appeared elusive, unknowable, anonymous beings whose identities were difficult to ascertain. Their mobility was, to an extent, acceptable; their anonymity was not. Since the anonymity of the nomad threatened the very basis of power, their mobility had to be restricted and regulated.

## Conclusion

In conclusion I wish to draw out the implications of my general argument.

In an interesting essay, Chris Bayly has written about a general process of peasantisation of nomads in the nineteenth century.<sup>82</sup> He counterpoises this process to the traditional thesis on the proletarian-



isation of peasants. This counter-position is problematic: in a sense, Bayly shares the premises of the argument he opposes. This is because both these apparently opposed theses share the common assumption that vulnerable social groups invariably succumb to the irresistible and all-powerful forces of commercialisation and agrarian expansion. Unable to resist, peasants, according to one thesis, become paupers; according to the other, nomads become peasants.

I would argue that a more complex process is at work. While pauperised, some nomads took to wage labour, earning small sums by digging canals or building roads. Some became part-time peasants or expanded their cultivation to supplement a declining income. Others concentrated on trading activities. And finally, there were those that continued their earlier pastoral activities even within the new regime where a legal order classed them as vagrants and criminals, forest acts appropriated their grazing grounds, and an expanding agrarian frontier colonised the tracts over which they earlier moved. At times, they silently defied the encroaching norms of the new order; at other times they rebelled more openly. Their conflicts with the state and agrarian society sharpened over time. Grazers set fire to reserved forests, defied restrictions on grazing rights, raided peasant communities, destroyed crops, and carried off peasant cattle.<sup>83</sup> The conflict with peasant society was perhaps most acute in the Canal Colonies, where pastoralists were expropriated on a grand scale. For a prolonged period, the 'janglis' carried on a war with the early peasant migrants from Central Punjab.<sup>84</sup>

There was thus both resistance and adaptation to change. I can see no simple, smooth process of displacement and dispossession; no uniform, unilinear development.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced here with permission of Neeladri Bhattacharya (author) and Oxford University Press. This essay originally appeared as: Neeladri Bhattacharya. 1996. Pastoralists in a colonial world. In: David Arnold & Ramachandra Guha, eds. *Nature, culture, imperialism: essays on the environmental history of South Asia*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 49-85.

<sup>2</sup> Punjab Foreign Department Proceedings (Hereafter Punjab For.), February 1872, A 27; Punjab For., January 1872, A 7; Punjab For., April 1872, A 18; Punjab For., December 1872, A 28; Punjab For., March 1879, A 11.

<sup>3</sup> Punjab For. (Frontier), April 1894, A 114-19.

<sup>4</sup> William Patrick Andrew, cited in David Ross. 1883. *The land of the five rivers and Sindh: sketches historical and descriptive*. London: Chapman and Hall, Limited., p. 90.



<sup>5</sup> SR: *Dera Ismail Khan 1883-84*, p. 76.

<sup>6</sup> Punjab For. (Frontier), August 1895, A 67-76.

<sup>7</sup> There was a relationship of intense conflict between the different groups of powindahs. For the conflict between the Kharotis and Suleiman Khels, see Punjab For., August 1873, A 20; Punjab For., September 1873, A 21.

<sup>8</sup> H.A. Rose. [1883] 1970. *A glossary of the tribes and castes of the Punjab and North-West Frontier Provinces*, vol. III. Patiala: Languages Department Punjab, p. 244.

<sup>9</sup> Punjab For., April 1872, A 4; Punjab For. (Frontier), August 1890, A 97-100; Punjab For., October 1876, A 24; Punjab For., February 1877, A 5.

<sup>10</sup> Punjab For. (For.), October 1879, A 3; Punjab For. (For.), November 1877, A 20.

<sup>11</sup> Punjab For. (For.), February 1873, A 20; Punjab For., September 1879, 2a; Punjab For. (Frontier), March 1894, A 54.

<sup>12</sup> D. Balland & C.M. Kieffer. 1979. *Nomadisme et secheresse en Afghanistan: l'exemple des nomads Pastun du Dast-e Nawor. Pastoral production and society* (Cambridge, 1979); D. Balland. 1991. *Nomadism and politics: the case of Afghan nomads in the Indian subcontinent. Studies in History*, VII (2), pp. 206-29

<sup>13</sup> SR: *Kangra 1865-72*, paras 26f.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., para 46.

<sup>15</sup> Report on Kulu Subdivision', SR: Kangra 1856-72. 'Kulu Forest Settlement Report', paras 126-27, *Selections from the records of the Financial Commissioner of Punjab (hereafter SRFCP)*, NS 25.

<sup>16</sup> Very often, the muqaddam was not a pastoralist. Of the eleven runs demarcated in Dehra tahsil, the Raja of Chamba was recorded as the muqaddam of two runs. 'Record of Sheep-grazing Runs in the Dehra Tahsil' appended to the 'Kangra Forest Record of Rights', *SRFCP*, NS 26.

<sup>17</sup> 'Kangra Valley Forest Settlement Report', para 82, *SRFCP*, NS 26.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., para 82.

<sup>19</sup> No. 972, dated 8 July 1896, From A. Anderson, Deputy Commissioner of Kangra, to The Comm. and Superintendent, Jullundar Division, paras 12-15, *SRFCP*, NS 26.

<sup>20</sup> 'Kulu Forest SR'; chapter V, paras 174-77, *SRFCP*, NS 25.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., paras, 127, 167, 171.

<sup>22</sup> Exasperated by the hostility of pastoralists to the closure of forest reserves, Robertson declared: 'they [the graziers] have been accustomed to graze absolutely without restriction of any kind up to now, and their real complaint is against any restriction of the privilege, however necessary and however innocuous to their real interests.' Note by F.A. Robertson on the Forest Settlement of Tahsils Muree and Kahuta, *SRFCP*, 16. And Baden Powell said: 'The people want nothing less than to have the *rakhs* given over to them absolutely, to graze everywhere [...]. ' No. 14F, dated Camp Kaghan, 16 June 1876, Baden Powell, Conservator of Forests Punjab, to the Sec. to Financial Comm.) Punjab, *SRFCP*, 16, p. 1484.

<sup>23</sup> No. 30, 14 February 1878, Denzil Ibbetson, Settlement Officer Karnal, to Comm. & Sup., Delhi Division Records, Series I, Basta no. 118, p. 81.

<sup>24</sup> SR: *Sirsa 1879-83*, p. 311.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 311.



<sup>26</sup> Information on nineteenth-century conditions of the different eco-zones of Punjab can be found in the numerous *Tahsil Assessment Reports, District Settlement Reports, District Gazetteers, Seasons and Crops Reports, and Land Revenue Administration Reports*.

<sup>27</sup> Land Rev. and Agr. (Famine), April 1898, A 30-7; Land Rev. and Agr. (Famine), July 1901, A 7; *Report of the Famine in the Punjab in 1896-7* (1898); *Punjab Famine of 1899-1900* (1901), 7 vols.

<sup>28</sup> Home Rev. & Agr. Fam., May 1907, A 5.

<sup>29</sup> *Report of the Fodder Famine Operations in the Ambala Division* (1930); *Final report of the operations for the relief of distress in the Hissar District* (1932-33).

<sup>30</sup> 'Report on Cattle Fair at Sirsa: 1871-72, *SRFCP, No. 13*; *SR: Sirsa 1879-83*, pp. 296ff., Punjab Rev. (Rev.), March 1879, A 9; Punjab Rev. (Agr.), February 1884, A 6-7.

<sup>31</sup> 'Report on Cattle Fair at Sirsa: 1871-72', *SRFCP, NS 13*.

<sup>32</sup> *SR: Sirsa 1871-72*, p. 302.

<sup>33</sup> No. 30, 14 February 1878, Ibbetson, Settlement Officer, Karnal to Davies, Comm. and Sup., Delhi Div., Delhi Division Records, Basta no. 118, Series I, p. 85.

<sup>34</sup> *SR: Sirsa 1871-72*, para 198.

<sup>35</sup> In the famine of 1896, pastoralists were seen migrating from all the *barani* tracts of the province. A report on Sharakpur, a cattle grazing tract in the Lahore district, tells us: 'When the people realized the impossibility of saving the cattle if they stayed at home, many families emigrated with their cattle and all their belongings to the Chenab Canal, the banks of the Ravi and Sutlej, and the submontane tracts of Sialkot and Gurdaspur. Many villages were left half empty and in two only one family remained. It is estimated that over 1700 families left the tehsil.' Land Rev. and Agr. (Famine), April 1898, A 30-5.

<sup>36</sup> No. 97, May 1885, Deputy Commissioner Karnal to Commissioner and Superintendent, Delhi Division, Land Rev. and Agr. (Famine), September 1885, A 3-4.

<sup>37</sup> This fact is authenticated in a large number of studies on ruminants.

<sup>38</sup> *SR: Sirsa 1871-72*, para 189, p. 294.

<sup>39</sup> Land Rev. & Agr. (Famine), 1898, A 30-5.

<sup>40</sup> Punjab Rev. and Agr., February 1878, A 10; Punjab Rev. (Rev.), March 1879, A 9; Ambala Division Records, Basta no XIII/28 (ii), Case 231, 16 March 1869.

<sup>41</sup> Land Rev. and Agr. (Famine), April 1898, A 30-5.

<sup>42</sup> No. 30, 14 February 1878, Ibbetson, Settlement Officer, Karnal to Davies, Comm. and Sup., Delhi Div., Delhi Division Records, Basta no. 118, Series I, p. 85.

<sup>43</sup> On the continuing problem of fodder scarcities in the twentieth century, see Land Rev. and Agr. (Famine), November 1911, A 8-42; Land Rev. and Agr. (Famine), April 1912, A 1-4; Land Rev. and Agr., January 1916, A 13; Land Rev. and Agr., February 1918, A 1; Land Rev. and Agr. (Famine), October 1920, A 1.

<sup>44</sup> Douie, *Punjab Settlement Manual*, chapter VIII; *SR: Karnal 1872-80*; *SR: Ludhiana 1878-83*; C.L. Tupper, *Customary Law of the Punjab: Records of the Punjab Government* (1881), vols. 1-3.

<sup>45</sup> 'Records of Rights: Kangra Forests', Section C para 11, *SRFCP, NS 26*.

<sup>46</sup> This statement applied to all pasture lands—the class four forests, as defined in the resolution on forest policy issued by the Government of India in 1894. *Punjab land administration manual*, p. 485.



<sup>47</sup> 'Kangra Valley Forest Settlement Report', para 35, *SRFCP, NS 26*. See also 'Record of Rights of Villages in Kangra Proper Prepared for the Revenue Settlement of 1865-69', Section 18, *SRFCP, NS 26*; Lyall reported that 'the *Khewatdars* only have the right to graze their own cattle and sheep and goats, and they have never exercised any greater power since. [...] the owners of the soil have no right to allow other persons to graze [...].' Note by James Lyall, dated 19 February 1892 on Mr Anderson's Report of 20 August 1887 on Forest Settlement of Kangra Proper, *SRFCP, NS 26*.

<sup>48</sup> Order issued around 1852 by the Commissioner of the Lahore division, *Punjab land administration manual*, para 764.

<sup>49</sup> 'Kangra Valley Forest Settlement Report', para 30, *SRFCP, NS 26*.

<sup>50</sup> The Gujars of Ferozepur were said to be 'unwilling cultivators and greatly addicted to thieving': Brandreth, *SR: Ferozepur*, the gaddis of Kangra were 'the most pernicious enemies of conservancy': Egerton; the graziers of the West Punjab *bar* were termed 'janglis' and stated to be 'wild' and 'lawless nomads' who held 'all peaceful pursuits in unaffected contempt'; Malcolm Lyall Darling. 1947. *The Punjab peasant in prosperity and debt*. London: Oxford University Press, p. 123.

<sup>51</sup> *Ferozepur SR*, 1853, p. 4.

<sup>52</sup> Darling, *The Punjab peasant in prosperity and debt*, p. 62.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>54</sup> Lynn White Jr. 'The historical roots of our ecological crisis', discussed in Donald Worster. 1979. *Nature's economy: the roots of ecology*. New York: Anchor Press.

<sup>55</sup> See Worster, *Nature's economy*, and Keith Thomas. 1983. *Man and the natural world: changing attitudes in England*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

<sup>56</sup> See Worster; also Thomas, *Man and the natural world*.

<sup>57</sup> John Drew. 1987. *India and the romantic imagination*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press; Javed Majeed. 1992. *Ungoverned imaginings: James Mill's The History of British India and orientalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> See the discussion of E.M. Forster's *A passage to India* and 'The Road from Colonus' in Drew, *India and the romantic imagination*.

<sup>60</sup> Stokes. 1992. *The English Utilitarians and India*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>61</sup> R. N. Cust. 1881. *Pictures of Indian life*. London: Trübner & Co, Ludgate Hill, p. 255.

<sup>62</sup> The shifting concerns within the debate over protection is studied by P.H.M. van den Dungen. 1972. *The Punjab tradition: influence and authority in Nineteenth Century India*. London: Allen & Unwin.

<sup>63</sup> Darling, *The Punjab peasant*, p. 112.

<sup>64</sup> Dewey argues that Darling was influenced by the late-nineteenth-century idealist philosophy at Cambridge which reacted against traditional utilitarianism. See C.J. Dewey. 1974. "Cambridge Idealism": Utilitarian revisionists in late Nineteenth Century. *Historical Journal*, XVII, pp. 63-78.

<sup>65</sup> Darling rode through the Punjab countryside and produced several volumes on his rural rides. See Darling. 1930. *Rusticus Loquitur*. London: Oxford University Press; 1934. *Wisdom and waste in the Punjab village*. London: Oxford University Press; 1949. *At freedom's door*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. The diaries and notes of these rural rides are available at the Library of the Centre for South Asian Studies, Cambridge. See Darling Papers, Boxes II, III, V, LVI, LIX, LX.



<sup>66</sup> See Michael Adas. [1989] 1990. *Machines as the measure of men: science, technology, and ideologies of Western dominance*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

<sup>67</sup> Only beyond the agrarian frontier could the nomads capture the romantic official imagination. The Pathan nomads were troublesome, yet objects of fascination; the desire to subdue and control them went along with a respect for their masculine pride. Ibbetson wrote: 'The true Pathan is perhaps the most barbaric of all the races with which we are brought into contact in the Punjab [...] he is bloodthirsty, cruel, and vindictive in the highest degree; he does not know what truth or faith is.' Condemned as barbaric, the Pathan is immediately rehabilitated as a masculine pastoral hero: 'there is a sort of charm about him [...] He leads a wild, free, active life in the rugged fastness of his mountains; and there is an air of masculine independence about him which is refreshing in a country like India.' Denzil Ibbetson. 1916. *Punjab castes*. Lahore: Superintendent of Government Printing, Punjab, p. 58.

<sup>68</sup> Akbar Ahmad. 1983. Nomadism as ideological expression: the case of the Gomal Nomads. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 17 (1), pp. 128-38

<sup>69</sup> Ibbetson, *Punjab castes*, p. 58.

<sup>70</sup> R. Maconachie, ed. 1890. *Selected agricultural proverbs of the Punjab*. Delhi: Imperial Medical Hall Press, p. 242.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>72</sup> Rose, vol. II, p. 7.

<sup>73</sup> Several versions of the Raja Rasalu stories are recorded in Temple, *Punjab Legends*, vols. I, II, III. See also Charles Swynnerton. 1884. *The adventures of the Panjab hero Raia Rasalu and other folktales of the Panjab*. Calcutta: W. Newman & Co.

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<sup>74</sup> For a discussion of the theme of journey in the context of Bengali popular literature, see Roma Chatterji. 1985. The voyage of the hero: the self and the other in one narrative tradition in Purulia. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 19 (I), pp. 95-114. On the theme of transformation, see Brenda Beck & A.K. Ramanujan. 1981. Social categories and their transformations in Indian folktales. In: D. P. Pattanayak & Peter Claus, eds. *Indian folklore*. Mysore: n.p.

<sup>75</sup> This kissa, originally from Sindh and southern Baluchistan, was popular all over Punjab. Hasham Shah transformed the folktale into a literary form. Bardic versions continued to differ from literary versions. For a bibliography on the kissa, see *Indian antiquary*, vol. XI, p. 291. The bardic versions of Hir-Ranjha and Sassi-Pannun recorded by Temple in the late nineteenth century show the complex relationship between the bardic and literary versions of these kissas. They show how the bardic versions borrowed from, contested and transformed the classic literary renditions of folktales. See 'A Version of Sassi Pannun as Told by a Bard from the Hoshiarpur District', Temple, vol. III, and 'Qissa Hir Ranjha Musannifa Hafiz Ahmed Mutawattan-i-Jhang', Temple, vol. II.

<sup>76</sup> In some popular versions of the kissa, Ranjha claims to have been a cowherd since he was five. See 'The Marriage of Hir Ranjha as Related by Some Jatts from the Patiala State', Temple, vol. II.

<sup>77</sup> '*Bela vich o maujan karde, koi no rokandar*' (They made love in the wilds, where no one was to restrain them) '*Qissa Hir Ranjha Musannifa Hafiz Ahmed Mutawattan-i-Jhang*', in Temple, vol. II.

<sup>78</sup> In one version recorded in Temple, vol. II, Ranjha plays thirty-six beautiful tunes in the forest and makes all creatures dance. For the Renaissance Pastoral, see Sukanta Chaudhuri. 1989. *Renaissance pastoral and its English developments*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

<sup>79</sup> This plot structure is common in Punjabi kissas. See the kissa of 'Adam Khan and Dur Khanai'. In: W. L. Heston & Mumtaz Nasir. 1989. *The bazaar of the storytellers*. Islamabad: Lok Virsa Publishing House. What is important is to see the way familiar plots are imbued with specific meaning: how the characters are actually defined and subplots worked into the general structure. Through this plot, Waris Shah explores the relationship between earthly love and



mystical love. Grewal has suggested that Waris Shah, who wrote *Hir-Waris* in 1766, was deeply influenced by Sufism. When Hir dies, Ranjha's soul departs from his body. Waris says that both Hir and Ranjha have left *dar-i-fana* and gone to *dar-i-baga*. In *Hir Waris*, true love on earth is like a Sufi's union with God. J.S. Grewal. 1984. *The World of Waris*. In: Sudhir Chandra, ed., *Social transformation and creative imagination*. New Delhi: Allied Publishers. For a reading of Hir, as a failed allegory within the framework of Sufi imagination, see Surjit Hans. 1983. Why the world of Waris collapsed. *Journal of Regional History*, IV, pp. 7-19.

<sup>80</sup> Temple, vol. II.

<sup>81</sup> 'Kissa of Abdullah Shah of Samin' (recorded in the Biloch language from the narrative of Ghulam Muhammad Balachani Mazari), Temple, vol. II.

<sup>82</sup> C. A. Bayly. 1987. Creating a colonial peasantry: India and Java, c. 1820-1880, *Itinerario*, 1 (1), pp. 93-106.

<sup>83</sup> On Grazing: no. 47, dated 16 October 1883, Report on Rohtak Birs, Delhi Division Records, Bundle 4, Memorandum on Grazing in Government Forests and Wastelands, Delhi Division Records, Bundle 4; on cattle lifting, see no. 260, dated 17 January 1907, from the Superintendent of Police, Lahore, to the Deputy Commissioner, Lahore, Punjab Home Police, September 1907, A 13.

<sup>84</sup> Peasant settlers found the pastoral scrubland hostile in every way, and the pastoralists ('janglis') appeared as their worst enemies. Malcolm Darling asked Maharaja Singh, one of the first 140 migrants to Lyallpur, about his initial impressions of the place. Singh recollected that the country was 'all waste but dotted with jand trees, snakes lifting angry heads, enormous scorpions, and not a bird to be seen.' Darling, *At freedom's door*, p. 79. In this description we have all the images of danger, fear, poison, death and desolation which recurred in other accounts that Darling heard from the colonists. All the colonists also complained of trouble created by the 'janglis'.

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