

Nomadic Pastoralism and Indian Rurality: Inter-relationship between Pastoralists and Settled Cultivators

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Abstract

This article attempts to describe the complex relation of cooperation and conflict between pastoral nomads and the cultivator communities. The article explores how research on pastoralism can reshape some of the arguments within traditional peasant studies. Through content analysis and historical methods, the article throws light on the transition in the patterns of resource allocation to the pastoral nomads and administration of pasture land. The article provides a detailed discussion on the colonial treatment of pastoral lands, the relevance of village commons in the relationship between nomads and farmers, and varying dimensions of reciprocity and conflict between the two groups. It concludes that, much like the future of peasantry, the future of nomadic pastoralism will rely largely on the decisions of the state in India. However, further state-sponsored intervention backed by empirical academic research could not only facilitate nomadic pastoralists and the cultivator community in making more from the limited scope of income generation from the agrarian economy, it could also result in developing a new and sustainable paradigm for the development of the Indian rurality. A comprehensive discussion on nomadic pastoralism sheds crucial information on the current conditions of all small-scale agrarian producers, and reflects that pastoralists and peasants share more in common than what appears from various divergent conceptualisations and theoretical traditions.

Keywords: Nomads, Pastoralists, Cultivators, Indian rurality, Agrarian crisis

Introduction

Nomadic Pastoralism in India is an ubiquitous phenomenon, yet it finds itself amidst compromise, deprivation and marginalisation. The biggest concentration of nomadic population occurs in South Asian countries (Singh 1997). In India, roughly seven per cent of the population is nomadic (Renake 2008). Even though they have a considerable share of India's population, most of the nomadic pastoralist communities do not have voting rights. Perhaps, this happens to be the reason behind their deprivation and marginalisation (Singh 1997). Although the nomadic populations have established a symbiotic relationship with the