

Negotiating Customary Rights and Regulations amid Climate Change: Gaddi Pastoralism in the Western Himalayas

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Abstract

Nomadism does not mean wandering- rather, nomadic movement is precise and intentional, with the idea of achieving specified aims and goals. Nomadic communities typically dwell in remote areas that are environmentally marginal and remote from populous places. Nomadic pastoralism can thus be understood logically as a distinct activity within regions where a wider range of economic activities are carried out, and it uses locations within a region that are unsuitable for agriculture. The long-term goal of the state was to convert pastoralists into a settled agriculture-based peasant population. However, authorities were unable to impose sedentarisation because agricultural revenue was little in comparison to pastoralism. Land agreements and pasture access controls, which had previously been free and flexible, were rigidly restricted after the coming up of state-imposed law and regulation. This paper examines the impact of state policies such as social forestry, development interventions, and climate change on the functioning of customary institutions that organize community-based utilization and management of natural resources. It also explores the evolution of taxation within the pastoral system, tracing its transformation from colonial levies to contemporary regulatory frameworks. Furthermore, it analyses how the legal framework, shaped during the British period and largely retained after independence, has influenced the governance of commons and redefined pastoral institutions.

Keywords: Climate Change, Commons, Customary Rights, Gaddi, Pastoralism

Introduction

Taking an evolutionary, pastoralism evolved from hunter-gatherer society, then later picked up settled agriculture as a step forward because it offered more stability and predictability and was considered an evolutionary progression compared to the unpredictability of pastoralism (Nori & Scoones 2023).

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