



## Editorial

Stories are powerful. With a few words strung together, they can evoke sentiments that lay deep or have, to some extent, faded with time. The resilience of civilizations has been attributed to stories told from generation to generation. It has been used as a tool to keep the knowledge alive. In remote regions of the Himalaya, stories have played no lesser role for thousands of years. Even in the changing times, the sense of community and pride continues to intrigue, as the fabric of stories holds the vibrant culture together.

The main aim of Himkatha is to share these stories and celebrate the relationship humans share with nature. In autumn of 2020, we shared the first set of stories in the upper regions of Himachal Pradesh. With the help of a handful of dedicated local champions, we were able to take these stories in the form of *Himkatha* newsletter to parts of Lahaul-Spiti, upper Kinnaur and Pangl.

For our spring issue of 2021, we want to bring to you the stories that evoke the theme of soil and water, the two most crucial elements for the agro-pastoral communities of

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Himalaya. Through culture and various practices, the people of high Himalaya have been actively conserving these valuable resources. This newsletter is dedicated to few of many such stories of conservation.

The first story is shared by Virendra who spent time travelling with the Gaddis of Chamba. He writes about the arduous journey they undertake every year to access the unrivaled alpine pastures and how these pasture have been changing due to climatic conditions. The next story is by Chemi, who reminisces about the life and memories of her grandmother in the Himalaya. Ranjini, in her short story, recalls the conversation she had with her friend on the role of women in water management. Next, is an essay by Sonam who elaborates on the growing importance of dry toilets in these times of unprecedented development in the name of tourism in remote Spiti valley. And finally, Amshu who has been working with farmers

to revive traditional crops across the landscape and talks about the benefits of heirloom crops. We have also included a page to share the information on price of grains and vegetables sold in various regions of Lahaul-Spiti & Kinnaur in the year 2020.

In the section for children, we have Pasang, a young writer, from Lalung (Spiti) who shares with us the details of her home in the village through her first book. And finally, Rahul from Mumbai, who recently found out about the hard life of mountain people, has written a letter to them expressing his concern.

We hope that you will enjoy these narratives from different ages and places. We also hope to hear back from you about these stories and more.

**Deepshikha Sharma**  
**Nature Conservation Foundation**



Photo courtesy Prasenjeet Yadav



# Traversing Climate Change

By Virendra Mathur

In the mystical lands of Bharmour and Lahaul, located in the north-western part of Himachal Pradesh, India, a seasonal event takes place every year that is an elegant harmony between local culture and nature. Here in the traditional seat of *Gaddi* shepherds, the community is described variably as semi-nomadic, transhumant pastoralists, or agro-pastoralists. The *Gaddis*, usually men of the family, start on a migratory event in early April, gathering their goat and sheep herd and taking them to the high-altitude summer foraging grounds. These unbridled pastures, known as alpine meadows are called *dhars*. This seasonal movement is ingenious at various levels – it sustains the economy of a *Gaddi* household without being too reliant on agriculture. Further, *Gaddi* herds provide rich manure to the tilled lands across various agricultural landscapes they pass through and in return receive food and a place to camp; a barter system still in place. And this practice helps avoid low productivity foraging grounds without putting undue pressure on alpine pastures.

The shepherds pass through various towns and villages, as they start their journey from

the low-lying areas of Kangra valley and plains of Pathankot, crossing the Dhauladhar mountain range towards Chamba district and travelling north towards the alpine pastures in the inner Himalaya. With them, on this arduous journey, are of course the livestock that they address as “*Dhan*” which also translates to money and wealth in Hindi. The sheep and goat herd constitute a flexible and continuous source of economic return for this community, especially when small land holdings do not allow for huge returns from agriculture. The flocks serve as a source of meat, milk, fleece and wool. The wool produced by *Gaddi* sheep is primarily used to make warm clothes, and is considered to be fine quality wool in a market where the quality dictates the price of the wool.

Himachal Pradesh State Wool Federation website displays the minimum support price (MSP) offered by the government for the sheared wool. Based on per kilogram price, the prices are lowest for the wool sheared in winter in the month of January-February, whereas the highest price is set for the wool that is sheared in autumn (in September or October), after the flocks have come down



Herds of sheep and goat return after grazing in the Dhar on the North-east of Kugti village; Photo courtesy Virendra Mathur



## Wool rates as fixed by the State Government

Year	Rate in ₹ per Kg.		
	Winter Clip	Summer Clip	Autumn Clip
2017 - 18	White wool (34.10) White crossbred (40.92) Black wool (25.50)	White wool (42.35) White crossbred (50.82)	White crossbred (78.00) Black wool (45.00)
2018 - 19	White wool (31.00)	White wool (38.50)	White wool (65.00)
2019 - 20	White crossbred (37.20) Black wool (25.50)	White wool (38.50) White crossbred (46.20)	White wool (65) White crossbred (78.00) Black wool (45.00)

Courtesy: The H.P. State Cooperative Wool Procurement and Marketing Federation Limited (H.P. WOOLFED), Shimla

from the alpine pastures. The *Gaddi* shepherds I interviewed called this an 'A' grade wool. In their opinion, the nutritional forage available in the alpine pastures, which consists of medicinal herbs, shrubs, and vital grasses, contributes towards development of such a fine and gregarious *Gaddi* wool.

Even more difficult than the journey to these pastures is living there. When I asked a *Gaddi* about the most important skill to survive in the alpine pastures, he simply stated that “*You have to become an animal to live with an animal.*” indicating the laborious of life in alpine pastures. The arrival of *Gaddi* in the alpine pastures is met by receding snow, and below it lays the abundant grass to forage for the livestock/goat and sheep herd. These alpine pastures stretch till the horizon, vast carpets slowly turning green. Guiding herds in these alpine pastures is the least of their worry, the real challenge is to protect the herd from the harsh surroundings. The relationship of herd and the shepherd arises from mutual dependency, and for *Gaddi* men who remain away from their families, their herd is their family. The relationship of care is intertwined around wool – it transcends the material value and takes up emotional

significance. It is the wool that earns shepherds the money, and it is this wool that comes back on the journey - laden on the back of a shepherd in the form of a blanket or a shawl. They keep a portion of the sheared wool for themselves, and use it to manufacture clothing - their traditional attire, shawls and blankets, which keeps them warm and protected. When a lamb is born, it is wrapped around in this blanket and kept inside their camp, and on the long treks in alpine pastures, lambs and goat kids are carried wrapped inside the blankets. Each head counts in this family, and shepherds sometimes risk their lives for their flock. On two separate instances, a group of shepherds, at night, rescued their stranded goats from potential attack of a black bear, and on another day, *Thaapu*, a young apprentice jumped into a glacial stream, shattering the thick sheet of ice to rescue a sheep and a goat kid that fell while crossing the glacier. He said that a shepherd has to protect every head he is responsible for, as this proves his credibility to his employer. While, the shepherds have adapted to the vagaries of nature, will their resilience fare them through impacts of climate change in the inner Himalaya?



In many ways, the life of a *Gaddi* shepherd and that of their flocks is interlaced with the seasonal changes in Himalayan pasture lands. Without knowing the term, the shepherds understand that their summer home is undergoing changes. Rainfall patterns have become erratic and it can impact the livelihood of *Gaddi* communities negatively. Abundant rain could lead to livestock mortality as the sheep contract various diseases in wet environments while less rainfall can delay the growth of grass and herbs in alpine pasture, as was the case this year. This is further worsened by foraging competition from large mountain ungulates; they informed me that a lot of problems has been caused by *chur*, commonly known as *dZo* across Himalaya (a magnificent cross between a yak and a cow). These large herbivores are domesticated by the villagers in high-altitude Himalayan communities for agriculture. These massive animals also graze in the alpine pastures, along with other ungulates like Himalayan Ibex and Himalayan Tahr, mules and horses. Large herbivores consume hefty amounts of fresh grown grass leaving only small patches for the sheep and goat herds, creating scarcity for *Gaddi* livestock. Similarly, the duration of grazing in the alpine pastures can also be cut short by erratic weather patterns, affecting growth of fresh grass and the productivity of alpine pastures in long-term. A decrease in nutritional quality will in turn impact the quality of the wool produced by the sheep.



Subhash Bhai and Sonu Bhai shear wool from the sheep in their herd. Shearing happens thrice in a one-year season, and while some herders use these scissors, other shepherds use wool-trimmers for shearing the wool; Photo courtesy Virendra Mathur



## Virendra Mathur

Virendra Mathur is pursuing his PhD from University of Toronto in Evolutionary Anthropology. He is a primatologist by training and is interested in studying spatial cognition and movement strategies of Himalayan Langurs for his doctoral work. As part of his fieldwork in Kugti Wildlife Sanctuary, he has been interacting with the *Gaddis* in Kugti village in Bharmour and learning about their herding experiences. Virendra is also keen on understanding human-nature relationships and inculcating community participation to build bottom-up frameworks for habitat conservation in Himalayan landscape.

### Acknowledgments:

Virendra would like to thank Wildlife Conservation Trust for funding this fieldwork at Kugti as a part of their Small Grants program. He owes all his gratitude to the humble and loving *Gaddi* community who make him felt at home through their generous, helping, and cheerful nature.



Today, the market for natural wool is facing increased competition from synthetic wool supplies which has made market accessibility difficult for these shepherds. While the traditional usage of wool is facing a decline, partly due to absence of knowledge transfer across generation, partly due to the lucrative nature of cosmopolitan living, traders and craftsmen now tend to prefer using imported wool. In the face of emerging changes, proper management mechanisms can help survive traditional agro-pastoralism in high Himalaya. *Gaddi* shepherds who are in this vocation constitute a dynamic medium of cultural exchange and fulfill economic needs of various farming communities through their resource exchange. Thus, the gradual loss of transhumance in Himalaya interacts with the loss of natural cycles of nutrient cycling in high-altitude communities and might possibly have downstream effects.

## Lingering memories of my grandmother

By Chemi Lhamo

When I was young, I remember my *Evi* (grandmother) used to take me to *yul-sa* (Buddhist shrine for village deity) every day in the morning to offer prayers. She would ask me to light butter lamps while she circumambulates around the altar before joining me in prayers. I used to fervently pray for stable electricity at home so that I could watch television the whole day. As an eight year old, I used to be so curious what she prayed and insisted on getting to know. She

would shirk me off for some time before succumbing to my pleas and tell me that she prayed for good winter snowfall so that we would have abundant water for our fields and for our animals during summer. She would continue sternly “One should always pray for all sentient beings and your personal wishes will be granted naturally. One should pray for peace, prosperity and abundant snowfall”.

*Evi* was from Tashi-gang, a quaint village in Spiti with abundant green pastures and less than 6 households. She was quite young when she got married and came to live in Kowang and like any other Spitian women of her generation, *Evi* had been nurturer all her life; she tended to our fields, the livestock and was sole custodian of our ancestral home where she lived independently until she was too old to live on her own.



Grain sheaf offerings to village deity after first harvest: Kowang, Spiti; Photo Courtesy Chemi Lhamo



*Aapa* used to tell me that *Evi* was deeply attached to her land “there was no difference between us, our *shinga* (fields) and our *dzomos* (female hybrid yak). She would tend to us all no differently”. She started working in the fields when she was fifteen and did that for another fifty years. She tilled all our fields, reared livestock and would traverse high mountains in our village to collect dung and dry twigs for winters. When she got old and frail, she stayed with us briefly and would often tell me stories of her younger days. She’s filled with memories of my father’s, my uncle’s childhood and would often reminisce about the large herd of animals she raised with equal fondness; memories of dead cattle, sick goats she nursed, new-born calf she cared for and about our *dZo* (hybrid yak) which went missing mysteriously few years back. She took pride in the health of our land, our village *chu-mig* (spring water) and our cattle in the same vein she identify as being a woman of *Khangchen* (Zamindar family) household whose life was devoted to agro-pastoral responsibilities. She was so closely engaged with the materiality of the agrarian

landscape that it became a deeply embodying experience and a crucial part of her identity.

Just like Tashi-gang, Kowang also is a small rural hamlet with just four or five households. *Evi* made the mountains, the fields, riverbanks and the vast expanse of barren lands an extension of her home. I was often told that she was very fierce and rigorous –someone who toiled hard in her fields and commanded authority. In Spiti, farming and related activities are considered communal affairs. Everyone partakes in the age-old traditional system “Bhey” where there is reciprocal exchange of work which denotes inter-household collectivism. This is further reinforced by Buddhist teachings intricately tying ecological ethics with religious beliefs laying emphasis on the virtue of cooperation and mutual support for each other in a community. Reality however, is more complex - village dynamics play a huge role in shaping agrarian responsibilities. Land ownership, access to resources and decision making is influenced by the undercurrents of unequal power dynamics within different members of



Ancestral house where Evi lived, Photo Courtesy: Chemi Lhamo





## Chemi Lhamo

Chemi is from Kowang- a village in Spiti with just five households. She is a post-graduate and studied Literature from University of Delhi. She has worked in Indian Development Sector for over 2 years as a communication professional and has recently joined NCF's High Altitude Program to work on conservation outreach in high himalayan landscapes in India

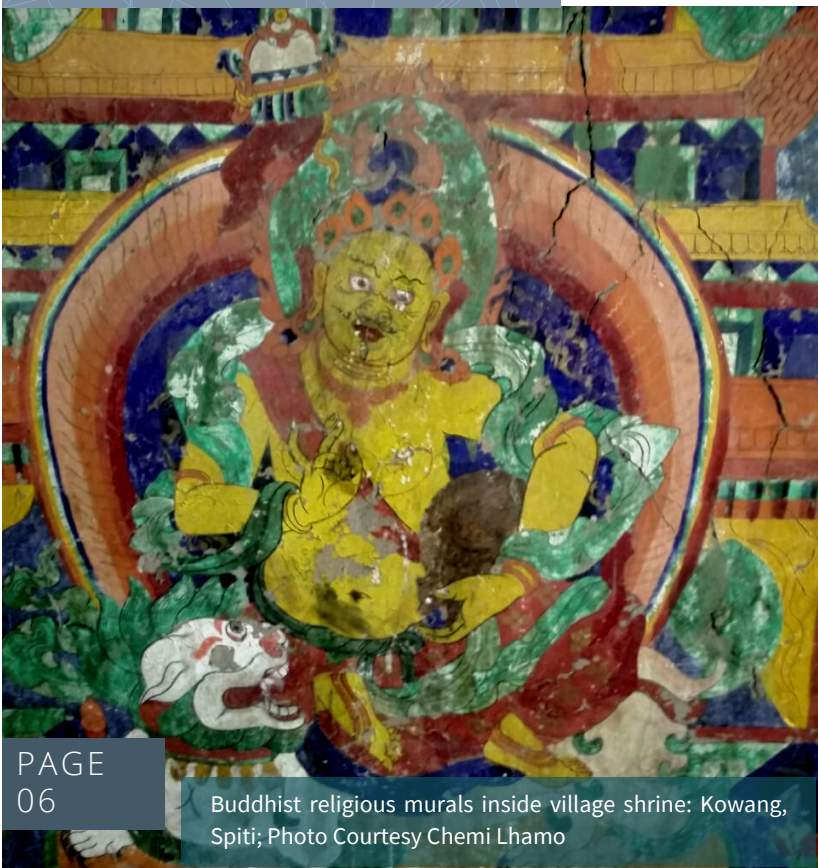
a community.

Although men and women both work in fields, there is an apparent work division; Spitian men engage in more cohesive and heavy loaded works like ploughing, harvesting and grazing while women work on array of scattered works (*thereby more invisible*) like weeding, levelling fields, drawing water channels, irrigation, winnowing, preparatory works of grinding grains and taking out manure from dry toilets. All these supposedly menial works are equally important, time consuming and render solidity to agro-pastoral labour hence are often overlooked. The division of agriculture labour and resource allocation is a reflection of larger social stratification where men of *Khangchen* household enjoy greatest prestige. "*Ane gyi leya la siruk mekak*" (there's no value in women's work or women's work is uncounted) is a popular expression and is often said grudgingly to show one's discontentment.

I remember chuckling amusingly at a funny anecdote *Evi* shared, "*Me-me* (grandfather) used to be so laid-back. It doesn't matter whether our *luk-chung* (lamb) strayed off from the herd or whether our village *Zing* (water reservoir fed from glacial melt water) is leaking. He has no care in the world. His seeding work is so disorganized that it looks as if he did that in drunken stupor of *Aarak*." To balance the narrative she

would continue, "What would he know of any farm works; he was a *tsongpa* (trader) and was always away. I used to do all the field work even the ones like ploughing with *Yak* and *dZo*".

Our ancestors were so well attuned to the natural world they lived in that they bore the harshness of living in a high altitude landscape like Spiti with remarkable resilience and self-sufficiency. Their wisdom was so innate and grounded in the material reality of their everyday life. They were deeply engaged with the physicality of the farm-works that they knew how to harness the health of the whole ecosystem, yet they barely saw their contributions as





worthwhile.

Living in remote, resource scarce places like Spiti, the value of rejuvenation is central to their environmental ethics. They might not quite articulate it that way but they embody it and live the experience which is also reflective in their ascetic lifestyle and in their belief of complex connection of living, non-living, material, immaterial, physical, non-physical entities to boost the overall health of an ecosystem. While laying dry hay for goats in *Evi's* open corral, she would often lecture vehemently, "Farming is not just acquiring food from nature. It is honouring *Kunchok Sum's* (three jewels of the Buddhist trinity) benevolence which looks after our soil, our streams, our pastures and overall health and happiness of our animals". As a child, she used to narrate a story about cursed "*srinmos*" (demoness). She would say, "behind the gigantic barren mountains of our village lies "*srinmo-yul*" (land of demoness) where ferocious and hungry demoness lives". She used to caution me that if we don't tend to our *riluk-balang* (livestock), our land, let the crops rot, these "*srinmos*" can manifest themselves in our fields and can cause

destruction to our fields and our animals. I used to believe in her story and would help her in chores like milking cows and putting fodder for cattle. Looking back, I think it was her way of making me reciprocate the deep attachment she shared with our land and our livestock.

The unconventional attachment she shares with the landscape results from decades of tenacious experience of physically engaging with the land yet it is not always idyllic as one would imagine. Living amid vast barren land of our village with scarce human companions posed its own challenge. She despised living in seclusion and would often run away as a newly bride only to be coaxed back to return by family members. Rural isolation drove her to the point of desperation even to pray for "miracle disasters" which would merge *Kowang* with its neighbouring more populated village *Kaza*. At her extreme old age she was able to enjoy more familial connections when she jointly lived with my cousin's family in *Rangrik*. I was always told my *Evi* was a brilliant cultivator and I wonder whether I will ever be able to understand the rich tapestry of the life she led with all its apparent glory and poignancy.



Living in mountains is not always idyllic as one would imagine. Feeling of isolation and disconnectedness is pervasive; Photo courtesy Chemi Lhamo



# The Water Managers in Kibber

By Ranjini Murali

In the distance, the early morning sunlight chased the shadows on the mountain peaks. I gazed longingly at the golden patches, wondering how long before I could feel the warmth of the rays. Lobzang saw me and laughed, "Are you cold? Come help, it will warm you up!"

Lobzang was building *kyaari* in her field. These are embankments built in the fields that help guide the flow of water. They are carefully built based on the natural slope of the land. In the neighboring field, I see Thinley ploughing his land using two yaks. I was in Kibber village, in Spiti valley, and the agricultural season had just begun. The day of ploughing had been decided a few days ago at the village meeting.

"How did you learn how to do this?" I asked Lobzang, fascinated at the skill and speed she was constructing the *kyaari*. "I've been doing this for years. When I was a little girl, I used to help my mother and I learnt from her. This year, it has snowed well, the water will be good."

In Kibber, I've learnt that the irrigation system is considered the domain of the women. The water comes from the snow melt from Kanamo, a holy peak in Spiti. The water from the peak is directed to the Kibber fields using *khuls*. This irrigation system was initially built for barley and black pea, but has been modified for irrigating green pea.

Lobzang tells me that the women were responsible for fine-tuning the watering for green pea. They learnt through trial and error, but now have perfected the quantity of water needed and when it is needed for a bountiful harvest.

"If you water them too much, or too early, the plants get thirsty, and will need more water. You have to water at the right time, with the right amount", she tells me.

The crops are irrigated in cycles and in each cycle a fixed



order is followed. *Yurma*, the first round of irrigation, happens 40 days after the ploughing. Just before *yurma*, women remove the weeds from the field and scatter them with dried *yalo* (*Aconogonum* sp). This prevents soil run-off and increases water retention. Irrigation on the first day of *yurma* is reserved for the fields of *amchi* and the *devta*. Women from all households participate in irrigation on the first day. The second day is reserved for families who have faced a serious illness or death the previous year or have pregnant women who are unable to work in the fields. The third day, *tiping langzet*, is reserved for families who have participated in the maintenance of water channels. After the third day, the remaining fields are irrigated.

This order is followed for the first three irrigation cycles, after which all the fields receive fixed turns. It is the women who decide the time of the second and third irrigation. The women also manage the daily distribution of water. Every year, two women are chosen to be the *khul* managers. They are in charge of managing the khuls, making sure the fields receive their quota of water, and managing small arguments that might arise related to the distribution of water. This system of women managing irrigation, is similar to systems in other parts of Nepal and South-East Asia. However, across the



Ranjini  
Murali

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world, it is uncommon to come across natural resources that are managed by women. Men manage most natural resources, especially those that are shared. This makes the irrigation system in Kibber, and likely other parts of Spiti, special.

The irrigation system in Kibber has been in existence for centuries. Lobzang tells me it has remained unchanged as far back as she or her grandmother can remember. The knowledge of irrigation is passed on from mother to daughter, from the time little girls start helping in the fields.

As the sunrays finally reached the spot we were in, and started warming me up, I felt more motivated to help Lobzang make the kyaari. “Show me”, I said. I was eager to learn a skill that has been passed down from woman to woman for generations. Are irrigation systems in your villages similar to the one in Kibber? Do write-in and tell us about them.

## Ecological importance of dry toilets

*By Sonam Yangzom*

Spiti Valley is a rural and dry mountain region located in the Indian Himalayas in Himachal Pradesh. Being a cold desert valley, it receives very less rainfall in the summers which is not enough for the crops to thrive. Dependence on water is therefore exclusively centered around glaciers whose water collect in streams traditionally called ‘tokpos’ and rivulets called ‘yuras.’ Local communities thrive next to the tokpos from where water is diverted into the fields through yuras. The unfortunate dual existence of agriculture and scanty rainfall compels the farmers to engage in a tedious task of irrigating the fields using glacial water. Additionally, Spiti also faces water shortage in winters, due to which people depend on pipelines (most of the villages lack it) and hand pumps to extract water for daily use. The hand pumps also have predictable chances of freezing and becoming unusable due to sub-zero temperatures. The problem of water-scarcity is



however eased by the existence of dry toilets which do not need input of water like modern pour flush toilets, also producing natural manure for the fields

A deeper look into the traditional agricultural practices of Spiti shows how the local knowledge pertaining personal sphere of sanitation holds symbolic power to question not only the design of modern sanitation systems but also the paradox of development and modernity that cities are clothed with. What is progress if whatever

*In Spiti, therefore, there is no concept of 'waste.' The symbiotic relationship between the toilet design systems in Spiti and the fragile ecosystem facilitates growth of healthy crops and reduces the brunt of water crisis in the region.*

new infrastructural advancements we are coming up with are detached from the ecology of the area it is being used in? Is it even progress if it's happening at the cost of the deterioration of nature's resources? We have been using dry toilets for generations in these cold Himalayas. It is also called

composting toilets and are the ancient versions of modern eco-san toilets. It has two levels, a toilet on the top and a composting unit underneath. After using the toilet, we shovel a bit of dirt (mostly ashes, hay or dry dung) into the composting unit, through a hole to facilitate decomposition by microorganisms. The dirt also covers the waste and blocks the foul smell. Furthermore, these toilets do not need water. At the end of every year, we clean the composting unit of every household with the help of our neighbours, friends and relatives. It is a communal affair and the waste that has decomposed is usually dry. The naturally formed manure is put to use in the fields before the ploughing season. In Spiti, therefore, there is no concept of 'waste.' The symbiotic relationship between the toilet design systems in Spiti and the fragile ecosystem facilitates growth of healthy crops and reduces the brunt of water crisis in the region. The use of dry toilets is therefore an eco-sensitive wisdom born out of the geographical realities of this cold desert and is especially useful in the winters when water freezes. However, an influx of tourists and the effect of modernity is not only



Photo taken from an online source.

hierarchizing sanitation design systems but is also disrupting indigenous knowledge and the temporal existence of infrastructure when it comes to construction of toilets.

### Symbolism of toilet design

Sanitation, although a very personal matter, is also very political. It is impacted by class, caste and geographical privileges that one is born with. Living in a society marked by caste, class and gender differences, our everyday objects and infrastructures are filled with symbolic meanings which have political connotations. Most of the semiotics revolving around these infrastructures are shaped by the overarching burden of development that we're all expected to carry.

*With modernity however, progress of sanitation design systems is measured by how well you can invisibilize the waste.*



The brunt of modernity is borne heavily by the marginalized communities who are socially, intellectually and financially less privileged. In the dry toilets of Spiti, there is an understanding of where one's waste is going; one sees the waste and later when decomposed to form manure, materially engages with it. The 'user' and the 'cleaner' is the same person here. With modernity however, progress of sanitation design systems is measured by how well you can invisibilize the waste. There is no awareness of what trajectory one's waste takes. In pour-flush toilets, waste is flushed, it goes into sewers and ceases to exist visibly for those using it. The waste is left in the sewers and septic tanks to be manually engaged by those who are forced by their caste status to do so. Intentionally or unintentionally, modern toilets and sanitation design systems work efficiently only to strengthen the existing inequalities in society and stigmatize dirt, caste status and sanitation work. For the outsiders, these dry toilets are symbolic of the 'backwardness' of the region.





These toilets are looked down upon and therefore become an indicator of the scale of development one has afforded to reach. When I took one of my friends to visit Spiti to meet my family, the first thing my parents said on the phone was, “We don’t have a good toilet. Will she be able to manage with our traditional toilet”? With the oppressive discourse of so-called ‘development’ and the hierarchization of toilet design systems, the traditional toilets immediately become instruments that trigger shame and remind Spitians of their class and their ‘backwardness.’ It compels Spitians to be apologetic that they cannot keep pace with the race of modernity.

### **Tourism and its impact on toilet design**

In recent years, Spiti has become a famous tourist hotspot. To service the influx of tourists, towns like Kaza have built many restaurants and hotels that are attached with modern pour-flush toilets and bathrooms. To cater to the preference of modernity and of the tourists, owners have constructed borewells to extract groundwater. With scarce rainfall, recharging the groundwater seems like a phenomenon that will take forever. Exhaustion of groundwater worsens the problem of water scarcity during the winters when tourists cease to visit. With tourists visiting and the influence of modern infrastructures, Spitians in the towns have moved away from their eco-sensitive traditional knowledge regarding construction of toilets. The indigenous knowledge is losing value in the face of the larger discourse around development and a drive to ‘modernize.’

In this era where development is seen as a linear phenomenon, rather than context-dependent, the dry toilets of Spiti symbolize how ‘backward’ or ‘developed’ one is. The toilets, therefore, become symbolic of one’s class and the scale of development one has reached in terms of sanitation. The visibility of the waste through the hole of the dry toilet is considered unclean. Dry toilets of Spiti are therefore, not only symbolic of how the ‘personal’ is linked to and influenced by the larger political discourse around development but also how infrastructures or sanitation design systems come to acquire and be trapped within social values of power, shame and backwardness.



## **Sonam Yangzom**

Sonam Yangzom hails from Pin valley in Spiti. She is a third year undergraduate student majoring in Sociology and Anthropology and minoring in Environmental Studies from Ashoka University. She loves writing and making videos about people and places she loves.



Illustrated by Malika

## Prices of Grains & Vegetable in Lahaul-Spiti & Kinnaur 2020

Landscape	Village	Grains & Vegetables			
		Green Pea	Black Pea	Apple	Potato
Spiti	Kibber	Rs 80/kg	Rs 150/kg	Nil	Self Consumption
Spiti	Lossar	Rs 75 - 80/kg	Rs 200/kg	Nil	Self Consumption
Spiti	Tabo	Rs 65 - 70/kg	Nil	Rs 1,800 - 2,000/box	Nil
Spiti	Pinvalley	Rs 75 - 80/kg	Rs 200 - 250/kg	Nil	Self Consumption
Kinnaur	Nako	Rs 110 - 170/kg	Nil	Rs 1,100 - 1,800/box	Rs 900 - 1,100/box
Kinnaur	Leo	Rs 72/kg	Nil	Rs 1575/box	Nil
Kinnaur	Shalkar	Rs 37 - 66/kg	Nil	Rs 1,250 - 1,750/box	Nil
Lahaul	Keylong	Rs 80 - 90/kg	Nil	Rs 1,200 - 1,800/box	Rs 600 - 900/box
Lahaul	Udaipur	Rs 80 - 90/kg	Nil	Rs 700 - 1,375/box	Rs 900 - 1,000/box

Landscape	Village	Grains & Vegetables			
		Barley	Broccoli	Cauliflower	Apricot
Spiti	Kibber	Rs 42/kg	Nil	Nil	Nil
Spiti	Lossar	Rs 45/kg	Nil	Nil	Nil
Spiti	Tabo	Nil	Nil	Nil	Rs 150 - 250/kg
Spiti	Pinvalley	Self Consumption	Nil	Nil	Nil
Kinnaur	Nako	Self Consumption	Nil	Nil	Rs 350 - 380/kg
Kinnaur	Leo	Nil	Nil	Nil	Rs 300/kg
Kinnaur	Shalkar	Nil	Nil	Nil	Rs 90 - 200/kg
Lahaul	Keylong	Nil	Rs 170/kg	Rs 35 - 40/kg	Nil
Lahaul	Udaipur	Self Consumption	Rs 70 - 90/kg	Rs 40 - 45/kg	Nil

\*A box is approximately 25kg.

#The prices listed above are as quoted by the locals and does not reflect the official rates.



# Young Explorers



O Rigzen, Julley

Really? What is it? I am excited.

No. How will I have any friends there?

oh wow! What has he written about?

Absolutely!

Julley Tashi!

I have interesting news to share with you today

Do you have friends in the city?

I received a letter from my pen-pal who lives in Mumbai. He has written a letter for all of us.

Would you like to read it yourself?



**My dear friends of Spiti valley,**

Hello everyone, how are you all doing?

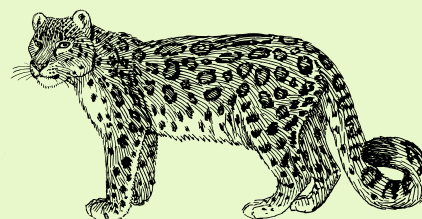
I am writing this letter to tell you what I have learnt about the **ghost of the mountains** of Spiti or the Snow Leopard. I have learnt that Snow Leopard are amazing big cat species and they are so talented; they use their mind and eyes as GPS and they camouflage brilliantly in their habitat.

The **ecosystem is fragile** and there might be a lot of predicament in those areas especially pertaining vegetation - you all have less vegetation and the diet includes mostly meat. As much problem you all have for vegetation the conditions for animals is also the same. I assume sometimes the Snow leopard would have entered the human settlement for the food and **killed several goats or sheep**. The people in those areas might have **suffered a huge loss**.

If you all ever caught the snow leopard **please don't kill it** because they also did it for their living. Else you all can use solutions like making **bigger fences for the sheep or goats** or send sheep in the mountains so that the leopard does not come to the human settlement, don't lose their hunting skills or they don't get dependent on it. I hope you will follow these solutions or find your own ways to protect it.

I have heard a lot about you all and will soon come to visit.

**Yours lovingly,  
Rahul.**







Truly agree with what he said. We live in a beautiful world amid mountains. It is precious and we should protect it.



I think Rahul must also wonder what it is like to live in the high mountain villages. Let's read Pasang Lhamo's illustrative account about her village to know more about the mountain way of life. She is from Lalung village in Spiti.







### जंगल

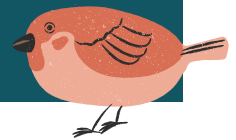
बच्चे भुबह भेड़-बकरियों को चराने के लिए जंगल ले जाते हैं और शाम को भेड़-बकरियों को जंगल से वापस लाते हैं। बच्चे जंगल में जाकर खेलते हैं और पेड़ के नीचे सोते हैं और पेड़ पर चढ़ते भी हैं। हमें जंगल में जाकर खेलना बहुत अच्छा लगता है। मुझे मेरा गाँव और गाँव में रहना बहुत अच्छा लगता है।

— पासंग लामो



## Activity

- Do you like writing letters? Write a letter to an anonymous friend and tell them about your hometown, what is it like living there, the natural surroundings and what you like most about it.
- Send your letter or mail it to us with your proper address and wait to hear from your new friend!
- Email: [himkathaindia@gmail.com](mailto:himkathaindia@gmail.com)
- Call /WhatsApp: + 91 765 000 2777



### Attributions:

Green Compass - Letter by Rahul  
Let's Open A Book - Pasang Lamo's Short Story  
Illustrations: Rohit rao, Pasang Lhamo



# Himalayan Agriculture

By Amshu CR

At 14,200 ft above sea-level, surrounded by the trans Himalayan range, I was looking forward to seeing the yak, for which I had travelled from Mysore to Kibber village in Spiti during the summer of 2016. The walk from the village to the pasture was an arduous one, but I had two girls from the village Lobzang & Tenzin who were accompanying me on my quest. On our way, we crossed many agricultural fields where the villagers were growing green peas. It was unusual to see a cash-crop in such a harsh and remote region. They explained how agriculture had taken shape in the last few decades and opening up of roads and tourism brought many possibilities to these remote places. "For our own consumption, we still grow barley. Green peas are only for the outside market" they exclaimed. Barley, a cereal grain, which has been a staple in upper Himachal has been the source of

nutrition especially during the long winter months when supply of any food produce is infrequent and unpredictable. However, due to lack of marketing opportunities, there is hardly any demand for it outside of Spiti. Discussion with these young girls led me to develop the idea of 'Thapasu'.

Thapasu is a for-profit impact company that closely works with farmers and other collaborations at multiple levels to make agriculture nutrition-rich and accessible to all. We hope to do this by working at ground level in protecting and preserving the agriculture knowledge and the biodiversity surrounding it. Our work began in early 2016 when, with the help of a few researchers and Government of India, we were able to start this initiative alongside two farmers – Deepak and Poonam from Kullu valley. We began by cultivating and marketing Jattoo variety of red



Photo courtesy Thapasu



rice. It was a huge success. Since then, Thapasu has been working with tribal farmers to produce, add-value and market various native, heirloom and wild products promoting natural and organic form of agriculture. Some of these include Barley, Seabuckthorn - a wild berry, Black-peas, Rhododendron, Rose Hips and Tartary Buckwheat. Today, approximately 3200 farmers have joined us from three districts in Himachal Pradesh (Lahaul & Spiti, Kullu, Mandi) and two districts in Karnataka (Mandya & Hassan) along with few regions in Leh, Ladakh.

Thapasu works with a 'Farm to Store' Model by marketing these heirloom species with the help of institutional partnerships and Government schemes. Through institutional collaboration, Thapasu also engages in building newer technologies which are then transferred to the farmers and self-help groups in converting the produce to the final product. 10% of our profit goes back into the community through various agricultural services we provide for farmers such as soil testing, land mapping, semi processing subsidies from government, skill training and new technology introductions. We are a team of eight resourceful people who bring various skills to enable this work in the Himalayas.

Food habits have changed drastically over the last 5-6 decades, however, the importance of saving local food systems is only becoming apparent to us in the recent past. Biodiversity is the key indicator of the health of an ecosystem.



## Amshu C R

The founder, Amshu CR has worked for the past 5 years in building a lean-sustainable agri-hybrid model for the tribal villages of Himachal Pradesh. She comes from a global marketing background with an MBA from Cardiff Business School. You can find out more about her work with the farmer groups at [www.thapasu.com](http://www.thapasu.com).



Photo courtesy Thapasu



But the extinction of wild, native and heirloom food grain species may have unforeseen impacts, sometimes snowballing into the destruction of entire ecosystems. Ancient products still continue to grow in certain parts of the country specifically where climatic conditions are harsh and rough because they are able to withstand drought, fix nitrogen and survive in the harsh climatic condition. Introduced crop needs

external inputs to do the same. But we are experiencing this shift where traditional crop patterns are being replaced by newer varieties of produce even in the remotest regions of the country. The best way to save the little that remains is by unlearning modern agricultural practices, re-adopting the traditional practices and building a circular system that benefits the farmer, consumer and the environment.





## **Why Thapasu?**

Farmers growing ancient heirloom products do so mostly for self-consumption. For livelihood, however, they have to depend on introduced crops for which they may be using chemical based fertilizers and pesticides. This is harmful to the soil quality and health of the community in the long run. Thapasu ensures a market for the organically grown heirloom products and fills gaps which are prevalent in the conventional agro-marketing infrastructure.

## **How Thapasu works?**

Any farmer/s who grows ancient heirloom products, organically, can reach out to us to help them sell their produce to the outside market. Once the quality and nutritional value of produce is assessed, we begin marketing and selling the produce as a Thapasu product. We buy a set quantity from the farmer which is mostly stored with the farmer and when we receive an order from our website ([www.thapasu.com](http://www.thapasu.com)) we request the farmer to send the package to the address via India post. Bigger orders are managed by us directly.

## **How are farmers paid?**

Farmers are paid when we buy the product from them. All the transfers are made directly to the bank account of the farmer. If the farmer does not have a bank account then the payments are made through our local champion who pays them in cash.

## **How much share does a farmer earn?**

Of the total profits earned, up to 50% goes to the farmer as part of direct income and/or services provided by us.

## **Are there any other services provided by Thapasu?**

Organic farmers or farmers looking to change to organic agriculture, can reach out to us for any grievances or consultation with regards to their fields or produce. In collaboration with other institutions, we also conduct regular workshops for farmers for transitioning to organic farming and skill building. We also do soil-testing, land mapping and support farmers to avail government subsidies.

## **How can farmers reach out to you?**

You can give a call or leave a message with your name on +91 973 140 8844. You can also send an email at [amshu@thapasu.com](mailto:amshu@thapasu.com) or visit our office in Manali: THAPASU Centre, #83/7, Siyal Village, Post Office Manali 175131, Kullu Dist., H.P, India.

## Write to us

Every place has a unique story to tell: about its culture, its traditions and practices, its folklore, or the sacred relation it has with the mountains. HimKatha is all about the capturing these stories and there is no one better to tell them, other than you!

So, let's share our experiences, stories of our villages, traditions, practices, with each other and with rest of the world through this newsletter.

If you have any feedback, suggestions or complaints regarding the newsletter, please do reach out to us.

Send the stories, feedback, photographs etc. along with your name and contact details on this e-mail address/ Number:

**Email: [himkathaindia@gmail.com](mailto:himkathaindia@gmail.com)**

**Call /WhatsApp: + 91 765 000 2777**

**Website: [www.himkatha.org](http://www.himkatha.org)**

Alternatively, you can mail to us at this address:

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