

## Pastoral Women of Himalayas

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**ABSTRACT** Women are the backbone of the economic structure, as the production system is dependent on them. The role and status of women vary according to the traditions of cultural group. Pastoral Societies depend for sustenance on livestock herding and use of pasturelands. Due to certain specificities like accessibility, fragility, marginality, diversity or heterogeneity; life in general is tougher for women among the pastoralists. The pastoral production activities implicate the services of both sexes, but women's involvement varies in different culture-ecological conditions. Women play a central role in the pastoralist way of life, providing labour for the various tasks with regard to the livestock, the land and the household. The pastoral societies have been largely seen to be male dominated in which men have economic, social, political and cultural powers special to men. Patriarchy denotes a culture of power relationship that promotes man's supremacy and women subjugation. With a secondary status, women play but a submissive role in social life. In the pastoral areas under study, the economic cycle and division of labour in the area has given an important role to the women. Women's participation in the economic activity is important for their personal advancement and their status in the society. The economic power of the women in the household is not translated into a corresponding community authority. The women in study areas contribute more labour for smooth running of the household than men do. The pastoral women suffer disadvantages in areas of education, employment, health and medical services. The present study corroborates the premise that women's status is high when they contribute substantially to primary subsistence activities even if they lack control of material resources. It may be concluded as it is observed that ecology and environmental factors existing in pastoral areas under study have given these women a special economic power and an elevated status. Men dominate in public, in social and religious affairs, and continue to play the role of the head of the family and breadwinner, while women enjoy a greater say in their family life, they have a greater deal of social freedom and several of their actions are condoned/tolerated. This confirms the thesis in one way, that in spite of the public/domestic dichotomy, the ecological/economic division interferes further modification in women's position. Here one may say that the public/domestic dichotomy is not the only criterion for determining women's status in society. To understand gender relations, it is necessary to realise the extent to which the masculine and feminine roles are interconnected and how one builds up on the other. There is a need for rethinking the relative power and status of women and men and also linkages between the domestic and public spheres in these societies. The idea of a comparison between the status of men and women is not straightforward. There is always too much behind the scenes action so it is never clear who has the upper hand. There is multiplicity of logics operating, practices of power and prestige at play. It is too complex to be understood in black and white terms. There are grey areas in which it is not clear in who is the subordinate of the two.

Pastoral Societies depend for sustenance on livestock herding and use of pasturelands. Due to certain specificities like accessibility, fragility, marginality, diversity or heterogeneity; as described by Jodha (1992), life in general is tougher for women among pastoralists. A pastoral production system rarely focuses on a single product, but makes use rather of both "continuing" (calves, lambs and kids; milk, butter and cheese; transport and traction; manure; hair and wool; and occasionally blood) and "final" (meat, hides and skins) products (Horowitz and Jowkar 1992). Women are the backbone of the economic structure, as the production system is much dependent on them. The role and status of women vary according to the traditions of cultural group. The pastoral production activities implicate the services of both sexes, but women's

involvement varies in different culture-ecological conditions. Women play a central role in the pastoralist way of life, providing labour for the various tasks with regard to the livestock, the land and the household. In some societies, there is no involvement of women in livestock production. Women lack ownership rights, control over resources and may or may not have control over the disposal of animals and animal products. In other societies, women are responsible only for processing products. In many societies, women are responsible for managing and processing small stock and other animals kept at the homestead. There are still other pastoral societies where women are responsible for managing and herding large stock and other animals and for the processing of livestock produce.

In spite of substantial participation and contribution to pastoral economy, the role of women in livestock production has not been paid

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enough attention. This is in part because pastoral societies are male-dominated like most other subsistence systems, but also of the attitude of women themselves, who are socialised to underestimate their economic worth. Except the Tuareg pastoral group of Sahara, the great majority of pastoral societies are patrilineal and male dominated. In pastoral societies, particularly those affected by Islamic inheritance rules, some animals go to daughters on the death of the household head, but these are then “managed” by the women’s brothers (see Tapper 1991). Patriarchy denotes a culture of power relationship that promotes man’s supremacy and women subjugation. It encompasses institutional endorsement of man’s ascendancy within the family and other social structures. Patriarchy, like gender is produced, materialised and transformed through culture and social relations. The Indian family organisation makes discrimination between the sexes. With a secondary status, women play but a submissive role in social life. On virtually all frontiers of human societal pursuits-economic, educational, scientific, legal, official, political and religious sphere, Indian women suffer profoundly. Despite several economic, political and social changes, women, are still far behind. In most pastoral societies, gender roles are strongly marked and patterns seem to be similar across the world.

There exists a limited research about the pastoral women and their role in livestock production. Earlier anthropological studies that dealt with pastoral gender relations applied a synchronic model, analyzing them in terms of either the pastoral mode of production or pastoralist ideology. Harold Schneider contended that among East African pastoralists, men’s control of livestock gave them control of women, who were ‘usually thoroughly subordinated to men and thus unable to establish independent identity as a production force’ (1979: 82). Spencer alleged that both male and female Matapato Maasai believe in ‘the undisputed right of men to own women as “possessions”’. Marriage, in his view, was therefore ‘the transfer of a woman as a possession from her father who reared her to her husband who rules her’ (1979: 198). Galaty (1988) maintained that in their ideology Maasai men were the ‘real’ pastoralists, while Maasai women were negatively equated with lower status hunters, providing an ideological explanation for their lower status.

The literature on women in pastoral societies is relatively limited when compared to the vast body of research on women in agriculture. The early studies of pastoralism largely ignore women’s economic activities and social status, even though there have been some improvements in more recent literature, especially by anthropologists (Horowitz 1992). Categorically, women in pastoral societies have a critical role in the socio-economic and cultural activities and the management and conservation of natural resources and environmental amenities of the household and communities. The pastoral societies have been largely seen to be male dominated in which men have economic, social, political and cultural powers special to men. In 1987, Dahl published a collection of essays with theoretical insights on issues related to women and significant roles played by pastoral women in various pastoral societies. By detailing different axes of social differentiation, division of labour and ideological elements most authors clarify economic roles and relative status of women in pastoral societies. Contrary to earlier anthropological treatments of pastoral women as socially and productively subordinate to men, these articles point out both direct and indirect ways that women contribute to subsistence production (Ensminger 1987; Fratkin and Smith 1995; Hodgson 2000; Little 1987; Talle 1987; Turner 1999). Such studies have highlighted the role of women in these societies in a variety of domain ranging from livestock production (Dahl 1987) to religious system (Straight 1997) to Kinship (Bianco 2000) to food allocation (Holtzman 2002). In Somalia and in the North-Eastern province of Kenya, women play a crucial role in solving conflicts (Elmi et al. 2000). In some pastoral societies, women are making effort to upgrade their technological and environmental knowledge that is crucial to their way of life (Smith and Webley 2000). Among Bedouin of Egypt, women try to update their database as livelihood practices keep changing (Briggs et al. 2003). Among matrilineal Tuareg pastoral groups of Sahara, women control urban markets indirectly from their rural tents through activities of men (Rasmussen 2002).

Pastoral societies in the Middle East show a poor understanding of the economic and political roles played by women. Fazel (1977) using comparative data examines strategies whereby women exercise power and influence decision-

making at all levels in an apparently male-dominated society. Among Boyr Ahmad of Southwest Iran, the position of pastoral women in relations of production, distribution and property disposition is regarded as the basis of their political power. In the Middle East and North Africa, where Islam is a determining factor, though women work more than men, are dominated by men. Adan (1988) discussed women's work in herding sheep and goats and in milking and processing milk from small stock and large (camels and cattle) among Somalian pastoralists. Women work more than 11 hours a day in the dry season and 12-13 hours in a wet season: most of this time is spent watering stock in dry season and milking and making butter in wet season. Women work cooperatively to make the constituents parts of their movable houses and cook together on ceremonial occasions. Both traditional law (*Her*) and Islamic law (*Shari'a*) regulate Somalian nomadic life. However, in South-Africa, Muslim women have greater autonomy and less gender bias.

Holtzman (2002) pointed out that researchers often failed to analyse the role and status of women, domestic/ public dichotomies among these allegedly prominently male dominated societies. This analytical framework assumes the universal subordination of women to men, attributes its cause to the asymmetrical binary opposition between the sexes that is women engage in domestic work concerning their own family and households such as cooking, collecting firewood, bringing water and child bearing in the private domain. While men care about their herds, herding and are engaged in trading. (Ortner 1974; Rosaldo and Lampere 1974; Rosaldo 1974). It was clarified in later studies that private/public spatial distinction was not equivalent to a domestic/political distinction of power, nor was it clearly gendered or hierarchical (Collier and Rosaldo 1981). Such an explanation assumes that such distinctive spheres are universally present and unchanging through history. This universalists argument has been criticised by many authors (Yanagisako 1979; Camaroff 1987). In the present study an attempt has been made to study the status and role of women in three pastoral societies inhabiting different regions of Himalayas.

### **Pastoralists of the Himalayas**

Most of the mountain pastoral groups are practicing subsistence agriculture along with

raising large herds of animals. Sheep and goat pastoralism is a constant feature of traditional mountain societies. *Gaddis, Gujjars, Bakarwals, Kinnauras, Kaulis* and *Kanets* of the north Indian Himalayas, *Bhotias* of Garhwal Himalayas, *Bhotias* and *Sherpas* of Khumbu valley of Nepal, *Kirats* of eastern Nepal, *Monpa* yak breeders of Arunachal Pradesh, *Bhutias* of Lachen and Lachung, Sikkim and *Changpas* of Changthang, Ladakh are some of the known pastoral communities of Himalayas. The pastoral communities of Himalayas make use of resources like high mountain pastures by three different ways by characteristic mobility patterns, socio-economic organisation and property rights. There are nomads like Changpa of Changthang in Ladakh, whose economy is predominantly based on animal husbandry; there are agro-pastoralist groups like Gaddis of Bharmour, Himachal Pradesh.; and Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung in Sikkim, who practice marginal agriculture and raise herds of sheep and goats and yaks (Bhasin 1988, 1989, 1996). The interaction of altitude, climate and soil fertility set upper limits on agriculture and pastoralism and within the range of agriculture, upper limits on types of crops (Troll 1968, 1972; Uhlig 1976; Dollfus 1981). Several authors have carried out studies on these pastoralist groups (Uhlig 1961; Singh 1963; Newell 1967; Khatana 1976a, 1976b; Nitzberg 1987; Goldstein and Messerschmidt 1980; Kango and Dhar 1981; Rao and Casimir 1982; Bhasin 1988, 1989, 1996; Farooquee and Rao 1999-2000). Though pastoral women studies have not been major part of these, however information on the role of Himalayan women have been provided by Bhasin (1989, 1990, 1996, 2007), Biswas (1990), Farooquee and Rawat (2001), Ghatak (2006), Guha (1989), Katoch (2003), Pokhriyal (1985), Rana (1996), Rawat and Kothari (1994), Rao (1998); Rawat and Singh (1993), Samal (1993), Singh and Rawat (1992). Rao (1998) using the concepts of personal autonomy and agency among women and men, as they are reflected in daily decision making with in a frame of socio-religious perception and structures of power and authority studied the live of Bakkarwal pastoralists.

India as a whole is characterised by sharp gender disparities, although women's status varies considerably by region. For all time there are socio-cultural factors, which validate for the status of women in particular society. Gender roles are socially constructed.

Status of women is generally measured using three indicators: education, employment status and intra-household decision-making power. In addition women's ability to communicate with and convince their spouses or other members of the family indicates their decision-making autonomy. Women with great decision-making power are supposed to have a higher status in the household.

In India women are discriminated due to several historical, religious and other reasons. There are various hypotheses about why women have relatively high or low status. The common premise is that status of women is high when they contribute substantially to primary subsistence activities. Women position is low in the societies where food getting is entirely men's job like hunting, herding or intensive agriculture. In the historical times when warfare was essential, men were more esteemed than women. Likewise in the centralised political systems men had high status. Men in most societies contribute more to primary subsistence activities, as women have infant and child-care responsibilities. However, women contribute substantially to primary subsistence activities that depend heavily on gathering and horticulture and in which men are away on labour or pastoral duties while subsistence work has to be done. When primary and secondary sub-sistence activities are counted, women work more than men.

Women occupy different positions in the social structure as they pass through the life cycle and the very basis upon which the community ascribes power, privilege and prestige also changes.

The present study deals with status of women in three pastoral societies in Himalayas. Out of the three, two groups, Gaddis of Bharmour, Himachal Pradesh and Bhutias of Lachen-Lachung, North Sikkim are agro-pastoralist transhumant and the third group, Changpas of Changthang, is that of nomads. Gaddis raise flocks of sheep, goats while Bhutias of Sikkim domesticate herds of yak and flocks of sheep and Changpas of Changthang raise herds of yak and flocks of sheep and *pashmina* goats. Gaddis at 2100 metres and Bhutias at 3000metres follow *Alpwirtschaft* type of strategy, associated with the movement of peoples and animals in vertical space, communal control of pastures, combined with individual control of plots and haying fields and social institutions that schedule the complex

movement in space and time. The Changpas inhabit cold desert of Changthang, Ladakh at 3,500 to 4,500 metres. Their complete reliance on natural pastures creates difficulties for year-round sustenance. Therefore, their pattern of migrations differs from Gaddis of Bharmour and Bhutias of Lachen and who have permanent houses at middle altitude. Gaddis spend their summers in their permanent homes in Bharmour tehsil and cultivate their lands. Due to heavy snowfall for about three to four months during winter, the Gaddis migrate to the lower hills and plains along with their sheep and goats. During this period the main source of livelihood is the sale of wool and the employment of their children and the women as domestic help in the houses of landlords where they go and stay. The migration is necessitated because the pastures and grazing lands are covered with snow and it is difficult to maintain the large number of sheep and goats; secondly, for the selling of raw wool which is available in large quantities in the absence of market facilities. Like Gaddis, Bhutias also migrate with their flocks to high altitude in summer and to lower altitude in winter (Bhasin 1988, 1989, 1996). Unlike Gaddis and Bhutias, Changpas have no reason to migrate to far off places, as the surrounding areas have the same short growing season. The tent-dwelling Changpas traverse with their livestock across the Changthang and the migrations between summer and winter pastures do not involve all the family members. An average family owns over two hundreds goats and sheep, several yaks and a few horses. Changpas and Bhutias have communal pastureland with a strong community regulation of land usage. Changpas and Bhutias follow the traditional system of grazing wherein headman-the *goba* and *phi-phun* decide areas for animal grazing. A unique feature of the traditional pastoral system is the complex administrative system of pasture allocation and reallocation by *goba* and *phi-phun* respectively among Changpas and Bhutias respectively. Gaddis have property rights in Alpine pastures and customary rights or contracts with residents in low hills for grazing. Male members of the family inherit these rights. In winter migrations, their families also accompany them. While men go with animals, women and children work as labourers and house help. The proprietor farmers provide shelter and grazing on their fields after harvest or on meadows. In return, the farmers get manure for

their fields. The Changpa women of Changthang and Bhutia women of Lachen and Lachung in North Sikkim profess Buddhism while Gaddi women of Bharmour in Chamba district own up Hinduism. Changpas and Bhutias have communal pastureland with strong community regulation of land usage.

Among Gaddis, the household consists of one elementary family of a man, his wife and their children, with the occasional addition of unmarried, widowed or divorced relatives who would be otherwise alone in their house or wife and children of married son's family. Conventionally fraternal polyandry, primogenitor and monasticism were part of a traditional culture among the Changpas and Bhutias to overcome economic and demographic problems. Nowadays, the patterns of marriage among Changpas and Bhutias represent a broad variety of alliances representing flexibility with which they react to periods of relative affluence and periods of scarcity. During the time of scarcity, Changpas and Bhutias follow the 'monomarital' or one marriage on one estate principle. Economic systems such as the Changpas and Bhutias requiring hands for farming, herding, collecting fuel and fodder, trading etc., the polyandrous family undoubtedly offered some advantage to its members, enables them to take advantage of the diversity of the physical environment. Polyandry ensures the presence of at least one husband at home, while others are engaged in periodic trading or herding activities elsewhere. Regional isolation helped to retain the traditional socio-economic system until the winds of change swept in (Bhasin 1999).

In pastoral societies, both men and women share the economic activities but they do not share the burden equally or in the same ways. Pastoral women suffer two kinds of desecrations: those that all pastoralists share regardless of gender and those that are specific to women. The women in study areas contribute more labour for smooth running of the household than men do. The Gaddi and Bhutia women have been playing a very important role in their economy. The decision-making regarding family and outside affairs rests solely on menfolk. The pastoral women suffer disadvantages in areas of education, employment, health and medical services. Bhutia women have been fortunate in the sphere of education and awareness about these programmes.

If we see Changpa, Bhutia or Gaddi women concerning their educational achievements, legal and political rights, employment opportunities and demographic characteristics, these women do not have high status. The level of education is not high among the three pastoral groups. Among Bhutias of Sikkim the literacy rate was 36.83 per cent, the male and female ratio was 51.94 and 21.92 respectively. The literacy rate of Gaddis of Bharmour was 24.6. The male literacy rate was 34.3 and female literacy rate was mere 12.2 in 1978 (Bhasin 1990). There is tremendous increase in literacy rates among Gaddis. The female literacy rate in the region increased from 1.88 percent in 1971 to 42.83 percent in 2001 (Axelby 2009). The sex ratio (the number of females per thousands males) shows a varied picture among the different groups. For Bhutias of Sikkim it was 921 and for Gaddis it was 870 (Bhasin 1990). Sex ratios have been found similarly unbalanced in nomadic communities of Rupshu-Kharnak in Changthang (Chaudhuri 1998). The Leh district sex ratio has been declining since 1921, until it reduced to 866 in 1971. In these areas gender selective methods can be excluded as a significant factor altering the sex composition of the community as preceding studies found no evidence of female infanticide or other negative gender-specific practices in the area (Crook and Shakya 1994: 708; Chaudhuri 1998: 78). A very high maternal mortality rate has played role in low sex ratio. Work-status of women in these areas is broad and it includes all forms of women's labour force participation: formal as well as informal work, work inside and outside the home and work for payment in cash or kind or no earnings. In these traditional pastoral communities, the women have an important role to play. Gender principles are central to the organisation of traditional communities. Emphasis on gender, a relational concept provides opportunities for looking at full range of social and cultural institutions, which reproduce gender hierarchies and gender-based inequalities. The cultural interpretation of gender is central to the identity and status of women that entails web of relationships

The social status of pastoral women is complex and is not possible to explain with a single paradigm. A single woman plays multiple roles associated with a particular relation to each individual.

All societies offer its children the presence of two genders and related roles, according to

kinship, sexuality, work, marriage and age. In the present study, an effort has been to describe the status of women in three different ecological regions, with different socio-economic conditions and cultural backgrounds. The conceptual framework to analyse women's status comprise the seven roles women play in life and work: - parental, conjugal, domestic, kin, occupational, community and as an individual. In order to appraise the social status of women in these diverse ecological areas, the findings have been divided in to subsequent categories: - (a) a girl/ daughter/ a unmarried woman; (b) a married woman; (c) a widow; (d) divorcee; and (e) a barren woman. Apart from the social status, women role in the social sphere; her political domain; religious sphere; economic activities and decision making have been discussed.

### GIRL CHILD

Children are highly valued among pastoralists. Pastoralists too have son preference but do not discriminate against girls by female infanticide or sex determination tests. The superiority of men is made clear at several occasions and events in the society. In Changthang, at birth, a male child is offered *Khatak* (white scarf), a female child is not. Women cannot make offerings at *lhatho* (village shrine), because they are considered less pure than men are. Even nuns are inferiors to lamas, as nuns are considered less pure because they go through a period of impurity each time they menstruate. Nuns can weave (as their services in their homes are always welcome) but lamas do not weave. Gaddis, announce the birth of a son noisily by drumming brass plate with a ladle.

It is very important for the pastoral girls to learn to weave. Changpas folklore explains the representation of women as demon. Men claim to be spiritually cleaner than women. Thus, while women must weave continuously, men weave occasionally. Though the fabrics woven by women are as essential as those woven by men, there is a thread of prejudice against women running through discourse of spinning and weaving. Boys and girls do not have similar inheritance laws. Girls care for younger siblings, perform household jobs and work in the fields along with their brothers.

Among pastoral groups under study, girls are appreciated because of their economic value. The

adolescent girls of the three pastoral societies under study share household and allied work. The girls are expected to perform each domestic activity and prepare themselves for future life. Their main jobs are meal preparation, washing utensils and clothes and sweeping and mopping. Other activities include cutting and bringing grass from fields, taking care of animals, bringing firewood etc. They act as pseudo-parents and look after their siblings. By age of 15-16, they start learning to weave as well, under the guidance of their mother. First, they learn steps to set up a wrap and pile weaving with sheep wool. After learning pile weaving, they weave with yak wool. The weaving of cloth is a measure of women's worth and a woman who does not weave or who does not cook well, will not be a good bride.

There is tremendous increase in literacy among Gaddis and Bhutias. Previously Gaddis were not educating their girls but with the effort of Integrated Tribal Development Programme, there is increase in literacy rate. In absence of hired labour, the girls work at home and in the fields and are of utmost importance. Their apathy towards the education matches their thinking that eventually the girls have to get married and start their families. Where parents are enthusiastic about educating their daughters, they enroll their daughters in schools but rarely allow them to complete their schooling. The girls study up to the primary or middle level and get married. Bhutia girls probably have benefited most from increased access to educational facilities. Changpa girls have not benefited from education due to lack of educational facilities in winter and the mobile way of life.

The girls in the three groups have freedom in selecting their life-partners, though arranged marriages are preferred. Among Bhutias of Sikkim and Changpa of Changthang, child marriage and the dowry systems are unknown (Bhasin 1998, 1999). Bride price is common among Bhutias and Changpas, but necessary items to start a new life are also presented by girl's parents. A Changpa girl has choice to marry, remain an unmarried woman and spend her life in her father's house or in a nunnery as a nun. Widowed or divorced women are free to marry again. As a norm, unmarried girls in the study group have right of residence in their father's home and to maintenance from their father, brother or nephew-whosoever is the head of the household at that point of time. However, if a married woman stays

in her parental house, she or her sons cannot inherit property, if father's sons are there. Only under very special circumstances, in the absence of sons, it is possible for a daughter to inherit the property. This however, is possible if she brings her husband to live with her father while the father is still alive. If she is already married and settled somewhere else, she is not entitled to property. There is decline in child marriage among Gaddis. Traditionally, child marriage followed by *gauna* was prevalent, but now adult marriages are taking place at the age of 18 years and above for boys and girls. Dowry system, in its true traditional sense, is not prevalent among Gaddis. At the time of marriage certain essential items are given to the girl as gifts by her parents. *Reet* or *lag* was prevalent, which traditionally consisted of at least 60 silver coins, but today it has been replaced by voluntary dowry given in kind and depend on the economic status of the household. Residence is patrilocal but there is tendency towards to settle separately soon after marriage.

In the three societies under study, the response regarding the case of a girl who becomes pregnant before marriage was analogous. If it happens then the matter is discussed in the village council and either the boy has to marry the girl or has to pay a compensation to her family. The child is born in her natal family and it does not have an effect on her marriage prospects in any way.

Men's *de jure* ownership rights over animals are guaranteed by a near universal gender-discriminatory set of inheritance rules rooted in androcentric kinship systems (Dahl 1987). The only exception is Twareg society among whom women's livestock, ownership rights are specially recognised: "Twareg women accumulate livestock through important gifts from both parents and other relatives after birth (*alkhalal*) which forms the basis of their own herds. Women may receive outright gifts of livestock from consanguine kin throughout their lives and in all marriages after the first, the wife herself accepts the bride price (*taggalt*). As a result of these gifts and pre-mortem inheritance practices Twareg women may become quite wealthy in livestock and it is not uncommon for a woman to be wealthier than her husband..." (Oxby 1987: 278-279). These discriminatory inheritance laws, however, do not imply women's total exclusion from animal ownership and are experienced in different ways according to the different existing

nomadic pastoral groups. Dupire (1963) explains that in the case of the WoDaaBe of West Africa, women receive cattle from their families either as gifts or through inheritance. The cattle belong to the women in that they control the milk, keep the animals in case of divorce and bequeath them to their children. Nevertheless, the fathers and husbands manage the stock and even sell them if it is essential. When and where Islam is practised, women's rights of ownership are recognised by the Shari'a (Lois Beck), although Muslim law grants daughters only half the inheritance rights enjoyed by sons. Unfortunately, these inheritance laws, despite's the religious validation are not always respected. This is the case, for example, among the Sudanese Arabs where male agnates retain custody over women's animals.

In most parts of India, women do not own property in their own names and do not get a share of parental property. Due to weak enforcement of laws protecting them, women continue to have little access to land and property. Pastoral women in the Himalayas face the same dilemma. In an exogamous system, if women can own significant herds of their own, they will take these away on marriage to a new camp and potentially deplete the herd of an individual household. Customary laws determine the inheritance of household property among Changpas, Bhutias and Gaddis. The pastoral societies under study are patrilocal and the right to inherit property in a complete sense is restricted to sons. Bhutias of Sikkim and Changpas of Changthang practice pre-inheritance, the father dispersing the herd among his sons prior to his death, since the principle of patrilocality means that the animals will anyway remain in the same physical herd. According to law of primogeniture, the eldest son of the Changpa household obtains rights at birth in the pastures and campsite. The eldest son inherits all property except the ornaments of the mother that go to eldest daughter. In the absence of any male sib, the Changpa girl is the sole inheritor and may enter in to a type of marriage by negotiation known as *magpa*, where the husband having no property rights takes up residence with her (Bhasin 1999). This does not eliminate certain well-recognised claim of the women in the family. Every woman with household has a right to maintenance until death. In case, even if there are no sons, the widow can stay in the house of husband/husbands. As long as she continues to reside on the inherited property, her legacy

persists even if she takes a partner to live with her who would assist in managing the economic affairs. This right normally ceased to operate if the widow either formally marries her partner or she leaves the house.

Among Changpas looms are passed on from one generation to the next and one loom can be used for generations. Men make looms for both men and women using wood, rope, wool and metal. As men and women, looms are different, eldest daughter inherits the mother's loom and eldest son inherits father's loom.

Among Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung, the component households are economically independent. Each house has its own animals, land and grazing rights by virtue of his *dzumsha* membership. Bhutias households follow a patriarchal family system, with the adult male as the head of the household. Among Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung, possession of animals, fields, grazing rights, household effects as well as the house itself belongs to the father or male head of the household. Land tenure is always registered in the name of the male head of the household. Women have no legal right to family property. Upon the death of the male head of the household, women retain usufruct rights to the family holdings and continue to live there until their death. Women are not entitled to sell, transfer or mortgage the property of her late husband. However, women and girls are given gifts and assets including livestock, utensils, ornaments, land (if the household is wealthy) and other goods, which may be taken with them after marriage.

According to the Bhutia custom only sons inherit property. The youngest son of the family receives the larger share as he has to take the responsibility of looking after his parents, unmarried sisters and the household. Like Changpas, Bhutias also practice pre-inheritance. After the birth of a child in the son's house, the couple establish themselves in a separate house. Bhutias society make arrangements whereby productive property in the form of land, herds and equipment and additional labour force are provided to secure the viability of newly established incomplete elementary families (Bhasin 1989).

Among Gaddis the right to till land is inherited among males only. Gaddis prefer partition of property and family into smaller nuclear families, even though they often pool resources. The

inheritance of property is in the male line according to locally recognised mode of inheritance known as *chundawand* (*chunda*= women, *wand*=division) and *mundawand* (*munda*=boy, *wand*=division). According to the former, the property at the first instance is divided into the number of wives and subsequently each share is further subdivided according to the number of sons. In *mondawand*, all sons legal or illegal, inherits the father's property equally. Although, legally all sons are entitled to equal share of family property, but here in Sachuien (the investigated village) the eldest son gets little more than the others called *jaithhund* and the youngest gets the readymade *chauka* (kitchen) of the parents. Children, on being taken by a divorced mother, lose the right of their biological father's property, but can inherit on returning to their father or can share their father's property in the event of their mother's remarriage. Girls have no jural rights over the property. Even in the absence of sons, girls have no right to claim the property though they may receive some essential items like clothes, ornaments and household items at time her marriage.

The women in the three pastoral groups under study are not able to nullify these discriminating laws by their ability to acquire animals in exchange for dairy goods, handicrafts, cooked food and such services as midwifery, collecting wood and herbage as reported in other parts of the world.

### MARRIED WOMEN

Each culture evaluates gender-specific activities and these evaluations are not necessarily congruent with actual gender contributions to the pastoral production system. The division of pastoral labour responsibilities is organised by sex and age. The pastoral gender division of labour only barely assigns to women major herding responsibilities over large stock, within the prominent exception of Twareg women in Algeria, Niger and Mali, who may own camels and who may engage in herding activities of small and large ruminants away from their domestic plain (Worley 1991). On the other hand, there are many reports of women herding sheep and goats, whose shorter grazing range does not call for women's prolonged separation from their homesteads.



Men can and do carry out feminine tasks of cooking and caring for children, the elderly and sick animals and women can and do assume male tasks, especially when men are absent on labour migration. Tamang men in Tibet are reported to be willing to undertake all activities associated with women with the exception of pounding grain (Panter-Brick 1986). In Yemen, Muslim Bedouin women may, in their husbands', brothers', sons' and fathers' absence, undertake the "men's work" of ploughing, harvesting *qat* and tending livestock (Adra 1983).

Men's work has generally been associated with herd management and women's work with the children and house. As a result, the extent of women's involvement with livestock has most of the time been under-estimated. In fact, the balance of work is such that women frequently spend more time than their husbands in animal care (Talle 1988: 11). Women are closely involved in caring for the young and sick livestock as well as for animals kept near the homestead. As "milk managers", they are responsible for milking, processing milk products and marketing of dairy products. Women's contributions to child-care and the daily reproductive needs of the household support their claims to milk. Generally and customarily, women are associated with milking, preparing and distributing food products such as butter, yoghurt, ghee and cheese. In some societies, women are not permitted or they are restricted to milking only certain kinds of stock. Among the Beja of Sudan, women herd small stock and do the milking and processing from small stock. They do not permit women to milk camels and in high mountain communities of northern Pakistan, only men milk yaks and goats, women milk only cows. Regardless of their direct participation in milking, women, by virtue of their mothering and domestic responsibilities, usually decide how to allocate milk between human and animal needs (Adan 1988). However, it is not always so easy to manage since gender-specific perceptions of milk, rooted in men's and women's relation to animals, dairy products and meat, may lead to marital conflicts and interpretative disputes over women's milk rights. Women's role in the distribution of milk grants them high status by the virtue of their control over the future welfare of their children, over hospitality and over growth of the household's herd. Women's milk rights also grant them decision-making power over food processing and distribution within and beyond their communities.

Despite overall similarities, variations occur in different cultural and economic contexts. For example, where social convention constrains women's mobility, as among Twareg, it is men who go to market and make household purchases (Oxby 1978: 284). In contrast, women have greater freedom of movement and are more involved in the sale of milk products (Talle 1988).

### Women's Role in Economic Sphere

Pastoral women in India contribute positively to the local economy and participate along with men in subsistence activities. In reality, women do more work than men do. All households have a recognised head, the husband in the family, who represents the household in all public and official dealings. A woman is looked upon as the head of a household in the absence of an adult male. In these societies, women provide labour for the various tasks related to livestock but have no say in the process of decision-making, particularly over the disposal of animals and animal products. Economic activities are grouped in to following categories: *domestic, agro-pastoral, collecting, trading and other miscellaneous activities*. Men are shepherds and cultivators; women grow crops, cook and raise infants. The sexual division of labour is rather complete, though certain phases of agricultural labour fall to men, women shepherds exist under rare circumstances. Because of tendency towards extensive social and economic equality in Buddhist society, there are no sharply defined division between the kind of work to be done by men and women in Bhutia society. However, among Changpas, there is however, a marked gender distinction in the pastoral production system, with the women involved mostly in milking and dairy processing, while males are responsible for shearing cashmere wool, herding and selling of animals. Both sexes participate in ceremonies but men share the major responsibilities.

**Domestic Activities:** Married women in the study area carry out a all types of work at home as well as outside that are demand of a mixed agro-pastoral economy. Among Gaddis and Bhutias, almost all women work in fields and take cattle to graze. The other activities of women include looking after the house and the children, food preparation, food processing, collecting firewood and water, spinning and weaving,

repairing clothes etc. The work done by women is constant, diverse and often arduous. Bhutias women apart from growing food crops and fruits accompany their husbands on pastoral duties as well. In the absence of men, the whole burden falls on women. Among Changpas, the women and old people staying back in the *rebo* are busy in the food processing; spinning wool and weaving clothes apart from other household work. Women and girls generally do the work within the household.

Women in the three groups do the milking and processing of milk but do not have the right to sell it. Changpa and Bhutias women also help in dismantling and rebuilding their houses with the men when they move from one pasture to another with their herds. The pastoral gender division of labour only barely assigns to women major herding responsibilities over large stock. Women in the study group take animals for grazing who do not accompany the main group for some reason or are left behind for agriculture. These women are different from Twareg women in Algeria, Niger and Mali, who may own camels and who may engage in herding activities of small and large ruminants away from their domestic plain (Worley 1991).

**Agro-pastoral Activities:** In the traditional societies, which lack a market system, the business of everyday living is usually carried on the basis of gender division of labour (Illich 1982). In the communities under study, the main subsistence activities are herding and agriculture and women folk are considered as the most important economic asset. Among the Gaddis and Bhutias the men are shepherds and women grow crops for food. Among the Gaddis, in all other tasks concerned with life in the village, such as crafts, house building, watermills and work on boundary walls, there is division between men's work and women's work.

Among the Gaddis and Bhutias, women perform major agricultural activities like hoeing, manuring, planting, weeding, irrigation, harvesting, thrashing and preservation of seeds except ploughing (which is done by men) in the fields adjacent to houses or far off fields. Even when men are working in the fields, women help men by beating the soil after ploughing, manuring, reaping and winnowing. Apart from performing two-thirds of the duties for crop cultivation, women are largely responsible for the fodder and water for animals kept at home, while men herd

the other animals. Bhutia women also look after *lee* (apple) gardens. Like women in Bangladesh who manage small ruminants, although men herd both cattle and small ruminants jointly (Feldman et al. 1986), Gaddi and Bhutias women also take care of sheep and goats that are left behind. Women and girls of Tihama region of Yemen are responsible exclusively for feeding, watering, milking and providing shelter for sheep, goats, cows and chickens kept at the homestead. Camel husbandry is a man's job (Hamada 1986).

Among Changpas the involvement of women of all age groups in the different spheres of pastoral life is largely equal to that of males. In addition to processing of milk, pastoral women also process the wool, fibres and hides. Pastoral women in all the three groups spin and weave woollen clothes, blankets, carpets, saddle bags and containers etc. All the Changpa women work on the loom for most of the time. The weaving of cloth is a measure of women's worth and a woman who does not weave, or who does not cook well, is not considered a good bride. Men and women weave specific articles. Thus, while women must weave continuously and men weave occasionally. The fabrics woven by women are as essential as those woven by men, there is a thread of prejudice against women running through discourse of spinning and weaving. Women weave textiles for use as clothes; blankets; containers for food and valuable possession; saddle bags for holding personal belongings; covering for floors, tent walls and saddles. Men weave blankets, saddle-bags and tents.

The Changpa women weave in summer months, from May/June to October/November. Women weave on a back strap loom (*Sked-thags*) and men use a fixed handle (*Sikpa*) loom (*sathags*). Before the closure of border, as long as wool was coming from Tibet, the Bhutia women were practicing spinning and weaving as a household industry. However, now the Bhutia women are mostly employed in making carpets, blankets, scrolls, Sikkimese caps, leather and woollen shoes in the Sikkim Institute of Cottage Industry for carpet and blanket weaving.

In the making of clothes, Gaddi men do the twisting of three threads on a spinner, weaving and making Doras etc., while teasing and spinning the wool in to thread is done by women. Embroidery, repairing and dyeing of clothes are female tasks.

**Collecting Activities:** Pastoralists mostly depend on natural resources, particularly for fuel,

fodder and water. Women look after a collection of all the three. In Changthang and north Sikkim, women collect yak dung to be used as fuel, while Gaddi women collect cow dung for using as manure in the fields. Several studies dealing with pastoral societies indicate that the position of women in such societies is not very high because the actual care of the livestock and handling of economic affairs is entirely a male domain.

Bhutia women collect yak-dung which they use as fuel and manure. Storing of hay is an essential part of pastoral economy. In Lachen and Lachung, herds are fed on hay from December to April. Immediately after the harvest of potatoes and vegetables, women cut grasses and weeds, tie these in bundles and store on the rooftop. They have to pluck fruits in time. They also collect roots, vegetables, fuel and fodder for daily use from forest. Changpa women also have to collect animal dung, as there are no forests in this cold desert. At campsites, the animals are tethered in *les*. It takes months for one group to return to the same spot. After settling, women collect animal's dung and use it as fuel especially when it is scarce during the long winters.

**Trading Activities:** In areas where milk production generates a surplus above household and herd consumption requirements, women may benefit by taking it to local markets and to small town processing centres. Barbara Michael (1990) reporting on production and marketing of milk and dairy products in the Sudan, states that Baggara women participate in all stages of this economic activity and that their incomes constitute two-thirds of the total annual household budget. They manage the money, which they earn and usually use it for the purchase of new stock or animal feed. Women's marketing links to various private and state cheese factories are facilitated by government pick-up posts and by a chain of middle women who sell the milk to retail sellers. Pastoral women serving consumer's needs in small encampments may also engage in milk transaction in urban areas, where primarily older local women traders who act as intermediaries between producers and consumers dominate markets. The desegregated nature of the milk market, the relative durability of soured milk and the low initial capital investment facilitate the participation of distant pastoralist women in milk marketing, which allows them a degree of cash autonomy (Horowitz and Jowkar 1992).

The literature is exceptionally unforthcoming on the roles of women in the marketing of wool,

hides and skins, yet these are often highly significant outputs of pastoral and agro-pastoral production systems.

In West Africa, herded sheep do not produce wool. The herders use locally tanned hides of sheep, goats and cattle. In East Africa, where herding households tend to slaughter their own livestock, there is a greater household involvement in hide and skin marketing which is an important source of income for women.

The socio-economical relevance of pastoral women and their contribution in livestock production in the study area is only supportive. In all the three communities, milk production does not generate a surplus above household and herd consumption requirements, women do not benefit by taking it to local markets and to the small town processing centres. Both Changpas and Bhutias are far from trading towns and cities and women do not participate in all stages of economic production. The Gaddi women do migrate to places around Kangra town but are busy working as househelp or labourers and men look after trading. Changpa men indulge in salt and *pashmina* trade and women keep out of it. These women do contribute to the household economy but are not a part of the pastoral production. Bhutias and Changpa women apart from performing their household duties, take on small business, run shops or work as porters as and when need arise.

Among the Bhutias and Changpas, the involvement of women of all age groups in the different spheres of pastoral life is largely equal to that of males. They actively take part in milking along with the males besides processing the milk into storing form – butter, *churpi* etc., that are to be exchanged for grains in the subsequent time. This situation is in contrast to Nuers, as observed by Evans Pritchard (1940: 22) that, "milking is performed daily by women, girls and uninitiated boys. Men are forbidden to milk cows. Stenning (1959) observed that among the pastoral Fulani of Nigeria, the Fulani women are responsible for marketing of milk and milk products as well. Among the Changpa nomads, though women are involved in all spheres of pastoral life and their involvement in their subsistence economic activities is much bigger, they are not given the portfolio of trade. These pastoral women have woven an indelible and colourful pattern of culture and life style in these rugged and economically marginalised regions. These women enjoy

higher social status because there is no clear-cut division of labour or specific land rights. In the traditional set up, there were no institutionalised ways of earning cash by the pastoral women of study area. Absence of infrastructure and preservation technology has so far prevented most women's direct access to the urban consumers. Since the men are usually grazing the herds during the day, it is women who interact with traders and intermediaries who come there to purchase animals and animal products. However, presently by the integrated rural development programme and Allied Programme, the women are helped in self-earning through poultry farming, piggery etc. it is true that these interventions have created more work for these already burdened women but have enhanced their economic value.

### **Women's Role in Social Sphere**

Role of pastoral women in the study areas is not only of importance in the economic activities, but her role in non-economic activities is equally important. Formation and continuity of the family hearth and home is the domain of the women. Women's role as wives, mothers and organisers and as basic foundation of other dimensions of social life is of extreme importance. In the pastoral societies, as men are out for pastoral duties, the socialisation of children automatically becomes mother's business, in the early years of life at least. The family assumes mother centeredness with the children and some important decisions falling to the sphere of women's intervention. In all the three societies, the role of women in childbirth, funerals and fairs and festivals is an important part of village life. Here women are carriers of traditional information in the absence of written records.

### **Women's Role in Political Sphere**

This inclination of pastoral societies in being androcentric is also reflected in women's absence from formal political institutions. Elder men work out decisions regarding herd mobility, conflict resolution and diplomatic relations with neighbouring groups and the state. Both among the Bhutias and Changpas, women enjoy high social status and exercise a considerable measure of autonomy and decision-making power, a result of their participation in daily productive and

reproductive activities. Women exercise, in fact, considerable informal political influence in their communities and households with regards to men's economic activities, marriage of their offspring, inheritance, transhumance routes and the like (Horowitz and Jowkar 1992). The role of women's empowerment for a just society was highlighted in the Beijing Conference (1995). In all the three societies under study, women power does not extend to societal or political spheres. The economic power of the women in the household is not translated into corresponding community authority. Women supremacy is restricted within the family domain and does not extend to social or political spheres. It is interesting to note that although by convention every village Panchayat has a female member, the woman never bothers to attend the meeting or to take any active interest in the proceedings of Panchayat. Sikkim has a tradition of collective decision making by communities through the institution of *Dzumsha*. However traditional institutions do not witness a significant role for women and *Dzumsha* is constituted of males only. In the absence of a male member, a female can represent her family unit. If a male head is absent from *Dzumsha* meeting, he is fined, however if represented by female head, she is liable to pay half the amount for her absence. Like Bhutias' *phipun*, *goba* holds Changpa encampments together and unites into unit. In this democratic form of government, the village council (*chogdus*) selects *goba* (Headman). The village council consists of all the male heads of the separate households. Women are generally bypassed and marginalised either because they lack the requisite skills or because women's heavy and unending domestic responsibilities makes attending meetings and participating in decision making difficult. Women perform waged and non-waged, productive and unproductive labour. The work-load that is associated with these activities most unlikely does not give women any time to indulge in community affairs.

### **Women's Role in Religious Sphere**

All the three societies under study show male dominance in ritual sphere. Two prominent religions – Buddhism and Hinduism are professed by the pastoral groups under study, operate with tenets that are restrictive of women's participation in their rituals. Their conventional religion is

different from their professed religion. Gender is a significant slip-up in Buddhist societies, as in Hindu or Islamic ones. Buddhist monastic practices reinstate the social hierarchies that the Buddha had disparaged. Nuns and their nunneries are completely ignored. Nuns remain subject to the authority and scrutiny of monks throughout a religious life that is theoretically devoted to rise above gender and other social hierarchies. In Buddhist communities, monasticism is as structured around a gender division of labour and the dualities of sex as are the lay communities. Nuns are distinguished from female renunciates who live at home and do not perform any public rituals. Buddhist women can never become monks or be ordained due to the ideology of purity and pollution. Among the Changpas and Bhutias, the lay and monastic realms are not alternating, as the monks play a central role in politico-economic processes. In Ladakh, Buddhist monasteries are wealthy, as monasteries are the biggest landing agencies and act as treasury. The lay patronage which sustains Buddhist monasticism is the Buddhist idea of earning merit. There is synchronised and incessant exchange between the laity and monastery and the politico-economic and religious functionaries of the area. However, Buddhist nuns face many hardships, first in establishing and afterwards in maintaining these nunneries. To become a nun, a woman rejects her femininity and maternity and dedicates herself to a spiritual life in the nunnery. When a girl joins a nunnery to learn rituals and Buddhist sermons, even then she is not free of her economic responsibilities towards her family and village. She performs her agricultural duties on the family farms and monastic estates. Families allow their daughters to join nunneries in order to earn merit and at the same time make sure the assurance of their productive services. Buddhist nuns play an important arbitrating role between the monastery and the laity by performing ritual services and serving monks and society, thereby earning merit for their families and communities while continuing to perform labour in the fields. Both nuns and lamas take vows to abstain from worldly pursuit but nuns end up working as domestic help. The Buddhist way of life and making merit can neither assure a livelihood for the nuns nor provide funds for their periodic rituals, while assuring the same for the lamas and their *gompas*. Despite the fact that nuns earn wide-ranging merit for the entire community, it does not assure them

patronage as they do not perform practical *tantric*, instrumental and propitiatory rituals like the lamas.

The religious organisation of the Buddhist society of Ladakh gives an idea about the gender inequality that denies status and independence to Buddhist nuns and perpetually subordinate and marginalise them. The situation of the Bhutia and Changpa nuns is like that of the Sherpa nuns. Ortner (1996) found that the moment of their creation as institutions the monastery supposedly represented the culmination of public concerns and the nunnery the embodiment of domestic ones.

Changpas and Bhutias place great emphasis on coercive rights of exorcising and destroying demons. Both the communities have trained male and female specialists for exorcising demons. Changpas have *lha-ma* (female) and *lha-pa* (male) and Bhutias have *pau* (male) and *nejohum* (female) who play a part in exorcising rights. The Changpa and Bhutias nunneries are geographically separated from the *gompas* (monastery) and nuns do not perform rituals and funeral rights for the people. They are present only during festivals and in certain ceremonies as spectators or at the time of earning merit for oneself. Bhutias even make a difference between male and female funeral pyres. In the case of female and male funeral pyres, eight and seven tiers of firewood are laid respectively for consuming the body into flames. Bhutias explain this discrimination in a way that women are one degree below men in the society. To compensate this lower status of women, her pyre is raised higher (Bhasin 1991).

Among the Gaddis as well, men control the ritual realm. Women participate in dancing and singing. In the rituals of Gaddi *Chela*, Gaddi women merely participate as spectators. There are no female counterparts of Gaddi *Chela*. Women are never appointed as priests and are skillfully manipulated against themselves. Both sexes participate in ceremonies but men shoulder the major responsibilities. Men mainly play musical instruments. Women do take part in dancing but their movements are different from men. As the religious sphere is most dominating among pastoralists, it constitutes a major field for male domination. The women are deprived of public authority. Religion legitimises gender hierarchy. The subordination of women in religious activities and their denial of access to positions of religious leadership has been a

powerful tool in most world religions in supporting the patriarchal order and the exclusion of women, from the public form (Ortner 1974; Sered 1994; Franzmen 2000). The religious sphere is a major field for male dominance and a strategy to deprive women of public authority (Scott 1988; Jones 1993). There are a few innovations in religious sphere and hence these changes must exist within a traditional, ritual and textual structure. Religious institutions are resistant to gender equality. In structure, an explicitly male religious framework contains the pastoral societies.

Changpas follow a ritually defined living arrangement in their *rebos*. The household occupying a *rebo* is a commensal and property-owning group. The space in the left side of the tent is for females and right for males. This is further accentuated by the placement of articles and work performed. The men of the household always pray while sitting on the right side. They store prayer books, incense and other ceremonial articles on the right side. They keep saddles, saddle covers, stirrups and bridles, as well as saddlebags and blankets woven by men on right side of the tent. On the left side of the tent women keep their kitchenware. Women cook and do all household work on the left side of the tent. They construct shelves on the left side of the tent for keeping clothes of family members, saddlebags and blankets woven by women. The women of the house, including those who visit, inhabit the left side of the tent. The husband and wife sleep on the left side. Deliveries also take place on the left side. Children sleep on the right side (Bhasin 1992). Though both men and women occupy different portions of the domestic sphere, but outside their *rebos* they walk together or assemble at common public places.

In these areas (as in all other areas) women have their own perceptions of gender equality that cannot be easily quantified by standard indicators

**Women's Perceptions on Contribution in Work Home:** About fifty percent women in the study area replied in affirmative. Husbands should and do help in cooking and bringing water. There is practically no task, other than minding small children, which does not require cooperation of both sexes. The work done by women is constant, diverse and often arduous. The work of men tends to be seasonal. In the men's light working season, they may help in the work at home.

**Prohibitions during Pregnancy and Menstruation:** There are no restrictions during pregnancy between the Bodh and Bhutias women, while among the Gaddis women there is restriction on keeping fast. After the childbirth, among the Bodhs and Bhutias, the mother observes a period of pollution, when she is confined to the house for a certain period, usually lasting 30 days. Even outsiders cannot eat food or drink water from the house where child-birth has taken place, as a house is defiled by the childbirth (*bangthip*). It is a socially imposed *zem-ches*. They also cannot appear before the shrines of family and village gods. Among the Gaddis there are no such restrictions, as sometimes deliveries take place during migrations. They do not worship, cook food and bring water. All the women justified the restrictions considering them impure.

**Ownership of Jewellery after Marriage:** More or less all the women considered it as their right to own jewellery.

**Permission of Remarriage of a Divorced Woman:** All women agreed on the point that like men, women should also have the prospect to remarry.

**Women's Talk:** Pastoral women talk about their homes, children and emotions; while men talk about work, innovations, ideas and politics. Pastoral women in the study area are separated by language. They speak local language; Hindi is mostly understood and spoken by men.. The women's mobility on social ladder is through marriage to a person who is likely to be socially mobile. They think it does not effect women social position whether she is educated or uneducated. Thus mostly boys are sent to school. This discrimination against girls is not because of her lack of intelligence or ability to learn, it is only that it is not going to help her in the traditional life- style. The problem of conversing with women is that all questions have to be asked through men and getting the answers by men. Men translate, take things for granted and mould their answers to suit the occasion.

**Concept of Women's Space:** Among pastoral groups in the study area, the concept of women's space is where only women may sit, work or enter freely at any time, is relatively informal and flexible and depends on the separation of activities that result from the sexual division of labour. It is a characteristics feature of traditional societies to set apart or see a distinction in physical space, which is used by men and women (de Schlippe

1956; Edelberg and Jones 1979; Ladurie 1979; Ilich 1982). In the study area, there are no such private or intimate spaces for women, though men have public space to hold meetings, settle disputes and discuss political and farming issues. Women do not have a similar, formal sitting space. The water mill is another space, which interchangeably becomes men's or women's. However as there are several water mills in each settlement, if women are at one, it tends to be only women and children but there are no fixed rules. When women occupy public spaces like the water source, water spring, field etc., men usually do not join them. The women interact with each other, not with their men as couples. Among Gaddis, the interaction between individual men and women varies according to kinship relation and relative age, which ranges from relaxed informality to extreme avoidance, marked by women covering their head and men averting their glances. Men who are not kin, especially elders do not come closer to an area where a group of women is sitting. By these standards, pastoralists also maintain the integrity of the gender divide

The courtyards are mainly women's space (except during threshing when men and women work together in the courtyard). All food processing is done here. Washing of clothes, spinning of wool, embroidery, providing bath to children etc is all carried out here. The kitchen is a woman's domain.

The grazing grounds in and around the village, near water source are areas where old women, young girls and small boys sit with babies, to mind cattle and sheep and goat. In the transhumant societies of Gaddis and Bhutias, both summer and winter pasture contains the elements of time and space when compared to village economy. That is to say, the pastures are spatially removed and are at different altitudes. Being seasonally used, they bring the concept of time. They provide gender differences in the utilisation of resources and tool such as animals as opposed to field crops, male instead of female labour. The pastoral women in the study area have been denied roles associated with masculinity as a result of ideology of the family and kinship, which identifies paternal roles with authoritative roles. Few women who have succeeded in acquiring some positions in communal life have found that their competence or their executive methods are frequently challenged or ridiculed.

**Equal Rights to Men and Women:** Pastoral women in the study area recognise the fact that

they have been discriminated against in education, income, consumption, status and access to power; they have a worse health record than men; they suffer from social, cultural and legal discrimination and often from violence. They are discriminated on grounds of equity (which refers to equality of opportunities and choices) and efficiency. There is need for quantitative measurement, for a complete set of cultural and rights indicators to assess women's rights.

**Labour Work:** Earlier when a woman was working on her farm or collecting minor forest produce from the forest for her family, she felt she belonged to it. However with the change in scenario, when she has to do the labour work, she has to collect forest produce for the other agencies, her economic role becomes different. They feel as they are working as unskilled labourers, it does not help in improving their position. Providing skilled training to women may help in elevating their status. Pastoral women insist on a need-based plan for providing work on year round basis, in line with the multiple occupational pattern of their work.

**Violence Against Women:** Few women are free from threat and violence at the hands of their husbands. Violence often becomes a tool to socialise family members according to prescribed norms of behaviour with an overall perspective of male dominance and control. Kelkar (1991) situates violence against women 'in the socio-economic and political context of power relations' and it should include 'exploitation, discrimination, upholding of unequal economic and social structures, the creation of an atmosphere of terror, threat or reprisal and forms of religio-cultural and political violence (Kelkar 1991). However, the violence in the form of female foeticide and infanticide suffered by women of other castes and communities it seems is not present in the three pastoral communities.

**Voting Rights** Pastoral women take pleasure in their voting rights and about 85 per cent of women in the study area exercised their right. Paradoxically, most of them follow the advice of their husbands or some of them are under pressure to accept the wishes of their husbands.

**Reproductive Rights:** Women in the study areas have no personal opinion on the women's movement in the other parts of the world on the reproductive health issue as a part of women's reproductive rights. They are not comfortable with the idea of women regulating their own

fertility. Though they do manage to have abortion with crude methods but men tackle major issues of planning the family.

**Utilisation of Health Services:** Utilisation of health and maternal health services is influenced by the characteristics of the health delivery system such as the availability, quality and the cost of the services. However, it does not necessarily mean that if medical services are operational in an area all women are expected to avail the facility. It may be true that even under the same conditions of availability, the response is different. Other factors such as social structure and status of women are equally important. In the study areas women could not take the decision on their own about going to health centres. It was not only peer pressure but lack of education was the deciding factor.

Women role in pastoral societies has been discussed by many scholars mainly focusing on the role of women in pastoral societies and related development programmes (Abu-Bodie 1979; Adan 1988; Al-Hassany 1983; Beaman 1983; Dahl 1987; Fazel 1977; Hewitt 1989; Horowitz and Jowkar 1992; Kipuri 1989, 1991; Oxby 1987). It has been observed that many development projects among African pastoral groups have not responded well, because planners and administrators did not take roles played by women into account (Hodgson 2000; Kettle 1992). As the Himalayan pastoral groups are facing the same dilemma, the studies from other parts of world may help to understand the importance of women role in social interventions. In reality, gender roles in livestock production are not always rigidly defined or followed. Women are called to perform male roles and sometimes-even men perform female duties.

All Indian pastoralists are facing the common problem of shrinking of their pastoral resource base. The establishment of national parks and sanctuaries, in combination with the expansion of agriculture into marginal areas has undermined the traditional livelihood of all of them. Displacement and settlement of pastoralists is a common response to shrinking of pastures and environmental degradation. There is a chain of adverse conditions, which are forcing pastoralists to abandon their nomadic lives, their traditions and a total loss of their identity and culture. No matter the cause, sedentarisation of transhumant groups has adverse effects on women's role and status. The pastoral families feel labour shortage as the number of household members is reduced; women

lose access to mutual aid networks, their social economic activities are diversified and their position and status as a whole are diminished. Moreover, degradation of the pasturelands contributes to the deterioration of both animals and fodder supply, a combination that considerably increases the burden of work on women. Any deterioration in the quality of grazing results into a reduction in milk supply, which is so critical to household provisioning and to household income. Reductions in milk availability force changes in the pastoral diet and in the amount of time women spend on food processing. As cereals become more prominent in the diet, women must spend more time in transforming the unhusked grain into a meal and in obtaining more fuel wood for cooking, which increases land degradation and impoverishment.

An immediate consequence of the shift out of dairying is its adverse effect on women's normal authority over the management of the household milk supplies. With the degradation of pastureland, they have to spend more time caring for young, sick and feeble livestock, which are kept at the homestead.

Wood shortage is another aspect of resource reduction, which has particular repercussions for women. Women are responsible for collecting firewood and this has become an increasingly time-consuming and tiring task as they have to walk for longer distances to find and gather sufficient firewood and wood for construction material. Deterioration of the rangeland, which necessitates frequent moves to find new pasture, results in additional work for pastoral women. House moving are the women's responsibility and more frequent moves means that this activity becomes much more time consuming (Dahl 1979: 64). Another matter of concern for pastoral women is the privatisation of common lands. Land privatisation, either by outsiders or by wealthy insiders, results in land shortage, which has an adverse impact on women. As a result, women's traditional access to private and common land is curtailed.

Among pastoral groups, at some point in their growth, individual households face labour shortages or surpluses. It is natural in communities which are not affluent and where labour can hardly be purchased, that there should be some arrangement for co-operation, when man is in want. All the three groups have mutual aid groups and obligatory assistance. These rela-



tionships are reciprocal. In the recent years, there have been major changes in the socio-economic structure of pastoral systems, which have reduced the variability of households and broken the exchange systems. This has called for major reorientation of labour allocation strategies towards employment, education for the young and wage employment etc., resulting in an increase in women's workloads in various ways.

The evidence thus indicates that environmental degradation contributes significantly to women's workloads while reducing their capacity to meet their household provisioning obligations. It suggests that the extra time many women have to spend in subsistence activities such as gathering wood, water and fodder reduces the amount of time available for other economic activities. For poor women or those with limited access to resources, the impact is likely to be even greater. In the course of their daily work, pastoral women develop an intimate knowledge of natural resource management, which they put in practice for the benefit of community and environment. As keeper of traditional knowledge, women pastoralists make an important contribution towards the sustainable management of land and natural resources the world over. Planners and administrators can make use of their knowledge and capabilities.

In the study area, both Changpas and Bhutias are feeling the crunch of resources due to closure of border after the Indo-China war. Changpas were using rich pastures near Tibet in winter. As a result of border conflict, these people were forced to alter their migrations, find alternative pastures or reduce the number of animals. A number of Changpa families have settled near Leh and are facing the difficulties of changing their profession and way of life. Likewise, for Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung, animal husbandry was not sufficient to sustain the population, so they indulged in marginal trading activities with the Tibetan across the border. The barter of timber, wood, dyestuffs and dairy products of North Sikkim for Tibetan salt and wool formed the basis of this trade. The Bhutias of Lachen and Lachung pursued it as an occupation intimately interwoven with their pastoral activities. Thus, as long as trade was unhampered by political restrictions, it enabled them to remain economically independent. However, with the closing of the Tibetan border in 1962, life changed for these people. It deprived them of their livelihood and had an

adverse effect on their traditional crafts. Military encampments, supply basis and defense posts were set up. Bhutias shifted from a pastoral and trading economy to a more settled agriculture and small-scale horticulture and wage-earning economy. Now with the opening of the area, tour operators are plying in Lachen and Lachung and Bhutias have started boarding and lodging services. Many of them have bought vehicles and have started transporting tourists. Though Gaddis have not been affected by the Indo-China war, but they are stressed by the stringent forest laws and breaking of traditional pasturing relationships.

There have been many development interventions focusing on livestock in these mountain areas in the last two-three decades. These development interventions in other parts of the world have faced numerous challenges and in many instances met with complete failure (Morton and Meadows 2000; Pratt et al. 1997). Researchers working in arid and semi-arid areas of Africa have attributed these failures to their migratory way of life as contrary to the goals of range management. (Ellis et al. 1993; Ellis and Swift 1988; Fratkin 1997; Fratkin and Smith 1994; Momewood and Rogers 1987; McCabe 2004; Scoones 1996). Many scholars contradicted this view and corrected this misconception (Benke and Scoones 1992; Ellis and Swift 1988; Gunderson and Holling 2002; Hogg 1985; Kelly 1993; Morris 1988); new challenges continue to face pastoralist development. One such challenge comes from a failure to take into account changing divisions of labour in the design and implementation of development interventions. Wangui (2008) examined the development of gendered aspects of livelihood strategies and various development interventions. Central to this is an empirical analysis of gendered division of labour in the context of rapidly changing pastoralists livelihood. These livelihood changes led to shift in gendered roles in livestock production. Quantification of women's roles is relevant because the role of women is consistently downplayed by pastoralists.

## ARGUMENT

A sexual division of labour is common in pastoral societies but the role of women's labour stands in sharp contrast to that of women in the foraging societies. In pastoral groups, women

have limited rights to dispose of the products of pastoral production, which tend to be controlled by men. Though women labour is important to societal reproduction, the status of women is lower in pastoral groups. In all the three groups' traditional rules and regulations form the foundation of women's position which is reflected in the traditional practices of society. The tools of production are owned by men, as are the forces of production – animals and pasture rights. Limited right of girls' access to education, lack of access to control resources and the associated rights and benefits of their roles in community affairs, decision-making, labour division etc., does not enhance women's status. In all the three societies under study, women power does not extend to societal or political spheres. The economic power of the women in the household is not translated into corresponding community authority. Men's work in public sphere has usually enjoyed higher status than women's domestic work. Women supremacy is restricted within the family domain and does not extend to social or political spheres. The main obstacle to have equality in status of women and men is the women's lesser ability to perform work other than domestic work.

As a result of cultural and religious norms, women are deprived of property ownership rights and given lower status in all of the pastoral communities. They are denied participation in the traditional leadership control of key assets and inheritances of common properties etc. However, the pastoral women in the study area have been given special privileges in marriage, divorce or remarriage.

Pastoralists speak little of statuses and roles when talking about their social life. What they do talk of are the skills for managing the environment for making a living. They also talk of marriage, married life, children and their socialisation within a community of relationships. The women's world in pastoral societies has three major manifestations, the home (tent), children and private communication patterns between women of the camps. Pastoral societies tend to be male dominated, although variations in female status do occur. Characteristically, males control the ownership, distribution and tending of animals, while women look after home, children, dairying and subsistence agriculture. Rights of access to resources are highly limited and through inheritance. On the surface, all the three groups are

patriarchal. Central and cultural institution such as marriage is regulated by men. Men take major decisions about the mobility, migration, sale of animals and animal products. They represent the household in village council and inherit property and grazing rights. On the other hand men are highly dependent on women for domestic well-being (Holtzman 2002). Women feed men and provide men with children through their sexuality, which they control to a certain extent. There are number of ways in which women oppose wrongdoings or undermine their husbands' authority. Women frequently engage in extramarital affairs, giving births to children not sired by their husbands. As was seen among the Gaddis, where economic ability of woman and her consequent social position has resulted in special institutional privileges that are bestowed on the woman. To mention only a few: (a) in case of the birth of a child after the husband's death irrespective of the time gap, child, if it is born in the husband's house (*chauhandu*= born within the four walls), has full inheritance rights; (b) in case the child is born away from the husband's house, the child gets a share of property from woman's father or brother. In case of remarriage the child is entitled to inheritance rights from her new husband. The extent of the property settlement is decided before a woman agrees to remarry; (c) it is socially expected and considered as desirable that subsequent to the death of her husband, a woman should marry her brother-in-law, but in actual practice the woman has a final say and she may refuse to enter such a marriage; (d) like all men, Gaddi men also want their women to be virtuous yet female promiscuity in Gaddi society is a well-known and accepted fact. There has been no case of women being punished or sent away on charges of promiscuity and immorality. This tolerance of promiscuity is obviously related to the economic importance of women.

The beliefs and ideas held by locals have a vital influence on the lives of the men, women and children. For one thing, it reinforces the gender division of work, place, tools and language. The present position and condition of the pastoral women is not an accidental affair. According to religious beliefs, women are considered impure, that is why they are not allowed to use plough and interact with supernatural beings directly. The economic cycle and division of labour in the pastoral areas has given an important role to the women. This economic role has undoubtedly

affected the social position of women, who have social freedom that is quite remarkable in its scope. It is clear that in the pastoral societies, women play a critical role in the socio-economic activities; moreover, there is a general serious and unpleasant lack of consideration and under-estimation of the role that women play in livestock production and in the management of labour.

Role of women is not only of importance in economic activities but her role in non-economic activities is equally important. Women's role as wives, mothers, organisers and as the basic foundation of other dimensions of social life is of utmost importance. The pastoral women in these areas occupy an economically significant place that is reflected in the generally high position and the importance that they have. The socio-economic equality of sexes can be observed in the attitudes and practices concerning marriage, divorce and household harmony. Girls have say in their selection of marriage partner. There are different type of marriages that suits the occasions. Divorce is permitted and can be initiated by aggrieved party on grounds of incompatibility of nature with socio-judicial approval among the three groups. A divorce is compensated by way of returning marriage expenses. Children are normally the liability of the father in divorce cases. Among the Gaddis, in the event a divorcee woman wants to take them, she can do so, if the divorcee husband also desires the same. *Khewat* (divorcee remarriage) can however take place. Widow remarriage is also permitted among Gaddis, preferably with elder or younger brother (fraternal widow inheritance). However, ultimate choice rests with the lady.

The pastoral women work very hard, in some cases even more than the men do. However these women are not backward. They have power in their own sphere, no men tell them what to do. They are responsible for their own share of work and share the benefits of their own work as long as the unit of production and consumption remains the home. The concept of patriarchy, which prevails in subsistence societies, conveys respect rather than envy between the genders (Illich 1982). Despite the fact that pastoral women live their lives as dependents throughout their life cycle: as daughters, sisters and wives or as mothers of sons, they have far more power and independence than modern suburban homemakers do. A woman always has it in her power to leave her husband if she is angry, dissatisfied or

unhappy. She has great freedom of movement as children, if any, remain with the husband. Her labour is sufficiently in demand so that she can move not only back to her natal family but also to a sister's husband's house or to a more distant kinsmen's house where she can stay till such times as she returns to her husband's house or finds a new one. Her economic ability and consequent social position has resulted in special institutional privileges that are bestowed on the women. In spite of having freedom they seldom have a voice in the political sphere. They are not ignored at household level, but are not given due credit and importance in the political and religious subjects. They are like invisible hands shaping and maintaining the structure of the society. Authority and power in these societies is structured by gender and age. As men grow older, their political power as members of village council increases. Women as they grow older, though they do not achieve any political power, they do gain power and respect in the household.

Women play an important role in their household economy. Pastoral women operate effectively in most economic and social institutions, participating in both local and migrant labour activities. Women's autonomy in terms of decision-making is highly constrained among pastoralists. They have little access to and exercise limited control over resources and few are free from threat and violence at the hands of their husbands. Working for wages is not necessarily an indicator of autonomy. The wage earning pastoral women cannot make the decision to work on their own nor do they have control over their earnings. The marriage pattern and family ties ensure that women are not cut off from family support.

Full range of social and cultural institutions which reproduce gender hierarchies and gender-based inequalities include legal equality and access to education and health. In the pastoral areas under study, the economic cycle and division of labour in the area has given an important role to the women. Environmental resource management illustrates that sustainability, especially in the fragile ecosystems of Changthang and Sikkim, is better achieved by knowledge, skills and techniques of local people, which include mostly women. This does not necessarily means that women are generally more environment-friendly; it is just that division of labour has given an important role to the women.

Women's participation in the economic activity is important for their personal advancement and their status in the society. Work participation is influenced by a combination of number of social, economic, cultural and demographic factors. There is cultural similarity among the different groups in the study area, as the women from different groups have the same economic roles to play, necessitated by the demands of environment to grow food for their own consumption. The economic value and worth of women therefore as (a) independent and necessary unit of economy without which the given economic system will not survive, (b) complementary to the men as work force, in organised functioning of the whole economic system. The economic power of the women in the household is not translated into a corresponding community authority. The male head, which is custodian of property, manages the family finance. Selections of the bridegroom for the daughter or sister, acquisition or disposal of property are all domains of the male members or eldest male. In spite of a substantial contribution in the subsistence economy, a women's right is not recognised in the transmission of landed property and this makes her dependent upon men.

The present study corroborates the premise that women's status is high when they contribute substantially to primary subsistence activities even if they lack control of material resources. It may be concluded as it is observed that ecology and environmental factors existing in pastoral areas under study have given these women a special economic power and an elevated status. Men dominate in public, in social and religious affairs and continue to play the role of the head of the family and breadwinner, women enjoy a greater say in their family life, they have a greater deal of social freedom and several of their actions are condoned/tolerated (Bhasin 1991). This confirms with Ortneil and Rosaldo's (1974) thesis in one way that in spite of the public/domestic dichotomy, the ecological/economic division interferes further modification in women's position. Here one may say that the public/domestic dichotomy is not the only criterion for determining women's status in society. To understand gender relations, it is necessary to realise the extent to which the masculine and feminine roles are interconnected and how one builds up on the other. There is a need for rethinking the relative power and status of women and men and also linkages between the domestic

and public spheres in these societies. The idea of a comparison between the status of men and women is not straightforward. There is always too much behind the scenes action so it is never clear who has the upper hand. There is multiplicity of logics operating, practices of power and prestige at play. It is too complex to be understood in black and white terms. There are grey areas in which it is not clear who is the subordinate of the two.

With the onset of development programmes, economic changes are taking place but pastoral women remain traditional in their dress, language, tools and resources because they grow food crops rather than cash crops. Significant changes have taken place in the two decades separating the United Nations Conferences on women in Mexico City (1975) and the meeting in Beijing (1995). Modernisation is bringing changes, which affect men and women differently. Modernisation brought by outside agencies is set in a male-biased ideology, women are seen as inherently 'incapable'; the new techniques are aimed at men by men. Male values are also reflected in the view that development is solely dependent on technological and economic advances. Such values exploit both the environment and vulnerable groups such as women (Hewitt 1989: 351). The thought that women are being treated shabbily, women-centered programmes for development were evolved which tended to overlook the importance of man-woman relations. Inadequate planning and implementation as well as cultural resistance gave rise to more gender disparities. The association between cultures, economic organisations and different patterns of women's labour force participation ought to be implicit. Though efforts have been made in almost all countries to improve the status of women but it is still an unequal world. In addition to its general implication in social and economic development, education plays a key role in improving the status of women. The existing barriers to girls' enrolment ratios are related to the limited autonomy of women and "deep rooted cultural beliefs and social habits that sustain gender inequality have a prolonged inertia" (United Nations 1995a). The education of women is the most important factor in determining maternal health, family and community health even after controlling for the availability factor. Education of a woman has a significant positive relationship to health status, as educated women are most likely to realise the

benefits of using maternal health services. In addition, education may enhance female autonomy, increasing women's ability to make decisions regarding her own health and children's health.

The indigenous institutional systems should be considered as key partners in all intervention attempts such as development, social change, environmental protection, socio-political issues, etc. If the knowledge system is capitalised on, the indigenous institutions provide means of avoiding harmful traditional practices that are affecting girls and women and reducing or avoiding social discrimination of the minorities. The indigenous institutions should be empowered to enable and rebuild the capacity of the local communities to assume greater responsibilities in the management of natural resources and decisions regarding basic services.

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