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Film Announcement:

Pastoral Politics

The film "Pastoral Politics" is a result of a collaboration between an academic, Vasant Saberwal, and a film-maker, Sanjay Barnela, and was filmed in 1993 and 1994, when Vasant was doing field work on the pastoralists of the Himalaya.

Migratory and nomadic pastoralism continues to be practiced in many parts of India, particularly so in the dry lands of the Indian Thar desert and the high ranges of the Indian Himalaya. These communities have had to deal with restrictive policies of various state forest departments which see their grazing practices as responsible for large scale land degradation. Whether or not this is the case is difficult to tell, in part owing to a lack of evidence for such degradation, but also owing to the difficulties of establishing what constitutes a state of degradation. As recent scholarship has shown, the word degradation is socially constructed, and whether or not land is degraded ultimately depends on the specific objectives of managing that land.

Pastoral Politics examines the issue of land degradation in the context of land use practices of the Gaddi community of Himachal Pradesh, in the North-Western Indian Himalaya. The politics in the title refers to two things: first, the politics that influence individual herder access to grazing resources, and second, to the politics of land degradation, particularly with regard to who establishes whether or not particular lands are considered degraded, which specific lands are identified as being degraded, and the cultural stereotypes that have historically underpinned Forest Department attribution of degradation to herding communities such as the Gaddi. The film suggests that despite the seemingly "primitive" nature of their lifestyle, the Gaddi have managed a successful commercial herding tradition in these mountains, and that some combination of herding and cultivation may in fact be the most productive uses of these mountain lands. The film calls for a rethinking of Indian conservation policies, and the development of policies that are more accommodating of life-styles such as those of the Gaddi, long considered to be outside the mainstream of Indian society, in need of direction to help modernize. Address any questions about the film to: moving@del2.vsnl.net.in



Rangelands west of Nagu, Tibet (Daniel Miller)