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Review of *The Gaddi Beyond Pastoralism: Making Place in the Indian Himalayas* by Anja Wagner.

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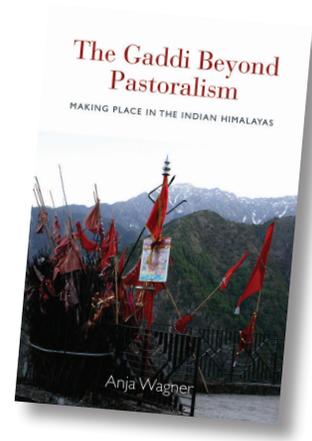
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***The Gaddi Beyond Pastoralism:  
Making Place in the Indian  
Himalayas.***

**Anja Wagner.** New York: Berghahn Press, 2013. 202 pages. ISBN 9780857459299.

**Reviewed by Stephen Christopher**

The Gaddis of Himachal Pradesh are considered the paradigmatic transhumant pastoralists of the Western Himalayas. In the Indian popular imagination, Gaddis conjure up pastoral images of a shepherd in a woolen cloak cinched closed by meters of black woolen rope, a cap cocked jauntily atop his head, confidently striding across highland pasturelands in the Dhauladhar Mountains. These halcyon associations between Gaddis and pastoralism were forged through successive generations of colonial surveillance and postcolonial management of community-based pasturelands. Parallel to

Wagner's argument about post-pastoral enactments of place has established a paradigm shift in Gaddi scholarship which hopefully opens new lines of inquiry into the production of tribal authenticity and the representational force of pastoral ideologies.

**Christopher on *The Gaddi Beyond Pastoralism: Making Place in the Indian Himalayas*.**

this, a tenacious romanticism in scholarship continues to reduce Gaddis to shepherding economies even as most Gaddis have liquidated their family flocks and less than 400 migratory shepherds are officially registered with the state government. Pastoralism has shifted from a prevalent lifeway to a set of associated place-making and kin-making practices, tropes of communal belonging, and ritual enactments.

It is in this context that Anja Wagner's monograph *The Gaddi Beyond Pastoralism* is an important contribution. The book tracks non-pastoral adaptations through which Gaddis construct their environment and conceptually enact social relations. Building from the work of Tim Ingold, Bruno Latour, and Philippe Descola, she argues that Gaddis apprehend their environment through lived experiences and cultural activities. By productively complicating the nature-culture dichotomy in the introduction, the book's chapters are tightly integrated around a processual model of place-making that emphasizes modes of mobility and perception, alongside ritual practices, which render place contextually meaningful and affirm group solidarity. This activity-centered approach is buttressed by ethnographic examples which advance Gaddi scholarship away from pastoral clichés privileging male-dominated, high-caste shepherding practices. What emerges are contextual engagements with the

environment that underscore the agentive role of women in localized pilgrimage and kinship practices in two villages near Dharamsala. Here location matters: by analyzing Gaddi constructions of the environment in Kangra, Wagner shifts the discussion away from Bharmaur (the notional Gaddi heartland) and towards the complex contact zones along the southern spurs of the Dhauladhars, where Gaddis are a tribal minority within the wider Punjabi cultural and caste milieu.

The second chapter analyzes how ideologies of belonging and representations of tribal pastoralism are transmitted through the video compact disc (VCD) industry. Colonial stereotypes of the supposedly distinct character of Gaddis—hardworking and naïve, courageous and adapted to premodern pastoral economies—are matched with visuals of Gaddis wearing traditional clothes engaged in traditional lifeways. The imagery constructs tribal authenticity as inextricable from gendered tropes and pragmatic adaptations to mountain ecology, thereby consigning Gaddis to the ethnically-distinct, socially-marked “nature” side of the nature/culture dualism. The argument concludes that reductive Gaddi media representations, often advanced by Gaddis themselves, obscure actual place-making practices in the Himalayas with “preconfigured images of transhumant identities” (p. 37).

I have elsewhere extended Wagner's argument about pastoral/tribal representations to analyze how high-caste Gaddi Rajputs and Bhatt Brahmins are naturalized as proper tribal subjects, endowed with Scheduled Tribe status in Kangra since 2002 (Johnson, Steven Christopher. “Tribal Margins: Dalit Belonging and State Recognition in the Western Himalayas,” PhD diss., Syracuse University, 2018.). These tropes of tribal authenticity in turn reify the exclusion of five low-castes who self-report as Gaddi, are unevenly assimilated into Gaddi cultural life, and are appealing to the state for tribal inclusion through a range of ethno-political mobilizations. A shortcoming in Wagner's research—not at all particular to her monograph but consistent with colonial and postcolonial scholarship in general—is to generalize about Gaddis as if they necessarily constitute a high-caste Scheduled Tribe and to overlook the contestation of belonging *within* the contested Gaddi ethnonym. Her discussion of social organization acknowledges the presence of low castes and rightly footnotes their porous integration into Gaddi life (p. 7). However, the book draws entirely from ethnographic examples of high-caste Gaddis, perhaps due to the caste compositions of the two villages Wagner researched, and underplays the extent to which Scheduled Caste groups aspire for Gaddi inclusion (overlooking Dhogri, Badi, and Rihare castes).

Although Wagner does not analyze how pastoral tropes are bound up with state ethnology and the exclusion of Gaddi Dalits, her broad acceptance of Gaddis as a linguistic community of three primary caste groups is a significant improvement over a conceptual purism in Indian sociology that rejects casteism within tribes and posits a static continuum of egalitarian, homogenous tribe to Rajputized, monocaste absorption.

The same concern extends to the third chapter, which presents an exhaustive analysis of the all-night sheep sacrifice (*nuālā*) that symbolically links Gaddis to Shiva and constructions of sacred place. Inspired by Joyce Flueckiger and William Sax, Wagner persuasively argues that the ritual performance narrowly emphasizes descent groups and kin relations while broadly constructing Gaddi self-identity against the pastiche of *pahārī*, non-Gaddi neighbors. Ritual enactments celebrate Gaddi sameness and establish the boundary of communal belonging. Again, this misses contestation *within* the Gaddi community. What appears to be notable for its “inclusive capacity and its celebration of community” is also a key marker of Gaddi Dalit exclusion (p. 59). Bhatt Brahmin family priests (*purohit*) generally refuse to oversee the ritual in SC Gaddi homes (sometimes with the notable exception of Sippis), and the discursive tropes of mountain mobility and pastoralism, celebrated in the *nuālā*, are felt as exclusionary by many Gaddi Dalits due to their sedentary caste vocations and exclusion from flock wealth.

The fourth chapter is the ethnographically richest and provides data on Gaddis that is generalizable across caste groups and regional affiliations. By analyzing how kin-making practices intersect with

the construction of place, Wagner makes several notable observations. She describes how Gaddi spatial orientations to mountain verticality translate into the fascinating localized and limited reproduction of traditional migratory patterns that used to span Kangra and Chamba over the several interconnecting, high-mountain passes. Now Kangra Gaddis oftentimes have two seasonal homes within Kangra itself, only at different altitudes. This allows Gaddis to practice the “special ideology” of seasonal migration *without* the underlying pastoral lifeway (p. 72). Wagner also highlights how kin networks, fueled by isogamous marriage alliances among Gaddi Rajputs, create inside/outside distinctions that are marked onto the landscape and structure mobility—especially for women. And because of her laudable emphasis on women’s worlds, Wagner makes a definite contribution to scholarship by describing how places become embodied through veiling politics and women enact different bodily dispositions (*hexes*) as they move between their natal home and in-law’s home (p. 86). Veiling practices and gendered markers (such as adopting the *mangal sutra*, a necklace worn by the bride for the protection of the husband, and following *kālā mahinā*, when newly-wed women conventionally return to their ancestral homes during the month of Sawan to protect their mothers-in-law from inauspiciousness) are undergoing important changes as affluent Kangra Gaddis adopt Hinduized respectability politics.

In the sixth chapter, Gaddi spirituality is analyzed as a set of associated practices, similar to kinship enactments, that bring the environment into being. Both humans and deities within Gaddi cosmology are mobile actors through which places are constructed and

apprehended. This includes small-scale pilgrimage around Dharamsala, localized goat sacrifices, and dispositional changes among Gaddis traversing sacred high-altitude zones inhabited by deities.

For scholars interested in Gaddi intercommunal contestation and the impact of state ethnology in adjudicating difference, this book provokes more questions than it answers. Nevertheless, Wagner’s argument about post-pastoral enactments of place has established a paradigm shift in Gaddi scholarship which hopefully opens new lines of inquiry into the production of tribal authenticity and the representational force of pastoral ideologies. As the sole English-language monograph on Gaddis, it is a vital resource for the next generation of scholarship.

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