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Shepherds, Memory, and 1947: Gaddis of the Western Himalayas

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Abstract

This article examines Gaddi memory construction and transmission, influenced by popular historical narratives from the agrarian communities with which they interacted. After considering the construction of Gaddi 'Rajputs' who migrated from Rajasthan—claims that are historically dubious but have obvious social utility—I draw from old fieldnotes to explore another salient memory. Specifically, I analyze Gaddi shepherds' memories about the communitarian strife and massacre during the 1947 Partition of India at the high-altitude Himalayan pass connecting Chamba to the Kangra plains. These events are the 'little histories' of marginal people that give us an insight not only into small scale societies but also how an event of larger dimension impacts even geographically remote areas and tribal communities. Their collective memories of 1947 stand out when we consider that they have little recollection of their origins and historical past.

Keywords

Memory; migration; upward-mobility; partition-songs; violence-songs

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Introduction

Gaddis, originally a shepherding community that has transitioned to largely pastoral-agriculturalists, are perhaps one of the most written about transhumant communities in South Asia. Most of these writings focus on the trajectory of change within the Gaddi community and herding practices, their dislocation and settlement away from homeland, and the contested claims to Gaddi identity. There is, however, little analysis of their accounts of self-perception, identity, and history, which are based on rather thin migratory imaginaries. In contrast to the vague memories of their origins, they have a vivid collective memory about the violence that accompanied the partition of 1947, some of which is preserved in songs, a memory that seeks to identify them with the larger Hindu identity in Independent India. This article analyses the pathways of Gaddis collective memories and how such memories are used to imagine, reimagine, and consolidate a group's identity.

In this article, I am only discussing Gaddi shepherds, with whom I travelled in 1989-91 while documenting their folklore, not the settled Gaddis of the Kangra plains. I draw from those fieldnotes in Gaddherana, analyze the memories of shepherds about the events surrounding the Partition of India in 1947, specifically as they occurred in Bharmaur and the Jalsu mountain pass. These events, never before explicated in scholarship, are the 'little histories' of marginalized peoples that reflect larger geopolitics playing out in remote mountain areas. Here I follow a trend in historiography towards microhistories that eschew using big concepts to explain small histories out of concern for ethical loss, decentering the subaltern and the fear that marginalized peoples' histories can go "out of focus as you change scales" (Ginzburg et al. 2022, 103).

The Shepherds

The Gaddi shepherds, though based in Bharmaur division of the erstwhile kingdom of Chamba (now Chamba District in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh), these shepherds were perpetually on the move from winter pastures in the lower hills of Kangra, Jammu, Panjab states and Doon-Garhwal, to alpine pastures in Spiti, Ladakh, Lahul, Kullu, Mandi and Chamba. Each shepherding group had fixed routes and pasturelands, with rights of pasturage, and could not freely traverse to other areas. Those moving into Kangra, for instance, could not venture into Jammu, or Hindaur (Nalagarh), or any other kingdoms. These kingdoms recognized the pastoral rights of the shepherds who in turn paid dual taxes, to the states where they pastured their flocks and to the Chamba Raja, their homeland. Similarly, if state fines were imposed for infringement, shepherds paid it to both the suing state and the Chamba Raja. It is evident that instead of conflictual reactionism to such fines, shepherds sought peace through legal compliance, a trait that is evident in many extant sayings about them (Barnes 1871: 42; KDG 1926: 296-298).[1]

As the community was perpetually moving, they hardly stayed at one place for any considerable time. It would not be amiss to describe the community as stateless, except for their notional but visceral association with the kingdom of Chamba; as such, Gaddis are an expression of Zomian borderland communities.[2] Their association with Chamba is because the kingdom first established itself in Bharmaur—the notional Gaddi homeland—in the 6th century CE. Bharmaur was always the core area of the kingdom as it conquered and assimilated other Chamba valleys and later shifted central administrative control into Chamba town.[3] Gaddis thus project themselves as kin of the rulers and used to shave their heads in mourning whenever the Chamba ruler died, as one would for kin, atavistically pointing to common origins (CSG 1910).

The Chamba rulers, however, Sanskritized themselves and used the Kshatriya warrior surname of Varman, as that of the Kashmir rulers among others. The process of Sanskritization is common to all hill kingdoms that appropriated the names of prominent dynasties, such as Pala and Sen. It was only in the 16th century that

the Chamba rulers dropped the Varman surname for 'Singh' to claim Rajput status. Moreover, in the contemporary royal genealogy (compiled in the 16th century), the Chamba Raja also claimed ties with the Rajput rulers of Mewar (Sharma 2004: 425-430; 2009: 15-75). Such manipulations of the past were effectuated at a time when Chamba rulers were struggling for survival from the Mughals and looked to the Mewar State for inspiration. This is significant in order to understand the broader processes and contexts that led to certain claims and manipulations of the past, such as claiming Rajput descent or connections with Rajputana (Rajasthan). Such claims are evident among Gaddis as well as other hill peoples, who saw this as a strategy for increased social prestige and upward mobility (Sharma 2011).[4]

What distinguishes Gaddis as a distinct community from other hill communities is their linguistic and cultural exclusivity. Their language has more 'tatsam' and 'tadhbhava'—Sanskrit loanwords and those carrying etymological association with Sanskrit—than any other Indian language, which continues to befuddle linguists as an outlier case (Bhardwaj 1989: 128-41). It suggests a distinct and closed group that kept their language alive even while interacting with other people. Gaddi costume was also atypical, consisting of a woolen frockcoat (*chola*) tied with a long woolen rope (*dora*) on the waist for men and a long-skirt (*ghundu*, later *nuanchari*) and *dora* for women (CDG 1962: 186). They were also organized into atypical but functional 'Goths', 'Jakh' and 'Al': clans, septs and lineages. The internal social division revolved around their pastoral lifeway, their 'Als' functioning like Sumpolu (oil-sellers), Chakerotu (basket-makers), Ranetu (chieftain), Lade (traders with Ladakh) and Phangtain (dealer in wool) (Rose 1883, II: 256-259).

It seems that the community was organized around functional septs that performed specialized operations to sustain shepherding activities or to facilitate the community by providing distinct services. It also explains the integration of disparate segments that were retained even though transformed by distinct identities, particularly the Sippis, Riharas, (among others), although classified and excluded to the margins of the Gaddis community. For example, Sippis, distinguished by their sept Phatian (shearers), performed the function of shearing and blanket weaving. These functional clans were exogamic and were not characterized as castes. Such exclusive distinctions anthropologically mark Gaddis as a tribe, much before they were enumerated as a Scheduled Tribe (not as a tribal community per se but inhabitants of a tribal-reserved area for government administrative purposes). Today the Gaddi tribe, disparate and settled in diverse Kangra localities, has ceded functional clans to caste identities within the community—making Gaddis a hyphenated community, as Gaddi-Brahmans, Gaddi-Rajputs, etc. Historically one may think of this as a process of transitioning from tribe to caste along a continuum, or the gradual peasantization of tribes (Nathan 1997).

The stratification of Gaddis is akin to a process that has been documented since the 1850s, when the colonial government, wary of peripatetic communities since the widespread Indian Rebellion of 1857, encouraged them to settle down, at least partially. Not only were Gaddis settled on the southern slopes of the Dhauladhar mountain range; even their women and children sought winter abodes with landed families while the men tended sheep in the winter forests in the lower hills. What was once a family movement became increasingly restricted, an enterprise only for men. During the summers, Gaddherana—the land of Gaddis—became a permanent home for families while men moved to alpine pastures (Sharma 2012a: 17-22).

As Gaddis were dependent upon the landed classes in the lower hills and exposed to their culture, they also imbibed the dominant social structures of agrarian society. Caste provided them a structured, even if hierarchical, identity, which was easier to negotiate than that of a tribe—an

egalitarian community largely outside the pale of the agrarian society that they were interacting with. This process had a profound impact on Gaddi self-perception, the negotiation of their identity, family structure, marriage and rituals (Phillimore 1982: 1991) and the refashioning of their social structure—an identity project that remains ongoing even today.

The temporary or permanent settlement of Gaddi shepherds was significant to allay the distrust of agrarian castes that looked down upon them. The agrarian communities regarded mobile herding communities, such as Gaddis and Ban-Gujjars (and the Labana muleteers) with suspicion, particularly their economic (mis)dealings. Their wary attitudes were codified into cautionary proverbs about them, such as the following (KDG 1926: LXXIX, App. III):

> *Gaddi, Gujjar, Labana bulai to Kabhi nahin jana*
>
> *Agar Jana to apana dou bachana*
>
> (Do not go when Gaddis, Gujjars or Labanas call you
>
> Must you go, watch out for your money)

Gaddi shepherds in particular were believed to be crafty traders who masqueraded their nefarious intentions behind a veneer of simplicity. The oft repeated couplet, recounted below, is a perception of Gaddis that reflects the mentalities of agrarian peoples, for which they were dependent upon for their winter pasturage, shaped over time by personal prejudice and financial dealings (Rose 1970, I: 260):

> *Gaddi mitr bhola / Denda topa ta mangada chola*
>
> (Gaddis is a simple friend / He offers his cap and asks a coat in exchange)

The perception of Gaddis began shifting and over time they came to be depicted as simpletons, albeit polluted and unclean. The above couplet was therefore tweaked, the new variant reflecting the changed perception (Sharma 2012a: 33, fn 11):

> *Gaddi mitr bhola / Haggi bharya chola*
>
> *Gaddan lagi dhona/ Gaddi laga rona*
>
> (The Gaddi is a simple friend / who soiled his coat
>
> While his wife started washing it / the Gaddi started crying)

Strands of Gaddi History

Another way to understand Gaddis is to track changing Gaddi perceptions about themselves and to reconsider the shifting literature about them. We have little historiographical knowledge about Gaddi origins. They are perhaps the remnants of the predominantly Shaivite and wool trading Audumbara kingdom (Cunningham 1902-03, V: 155; 1871: 254), which gained ground as the Bharmaur Kingdom in the 6th century CE. This is significant as most of the hill communities are associated with the Khasas or Kanets, a fact that perhaps explains the linguistic, cultural and social exclusivity of Gaddis vis-à-vis other hill populations. Gaddis, however, have little memory about themselves as a people, a community, and a tribe except their later geographical claims to have migrated from Rajasthan and Lahore. The association of Gaddis as a sheep raising community is reflected in the generic term *Gaddi* (Sanskrit for *Gardhi*, or ewe), which means the 'master of sheep', the *Gaddarik* and later *Gaddariya* or shepherd (Monier-Williams 1983: 342c). There are vestiges in their dialect of prior associations with other states and peoples, since forgotten. For instance, people of Kangra are called *Jandhare*—reminiscent of Jalandhara, the former name for the Kangra kingdom, underscoring the early dichotomy between settled communities and mobile shepherds. Their ritual lore emphasizes their association with Shiva as Dhudu and is an expression of Saivism, which is the dominant religious belief in the mountainous terrains of the Western Himalayas. This lore also describes the drift of Shaivism from the southern plains (possibly Punjab), and there are myths explicating how local deities were assimilated into Shaivism and hierarchically arranged in relation to Shiva.

For instance, the Kailung Naga—the serpent deity of Keylong in Lahul—became the Wazir of Shiva (Bharmaur 1964). This is one example of how Sanskritic beliefs entered the hills and assimilated 'native' beliefs through cooptation and acculturation in order to reflect hegemonic dominance.

If we deconstruct the copious Chamba epigraphs (Vogel 1911; Chhabra 1957; Sharma 2009), Gaddis were sought after for their knowledge of and dexterity in crossing the mountain passes connecting the Chamba kingdom with the other hill states. Jalsu Pass and Paprola town are particularly mentioned as a trading town with a custom house that controlled trade (Buhler, 1892: 110-11). There must have been a Gaddi army contingent for the purpose of navigating mountain passes and helping wage war in the higher hills. The 1720s painting from Guler, for instance, depicts a Gaddi army contingent (Sharma 2015: fig 1, 2, 103-06). This is the first sign that some Gaddis were employed and settled by hill kingdoms, prized for their hardiness and loyalty. Some of them must have been granted Rajput status as warriors, as the Rajas could confer caste status. Rajas could alter the caste hierarchy by 'raising' or 'lowering' members of 'caste' communities, therefore controlling the nuances of social prestige (KDG 152). However, Barnes (1871), and later Lyall (1874), Rose (1970), CSG (1910) and Middleton (1915) were all informed that, when the British land settlement and enumerations took place, Gaddis settled in the Himalayas from Rajputana, having fled Rajasthan to escape religious persecution from the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb (who is infamous for razing prominent Hindu temples, though most examples are from the Gangetic plains, particularly Mathura). Conversion stories, real and imagined, gloss over the 'mass exodus' echoed in such saying that the Mughals gathered daily '2.5 *Mann*' (100 kgs) sacred-threads (*dhai mann janeu*), suggesting the extent of persecution. Such claims, however, are counterfactual to the norms of Rajput warriors and the lore of resistance that developed in contemporary Rajasthan, as well as to the documented histories of these times.[5]

Such claims became a dominant memory of most Rajput and Brahmana castes in the hills, including the ruling class keen to shed their local roots and claim dominant warrior Rajput status, as noted in the case of Chamba rulers (Sharma 2004: 425-430). It seems reasonable to suggest that such claims must have influenced the Gaddis as well, who perhaps borrowed such lore to craft their identity, thereby claiming a warrior and priestly status and gradually stratifying themselves into lateral castes. Colonial administrators, more comfortable with the hierarchies of castes than the egalitarianism of tribes, encouraged such identity claims as it facilitated enumeration and forms of social and juridical control—a process continued by post-Independence census enumerators, as well. Where would they fix Gaddis as a tribe in the larger social matrix? By reifying Gaddis as castes, they could fix them within the larger social structure. Thus Newell even went so far as to say "Gaddi which is the *name of the caste*" (1955: 106; emphasis added).

Along with the claims of migrating from Rajputana, there is a couplet that Gaddis migrated from Lahore:

> *Ujjadiya Lahore te vasya Bharmaur*
>
> (After Lahore was deserted,
> Bharmaur was inhabited)

As Rajput-Gaddis claimed Rajasthani origins, Khatri-Gaddis claimed descent from Lahore. This couplet is also influenced by the influx of Khatris, invited by the rulers of western-Himalayan hill-states, particularly Mandi and Chamba, seeking trade-ties and capital investments while the Khatri and Sood traders sought safe refuge from Ahmed Shah Abdali (Durrani) who controlled much of north India after the 1750s (Minhas 1998: 177-205).[6] The rhyming couplet also assumes significance against the backdrop of the fall of Lahore durbar of Ranjit Singh, as this was yet a recent memory, having been taken over by the Colonial regime in 1849, while Barnes

first recorded this in 1852 (Barnes 1871: 42). This claim of the Khatri Gaddis however took a back seat as Gaddis started settling in Kangra in large numbers and sought to congeal their identity as Rajputs. The precedence of one type of memory to the exclusion of others, perhaps by contesting, reshaping, reinventing and reinforcing the linkages to create a dominant memory is a process that is not exclusive to the Gaddis only.[7]

There are more questions than answers about such caste and place appropriations (there is only this extant statement and no additional information). Why would warriors and traders fleeing Rajasthan or Lahore settle in the remote Himalayas and adopt shepherding? Group migration is generally a gradual process and not a long march into a remote territory without intervening intermediary states. We are aware of individual migrations into small Himalayan kingdoms, through official state invitation, in which the migrants maintained distinct clan identities, which were considered more prestigious than local clan names like Rathor, Chandel and Chauhan. Their services as warriors, textualists, and administrators were much sought after and valued. These identities are distinct, unlike their appropriated identities as generically Rajput. Moreover, were these Rajput and not hyphenated identities as Gaddis-Rajput or Bhat-Brahmana? There are other historiographical factors that undermine the story of Rajasthan migration or the constructed identity of Rajput/Brahmana. Why would warriors, traders, and priests adopt shepherding and nomadic lifeways? Could anyone become a shepherd or is it an exclusive and specialized profession? Historically, does nomadism or tribal structures not generally precede peasantization? Why would they give up their language and adopt an archaic language, a distinct culture, new lineages, and generic but hyphenated caste names such as Gaddi-Rajput? We now understand that Gaddis appropriated a Sankritised identity, as did the rulers of Chamba and the 'native' population, to gain prestige among agrarian communities with whom they were interacting. This memory has been transmitted over 150 years such that now it is assumed as fact. As Pierre Nora formulated, "memory is blind to all but the group it binds" (1989, 9); likewise, this memory of Rajput migration has widespread historical factuality among Gaddis, propelled by the uncritical recordings of the colonial archive.

There has been another, much more recent shift, in Gaddi identity claims. Several contemporary anthropologists, particularly Christopher (2020a; 2020b; 2022a) and Wagner (2013) document various other castes/professional groups settled in Kangra claiming to be Gaddi. They call themselves Gaddi Dalits or Scheduled Caste Gaddis. The term seems somewhat oxymoronic from the etic perspective of a historian. What does Gaddi Dalit or 'Scheduled Tribe Dalit' mean? If Gaddi is a tribe, there cannot be Dalits within the tribe. Such modern identities, mostly post-1990s, are indicative of the political and economic aspirations of people aimed at state-adjudicated quota reservations. Many of these Gaddi Dalit communities had Dalit status in their respective homelands.[8] Ever since Kangra Gaddis were designated as a Scheduled Tribe, peripheral groups have sought such status as a means of doubling reservation-quotas (ST reservation is 7.5% while SC is 15%). It is apparent that identity is a dynamic process. However, there are unsettling questions that beg to be asked about the claims of Gaddi Dalits. Why do those settled in Kangra claim this status with more intensity than in Chamba? How do they stand to benefit from being identified as Gaddis? Have they positioned themselves as 'Adivasis' or 'natives' and Gaddi-Rajputs as outsiders?[9] Such questions mirror the pan-Indian caste debate, in which lower or untouchable castes position themselves as 'natives' and construe the high castes as outside invading Aryans? The fact that Gaddis claim descent and migration from Rajasthan only adds credence to such a discourse. These counter questions into different imaginaries and identity-memories however open a window for us to assess the multiple and conflicting versions that the 'narrated memories' provide, revealing

alternative truths. Such memories may however fail, 'leaving blanks', while collaborating 'with forces separate from actual past events' (Gold and Gujjar 2002: 82-83).

Are such conceptualizations mere coincidence? Or are these conscious efforts to manipulate the past in light of the emergent present? Today, we know that Gaddi-Rajputs are trying to discover genealogical linkages with Rajasthani tribes and are also contemplating a Gaddi Museum in Dharamsala.[10] How they are going to establish genealogical linkages—by family or by group; to which place, or clan—remains unknown. Through DNA mapping? Similarly, what would be exhibited in a Gaddi Museum—which artefacts, which past—is also imponderable. These group aspirations, however, provide insight into how Gaddis are trying to construct their past on the perceived memory of migration, even if that is a memory motivated by the dominant lore in the hills as discussed above. As Susan Crane has discussed, museums are used to represent memory wherein distortion of memory and history flows from a lack of congruity between experience and expectation, along with the communitarian representation of the past (1997: 44-63). As we await such community representations of their past with bated breath, we are acutely aware of the Gaddi shift from Chamba to Kangra and of the efforts to rework the past to affirm a Rajput identity. Settler Gaddis are keen to renew their ties to Gaddherana, their ancestral homeland, oftentimes assuming that the generic term 'Gaddi' means seat (as it does in Hindi) and not herding—therefore strengthening claims to Bharmaur but not to the herding profession (Wagner 2013; see note 9). It is a reminder of the Gaddi transformation from nomadic lifeway to a settled community, a tribe of 'Als' and 'Goths' transformed into hierarchical castes.

Gaddi Songs as Memories

I began my Gaddi oral-tradition project for an MPhil thesis in 1989 with a mobile shepherd and his herd of 800 from Thanetar in Gaddherana. The owner (*mahlundi*), Bhagal Ram Thanetar, was very enterprising and well-versed in Gaddi lore. Two persistent questions that motivated my research were: who were the Gaddis and what are their memories of their past? During fieldwork, I was introduced to other groups we met on the way to and from Gaddherana. I started moving between groups recording folktales, songs and personal narratives; asking questions about the changing social structures of the community; and gradually learning about the ecologies and economics of shepherding. One fact soon became apparent. Gaddis were unsure about how to locate their own pasts. The collective narratives I recounted above—about Rajasthan, Aurangzeb and Rajputization—were claims that they had heard about, although they were quick to point out that Gaddi-Brahmanas and Gaddi-Rajputs were different from the Brahmanas and Rajputs of the Punjab plains. In a different context, this is perhaps the same as one of the Sippi informants of Christopher explaining how "the greatest perpetrators of casteism are not Rajputs but Gaddi Rajputs", emphasizing the difference between two homologous caste categories (2022a: 29).

Such claims run parallel to the larger hill society that Gaddis shepherds interacted with, ultimately raising more questions than answers. Barring such contested claims of identity, as a community Gaddis were largely uncomfortable talking about themselves and had little memory about their historical past. They had, however, vivid personal memories, exclusive to each group and often collectively shared, about pastures, forests, herbs, avalanches, famines, drought, inflations, markets, haunted routes and places and mountain passes. Such knowledge sustained the community and was transmitted to the next generation. This is because such memories come out spontaneously, as they are activated in the cultural-ecological niches in which they were formed, or 'milieux de memoire' (Nora 1989: 9). Like many communities around the world, there is a distinction between amorphous, historically unverifiable memories and memory-as-knowledge, concrete and experiential.

However, to suggest that Gaddis have no sense of history—as a way of mapping change relative over time and space—would be incorrect. For instance, they sing satirical songs that speak to cultural and environmental issues, extending into the past and of current social significance. Moreover, as Gaddis interacted with various communities, and settled down in Kangra over the winters, they acquired certain songs, tales and anecdotes, which are uniquely preserved as traditional knowledge—despite the rapid loss of shared knowledge among Kangra Gaddis. In this way, Gaddis often transmitted not only their own but also the cultural memories of other communities, as well. In fact, most of their memories are about others. For instance, a song about oppressive inflation that made life unbearable could be about any community, in any region, with whom Gaddis interacted.

Dhadi rupaye sheera aunda

ek rupeya temaku

Bahar gabhru romda

Taa andhar dadde baapu.

Keho jamane aayo re bhayo,

Kehe jamane aayo…

(2 ½ kilograms of sweet buckwheat costs a rupee,

Tobacco costs us one and quarter,

In the courtyard cries the son,

In the backyard, the father.

The times and inflation have spared none,

What time has come, listen O brother…)

Such songs, cutting across regions and peoples, also mapped 'physical' changes. Shepherds were keenly aware of how their community was being socialized by new institutions. For instance, there are songs about the 'Forest Guards' who controlled grazing and collecting fuel wood. There are also songs about how Gaddis perceived environmental and social changes after the government commissioned the hydroelectric Chamera Dam in the 1970s to impound the waters of the Ravi at the places where Gaddis, along with other communities, were employed as field laborers. The 'song' has discernible satirical aspects that emphasize how the mountains were flattened to make this dam and explores how Gaddis navigated social changes (when the protagonist announces to his wife that he needs his tea before clocking into work at 9am). Unlike the time constraints of this work, shepherding lifeways express time in an altogether different way that is synchronized with the environment.

Choti Surgani ho badda dam baneya

Pehle tha pahar hun maidan banaye

Uttha khadi uttha vo Resho chaa banayi de

Nau baje di hajari Surgani jayi ke…

(In a little place called Surgani, a big dam was made

Earlier, where there were mountains, now there is a plain

Get up, O my Resho darling, make me a cup of tea

I must report at Surgani, when the clock strikes nine…)

Many Gaddi collective memories are about others, rather than the shepherds themselves. Even when the community is marked in their songs, such songs are often about social and cultural issues of wider significance, not exclusive to Gaddi shepherds. Significantly, oral traditions do not recount the sites of conflict—neither with the government nor the communities which the shepherds interacted with and

were dependent upon. There are scant memories about individual Gaddis or the wider community, except for the motivated memory of migration from Rajasthan, as discussed above. It is against this backdrop of claiming socially convenient identities for localized prestige, with few memories about their own histories, that Gaddi memories about violence during Partition deserve attention. Such memories, however should be treated with caution, as also suggested by Gold and Gujjar (2002), who use memory recall in their ethnographic study in Rajasthan. They suggest how the 'elusive position' between individual and collective memories become significant. Such memories are suspect, yet vital at the same time, necessitating, therefore, a distinction between what has been heard and seen (Gold and Gujjar 2002: 88-89). In the following section we analyze the memory based on the seen rather than only heard.

1947 Flashpoint in the Western Himalayas

One memory that is vivid in the Gaddi imagination is that of communal conflict and violence leading to the partition of India in 1947 and months thereafter. That they were participants in, as well as observers to, the unfolding events gives more credence to their accounts of incidents than the narrated or imagined memory of their migrations. This is, however, perplexing for a group that has been largely non-conflictual in the past. More so, against the backdrop of scant memories about their imagined past. These narrations, collective and individual, are perhaps the 'textures of life-world in which power's subtleties are rendered vivid in memories' (Gold and Gujjar 2002: 24).

The summer meadows and lower Himalayan ranges were shared by Gaddi shepherds and Muslim Gujjars, a buffalo herding community also known as Ban-Gujjars: literally, the herders-of-the-forest. Like Gaddi shepherds, Ban-Gujjars had also historically established rights-of-way and held ownership rights over meadows that they frequented yearly. Unlike Gaddis, who were rooted in Chamba territorially and linguistically, Ban-Gujjars were diverse, having different geographical bases in the plains of Kashmir, Jammu, Punjab, the Doon valley and areas around Saharanpur. They resided in their geographical bases in the winter months, and in the summer visited different hills, each herding group occupying only one area, such as Chamba, Mandi, Bilaspur or the various Shimla hill states. Unlike Gaddi shepherds, Ban-Gujjars could not access higher pasturelands because of the prohibitive bulk of their water buffaloes (Rose 1970; Axelby 2016: 5-6; 2020).

While Gaddis have few historical memories about their own community, Ban-Gujjars take pains to emphasize their 16th-century ancestry from Central Asia. This too is a motivated memory, like Gaddis claiming descent from Rajasthan, an association with a pure Islamic land so different from the converted population of Indian Muslims. Despite the religious associations, Ban-Gujjars, like Gaddis, were a borderland community that crossed different states, cultures, and peoples, who were dependent upon and served an important economic function to the local communities they interacted with by selling excess milk, butter, and clarified butter (*ghee*). In Chamba, the Gaddi homeland, Ban-Gujjars were concentrated in the areas of Bhandhal, Kihar, Salooni, Saho Paddar and Khajjiyar, as well as in Khadamukh and Yada in the Bharmaur region.

Historically, the two herding communities went their separate ways and had few shared social spaces, except for momentary meetings en-route to their respective pasturelands. The relationship was typically cordial and of mutual support, as both herding communities shared the same visceral experiences of relying on nature, combating harsh environmental elements, and utilizing pasturelands; consequently, they emphasized the similarities of their lifeways and respected their religious differences (Axelby 2016: 48-50). While there were very few connubial relationships or reciprocal exchanges, both communities carried the same set of

functional beliefs. Both the communities, for instance, believed in and offered sacrifices to forest spirits and the spirits residing in the mountain passes (*banakhandi devi*). Many Ban-Gujjars, particularly those from the Doon-Saharanpur area, had unflinching affinity with Krishna, the Hindu cowherd deity. This was not unusual. For instance, as early as the 16th century, Finch mentions several 'Moores' paying homage at the goddess temple at Nagarkot (Forster 1921: 180). The Chamba State Gazetteer of 1904 similarly observed that Chamba Muslims worshipped Hindu idols (CSG 1910: 190); while Hugel in 1842 observed how the impoverished 'Mohammedans' of Nurpur sought the benediction of a Hindu goddess (1845: 142).

The sense that emerges is that these mobile communities were religiously tolerant and harbored few social hostilities against each other, even if they shared incidental common pasturelands. In the higher altitude pasturelands, there was a fair degree of mutual tolerance, whereas in the lower altitude grazing, during winter pasturage, the possibility of tension increased. However, this was not the situation in the lower hills of Kangra, Jammu, Doon Valley, the Kandi foothills, or Punjab, in which these herders visited places such as Gurdaspur, Anandpur, Ropar, Hoshiarpur and the Nalagarh region. Drawing from my 1989-91 fieldnotes while traversing with Gaddis shepherds in Paprola, Baijnath, Banuri, Shahpur and Rilhu, I narrate the Gaddi oral narrative rendition of the events of the Palam Valley in the summer of 1947.

In the lower hills, a disparate and affluent Muslim community, dissimilar from the mobile Ban-Gujjars, wielded influence as bankers and landowners in Chamba and Kangra. Many members of this community were once settled by respective *rajas*, who had invited them to be a private protective force. In a political climate of competing Rajput clans and expanding clan-based kingdoms, Muslim soldiers, like Gaddis, were considered a reliable and loyal force without any clan partisanship. They were settled, provided with land charters and property in respective capital towns. Chamba town, for example, had a sizable Muslim population settled in areas close to the royal palace, the Lakshmi-Narayan temple complex and the historic Chaugan. When the local kingdoms, such as Kangra, gave way to a colonial regime in the 1850s, these charters were turned into private property, which landlords managed through several tilling-tenants (*pahu*). Muslim landlords were also moneylenders in rural areas where they were concentrated, while the Sood and Khatri traders were moneylenders in urban towns. The Muslims were also oil pressers, or Telis, and controlled much of the trade in armaments, horses, and tobacco (Minhas 1998).

The relationships between tenants and proprietors in the region were fraught with mutual suspicion; throughout the 1920s-1930s, there were many peasant rebellions, including against Muslim proprietors (Sharma 2009: 311-12). While this was projected as a movement against caste-pollution to claim social status through Sankritizing caste aspirations, Gaddis remember it as a revolt against the highhandedness of Muslim landlords. The two communities, Hindus and Muslims, apply different historical filters but both remember the events as revolts against exploitation, albeit of a different nature. Gaddis remember the harsh dealings of Muslim moneylenders that fomented the peasant rebellion against them. It is significant that memories of peasant rebellions emphasize the role of Hindu landlords, while economic angst is emphasized for the revolt against the Muslim landlords. This is perhaps due to the evolving political climate of the time. For instance, Bhagal Ram Thanetar pointed to the 1940s rise of Jana Sangh, the right-wing Hindu party, even as the Praja Mandal was gaining ground in Palam Valley. Perhaps he confused the Hindu Mahasabha with Jana Sangh, which was formed in 1951.

Irrespective of commonplace memory slippage, it is important that hatred against Muslims was already gaining ground in the period leading to Partition. Social prejudices

were hardening, further fanning such hatred. For instance, one of the grievances against Ban-Gujjars was that they were said to spit into milk pots that they suppled to Hindu traders and families. This was believed then, and many Gaddi shepherds *still* believe this, as a way of polluting high-caste Hindus or surreptitiously Muslimizing unsuspecting Hindus. Did this lead to an economic boycott of Ban-Gujjars, who would then have no way to dispose of surplus milk? Another rumor was that Ban-Gujjars forcefully abducted Hindu girls and surreptitiously transported them to their home bases in the plains. These extant prejudicial memory traces are important indicators of attitudes, social practices and rituals of exclusion. In an atmosphere of intense suspicion, such incendiary rumors could instantly flare up into a major flashpoint.

The turning point came with the killing of a Mian Rajput family in Gojar (Palam Valley), which precipitated widespread rioting and indiscriminate killing in Kangra district, especially Palam Valley. There are many contending stories of material looting and land occupation being the main reasons for the violence—not only religious antagonism. However, local leaders soon enflamed this hate movement into the higher reaches of Chamba. It spread through low-lying mountain passes, such as Jalsu Pass on the Paprola-Bharmaur trade route, Indrahara Pass on the Dharamsala-Illaka-Bharmaur route, and Chauri Pass connecting Shahpur to Chamba. Most of these passes were near Ban-Gujjar pasturelands; consequently, the flare up in the plains was taken up by the forest communities.

This flare up incidentally coincided with the seasonal migration of both Ban-Gujjars and Gaddis, as they moved from Kangra towards Chamba in the summer season of 1947, before the onset of the monsoon rains. It is alleged that Ban-Gujjars, returning from their bases in more polarized areas in Punjab and Saharanpur, in the month of Bhadon (June-July) murdered a travelling Gaddi mother and child near the Jalsu Pass that connected Bharmaur and Paprola.

To Gaddis similarly returning from the Kangra hills and Punjab forests, in this atmosphere, this was a prophetic signal of the proverbial war-of-righteousness (*dharma-yuddha*) vociferously trumpeted by the plains people. Such a polarized atmosphere eventually led to many killings on the high mountain passes. Ban-Gujjars, who controlled the narrow Jalsu Pass, killed many Gaddi families moving towards Chamba-Bharmaur. Gaddi reprisals, aided by vigilante groups rushing in from the Paprola-Baijnath area, were equally severe. Many Ban-Gujjar were killed; others fled and hid deep in the forests. The pithy Gaddi couplets, indicative of the communal pride in the act of killing, testify to the ferocity of these incidents:

> *Ambar baraya kini-kini / Gujjar badhe gini gini*
>
> (As the sky drizzled/ the Gujjar were slaughtered by the count)
>
> *Jalsura bhura bhura barkha ho / Gujjar door-door badhe ho*
>
> (It started drizzling on the Jalsu pass / the Gujjar were slaughtered near and far)

In addition to the murders, there are many competing stories about how the cattle were purchased by some and looted by others, though not by Gaddis themselves. These stories are about economic expropriation, not religious or political divisions that fueled violence, even though the targeted community is the religious Other. These are stories about how Muslims, not only Ban-Gujjars, were forcibly dispossessed; specifically, about how storage tanks belonging to Muslims were burned. Bhunka, a Gaddi from Bandla (Palampur), who participated in and witnessed some of these incidents, informed me that as many as fifteen oil tanks were burned up in Paprola town alone in a single day. Their oil presses (*kolhu*) were burned or forcibly occupied. Many fleeing Muslim families were killed or drowned in the Ravi, Binwa, Neugal, or Ava Rivers; others roamed astray until saved by the army. Forced sale of properties at

throwaway prices is part of the collective narrative. Some Muslims, who thought this was a temporary phase, entrusted their properties with whoever they thought was trustworthy; other Muslims sold their properties in desperation. For example, Gaddis in Holi narrate a story of one such sale of a bungalow near Mehla in Chamba which, along with over ten acres of land, was sold for seven rupees. Similarly, a Ban-Gujjar reportedly sold his entire herd for seven *ānna* (less than half a rupee).

Notwithstanding the memories of Muslim exploitation, there are also rarer stories, more uplifting stories, of Hindu families who took pity and provided surreptitious shelter to known Muslim families. As we know, there are many variations in personal narratives, some with their retrospective embellishments, and these narratives keep on changing. From the vantage point of recent times, at moments when relatively peaceful secularism is in the ascendant, narratives remembering offers of help are forthcoming; when right-wing foments are occurring, as in the present, narratives of massacre are more in vogue. For instance, I was informed that many families who helped Muslims during violent outbreaks, including Gaddis, were despised for such an act of kindness, marked and jeered at by both their contemporaries and future generations. Fluctuating narrative emphases based on current social climates is why the more durable collective memories, orally recounted, become significant. These songs have been transmitted across generations, accurately recording the attitudes and emotions of the past. Today, these songs are not of great significance to Gaddis; but they are historically important as indexing intergenerational memories instead of the sometimes opportunistically crafted personal narratives of the present.

During these violent episodes there was a natural recourse to religious conversion to preserve life. There are instances of families being separated in the melee; Muslim girls, separated from their families, were married into Gaddi or other peasant/artisan households. While there are many stories recounting women being raped, killed, and converted during Partition, the song reproduced below is singular in capturing the victims' emotions. The fact that this song remains transmitted within the larger Gaddi community is indicative of how it is integral to the collective memories of that time. The song highlights how women's bodies have always been sexualized, objectified for sensual gratification or for reproductive purposes. Thus, in this Gaddi song the rarely glimpsed perspective of an imperiled Ban-Gujjar girl is utilized. She asks that rather than be murdered, 'make me a Hindan' (feminine for Hindu woman). The song is an emotional appeal, begging for mercy by offering religious conversion as an alternative to death. If she were no longer a Muslim, she would be neutralized as an enemy. There is also a reference to the police, who perhaps facilitated conversions to prevent further violence. The solution for the separated is sought in a willing religious conversion and staying back, rather than moving to an unknown place amongst unknown people.

Thehar munni, ther gujjereti ho,

Mindana banai de, teri saun.

Ik hathe paire duje chuniye

Mera chakru ari jo mate banda ho…

Minjo khadiya jo fata mata banda ho

Bapade Hindya, teri saun

Bapdi loka, teri saun

Hai, bo hai, muni gujjereti ho…

Panja sipahi, panja thanedar ho,

Minjo Hindana banaiye de

Hai, teri saun.

(Wait, O Gujjar girl, wait,

Make me a Hindu, I swear by you!

My hand is at your feet

The other is on my head [I beg mercy!]

Do not slaughter my son…

Do not 'split' me while I stand

You 'born Hindu' of your father, I swear by you!

Do not swear by my father's name

Alas! Wait, O Gujjar girl, wait…

O you five sepoy, the five officers,

Make me a Hindu,

I swear by you!)

In addition to these songs about the murder and forced conversion of women and children, there are also songs about the general plight of Ban-Gujjars and other Muslim families, particularly in Chamba, for whom it must have been difficult to abandon their homes, even with the looming threat of physical violence. One such song captures the emotions of a fleeing family, when the protagonist says 'Allamaste', something like 'God take care of you'—fusing Allah and Namaste into a syncretistic, emotive phrase. The song captures the sadness of bidding a final goodbye set against the threat of impending violence. It captures the nuances of earlier syncretism and communal cooperation between religious communities when it says that members of *both* communities used to play sports on a common playground, the famed chaugan of Chamba.

Kuni chora minjo, Allamaste!

Mana mera yoyo ho, Allamaste

Dila mera yoyo ho, Allamaste

Thakar deas jo, Allamaste…

Tere Chamba di chogana jo, Allamaste

Jithu khinuan khialandai ho, Allamaste…

(Who shall take away this privilege

Of biding the last farewell? Bye!

My mind bids me to say so, goodbye!

O the country of idol-worshippers, bye…

Bye to the polo grounds of Chamba

Where you taught us to play a ball game,

Goodbye to [all] that…)

The Muslims were rescued from onslaught by the Indian Army and kept in Yol or Alhilal cantonment areas in the Palam valley, or Bakloh camp in Chamba, from where they were sent onwards to Pakistan and other locations. Their properties were confiscated by the government and handed over to the village panchayats, which redistributed them to the landless and depressed classes. Gaddis, settled in the Kandi or sub-mountainous areas, also benefited from this arrangement. For about a decade or so thereafter Ban-Gujjars did not visit these hills. Since then, they have reclaimed their pastoral rights due to the Indian government granting them fresh permits. Besides a few isolated murders (see Christopher 2022a: 28 about the recent alleged murder of Shivraj Sharma), there has not been systemic violence in the higher hills. However, communal attitudes are now tinged with cautious suspicion, perhaps stemming from their memories of Partition, transmitted as collective memories and keeping the wounds of mistrust fresh for subsequent generations. This is especially the case as Ban-Gujjars are settling, raising the questions about communal identity and aspiration vis-à-vis quota reservations and their relationship with the Indian State, especially in the context of other communities, such as Gaddis (Axelby 2020).

Conclusion: Shepherd's Memories

Ho chhota jina jhajanu banana ho

Asan chali smane jo jaana ho.

Ud jo asmani hahaja ho

Asan udi smane jo jana ho.

Tera tutli ta gatha laila ho,

Meri paire marali kiyan jita ho…

Kapde fati gand sailaila bo,

Swarga fatila kiyan seena ho.

Khasam mare ta ji laila ho,

Piyar mare ta kiyan jeena ho…

(We shall make a small airplane

We will fly fearless in the sky

When a rope breaks, we knot it

When my feet die now, how shall I live…

If the clothes are torn, we can sew them

If heaven is shorn apart

Who shall mend it?

If a husband dies, we can still live,

But, if love dies, how shall we live…)

Gaddis shepherds' memory of 1947 is painful yet purposeful. The above song, a post-memory of the event, trying to diminish and neutralize guilt-ridden feelings after the gory incidents. The shepherds would rather fly away without guilt, without having to take part in cleaving apart the heavens. But the sundered social fabric hence, and communal suspicions, are not so easily mended. Gaddis took part in these incidents, thereby claiming the territorial identities of the dominant community, with whom they threw in their lot for future security. This process of Gaddi laboring for recognition as co-equals in the larger society went on for centuries and is part of Rajasthan migrations for gaining prestige amongst agrarian communities.

These songs are vital to the larger canvass of storytelling. They contrast and even complements the memory of partition and the communal violence that accompanied it. These songs and narratives are not a perfect recall of the times but an articulation of suspicion and violence, of silence and loudness, of anguish and disruption of life that defines those times (Butalia 2000; Pandey 2001). Songs are different from personal narratives, which are individualized and plural (Freund 2013: 223). Songs assuage personal trauma by neutralizing it as collective memory and, in doing so, crystalize moments within a localized timeline of meaningful historical continuity. They are sites of memory that enliven the past by linking it to the present: the making of the Indian nation, the political dominance of Hindus (that Gaddis historically and currently are part of), and the processes of vote banking and selecting legislative representatives. The group dynamics have sharpened due to the dislocation of being settled and moving from shepherding as a vocational lifeway to a performed heritage marker.[11] The possibilities of a Gaddis Museum in Dharamsala, or seeking genealogical connections in Rajasthan, is part of a process of enlivening memories of the perceived past.

This paper is also about how imaginative genres of folklore enter into and inform the more dominant discursive frameworks of social history in as much about "how ethnography provides fluid and contextual creativity, or memory, that is denied by the recorded history" (Raheja and Gold 1994: 17, 24). Of significance is not only the context in which these songs were composed ('lieux de memoire', Nora 1989: 7), a context of Partition violence, but also the intention for singing such songs, namely,

to demonstrate equality with the larger Hindu society in which they are embedded. These songs also firm up discourses of caste hyphenations and perceived migrations from Rajasthan, borrowed from or modelled upon the prevalent discourses of proximate plains agrarian communities. Following both Maurice Halbwachs (1992)[12] and Pierre Nora (1989), we see how memories become collectivized and absolute, as 'little histories' rooted in the continuities of imagery, objects, space, and time. These songs are significant as historical documents insofar that they recount both events and attendant subjectivities of subaltern actors, the emotional registers that accompany the memories of displacement, injustice and inequity. These memories are reinscribed as meta-narratives that serve a sensitive function of binding once-mobile Gaddis with the settled agrarian as shared co-religionists with shared Others within a society of marked religious and ethnic differences. Gaddi Partition memories are part of this larger project of establishing shared cultural values within a larger conglomerate identity. Yet this shared larger identity comes with its own baggage: of caste aspirations (leading to its own hierarchies of exclusion), of identity contestations and appropriations, of Sanskritization and normative acceptance. Such identity discourses surrounding caste status, political representation, and social belonging have their idiosyncratic contours regarding Gaddis, as explored in this article, but inform many *pahadi* communities across the region.

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Endnotes

1. There are sayings to the effect that 'the Gaddi will bury the hatchet for profit'; 'money over feud (*doru dende ki huen*)'. Similarly, Duff in his assessment of Dehra forests mentioned how the Gaddis resolved conflict with the local peasants by apportioning a part of revenue due to the State (KDG 296-298).

2. We might even consider Gaddi shepherds as Zomian in a restrictive sense (Scott 2009; Shneiderman 2010), who use strategic compliance rather than overt conflict to keep the state at arm's length.

3. For a discussion on Chamba history, see Goetz (1952), Ohri and Khanna (1989); and Sharma (2004 and 2009).

4. Sharma (2011) analyses how the Chamba rulers, sanskritized themselves over centuries by manipulating their history and claiming descent from the dominant political dynasties of the time. In their earlier inscription they belong to the Mosun gotra-clan (Thapar 2000: 427-434) and when they became the rulers of Chamba they dropped this to claim the Varman surname, which was the lineage of Kashmir rulers who had hegemonic influence over Chamba. However, in their genealogical roll, compiled between 1550-1650 CE they dropped the Varman surname and appended the generic suffix Singh to claim Rajput warrior status. They obliquely tried to claim association with the kingdom of Mewar in this roll. This process is also seen in the genealogies of many a hill State, claiming subsequently the Rajput status in medieval times. Gaddis claims, however, start in the 19th century and are widespread in the consciousness of the community by the mid-20th century as they started settling in large numbers thereby creating a parallel community of nomadic shepherds and settled agro-pastoralists and later predominantly agrarian community.

5. Gaddis, like most Rajputs in the Punjab plains, claim descent from Rajasthan and forced migration to save their religion from the atrocities of Aurangzeb. This is in sharp contrast to the historical facts. Aurangzeb had cordial relations with Rajputs, including the Mewar and Marwar states, until the death of Jaswant Singh in 1678, when a religious tax was imposed. Consequently, there were Rathor uprisings in 1679, as well as Jat and Satnami rebellions. This is also a time when Aurangzeb was much embroiled in the Deccan wars which continued until his death in 1708—and had little time to focus on North India. Fleeing from conversion is a narrative framing device throughout the Punjab plains among those claiming connection to Rajasthan and Rajput/Brahmana identity. I argue that Gaddis, seeking acceptance and social prestige by the Sanskritized agrarian society upon which they depended, adopted this narrative, which is also perpetuated by the nationalist historiography.

6. Such was the fear of Ahmad Shah that there was a popular saying that: '*khada pita lahe da/ baki Ahmad Shahe da*', (Whatever has been eaten is the only profit / rest everything belongs to Ahmad Shah).

7. For Rajasthan, see Gold and Gujjar based on their analysis of Jonathan Boyarin (2002: 88).

8. Such claims by 'Gaddi Dalits' to be reassigned from the SC to ST quota is consistent with scholarship on the stigmatization of the SC quotas, for example the Kolis of Kanra (Parry 1970: 99).

9. Christopher (2022b) shows how Kangra Halis discursively emphasize their first-ness over Gaddi Rajputs to gain prestige and petition the government for Scheduled Tribe inclusion.

10. I am grateful to Stephen Christopher and Richard Axelby for providing this information.

11. Wagner (2013) analyzes Gaddis as a community dislocated from homeland and herding, consequently constructing an identity through ritual and aesthetic acts. Gaddi environmental imagery (in VCDs and now on YouTube), ritual (especially the *nuala*), and pilgrimage (visiting ancestral places in higher altitude Bharmaur) are used to construct a communal identity as mobile shepherds, even though most are long settled in Kangra.

12. Memory, for Halbwachs, is created under social pressure and may be understood as a reconstruction of the past, one that, more precisely, finds assistance in present occurrences. These latter are cadres or frameworks situated in the present which enable each particular group to recollect. Actual memories are prepared by means of other, already earlier undertaken reconstructions, from which a past image always emerges more or less strongly (Halbwachs, 1992).

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