

# Urbanization and Cultural Shifts: Transformations in the Livelihoods of Gaddi Pastoralists in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh

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## Abstract

This study explores the influence of urbanization on the livelihoods, socio-economic conditions, and traditional pastoral practices of the Gaddi pastoralist community in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh. The research reveals significant changes in demographic profiles, livelihood patterns, and cultural practices due to modernization and urban encroachments. Traditional sheep and goat rearing, once a predominant livelihood, has declined, with many Gaddi pastoralists shifting towards wage labour and government jobs. Urbanization has brought socio-economic improvements, including increased access to healthcare, education, and digital connectivity. However, it has also reduced grazing lands and disrupted seasonal migration patterns, leading to a decline in cultural practices. The study highlights the dual impact of urbanization, bringing both opportunities for economic advancement and challenges in preserving cultural heritage. The community perceives urbanization positively in terms of infrastructure and services but expresses concerns over cultural erosion. Policy measures must focus on integrating sustainable urban development with the preservation of traditional practices to maintain the cultural identity of the Gaddi community while ensuring their socio-economic progress. Understanding these impacts is essential for crafting balanced policies that promote sustainable livelihoods and cultural preservation in pastoral communities.

**Keywords:** Gaddi pastoralists, urbanization, livelihood shifts, socio-economic changes, cultural preservation

## Introduction

Gaddi people mostly live in the mountainous regions of Himachal Pradesh, including near Dharamshala. Their lifestyles, traditions and cultures are intricately intertwined with the stunning Himalayan landscape. Living in the beautiful surroundings of Dharamshala, the Gaddi people have long been semi-pastoralists and walk through beautiful valleys and pastures with their sheep and goats. Their nomadic lifestyle has declined significantly due to modernization and land use changes, and many Gaddi people have settled in cities or villages. (Dhiman, Bandyopadhyay, Singh, Kumar, & Chaudhary, 2022)

Their traditional dances, folk music and traditional beauty are well known and influence their daily lives and connection with the natural world. Gaddi men usually wear traditional clothes such as a large shirt called 'chola', loose trousers called 'churidar' and a woolen cap called 'Pahari Topi'. An important aspect of Gaddi culture is religion. Most people practice Hinduism, but others combine Hinduism with indigenous beliefs. Temples and other places of worship in

the region hold public festivals to celebrate festivals such as Shivaratri, Navratri, and Diwali. (Surroch, 2014)

Together with their cattle, they regularly migrate to higher altitudes in summer and lower altitudes in winter to avoid harsh weather conditions. Their culture is rich in stories, music, dance, and oral traditions that have been passed down over the years. The language of the Gaddi people is a dialect of Pahari. But many also speak Hindi and other local languages. Due to various economic changes and modernization in the society, the lifestyle of the Gaddi community has changed a lot. They still feel connected to their culture and traditions. The rate of migration has increased in Gaddi in recent years. (Dhiman, Bandyopadhyay, Singh, Kumar, & Chaudhary, 2022)

Gaddi migration affects immigrants and the regions they live in in many ways. Gaddi culture, rituals and language have developed through migrations and have been preserved as a tradition. As a result, the Gaddi people developed a sense of community and retained their unique identity despite their displacement. However, this relocation also causes a change in their culture due to exposure to other places and influences, resulting in a merging of cultures. Immigration brings opportunities and challenges to businesses. Their economic activities have also changed due to the transition from traditional activities such as animal husbandry to various lifestyles in new places. While some Gaddi people are better off financially in their new communities, others have difficulty adjusting to their new lifestyle and work life. The relationship between the Gaddi community and the places they moved to has been affected by migration. The Gaddi people were associated with various civilizations in their new homeland, and cultural exchange and integration occurred frequently. However, this relationship also disrupts the relationship. Gaddi people have problems with recognition, recognition, and integration into wider society. The migration of Gaddis affects their old and new environments. The traditional lifestyle of the Gaddi community has an impact on ecosystem dynamics and land use patterns. Although historically their travels have led to peace with the world, changes in land use and the settlement of new places have occasionally caused environmental stress, including problems with resource use, deforestation, and grazing pressure. The cultural, economic, social, and environmental landscape has been greatly affected by the Gaddi migration. Complex in nature, it makes the necessary adaptations to survive in the new environment while preserving some of the past. To fully understand the dynamics and wider impacts of migration, we need to understand these impacts in detail. (Wagner, 2013)

### **Review of literature**

Semi-nomadic shepherds, the Gaddi people are well-known for their annual migration of their herds of sheep and goats from the high-altitude meadows in the summer to the lowlands in the winter. The Gaddi family set off on their difficult journey as the snow melts and mountain meadows blossom in late spring and summer. As they prepare for the arduous journey to the verdant, high-altitude grazing pastures known as bugyals, the community comes together, gathering their possessions and livestock. The Gaddi is able to maintain their traditional pastoral lifestyle because these bugyals give their animals plenty of possibilities for grazing,

maintaining their wellbeing. Migration is a social and cultural phenomenon in addition to a utilitarian requirement. (Hänninen, 2014)

The people of Gaddi wear colorful clothes and walk their animals on the old road that winds through narrow roads and hills. This movement is an important part of animal husbandry, promoting social cohesion and strengthening family ties. It's not just about moving them to a better area. During their stay in Bujar, the Gaddi people took care of their animals to ensure that they had enough food and could survive at higher altitudes. (Sharma, Parkash, & Uniyal, 2022)

Apart from ancient trade, the Gaddi people also used summer grass resources to weave wool. As autumn approaches and the weather gets colder, the Gaddis begin to return to the valley, bringing with it a harsh winter. They will return home until snow covers the upper areas, making it difficult or impossible to survive during the winter months. Gaddi people return to their villages to prepare for winter by making their homes strong enough to withstand the cold. They rely on stocks to pass the time during the next migration season, where they participate in a variety of activities such as storytelling, crafts, and gatherings. (Kaushal, 2001)

The Gaddi lifestyle has been preserved for generations. It is a symbol of the rich heritage of the Himalayan region; this shows their resilience, resilience and strong bond with the land and animals. As for their seasonal migration, there may not have been any serious migration in the last few years. Like many communities, their traditional lifestyles will be affected by changes in society. (Mohan, Thakur, & Kumar, 2023)

The old way of life may gradually decline as the new generation moves to the city in search of work or education. The government's efforts to address urban population and other factors such as urbanization and education will affect social development. Cultural, economic, environmental, and social differences lead to Kadi migration in complex ways. This dynamic phenomenon is rooted in their history and lifestyle and demonstrates their adaptability and resilience in the face of change. (Pathania, 2016).

### **Method of study**

The study was conducted to examine the influence of urbanization on the livelihoods of Gaddi pastoralists in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques. The sample comprised 60 Gaddi pastoralist households, selected using purposive sampling to ensure a diverse representation of age groups, education levels, and family sizes.

Data was collected through structured interviews and field observations, focusing on changes in livelihood patterns, socio-economic conditions, and cultural practices due to urbanization. The interview schedule included questions on traditional livelihood practices, shifts in income sources, access to healthcare and education, and perceptions regarding urbanization's impact. Observations were made regarding pastoral practices, migration patterns, and interactions within the community. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, with results presented in tables showing frequencies and percentages. Tables highlight key shifts in

livelihood patterns, socio-economic changes, and respondents' perceptions of urbanization's impact. Qualitative data from open-ended responses was coded and thematically analyzed to understand the deeper implications of these shifts.

## Results and analysis

This section presents the findings of the study conducted to examine how urbanization has influenced the livelihoods of Gaddi pastoralists in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh. The analysis covers demographic details, livelihood patterns, socio-economic shifts, and the impact of urbanization on traditional pastoral practices.

### 1. Demographic Profile of Gaddi Pastoralists

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the Gaddi pastoralist respondents, including age, gender, education level, and family size.

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	18-30 years	15	25%
	31-50 years	30	50%
	Above 50 years	15	25%
Gender	Male	45	75%
	Female	15	25%
Education Level	Illiterate	12	20%
	Primary Education	18	30%
	Secondary Education	20	33.3%
	Higher Education	10	16.7%
Family Size	Small (1-4 members)	18	30%
	Medium (5-8 members)	30	50%
	Large (9+ members)	12	20%

**Analysis:**

The majority of respondents (50%) fall in the 31-50 age group, indicating that most pastoralists are middle-aged. About 75% of the respondents are male, reflecting a gendered division of labor in pastoral livelihoods. The education level shows that a significant portion (33.3%) of Gaddi pastoralists has completed secondary education, but the proportion with higher education remains low at 16.7%.

**2. Shifts in Livelihood Patterns**

Table 2 highlights the changes in livelihood sources of Gaddi pastoralists over the past two decades due to urbanization.

Livelihood Source	Traditional (% Pre-Urbanization)	Current (% Post-Urbanization)
Sheep and Goat Rearing	80%	40%
Agricultural Activities	60%	50%
Wage Labor	10%	30%
Government/Private Sector Jobs	5%	15%
Handicrafts and Wool Products	20%	5%

**Analysis:**

The data indicates a significant decline in traditional pastoral practices, with sheep and goat rearing dropping from 80% to 40%. Conversely, there is a notable rise in wage labor (from 10% to 30%) and government/private sector jobs (from 5% to 15%). This shift illustrates how urbanization has pushed pastoralists to diversify their income sources due to reduced access to grazing lands and market pressures.

**3. Socio-Economic Shifts Post-Urbanization**

Table 3 outlines the socio-economic changes experienced by Gaddi pastoralists as a result of urbanization.

Socio-Economic Aspect	Before Urbanization (%)	After Urbanization (%)
Annual Income Below ₹1 Lakh	70%	30%
Annual Income ₹1-3 Lakh	25%	50%
Annual Income Above ₹3 Lakh	5%	20%

Access to Healthcare Facilities	40%	80%
Children's Enrollment in Schools	60%	85%
Ownership of Mobile Phones	10%	75%

**Analysis:**

Urbanization has led to improved access to healthcare and education, with 80% of respondents now having access to healthcare facilities compared to 40% before. Similarly, children's enrollment in schools has increased from 60% to 85%. There has also been a significant rise in mobile phone ownership (from 10% to 75%), indicating increased digital connectivity among pastoralists. However, traditional income sources have reduced, compelling many to seek alternative livelihoods.

**4. Impact of Urbanization on Pastoral Practices**

Table 4 focuses on how urbanization has impacted traditional pastoral practices, particularly regarding grazing lands, migration patterns, and cultural practices.

Aspect	Observation	Impact Level
Grazing Lands Availability	Reduced access due to urban encroachments	High
Migration Patterns	Shift from long-distance migration to localized grazing	Moderate
Cultural Practices	Decline in traditional festivals and rituals	High

**Analysis:**

Urbanization has significantly reduced the availability of grazing lands, forcing pastoralists to modify their traditional migration patterns. Cultural practices have also been affected, with a decline in traditional festivals and rituals as pastoralists adapt to urban lifestyles.

**5. Perception of Urbanization's Influence**

Table 5 presents the respondents' perceptions of how urbanization has impacted their livelihoods.

Perception Statement	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
Urbanization has improved our quality of life	60%	20%	20%

Urbanization has led to a loss of traditional practices	70%	15%	15%
Urbanization has created new employment opportunities	75%	15%	10%
Urbanization has increased our dependence on markets	80%	10%	10%

**Analysis:**

The majority of respondents (60%) agree that urbanization has improved their quality of life by providing better infrastructure and services. However, a larger proportion (70%) also believe that urbanization has led to a loss of traditional practices. The findings indicate a mixed response, with pastoralists recognizing the benefits of urbanization while also lamenting the erosion of their cultural identity.

**Conclusion**

The findings of this study reveal that urbanization has profoundly influenced the livelihoods of Gaddi pastoralists in Kangra, Himachal Pradesh, reshaping their traditional way of life. The demographic profile analysis shows that Gaddi pastoralists predominantly consist of middle-aged men, with limited access to higher education. This demographic pattern reflects the socio-cultural structure of pastoral communities, where men traditionally assume primary roles in livestock rearing and household decision-making. The shift in livelihood patterns highlights a significant decline in traditional pastoral activities such as sheep and goat rearing, which has decreased from 80% to 40% over the past two decades. The increasing reliance on wage labor and government or private sector jobs illustrates the community's adaptation to urban economic pressures, particularly due to reduced grazing lands and market influences. This diversification indicates a survival strategy in response to shrinking pastoral opportunities. Urbanization has brought notable socio-economic shifts, including improved access to healthcare, education, and technology. The rise in children's school enrollment from 60% to 85% and mobile phone ownership from 10% to 75% demonstrates that the Gaddi community is becoming more connected and integrated with urban society. Furthermore, the increase in annual household incomes reflects an economic upliftment among pastoralists, though it comes at the cost of their traditional practices. The impact of urbanization on pastoral practices has been significant, particularly concerning the reduction of grazing lands and changes in migration patterns. The availability of grazing lands has diminished due to urban encroachments, forcing pastoralists to abandon long-distance migration in favor of localized grazing. This shift has altered their seasonal movement patterns and disrupted their cultural practices, leading to a decline in traditional festivals and rituals.

The Gaddi pastoralists' perceptions of urbanization reflect a dual narrative. While the majority acknowledge improvements in their quality of life, such as better infrastructure and



employment opportunities, there is a concurrent concern about the erosion of traditional practices and increased dependence on markets. The community recognizes the tangible benefits of urbanization but also grapples with the cultural cost of losing their pastoral identity.

In conclusion, urbanization has ushered in both opportunities and challenges for Gaddi pastoralists. The community has witnessed socio-economic improvements, yet it faces the existential threat of losing its cultural heritage. The balance between modern livelihoods and preserving traditional pastoral practices remains a critical concern. Policy interventions that promote sustainable development while safeguarding the unique cultural identity of pastoral communities are essential to ensure that urbanization does not completely erode their way of life. The findings underscore the need for a nuanced approach that integrates modernization with cultural preservation to secure the future of Gaddi pastoralists in a rapidly urbanizing landscape.

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