



Himalayan Pastoralism: Glory Days, Last Gasp or Somewhere in Between

A lecture delivered by Dr. Vasant Saberwal

As part of the lecture series titled 'Dialogues on Development', the Bahá'í Chair for Studies in Development at Devi Ahilya Vishwavidyalaya, Indore is pleased to announce a lecture delivered online by Dr. Vasant Saberwal on Saturday, 27 July 2024 from 3 pm to 4 pm on the theme 'Himalayan Pastoralism: Glory Days, Last Gasp or Somewhere in Between'. Those interested in participating in the lecture may register at the following link:

<https://forms.gle/Fwf6876B2JWZ4vyg8>

Abstract of the lecture

This overview of pastoralism in the Himalaya, with a particular focus on Himachal Pradesh, draws upon research and observations over a thirty-year period, to try and understand the changing rationale for, and changing nature of, such extensive animal husbandry. We trace a sustained opposition towards pastoralism over the past century and a half, locating it within political, ecological, and cultural frameworks. We argue that despite this opposition, pastoralism has persisted over this period largely on account of the economic gains from animal husbandry. But we also argue that Himalayan pastoralism today is at a point of inflexion, and likely transitioning to household management of smaller herds as a means of retaining a toe-hold in pastoralism. We posit that present day pastoralist decision making is often premised on labour practices that opt for cash and temporary work rather than apprenticeship, and on altered herd management that revolves around dramatically smaller herds, managed over localized migratory routes rather than the much longer routes used in the past. We also argue that this involvement in herding is more peripheral to household economics, compared with the 1990s, when herding represented a predominant, overriding component of herder household incomes. At the outset, we note that our commentary is premised on anecdote and limited data, more hypotheses than trends discernible in long-term data. We anticipate that findings from ongoing research will support the broad argument that pastoralism in the Himalaya remains profitable, even as the contemporary logic of animal management has deviated from earlier models. And that profitability will likely sustain pastoralism in the near to medium term, even as the call to sedentarize grows louder, both within and outside the community.

About the speaker

Vasant Saberwal is the Director of the Centre for Pastoralism. His research interests have lain at the intersection of the politics of science and its use in shaping the terms of access to grazing, forest and water resources. He has worked on pastoral communities of the Himalaya for well over 3 decades. He did a PhD in Political Ecology, with a focus on Himachali pastoralism, and post-doctoral research in the Western Ghats. His publications include *Pastoral Politics: Shepherds, Bureaucrats and Conservation in the Western Himalaya* (OUP, 1999), *Battles Over Nature: Science and the Politics of Wildlife Conservation*, edited with Mahesh Rangarajan, (Permanent Black 2003) and with Ashwini Chhatre, *Democratizing Nature: Politics, Conservation and Development in India* (Oxford University Press, 2006). His films, co-directed with Sanjay Barnela, include the award winning documentaries, *River Taming Mantras* and *Hunting Down Water*, part of a five-part series on the political economy of water. He helped launch the inter-disciplinary journal *Conservation and Society*, and was Executive Editor from 2002 to 2004.