



THE GRASS SEEKER

Photographs by Ruhani Kaur
Text by Uddalak Gupta





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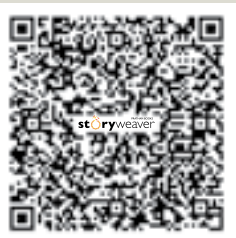
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**THE
GRASS
SEEKER**

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Every year, when the snow starts to melt, 67-year-old Gaddi shepherd Room Singh packs a few of his essentials.

Food for himself.

40 kgs of salt for his animals.

Pots and pans.

A worn radio.

Medicines.

A torch and solar lantern.

And an old rifle to scare bears away.

Rounding up his flock of about 300 goats and sheep, he bids farewell to his wife Hitmani Devi, his family and his village Shiah in the Garsa valley of Himachal Pradesh.



Grass. Juicy blades of grass high up on the hill slopes, fed by meltwater streams and clean mountain air, that his flock loves to graze on. That is what Room Singh goes looking for, when summer reaches the valley.



For hundreds of years, nomadic Gaddis have responded to the changing seasons, heading up in summer and turning back from the high grasslands before the freezing winter. For the last 40 years, Room Singh has followed in their footsteps.





Finding pastures isn't always easy. Some years ago, when he reached his final camping ground at Donspaan, it snowed for two days without stopping. His animals went without food because the grass was buried deep. He couldn't bear to eat, either. "If they go hungry, I do too," he says.

He begins his long uphill trek from a village called Kalga. After crossing Kheerganga, Room Singh enters a wild and unspoilt landscape, where settlements have musically-sounding names. Tundabhuj, Thakur Kuan, Patra Ghat, Pandu Pul.



KALGA

KHEERGANGA

TUNDABHUT

THAKUR KUAN

PATRA GHAT

PANDU PUL

PIN PARVATI VALLEY

P A R V A T I R I V E R

*Map not to scale



The 60-kilometre journey takes him along the raging Parvati. The bridge across is broken, and there's only one trail ahead. He crosses icy torrents and melting snow bridges; he climbs across steep rock faces and navigates chilly waterfalls. The tinkling of the flock's bells keeps him company in the silence.





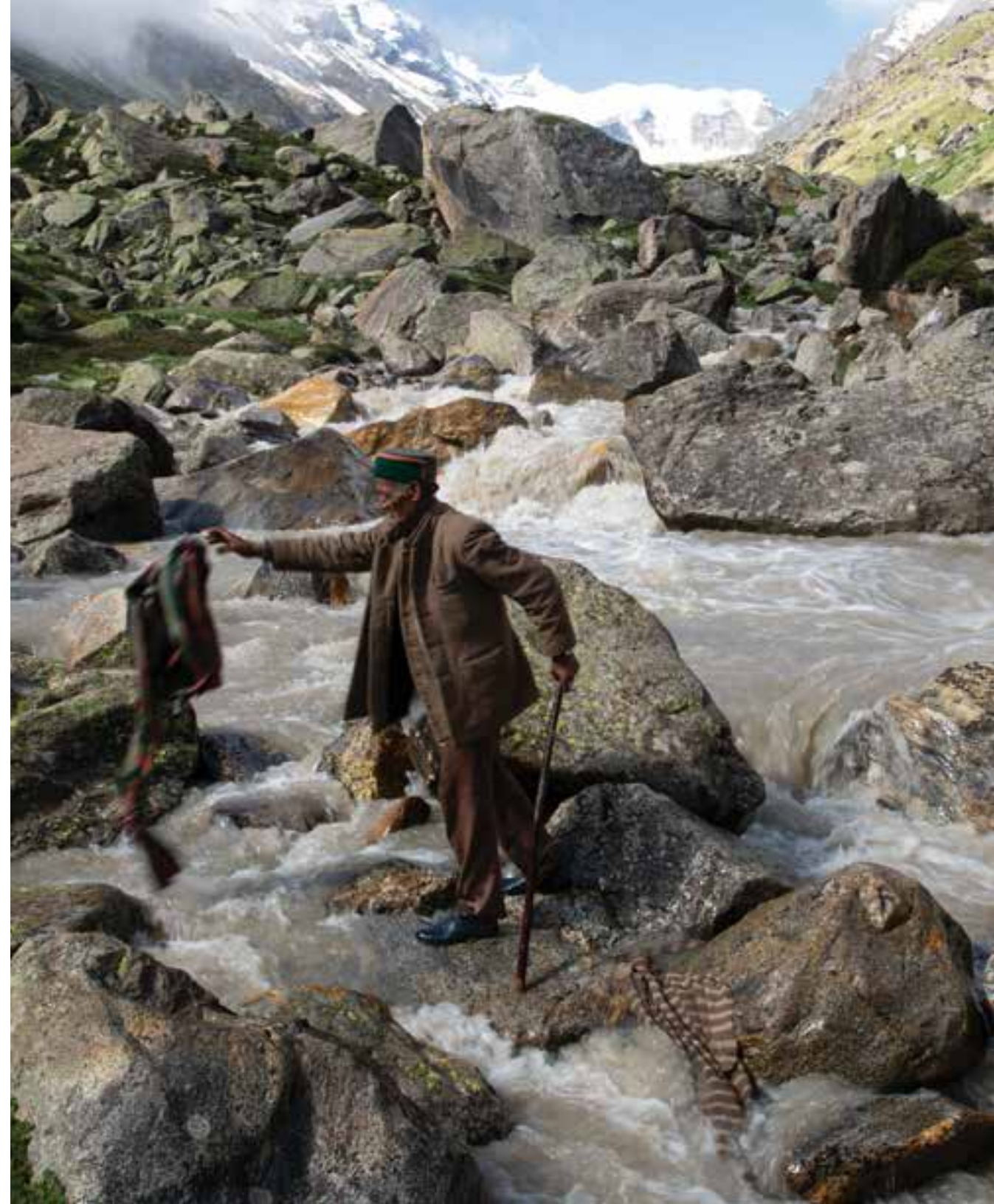


Here, 13,000 feet up in the Pin Parvati valley, Room Singh likes to walk in the wide open spaces, collecting firewood and letting his flock graze at its own pace. There is no rush to get anywhere. The air is pure. The water is clear and sweet. Wildflowers are abloom and herbs grow waiting to be picked.

Room Singh has seen these high places change over the years. There was a time when no rock could be seen on the mountains nearby because they were always covered by snow. Now, with temperatures rising because of climate change, the glaciers are melting and grassy pastures have become rare.



He worries that if it stops snowing,
the rivers will run dry and the world
will come to an end.





To the Gaddi, each stone, each spring, each slope is precious.
Room Singh loves the mountains like he does his family.
The shepherd sleeps under the open sky, his flock gathered
around him. He wastes little and barely pollutes,
leaving no trace of his stay.

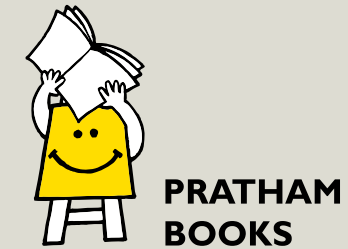
Room Singh knows that the days of his past are drawing to a close. Finding pastures is getting harder, and his animals aren't as healthy as before. With their wool no longer being what it used to be, selling the Gardu blankets and shawls isn't easy.



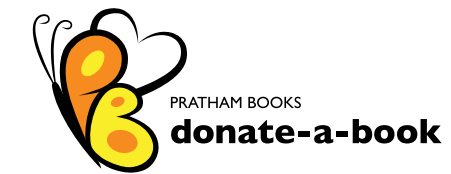


The climb has also become more difficult, with old routes closing down and trees being planted on pastoral grounds. Nomadic grazing, some believe, leads to soil erosion and bare forests. But a Gaddi shepherd migrates only to grasslands that are high up, unfit for agriculture. The manure from his flock makes the soil rich, too.

The way of life of these generations of pastoral wanderers is fast disappearing. But Room Singh continues to walk to the place he feels most at home.



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Uddalak Gupta trained as an architect, worked in advertising as a creative professional and is now a freelance writer. He enjoys reading mountain literature and going on occasional rambles in the Himalayas.



Ruhani Kaur is a freelance photo-journalist whose work focuses on environmental and gender issues. A conversation with Pradeep Sanghwan of The Healing Himalayas led her to this subject. To see her work visit www.ruhanikaur.com.

Reference:

Prof Molly Kaushal, 'Sacred Response to Environment: The Gaddi and His Mountain'.

As the weather turns warm, Room Singh takes his flock of goats and sheep and scales the Himalayas for fresh grass as he has for the last 40 years. With global warming a reality, this photo book traces the journey of a Gaddi shepherd whose search for green pastures takes him a little higher up in the mountains every year.

Learning to read – level by level. This is a Level 4 book.

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who are eager to begin
reading and listening to
stories

1

Learning to Read

For children who
recognize familiar
words and can
read new words
with help

2

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who can read with
confidence

4

3

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