CHAPTER – 4

SERENDIPITY OF SURVIVAL: ECONOMY OF GALESH

When I started writing this chapter, the first name that instinctively came to my mind was serendipity that implies “fortuitous happenstance” or “pleasant surprise” (wikipedia.org retrieved on 3rd May 14) - in this context explaining my feelings that I experienced while in the field seeing these simple pastoral nomadic people survive. It was the perseverance with which they were sustaining the different ways of their life against all adversity that one wonders if it was not karishma or a ‘miracle’. In sociological thinking the concept first occurred in the writings of Merton (1957) referring to ‘serendipity patterns’ that described common occurrence of ‘unanticipated, anomalous and strategic datum, which becomes the occasion for developing a new theory or for extending an existing theory’ (ibid). Robert Merton later developed this idea in a co-authored publication with Elinor Barber and titled it as The Travels and Adventures of Serendipity. Serendipity is now commonly used in grounded theory for qualitative research and it is with this formative background as stated in the previous chapters that I present some salient aspects of my research work among the Galesh.

Amanolahi (2003: 261) makes a disturbing observation in his research work on the Basseri, simultaneously drawing the attention of every researcher in this field to the fact that in 1938, the pastoral Nomads constituted 20 per cent of the entire population of Iran but by 1985 it reduced to minimum 2 per cent of the entire population of Iran. The Galesh are not even listed separately in the census of Mazandaran province. An apt appreciation of the pastoral landscape is given by Blench (2001: 11), when he writes that the ‘pastoralist’ landscape is flecked with an invisible constellation of resources. They have to balance their knowledge of pasture, rainfall, disease, political insecurity and national boundaries with access to markets and infrastructure. They prefer established migration routes and often develop long standing exchange arrangements with farmers to make use of crop residues or to bring trade goods”. The pastoral economy falls within the purview of cultural economics. Cultural economics essentially looks at “how goods are strategically shifted between socially defined exchange circuits and the way these movements connect social
positions to prestige, power, gender, competition, and reproduction”. *Galesh* economy presents a classic illustration of Mauss’s (1990) work on presentation and reciprocity. This will be amply demonstrated in the chapter when the institution of *Sereh* is discussed. *Sereh* constitutes the key institutional and organizational premise of *Galesh* economy. It is symbolic of close relationship that exists between their economy and culture. There is a popular proverb in the these provinces that says *Galesi cehl o char nedarneh* implying that it is immaterial whether a *Galesh* has four cows or 40 cows, he will always remain a *Galesh*. This intimate relationship with a way of life, culture and economy finds repetitive mention in the details that follow.

**The Shepherd or *Galesh* in Mazandaran**

The shepherd is a significant central figure, in the Iranian rural world, in which livestock comprising sheep and goats predominate. The word shepherd has several connotations in dialect and pronunciation. He is the ‘*chupan*’, or ‘*coban*’ in Mid Persia, ‘*soban*’ in North Persia. He is also referred to as ‘*xuwan*’, ‘*spe*’ in Pashto; wakhi spun and ‘*xwspn*’. The sheep dealer is called the ‘*chupdar*’ and the old sheep market just outside Shiraz is called the ‘*su-bazar*’.

The shepherd is a specialist, on whom livestock owners entrust their large flocks of sheep and goats for long periods of time ranging from two to six months even for years. An average of 200-600 heads of cattle generally allocate to one to three shepherds for their long-term care and upkeep. (Digard, 1981 and Glatzer, 1977) have emphasized on the presence of other kinds of specialists like the ones hired for looking after horses and “other categories of livestock: *ramakan* for herding horses, *gavcaran, gavgalan* and *gales* for herding cattle”.

The rearing of sheep and goats is essentially a family enterprise, which, combined with orchards and farming, provides for all the shepherds’ family needs. All or a group of the heads of families in a village may agree to combine their animals to form a collective herd. This collective herd is entrusted to a shepherd. He is paid in proportion to the number of animals that are given into his care. He makes himself familiar with each and every animal in the herd. To the extent that he can individually discern animals of his herd from those of others. It is a common practice to name individual members of the herd. The singular element of the shepherd’s task is to take the collective herd to pasture.
Various authors have detailed the particulars of the shepherds. Among them are Pour-Fickoui and Bazin who wrote, “In the Caspian provinces, where cattle raising is predominant, the cupans constitute groups specializing in the raising of small animals and are clearly differentiated socially and culturally, on one hand, from the Galesh, cattle owners who spend summer with their flocks on the lower slopes of the Alborz, and, on the other, from the rice growers on the plain”, (Bazin, 1987: 6-8).

Thus, opinion is further accentuated by several authors: “The shepherd plays an even more important role among the tribes, which depend for their livelihood on their flocks of sheep and lead a type of life particularly well adapted to this activity, that is, a nomadic life based on migration to different altitudes according to the seasons. Shepherds are generally recruited from junior lineages and employed by the chiefs (Khans, Kalantars, Kadkodas, etc.), who generally own the largest flocks. Their work is, thus, closely related to the tribal structure but may also serve as a not unimportant means of upward social mobility” (Balikci, 1981; Beck, 1980, Black-Michaud, 1974; Glatzer, 1977; Tapper, 1991).

**Payment Contracts of the Galesh:**

The shepherd is paid a comparatively lucrative amount as compared to the normal pay scales. The owner of the stock and the shepherd enter into a contractual arrangement mutually satisfactory and partially favoring the shepherd. “It is generally fixed by contract and includes a sum of money, a share of the produce from the animals (milk, wool), a portion of the new lambs, or some combination of the three; in addition, the shepherd receives various other payments in kind: food, batteries, a certain number of pairs of light cotton shoes (giva, malaki), clothing related to his work, like a felt mantle, and so on” [Digard, 1980]. Commonly used terms applicable to Galesh life especially pertaining to herd/ flock size [mostly taken from the accounts recorded in the case studies conducted among the Galesh] are:

**Wahed-e-Dami:** The land on which a particular number of sheep can live satisfying all their needs as well as for a place or shed where they may be housed.

Each sheepherder has to register his Wahed-e-Dami. The national Resources Offices check back, inspect minutely and then formally register the Wahed-e-Dami of each individual. On the death of such an individual the Wahed-e-Dami has to be
registered again in the name of the successor who inherits the animals. The minimum number of animals that comprise a Dami has to be at least 30. This is only for sheep and goats and not for cows.

**Damdar:** The owner of the Wahed-e-Dami is called the Damdar. He may build upon his flock gradually from a small Wahed-e-Dami to a sizable one. However, whenever the Wahed-e-Dami is increased or decreased the Damdar has to inform the office. Normally people do not do so as a rule but whenever there is an announcement about some subsidy then everyone goes running literally to the Natural Resources offices and authenticates his claim. The government definition of a Damdar is an individual who is rearing at least 30 sheep with the help of his family and may even be taking the help of a worker. This information is necessary to obtain a certificate for pastoralist rights on grassland. It must be acknowledged here that the number of sheep and goats actually exist may not be according to the records.

**Dame Katol or Dame Khanegi:** These are traditional sheep/goat herders who do not follow the government registration. They are not allotted grasslands and are compelled to use on either mutually shared basis or rented from another Damdar at a cost. Their grasslands are under threat many a times because these groups do not fulfill the conditions for registration of Damdar. The Registered Damdar only has access to grassland and subsides. The salient conditions for registration of the Damdar are:-

**a)** At least 20-25 years experience is necessary in sheep rearing to give one the authentication of being a ‘Damdar’. The person must be working with sheep since 1985 or before. For all those others who had begun working after 1985 there is a different set of conditions. The older certificates were confusing and did not correctly record the number of sheep or goats held by an individual or a family. During the Pahlavi dynasty a Damdar may have 500 sheep but the certificate would be for a maximum of 100 to 150 animals only. Therefore, there was much confusion and dissatisfaction among the pastoralists when the subsidies were announced. This is the main reason that new conditions have been drafted and newer forms of schemes are being framed and utilized for the pastoralists.
b) Inspection of the construction of sheep enclosures: There is thorough inspection of documents and spot checking of the actual edifice before the fact is registered as to whether it was constructed pre-1985 or post 1985.

**Tareh Khoroje Dam:** After the Revolution just about 10 years ago the government framed a law for the Galesh and dwellers of jungles to leave their habitats to help the grasslands to flourish. This is especially for those who have been registered as sheep owners but are living and working elsewhere. It was compulsory for them to obtain compensation in the form of money or land according to a particular formula prepared by the government. These conditions formed the *Tareh Khoroje dam.*

a) In case people were tardy or lax in responding to the announcements of the government, then the government also takes its time in giving out the compensation. The officials in the government office also behave accordingly by being slow in processing the applications and delaying the payment of compensation [Voices from the field]. Eligibility for compensation and subsidy is decided by certain specific persons who not only authenticate the eligibility of the application but have to own the responsibility for its payment to the beneficiaries. These are:

1) Manager of National Resources office
2) Representative or agent of Marta (grassland)
3) Manager of ‘Plan of Exit of Cattle’
4) Nazer / Accountant for Plan of Jungle Checker
5) Head of Jungle of Savadku or Ghaemshahr etc.

Unit of equalization for Cow, sheep and goats has been developed by the government and is used to work out the grassland requirements of various animals. The unit of equalization for cows is as follows: One cow eats enough fodder or grassland equivalents to 5 sheep or goats. Similarly by that same corollary it is understood that the maintenance of six cows is equivalent to the maintenance of 30 sheep. This equivalence has also taken into consideration the fact that the cows eat much more while grazing than do the sheep. Thus, one *Wahed-e-Dami* for 30 sheep would be equivalent to that for 6 cows.
The household units also have an equalization plan. According to the National Resources office it was reported that the Inhabitation Plan had been framed during the Pahlavi period but was being implemented only now after the Revolution. The basic unit of habitation is 20 households according to this plan. It was apparently declared and reported daily through the National electronic and print media as also posters etc., that all pastoralists should leave those village, which had been marked for the development plans already. All inhabitants of such villages had been asked to report to the National Resources office for verification. The compensation unit for grasslands allocation in terms of area was that one sheep required 160 meters of grassland.

The Galesh Damdar, in fact, all pastoralists are to be given compensation as per this form of equivalence. The individual is given the option of taking land or money in compensation. Once the transaction is completed and the government records have been suitably adjusted and updated then the pastoralist has to immediately vacate the jungle area and go where he has been allocated land or has to purchase the land he wants on the basis of the compensation he has been paid. If the person does not comply with these orders immediately or within a stipulated period, the effect is that he is liable to be imprisoned, as this is the decree passed by the Parliament (Majlis).

In monetary terms the cost of shifting has also been calculated. It works out to be approximately USD 14 per single sheep. This compensation, however, was not what was paid out to the Galesh according to the field data. The actual compensation was much less or was inadequate and served the pastoralist poorly in setting himself up again in a new comfortable homestead.

For those opting to take land in compensation there are several options of land available given to an individual. He is asked his choice and depending upon the size of holding he is to be allocated landholding in the area chosen. The areas allocated are also on priority basis. Thus, it is highly probable that one may not get the land of one’s choice. Three knowledgeable officers do the evaluation of the houses and landholding independently from the Natural Resources and Jungles office while one person is deputed from the courts. They physically examine the site, take photographs and even get copies of maps and legal papers of the households for which the compensation has been applied. Thus, it is only after these three officers have
recommended their acceptance to the Galesh, they were able to obtain a certificate which makes them as individuals eligible for the compensation. This evaluation, conducted by the three officials, also determines the size and form of compensation to be allocated to each householder.

Apparently the government compensation is more favourable for householders, i.e. men having wives and children, rather than single individuals who may be widowers or men and women whose children and grandchildren had left them to seek livelihoods in the cities. Such single dwelling people were given only a very small or negligible consideration in compensation.

The government offices have also formulated details in the exigency that there are some cases of certain Galesh persons insisting on continuing their ancestral task of rearing sheep. There are a number of beneficiary schemes that the government has formulated for their benefit. If a pastoralist wants to live on a piece of land allotted to him and the land is not even then the natural resource officer of the Ministry for resettlement reported that [interviewed the Natural Resources officers] he would get the land levelled at government cost by sending in bulldozers etc. These offices can also provide the fencing for large pastoralist holdings. The process had already been initiated for several resettled Galesh in my field area and some others had requested for the benefit to be provided to them. They are given easy loans on comfortable terms for all kinds of purposes so that they could follow their ancestral occupation. They are also given priority for obtaining electricity and water services besides other facilities being provided by the government. Similar benefits were extended to all the pastoralists who had opted to shift out of the jungle to newer grasslands and homes. Yet, when some of the pastoralists refused to shift from their homes then legal action was taken and sometimes they were even forced to evict the area.

Goroghshekani – Annual Ceremonial Entry into the Grasslands: A Government promoted Event / Ceremony

The annual opening of the grasslands or pastures to the privately owned grazing animals like sheep, goats and cows is a government ordained event. Information about the date of the event is declared well in advance so that all Galesh are informed and are ready to transport their flock to the entrance pathways of the pastures. The Government provides many instructions through announcements, posters and banners for people to regularize grasslands. These regulations in the
opinion of the officials have been put in place for effective use of available grasslands and to better preserve the natural resources, which include the jungles, mountains, ecosystems, trees and waterways. Towards attaining this objective the Government has already ordained and established that the Galesh should stay three months only w.e.f. 1\textsuperscript{st} June every year and on completion should leave immediately or the army would have to enforce their evacuation from the area to prevent damaging the grasslands extensively. This event is called Ghoroghshekani.

Plate 4.1: Ghorogh Shekani ceremony in Savadku area

According to the Tabri calendar the term “Ghorogh Shekani” refers to a traditional Galesh ceremony in which the sheep owners take their herds of cattle and sheep to the pre-determined boundaries of common mountainous grasslands. The monitoring officials have retained the original ceremony but have predetermined the date on which the ritual as per the normative practice is to take place. This ceremony starts around 1\textsuperscript{st} of June. But a few days before the determined day the government sends an officer (usually an agriculture engineer) for checking the grasslands and confirming to the Galesh people the exact day for the ceremony. Grasslands are allotted by government for a total duration ranging from 90 to 100 days of actual habituation of the grasslands from the day of being opened for the shepherds. Some local authorities, elders and common people gather in the designated place and perform a ceremony to allow the Galesh herds of cattle and sheep to cross the border collectively into the common grasslands for grazing. Even though most of these pastoral nomadic people persisting with the traditional mode of economy are illiterate,
they fully comprehend the value of the certificate that is allotted to them every year on this day. Each herdsman has been allocated a certificate detailing the number of heads of cattle he is herding as also the grassland area he has been allocated. This ceremony usually ends with an address by the local leader or someone in authority. It is noteworthy that all owners of the sheep and cattle have the official deed for grazing their animals on the grasslands. The permission deeds go from the fathers to their children as a part of their inherited legacy. They are required to have these deeds or certificates renewed from the relevant authorities from time to time. Even though the ceremony of Ghorogh Shekani has moved from the realm of a sacred ritual to an official grazing license allocation ceremony—the fervor with which it was celebrated earlier continues to remain the same.

The ceremony commences with a reciting of the holy Koran and an old village bard stands reciting the verses of the holy Koran. After a reading of the Koran the ribbon is cut by a Galesh elder in the presence of Government officials and the army. With this is initiated the entry of the shepherds into the grasslands. Once the herds have crossed over to the grasslands the ceremony goes on. In the ceremony the Galesh recites local poems on nature at intervals between singing songs and playing the ‘Ney’ [a Galesh flute like musical wind instrument] as well as there are speeches by dignitaries. The ‘Ney’ is a flute like simple musical instrument played traditionally by the shepherds for calming his sheep.

Plate 4.2: Shepherd Playing ‘Ney’
The government approves the ceremony and also provides formal entry into the grasslands and ensures police security, while widespread coverage is given in the national newspapers and TV channels. Sometimes at the starting of the ceremony a ribbon is cut by the Chief Minister and then someone reads a passage from the holy Koran. Members of the Parliament (Majlis) have also been known to visit during the ceremony. After the formal inauguration, everybody takes breakfast in which they take tea, sweets, milk, honey and cream. After breakfast the ceremony continues with the co-coordinator talking about the next program pertaining to the closing of grasslands and pastures. Everybody in respect of the country sings the national anthem. The Chief Minister and his staff tell the local people about the benefits of the jungle and grasslands and importance of preserving these for maintaining balance in the biosphere. This ceremony in a way symbolizes the fostering of a relationship between the government and the common people. During one of the Ghorogh Shekani ceremonies attended by the researcher, the Manager from the Natural Resources Office had informed the people about the precious natural resources saying that of a total 51 thousand hectares, 45 thousand hectares were jungle and villages and 6000 hectares were grasslands in Laffor around the Alborz areas. However, the Galesh people who were using this grassland were constantly facing a problem because Babol, Savadku and Ghaemshahr have boundaries that overlap. Ghaemshahr has more grassland than both Babol and Savadku put together.

Plate 4.3: Researcher participating in the ceremony
Often at such ceremonies the Galesh shepherds give vent to their innermost sentiments through rhetoric, recitations, speeches, poems and songs when they express their pride in the crystal clear natural springs, streams and rivulets of the mountains. They vividly describe their traditional peaceful ways of life steeped in nature as also the bounty bestowed upon them by God for which they are highly appreciative and thankful.

**Galesh as experts of Animal Husbandry**

Animal husbandry is the first and primary livelihood of the Galesh while all other jobs are considered secondary. For them animal husbandry is not a temporary or even a seasonal form of livelihood. It is a way of life and it is what dictates their entire lifestyle. Whether it is summer or winter the main form of occupation for the Galesh canters around his animals. The location and base of his livelihood may, however, shift during winter to a different location and in summer to yet another location. If the total number of animals under his care is less, he tends to them with the support of his family. Small herds are often kept in individual residences but if the flock is larger than enclosures are especially made for them just outside of the village or the main living areas where they are strongly constructed.

Cattle and sheep are the most important flocks of the Galesh and rearing goats is a secondary occupation. Over and above these in some Galesh families there is also seen the presence of horses or mules. These households are regarded as more affluent then the others. These animals are used by the Galesh for their own personal use or are sometimes lent out to neighbours and kinsmen if required. The horse and mule are mainly used for conveyance and transporting of their tools and various materials. In the last few decades the respondents from different field site villages informed the researcher that there was a visible shift in the practice of cattle rearing in particular in terms of breeds that were used for providing dairy products. Some of these families were subsisting by selling milk and milk products and had experienced a gradual decrease in the quantum of milk and milk products. They decided to replace the local breeds of cattle with hybrid and inter-mixed forms of cattle for obtaining higher yields. This experiment had proven fruitful and they found it to be a more viable option economically.
Animal husbandry for the Gheslagh is a form of practice of care and other suitable practices that need to be taken up as per the requirements of the season. As the season progressively becomes colder they move towards the lower parts of the hilly slopes to nest their flock for the winter. Some of them even reach as far down to the beaches at the edge of the Caspian Sea from the heights in the mountains. Although the distance is not very great especially in a place like Ghaemshahr, the Galesh take their time and make the descent with their flocks gradually and steadily giving themselves and their flock plenty of time to acclimatize themselves to the comparatively cool climates and heights to the plain area and the warmer temperatures. Their descent is marked with a few stoppages [about four to five at least if not more] where they may rest their flock for as long as a month even. Their gradual descent from the heights of the mountain slopes also signifies their underlying concern for their environment. They are cautious enough to ensure that they do not overgraze the scarce pastoral grasslands in the lower reaches.

Sometimes in the plains areas, some Galesh families may spend the entire fall of winter and also the beginning of spring. They even hold out till the end of the rainy season in these encampments. It is in these habitats that most women of the tribe stay, looking after their children and taking care of any small horticulture or agriculture land they may have. These days majority of them stay back to send their children to school for formal education in Persian.

During the summer months the Galesh are mainly consumers. As they are away from the natural pastures they have to provide food for their flock, which proves to be an expensive exercise for them. Since the amount of milking during this period is the least and the possibility of making any milk products is also quite low, the Galesh have frugal means to make both ends meet. They subsist on the gardens, orchards and farms besides gathering some produce from the forests but their forages cannot meet the needs of their flocks. Thus, the Galesh have no other alternative except for feeding their animals different kinds of food locums like, dried grass, straw, beet dross and barn grain. As most of this material has to be bought they take up odd jobs to be able to generate some extra money and pay for the upkeep of their animals.
During the winter residence their animal flocks are in the stalls most of the time. Since the length of the days are short in winter and fall the flock are allowed to spend their time out of the stalls from 7 clock in the morning to 5 in the evening and if, on the other hand, there happens to be heavy rainfall or steady cold winds are blowing then the *Galesh* tend to bed down their flock and do not allow them to come out of their paddocks.

With the advent of spring the earth refreshes its natural cycle. This is indicative of the *Galesh* refreshing their cycle of geographic mobility. Some animals are restless and tired of the long, dreary winters and intuitively understand that it is time for immigration. The gradual greening of the earth’s surface and the replenished grasslands in the forest and mountain areas is initiated and gradually extended to the mountainside. Thus, in accordance with the natural phenomenon of change and growing grasses in the pastures the *Galesh* start their movement towards the heights. This passage is also covered in a phased manner just like the descent had been covered by passing several stages (2 to 4 stages). As during the descent the *Galesh* make stoppages on the way up the hills and at each stage they live for few days. This practice helps the animals and human beings both gradually to acclimatize themselves to the gradual gradient that they are climbing and there are no health hazards like breathlessness or high blood pressure as they slowly gain height in the mountain areas.

Plate 4.4: *Sereh in Yeylag*
The total achievement of the Galesh at the end of this entire exercise is that his flocks use the fresh pastures, become well fed subsequently increasing the quality of milk products during the summer. The summer residences, according to the Galesh, are natural and god-given. They normally do not build it. Another aspect of the summer residences is that some part of the flock is sent off along with a few of the shepherds to a prior earmarked location called the ‘Sereh’. The ‘Sereh’ is a certain special place allocated by Galesh for keeping and multiplying their flocks in summer. Each Sereh contains several small and simple buildings, which are called ‘Kelum’ (details discussed in the later part of the chapter) and are constructed on a flat surface having an adequate supply of pasture for their flock. Every several hectares of grasslands are dotted with such Sereh and Kelum and these are further used for providing and keeping milk products. They are also the resting places for the Galesh and used by them for keeping their tools and material things besides implements for tending to their flock along with reserves in each house like surrounding. There may be just 2 to 5 Kelums put together but each of them serves a specific goal. In these summer residences on the mountainsides the Galesh take their flocks to graze during the day and at night they take care of their flocks, in an open place on the Sereh.

During the day the flock are allowed to graze freely on the demarcated grassland area and at night they spend their time in a space that is well guarded. Also in many instances the surrounding environment is fenced in by stone and wood and dried branches to delineate the outside boundaries of this area so that none of the flocks can wander away, be lost or be carried away by predators like the fox and the wolf. Each of these flocks of sheep have four to five dogs to take care of them and to protect them from becoming easy bait for the wolves that prowl the mountain heights. Although the location of the Sereh and its environment and Kelums are in the possession of a single owner many of the Galesh share the privilege of keeping their flocks within any particular Sereh. Normally the method of operation for using the Sereh is mutual and cooperation is based on previous negotiation and agreement under the owner’s management. Gradually with the passage of years they get to know each other better and commonly tend to spend summer and spring with each other on a regular pre-ordained basis. At the end of summer they separate the flocks from each other, and each person takes his share of the accumulated milk products.
Plate 4.5: *Kelum, Yelaq for keeping the flocks safe*

*Sereh* is a common place for the *Galesh* to collect about 100 to 150 animal owners. They live together through the summer while residing in small rooms on the *Sereh* and taking care of their flocks. As a singular operational rule of the *Sereh* strangers are not allowed to come to these *Serehs* especially when the milking process is going on for fear of *chashm-e-zakhm* or the evil eye befalling upon the produce and something going wrong with it. The *Galesh* discourage the presence of all external elements in the *Sereh*. This is basically because they believe that external forces cannot be trusted and can easily harm their stock through casting an evil eye. They zealously guard their animals and products, as this is their key economic sustenance.

**A Nomads Life**

The dominant way of living among the *Galesh* is through the sustained practice of animal husbandry and theirs is a primarily pastoral economy. Some *Galesh* families are maintaining large flocks of sheep, lambs and cattle. As this is their full time occupation most of annual expenses are met through the supply of milk and milk products, selling of wool and even some part of the herd for the meat. As stated earlier these families have their own *Sereh* and some other equipment’s and facilities for regularly taking care of their flocks in the summer and winter residences. Some other co-habitants of the area who are poor and need employment as a worker offer to travel along with them for the payment of some wages agreed upon mutually.
Comparatively there are many families who have smaller animal and flock holdings and it is not economically viable for them to indulge in the maintenance of Gheslagh and yelaq during the winter and summer seasons. Average sheep holdings of families in the research sample varied from 30 to 600. To solve the problems of the pastoral of their animals the Galesh enter into a contractual arrangement with one of the Sereh owners. They give over their flock to the safekeeping of one common Sereh and again during the winter they separate their animals from the larger horde. Herdsman who are pastoralists and shepherds of flocks have the total responsibility over the herd. They are helped in the task of keeping the flocks safe and together with the help of one or two well trained sheep dogs. The dogs of the Galesh are very close to them and the Galesh too look after them because in the summer residence the Galesh shepherd goes out of the house in the morning and carries a small meal with him. He may eat this meal at the Sereh and then returns back to his home in the evening. But during the winter residence because of the short distance between Sereh and pasture and because of restriction on grasslands, availability of pastures for grazing the flocks become limited. Kelum are favourite abodes for the Galesh men. There is a specific order in which they live in the Kelum. And this order has remained unchanged through the centuries.

Plate 4.6: Making of Mast (Yoghurt)
Construction and spread of the Sereh

Although the Galesh of different areas of Gilan and Mazandaran know the word ‘Kelum’ it has different meanings for different people. In Savadku among the Galesh, the ‘Kelum’ is referred to a stall and stable. It is the place for the production of the milk products. It is also the place where the pastoralists relax and store their precious personal effects including pastoralist’s tools. Thus, the Kelum is a kind of covered building for humans or even animals, which is built in the Miyanband or forest areas and also in the high mountain areas. The Kelum is the larger habitation site comprising living spaces and the Sereh for keeping stocks. In the forest or Miyanband areas the Kelums are bigger and their numbers too are more. The Kelums of mountain areas are not used for keeping flock of sheep or even droves of cattle’s but they keep the flocks and droves outside the Kelums often in the open areas around the Sereh in the day and even at nightfall.

Plate 4.7: Kelum in Jamshidabad of Savadku (jungle area) 2011

Kelums of mountain areas are placed at a height and have the length of 5 to 8 meters and a width of 3 to 4 meters in the vicinity of the Sereh. During the field study it was observed that a flat land with the approximate coverage of 5×3 to 8×4 square meters are fenced by stones and 1.5-meter height of Kelum is made. Only stones were used for building it. Stones have to be placed skilfully one upon the other and it requires special training. The Galesh almost always does the construction work
without any support from other helpers at the site. Usually the thickness of these riprap stones is 60 to 80 cm. After attaining a height of 1.5 meters it is covered with branches of trees and boards and roof is constructed with a wooden plank called a ‘lat’. The Lat is a small square board made of wood and the roof of these houses is covered by it for preventing the blowing away or weighing down of the roof during storms. Some small and big pieces of stones are placed strategically on it. The approximate dimensions of the lat are 40 × 15 cm and its thickness is 2 cm. This is designed with the intent of warding off heavy rains in the Caspian Sea areas.

The roofs of all buildings even the Kelums are slanting to prevent rainwater from getting accumulated. The architecture of the Kelums is very basic and simple and the material required for its construction is equally simple and easily obtained from the natural surroundings like stones, wood and lat. The directions of the kelums are determined according to the place of setting up of the Sereh, in such a way that even heavy winds and rain cannot easily damage these structures. The open space around the Sereh is called the ‘Malge’. Generally a Malge will have 40 to 50 flocks of sheep roaming around freely. It is regarded by the Galesh as a resting and safe place.

The Kelum, the Malge and the Sereh are also the places for making and storing the milk products. In addition to sheep and cattle, Kelums also shelter two to four strong dogs for guarding the flocks against the danger of wild animals like the wolf and the bear. There is a special segment of the Sereh called the Vare Lee where the lambs are kept away from their mothers so that they may not drink their entire mother’s milk. Therefore they are segregated in an enclosure covered with branches of trees to protect the little lambs. The duration of usage of the lee is between 1 to 2 months. The Vare lee is made in a circular form wherein it is covered by thin but thickly laid out branches. There is only a small hole in it instead of a door for taking out and putting in the lambs. The Vare Lee does not have a roof covering because it is built right next to the malge and the Kelum and is guarded by strong dogs.

**Division of Labour, Coordination in the Sereh**

Sereh is an ideal example of work solidarity that small-scale pastoral nomadic communities experience while making collective endeavours to take care of their primary means of subsistence. The practice of this kind of community living and collective care of their herds has been in operation for more than a thousand years.
Sereh is an exclusive domain for men clearly indicating the division of labour that exists in this pastoral nomadic community. The men residing in the Sereh are in the age group of 15 to 70 years, clearly demonstrating that the adolescent and adult males are sent to Sereh as part of the accepted normative practice. In places where cattle are kept close to the homestead, women are seen taking care of these animals and I also occasionally observed them milking these cows. Women do not participate in collective economic activities because of Islamic tradition of sex segregation in communal spaces. One or two persons are given the duty of scavenging for and bringing wood from the forest to the Sereh for purposes of heating and boiling of the milk on the boiling kiln as well as the churned sour milk to obtain clarified butter besides the normal everyday cooking on the earthenware ovens.

Plate 4.8: Old Galesh woman preparing Ash

Most of these workers are usually the younger lot or the eager teenagers who have the energy and the enthusiasm to run around and get the tasks done. Similarly the teenagers are given the task of grazing the calves while the older and more experienced hands take on the job of grazing the other animals and especially the cattle. The elders, however, closely monitor all activities. There is also well segregated division of labour in these groups of men working together. One of them is made responsible for arranging food and cooking it for the entire Sereh community. Another person is entrusted with the tasks of processing the milk and milk products. Most of them, however, collectively take turns at milking the cows twice a day. One
of the Galesh who has had more experience becomes responsible for the daily processing of making yoghurt and making butter and is also responsible for allocating specific task to each member of the Sereh.

Along with these responsibilities there is the most important errand of micro managing the relationships between different members of such diverse age groups within the confines of a restricted space. In addition he also has to undertake task of rapport building with the nearby village or town and create a market for the products manufactured in the Sereh. One particular group in the Sereh is assigned the task of rapport building with the neighbouring villages.

The pastoral nomadic communities were separated from the farming communities by some estimates almost nine thousand years ago. Studies on pastoral nomadic communities suggest that even when pastoral groups accumulated political power and were often seen as plunderers of the agricultural wealth (as cited in the review of literature), they continued to maintain somewhat fluctuating trade relations with the settled agriculturists. The products traded often included exchange of milk and milk products with grains, salt and other day-to-day requirements. There is a popular saying among the Galesh that says *Adem Bimare Xaxer Vune, Bihemsayye Navune* that means ‘it is possible to have a Galesh home without a mother or a sister but it cannot go on without neighbours and associates’. Two things that emerge from this proverb are that women remain marginal to the economy of the society and economy survives on good neighbourly relations, as they are the primary consumers of the products sold by the Galesh.

The Sereh function like a production unit and is quite comparable to a present day manufacturing and marketing unit with the difference that the trade relations in this context are akin to in certain ways to the system of barter. The present day industrial units are not required to maintain face-to-face interactions with their customers. For successful marketing by the members of the Sereh, it is essential to establish a personal bond with the future or probable customer. These transactions may take place on a regular basis or may even be occurring every day. It is a common sight in most of the field sites to see a person bringing food like vegetables and other requirements to the Sereh by mule or taking butter and dried milk to the neighbouring villages or town.
Functioning of the Sereh

In a large herd the cattle are sent out right after the milking has been done and they return in the evening or late afternoon for the second milking. The animals are tended by some of the younger Galesh shepherds in the surrounding meadows where they graze peacefully throughout the day. Once the herd has left the other members of the Sereh get busy with the tasks of cleaning and preparing the Sereh for the evening. They tend to the milk that has been collected and do the required processing for making butter and buttermilk as well as clarified butter. They also make a few other products, which are popular in the local market. The villagers look forward to the seasonal advent of the Galesh in the Sereh so that they can get many of their milk and milk products from them besides fresh meat. Teenaged members of the Sereh are trusted with the responsibility of taking the herds out but if they are not back on time in the evening, then elders will go looking for them. The level of responsibility and accountability is the key to the success of any Sereh.

The head or leader of each of the Sereh is called the Sar Galesh. He is like the CEO of a large organization ensuring day-to-day functioning and routine marketing of all the products. There may not be a particular focus on profit like a modern day organization, as the Galesh economy continues to be a subsistence economy but the firmness and the ordered design by which they run the Sereh can be a match to any present day successful enterprise. The Sar Galesh is also directly responsible for the upkeep and maintenance of all the tools and implements and he is also the chief authority to decide on the pricing policy of the products produced in the Sereh. All the others give him deference, as the Sar Galesh is often the most experienced and may be even the oldest member of that particular Sereh. He maintains law and order within the organization and is the ultimate voice in any dispute reprisal.

Along with the Saar Galesh the general everyday management of the Sereh is in the hands of the Selar who is designated as internal manager of the Sereh. In addition to ensuring that all tasks are being conducted in time and with precision and regularity he is also responsible for maintaining the records of milk products and the ratio in which they are allocated to each member of the Sereh. He is also in-charge of paying the Galesh their salary and sending the food items to the Charvedar or to Malge and other homesteads. The Mashaken is the person looking after the total dairy
process of making yoghurt, cheese, butter and clarified butter besides other milk products. The collection of drinking water as well as water for all other needs like cooking etc. is the responsibility of the Mashaken. The duty of storing the morning milk belongs to the Doopach, and storing of the evening milk duties are performed by the Pelapoch. The Selar assigns these duties to them. At the time of milking sheep all of them except Pelapach are in attendance in the Bargloo or the enclosure to milk sheep.

As stated earlier the Sereh is a world in its own. It has a well articulated in which specific responsibilities are assigned to individuals at different levels of hierarchies. The work is allocated in accordance with a defined charter by the head of the encampment and all the payments or the remunerations are made to the Galesh according to what had been agreed at the outset. The tasks are not necessarily commiserated in monetary terms as per the labour invested. Every member of the Sereh is contracted individually and the terms of the contract also vary from individual to individual, but once committed the contract is regarded as sacrosanct. Sereh is a summer resting place for the flocks in a high mountain areas and the time of stopping there is less than 3 months, thus the shepherd wants to take the maximum advantage of the limited opportunity and will not generally negotiate hard for monetary or any other form of compensation.

**Tools and Implements inside the Sereh**

The chief function of the Sereh is to look after the animals and to make milk products and is order to ensure a steady supply they have to keep in stock a few implements as essentials for the manufacturing process. Given below is a description of some of the tools and instruments commonly used at the Sereh:

i. Murs: It is a metallic pot, which is made of copper and has a volume of less than 10 litres and is used for milking sheep and cows. This pot has the form of an earthen jar and its height is about 50 cm.

ii. Tal: The volume of this storage pan is one or one and a half times more than the murs. It is meant to store about 10 to 15 litres of milk or yoghurt. Copper workers also make Tal like the murs. Sometimes, it is also used for milking too because the mouth of both tal and murs are open and wide and the body
is long for containing the liquid and are regarded by the locals as equally suitable for milking.

iii. Kalchek: it is a pot made of earth or mud and is used for making cream and yoghurt from the top milk as well as surplus milk that has not been sold. The name kalchuk is a combination of two words that is kala + chek. The ‘chek’ denotes the size as being small and the ‘Kala’ is the pot. Thus, Kalchek denotes a small Kala or earthenware pot.

Plate 4.9: Tal (Shirdon): Utensil use for milking Cow.

iv. Kala: Kala is a big earthen pot, which has a volume four times that of the Murs. Its total capacity is a little less than one hundred litres. The Galesh make yoghurt in the Kala and Kalchek and keep the yoghurt stored in it before making the butter when it turns sour and has to be churned. The Kala is bigger than the Kalchek and in each side there are one or two handles for moving it. The handles are placed nearer the mouth to facilitate pouring out of the fluids.

v. Doshan or Telem: Discussed in increasing order of size the Doshan can be described as the largest of all the pots described so far. This big earthen pot has a height of 1.5 meters or more. It has 4 handles, which are located on 3 sides of the pot. The Doshans are so heavy and huge that covering and transporting them is a huge task.
vi. **Using the Doshan**: As this vessel is several times the size of the *Kala* the *Galesh* pour the sour yoghurt of all the stored *Kala* into it. Then two people of the *Sereh* sit down on either side of the *Doshan* and each of them takes the handles strongly and firmly in their hands and shakes the *Doshan* steadily and continuously. This churning process goes on till the formation of butter occurs. The *Galesh* continue removing the butter and churning the remaining yoghurt till all the butter has been formed and has been collected after rigorous churning. After taking out all the butter from the *Doshan*, the liquid or buttermilk, which remains, is a mixture of yoghurt and water (churned sour milk). This is used as it is or in the dried form as an addition to milk or in the form of cheese. This process of churning the milk is called ‘*Doshan Zadan*’. It is a labour intensive exercise and it is a tedious process. Most of the *Galesh* who work on it become tired and feel bruised all over especially in their shoulders. They have to flex the muscles of their hands and shoulders to relax intermittently all through the process of the *Doshan Zadan*. 

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Plate 4.10: A Galesh man preparing Telem or Doshan
Naming flocks

At the beginning of this thesis an attempt was made at trying to arrive at a suitable explanation for defining the actual meaning and derivation of the word *Galesh*, while several alternatives were offered, for the *Galesh*, for the people of the community it connotes ‘men who spend some time in the *Sereh* with their flocks of both cattle and or sheep’. The researcher on the basis of observations in the field has decoded them into two specific categories.

1) The *Gesfend Galesh*: These are pastoralists who take care of sheep and do shepherding and are divided into many different kinds.

2) The *Gu Galesh*: These are the pastoralist who take care of the growing herd of cattle, sheep and goats. Depending upon the animals that they are tending these *Galesh* are further divided into the following categories. Those tending to the goats are the *Bez Galesh*. The sum total of their activities is keeping, maintaining and rearing goats and steadily adding to the size of the overall herd. In fact just like the *Galesh* have been segregated on the basis of their role in tending to a particular flock the animals too have been categorized into a variety of terminologies so that the *Galesh* knows exactly what he is talking about whenever he has to discuss the strength and virtue of his particular
flock. In fact the long lonely nights under the summer starry skies gives the Pastoralist plenty of time to acquaint himself with the characteristic of virtually each member of his herd.

Some of the categories proposed by the Galesh for their animals are:

1. *Rizemal*: it is generally a term referred to all the sheep and goats in a “small flock”.
2. *Vare*: it refers to the age of the lambs from birth to about six months of age.
3. *Kevi*: it refers to lambs who are between 6 months to 18 months old.
4. *Mah gesfend*: refers to the female sheep of 18 months and above and that is physically matured to mate and have progeny.
5. *Nar-e-Gesfend*: is the male sheep and depending upon the age is further categorized as follows:
   - The *Nar-e-Kevi* refers to the male sheep which is between 6 months to 18 months old.
   - The *Narparneh* is the male sheep between 1.5 years to 2 year olds.
   - The *Pilenar or pela* literally denotes ‘big’. This term is for the sheep that are very strong.

Every member of the *Sereh* knows his duties and responsibilities towards the upkeep of his herd. They are further classified on the basis of tasks assigned to them:

a. *Vare Galesh*: the term denotes a pastoralist and shepherd whose duty is keeping and growing lambs. *Vare Galesh* must be a skilful person. Since he is working with several lambs of different age groups. He has to have veterinary skills and must understand the moods of the animals to comprehend any other or troubling issues that these sheep may have. His errands are furthered with the young lambs. He must be aware and adept at feeding the animals as per their requirements. If the *Vare Galesh* is a highly experienced person then the numbers of deaths of lambs are minimized and economic loss to the shepherd is minimum.

b. *Kevi Galesh*: These are the pastoralists who take the *Kevi* sheep to the meadows around the *Sereh* for grazing and have comparatively lesser responsibility then the *Vare Galesh*. 
c. Poralmal Galesh: He is given the chore of looking after the sheep, which have gone dry and are not giving milk anymore. These sheep are incapable of bearing children and are called ‘Poram Gusfend’. Therefore Poralmal Gusfend is a pastoralist who tends to the sheep that cannot be milked any more and having lost their economic worth are not as important for the Galesh.

d. Nar Galesh: This particular Galesh takes care of the male sheep, which are bred for their ability of coupling with female sheep for bringing good stock of animals into the flock.

The classification presented above points to the scientific management of the Sereh by these traditional pastoral nomads. Their knowledge is based on years of training and wisdom that they inherited in the form of their oral tradition. To dismiss these economies as simple and dated reflects the arrogance of so-called learned ‘men’ that claim that these economies are ecological disasters.

**Nuance of Cattle Rearing**

After sheep the most important share of animals reared by the Savadku Galesh is a cattle. If the number of the cattle holding of a family is low it is not necessary to take them either to a mountainside, meadows or Sereh. While the Galesh keep cattle regularly, they maintain them close to their homesteads by making stables and stalls in the gardens and besides their own houses through the year. As a necessary part of their animal husbandry terminologies, the Galesh have named the cattle according to their sexes and ages, and have categorized them as follows:

a) **Kuloo**: is the calf from its birth to attaining 1 year of age.

b) **Demes**: usually refers to the calf, which is from 1 to one and half years old. If this calf is a female it is called Mahdemes and if it is a male, then the calf is called Kalmes.

c) **Rameshe**: it refers to cattle, which are between one and a half to three years old, and if they are female they are called Merumshe and if it is a bull calf it is called Kalrumse.

d) **Talem**: it refers to the cows that are between 3 to 4 years and cannot bear offspring any further.

e) **Kalga**: it refers to a non-stag bull from 3 years old to the end of his life.

f) **Keramej**: it represents a stag, which is less than 4 years old.

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g) Verza: it means a stag, which is more than 4 years.

h) Sirgav: it denotes milking cattle.

The difference between kalga and verza is that the verza is stag and just some years ago were used for ploughing and helping in tending the fields. However, the kalga is not a stag and is used for breeding and cross-matching of the cows. Their meat is also sold. The Galesh gesfund or sheep are of several different kinds; the number of Galesh cattle is limited. Even the categories created for the caretakers are few. One of them is the Kuloo Galesh or a pastoral that is skilled in the upkeep and care of the vulnerable young calves. He must be skilful enough to provide tender and gentle care to the young animals. He has to be aware of procedures that help these cattle adapt to seasonal variations. The other category is that of the Dumus Galesh or someone whose responsibility it is to grow and keep the Dumus (calf 18 months to 3 years old) safe and healthy. Thus, he too has to have certain specialized skills.

Then there is the ‘Gar Galesh’ or the pastoralists of cattle who have the basic difference from the Gesfund Galesh in that they do not practice nomadism. They take their cows in the morning after milking them and remain with them in the Sereh while they do other things. Then in the afternoon, when the cows come back they are milked again, and then settled for the night in the sheds. The work of the Gesfund Galesh is specialized and keeps them occupied through the day. Gesfund Galesh represents a stage in the transition of the Galesh economy. From transhumance, the community is slowly becoming agro pastoralist (Blench 2001:13). According to Blenc: Agro pastoralists may be described as settled pastoralist who cultivates sufficient areas to feed their families from their own crop production. Agro pastoralist hold land rights, use their own or hired labour to cultivate land and grow staples. While livestock are still valued property, their herds are on an average smaller than other pastoral systems, possibly because they no longer solely rely on livestock and depend on a finite grazing area around their village, which can be reached within a day. Agro pastoralists make greater investment in housing and other local infrastructure and if their herds become large, they often send them away with more nomadic pastoralists.

In Mazandaran and Savadku, large numbers of Galesh families have become agro pastoralist. Many of them have children studying in neighbouring cities and the coming generations prefer to work in the cities but do not want to give up their rights on the land and other benefits that come with their traditional status of being a
pastoral nomad. The tradition of hiring poor Galesh to work as shepherds has gained prominence in the last few decades.

In this context, it is important to understand the value attached to agriculture and to analyse the importance attached to agriculture and horticulture vis-a-vis pastoralism. The following narrative details the rituals, festivities and ceremonies associated with the agricultural cycle demonstrating the context in which these observations are located.

**Galesh Practices in the Process of Planting ‘Shaltuk’ or Paddy**

Paddy plantation among the Galesh is an elaborate process that accompanies several rituals, festivities and ceremonies, demonstrating the importance attached to it by the Galesh. There is elaborate preparation before the plantation of paddy. One of the most painstaking and repetitive processes is called ‘Ambard’ by which a seedling is nurtured and in colloquial terminology it is called ‘Koper’. Galesh normally use Vermicompost and organic manure for their crops. To this manure rich earth and water are added and to soften the land, feet do mulching. Mulching is a collective and cooperative effort in which neighbouring farmers come to each other’s farms and help prepare the land. This activity is part of the several processes before paddy plantation. When the land is good and soft then only is the rice sapling planted or technically the paddy is transplanted. ‘Theemae Bunj’ is the name given in the local dialect to the process of paddy plantation.

Even the process of the preparation of the rice seedlings prior to plantation is very elaborate. The rice grains are first sprouted in a mixture of water and honey. Sprouted grains are spread over the soil with a practiced hand in a thin layer. The farmer waits for the fine network of fibres that form subsequently. Once the saplings appear they are transplanted in the fields. The process in Galesh dialect is described as ‘Phisubaiten’. The sprouting process is called ‘Seou’ or literally ‘three days of water’. After 15 days the honey is totally washed out. If any part of the honey remains, the Galesh farmers warn that the paddy will turn yellow. Washing away the honey ensures that the paddy stock and leaves are a rich green. The sprouting plants grow up to seven inches tall. Galesh calls the saplings stage the ‘Rasou’. This period is perilous for the farmer because birds tend to eat away the seeds. They make ‘Adem Raseh’ or scare crows and put them in the fields to scare away birds. The other danger is from Khook (Persian) or Khég (Galesh) wild deer along with wild boars or pigs that tend to severely damage the crops by trampling about in the fields. The farmers protect against them at night by tying torches made up of old clothes and waste items.
These torches emit a lot of smoke, which scares the wild pigs and other smaller wild animals away. The entire plantations process comes with several tribulations and a popular proverb in the region is *Asiyou bigard navouneh* that entails ‘that only hard work can beget results’.

**Process of Shaltuk Rice Growing**

During the entire process the farmer stays in the field, as he is afraid that some harm may come to his crops if he is not vigilant. Since the *Galesh* way of working is through cooperation and mutual consent they divide the territory between themselves and one person is made responsible for looking after 10 hectares of farmland where the crop is growing. Paddy plantation is a community activity and both men and women are engaged in it. While planting, they either bend over or sit on their haunches for the transplanting process called ‘*Nesha*’. While they are transplanting the ladies sing to lighten the burden of a laborious activity. This form of singing is called ‘*Khundesh*’. The songs may be joyful or full of comic innuendo or even sometimes long sad ones describing the hardships of the *Galesh* way of life.

While the women are singing there is one who raises her voice in chorus as a lead singer. She is called the ‘*khallevang*’. The person in charge of the work being done provokes the workers by warning them every now and then by saying, “If you don’t work hard you will be stung by honey bees and your limbs will hang uselessly by your sides”. Women also sing ‘*Taranae*’ or popular songs while the transplanting process is going on. The songs sung by women often express their ecstasies and agonies. The most popular among them are songs expressing patriarchal compulsions of patri-locality compelling women to leave their natal home after marriage. Some of these renditions are:

“*My mother has married me off to another place (exogamy) she has sent me far away I do not like this place*”.

“I prefer men from my own home place; in fact I like the man who has employed us to do this work”.

Single men and women listen to such ‘*Taranae*’ and often add their own soulful music with the words, “I shall save what I earn here for my marriage”.

Some mother’s sentiments are reflected in the song of praise she is singing about her daughter, “I like the fact that my girl is putting in the seedlings and wearing a tucked up loose, pants (*Shalwar*). Her face is also beautiful”.

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Rice cultivation in most rice growing communities is a cultural and cumulative experience and for *Galesh* in particular, they carry their instinct for cooperation from their pastoral tradition as narrated above. One can observe this even in the following undertakings linked to rice growing and harvesting. Rice cultivation in most rice growing communities is a cultural and cumulative experience and for *Galesh* in particular, they carry their instinct for cooperation from their pastoral tradition as narrated above. One can observe this even in the following undertakings linked to rice growing and harvesting.

![Plate 4.12: A paddy field along with the rice factory](image)

**Eakkal zani, Dekal zani, Sekal Zani**

The above terminology is for the number of times the farmer replaces the grain that has either gone bad, has become rotten or is scarce and is giving signs of not being able to sustain a healthy crop. The first round of inspection by the farmer and his associates either from the family or other experts from the community is called ‘*Ekalzani*’. They examine the sprouted crop and give their opinion. The farmer replaces the grain in that part of the land where the first inspection shows that there is scope for replacement. The second round of inspection is done after a few days again and is called ‘*Dekalzani*, and if required the third round of inspection is also done and is referred to as ‘*Saekalzani*’. Indigenous knowledge of farming permits sapling replacement only up to three times. Traditional knowledge systems have perfected the ethno science of agriculture in accord with the ecological surroundings and varying climatic changes. The *Galesh* farmer like several other indigenous farming communities has mastered the process of paddy growing.

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One of the most important requirements of paddy cultivation is to retain water for the young saplings. For this purpose boundaries are made to keep the water inside. The water is not allowed to become stale or rancid or even salty. Another important component of healthy paddy crop is the process of weeding away useless plants that may come up along with the rice crop. This is referred to in the area as ‘Vegin’. Weed removal is an on-going process to ensure that the crop gets all the nutrition and it is not wasted because of the weeds. The weeding does not stop till the harvest.

In Galesh dialect in the Mazandaran province, the entire process of rice cultivation is distinctively described by certain terms and these are: ‘Sekkepar’ that defines the paddy after one month when the stem of the paddy is yellowish in colour. ‘Jeftepar’ implies growth of the seeds on the stalk – in an alternately placed pattern. The seeds are formed inside. This is when the plant is called ‘Digh’. After this is the ‘Gharal’ stage when seeds enlarge. ‘Pakesar’; is the stage when the paddy ripens totally. But it is still green. ‘Naza’ is the stage when the rice grains become fat and sweet and strong. Finally the ‘Khushae’ or bushels are hanging down. Once these are sighted the Galesh believe that harvesting would have to be initiated within another 10 days.

**Harvesting**

The local tradition was to harvest with a hand held sickle or ‘Dareh’. The Galesh farmers had specific terminology for everything related to their favourite subject of farming. They cut the stalks in bunches of ten at a time and keep them away till they form a ‘Meghal’ or a bunch or sheaf. The 8-10 Sheaf are then tied together for drying for 3-4 days. These bunches are called ‘khasoo’. All ‘khasoo’ put together are called a ‘Khar’. Some of the commonly used implements in the harvesting process are the ‘Lefo’ or long handled rake like implement for clearing away the stalk remains from the seeds that have been separated. It is also used for pulling out hay kept in storage for the cattle in winter. The other instrument is the ‘fiveh’ or thick broom like implement for brushing away the husk from the rice and separating the good rice from the bad.
Only recently the farmers are using tractors and tillers. The harvester combines are also doing harvesting but these can be undertaken only by the affluent Galesh farmers in particular those receiving supplementary income from other sources or from their children settled in towns. Even though much of the earlier ways of doing rice cultivation are under pressure, one significant attribute stands out and that is the spirit of collective enterprise. Galesh continue to do so irrespective of compelling forces of technology and state sponsored ‘modernization’. Over the years this threatened community has evolved mechanisms that can be envy of any community in times of scarce resources. The ceremony of Mirab that describes a well-organized concept of water distribution at the time of plantation of paddy is an inspiring example.

Plate 4.13: Instruments use in Farming (the first one is Gharbal and the second is Dareh)

Plate 4.14: Harvesting activity or karzani

Plate 4.14: Harvesting activity or karzani
Ceremony of Mirab

Division of water is in the hands of the ‘Master of Waters’ – a self imposed restriction to facilitate equitable distribution from scarce water resources. Among the Galesh there is a special arrangement for the sharing of this scare water source so that all the farmers may be equally benefitted. The people take water from a common source like a stream or rivulet that has been constructed specially to bring the water to their lands. This arrangement of taking water by turns is called the Panji or ‘Rule of Five’ Thus, Panji is comprised of five landowners who have their lands close to each other and on the same side of the stream. They are called the ‘Panji Bazuan’ that means those who are entitled to share that source of water. One of the members is selected to be the ‘Master’ who ensures that the waters are diverted once the fields have had their adequate share. He does this easily by placing a mud mound and diverting the flow of the water to the other side. He is responsible for assuring that everyone gets a fair share of the precious resource. The master is also called the ‘Mir Ab‘ or ‘Master of the Waters’ and all the farm owners pay him a fair remuneration. The remuneration he is paid is usually in kind in the form of grain that is produced and is called the ‘Gharardad’. He is also responsible for reminding the farmers whether it is time to initiate the transplanting of the paddy saplings. For this he observes the crop output, the land softness and the change in weather conditions. But over and above all he too consults the Farmers’ calendar: He studies the Galesh calendar (details of fascinating Galesh calendar discussed in the next chapter) and also deliberates with all the farmers he is working with to see if the time is just right or not for transplanting paddy.

The Taqveem – e – Ghadeem or (‘lunar calendar) are the ancient calendars consulted for each phase of the paddy growing processes. When the Sun, Moon and Earth are in alignment it is considered a bad time for the paddy grower because there is the common fear that ‘shaltuk’ or the rice grains will be struck by the evil eye (Chashm-e-Zakhm) which may damage or harm the crops. It is a common belief that the shells of the rice grains are ready to cocoon the earthworms at such a time. In Tabri, ‘Nas’ signifies bad while ‘khub’ signifies all that is good and the quality of the day will be decided as per their taqveem or calendar. The Galesh also believe that whenever there are strong winds there would be much damage to the standing grain. They believe that they are growing their crops under the graceful powers of God. Thus, when such threatening winds arise they are called ‘Binj Ozar Darneh‘. They are
advised not to be afraid of strong winds, as the wind velocity is a good omen for testing the strength of the standing crop.

There is a Galesh belief that says: if a ‘Seyyed’ initiates the harvesting then there would be ‘barkat’ or great bounty in the total harvest. They also believe that the sage is bestowed with Sabuke (pious) hands. Once he initiates the process there will be prosperity. If the sage fails to bestow the crop, then the common superstition is that the owner may die even before the crop is harvested. It is a common belief among the Galesh that if the harvest is good it is probably because the Prophet himself had walked in that part of the farm and it was his blessing that had made the farm obtain such a bumper harvest.

**The Jashn-e-Kharman**

This marks the onset of harvesting. In earlier times it was also called Bardasht-e-Mahsol or the time of collection of tax on the produce or grain being harvested. The above are two allied ceremonies that may seem similar but they vary from each other. The 23rd of September marks the initiation of the Jashn-e-Kharman while the national and ancient ceremony of Mehregan begins on the 16th of September.

Threshing of paddy and wheat is done with the help of horses and oxen. The Galesh farmer has a ‘Kharman’ area allocated on his land for threshing. The ‘Kharman’ is a threshing place where the crop is laid on the ground and the animals pound it with their hooves. The ‘Kofa kharman’ is the ritual payment made to the person who provides the horses used for walking around and helping in the de-husking of the paddy under their hooves. ‘Khar’ is a rough broom made of paddy stalks, which the horse owner uses to push the grains under the hooves of the horses so that the de-husking process is facilitated. The pushing of the un-husked rice under the hooves of the horses is called ‘charbidar’ process. The horses are made to walk around collected mounds of un-husked rice for hours and while the sweeping of the de-husked rice is done to one side and their separation from the chaff is done with the help of the wind, the grain is poured down from large colanders onto the earth. The Galesh follow the tradition of ‘Kharman’ that denotes collective voluntary participation in all community undertakings. There is no money involved in ‘Kharman’. The word ‘Mehregan’ also means ‘mohabbat’ or love and the end of September begins what is commonly known as the – month of ‘mehar’ – or and entire month of Divine blessings also renowned as Jashn-e-Mehregan.
One of the founding principles of ethnographic research was to document ‘dying cultures’ or to ‘salvage’ those cultures that were part of the origin of human civilizations and are on the verge of extinction for posterity. I do not think that when I started documenting the material and non-material cultural traits of this vibrant population the reasons for collecting and documenting their ethno-history were very clear to me. The traditions did not appear exotic to me it differed from my Persian roots. My curiosity wanted to capture it and encapsulate it. Having spent more than five years with the community, whose exact demographic count still remains elusive to me the vitality for documenting their heritage, is becoming relatively clear to me.

There is a story of civilizations built into their cultural and economic history. It brings forth the reasons that helped this nomadic pastoral / transhumance economy survive for centuries. It is under immense pressure now, there is state and political pressure for ‘settling down’, there is international pressure of environmental agencies putting the responsibility of restoration of ecological balance on these children of ecology itself, and then there are aspirations of the younger members of the community itself wanting to ‘move on’. The next section of this chapter is essentially trying to view this enigma recalling some narratives from the field that document these paradoxes and contradictions.

**Whither Galesh Economy? Debates from the Field**

Iran today stands at number 39th in terms of its Industrial development and is classified by the UN agencies as a ‘semi-developed’ nation. According to the International Monetary Fund, Iran is a ‘transition economy’. The following Table partially demonstrates the state of present day Iranian Economy:

**Table 4.1: Iranian Economy: Some Facts (Financial Year 2013)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Currency</th>
<th>1 toman (super unit) = 10 Iranian rial (IRR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 $ = 35000 Iranian rial or 3500 toman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inflation (CPI)</td>
<td>37.5% July 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>18.7% living below $11 / day (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below poverty line</td>
<td>3.1 living below $2 / day (2006)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour force</td>
<td>25.7 million (2010 east.); Although there is a great shortage of skilled labour the total labour force is 25.7 million strong.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>12.3% according to the Statistical Centre of Iran (April 2011 – March 2012)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Average net $500 / month / person (2010)

Salary $930 /month / family (including cash subsidies) (2012)

Main Industry Manufactured goods, pharmaceuticals, home appliances, electronics, telecom, energy, power, textiles, construction, cement and other construction materials, food processing (particularly sugar refining and vegetables oil production), ferrous and non-ferrous metal fabrication, arrangements.

Ease of Doing Business Rank (in the world) 145th (2013)

* The Iranian rial lost more than 40% of its value between December 2011 and April 2012. The central bank’s interest rate is 21%, and the national rates has climbed to 22% in 2012, 10% higher than in 2011. According to the Central Bank of Iran the Gap between the rich and the poor narrowed because of monthly subsidies but the trend could reverse if high inflation persists. At 2013 rates one USD was equal to 32,000 Rial and 3200 Taman.

The question that I am asking in this context is where do the present day Galesh residents of Mazandaran province stand in this structure of economy, where there is specific tilt towards industrialization and in the absence of strong affirmative policies for sustaining traditional economies this fragile community is immensely threatened.

I started writing this chapter by using the noun serendipity and teamed it up with survival-two key constituents of the argument being put forward by the surviving Galesh resident of the Mazandaran province. I have deliberately not used the defining terminology of nomad, pastoral nomads, transhumance or even agro-pastoralists. Galesh economy today is at a threshold as is evident from the narratives from the field in which arguments on the one side are strongly in favour of sustaining their cultural economy. For them it was not only a way of earning a livelihood but the essence of their very existence and survival. Many would attribute their survival to sheer good luck and the fact that against all adversity, they have continued to sustain their traditional lifestyle. A way of life that was rooted in rituals, in cooperative existence, in sharing without greed as reflected in several Galesh proverbs that teach people to live without greed. One of the most important things that should be mentioned in here is a Taqhveem (the Tabri Calendar) that defined not only the pathways for their mobility but also the root to serendipity. To substantiate this journey few representative case studies from the field are being cited to support this premise.
Case study-1

Ahmed Eskandari is a 75 years old respondent. He said that he was born in Cherat like his father and grandfather before him. He was sure that his family had been living there for the past six generations. He lives in Anand during the three months of summer and then goes to Babolsar. This is generally because the weather becomes rainy and snowy during the cold season and it is not possible for them to live there. He pays an amount in riel that is equivalent to about $200 to some family or individual to maintain his house and the sheep during this period. Once it starts snowing most of the residents’ head towards the city. The person whose family has been contracted for looking after his homestead is named Reza, and he is content to live there during the winter season. Like many other affluent Galesh families, Hadi Rezaei is maintaining two homes. One in Baghertanghe, in a part of Babolsar city and the other is in Anand village. He disclosed that he paid equivalent to $180 in Iranian currency every year to a shepherd from Babol to take care of nearly 700 sheep that he owns. Ahmed is only interested in sheep herding. He is not interested in farming or maintaining a garden or growing trees or flowers. He is not familiar with the Tabari calendar and has never used it for pastoral practises.

Case-Study -2

Ali Tila is a 56 year old respondent and lives in Bikar Ayyesh village. His ancestors came to Mazandaran five generations ago. They were pastoral and came from Veresk. He has two cows and around one hundred sheep. He vented his anger at the government because the government was importing Hoginer sheep. He believed that these sheep were infested with some peculiar diseases. They infected other sheep in the herd and because of it many people have lost their sheep. He had also lost 35 sheep to this strange epidemic. He wanted that the government should support pastoralists like him to take better care of their animals. There were 22 Galesh households in his neighbourhood and all of them were upset with the state authorities because government was not offering any affirmative programmes for the welfare of these traditional pastoral nomadic communities, while forcing ‘us to change our traditional lifestyle’. He further lamented that their children were not interested in pursuing the traditional profession and were gradually moving to the cities in search of jobs.
Life was getting increasingly difficult for the pastoralists. There was much the government could do to make their lives better said Mohseni. He felt even provision of good roads could help them. Presently the road was out of repair and this made their transfer of Sheep from home to pasture and back very difficult. He said that the sheep were the main source of meat in the area and if the government did not help the Galesh there would soon be a dearth of fresh sheep meat in the markets. This was imminent because the Galesh themselves were struggling to make both ends meet. If there were not many more considerate schemes and polices of the government, the Galesh would altogether disappear. Their children had refused to follow their ancestral ways but were also ill equipped for any other form of work. Unless the government took specific measures to ameliorate the situation the Galesh would gradually merge with the city folks and loose their rich culture and heritage in the coming decades.

Another aspect was that of the economic non-viability of meat being sold by the Galesh because it was expensive even though it was fresh. The import of frozen meat has impacted the sale of meat in the region because it is comparatively less expensive. It is imported from countries like New Zealand (Mutton) and Holland (Chicken) and sold at rates almost 20% cheaper than the fresh meat. Mohseni felt that if the government supported the Galesh instead of facilitating the imports of frozen and preserved meat there would be no scarcity of fresh meat and even its price could be subsidized. Some salient observations that can be made after talking to nearly 400 Galesh in the field were that there is a gradual decline in the number of people continuing with their traditional mode of economy. The levels of literacy in the region are high and there is more than 80% literacy among people above the age of fifteen. Those having university and professional degrees move out of their ancestral habitats and take jobs in the cities. Gradually they disconnect with the village and the traditional modes of economy. Only those having large landholdings and herds having licenses for grazing areas will hire shepherds as are demonstrated in the case study cited above, and take supplementary income from the traditional economy. It is only those Galesh that continue to persist with their ancestral occupation that have not been able to secure good jobs in the cities, or those who haven’t had access to quality education and believe that they can make more money following traditional
occupations of selling milk, meat and other pastoral products. Another section that moved out of the primary pastoral mode of production are those that have lost their landholdings, grazing licenses and have very small herds. They moved to the industrial belt in the neighbourhood and sought employment as construction workers, labourers or other manual workers. The statistics that are presented in the Table above clearly demonstrate that nearly 21.7% of Iran’s population survives on a remuneration ranging between $2-$11 per day and it is quite visible in the 40 villages that I surveyed for this research work that an average Galesh’s perseverance with his transhumance/pastoral nomadic mode of production is slowly resulting in his pauperization.

There are two popular proverbs that summarize the state of those Galesh in Savadku desirous of insisting with their traditional pastoral nomadic/transhumance mode of life. These are *pul ya tase dele dare ya u dele* meaning ‘it is not easy to earn money it is like fighting fire and water’ and the other that defines the status of a Galesh in the province *Avvelem vesena, axerem vensa* implying that ‘he was born hungry, lived hungry and he died hungry and poor’.

In the next chapter the unique tradition of Galesh (calendar) is documented which continues to be etched in the ritual and cultural memory of the Galesh. It strikes a chord even among those that are trying to rupture the past in search of new identities. For an average pastoral nomad the Tabri Calendar was a way of life that defined and controlled every move that they made. For the younger generation it has only symbolic value but the fact that this unique tradition survived till today despite various vicissitudes of history is a matter of pride for every Galesh of the Mazandaran province.

Notes:


These are official statistics generated by the census department of Iran.