Shyam Singh Shashi. *Nomads of India*. New Delhi: National Book Trust, India, 2015. PB. pp. 63. Price ₹ 45. ISBN: 978-81-237-7413-8. (Translated by C.R. Biswas and vetted by the author.)

Reviewed by
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Padma Shri Dr. Shyam Singh Shashi is an eminent Hindi poet, anthropologist and social scientist. He has *Encyclopedia of Humanities and Social Sciences* (50 volumes), *Encyclopedia of Indian Tribes* (12 volumes), *Encyclopedia of World Women* (10 volumes) and *Encyclopedia Indica* (150 volumes); many poetry collections and other important books to his credit. The present book, *Nomads of India* (2015) is a great contribution to the knowledge of mankind. The book presents anthropological, historical and sociocultural studies of nomadic communities of India. This is the result of extensive studies on these communities in India and abroad by the writer. In the preface of the book the writer mentions about his amazement that we usually talk about the great world travellers – Columbus, Vasco-De-Gama, Fi-yan and When-Sang but not those nomads who have been travelling since ages from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari and also to different countries. They are neglected and disadvantaged groups of the society. The writer intends to create "an awareness among the young readers about the forgotten and neglected communities and to work for their well-being in missionary spirit." (6)

The book has ten chapters, each dealing with different groups and kinds of nomads living in different parts of India and the world. In the first chapter, the writer finds that nomads are 'a proud and self-reliant community'. They do not 'accept anyone's mercy, favour or reservations' (9). After India attained independence, the first Prime Minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru offered houses to the nomads, some State governments also did the same but these people did not stay in their houses for long and again started living in their old style – wandering here and there in search of food, and fodder for their cattle. It is embarrassing to say that even after several years of independence, many of the nomads have not acquired citizenship of India.

The author has divided these nomadic people in three major groups: 1. Seasonal Nomads; 2. Hunting Nomad; and 3. Perpetual Traditional Nomads. In Hindi, nomad is known as '*yayavar*' and '*khanabadosh*'. There is description of semi-nomads; they are Gujjars, Todas, Gwalas, Gaddis, Rabaris, Idians and Kurumba – shepherds. These semi-nomads have been classified according to their 'vocations' in different categories: 1. (a) Cattle-rearers: Aabhir, Ahir, Charan, Ghos, Ghoshi, Gwala, Gopal, Gopi, Bakarwal, Bharwad, Dhangar, Meshpal, Gadariya, Kuruba, Gavari, Gujjar, Idian and others; (b) Camel-rearers: Rabari, Rayka, etc; (c) Ancient Cattle-rearing Tribe: Todas of Tamil Nadu. The above mentioned groups subsist on the earnings from milk of their cattle and selling wool of their sheep. 2. Professional Nomads: These kinds of nomads

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entertain people through various methods. Some of these are: (a) Snake charmers, (b) Madari (jugglers), (c) Nat – acrobat, (d) Sikligar – making keys, knives, etc., (e) Magicians/Conjurers, (f) Bear-dancers, etc. They struggle for their living as well as for their herd, who are their source of income. 3. Ex-criminal Tribes: During the first freedom struggle, some tribes had killed British soldiers so, they were classified as criminals. Even after independence, these communities face 'discriminatory treatment'. They are: Sansi, Kanjar, Bawariya, Dom, Jhallimar and so on. 4. Trading Nomads: The Banjaras come to this category. They used to transport food grains and other goods from one place to another in olden times. 5. Begging Nomads: Saints used to beg for their food in olden times and gradually some other communities started begging as their vocation. There are a number of begging nomads discussed in the book: (a) Jogi (in olden times they might have been Yogis), (b) Ramaswami, (c) Rangaswami, (d) Karwal, (e) Singiwala, (f) Gulgulia, (g) Teya, (h) Singikat, (i) Budungjangam, (j) Kela, and (k) Dholi. Besides the above mentioned communities, today begging has become a way for survival for so many poor people in India and several other countries.

The second chapter of the book, "The Banjara Goes on Singing", discusses that Banjara "is not bothered about his future at all. He is absorbed within himself as part of the caravan of his fellow-travellers". (13) Singing and playing music of Banjara is popular in our society. We find in this chapter about the habitat, dress and costumes, social structure and customs, and religious faith of the Banjara. We come to learn that they are found in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Telangana, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha. The word 'Banjara' has its root in the Sanskrit word *vanijyam* which means business or trade. Once Banjaras used to live in forests and did trade in food grains and salt. Today they sell milk, medicinal herbs and vegetables. Banjara women used to wear heavy and decorated costumes, but today they wear modern dresses; though, regional variations are also found in dress and costumes. They are monogamous and follow patriarchal system. They follow Hinduism and celebrate Holi, Diwali and other festivals; one of their deities is Banjara-Devi. Animal sacrifices ceased due to social reforms. They have formed national organization for their rights and take part in national politics also. It is important to note that some Banjaras had migrated to Europe with Roma-Gypsies for business purposes and became part and parcel of Roma society. They have spread in different European countries today. However, their history is full of struggles.

In the third chapter, "Gaddi – the Charming Friend", we learn about the original habitat, social structure, migration, religious faith and also about the Gaddi Regiment. The author describes that Gaddis are "a semi-nomadic, semi-agricultural and semi-pastoral tribe". (17) Like Banjaras, Gaddis also follow Hinduism and celebrate Holi, Diwali and other festivals. They follow patriarchal system and wear dresses of modern fashion. They are said to be originated from Chamba and Kangra regions and particularly from Bharmour (Brahmaur) of Himachal Pradesh. Those who visit Bharmour, they compare Bharmour with Switzerland for its natural beauty, and serene atmosphere. Many people of Gaddi community serve in the Indian Army.

The fourth chapter is about "The Patriotic Gujjars". The writer mentions that Gujjars are mainly pastoral. They have spread over Kashmir to Himachal Pradesh and then to Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand. They are nomadic in nature. There are the Muslim Gujjars in Kashmir and other Himalayan regions who later got converted from Hinduism; though their *gotras* and some customs have remained unchanged. The writer discusses about their history that they had their glorious past and were rulers in some age. "At the time of Akbar, the Gujjar rulers had their kingdoms in many parts of Gujarat. Their land was spread up to Saharanpur in Uttar Pradesh". (23) Most of them have Rajput *gotras.*

It is important to note that "during the decline of Gupta Empire, the Gujjars united the Kushans and Huns. Huns had two groups – the Hara Huns and the White Huns. They founded Hungary." (23) When the writer was invited to Budapest in 2004 in the World Hungarian Conference, people told him that the original name of Budapest was Buddha-prasth, where the follower of the Buddha lived. There are a number of important historical accounts of the Gujjars in this chapter that are useful for historical interest. We also find description of Gurjar Regiment, migration and conversion during Muslim rule, their pastoral society, food habits, customs, problems with them and solutions.

The fifth chapter, "The Wandering Bhotias", begins with the description of the mountainous regions of Garhwal and Kumayon and dense forests where the Bhotia tribe lives with their cattle. Their lives are similar to the Gaddis. They had their trades in wool and so many other things but after Chinese aggression in 1962, their trades stopped. Their costumes, food habits, social structure, migration, and religious belief are also discussed. They worship Lord Shiva and Sheshnag. They have progressed well towards modernity in recent times.

In the sixth chapter, "The Dhangar, Kuruba and Other Shepherds", we find the social and historical background of these communities who used to "quench their hunger and thirst with roots and shoots or sometimes by hunting birds and animals." (35) "Dhangars of Indore and Maharashtra", according to German researchers, "are the indigenous tribe who lived in this region before the advent of Aryans." (36) The writer also mentions their help and support extended to the Aryans that later contributed to the evolution of Aryan and Dasyu cultures. The most important roles that the Dhangars played are their contributions to the Aryan culture in the North, and Dravidian culture in the South. Their contribution to the development of Sumerian civilization is also remarkable. Dhangars are supposed to be originated from some part of Madhya Pradesh who later spread all in other parts of the country.

Kurubas are found in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh who made their mark in their own States as well as on national level. Besides animal husbandry and agriculture, they are seen in a number of government jobs. The writer has discussed several other aspects of their lives including social, cultural, religious and good moral character. Cowherd Bharwads, Rabari, Ahir or Pal Yadav get special mention in this chapter with their origins, change of social structure, traditional professions and present status in society.

In the seventh chapter, "Other Nomadic Communities, Castes and Tribes", the writer has discussed about Hawking Nomads, Swami, Dholi, Kalbelia, Gadia Luhar, Sathiya, Banbabavari, and Nomads as beggars. There are several illustrations about their origins, fights with the Mughals, struggles for survival, places of habitat, initiatives of the government for their upliftment and so many aspects of their lives from beginning to the present age.

The eighth chapter, "Nomads and Roma of Indian Origin in Other Countries", begins with a personal quote of the writer, "Mobility is life and inertia is death". (52) Discussing about the Gypsy, the writer mentions that "Gypsy is a derivation from Egyptian and in some period of history they had migrated from India, and roamed in different countries before reaching Europe. In France, they are known as 'Manush', while in Russia and East Europe, they are called 'Tsigans'- Gitano". (52)

Roma migrated from India in small groups in different periods due to "family-ties and dynastic lines". It is interesting to note that the Roma are of Aryan origin, therefore, Hitler spared them once, but later he made them suffer. The Roma have settled in different countries but their customs continue to remain like those existed in medieval India. "They use 'Kan' for ear, 'Yakh' for eye, 'Bal' for hair, 'Kalo' for black, 'Fen' for sister, 'Salo' for bother-in-law, 'Sasur' for father-in-law, and many such words of domestic parlance – Romani." (54-55) Many of them got converted to Islam and Christianity, still their old belief in Hinduism: worshipping Nature, Sun, Devi (goddess Kali), continues.

Chapters ninth ("As Years Passed") and tenth ("Unending Journey") deal with the personal experiences of the writer while travelling to different parts of India and foreign countries, delivering speeches and meeting different scholars and gathering information about the nomads.

The extensive researches on nomads and similar tribes carried out by Dr. Shyam Singh Shashi for several years and incorporating important data in this book have made it a unique of its kind.

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