



# Rights of Van Gujjars

## Why in News

The **Uttarakhand High Court** has **reprimanded the State government for stopping some Van Gujjar families on the way to Govind Pashu Vihar National Park** and said their **right to life is being violated** by the authorities.

## Key Points

### ▪ Background:

- The **Van Gujjars pursue seasonal migration from the Terai-Bhabar and Siwalik region of Uttarakhand to the higher bugyals in the Western Himalayas in summer** and vice versa in winter.
  - This **phenomenon of transhumance** pursued by the community is among the few climate-adaptive and resilience strategies that ensures their pastoral livelihood remains viable and sustainable.
- The Van Gujjars **possess legitimate permits** across their summer (Govind Pashu Vihar National Park) and winter homesteads. However, they are **not permitted by authorities** to enter the Park.

### ▪ Rights of Pastoralists under [Forests Rights Act 2006](#):

- It has ensured that **even pastoralists possess rights to access grazing pastures in lieu of the Community Forest Resource right** they are eligible for.
  - Section 2 (a) **prescribes for the rights of pastoral communities on customary common forest land** within the traditional or customary boundaries of a village.
- It **also prescribes the seasonal use of a landscape in case of pastoral communities**, including in unclassified forests, reserve forests, un-demarcated forests, deemed forests, protected forests, sanctuaries and national parks.

### ▪ High Court's Order:

- Upholds the **right of Van Gujjars to migrate to their summer homesteads** in the **bugyals (Himalayan alpine meadows)** located within the **Govind Pashu Vihar National Park**.
- The court relied on [Article 21 \(Protection of Life and Personal Liberty\)](#) of the **constitution**.

## Article 21 of the Constitution

- It declares that **no person shall be deprived of his [life or personal liberty](#) except** according to **procedure established by law**.
- This right is **available to both citizens and non-citizens**.
- The right to life is **not merely confined to animal existence or survival** but also includes the right to live with human dignity and all **those aspects of life** which go to make a man's life

meaningful, complete and worth living.

▪ **About Van Gujjars:**

- Van Gujjars are the **forest-dwelling nomadic community** inhabiting the **foothills of Himalayan States such as Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir.**
- Usually, they **migrate to the bugyals (grasslands)** located in the upper Himalayas with their buffaloes and return only at the end of monsoons to their makeshift huts, deras, in the foothills.
- They traditionally **practice buffalo husbandry**; a family owns up to 25 heads of buffaloes. They rely on buffaloes for milk, which gets them a good price in Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh markets.

**Govind Pashu Vihar National Park**

▪ **Location:**

- It is located in the **Uttarkashi district** of the state of **Uttarakhand**. The park lies in the higher reaches of the **Garhwal Himalayas**.

▪ **Establishment:**

- The park was **established as a Wildlife Sanctuary in the year of 1955**. It was **declared as a National Park in the year of 1990**.

▪ **Flora and Fauna:**

- Fauna include the [Snow Leopard](#), Brown Bear, Musk Deer, Western Tragopan etc.
- Some of the noteworthy trees present in the sanctuary include deodar cedar, chir pine, silver fir, blue pine and several **deciduous species**.

▪ **Other Features:**

- Within the park is the **Har-ki-dun valley** which is a known **spot for trekking**, while the **Ruinsara high altitude lake** is also popular as a tourist destination.
- The park creates an upper water catchment of **River Tons**.
  - **Tons river** is a significant tributary of **Yamuna River** and reaches the upper **stretches of Garhwal**.

**Other Protected Areas in Uttarakhand**

- Jim Corbett National Park (first National Park of India).
- Valley of Flowers National Park and Nanda Devi National Park which together are a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#).
- [Rajaji National Park](#).
- [Gangotri National Park](#).
- Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary.

[Source: DTE](#)

