NEPAL AND HIMALAYAN STUDIES

Democratisation in the Himalayas

Interests, Conflicts, and Negotiations

Edited by Vibha Arora and N. Jayaram

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1 Seeking identities on the margins of democracy

Jad Bhotiyas of Uttarkashi

Subhadra Mitra Channa

The Indian democracy, unlike some others, for example, the French, has built itself upon the recognition of multiculturalism as well as protectionism towards those it considers marginal and weak. Terms such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes were used in the Constitution of India to identify such groups of people who were viewed as only marginally integrated into the mainstream of Indian nation, and positive discrimination policies have been directed towards achieving the goal of fuller integration or ironing out of differences. Various mechanisms such as those of education and of communication like the media, mostly television and radio, have been extensively used for this purpose. Preceding such administrative action was the important assumption that there were entities that could be identified and labelled and then classified (put into a schedule). Such assumptions informing administrative action are to be found in most of the emerging nations as well as the colonial metropolis preceding them. As Ian Angus puts it, 'Modern nation states have been built upon an assumption that the normal basis for a society is a shared ethno-cultural tradition, and the assumption has silently entered into the large part of modern social and political thought' (1997: 163). Thus, whether like classical anthropology (mostly colonial) that defined a 'tribe' as a bounded and static given unit or contemporary social thinkers who have variously carried out a discourse on 'ethnies' (Smith 1986) or ethnic groups (Barth 1969) or some such entity, 'which they impute with a primordial authenticity' (Silverstein 2002: 123), the existence of 'a people', 'group', or 'tribe' has rarely been questioned.

Democracy as a process of nation-building has somehow attempted to 'recognise' such units, classify them, and then create a sense of symbolic unity that has been identified by most students of the nation-state as 'constructed' or 'imagined'. But, again, as Silverstein (ibid.) points out, the constituent units such as tribes or ethnic groups or linguistic categories have rarely been understood as constructed, as if their 'reality' was beyond question. Thus, while it is well recognised that the nation is a generalised and

diffuse entity, mostly imagined and less concrete, the segments that are its constituents are almost always taken for granted as real and concrete. Thus, while one may 'imagine' a nation, one need not imagine a tribe. The latter has an objective existence, conveniently converted into ethnographies by anthropologists and documented in gazettes by administrators (see Atkinson 1980; Dalton 1872; Francis 1908; Hutchinson 1909).

In this chapter I take up one such case, that of the Bhotiyas, who, according to the Gazetteer of Uttar Pradesh (Rizvi 1979), have been identified as one of the 'tribal' groups in the state and classified as 'scheduled tribe'. B. S. Bisht mentions that 'in Uttar Pradesh only five tribal communities, that is, Bhotiyas, Buxas, Tharus, Rajis and Jaunsaries [were] declared as Scheduled Tribes in 1967' (1994: 15). From the same source we find that the Bhotiyas have been declared as geographically distributed in the districts of Almora, Chamoli, Pitthoragarh, and Uttarkashi. All government programmes under the policy of positive discrimination have been provided to a category of people so identified. The administration has no doubts about their existence, their identity, and, of course, their structure; thus, the Bhotiya identity has gradually become objectified and accepted as real.

At the same time, the gazettes and secondary literature (Bagchi 1977: 365–66; Brown 1990: 159; Levine 1987: 3) do acknowledge that all groups put under the category of Bhotiya are not really the same.

> For a long time Bhotiyas of Uttaranchal[1] have been inhabiting in seven river valleys after which they derive their name, namely, Joharis, Darmisa, Vyansis, Chaudasis (in Kumaon), Marchhas, Tolchhas and Jads (in Garhwal). . . . These Bhotiyas are believed to be of different origins.
>
> (Bisht 1994: 25)

Thus, there remains a disjunction between administrative imagination and the ethnographic reality that I could also discover through empirical investigation using anthropological methods.

After travelling to the district of Uttarkashi and locating myself in a village called Bhagori (a tiny settlement on way to the shrine of Gangotri) in Harsil district, where I did fieldwork during 1997–2001,[2] I was able to find out that what was an administrative reality had little basis in any 'primordial' unity, or in any of the anthropological definitions such as 'endogamy' and 'origin myth'. What really pass off as 'a tribe', namely the Jad Bhotiyas, is, as of now, a fairly heterogeneous mix of people from different locations on the Himalayan border, speaking and possessing a variety of languages and myths of origin. They have an identity that is primarily based on a sharing of resources and what Arturo Escobar (2008: 63–64) has termed

'emplacement', a unity of identity with a place, where place is not merely empty space but reflects an embodied relationship.

Who is a Bhotiya?

The most significant associations of the term 'Bhotiya' are with Tibet and erstwhile cross-border trading involving that part of the Himalayan ranges that lie alongside Tibet. Two popular ways of interpreting this term have been either by linking them to cross-border trade across the Tibet border involving neighbouring countries like India and Nepal or by associating with the 'Bhot' region, meaning the region lying on the Himalayan higher altitudes comprising northern parts of Chamoli and Pithoragarh districts extending into the valleys of the major rivers flowing here. Christopher von Fürer-Haimendorf writes,

> All along the Himalayan main range there are areas of high altitude where small communities subsist by combining agriculture and animal husbandry with vigorous trading activities. The Himalayan mountain dwellers thus acted largely as the middle men between two distinct economic zones, the arid Highlands of Tibet and the more fertile monsoon zones of Nepal's middle ranges and low lands as well as the corresponding zones of India.
>
> (1981: x)

von Fürer-Haimendorf has linked the Bhotiyas with a generic Tibetan-speaking people engaged in barter trade with Tibet from both Nepal and Indian borderlands (1975: 4, 1978: 339).

There are many references to the term 'Bhotiya', or 'Bhot', by scholars of the Himalayan region. N. J. Allen (1997: 314) prefers to link it to Buddhism and to Tibet, while Charles Ramble says, 'Literally a Bhotiya (Bhote) is someone from Bhot. Bhot in turn derives from the Tibetan term Bod, meaning Tibet' (1997: 391). A more recent work by Vibha Arora (2007: 198–99) also mentions the Bhotiyas (Bhutias) of Sikkim as having Tibetan links and a tribal identity. In a detailed account of cross-border trade involving Tibet, M. P. Joshi and C. W. Brown mention that such trade probably existed from at least the 3rd century BCE and involved 'salt and probably horses and dogs were brought from Tibet while *guda* and cloth were imported from the plains' and 'Traill (1851) notes the sale of hawks, musk, *dupees*, frankincense . . . Borax, salt, *punkhees*, ponies, *chowries* (yak tail), roots and herbs' (1986: 59, 61). From the same source we find that borax was an important item of import from Tibet from at least the 6th century CE, and there is evidence of it being used by the goldsmiths of Kumaon.

C. W. Brown (1987, 1990) discusses the manner in which British trade interests fostered and to some extent consolidated the identity 'Bhotiya'.[3] The most interesting point mentioned by Brown (1990) is that the Bhotiyas, at least on the Indian side, were not Buddhists but Hindus and claimed Rajput status, which was not recognised by the surrounding Hindu population because of their assumed descent or kinship with the Tibetans and also because of reasons of trade and their Mitra system (a system of hereditary trade partnership with the Tibetans). They were also sharing food with the Tibetans, who not being Hindus were considered 'untouchable by the upper-caste Rajput and Brahmin Garhwalis' (ibid.: 164).

Thus, the term 'Bhotiya' carries itself across borders of at least three countries or geopolitical entities (as technically Tibet is no longer a country), namely Tibet, India, and Nepal. While in Nepal the Bhotiyas are explicitly associated with the Tibetan language and Buddhism (also in Sikkim as described by Arora [2007]), in India the so-called Bhotiyas in the region of Garhwal were always claiming a Hindu upper-caste identity, as we have seen from the work of Brown quoted earlier. The Bhotiyas were further consolidated as a 'people' who were cross-border traders by British trade interests, who found them very effective carriers across the difficult Himalayan terrain. Thus, the Bhotiyas, for their trade interest, had to jeopardise their Hindu claim. But, by the time I conducted my fieldwork during 1997–2000, the situation had changed enough for them to renegotiate this identity with a vigour that was supported by several factors – economic, political, and historical.

The Jad Bhotiyas' claim to recognition as an entity is based more on situational than on historical or primordial associations. Their incorporation within the Indian nation and their performance within the Indian democracy are necessarily incumbent on the fact that they self-recognise and operationalise this identity. For ethnographic and descriptive purposes, this situational identity has been used but with apologies. One needs to assume that at any point when referring to the Jads I have always foregrounded them as 'as and then' and not as given and fixed.

Displacement and relocation

The Jads have been subjected to displacement and relocation simultaneously – shifted from their upper Himalayan villages near the Neilang Pass and relocated in the slightly lower and pre-existing village at Harsil – following the China–India border conflict of 1962. When I say only slightly lower, about 10 km away, and also pre-existing, it means that this particular village, namely Bhagori, was already existent as a higher-altitude village for the transhuman pastoral group. Thus, prior to 1962, they had three villages

in the higher altitudes, which was used as summer villages, and one large village at Uttarkashi, called Dunda, which was used as a winter village, along with a winter camp at Chorpani in the forests near Hrishikesh. But after displacement the three higher-altitude villages were merged into one, although they still retain their pre-existing identities for some purposes at least. Those who originally belonged to the village at Harsil often tease the displaced persons as refugees, calling them *Chongsa Rong-pas* (displaced *Rong-pas*), *Rong-pa* being the name they prefer to use for themselves, in their own Tibeto-Burman language.[4] A colleague from the Himalayan Studies Institute at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, told me that, in Tibeto-Burman language, *Rong-pa* means those who inhabit a high mountain range. Also earlier, the high-altitude village Neilang, rather than Bhagori, was the focus of their identity, and they were often referred to as the Jads or the people of Neilang (Rizvi 1979). In Neilang they had more land and were able to do agriculture using yaks and a plough, while in Bhagori their primary subsistence crops (namely naked barley) could no longer be grown and only a little horticulture is carried out by the women. Thus, from a self-sufficient people, who grew their own food and obtained the rest through barter trade, they have now been integrated into a cash economy where they have to buy their primary food items like rice and wheat, mostly from state-run ration shops.

The villages were and are still run primarily by the women, who carry on agriculture and processing of wool, and knitting and carpet-weaving; they also sell these items either directly from the village or in the nearby markets. The women keep the proceeds of the sale with them. The men take the sheep for grazing on a typical route, divided into two 4-month blocks called *chaumasa* (four months), so that they spend four summer months on the high-altitude pastures and four months moving downwards through the forests, when they camp near the village and shear the sheep, passing on the wool to the women. At this time, some wool is sold along with some male sheep for cash that the men keep for themselves. Once they reach the lower-altitude pastures, they graze their animals near the forests near Dehradun and Hrishikesh, where they share these pastures with other pastoral groups from near Niti and Mana and Chamoli. Earlier they shared these pastures with the sheepherders of Kinnaur as well, who have also been referred to in literature as similar to the Bhotiyas.[5]

It is customary for the Jads to marry in the groups with whom they share pastures, as a degree of familiarity is formed while sharing common resources. Thus, there were many men and women in the Jad village at Bhagori who had come from other villages of similar sheep-grazing groups, with whom the Jads have a kinship derived from sharing of resources. Anybody married into the Jad village becomes a Jad if he or she shares the

same lifestyle as that of the Jads, which requires them to come up to the summer village in the higher altitude and to participate in their rituals and pay allegiance to the village god Me-Parang.[6] Thus, at any time in a Jad village, one would have men and women from other parts of the Himalayas, who are still identified by their origins as Kunnuba (from Kinnaur), Nitali (from Niti), and so on.

Before the borders were closed, the men combined grazing activities with trading, bringing salt, borax, precious stones, yaks, wool, dogs, and so on. The entire village also moved from the high-altitude village to the lower-altitude village in winter, and back again to the higher-altitude village in summer. In addition to their seasonal movements between the high- and low-altitude villages, the women and some men along with children take the horses and goats and other animals like yaks and cows to the forest camp at Chorpani (hidden water) to graze in winter. As I have described elsewhere (see Channa 2002), they kept as much distance as they could from the plains people, with whom they felt no identity. They felt safe only after reaching their own village, Dunda at Uttarkashi, but before that, while coming up from Hrishikesh, they would hide in the night to travel and avoid interaction as much as possible.

Trade with the plains people was and is still mostly carried on at Chorpani, where they remain hidden in the deep forests and have minimal interaction with the local traders, who now come to them to buy wool, carpets, puppies (of the Bhotiya dogs), and knitted items. Previously, while they were still trading with Tibet, the main attractions were borax, salt, and precious stones along with yaks and mountain horses. From the plains they would carry primarily rice, tea, sugar, and utensils. Currently, they sell for cash woollen items that they make themselves and other items such as jungle herbs and mushrooms. I often saw young men and women go deep into the forest looking for specialties like mushrooms and herbs, which they later sold for high prices. The distrust of the plains is still very much a part of their cognitive world, as is the safety and purity of the high-altitude places that they inhabit.

The Jads consider their high-altitude village to be the focus of their social life and identity, a place where they are 'their own selves'. Most old people express a desire to die at their high-altitude village and ascend to heaven on a pyre of deodar wood. In their own words the higher altitudes are *sangma*, meaning pure and unsullied. They are explicit that there were no gods in the plains, '*The gods live on the high mountains where everything is Sangma.*'

The Jads, in moving away from the border and from cross-border trade with Tibet, redefined to some extent their marginal status as *junglee* (wild, but with polysemic meanings) with their local Garhwali neighbours. But this term is still being used for them by the people from the plains. The

teachers in the local government-run school, where I had stayed during one of my fieldworks, found it strange that I, an apparently well-educated woman, would like to voluntarily go and mix with the *junglee* people. Their classification as a tribe also reinforces such a worldview. As Sumiut Guha puts it, *junglee* refers to the 'definitive others against whom the civilised folk measured themselves' (1999: 17). Stereotypical notions – such as they get drunk in the evening, their women have loose morals, they are not like 'us' – were some of the deterrents used to prevent my going and working there. Even while I was leaving for the field some senior teachers warned me that 'it was no place for a woman to go and do fieldwork and certainly not to spend nights and evenings'. Veena Das and Deborah Poole (2004: 9) have identified three concepts of margins, and one of them is that the margins are containers for people who are 'unruly' or 'natural' subjects of the state (meaning uncivilised).

Their earlier dress and language as well as their celebration of some Tibetan festivals, such as the Tibetan New Year, Losar, which they still celebrate with gusto, and their belief in the magical powers of the *lamas* have also led the Jads to be designated as 'Tibetan' and Buddhists. Their villages are marked by the fluttering of Buddhist flags from the rooftops, which they put up on the instructions from the *lamas* who play an important ritual role in their lives. Yet the fact that they consider the *lamas* to be powerful religious functionaries does not take away from their self-identification as Rajputs, a fact in which the Jads and other Bhotiyas on the Indian side (including the Kinnauries of Himachal) have always believed in. This identity had historically been reluctantly compromised in view of their profitable trade with their Tibetan (Mitra) partners, and the cessation of this trade was reason enough for them to reaffirm this upper-caste identity. The increase in trade and political relationships with the Indian mainland became an added incentive to the pursuit of an upper-caste identity.

The process of relocation and improved communication with the Indian mainland had a dual function. For the side of the Jads, it provided a rational and practical reason to give up their association with Tibet and assert a greater tie with local Hindus, especially Garhwali Rajputs, in a bid to improve their social standing within the local *pahari* community. The improved communication, the presence of the army and the rising population of the Jads (due to better health care facilities) encouraged the Indian state to engage in 'pedagogy of conversion' (ibid.) to bring these 'marginal' people within the folds of Indian democracy. The paradox lies in an unrecognised tension between being upper caste and a *janjati*, an identity that they simultaneously perceived as an advantage, especially in their relation to the state (see Arora 2007).

The Jads in relation to the Indian state

While the Jads had little idea of the central Indian government or of the abstract identity 'India', they had never been an anarchic people, in the sense of not recognising higher authority. They had been under the influence of the local sovereign, the rajah of Tehri Garhwal, as well as bound by the legalities of Lhasa, representing Tibetan sovereignty; while conducting trade with Tibet. While Tibet lost its sovereignty to China (after 1959), it still owes allegiance to the rajah of Tehri, whose photographs continue to adorn its walls (an additional reason is that the rajah of Tehri is recognised as Bolanda Badri, the living manifestation of Badrinath by the people of Garhwal even today). After coming down from Neilang (and Jadung), they became more aware of the local Garhwali society, and their aspiration as of now is to find a respectable position within the *pahari* society, an ambition that has been fuelled by the formation of the separate state of Uttaranchal in 2000.[7]

The central and state governments, on the other hand, have been wooing the Jads with protective discrimination policies such as reservations in and facilities for education, employment, and so on. Their strategic position on a politically volatile border, their ability to navigate across difficult and inhospitable terrain, and their recognised access to what is now considered as 'enemy' territory had led them to be 'pampered' by the Indian army, who often used them to spy on the border. The Jads maintain a friendly and equalitarian relationship with the lower ranks of the Indian army posted there as well as with the Indo-Tibet Border Police. Liquor is exchanged, and much barter trade with the army goes on while they graze sheep into the deep hinterlands of the forests, to which they are the only civilians to have access. While doing fieldwork, I was often witness to the cricket matches that were enthusiastically arranged by the local army, and Indo-Tibet Border Police, with the local youth on the army helipad, to which the entire village came out to cheer. Special concessions are given to the Jad children in view of their transhumant lifestyle, and a special school, called Neilang-Chorpani school, travels with them, giving primary education to the small children. I met the elderly man, who has been the only teacher of this school in the winter of 1999, when I was visiting their camp at Chorpani near Hrishikesh. He told me that his task had become easier ever since the Jads were relocated in Harsil. Now high schools have been opened near their villages; the Jad children have the facility to study at both the high-altitude school at Harsil and the lower-altitude school at Dunda, without interrupting their studies.

In 1992, the Seventy-Third Amendment of the Constitution made significant changes in their participation in democracy, with the formation

of the statutory gram panchayat. The majority of Jads view the process of elections as an intrusion into their community life. As one young man put it, 'The sarkar [government] has pitted brother against brother and sister against sister. We had a harmonious community life before but now factions have been created within us.' This shows how mindless introduction of macro-democratic policies can have a deleterious effect, for the Jads had very little by way of internal stratification. They never had any concept of headman or village council. Their population before they came down to Harsil was very small, barely a couple of hundred people. Women told me how every year, during the rainy season, most children below the age of one would die of stomach-related diseases. The genealogies collected by me showed very small families[8] and high death rate. Apart from high infant mortality, tuberculosis, and accidental deaths (like falling from mountains) are common-enough causes of mortality.

Such a small population was able to maintain a fair degree of internal order believed to be with the help of supernatural beings who laid down 'dos' and 'don'ts' and imposed their will by sanctions mostly in the form of ill health and misfortunes. Every misfortune, such as illness, is believed to have a supernatural causation, and the reason is always the wrath or displeasure of some supernatural being. Whenever someone is ill or has a problem, the first recourse is to divination to find out what mistake has been made, or what rule has been broken by the person concerned. It is obvious that people adhere to rules and norms because of this 'invisible surveillance' that is impossible to bypass.

The only person, about 90 years old, who was identified as a 'group leader' held an office they called *malguzar*. When I interviewed him, he told me that his job was to negotiate on behalf of the Jads with the officials on matters related to payment of taxes and so on. However, he told me with a twinkle in his eyes,

> My more important work was to act as go between for lovers. Since I was good at making speeches, boys would ask me to go to their girlfriends and plead on their behalf. I could make eloquent and poetic propositions and persuade many a girl to meet with her lover.

But, when it came to real authority, the Jads provided a test case for what anthropologists have called acephalous (Evans-Pritchard 1940) societies, that is where most decisions were taken on a community level and with supernatural interventions. Thus, the local authorities invoke no fear or respect in the Jads, who remain mentally at least a 'free' people.

The relative position of men and women is also paradoxical as the women have control over the social life of the village even as the men are considered

ritually superior. In this sense, their participation in the democratic process is of a different nature than is expected in a largely patriarchal domain.

Gender and politics

During the period of my fieldwork, a woman was the *pradhan* or statutory head of the panchayat of five villages, of which only one was a Jad-inhabited village. She was an active, vocal, and assertive woman; she went for all meetings and all by herself to the district headquarters at Bhatwari, but had very little authority within the village. I often saw her going out of the village in a Western-style blue woollen coat of which she was very proud, trying to look important, while most others looked at her with suppressed grins and passed snide remarks. In fact, the Jads have no cultural ways to show deference to anybody; they treat everyone equal. Also, being a woman, her taking care of affairs outside of the village was not taken seriously by anyone. It is paradoxical that, while women are regarded as proper caretakers of village affairs, they are not supposed to be going out of their own space to interfere in the men's world. Yet the men too do not feel that politics is their forte, as the locus of the gram panchayat is the village. Earlier they were used to negotiating with outsiders, but the inner realm of the village is not seen as having any particular need to be 'governed', so to say. Whatever is done by the local body within the village is not taken as of any use. If necessary, they go to a religious practitioner to get their problems solved; the concept of a secular caretaker is alien to them. Thus, the incursions of democracy into their lives have stirred up more debates and controversies than brought about any need-felt transformation.

On my very first visit to the village in 1997, I witnessed one of the stormy panchayat meetings, where while the village *pradhan* stood in the centre, a group of vociferous women surrounded her and there was a verbal fight. The visiting officials of the Zila Parishad (District Council) sat around in embarrassed silence and the men of the village stood around amused. Elsewhere (Channa 2010c) I have discussed how in the Jad cosmology the women occupy central position in the social world; it is they who practically run the village. The men, being traditionally shepherds and traders, spend most of their time travelling outside of the settlements. Thus, most of the social life revolved around women and is considered their responsibility. On any day one would find women forming groups to do agricultural work on the fields, sitting in large groups in the centre of the village, knitting, or doing other wool-processing work. They are mostly in charge of conducting ceremonies even though it is men who should be doing them officially. One woman told me,

> The rituals of offering to ancestors and other important rituals such as at Losar are to be properly done by men, but my husband is always out

> of the village grazing sheep or gone for some work, so what am I to do? I perform all the rituals on his behalf.

When I asked Kamala, the then *pradhan*, how she felt about her role as a political functionary, she said,

> It is alright but the most difficult part is for me to travel outside of the village. I have to go and stay sometimes overnight at Bhatwari (the district headquarters) and I do feel uncomfortable in the presence of strange men. But it is my responsibility so I have to do it.

Interestingly, Kamala made no mention of how her husband felt or if his opinion was of any consequence. I learnt that this man had very little say in his wife's affairs and preferred to stay out of all her business. I would see him sitting under a tree with his flock of sheep and meditate into space, while his wife made herself busy. Her daughters (six in all), however, were enthusiastic about their mother's position, and at the meeting that I have already described, they were serving tea. If she wanted to discuss something, she would do it with her daughters. Women normally took charge of most activities around the village, and during the celebration of a wedding in the village, a local Border Security Force jawan told me, 'In our village the men do all the work of arranging weddings, but here I see that women are doing everything. This is a place where women do everything.' The men have no legitimate space within the village. So, when they are around, one sees them either in the local shop drinking liquor or playing a local variety of chess sitting under a tree; the younger men play cricket on the army helipad. They are not supposed to be around the house, unless they are too old or very young.

Under such a scenario, where politics is located in the village, men can legitimately engage in it. Paradoxically, they are not taken seriously within their own community. In fact, it is women who take part in political activities; it is women who are taken more seriously. Gender issues form a key line of disagreement and negative stereotyping between the local Garhwalis and the Jads, as the former consider the latter to be inferior precisely because their women seem to have so much freedom and mobility. Jad women move freely, have control over their own money, brew millet beer (local *chang*), make all important household and even village-level decisions, conduct rituals, and, in short, have complete control and agency.

The men are considered ritually sacred, more pure, and more equated with nature. In the Jad cosmology, the village is secular, the seat of everyday existence, and the proper place for women to be, because women are not pure and superior like the men who go into the high-level pastures,

from which women are debarred. Men can also traverse the forests and go to faraway places because they are pure and superior to women. In the Western understanding informed by Judeo-Christian theology, humans are superior to nature and are meant to dominate nature (Eliade 1978: 354). Women are closer to nature because they are driven by instinct and men are guided by reason that is cultural. These ideas were further concretised during the scientific era of industrialisation, when greater value was attached to reason and human potential to conquer nature (MacCormack 1980: 6; Ortner 1974). But Jad cosmology deviates distinctly from the Western view. First, there is no clear distinction between nature and culture, and second, the natural, in the sense unsullied by human presence, such as the high mountain tops, considered pure and sacred, is superior. Men by way of their pure bodies can converse with the natural, but the women who are not so *sangma* (pure) must keep away. The very ritual superiority of the men situates them appropriately in the wild, for the forests are sacred and the village is not (Channa 2010a).

Because the nation-state prioritises human habitation, such as the village or town, as the seat of power, we have a dilemma, something that makes the participation in the democratic process somewhat problematic for the people here. They are not used to having any kind of person in authority within the village, man or woman. Second, it is difficult for them to accept men as central focus of village authority. The men are attempting to redefine their position within the village but with little success. I found that young men who study in the plains, in cities, to be particularly reticent in interaction with outsiders. They would be very silent and try to be as invisible as possible; none of them, for example, would speak to me. The integration of the Jads into a primarily patriarchal political system thus remains somewhat shaky.

The divisive effects of elections

The democratic process that requires people to vote and select candidates is bringing to surface all kinds of internal divisions that were suppressed or were not relevant. The people who live in this village draw their name and identity from their occupation of a certain space and not because they have necessarily common origins (Fisher 2001: 35).[9] Locality has pre-eminence in the political domain over ethnic differences. Thus, while the democratic process has been initiated into this village based on the rather misinformed notion that the Jads are a tribe, in reality it is reemphasising all the hidden cracks in their village society that arise from different origins, different clan gods (*kuldevta*), and even the fact that many of them had originally belonged to different villages (Neilang and Jadung) or have come from different regions like Kinnaur, Chamoli, Niti, and Mana passes.

I was told that certain gods (*devta*) are the clan gods only of some people in the village and they only will perform a certain ritual or that even some of the main rituals like Panoh were performed at two different sites within the village, as people originally from Neilang want to have a separate medium than those from Bhagori. Hence, the divisions between 'gods' reflect political differences between groups and express their belonging to their locality; this is also found in other Himalayan societies and Bhutias of Sikkim (Arora 2007).

At a ritual that was initiated by the then village *pradhan* as divination for her ailing daughter, one of the key roles of a *devi* (Draupadi) could not be played by the woman who usually is the medium for this particular deity, as she was the wife of the main political rival of this woman (his sister having fought the election against her and lost). They had to get a woman from another village to act as the shamanic medium.[10] The internal divisions that formal politics has created or furthered are reflected in this instance.

The external imposition of administrative processes was particularly problematic for men. They were required to participate more with other men in the district, not a very comfortable situation for them or for the women either. The men were uncomfortable in their roles as being responsible for the village, while the women mocked them and did not take them seriously. Women in the village were not used to any of the ways of the general patriarchal system of the local Garhwalis. Men, who interacted more with outsiders, did recognise that their position within the village was not commensurate with those of other men they knew, again had no cultural means to deal with it.

Presence of state power and impact of development programmes

The state has made its presence felt for these people in the shape of the erstwhile princely state of Tehri, as like all pastoral people they had to depend on the power of the state to grant them grazing rights on large tracts of land. Unlike Kumaon, which was a part of British India, Tehri had maintained its symbolic independence, as the British ruled through its semi-divine ruler. They say that it is the rajah who granted them grazing rights to the upper-altitude pastures, a right that has been recognised by the Government of India after independence; it still issues special passes to them to cross over to that part of the border that is closed to all other civilians. The Jads recognise a close relationship with the military and police on the border and have stories to tell about how they help them in getting information.

The Indian state's presence is marked by the military, the Indo-Tibet Border Police, and the occasional presence of a minor local politicians or

higher state officials who arrive at the helipad to visit the shrine at Gangotri. But rarely do the officials have any direct interaction with the Jads, who remain hidden in their village that is situated such that it is not even visible to the outside world.[11]

The second way in which the Jads recognise the existence of the state is when they have to pay taxes to the *sarkar* for use of the lower-altitude pastures. The men are the main nodes of interaction in these, as it is they who go grazing, pay taxes, and meet other people in the lower altitudes. For the Jads, it is the towns or cities that are wild and dangerous and need to be negotiated carefully and necessarily only by men (see Channa 2010a).

In 1995, this village was selected as an Ambedkar Village under the Ambedkar Gram Vikas Yojana.[12] Through this Yojana funds were channelled into this village, and the first heated discussion that I witnessed in a panchayat meeting was regarding the use of some of this fund to build a road (of no use at all) in the village. The village is built on a mountainside with steep inclines, and roads make no difference to how one walks, because the local people are used to climbing over rocks and find it more comfortable to do so. Vehicular traffic cannot cross the deep gorges to enter the village. Many shops were vacant in the village as they were of no use for the Jads, who do not like shop-keeping. Given the small population and practically no visitors, such shops have no commercial relevance in this out-of-the-way place. The *sarkar* remains a shadowy figure for them, at least for most of them who rarely go to the plains or have visited any town or city.

It is paradoxical that in the Jad village women are supposed to be the centre of authority within the village, yet in dealing with the outside world of the government and its administrative machinery, it is the men who are expected to interact in conformity with the patriarchal norms of Indian society. When such interaction was limited to paying of taxes and tributes for grazing and trading, these were acceptable to the social norms. But the situation is becoming problematic as politics is entering the internal affairs of the village.

The workings of democracy, especially the implementation of the Panchayati Raj institutions, have brought external governance to the village. In the Jad context, women consider it only natural that they should have all the say in the village matters, while the administrative officers coming from other areas find it embarrassing to deal with the vocal and assertive Jad women. For instance, at one panchayat meeting that I witnessed, the officials sat in incredulous silence as they watched the women argue regarding issues while the village men hung around as mute spectators. No doubt, such gender roles are further used to strengthen the notion of *junglee*.

The local *pahari* society

Since most Jads, especially women, find the outside society and *sarkar* ephemeral and unintelligible, it is within the local *pahari* society that they want to relocate themselves as local Rajputs, at par with the Garhwali Rajputs whose names they have borrowed and whose worldview they share and identify with. One way in which they seek this location is by acquiring a village *devta* (deity). Each village in Garhwal, and also adjoining Himachal Pradesh (that is a culturally similar and intermarrying area), has what they call a village *devta*, whose status is that of a ruling deity. The rajah of Tehri Garhwal,[13] the human manifestation of Badrinaryan (Lord Vishnu), is located at the apex of a system in which all the other local village gods and goddesses are viewed as ruling monarchs over their territory.[14] The ruling gods have their treasury and their coterie of functionaries who take care of and manage the god's property. The identities of people and local power hierarchies are inextricably tied to the sovereign and living village gods, and most people identify themselves as the *praja* (subjects) of their presiding village deities, although a variety of other superhuman beings, including clan gods or *kuldevta*, play important roles in the social and political life of the villagers.[15] Most decisions – like when to plant crops, when to harvest them, when to take the sheep on their grazing routes, and even whom to marry – are believed to be controlled by the will of the ruling *devta*. As described by Jean Claude Galey, 'Most village gods associate in common festivals, migrate to visit one another and constitute a local pantheon, having one of their temples for headquarters' (1994: 197).

The movements of the *devta*, which is exactly like that of human beings on social visits or of kings to map out territories or to show the extent of their influence, have been described by other scholars such as Channa (2010b, 2013), Mazumdar (1998), and William Sax (2000, 2002), writing on this cultural area, which is known in anthropological literature as *pahar* (Berreman 1972, 1983). Most of the local gods are bound by kinship relationship with each other, including that of marriage. The female goddesses go to visit their *mait* (mother's place) (Sax 1991) and also to visit their husbands. There is also a recognised as well as contested hierarchy of these gods.

In this context, it is relevant to discuss the acquisition of a village god by the Jads as most people were quite uncertain about the aetiology or origin myth or any kind of ethno-history of this *devta*, who is also not the local form of a higher Hindu deity like Badrinath or Parvati or even a Mahabharatian figure like Hidimba. The *pahar* is also known for its symbolic and ritual association with the Mahabharata and elsewhere (see Channa 2005) I have described the incorporation of the Pandava in their rituals along with

their claim to a Kshatriya status. Sax mentions the significant fact that 'Garhwalis associate Mahabharata not only with their region but also with their own bodies. Garhwali Kshatriyas . . . say that they are descended from the Pandavas' (2002: 57). Thus, the Jad's claim to be Kshatriyas in the *pahar* has more significance than a mere claim to high-caste status; it incorporates them within the ritual kinship of the region.

The village deity appears to be an ancient nature god worshipped in the form of bamboo pole with pieces of red cloth tied to it, identified by the Jads as fire and grandfather (*Me* means both and *Parang* is an honorific in the Jad language). He has no kinship or relationship with any other local god and is not yet the part of any local hierarchy. This suggests he may have been a later incorporation as the Jads were struggling to get recognition in the local Garhwali society or in the culture of the *pahar*. Today, the Jads not only possess a *devta*, but they also take him out on ritual processions (*yatra*) as a public demonstration of their claim to a central upper-caste *pahari* identity (Channa 2010b).

Another way in which the Jads are shifting their identity towards the centre of *pahari* society is by distancing themselves from the Tibetan association that has been an integral aspect of their identity as Bhotiyas, but which had also denied them an upper-caste Hindu status, reducing them to being *junglee*. They have entered into a discourse of their ritual and social superiority to the Tibetans by claiming that they consider the latter almost as 'untouchables'; they never marry into them and consider their women to be like inauspicious widows (*raan mool*). I call this a discourse because most of these differences are verbalised for the benefit of outsiders than actually practised.

Marriage had always been out of question, but cultural similarities do prevail, as does their belief in the Buddhist *lamas*, a belief that is shared by the Tibetan refugees in their villages whom they refer to as Khampas. They have a Buddhist monastery and a female religious practitioner, the Chomo, who is regarded highly by all, Jad or Khampa. I have seen them share food and attend funerals and marriages at each other's houses. Yet, when I asked the Jad women about the Khampa, they made faces to tell me that 'they are different from us. These women do not put a bindi or put vermilion (sindoor) in their hair like Hindu women do'. But I never saw a Jad woman with these trappings either. Sometimes for fashion or decoration a young woman would put a *bindi*, but it was never put on religiously like Garhwali Hindu women and never did I see anyone with *sindoor*. It was quite impossible to tell the Jads apart from the Tibetans, both old and young, and I often found myself interviewing a man or a woman who I thought was a Jad but turned out to be a Khampa.

Thus, it is the *denial* rather than the actual dissociation that is important, for it is through denial that a new identity is being negotiated, that of an

upper-caste Hindu Rajput and not one associated with the Tibetans (who being non-Hindus are considered untouchable by caste Hindus). However, while the Jads may deny the Tibetan link, they do not deny their association with Buddhism as a matter of faith. It is here that they may verbalise, 'We believe in both Hinduism and Buddhism, for we are in between both these people.' The presence of the monastery in their village and going to the *lamas* for magico-religious practices are never denied. Some young Jads today are even asserting a Buddhist, non-Hindu identity as self-identification to counter what they feel as the Hindu arrogance in denying to them a place in upper-caste Hindu society. In fact, Buddhism as a religion has made an entry into their lives only after H. H. The Dalai Lama came to India with his followers. The *lamas* who came with him spread out mostly into the hilly regions of the north and built many monasteries and also came in face-to-face contact with the local people. Buddhism is thus something that belongs more to their future sense of identity than the past.

As recalled by older people, there were no *lamas* in Neilang prior to the closure of the border with Tibet. What the Jads practised then was a village form of animistic religion similar to that of the border villagers of Tibet, situated far away from the influence of Lhasa. Thus, both Hinduism and Buddhism, at least in their recognisable forms, are more recent acquisitions of these people.

It is mostly the younger men and women who have travelled and interacted with actual upper-caste Hindus, who feel the futility of trying to negotiate a place within Hindu society, especially outside of the *pahar* where they are still stereotyped as 'Tibetan' or *junglee* or, if nothing else, as scheduled tribe and, therefore, not Hindu. What the young and more educated persons among the Jads understand is that there is an inherent contradiction between being classified as a scheduled tribe, a classification that brings them some benefits, and being an upper-caste Hindu. The older people do not see any such contradiction for they are not aware of how the term 'scheduled tribe' is actually assigned. In fact, for them, the significance of such a classification is as ephemeral as the presence of the state.

The two most important areas where state presence is felt in civil society, namely justice and law and order, are maintained here more through the *devta* than through any state mechanism, which hardly makes its presence felt in this remote area. At present, it is through their *devta* that the Jads are negotiating a position in the local *pahari* society. Thus, it was the younger people who seemed more involved with Me-Parang and his significance. It is they who usually described how they went with him to the shrine of Gangotri and how important he was for their village. The elderly seemed much less concerned and, according to some, Me-Parang was someone who has entered the village only in more recent times.

Participation in local politics and emerging identities

Over the years, the Jads have come to realise their importance within the local *pahari* society. In fact, there has been a shift in identity from being closer to the Tibetans and cross-border traders to being Garhwali Rajputs, an identity that was always present (Brown 1990: 164) but which they could not express because of lack of acceptance by others. After their physical shift from the borders, they were made aware of the actual extent and the implications of their marginality. While they were engaged in highly profitable active trade with the Tibetans, they probably were both unaware and did not care about their position vis-à-vis the Garhwali Hindu society. It is only when they became economically dependent and more physically integrated with the Hindu Garhwalis that they realised they were a socially and culturally marginal people, the *junglee* and the social outcastes. But the Jads, like the Thakalis (Fisher 2001: 6)[16] are a very adaptive people. Since they do not have any sense of a primordial identity, they are ready to adapt to any situation and negotiate.

As mentioned, the identity of Jads is closely tied to a sense of 'emplacement', a tie to a place rather than to any specifically kinship-based grouping. Since they had now 'shifted' spatially, they consider it expedient to adapt to the new situation. In fact, shift or movement is something that is intrinsic to their worldview as a transhumant people engaged in grazing and trading (Channa 2013: 12–14). Therefore, shifting into another identity is not considered illegitimate or an out-of-the-ordinary situation.

Angus defines 'social identity' as 'a feeling of belonging to, or identifying with, a socially defined form of human organization' (1997: 11). The Jads have redrawn their boundary of belongingness, from the Indo-Tibet border to a social space situated centrally to the *pahari* society. They are now making efforts to create all the cultural apparatus that they may need to be identified as *pahari* Rajputs. These include having a village *devta* and for the *devta* to negotiate his space in the local social network of *devtas*, to incorporate the Pandava cult identified by some scholars as the 'icon' of *pahari* society (Sax 2000), to take on Garhwali Rajput clan names like Bhandari and Rawat, and even to change their personal names to sound more like Hindu commonplace names such as Ranjita, Babita, and Sanjit.[17]

However, no amount of efforts from the Jad side would have brought any fruits unless the larger Garhwali society too considered at least some of the Jads' claims as legitimate. A considerable degree of such legitimacy, one that now allows them to take their village *devta* in a public procession to the shrine of Gangotri, comes from two sources. The first is the relative economic prosperity of the Jads, who are wealthier than the Garhwali peasant

populations, because of the items they produce/trade in, namely animals, carpets, woollen goods, and now apples. Most of the Garhwalis in comparison have to depend on salaried jobs to supplement their meagre income from cultivation in a mountainous region with little cultivable resources.

Second, the Uttaranchal movement has drawn all the *pahari* communities together as against their common enemy, the plains people and to some extent the central and also Uttar Pradesh government. The plains people had been exploiting the resources of the mountains while creating derogatory stereotypes of the mountain people. This exploitation, along with the cultural arrogance of the upper-caste plains Hindus, led to a claim for a separate state for the hill people in the 1990s. After almost a decade of struggle, which drew all who were having or aspiring for a *pahari* identity (like the Jads) together, the new state of Uttaranchal finally came into existence in April 2000.

The Jads' support for this movement and its success has now legitimised their claim for a more significant place and location within the *pahari* society. A prominent member of the *pahari* community in Harsil told me during the peak period of the struggle for a separate state, in 1999, 'We consider the Jads as Rajputs like ourselves. Some *outside people* (bāhar wale) look down upon them but we consider them as our brothers.' The term 'outside people' was an obvious reference to the people from Uttar Pradesh or the plains.

The redrawing of political boundaries has led to a redefinition of belongingness. The Jads, by virtue of being *pahari*, are now a positive reference group. The local *paharis* realise that, if the plains people regard the Jads as *junglee*, they too are not regarded as much better. They feel it is better for the *pahari* people to stand together. To this end they would redefine the boundaries and put the onus of defining *junglee* in its various degrees,[18] on to the plains Hindus. Thus, the feeling of being *pahari* together, to some extent, does make possible an integration of the Jads with the local people. Also with increasing population, the possibility of greater village endogamy makes for the emergence of an actual internally homogeneous Jad population in the future, leading to the phenomenon of having an ethnic identity actualising itself because of 'outside' interpretation and also political need.

The Jads are realising that, as a people or a tribe, they have a political identity that may be beneficial to actualise, especially in view of the benefits that such an identity bestows on them in the form of preferential treatment and concessions from the central government. At present, they are evolving an identity and giving it a concrete shape in the form of the village god and common rituals. But the very democratic process that expects them to be 'a tribe' simultaneously threatens their social unity by exposing the internal fracture lines of this put-together identity. The very process of voting pulls

them apart in terms of their past links and associations. There is a contradictory message that is received by them from the *sarkar*.

Thus, the earlier mention in this chapter of Jad being a situational rather than a primordial identity, which is determined by residence at any moment and on a common sharing of resources, is always fragile. As soon as people are expected to compete against each other, a necessary condition of the democratic process, this Jad Bhotiya identity becomes brittle and tends to crack. But it is democracy and the state again that made the existence of such an identity necessary in the first place for, to engage in any kind of interaction with bureaucracy and state administration, the Jads need to identify themselves, and they have been doing that as Jad Bhotiya. Interestingly, the women and those who are not in touch with outside administration are often ignorant of this label.

It is because Jads are not able to make legible all that they receive from the state that interacts with them through the local political and social nodes that they are yet to develop any stable relationship to the 'abstract' Indian nation making its presence felt as the *sarkar*. Suspicion and distrust of outsiders is prevalent, yet there is a movement towards integration. Sometimes, this integration is global, like the young man who had named his two daughters Martina and Monica after the tennis stars Martina Navratilova and Monica Seles. At some levels, like when they are watching a cricket match, a sense of nationhood is also emergent but not completely understood.

The very small size of the community also makes the Jads fairly 'invisible' in political terms and, as far as I know, no major political figure or even local politician or lawmaker has ever visited them, given the inaccessibility of their terrain. The names of the major political parties like the Bharatiya Janata Party and Congress are familiar to some of them, especially the young men and women who have travelled outside to study. The major impact on their community has been in terms of the benefits of positive discrimination by virtue of which several of them have received high professional degrees and employment. Even around 2000, at least one young couple were medical doctors in the All India Institute of Medical Sciences in New Delhi, and several young men were studying in medical and engineering colleges in the plains of Uttar Pradesh.

The making of the separate state of Uttaranchal has not resulted in any specific change in Jads' position in spite of the very process of making of the state having conferred on them a more accepted Garhwali identity. This again creates both a tension and a confusion as most of them would like to be accepted as Garhwali Rajputs of high status, and they have also taken up such names as Negi, Rawat, and Bhandari to effectively make their identity fused with that of the locals. At the same time, the pull of being *janjati*,

with its benefits as well as their cultural differences, makes them wary of too much integration. One major hurdle in the process of such integration lies in their substantively different gender cosmologies. As I could assess, their major goal was to be accepted as social equals of the local Rajput Garhwalis but not to merge with them culturally so as to *become them*.

Conclusion

The Jads exhibit the uneasy and problematic relationship that may exist between 'democratic values' and democracy as an institutional set-up, with its hierarchies and administrative mechanisms. Thus, as a people who have always believed in the essential equality of all beings, in spite of the differences, the procedural aspects of a democratic form of governance that involves something like voting make no sense. 'Why do we need to choose between our kin and brethren?' was something most of them could not understand. Anything that was hierarchical was essentially in the realm of the supernatural like the village god and the rajah of Tehri (embodied form of Badrinath). Thus, to them democracy appears as hierarchy rather than equality, a curtailment rather than freedom of choice. The *sarkar* is thus an external entity, visible only in the form of the *sarkari babus* (government representatives), whose presence in their village is rare and far between. The so-called elected representatives are nothing more than go-betweens with this ephemeral and just-to-be-tolerated *sarkar*. There is no sense of leadership as it is known in other parts of the country. In this way, the movement for a separate state, the most recent and effective political movement of which they were a part, was not something that happened under anyone's guidance but a spontaneous movement of the people of the *pahar* against those of the plains. The word heard most in the context of the movement in these areas is the collective, *hum* (we), rather than the name of any particular leader.

The relative lack of gender hierarchy is also reflected in the Jad tendency to place women at front, when they refer to the collective, as against the brotherhood of men implied in most other places in north India, one point where they mark their difference from the 'others'.

The local panchayat heads are dismissed as essentially some people who are required by the outside system and have no role in the local social set-up. No form of deference or any kind of importance is attached to the present or former panchayat heads. A special problematic is the acceptance of men as village leaders. Gender remains a key issue that prevents them from accepting the external forms of governance that is totally mismatched with their concept of appropriate gender roles; it is women and not men who should be in charge of village affairs!

The democratic process here is thus something that is outside of the local cognitive space. The Jads are having a taste of their preliminary exposure to state and to democracy imposed from outside, and the external democracy is actually antithetical to some of the core democratic values of their society. They are yet to even decide what identity they want for themselves, as the most coveted identity of being an upper-caste Hindu Rajput is at variance with their perceived advantageous identity of being a tribe. But being a tribe has no sense of value for them for, unlike the larger tribes such as those of the northeast or central India, they are a small population enclosed by upper-caste *pahari* Hindus. They share a politically charged *pahari* identity with all Garhwalis that makes more emotional appeal to them as it is part of their experienced world of discrimination. Most of them have felt and still feel alienated from the world below their mountains that appears to them as wild and dangerous (Channa 2010a). There is thus little desire in them to break away from the identity of being Garhwali and Rajput and to establish a proud tribal identity (Arora 2007; Xaxa 1999). An alternative identity to being Hindu and Garhwali is to reinvent the Tibetan and Buddhist connection. Some young people who realise that they are not likely to be accepted as upper-caste Hindus, especially with respect to the world below the mountains, are turning to the Buddhist identity as a way to establish respectability and status. Around 2000–2001, many young women had expressed a desire to become nuns, and by 2013, a visit to the field showed that many of them had indeed done so.

Thus, alternative trends are appearing as one generation had shown the desire to shed the Tibetan identity and become 'Hindus', the next generation is again going back towards the Buddhist connection. The Jads would visualise their own selves as simultaneously Hindu, Rajput, *janjati*, pastoral, and Buddhist. They would also view as different from themselves all who practise agriculture, who live in cities, who are of a different social domain, and so on. Flux rather than any stability seems the order of the day, and conclusive statements would not be realistic to make. The term 'identities', rather than 'identity', better describes the on-going social and political processes.

To draw together all the threads, it is probably pertinent at this point to comment that 'democracy', as imposed by the state, follows a monolithic pattern that refuses to acknowledge differences of cognition and life ways of marginal people such as the ones described. Here, for example, a key difference is that of gender relations. The democratic process will continue to encourage invention of identities where none existed, reinvent and transform, re-create and disturb existing ones (e.g. create hierarchies where none existed), and remain overall and universally problematic, but perhaps necessary. The nation-state as an invention works with invented identities, and in the process of

participation in the democratic process, some tend to become real or tend towards self-acceptance, like the Jad Bhotiya. The forces of internal contradictions continue to pull back such assertions, while self-interest and political and economic gains may push forward for acceptance. Various people, even within the group, find themselves on different platforms and all arenas to be dynamic, contested, and reworked over and over. Such is democracy.

Notes

1 The term 'Uttaranchal' refers only to the northern part of the region, and not to the state of Uttarakhand, which was not in existence in 1994.

2 The data presented here was collected by anthropological fieldwork techniques that involved staying in or near the village for about two months at a time and carrying out observations and interviews as well as collection of genealogies. The fieldwork was made possible by a grant from the University Grants Commission. I was helped by my field assistants, Ms Anamika Verma and Mr Bhaskar Singh, and I thank them both.

3 Details of such trade and their political implications can be found in Brown (1990, 1994) and Cammen (1951).

4 The Jads are bilingual: they speak their own language within their community but can communicate in fluent Hindi with outsiders.

5 During a recent visit to Kinnaur, I found that the sharing of pastures has been discontinued because of the political division between the two states of Uttaranchal and Himachal Pradesh. In some way, this may also be seen as an effect of democracy when people began to identify themselves with their local states and preferred to forget historical associations.

6 Me-Parang is the village god who is given offerings at any time. In addition, he is taken in a ritual procession to Gangotri on the occasion of Janmashtami. Also, he appears at any other divination ritual such as Panoh (see Channa 2005, 2010b).

7 The state of Uttaranchal was formed as a separate entity form Uttar Pradesh in 2000 after a prolonged struggle by the people of this area, largely propelled by, among other reasons, the negative image of the *paharis* prevalent in the plains and the view of the plains people as exploitative by those in the hills.

8 In 1997, when I took the first demographic survey of the village, I found that the older generation had on an average only one or two children, although some, like Kaushlya, my friend, had had seven children, out of whom only four survived. There were many instances of only one or two or no surviving children. However, in 2000, when on a revisit, I was told that there has been a baby boom; there were about eleven babies in the village, a record for them.

9 About the Thakali, Fisher writes, 'So many divisions exist, in fact, that it is apparent that what often looked like a coherent upwardly mobile group and was interpreted as such by many outside observers was, in many ways, a heterogeneous population' (2001: 35).

10 All the gods (*devta*) here have their designated medium into who they descend for ritual purposes. Such mediums are fixed and lifelong (see Channa 2005).

11 The Jads say, for safety, a village should be located in a *gurgur* (a depression). For them, it actually means that the village is situated about 18.3 m below the road level, completely hidden from the main road towards Gangotri by trees and surrounded by mountainsides and also separated from the small town of Harsil by deep gorges and flowing streams. Unless specifically guided there, no one can chance upon this village easily.

12 Dr Ambedkar Rural Development Department (Dr Ambedkar Gram Vikas Vibhag) was established on 12 August 1995 for effective implementation of Dr Ambedkar Gram Vikas Yojana. The department has one section with twenty-six posts and a cell with twenty-nine posts. These posts were created vide Government Order No. 01/66-95-48/95 dated 19 September 1995. The Yojana was initially launched by the Government of Uttar Pradesh on 2 January 1991.

13 The state of Uttarakhand is divided into Garhwal and Kumaon divisions. Garhwal comprises the districts of Chamoli, Pauri, Tehri, and Uttarkashi. Kumaon was annexed by the British during the colonial period, but Garhwal remained independent under the king. It is interesting that the Jads do not identify with the Bhotiya tribes of Kumaon, possibly because it is not the territory of their king.

14 The concept of Bolanda Badri is strictly confined to the *pahar*. The Hindus of the plains believe in the shrine of Badrinath and worship him only in his iconic form. The concept of living gods or god in the human form is ridiculed by the plains' Hindus.

15 Sax writes, 'I wish to focus on the fact that these deities all figure as divine kings, with sovereign rights over their respective territories and subjects' (2002: 172).

16 The Thakalis, who, like the Jads, were engaged in salt trade, and after the cessation of this trade, 'purposefully and unilaterally' moved towards Hinduisation (Fisher 2001: 6).

17 It must be noted that most of these names are borrowed from television serials or Hindi films, as they do not have much direct interaction with people from the plains. It is also likely that Garhwali Hindus might also be borrowing these names from the same sources.

18 Even the upper-caste Garhwalis are regarded as 'inferior' by the plains Hindus, who look down upon their drinking and meat-eating habits. At the same time, we can quote from Berreman that 'the high-caste mountain people also look down upon the plains people. They put forward better status of women and a less rigid caste system as evidence of their own superiority' (1983: 252).

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