

## The Life History of a Jad Woman of the Garhwal Himalayas

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### Introduction: The creation of this document

This life history was collected by me using the fieldwork method in the village of Bhagori, in the upper Himalayas on the Indian side of the Indo-Tibet border.<sup>1</sup> Bhagori, situated at a height of 2620 metres above sea level, is the summer village of the transhumant Jads, a pastoral group and one of the many Bhotiya communities which traditionally carried on trans-border trade with Tibet (Fürer-Haimendorf 1975, 1981). They are bilingual, speaking Hindi fluently as well as having their own language which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group. They call themselves Rongpas in their own language, but all the literature about them, including Census reports, refers to them as Jads (Rizvi 1979, Bhandari 1981, Naithani 1986, Bisht 1994); they are also often, especially in the local official registers, categorized simply as Bhotiyas. I spent two summers at their high-altitude village and other times at their winter village and low-altitude camp. Most of the life history was collected at the summer village, where these people feel most at home and relaxed.

The Jads move seasonally between their summer village at Bhagori and their winter village at Dunda, near the sacred town of Uttarkashi. Some also go down to the winter camp at Chor-Pani near Hrishikesh, where they trade their goods with people from the plains. Like all mountain people, they consider the

<sup>1</sup> The district of Uttarkashi shares its northern border with Tibet and the Indian district of Kinnaur; to the east lies the border of Tibet and the district of Chamoli; in the south it is bound by Chamoli and Tehri Garhwal; and in the west lie the districts of Mahasu and Dehradun. The district is divided into three sub-divisions (*tehsil*): Bhatwari, Dunda, and Purolia. The Jads are located in Bhatwari and Dunda, having a permanent village in each of these places. Bhatwari, where their main village, Bhagori, is located, is also the district headquarters. Conceptually the people regard Bhatwari and Dunda to be Uttarkashi. The latter term is used for this entire region although it also refers to the main town of Uttarkashi, which is one of the holiest pilgrimage sites of the Hindus.

higher altitudes to be their real domain.<sup>2</sup> Their identity is closely tied to their high-altitude village and they feel a sense of belonging to it, an emotion not expressed for the low-altitude village. Most old people aspire to die at Bhagori and thus would like to spend more and more time there. They believe that if they are cremated on a pyre of Deodar wood near the river Ganga that flows through their village they will attain heaven. The Jads are a true border people. Spatially, they inhabit a territory that lies between India and Tibet, but their history of economic and social interactions with the Tibetans has produced a culture made up of influences from both Tibetan and Hindu cultures. Yet the Jads are neither Buddhist nor Hindu but share in both belief systems along with their own distinctive primal beliefs.

This life history was the product of my interaction with a seventy-eight-year-old Jad woman named Kaushalya, a Hindu mythological name quite common among the Jads, who inhabit a landscape sacred in Hindu cosmology, from the Gangotri to Hrishikesh. The first time I met Kaushalya, she was sitting outside her ornate house with elaborately carved wooden pillars (made by craftsmen from the nearby region of Himachal, with whom they frequently intermarry). She was enjoying the sun in the company of her grandchildren. One year I found her in the company of her son and daughter-in-law and their small children and another year her married daughter and two grand-daughters accompanied her. In both cases she was staying in the same house which belonged to her, having been the house of her husband. Both the married son and married daughter, in different years, were staying with her as her guests. Kaushalya told me that if any year she was forced to stay behind in Dunda in the summer, she was acutely unhappy. "I enjoy this mountain climate and environment," she told me. "This is where I belong and this is where I want to die."

The life history was collected as a narration, but not continuously. I would sit around and chat with Kaushalya as she had tea or played with her grandchildren (sometimes her son's children, sometimes her daughter's). At times she would be oiling her hair or just sitting idle and wrapped in her blanket, 'snug' (*timu*), as she would say in her own language. She was a very articulate and reflective woman, who at the age of seventy-eight (in 1999) had seen a lot of life. My interaction with her began as with a friend, since she was interested in me and would invite me to sit with her on her verandah and talk

<sup>2</sup> The association of altitude with sacredness and purity is not only a feature of the pastoralists of this region, as mentioned by Rao (1998), but also of the Hindus, who regard the top of the Himalayas as Mount Kailash or the heavens, and legend has it that the route from Gangotri upwards is the pathway to heaven.

to her. Jad women have considerable freedom of movement and frequently travel on their own, so two females (my research assistant Ms Anamika Verma accompanied me on most of my trips) making it on their own to a mountain village was not at all surprising to them. This meant that rapport was established more quickly than would be usual in a place where women are not seen as having much freedom of movement. "In this place we women walk on our own feet, we go everywhere on our own, like to the doctor or to the market," they would tell me. Kaushalya was one of the first local people I became friendly with and she continued to be one to whom I remained close.

Thus the life history, as a document, was the product of an interaction (Freeman 1978: 86). It was not that we were always alone; such privacy is rare in an Indian village, where life is based on close personal interactions and community living. Sometimes other persons—her daughters, grand-children, daughters-in-law, or even neighbours—would be present either sitting with us or passing by. (The Jads live in houses with open verandahs, which is where most of the daytime living is carried out. The rooms are windowless and dark and used only for sleeping at night. Nearly everyone, unless very ill, spends their time sitting either outside their houses or beside the road.)

Since Kaushalya was too old to be doing much productive work, her time was mostly spent sitting in the sun gossiping and looking after her grandchildren, and drinking numerous cups of butter tea (*chacha*) out of a lovely flask which she said came from China. (The Jad men are active traders and in Jad houses one has evidence of goods coming from various places that fall within the range of their trading activities, such as Nepal, China, and even Burma.) At times the narrative would include reference to other people, like her son or grandchild who might come within her vision, thus triggering off an observation or a bit of memory. We spoke in Hindi, both of us being fluent in the language, although after some time I had also picked up a little of their language and was also tutored by Kaushalya herself. The reason why she spoke intensively to me was that, as an old woman, she had little work to do. I provided a ready and eager audience, and she probably entertained herself in the process, taking it as a good way of passing the time. She was pleased at my eagerness to learn about her and would often ask me why I had chosen this particular place to work in. I told her quite truthfully that I was in love with the stunning beauty of the surroundings and that I was also very interested to study a pastoral people with their shifting lifestyle. Also I knew nothing about them and neither did anyone else. It would be a good thing if I wrote about them and a lot more people came to know them. To this she agreed, saying that many tourists did pass this way but no one stayed on in the village or

showed as much interest in them as I did. In this way the interaction was on an equal footing and often Kaushalya, as the older and in this case more informed person, would take the role of a tutor. At other times she would ask advice, for example about a slight indisposition or stomach upset. In this way my approach differed considerably from that of Freeman, for whom the anthropologist assumed the role of a patron or employer. In no way did I make Kaushalya or any one else feel that I was on a higher social or political rung than them. At times they would sympathize with me, that for the sake of my work I had to travel many miles and climb such altitudes, leaving my family behind. Sometimes she would feel the fabric of my dress and comment that it was good-quality wool. Sometimes I would be reprimanded for not wearing the right colours. "We never wear red and yellow in the mountains. They attract the jealousy of the *mātriyal* (spirits of the forest)." Although she and her daughters and grand-daughters did occasionally accept a few small gifts from me, these were given and taken in a spirit of affection rather than of payment. In fact she would often feed me with tea and snacks while we talked.

Tonkin (1992) has referred to the temporality of the occasion of narration itself, which brings together at a particular point of time the narrator and the listener, both with their own histories. This life history is born out of a two-way interaction between two women, one old and belonging to the place where the interview took place, and the other middle-aged and not really belonging but nevertheless an acceptable part of the community. Our histories were very different but nevertheless converged: I was interested to know about her both from an academic and from a personal point of view, since many of her experiences overlapped with mine.

Although I cannot speak for Kaushalya, I can guess that she was motivated by curiosity and a certain bond between us, including a similar social standing based on kinship identity, we were both mothers and mothers-in-law, and both either actually or potentially grandmothers. Our age and sex gave us a common platform on which to share thoughts and feelings. As an example I cite an instance when I was playing with her grandson, a rather hyper-active child of about three years of age. Kaushalya, quite exhausted in her attempts to control him, said: "You like children? That is because you have only two of your own. I had nine children and they were enough for me. Now these grandchildren are a bit too much for me to handle."

During the interviews, Kaushalya would often ask me why I had chosen to come so high up, and why was I so interested to know what, to them, were minute and worthless details. She compared me to the government officials

who just took some data in an off-hand manner and left. Our interaction was always even-sided, even though she may have been the only person talking. I am sure Kaushalya sized me up in her own eyes and decided what she thought should be contained in her narrative. The convincing aspect of my work was that I was going to write a book, which seemed legitimate enough for her (although she was disappointed that I was not going to do a television programme instead).

While recording the life history I was also aware that she was not talking in the first person at all times; often she contextualized and collectivized certain events. Tonkin quotes Schrage, who says: "Far from dealing only with ourselves when we tell about the past, we incorporate the experience of a multitude of others along with our own, they appear in what we say" (Tonkin 1992: 41). Thus what Kaushalya did unconsciously, I had to do consciously; that is, I had to cast the individual in the perspective of the collective. She was often referring to the community or the world at large and I had to make sense of the community and infer the world at large in her words.

Thus her life history can be better understood as a series of episodes that illustrate or are significant for the understanding of larger events, historically contextualized. The life history of Kaushalya is woven into the matrix of the history of the Jad people, their displacements and relocations as a result of the entry of markets and national politics into their lives. As an anthropological document the life history makes sense in integrating a larger reality into a specific experience.

### The life history

We are a people of the forest and the mountains. Our forefathers may not even have had a village for we are, as you know, people of the jungle (*jangli*). We are different from the people who till the soil and who stay at one place, we wander here and there, and it is quite likely that some of our forefathers may have got tired of wandering and settled down at Neilang, which was the place where I was born. This was way up on the mountains [pointing upwards], it was quite different from here. We came to this village, Bhagori, only after the 1962 war with China, when the army came and evacuated us, shifting us down to this village. Earlier, Neilang was the largest of our summer villages. Then there was Jadung, a small village adjacent to Neilang. As children we had no schooling. We would wander around and sit on the roadside and

watch the pilgrims pass by. A large number of pilgrims used to pass this way on their way to Gangotri [the glacier that is the source of the river Ganga]. The rich men (*seths*) would be carried on the back of the local people; they would be paid for it. We were amused by the stream of people passing by and would beg them for small things like *bindis* [small dots worn on the forehead by Hindu women].

Here in Bhagori, there were only a few *mavasā* (households)—not more than ten—of the Jads.<sup>3</sup> When we were displaced we grabbed the land of the *zamindār* (landlord) of Jhala [the nearest village], to whom most of the land belonged. Even now he has a little land in the village. See that large apple orchard, it belongs to him. No one said anything to us. The government was on our side. They had to find land for us so they just settled us all here.

Up there, there was a lot of land. It was flat, not hilly like here. We used to plough the fields with yaks and oxen. We had a variety of cows called *chorgai*, which came from Tibet. You still see a few of them around. They are small and hairy and give rich milk that produces a lot of butter, yellow in colour and very thick. Up there we used to produce maize and a variety of millet called *soh*. It was called 'naked millet' because it did not have any outer covering. The women did all the agricultural work like sowing and harvesting and the men traded and grazed sheep. They traded with the Tibetans across the border. We had families with whom we traded and the men would go and stay with those families for a couple of months, eat and sleep like family members, and then come back with the goods. The Tibetans would come also and stay with us. They made cups for us to drink tea in. These would be made of silver on the inside and have a wooden covering on the outside. Whenever anyone got married at least two cups would be given as gifts by the girl's parents to the newly-weds. The Tibetans were like our family members. But ever since the [1962] war, relations have broken down.

<sup>3</sup> As I have written elsewhere (Channa 1998), Jad identity is closely linked to birth in a Jad village. Children born to Jads, both men and women, are considered as Jads irrespective of whether their mothers or fathers were originally Jads. Thus, although the name is inherited in the male line, Jad identity is not. A Jad woman like the daughter of Kaushalya, who is married to a non-Jad husband living in Dunda, a Jad village, was going to bring up her children as Jads. This absorption of children of outside fathers and Jad mothers within the Jad village had led to a proliferation of lineage names and also lineage gods. Kaushalya expressed this by saying that the number of gods (*devtā*) is steadily increasing. In this case, the children inherit the name of the father and the identity of the mother.

This part of the narrative illustrates the changing relationship of the Jads with the Tibetans. Actually it indicates a change in their social world that was originally shaped by a close interaction with the high-altitude Tibetans and is now influenced more by the plains Indians. The shift from high to low is bringing about changes in their worldview, but the process is as yet incipient and they still think of themselves as a high-altitude people distinct from the Garhwali cultivators who surround them.

We are the *bhed charānewāle* (sheep herders). We have no attachment to the soil like the *zamindārs* (cultivators). The *zamindārs* look down upon us. They would marry our daughters but not give us theirs. If they find a girl to be very beautiful, they would take her, like two of my daughters are married to Garhwali men. They asked for them in marriage. We do not like to give our daughters to the cultivators because they eat the money of their daughters. They take money from the bridegroom. We Jads, we do not take or give money in our marriages.

Until this time the Jads were a mountain people who had only marginal contact with the mainstream populations of the plains of India. "Sitting on the roadside to watch the pilgrims go by" is a graphic description of the nature of interaction at that time with the Hindu majority. The Jads, however, derived a large part of their income from the pilgrims by providing them with transport by way of the animals they raised and also by acting as guides and porters. They prefer not to marry with the cultivators because they are considered 'not like us'. The marriage culture of the Jads is distinct both from that of the surrounding Hindus and from the Tibetans as well:

When I was married nothing was given or taken. The parents and the relatives put together some vessels for daily use. The marriage gifts at my wedding consisted of one brass plate (*thāli*), one ladle (*karchi*), two saucepans (*degchi*)—one for making *sāg* (vegetables) and one for making rice—, one mattress and one quilt, one blanket, about 10 gms of gold and about one kg. of silver. We also received 8-10 sheep to start our own flock. My husband's family gave a nose ring. When I got married there was no ceremony. We were just made to wear new clothes and everyone got together and ate and drank and we were told that we were married. In those days most people did not perform any other ritual to get married. It was just a way of announcing, by eating and drinking together, that the boy and girl were married. In those times the boys and girls were married very young, even before they knew

what was happening to them. When they grew up they would find out that they did not like each other. Then the fights would start. At that time more than one third of the couples separated and got married again. Someone would marry someone else's wife and someone would marry someone else's husband. Nowadays such things do not happen, because the boys and girls marry at late ages. They now marry according to their own choice. The boy must come and ask for the girl among us. We do not have the custom of a man marrying more than one wife like among the *zamindars*. Some of the women had more than one husband; like my daughter-in-law here had two fathers, they were brothers. But this was also rare among us. This custom was more prevalent in Kinnaur.

We were just small children, my husband and me. I was fourteen years old and he was just a little older, around sixteen. He was the son of my father's sister. We consider it right for a girl to marry her father's sister's son but we would never marry the son of the mother's brother. That is a sin. It is like marrying your own brother. My own brother is the one born of my parents but the sons of my mother's sister and my father's brother are also my own brothers, we make no difference between them. But I personally think that one should not marry any one as close as the father's sister's son. If you do that then you get sick children as I did.

Two of my sons were born weak in the head. One of them was put in a hospital and died last year. The other one you see wandering around. He is not quite right in the head. He does not know what he is doing. But sometimes he is very cunning. That day he was telling me that I should not talk to you for you might give me up to the police. I told him that I have nothing to fear from the police for I have done nothing wrong. He became like that because of addiction to *bangi* (*bhang* or *cannabis indica*).

To a great extent I am to blame for his addiction. I smoke *bidis*. When he was very young, he would pick up the stubs that I had smoked and thrown away and smoke them. Gradually he learn to smoke *bhang*. That ruined him. Now he just wanders around and comes home when he is hungry.

Every one in our community smokes *bidis*, it is seen as perfectly normal. Earlier we all learnt to smoke when we were just 8 or 9 years old. We would pick up the stubs smoked by the adults and smoke them. It was just a game with us and no one said anything about it. Nowadays the modern doctors tell us that there is something wrong with smoking

but we never thought so. It is only bad to smoke *bangi*, that is bad because it takes away your reason.

When I was small I would pick up stubs left by older people and smoke them. We used to just roam about like wild children. I would roam in the jungles near our village and pick berries and eat them. We never went to school. In our village there has been a school for a long time now. Earlier only some children used to study, only those who wanted to. Our parents did not think it necessary to educate children. They saw no benefit in education for all that we had to do, like grazing sheep and working in the fields. Everyone goes to school nowadays because they want to become *bābus* (white-collar workers). I sent all my children, boys as well as girls, to school. They are all educated and can read and write, unlike me. One of my sons is a schoolmaster, the other is also working in a job. None of them herd sheep.

At a personal level, Kaushalya is not without regret for the earlier way of life, especially for the masculinity of the men like her husband who were strong and braved the hazards of the shepherd's life like true men. It was not without a sigh that she narrated:

They [her sons] are not like their father, my husband, who was a strong man and could manage to keep a large herd of sheep single-handed.

If you are not strong, the wild animals will eat your sheep. Also in the jungles there are no comforts of home and hearth. A man who likes the comfort of a soft bed cannot sleep on the hard bed of the forest. These boys are incapable of such hard work and could not survive the rough life of the jungles.

Life was hard but it was good. My husband would go away for months to herd sheep and to trade. My husband and I were happy together. He had about 3-400 sheep. We were very fond of travelling. Almost every year we would go somewhere as pilgrims. I have seen a lot of places in my life. We even went to far off places like Nepal and Tibet. There were beautiful monasteries and temples in those places.

My husband was one of three brothers, all of them herded sheep. That was the only work we knew. We traded with the Tibetans across the border. We would get salt from them, and wool and horses, dogs, blankets, yaks, and cows. In return we would give them brass utensils, rice, and sugar.

The wool from Tibet was long and silky, it was very warm. Their dogs had silky fur like pashmina, the horses were of extremely good quality. They could carry you up the steepest mountains. They would

keep going no matter how steep and difficult the terrain, but would stop as soon as they came across a gorge. Ever since trade with Tibet stopped we can no longer get all those fine goods. Nowadays we get more things from the plains. In earlier times we never went down beyond Sukhi [a village about 100 kms below them, a journey of roughly half an hour by jeep]. There were no roads. The bridges have all been built after the army entered this region. Before that, people used to cut a tree trunk and throw it across, to cross over a deep gorge. These were temporary and would disappear after some time. The animals raised by us provided for all the transport requirements of this region. Ever since the roads have been built and wheeled vehicles have started plying we have lost a major source of our income.

The establishment of communication links with the plains and participation in the market network of the Hindu lowlands has brought considerable changes to the Jad way of life and to their meaning system. The absorption of this region into Indian democracy has made them aware of a larger social participation than before. For people like Kaushalya, who straddles the two worlds, the transition is not easy. Earlier the plainspeople were 'Other', to be contacted only for necessary trading. They were not part of the discourse that shaped their lives:

We did not grow rice ourselves but got it from the plains of Hrishikesh in exchange for our wool and Tibetan salt. I remember we used to come up from Hrishikesh laden with goods on our backs like pack animals. We did a lot of direct exchange in those days. We had hardly any money to spend. In those days no one did jobs that paid you money. We had our goods, either grown or made ourselves like our wool and shawls, and we exchanged them for other things we needed. We would buy clothes and utensils from the market with the money we got from the sale of sheep and wool. But most other things we got through exchange like most of the Tibetan goods. They had their own money, but we exchanged goods for goods.

The Jads are transhumant and move between their winter and summer village and a camp at Chorpani, a place in the forests near Hrishikesh, the holy town in the foothills of the Himalayas. This is the lowest point to which the Jads descend:

Our life in the early days was too hard. We would go down to Chor-Pani in winter and graze our mules and horses in the jungles there. The

men took the sheep to their pastures in the plains. Sometimes my husband and I would take the larger animals to Chor-Pani and let the servants take the sheep for grazing. Sometimes my husband would go and look after the sheep while I would stay in the camp and look after the horses, cows, and mules. At that time every one had cows for milk. At Neilang and Jadung there was enough space to graze the larger animals in summer, and in winter we would come down to Chor-Pani. Even when I was a child I remember going to Chor-Pani with my parents. We make shelters there which are temporary. As a child I enjoyed going to Chor-Pani and would wonder how the water came gushing out of the stones there. It is a place where the water remains hidden in the rocks and comes out suddenly when you go looking for it. Whole families go to Chor-Pani, all women and children.

Nowadays people keep fewer animals. That is because there is little place to graze them at Bhagori in the summer. A very few families go to Chor-Pani now. Very few households have pack animals as even the use for them is diminishing. At Hrishikesh we would buy a lot of things with the money we got in exchange for all our stuff. We would buy clothes for the whole year and brass vessels, sugar, tobacco, and jaggery. When we came up we were loaded with goods.

At Chor-Pani I always felt scared. We would hide in the deep jungles and go out only in groups. We were afraid of the people of the towns who came to Hrishikesh. They were all so different from us. When we had to come up we would start in the night itself. We would get up in the middle of the night and start walking, because our animals do not like the heat of the plains and cannot walk in the bright hot sun. They get tired, and so do we. Moreover, we did not like to move during the day and get in the way of the townspeople. I remember feeling shy and strange in front of the people from the plains. We never wanted to interact with them much. Only when they wanted to trade with us. One very popular item of trade is our dogs. When we were going to Tibet we got these dogs. All that you see around this place are the descendants of the Tibetan dogs. They make very good watchdogs and many people want them.<sup>4</sup>

We would start off in the middle of the night. There was no fixed time. Whenever any one would get up they would start loading the animals and the others would get up also. It could be two or three a.m. We kept close to each other while we were in the lower altitudes. We used to feel so scared that we might be attacked or that thieves might

<sup>4</sup> During the course of my fieldwork I also met people from the cities who wanted to know whether they could meet Jads who were selling Bhotiya dogs.

steal our things. However, once we came up to Uttarkashi we felt much relieved. After reaching Dunda we would take rest and then break up into smaller groups. Then the journey became a pleasure. We would take our own time, staying on at the homes of our friends and relatives. From Uttarkashi onwards it was our own domain. We were no longer afraid because we were with our own friends and relatives. The journey from Hrishikesh to Uttarkashi took about fifteen days, but from Uttarkashi to Neilang we took two to three months, staying on with our people and enjoying ourselves. We would exchange gifts and eat and drink and spend some time in leisure before we went back to our own village in the summer; then the agricultural work would start again.

In this part of the narrative it becomes clear that the lower altitudes were regarded as unfamiliar and dangerous. The Jads would move through as quickly and as unobtrusively as possible, hiding in the darkness before dawn. But as soon as they reached higher altitudes, they would relax, slow down, move at their own pace, and interact socially with the people they considered as 'themselves'. We are also informed about the nature of traditional trade, mostly barter.

The men would go up to the highest altitudes at Purunsumdu, at the border of Tibet, with the sheep, and we would stay in the village and work in the fields and do other household work. The men say that the grass at those high altitude pastures is like ghee: it is soft and pure. In the month of Bhadon the sheep become so fat after grazing on this grass for three months that if they sleep too much at night they die and do not wake up because of the excess fat in their stomachs.

I have never been to those pastures, as women never go up to the *danda*, the faraway pastures; I have only heard my husband and other men like his brothers talk about those places. We women never go the pastures: that is a man's job. In my family now no one keeps sheep. Even my sons-in-law are working in jobs. So you do not see my daughters or daughters-in-law knitting or beating wool, as other women do.

A most significant change that is coming in the lives of the people is demographic. Earlier, due to lack of medical facilities, a large number of children would die. Moreover it seems the Jads were, even to begin with, a small settlement of pastoral people, who could only reproduce by marrying into other communities similar to themselves. Most persons marrying them, both males and females, were absorbed into the Jad identity. This is more of

an identity based on common resource use and residence, than on a rule of endogamy (Channa 1999). The life experiences of the women kept them away from the pastures and none of them, even today, had ever seen those places, though they travel a lot otherwise.

At that time [about sixty years back] there were only twenty to twenty-five households at Neilang, which we considered as our base village. At Jadung and at Bhagori there were only about ten households each. When we were shifted to Bhagori all the persons of our Rongpas became part of the same village. We are now three villages here. In the present time the number of households has increased to about three hundred.<sup>5</sup>

The Jads are not a uniform community of people. All who are known as Jads were not necessarily so even a generation back. Many are in-marrying sons-in-law, a custom held in common with Tibet. With increasing Hindu influence the customs of polyandry and the residential son-in-law are falling into disuse. Migration from other regions is also in decline as the village grows in size and young people can easily find a mate near at hand:

Not all people who are in this village were born here. Many persons came here from Chamoli, from Kinnaur, and from the Niti Mana valleys near Joshi Math. My paternal grandfather came from Kinnaur to settle here after marrying my *dādi* (paternal grandmother) as a *mappa* (resident son-in-law). Many men in those days used to come from Kinnaur to settle here, because there they used to have one wife between several brothers. Sometimes a man would want to have his own wife, like my *dādā* (paternal grandfather), and they would run away to this place and get a girl to marry them and become a part of the village. Then their children would become Jads. A man may be very poor and have no land or sheep and then he would come here and become a *mappa* to a girl who had no brother. Then he would have land and sheep and his children would inherit the property of their grandparents. Sometimes a young man may have some differences with

<sup>5</sup> Jad households usually consist of only one married couple because sons separate after getting married. But the households usually contain other relatives and even resident servants. They often also include children whose parents may not be present in the village, or old people who cannot take care of themselves. Kaushalya always came to live in a house which had belonged to her and her husband. Her older sons had separate dwellings in the village and although she visited them often she stayed in her own house. This also belonged notionally to her younger son who would inherit it by the rule of ultimogeniture.

his family and say, 'I am going away, I do not want to see your faces.' He may wander here and settle down with a girl of the village. We have people from other pastoral communities within us. Many young men came from Kinnaur primarily because of the custom of sharing a wife between several brothers. In that place people have a lot of agriculture and they do not want the land to be fragmented, so they marry all the brothers to a single girl. I know my paternal grandfather came away for this very reason. My maternal grandfather also came from some place in Himachal. He was very poor and just wandered into this place. My grandmothers were both from this village and so was my mother.

A part of the narrative recounts the common experience of being a Jad woman. Although some of it is specific to the speaker, a large part is shared with other women of her times and her community.

I had nine children. We never did anything to stop the children from coming. Nowadays I hear that there are injections and medicines to get rid of an unwanted pregnancy. We never made use of anything to prevent the children from coming and we never did get anything to get rid of a child. The children are like gifts of God and anyway we lost many children. We were only too happy to get as many as possible.

My children were born quite easily. I did all the work when I was pregnant. I would climb up the hills and walk long distances. Among us a woman would sometimes give birth on the roadside, if her time came while we were on the move. She would simply go behind the nearest bush and give birth. We used the knife with which we cut bushes and shrubs for firewood to cut the umbilical cord. A woman always cut her own cord. She would go to the nearest stream and bathe herself and clean the baby and throw the afterbirth and umbilical cord in the running stream. We do not bury them. The mother does all the things herself and, unless she is having a very difficult birth, is not assisted by anyone. Some of her female relatives may sit around, but they do not touch her unless absolutely necessary. Either the woman's mother or her mother-in-law assists her in childbirth. Some other relative or woman may also help. But this is done when it is absolutely required. Most of the time, if she can, the mother herself takes care of everything.

As soon as the baby is born, a spoonful of warm ghee is poured into the mother's mouth and she keeps her mouth closed for a while so that her teeth do not become weak.

I never had any trouble with the birth of my children. But I lost several of my children. One daughter died when she was just nine

months old. I do not know why, she just fell ill and died. One of my sons died when he was only thirteen years old. I took him to the hospital and the doctors said that he had pneumonia. All the rest of my children grew up. But I lost two sons in recent years. One of them was not alright mentally, so we put him in a hospital in Benaras, and he died there last year. Another son died after falling from a cliff. I do not think he died naturally. I think that he was pushed into the gorge during a drunken brawl. He was a heavy drinker. Often people die here after falling from cliffs. They may be drunk or may be pushed, who knows? Even about ten years back many children used to die. When we were at Neilang during the rainy season most children below the age of one would die of loose motions and vomiting (*jonka*). They would just wither up and die. We did not do anything to prevent this. It was only an act of God. I would go to the lama to get the evil eye off my children and tie amulets around their necks and arms but when they have to die then nothing can prevent it.

I see a lot of changes all around me. The dresses have changed, the names have changed. Even the names by which people call their relatives have changed.

#### In the course of a life...

As Tonkin has pointed out for similar cases, Kaushalya's life incorporates a collective experience and we go through a kind of ethno-history where the changing world of the Jads and the historical transformations to which they have been subjected emerges from the narration. It shows how a small group of people may have their lives changed by the changing political and economic relations between countries. The Jads reflect the true dilemmas of a border people, who not only inhabit the borders between two states but also the borders between two cultures. The push from the Tibetan to the Indian side has had far-reaching effects on the Jads, and a single life mirrors many of these changes. This life history shows the interdependence of what Maynard (1994: 15) quoting Brah (1991, 1992) calls the distinction between the "the everyday of lived experience and the experience as a social relation." Thus, through the everyday lived experience of Kaushalya, we get a glimpse of the larger relationships of the community as well as the even larger political relationships within which they are situated.

This life history is an example of the specific reflecting the general. At the individual level, Kaushalya is a typical pastoralist woman, moulded by a life



experience specific to the economy, lifestyle, and landscape of the Jads. She was in the last phase of her life-cycle, a time of leisure, after going through periods of hard labour, child-bearing, and productivity. The old among the Jads are treated with care and contribute significantly towards childrearing, which remains their primary task as long as they are able. When they become too old and infirm, they spend their time sitting in the sun and are taken care of by family members. The Jad women have a position of independence that is influenced more by the Tibetan worldview than by mainstream Hindu Indian society; they conform to the picture of "strong and independent Tibetan women" (Diemberger 1993: 98). The women of Kaushalya's generation ate and drank like the men, they smoked and consumed alcohol. When the men were away grazing and trading, they looked after the fields and crops and also traded and exchanged goods. Thus the women went with the men to Chor-Pani, and as Kaushalya has described, would come up from the plains laden with rice and other goods, "like mules". They worked hard and had their independence, and they would travel with their husbands and even on their own. Kaushalya, as we have seen, is a widely travelled person and listed "travelling" as one of her main pleasures in life. She had admired her shepherd husband as "strong" and "brave". She had many children and lost several of them due to ignorance and lack of proper medical care. She maintained equal and symmetrical ties with her son and daughter, reflecting the bilaterality of Jad kinship relations, and their emphasis on filiality rather than descent.

Since the women work and contribute to the making of the house, it is believed that the house belongs as much to the wife as to the husband. At the death of the husband the wife is seen as the owner of the house, as Kaushalya was seen of hers. As Kaushalya's genealogical links indicate, many of the present-day Jads are people married into the community from places such as Kinnaur and Chamoli. The important condition for forming alliances is sharing a common economy and way of life, as well as shared pastures. When a Jad woman marries a non-Jad, as in the case of Kaushalya's daughter, the children become Jads.

The changes that are taking place in kinship and marriage institutions and in the position of the women are somewhat informed by the stronger influence of universal religions like Hinduism and Buddhism, both of which have become more influential than before. Thus many of the changes that have taken place in Kaushalya's own life and that of her daughters and sons, and also of the Jads as a whole, cannot be understood without referring to the local changes that have taken place over the past four decades.

The landmark event that the Jads identify as the turning point in their lives is the closure of the Indo-Tibet border after the Indo-China war of 1962, and the relocation of their two border villages, Neilang and Jadung, at the lower altitude of Bhagori. With this relocation they also came into close contact with the army and the Indian plains. The bulk of their trade was with the Tibetan borderland people, who were culturally similar to them. With the closure of the border and the increased communication channels, opened mainly by the army's own transportation needs, they came into closer economic and social interaction with the people of the Indian plains. Most of their trading activities were now concentrated on the Indian side of the border, and they soon started specializing in goods of greater value to the people in Hrishikesh and those who came up as pilgrims and even tourists. Thus making and trading shawls, woolen goods, carpets, and now apple farming, were started by the Jads in a big way. The women turned more towards wool-processing as the agricultural work they were doing in Neilang was stopped. Population pressure at Bhagori has made agriculture purely marginal, limited to growing red beans and potatoes on a small scale. Earlier, most of the trade was barter and done by the men on their journeys. Nowadays the women exchange the goods they make directly for cash in the local markets.

When the Dalai Lama came to India, Tibetan monks came with him in large numbers. They built many monasteries, including one at Bhagori. The religion that they had been in contact with from their Tibetan partners was a folk system of beliefs like their own. The lamas brought universal Buddhism and its influence is visible on the younger generation, to the extent that several young women and one young man stunned their elders by wanting to become Buddhist monastics. Hinduism is also becoming more dominant as interaction with the Hindus from the plains is increasing on a personal level, through participation in educational, political, and economic activities. Kaushalya, for example, would always pester her literate daughter to read to her from Hindu scriptures because she "liked the stories". She also pointed out the increased religiosity pervading the life of the Jads by saying, "In Neilang we had no use for so much religion as I see around now."

Education is playing an important role in changing the lives of the Jads. The sons and daughters of Kaushalya are all educated and none is herding sheep. Her daughter's husband is a schoolmaster and a Garhwali Hindu. The lives of women whose husbands are not shepherds is different, for they are becoming more like Hindu housewives. The number of such families is still small but it is increasing slowly, as more and more young persons are opting for education and jobs. In this they are encouraged by the Indian government

which gives them positive discrimination in the form of reservations in jobs and professional institutions as they fall under the category of 'scheduled tribes'. With the establishment of an army base, they receive proper medical care and are better connected with the urban centres due to the building of roads.

Demographic changes have had a big impact on Jad identity. There has been a drop in infant mortality and the Jad population has been concentrated in one village instead of three. The larger population makes it possible for more and more young people to find a match within the village, and the village is becoming a focus of their identity. As a larger number of children survive and grow up, they will in a generation grow to be numerous enough for the village to become endogamous. But the village, in becoming integrated into the Indian democracy, is changing its character. The Jads are now also realizing that they have a political identity, a concept unknown before the introduction of adult franchise and the recent village self-rule in the form of Panchayati Raj. Having lost their erstwhile Tibetan trading partners, they are trying to reform similar relationships with the people on this side of the border. The influence of the market network is also making itself manifest. One potent form of this is the change-over from a barter to a cash economy.

The high-altitude village of the Jads at Bhagori is still more or less cut off from the influence of modern technology. But their low-altitude winter village at Uttarkashi has all the trappings of an urban place. They have television and movies, two of the primary sources of entertainment for common people all over the world. Since the Hindi movies that they see propagate mainstream Hindu ideals of family and kinship, changes are slowly coming about in their values. The simple marriage ritual described by Kaushalya is no longer favoured by the Jads. In one marriage I attended, a Hindu *pandit* (Brahmin priest) was brought in, although he performed no rituals. Kaushalya was apologetic about the Jad custom of cross-cousin marriage that does not exist in northern India. She mouthed the opinion of high-caste north Indians, who shudder at such marriages, that this custom was responsible for her sons "not being quite right in the head". She also blamed her smoking habit. She would often refer to herself as *jangli* ('uncivilized'), again an influence of urban society. The dress pattern of her daughter conformed far more closely to that of urban Indian women, although Kaushalya still wore the traditional dress and cap of the mountain women. The important change was that Jads a generation younger than Kaushalya did not visualize the plains as the 'Other'. They demonstrated far greater assimilative tendencies with mainstream Indian culture and regarded the older generation, heavily influenced by Tibetan

culture, as strange. The younger generation of Jad women, like Kaushalya's grand-daughters, were shy and some even professed vegetarianism. They considered drinking alcohol, smoking, and 'multiple marriages' as 'wrong'. Even the institution of *magpa* marriages is falling into disuse. It is paradoxical that global technology is actually leading to a moral conservatism that may spell doom for self-assertive and independent Jad women like Kaushalya in the future.

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