Tribal Margins: Dalit Belonging and State Recognition in the Western Himalayas

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Abstract

*Tribal Margins* analyzes the project of tribal fashioning in the Western Himalayas against the backdrop of affirmative action politics. Specifically, it unpacks the discursive loop between government-administered ethnological paradigms for positive discrimination and its effects on ethnic belonging and spirituality.

These dynamics are located among the Gaddis of Himachal Pradesh, a heterogeneous tribal/Dalit community traditionally associated with transhumant pastoralism on both sides of the Dhauladhar Mountains. The 2002 awarding of Scheduled Tribe (ST) status to only high-caste Kangra Gaddis has instigated a range of tribalizing strategies from Dalit groups who identify as Gaddi and are partially assimilated into tribal life. These low-status groups demand tribal recognition as both a form of social justice in the face of longstanding social discriminations and as a pragmatic strategy for state support amid the growing tide of neoliberalism. They rightly contend that the demographics of Himachal Pradesh (with the second-highest Dalit population in India) cause fierce competitiveness within the Scheduled Caste quota – about four times as competitive as the Scheduled Tribe quota. Many have mobilized under the trending discourse of Scheduled Tribe Dalit (STD) and fused indigenous ethnic associations with the pan-Himalayan struggle for double SC/ST status.

The analysis of marginalized social formations in the tribal margins fundamentally reconceptualizes how political subject formation trickles into social life. The introduction of self-identifying Gaddi Dalits, largely sedentary laborers and former landless tenants, into the transhumant tribe disrupts the colonial literature on Gaddis. It further unsettles assumptions of tribal egalitarianism and complicates how South Asian sociology theorizes the discrete borders of tribal and caste organization. Understanding the intersectional identity of Gaddi Dalits speaks to the broader issue of tribal casteism and the double marginalization of low-status groups who remain misrecognized by the state and discriminated against in their everyday lives. In short, it imagines new trajectories of ethnic belonging and social justice for Himalayan Dalits.

Each chapter attends to these trajectories within the lived experiences of Gaddi Dalits, specifically Halis (former landless tenants) and Sippis (wool-workers and shamans). The experience of fractured caste consciousness has led to ongoing legal woes due to their juridical liminality. These dynamics shape how Gaddi Dalits experience divinities, exorcism and witchcraft. Individual chapters trace forms of spirituality, religious conversion and ritual practice that provide powerful personal arenas for the re-articulation of ethnic identity and the burgeoning emergence of tribal multiculturalism. The presence of Tibetan refugees in Gaddi villages around Dharamsala has injected contestatory forms of sociality, modern aspiration and cosmopolitan competencies into tribal performance.
TRIBAL MARGINS:
DALIT BELONGING AND STATE RECOGNITION IN THE
WESTERN HIMALAYAS

BY

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This dissertation is based on sixteen months of fieldwork among Gaddis, primarily in Himachal Pradesh but also in Jammu and Kashmir, Goa and Delhi. I would foremost like to thank those Gaddi Dalits who shared their struggle for recognition with a foreign anthropologist. If I have conveyed their stories with empathy, I hope they will forgive me the discomfort my insistent questioning sometimes caused. While this dissertation aims to contribute to the amelioration of tribal casteism, data collection occasionally intensified emotions of frustration, helplessness, anger at injustice and fear of social reprisal. Coaxing out these tensions was cathartic for some and voluntarily onerous for others. I remain humbled by the trust I was bestowed and the hospitality I daily received. Although they are pseudonyms in this dissertation, their real names I cannot forget.

I am indebted to my primary research associates – Atul, Bihari and Reeta – for their patience conducting fieldwork and transcribing more than 350 hours of interviews. Our lives have become so entangled that it is impossible to say where work ends and friendship begins. Since completing research, Atul enrolled in a PhD program in Political Science and is pursuing parallel research on Gaddi politics. Bihari remains a fixture at the district library while preparing for government exams. Reeta, after teaching at Yale University through a Fulbright award, works at a call center in Chandigarh and continues to give Gaddi cultural performances.

This project was aided by the transparency of several Gaddi organizations. I want to specifically thank Ramesh Mastana, president of the Himalaya Gaddi Union, for tirelessly fighting on behalf of Gaddi Dalits; Thakur Das, founder of the Gaddi Sangh in J&K, for his honesty and friendship; Rakesh Jaryal, president of the Hali Mahasangh, for sharing legal documents and archival data; Parveen Jaryal, president of All J&K Gaddi Sippi Tribes Welfare
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considerably insight into the precarity of refugee life in Dharamsala. This view was reinforced by Khampa housemates during research in McLeod Ganj.

Throughout the writing process, several chapter drafts were presented and received constructive feedback. I am grateful for the opportunity to guest lecture at the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies in Delhi, where Director Sanghmitra and faculty helped me to think comparatively about tribal Dalits; at Kyoto University in Japan, where Tatsuro Fujikura and faculty guided my analysis of Tibetan patronage into an East Asian context; and at the Tibet Society in London, Syracuse University in New York, Vietnam National University in Hanoi and the Landour Lecture Series in Mussoorie. Conference papers based on dissertation drafts were presented at the AAAs, AARs and the Annual Conference on South Asia, among others.

The community of scholars focused on Gaddis is small but resilient. In the early stage of fieldwork, conversation with Kriti Kapila and Anja Wagner helped me to think through the problem of Gaddi nomenclature. Richard Axelby has been a mentor and friend; neither of us will soon forget our time together in McLeod Ganj with the Lion Man. Peter Phillimore has been more than gracious reading chapter drafts and providing his considerable expertise. Daniel Côté helped me make sense of his French-language dissertation on Gaddi spirit possession. And Mahesh Sharma hosted me at Punjab University and helped place my ethnographic findings in historical context. Likewise, Daniel Wojahn, Atreyee Sen, Keila Dielh, Daniel McNamara, Natasha Mikles, Heidi Swank and Pauline MacDonald have proved invaluable resources for analyzing the Tibetan diaspora in Dharamsala. I am thankful for their correspondence.

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### Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AFSPA</td>
<td>Armed Forces Special Powers Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSF</td>
<td>Border Security Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>Bharatiya Janata Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CISF</td>
<td>Central Industrial Security Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRPF</td>
<td>Central Reserve Police Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTA</td>
<td>Central Tibetan Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DNT</td>
<td>Denotified Tribes (<em>Vimukt Jātiyān</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>HP</td>
<td>Himachal Pradesh</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRDP</td>
<td>Integrated Rural Development Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>J&amp;K</td>
<td>Jammu and Kashmir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JKNPP</td>
<td>Jammu Kashmir National Panther Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>MD</td>
<td>Mountain Dalit</td>
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<tr>
<td>MNREGA</td>
<td>Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCST</td>
<td>National Commission on Scheduled Tribes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PESA</td>
<td>Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PoAA</td>
<td>Prevention of Atrocities Act</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSS</td>
<td>Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RTI</td>
<td>Right to Information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Scheduled Caste</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCM</td>
<td>Smart City Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDM</td>
<td>Sub-divisional Magistrate</td>
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<tr>
<td>ST</td>
<td>Scheduled Tribe</td>
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<tr>
<td>STD</td>
<td>Scheduled Tribe Dalit</td>
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<tr>
<td>STGB</td>
<td>Scheduled Tribe Gujjar Bakerwal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STO</td>
<td>Scheduled Tribe Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TCV</td>
<td>Tibetan Children’s Village</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TGiE</td>
<td>Tibetan Government in Exile (CTA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSP</td>
<td>Tribal Sub Plan</td>
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</table>
Note on Transliteration and Spelling

Many Hindi and Gaddi words are retained in parentheses within the English translation. Romanization adheres to the Library of Congress chart for Devanagari. Tibetan terms are transliterated according to the Wylie system (Wylie 1959, 261-67) and sometimes left in phonetic transliteration (http://www.thlib.org/reference/transliteration/phconverter.php). This occasionally makes for wooden reading and surely frustrates readers not versed in those languages. I have striven to maintain an impossible balance between readability and exactitude. It felt somehow dishonoring to translate out of existence the complex texture of language interlocutors used to describe their lived realities. Extended block quoting and the selective adoption of Hindi/Gaddi phrases is my effort to convey the moral force of representing the socially obscured. Kirin Narayan describes being “gently taken to task” by A.K. Ramanujan for dotting her doctoral dissertation with parenthetical Hindi words and phrases (73, 2012). If I am guilty of breaking the narrative flow with Hindi parentheticals, I hope readers will similarly moderate their reproach.

loc.gov/catdir/cpso/romanization/hindi.pdf
Cool Kangra hills, my heart’s love
We shall go to Bhagsu hills, O we shall go to Bhagsu hills
May brings sunlight, February brings cool breeze
Fog in the July rain, my heart’s love!
In July and August, the rain comes
Beautiful rain brings greenery along with her
I miss her, my heart’s love!
Tears spilling from the eyes of my beautiful
We shall go, we shall go to Bhagsu hills
Where there is cool water from natural showers
There we will drink cool water and have idle chatter
We shall take a sacred dip and enjoy the scenery
And after that roam in the market
Beautiful, beautiful Kangra Valley, my heart’s love!

— Gaddi composition by Sunil Rana, Dharamsala folksinger
1 / Locating Gaddi Dalits

In the Indian popular imagination, Gaddis conjure up pastoral images of a shepherd in a woolen cloak cinched closed by meters of black woolen rope, a cap cocked jauntily atop his head, widely striding across highland pasturelands in the Dhauladhar Mountains. In 1970, N.K. Issar directed a documentary on Gaddis through the Films Division Production of the Government of India, which opens with a springtime pastoral of shepherds smoking hookah and distractedly watching over a herd of sheep spread out over a bushy mountainside. The narrator intones that “the Gaddi, his sheep and his dog are very much a part of the lush landscape.” The film emphasizes Bhermaur, affectionately called Gadderan by elders, as the epicenter of Gaddi life. Likewise, the Punjabi artist Sobha Singh, famous for his depictions of Sikh Gurus and Sohni Mahiwal, painted Gaddi shepherds from his verandah in Andretta on their yearly peregrination from Kangra to Chamba via Jalsu Pass. One painting from the series remains a local favorite, often found under cloudy lamination in roadside restaurants and homes: a Gaddi woman, defiantly poised, crossing a mountain footbridge surrounded by her flock of sheep and goats, a checkered woolen blanket draped across her shoulders and a baby goat in her arms, followed closely behind by a stalwart shepherding dog.

The association between Gaddis and pastoralism is as steadfast as that of Inuit and Husky-pulled sledges – and equally anachronistic. Most Gaddis liquidated their family flocks two or three generations ago, and less than 400 migratory shepherds are officially registered with the Himachal Pradesh government. Creeping modernization and increased education have bent the Gaddi perception of pastoralism away from the rugged masculinity of Hemmingway and towards the recognition of its physical danger and social dislocations. Mountain pasturelands abutting Dharamsala more frequently serve as picnicking idylls and ritual spaces of small-scale
pilgrimage than as grazing land for transhumant shepherds. McLeod Ganj, also called Upper Dharamsala, has successively transformed from shepherding midpoint to earthquake-ravaged colonial hill station to geopolitical hub of diasporic Tibetans and a premier tourist destination. The few shepherds who dare to graze within city limits do so with increasing uncertainty about the privatization of once-public pasturelands and existential anxiety about how their uncouth demeanor may be at variance with prevailing norms.

Figure 1.1 “Her Grace the Gaddan”. A Gaddi shepherdess tending to her flock. Painting by Sobha Singh.
Like a washed-out goat trail, transhumant pastoralism as a livelihood practice recedes into the collective consciousness. Rural Gaddis continue terraced scratch-farming, jungle foraging and localized shepherding. Those aspiring for modern amenities (suvidhāen) have migrated towards urban population centers, establishing small-scale commercial enterprises and availing themselves of tribal-reserved civil service positions. Some have migrated further afield, to Delhi, Goa and even the UAE, where regional tribal differences are subsumed in generic identities, such as Himachali, Himalayan or even Hindu. Gaddi society, however, is a palimpsest, and the original marks of pastoralism are indelibly impressed on contemporary identity formation, ethnic mobilization and ritual practice.

Pastoralism has also shaded scholarly lenses. This began with British colonial ambassadors, who considered Gaddis the paradigmatic transhumant pastoralists of the Western Himalayas. The association between Gaddis and pastoralism was reinforced by five decades of ethnographic research, most recently focused on how shepherds creatively negotiate state restrictions and bring informal resources to bear on community-based pastureland management (Saberwal 1999; Axelby 2007) and on how mountain pastoralism infuses a vertical spatial orientation to mythology, place-networks and the enactment of kinship (Kaushal 2001; Wagner 2013). For several decades, anthropology students at Delhi University have produced a cottage industry of Masters theses, backed up by ten-day fieldwork stints, which unintentionally advances outmoded stereotypes about tribal naiveté and the perpetuation of pastoralist lifeways.

Instead of further romanticizing Gaddi pastoralism or naturalizing strategic essentialisms, this dissertation analyzes the production of “tribalness” within the conscripted confines of state recognition and against a shifting tableau of caste relations. The propagation of authenticating pastoral tropes – what Anja Wagner (2013, 72) rightfully terms the “special ideology connected
to seasonal migration” – is part of a national project of tribal fashioning inseparable from state reservation benefits.

Recently there has been a call within anthropology to use qualitative methods and critical ethnography to study the social field of affirmative action policies in South Asia (Shah and Shneiderman 2013). India’s affirmative action system is among the oldest and most expansive, stretching back to the utilitarian experiments of 19th-century colonialists and greatly expanded through the Indian Constitution and the Mandal Commission report of the 1990s. Understanding the recursive loop between government-administered ethnological paradigms for positive discrimination and the effects of such processes on shaping ethnic consciousness is urgent business in India, where a quarter of the population is either Scheduled Caste (SC) or Scheduled Tribe (ST) and where thousands of petitions from caste groups await adjudication. This issue has been addressed through studying the subjective contingencies of state ethnography (Middleton 2016); the changing idioms of caste antagonism through the stereotyping of recipients of affirmative action (Still 2013); and the growth of commensality restrictions when a homogeneous community is cleaved by different government quotas (Kapila 2008).

The analysis of Dalit mobilization in the Gaddi margins extends this scholarship while fundamentally reconceptualizing how political subject formation trickles into social life and spirituality. Scholarship has at times obfuscated, at times prematurely foreclosed, the contestation and negotiation of status groups and caste cleavages within the tribal ethnonym “Gaddi”. By panning the ethnographic lens away from pastoralism, the hereditary profession of only Gaddi Rajputs, hitherto marginalized social formations come into focus. The introduction of SC Gaddis and self-identifying Gaddi Dalits, largely sedentary laborers and former landless tenants, into the transhumant tribe disrupts the colonial construction of Gaddis. It tracks the
diversification of tribal identity to encompass a community (samudāy) of stratified castes bound together by processes of cultural assimilation, language adoption and affective belonging – a contemporary development markedly divergent from the rise of partisan tribalism strafing Euro-American politics and social belonging. It further unsettles assumptions of tribal egalitarianism and complicates how anthropology and South Asian sociology theorize the discrete borders of tribal and caste organization. In short, it imagines new trajectories of radical futurity for Himalayan Dalits.

For clarity, “Gaddi Dalit” applies to those castes that marshal histories of indigeneity and untouchability as evidence of tribal inclusion. This includes Dhogri, Badi, Rihare and Hali castes, the latter the primary focus of this study. In this sense, the pairing of Gaddi and Dalit is a descriptive denotation of social reality as it is – namely, that Scheduled Castes are culturally and linguistically assimilated Gaddis who self-identify as such. In another sense, however, “Gaddi Dalit” is a normative claim expressing that Dalits ought to be enfranchised as Scheduled Tribes and socially accepted as Gaddi. This connotes a disjuncture between felt identity and external recognition. “Gaddi Dalit” both speaks to the problem of caste-based tribal exclusion and gestures towards a solution. The nomenclature “Gaddi Dalit” expresses the nascent emergence of Dalit consciousness among SC Gaddis, advocated by ethnic associations and unevenly adopted by marginal Gaddi populations.

As analyzed in Chapter Five, Sippis complicate the picture as members of a Scheduled Caste who vociferously assert their priestly functions and equal standing with high-caste Gaddis. They wholesale reject Dalit associations and self-identify as “SC Gaddis”, a term which equally applies to all Kangra Gaddi Dalits. Notwithstanding, I have chosen to generically describe low-status Gaddi aspirants as Gaddi Dalits and not SC Gaddis, not only for readability but also to
capture the political activism and emphasis on tribal casteism that undergirds their claims to belonging. When describing the caste-specific factors impacting state recognition, particularly Halis in chapter two through four, I revert back to caste names and distinguish between tribally-assimilated and non-assimilated Halis.

When speaking generically of the problem of tribal casteism and the exclusion of Dalits, I have adopted the NGO legalese of Scheduled Tribe Dalits (STD) and Mountain Dalits (MD). Mindful that STD and MD are more commonly understood as telecommunication and medical acronyms, in both India and the West, they are also intense sites of communal aspiration in the Western Himalayas. Although I am transparently sympathetic to the cause of Dalit recognition within tribal formations, I occasionally revert to clunky qualifying terms such as “self-reporting” and “self-identifying” so as not to foreclose debate or misrepresent the ongoing sociopolitical dispute.

**Who Counts as Gaddi?**

The bird’s-eye view, roving across thousands of villages of varied caste configurations spanning hundreds of miles, from the dusty plains of Lower Kangra to the uppermost mountain perches in Chamba, reveals the seven castes that arguably comprise the fullest stratification of Gaddi social organization. Across the Dhauladhars, Gaddi Rajputs are a demographic majority and reference group. Oftentimes called Gaddi (a convention I follow for shorthand), they are a conglomerate caste subdivided by exogamous clan affiliations. In some villages, early 20th century stigma surrounding tribal backwardness led to pockets of Gaddis renouncing their caste and emulating general caste Rajputs. Whatever social intangibles that accrued to Gaddis legally identifying as Rajputs (predominately Rana, Rathi and Thakur) before Independence, since then they have
fallen into juridical limbo as *de jure* general caste Rajputs unable to avail reservation benefits befitting ST Gaddis. At times, this has generated debate of symbolic and material consequence about the precise boundary demarcating Gaddi Rajputs from so-called “real” (*asli*) Rajputs. How the legacy of tribal stigma and intertribal casteism have entangled Gaddis of all castes in bureaucratic prerogatives to satisfy the evidentiary minimum to “correct” their castes through legal emendation (*durusti*) is a recurrent theme in this dissertation, especially as it impacts Gaddi Dalits aspiring for tribal inclusion.

In other villages, Gaddis have intermarried with Rathis, a once-stigmatized “lightweight” (*halke*) Rajput caste more closely aligned with Shudras before 20th century reclassification (Parry 1979, 231). Such segmentations among status-conscious Rajputs are largely overlooked by Gaddis hoping to shed their tribal associations through generic Rajputization. In practical terms, Gaddi-Rathi intermarriages further erode the fragile conceptual differences between tribal and caste Rajputs and undercut scholarly contentions that Gaddi castes run parallel to, and don’t intersect with, the larger Kangra caste configurations in which they are enmeshed (Phillimore 2014, 162-63).

In addition, a small number of Gaddi Brahmans, often called Bhatt Brahmans, are the traditional lineage priests (*kul purohit*) who perform rituals and preside over lifecycle events. Some Gaddi-speaking Bhatt Brahmans, mostly clustered around Palampur and Baijnath, cut their losses in the 1990s, abandoning their quest for ST status and accepting Other Backward Class (OBC) status. In retaliation, Gaddis have exacerbated commensal distancing and downplay commonalities (Kapila 2008). Meanwhile, Gaddi Brahmans in Jammu and Kashmir (confusingly called Gādde Brahmans) opted out of public recognition as Gaddis by excluding themselves from the 1996 ST reclassification. Chapter Five analyzes the impact of sociality and ethnic
belonging among J&K Gaddis, Gādde Brahmans and Sippis, the latter awarded ST status as a separate tribe while their relatives living in Kangra remain mired in the SC quota.

Besides Gaddi Brahmans and Rajputs are five Scheduled Castes – Sippi, Badi, Rihare, Dhogri and Hali – who have maintained a contested purchase on Gaddi identity since the earliest historical accounts. This dissertation analyzes how Halis and Sippis struggle for tribal inclusion and how their social aspirations impact subjectivity, spirituality and embodied practice. Some of these Dalits were landless tenants (pāocārī), “brought” labor from Chamba into Kangra as jajmānī and hāliprathā clients with degrees of propinquity to their tribal patrons. Although linguistically and culturally assimilated, the opposition of pure and impure led to their social oppression and systematic disenfranchisement from pastoralism (flock size being indicative of wealth and prestige), from owning grazing pastures and arable land, and from ritual practices associated with sheep sacrifice and pilgrimage.

Sippis are exceptions. Their niche role as wool shearers and tailors in the pastoral economy is the cornerstone of their claims to exceptionalism among SC Gaddis – the subject of Chapter Five. Barring this important caveat, Gaddi Dalits were obliged to work within the confines of their caste occupations, as woodcutters, musicians, slate miners, ploughers and disposers of domestic animal carcasses. Their immobile caste occupations, ritual impurity and often severed ties with their ancestral village in Gadderan, the area of Chamba most associated with Gaddis, further excluded these Dalits from the hegemonic tropes and ethnic markers of Gaddi tribal identity. This alienation was compounded by colonial classifications and still lingers in contemporary scholarship that neglects caste heterogeneity extending to SC groups within the Gaddi tribe. This dissertation aims to be a modest corrective by insisting on a slow tilt towards
tribal multiculturalism and new forms of social belonging that cut against academic theorizing and administrative norms.

The above-mentioned hegemonic tropes of tribal identity were transformed into a 40-year appeal by Kangra Gaddis to gain ST status and be united, politically and socially, with their ancestors living in Chamba. The Kangra Gaddis had fallen into an administrative paradox: although their affines in Chamba were granted ST status in the first post-Independence scheduling, those Gaddis who since the early 19th century migrated to the southern slopes of the Dhauladhar Mountains in Kangra were considered general castes and later OBCs. This is because Kangra was part of the Punjab, an area that British administrators considered free of tribals. Several Punjabi castes were notified as Criminal Tribes, a broad terminology which enforced mandatory government registration, weekly visits to local police, and travel restrictions. When the label of criminality was removed in 1952, these Denotified Castes (DNT; *Vimukt Jātiyān*) became general castes (Singh 2010, xvii). As of 2018, eight Punjabi caste groups are struggling for ST reclassification with the aid of anthropologists at Punjabi University (Singh 2009).

The Punjabi Gaddis had better luck. Kangra shifted to Himachal Pradesh in 1966, and Mandal reforms and political alliances shifted in favor of the Gaddis. Their appeal was granted in 2002, and high-caste Kangra Gaddis were given the political designation of ST and, as such, rights-availing as a historically marginalized community. The Gaddi struggle to aspire for social prestige within the regional caste system while aspiring “sideways” to ST status for federal benefits is a struggle seen throughout India, most recently with Gujjars in Rajasthan (Mayaram 2014).
However, political reclassification did not extend to Gaddi Dalits, who were conspicuously absent from the ethnographic survey. Later, I describe the personal resentments, local legends and ethnopolitical mobilizations that intensified in the wake of perceived state misrecognition. Many Gaddi Dalits are bitterly resentful about trailing Gaddis in virtually every matrix of social uplift (Pattanaik and Singh 2005). They contend that they are systematically outperformed among the demographically outsized SC communities. Himachal Pradesh has the second-highest SC population (25.2%) in India, competing for 15% quota reservations, whereas the ST population (5.7%) competes for 7.5% quota reservations (Census of India 2011).

Analyzing the double marginality of aspirational Dalits within a Scheduled Tribe is congruent with what Gyanendra Pandey (2013, 33) highlights as the “subalternity and difference […] navigated within subalternized constituencies and assemblages themselves”. The mutually reinforcing vectors of poverty, casteism and tribal marginalization place unique constraints on Gaddi Dalits. Recognition of such intersectionality strives to “simultaneously take into account the intersection of multiple social locations, each socially defined, with the constraints or opportunities that such a definition can entail” (Denis 2008, 681).

Gaddi Dalits are structurally analogous to other minorities-within-minorities, such as Bukharian Jews from Uzbekistan who, having fled Soviet suppression and relocated in Israel, were discriminated against by Ashkenazi Jews for having Muslim-influenced cultural practices (Elo and Jokela 2015, 28). Both Bukharian Jews and Gaddi Dalits represent seeming contradictions, category breaches; not only must they struggle for legitimacy and inclusion within their community confines, what Sara Shneiderman (2014, 280) calls “group-internal recognizing agents”; they must also appeal to “group-external prerogatives” of state ethnology, conditions of citizenship, international scholarship and NGOs.
In both cases, their relative disadvantages as marginalized subgroups are obscured by the brute realities of homogenous anti-Semitism and tribal underperformance facing the dominant communities. Double peripheralization impacts minorities worldwide, from the online silencing of Syrian refugee women when their opinions diverge from “the language of Western hegemony in understanding the Arab and Muslim world through self-orientalizing discourse” (Alhayek 2014, 699) to Kenyan coastal Muslims persecuted by the Christian state and disregarded by the Islamic ummah (Kresse 2010, 84). In all cases, double peripheralization structures how social injustices are experienced and which forms of suffering are sanctioned by dominant interests.

![Scheduled Caste distribution by state based on the 2011 Indian Census. Map from Wikimedia Commons.](Figure 1.2)
The experience of Gaddi Dalits, doubly marginal and largely invisible, poses sociocultural and psychological challenges for many. This dissertation dissects not only how affirmative action draws from and transfigures Gaddi identity politics, but also how low-status Gaddis living in Dharamsala respond to their liminality in the domains of spirituality, sociality and ethnic mobilization. These are facets of the Gaddi experience occluded in existing scholarship but increasingly central to people’s lives as they negotiate governmentality and the ever-increasing instrumentalization of ethnicity (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2009). By analyzing the recursive loop between recognition politics and identity, the complex domains of sociality, subjectivity and embodied practice are put in conversation with, but not reduced to, the instrumentality of ethnicity.

My aim is to highlight the “simultaneous, jigsaw-like conjunction” of internal practices and objectifying performances that, taken together, “constitute the whole of a broader conceptualization of ethnicity in action” (Shneiderman 2014, 280). While caste and ethnicity are conceptually different forms of social differentiation, interlocutors often used both terms in the Hindi vernacular interchangeably. Semantic slippage between caste and ethnicity in the field is reflected in recent scholarship on the similar “nature and effect” of caste and ethnicity from a “critical and relational perspective” that addresses the persistence of group inequality (Jodkha 2018, 132).

In the chapters that follow, the voices of various state and bureaucratic actors who shape the collective project of increasing life chances for all Gaddi castes shine through: pancāyat leaders, Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), government servants and NGO employees. I worked closely with Gaddi Dalit associations, such as the Dalit Backwards Class Gaddi Organization, the Himalaya Gaddi Union and The People’s Campaign for Socio-economic
Equity in the Himalayas. But this is not a work of political anthropology, concerned solely with organized administration and strategies of top-down mobilization by ethnic entrepreneurs. I argue that such entrepreneurs rarely capitalize on managing collective identity, and their effort to join the tribal fold is not a project of constructing difference or ossifying group boundaries but rather a project of multicultural inclusion emphasizing unity through heterogeneity (cf. Barth 1967). Greater attention is given, instead, to the contact points where ethno-mobilization and formal political structures are encountered in the most intimate scale of rural Himalayan life. These everyday intimacies are unequally distributed throughout the Gaddi world based on geography, socioeconomic status, and caste differences.

Each chapter attends to these differences, especially the experiences of Gaddi-identifying Dalits who are poised between political exclusion and ongoing discursive and social practices aimed at wider tribal acceptance. Their place as Gaddis mirrors what Middleton (2016, 29) describes as “anxious belonging” among Gorkhas in Darjeeling, who escaped labor exploitation in Nepal for the threat of extradition, quasi-legality and social dislocation in India. Such anxieties shaped sub-nationalist agitations for Gorkhaland in the 1980s and continue to provide affective grist for ethnic mobilizations in quest of state recognition through the Sixth Schedule. While the idiom has shifted from sub-nationalism to indigeneity rights, from separatism to national integration, the Gorkha quest for recognition yokes the material promises of positive discrimination to the “more existential realms of affect, belonging and self-realization” (Middleton 2016, 32). Similarly, Gaddi Dalits experience fractured caste consciousness and face ongoing legal woes because of their juridical liminality. Their experience of Gaddi divinities, of exorcism and witchcraft and, ultimately, of being Gaddi is marked by precarity – “life amidst
indeterminacy” that entails personal suffering and the possibility of structural change by “remaking the conditions of precarious existence” (Allison 2016).

To that end, the precarious hold on Gaddiness among partially-assimilated Dalit groups imbues existing caste features with new forms of social aspiration. This dissertation attends to the discursive and processual elements of tribal self-definition by Gaddi aspirants, oftentimes perceived by Gaddis as a category breach, an oxymoronic usurpation of tribal identity. Moreover, following Cooley’s formative theory of “looking-glass” self, it recognizes that much Gaddi Dalit precarity rests on their own perceptions (suspicions, inklings) of how Gaddis discredit their intersectional identities. This doubling – not only what Gaddis think about Gaddi Dalits but what Gaddi Dalits think they think about them – is of central analytic importance. “As we see our face, figure, and dress in the glass, and are interested in them because they are ours, and pleased or otherwise with them according to whether they do or do not answer to what we should like them to be; so in imagination we perceive in another’s mind some thought of our appearance, manners, aims, deeds, character, friends, and so on, and are variously affected by it” (Cooley 1922, 184). Self-conception is shaped by others, especially by individuals of social prestige, representatives of normative ideologies and community gatekeepers who serve as mirrors. As later expanded, self-conception is not the objective transference of social judgment but rather filtered through subjective assessments about how individuals perceive they are being socially valued and perceived by others (Shrauger and Schoeneman 1979). Extending recent theorization of immigrant identity (Heilbrunn, Gorodzeisky, and Glikman 2016), Gaddi Dalit precarity is analyzed as the outcome of both self-reporting valuations and their perception of how Gaddis define them; in other words, self-assessments are inextricable from the perceived reaction of others.
This interactionist model of self-valuation is framed by a discussion of social stigma and subaltern agency. How societies construct normative categories and how people negotiate the material, social and psychological effects of not belonging inform the everyday interactions of Gaddi Dalits. This dissertation attends to quotidian forms of resistance, what John and Jean Comaroff (1993, 17) theorize as “a continuum of possibility, a range of means by which those who see themselves as dispossessed and disempowered seek, through their own agency, to regain mastery over their lives”. Ethnography reveals a variety of strategies Gaddi Dalits employ to negotiate their tribal liminality, responses which extend a body of scholarship on the hemmed in and ambiguous effects of resistance by subaltern actors (Seizer 2005; Abu-Lughod 1990).

The originality of this dissertation is, I hope, to extend the literature on Gaddis to include hardly-referenced status groups who have lingered in the tribal margins for centuries. Focusing on Gaddi ethnic boundaries highlights the contested process of tribal multiculturalism emerging in Himachal Pradesh and shaping tribal belonging in 21st century India. Practically speaking, it brings Gaddi studies up-to-date by tracking the shift away from transhumant pastoralism and towards urban migration and broader assimilation into the sedentary Hindu mainstream. It also theorizes and historicizes the interface between Gaddis and Tibetan neighbors in Dharamsala, interjecting a new perspective into Tibetology and obliterating traditional preoccupations of tribal studies.

**Colonial and Scholarly Constructions**

The emergence of tribal Dalit identity is enmeshed within the multiple and often contradictory ways in which Gaddis are defined through early British administrative literature and more recent anthropological and governmental accounts. Gaddis are variously defined as the geographical
inhabitants of Gadderan, as an administrative category not corresponding with tribal social organization, as a nationality of two or four classes, as synonymous with Gaddi Rajput, or as a generic title inclusive of only high castes, or of all castes. Excavating the earliest colonial documents does not provide a unifying consensus of Gaddi identity but rather establishes the archival parameters from which contemporary scholars and local ethnic entrepreneurs shape their arguments. Making sense of these arguments about Gaddi nomenclature and social belonging requires an unavoidably meticulous excursion into the archival record.

Although there is a paucity of ethnographic data on self-reporting Gaddi Dalits, faint echoes resonate from the margins of colonial accounts and census reports. These low-status groups are oftentimes branded as “self-stylized” Gaddis and dismissed as dissembling poseurs. Virtually all scholarship on Gaddis tacitly promulgates this casteist perspective. While the question of Brahman inclusion has been debated (Verma 2002, 159; Sharma 1998, 10), there is a *prima facie* bias against considering Dalits as Gaddis (Kapur 1993, 76). Although no overwhelming consensus exists, from the earliest colonial texts to the most recent scholarship two camps emerge: the first naturalizes Gaddi exclusivism based on emic self-definition, the second reconfigures Gaddi identity as a community of cultural and linguistic commonalities encompassing a range of caste groups. This move towards inclusivity parallels census data on the shifting identification of Gaddis by both high castes and Dalits, and the ongoing and uneven assimilation of Dalits through campaigns of ethnopolitical mobilization. Focused on these dynamics, this section also extracts from the archival margins whatever can be gleaned about Gaddi-aspiring Dalits and their historic relationship to Gaddis.

Barnes (1862, 90) considers Gaddis as a “generic name” demographically dominated by Khatris, Rajputs, Rathis and Brahmans. Among the list of stereotypical Gaddi traits are
virtuousness, simplicity and female chastity; their adherence to Hinduism, such as the wearing of sacred threads (*janeū*), is considered “much stricter […] than most of the inhabitants of the higher ranges of the Himalaya” (Barnes 1862, 91). Through this caste prism, Gaddi is a generic title for high-castes (*svārṇ jāṭī*) engaged in pastoralism. While Dalits (so-called “impure castes”) are excluded from generic Gaddi identity, it is notable that they are included in the “Gudee” subdivision. Such Dalits “are not styled Gudees, but are known by the names of Badee, Seepee, Hallee, &c” (Barnes 1862, 91). In this way, Barnes lays an archival foundation pulling apart at the seams, simultaneously establishing Gaddis as high-caste agro-pastoralists while recognizing peripheral Dalits who are not considered Gaddi in the vernacular but, nevertheless, exhibit enough commonalities to be similarly classified.

Both Lyall and Rose move towards a more muddled but inclusive definition of Gaddis by introducing the division of Gaddi classes. Lyall (1874, 87) considers the Gaddi a “distinct nationality” composed of two classes. “The first class Gaddis are divided into Brahmans, Bats, Rajputs, Khatris, Thakars, Rathis, and Tarkhans, and the second class into Sepis, Badis, Halis, Dogris, and Lohars.” Instead of explicitly defining these classes or analyzing their mode of national relatedness, he draws a comparison: high-caste Gaddis relate to low-caste Gaddis as Kanets relate to Dagis; that is, the higher practice commensal distancing with those considered “their lower castes” (*Kangra District Gazetteer* 1897, 27). Rose (1911, 256) expands this classification into four classes:

(i) Brahmans, (ii) Khatris and Rajputs who regularly wear the sacred thread, (iii) Thakurs and Rathis who, as a rule, do not wear it, and (iv) a menial or dependent class, comprising Kolis, Riharas, Lohars, Badhis, Sipis and Halis, to whom the title of Gaddi is incorrectly applied by outsiders as inhabitants of the Gadderan, though the true Gaddis do not acknowledge them as Gaddi at all.
Note the shift from Barnes’ exclusivist definition to open-ended class distinctions advanced by Lyall and Rose. Whereas Barnes emphasizes the twice-born Hindu purity of Gaddis relative to other hill communities, Lyall describes the unequal halves of a distinct Gaddi nationality. Similarly, the Kangra District Gazetteer (1883, 91) describes Gaddis as a race composed of distinguishing “features, manners, dress and dialect”; while Hutchison’s entry in the Chamba Gazetteer (1910, 91) describes the Gaddis as a “separate clan” from other hill groups. Rose’s classification is the most polysemous. The Gaddi community has four classes; and yet, the “menials” in class four are both Gaddi through their residence in Gadderan and not Gaddi following local usage. Such slippery 19th-century conceptualizations of group belonging and ethnic identification, couched in the terminologies of nation, race, clan and class, provide some archival basis for ongoing movements to integrate high- and low-caste groups within a larger sense of Gaddi belonging.

In the next chapter, I show how these classificatory ambiguities have been generative for Dalits in their struggle for sociopolitical recognition as Gaddis. Instead of mining colonial administrative classifications for an ontology of Gaddi social organization, I want to emphasize how, woven together and played off each other, these texts provide Dalits with an external source of authority, tinged with an air of scientific factuality and impartiality, which refute local exclusionary practices among some Gaddis. Rather than reconciling these colonial classifications, I show how their intrinsic polysemy is put into practice through Dalit interpretive strategies. While one could read Lyall and Rose as emphasizing hierarchical inequality in the language of Gaddi classes, it is more often understood by Dalits as the basis for Gaddi social inclusion. It is impossible to understand why Halis sometimes proudly call themselves “Class Two Gaddis” or “Class B Gaddis” apart from the colonial literature which imprinted
bureaucratic and quasi-scientific boundaries on Gaddi identity. While these boundaries have often functioned as aspirational limits and hegemonies of belonging, they are now fecund sources of indigenous redefinition.

William Newell, writing primarily in the 1950s and 60s, was the first British post-Independent scholar of Gaddis. His key contribution to understanding Gaddi social organization was to trace the incorporation of several Rajput segmentations (Thakur, Khatri and Rana) into a newly-consolidated Gaddi caste (1955, 107). His analysis of the emergence of a conglomerate Gaddi Rajput caste never seriously engages with the social aspiration of partially-assimilated Dalits; instead, his attention floats upwards to the Gaddiness of Bhatt Brahmans who self-excluded from isogamous caste incorporation in order to maintain their purity as lineage priests (*kul purohit*) (1955, 110). Newell occasionally falls into methodological problems when generalizing about Gaddi social organization from his single vantage in Goshan village. He is unconcerned about the representativeness of his field site, seemingly assured by its proximity to Bharmaur and the notional Gaddi heartland. Despite this, his scholarship points away from the static and largely arbitrary colonial classifications insofar as he highlights diachronic and contextual caste shifts. Given the dominance of British structural functionalism and the emphasis on self-perpetuating integrated systems, however, it is unsurprising that Newell overlooks social discordance. Nowhere is the casteism, labor exploitation and discursive marginalization that would have prevented Dalits from isogamous incorporation as Gaddis.

The shortcoming of Newell’s analysis was to uncritically treat Dalit marginalization as a primordial given, a basic structural axiom or “what-there-is” of tribal sociality. The Gaddi emic exclusion of Dalits looms large in Newell’s analysis of caste. He notes how Gaddis “look down upon” these groups, and “none of the higher castes will ever consider them Gaddis, even though
they wear the chola like any other citizen of Bharmaur” (1952, 86). Newell never conducted intensive fieldwork among self-reporting Gaddi Dalits nor reimagined Gaddiness from their hemmed in vantage. Although he hints at the commonalities of culture, language and history that constitute a Herderian notion of shared identity, he never analyzes how the social construction of “Gaddiness” becomes fashioned into a cultural hegemony and ideology of dominance.

Nevertheless, in the margins of Newell’s scholarship are glimpses into the social ties uniting Gaddis and Dalits exhibiting Gaddi-like characteristics. Foremost are economic exchanges (bartan) between Gaddis and Dalits based on family ties, personal preference and caste proscription. That he only analyzes exchange between Sippis and Gaddis is likely due to the demographics of Goshen and again speaks to the methodological problem of generalizing data from a single locale to a heterogeneous and dispersed mountain community. It was my observation that Halis, Badis, Dhogris and Rihare also share bartan ties with Gaddis on both sides of the Dhauladhar Mountains. Newell provides an example of Gaddis exchanging a “traditional share” of their harvest with Sippi slate roofers (1952, 89). Such bartan relations entail specific forms of social solidarity between individuals and caste groups. Hesse’s (1996, 112) analysis of bartan exchange among Khatri in nearby Mandi describes it as “an expression of social and ritual interaction, of social relations between individual kin and kin groups. Its basic principle or social substance is the establishment of sociability, solidarity, communality and the continuity of social relations.” Similarly, the prevalence of bartan exchange between Gaddis and Dalits suggests heightened sociality, as do other forms of inter-caste sociality specific to Gaddis, such as village men cutting down a tree for communal celebrations (chei) and village assistance with seeding fields (juar) and constructing roofs (lanter pana gana).
These symbolic reciprocations between high- and low-caste Gaddis remain to the present a stated form of inter-caste communal solidarity. For example, Gaddis in McLeod Ganj and Badis in nearby Heeru village honor their generations-old bartan relationship by inviting each other to weddings and public functions. Although privately some Gaddis surely consider Badis as socially inferior, publicly they will exchange prestations and gifts. Food is customarily prepared and served by Brahman cooks (boti), a degrading prerequisite for Badis and other Dalits throughout Himachal Pradesh that facilitates inter-caste dining. This maneuver speaks to the blunt reality that most Gaddis remain apprehensive about eating food prepared and served by lower castes. Bracketing the role of the Brahman intermediary in purifying food at Dalit feasts, however, bartan exchange continues to be a genuinely-felt enactment of recognition and mutuality binding Gaddis and assimilated Dalits.

Newell also recognized that social differentiations are internally intensified but externally flattened. His observation was regarding high-caste Gaddis, but equally relevant to Gaddi belonging among contemporary Dalits. “A Brahmin Gaddi will always call himself a Brahmin, a Rajput Gaddi will nearly always call himself Rajput. It is only the Khatris, certain Thakurs and Rathis who, when asked their caste will reply ‘I am a Gaddi’” (Newell 1952, 86). In other words, while the politics of naming have intensified among Gaddis vying for status both within the Gaddi caste hierarchy and among contiguous hill groups, the latter are often oblivious to such distinctions. For them, all cholâ-wearing, Gaddi-speaking people are Gaddis – just as Tamangs in Western Nepal make ethnic distinctions between gle, Shar-pa and Tamang, “despite the fact that outsiders consider them the same” (Holmberg 1989, 20). This situation has taken on unique relevance in Dharamsala, where Dalits can reimagine their social standing and sense of worth in relationship to Tibetans and tourists who have no knowledge of involuted Gaddi caste
distinctions. Such outsiders form group-external collectives for reimagining identity, sounding boards for self-stylization and -presentation that parallel official classificatory schemes for reservation politics and group-internal dynamics.

Conversely, Newell’s account of Goshen is also useful as a record of marginalizing practices. Gaddis would compel Dalits to worship at separate shrines, perform funerary rituals at separate cremation grounds, and separately eat and smoke. Gaddis upheld “a strict attitude towards the infringement of caste”, enforced through familial pressure and local village councils (1955, 106). Much has changed in the intervening sixty-eight years, and forms of Gaddi casteism are today primarily driven by “commonality of material interest and its consciousness and less and less by considerations of the traditional ritual hierarchy” (Sheth 1991, 334). Ritual distinctions and the Dumontian model of purity/pollution is everyday ceding to a more diffuse sense of caste-correlated social status in the domains of work, education and wealth attainment. While ritual distinctions can still funnel into practices of social exclusion, as we will see, such instances are certainly declining. This has caused Gaddis under about forty to misremember the structural disadvantages from which Dalits are now only slowly emerging.

Although Newell’s scholarship may lend credence to Gaddi purists resisting the emergence of a Dalit-inclusive tribal community, in its margins and idle wonderings, and sometimes in its absences, it inadvertently undermines its own argument for the non-Gaddiness of Dalits. For example, Newell recognized the contestation over Gaddi naming practices, which he broadly relates to inexact self-reporting on governmental censuses; the assumption that all residents of Gadderan are de facto Gaddis; and the consolidation of various mid-range castes into a single Gaddi caste, associated with shepherding and traditional dress. “There can be no doubt that the term Gaddi can only be applied to the third of these three definitions and that the Gaddi
caste is a result of an isogamous union over the course of many hundreds of years. The term Gaddi Brahmin is an impossibility” (20). By extension, the term Gaddi Dalit is outlandish.

It is unclear if Newell’s conceptual gate keeping is due to tribal primordialism, the naturalization of emic exclusion or the obviousness that SC/ST are administrative categories and not exact correspondences of social reality. He clearly recognizes how state enumeration impacts self-presentation. “The dominant ‘Gaddi caste’ see their position threatened by new patterns of social importance. The Brahmins and some Sipis are changing their allegiance to where they see present day opportunity lies and the Gaddis naturally resent their loss of support” (96). This is sometimes done deliberately, when in the 1961 census the Gaddi population swelled to 23,748 because of Rajputs and “allied castes” seeking tribal benefits; other times it is done through administrative oversight, when in the 1931 census Gaddis were obliged to report as Rajputs (Newell 1961, 20-21). Originally written as concluding remarks to the 1961 Census of India, Newell’s observation about the looping impact of state recognition and modes of belonging are ever relevant for analyzing the mobilization of Gaddi Dalit consciousness in contemporary Kangra and their struggle for legal reclassification.

Peter Phillimore, a recently-retired British professor writing in the 1980s, develops several themes in Newell’s scholarship. His primary fieldwork was conducted in 1976 in Karnathu, a remote village above Baijnath notable for pastoralism and the prevalence of black magic. His primary focus extended Newell’s observation about caste isogamy and hypergamy with regard to Gaddi marriage practices. In a lengthy discussion of community parameters, Phillimore (1982, 14) argues that Gaddi is a caste name, synonymous with Gaddi Rajput and ranking “at the lower end of the fairly elastic Rajput category.” He agrees with Newell that it would be “quite mistaken to speak of ‘low caste Gaddis’ or ‘Brahman Gaddis’ from the point of
view of a member of this society” (1982, 19). Caste groups are known by their caste names; Gaddis are Gaddi Rajputs, Gaddi Brahmans are Brahmans. Dalits are never confused with Gaddis. Following emic usage, Phillimore (1982, 20) discounts the Gaddiness of low-caste groups: “although obviously associated with the Gaddis, they have almost certainly never been Gaddis as such, other than in the mistaken usage of outsiders.” Throughout his work he refers to Gaddi Rajputs alone as Gaddis, which he considers “more ethnographically appropriate”, and adopts the term “Brahmauri” to refer to the “social system as a whole”, encompassing Brahmans and low-caste groups as a collective (1982, 28).

Which is not to say that Phillimore overlooks the commonalities among caste groups that “encourage the prevalent perception outside that Gaddi is a generic title for all castes, high and low” (1982, 21). The distinctiveness of Gaddi dress and dialect, of their migration history and transhumance in the higher reaches of the Dhauladhar Mountains, are factors which, in the aggregate, promote a generalizing and caste-inclusive understanding of the “Gaddi” ethnonym, one which brackets Gaddi distinctiveness from surrounding mountain (pahāṛī) castes and dialects. Importantly, he recognizes how the administrative status of Bhatt Brahmans and Gaddis as STs in Chamba, and their advocacy for equal recognition in Kangra, further inscribes their distinctiveness from Gaddi-aspiring Dalits. Added to this are the Himachal Gaddi Union and Himachal United Gaddi Association, both established in 1966. The former primarily concerns itself with advocating for shepherds and is irrelevant to Dalits who rarely, if ever, had principal ownership in sizable flocks. The latter, based in Dharamsala, continues to “serve the low castes also, who in this sense are counted as Gaddis” (1982, 26). Phillimore struggles to reconcile the use of “Gaddi” as a caste-inclusive community, already evident in the 1970s in administrative
and popular use, with a “strict ethnographic sense” that renders Gaddi Dalits or, for that matter, Gaddi Brahmans, a “contradiction in terms” (1982, 26).

However, Sippis and Rihare have lived among Gaddis in Karnathu for generations, and Phillimore argues for general homology between Gaddi castes and Kangri caste configurations. Among the social transactions he focuses on – what Parry calls “the principal rank-defining transactions between castes” (1979, 93) – the exchange of greetings and hookah-sharing conventions have largely disappeared, while commensal practices and the service exchange remain caste inflected (1982, 110). His analysis of pollution avoidance corresponds with subtler forms of casteism practiced today through commensal exclusion, restricted access to temple worship, strict marriage endogamy and the perpetuation of inequality stemming from Dalit restrictions on flock ownership. Such instances of untouchability are commensurate with recent all-India surveying on Dalit exclusion (Teltumbde 2012, 12).

Phillimore describes how Gaddi patrons would extract vocational labor from Sippis and Rihare structurally analogous to the enlistment of other low-caste groups in the region, such as Dumnas, Nais and Kumhars (1982, 129-30). The difference, however, is that Gaddis often referred to Sippis and Rihare as “their own low castes” – an expression of consanguinity, however embedded in hierarchical differentiation, that might serve as a basis for “Brahmauri ethnicity” (1982, 130). Proffered offhandedly, this comment significantly gestures towards conceptualizing Gaddis as a caste-inclusive social entity, bounded by proto-natinalist regional and cultural affinities, marked off as a collective from Kangri groups. Should Phillimore have further investigated the processes and contestations over defining Brahmauri ethnicity, his analysis may have rejected, or at least problematized, Gaddi emic categories that naturalize casteism and negate the Dalit experience.
Parallel to post-Independent scholarship by Newell and Phillimore are government-authorized reports on Gaddis. “A socioeconomic profile of Gaddi habitat of Kangra District” is a sprawling 1984 report drawn upon by the District Statistical Office in Kangra for development and policy proposals. It uncritically reproduces stereotypes of Gaddi simplicity, naïveté and female chastity from Barnes’ earliest account. Furthermore, it verbatim restates Barnes’ definition of Gaddi as a “generic name and under it are included Brahmans, Rajputs, Khatris, Thakurs and Rathis” (Bhatnagar 1984, 18). This exclusivist view is later complicated by the recognition of an internal caste hierarchy among Gaddis. “Brahmins, Khatris and Rajputs are the main caste of Hindus whereas the scheduled caste includes Sipis, Rehras, Bahdies, Daughries, etc. High caste Gaddis especially of Brahmin and Khatri caste do not consider Sipis etc. as Gaddis but brand them as outcastes” (Bhatnagar 1984, 55). As did Phillimore, the surveyors struggle to balance an inclusive notion of a community of castes against vernacular exclusionary uses.

In the end, the report has little else to say about these low-caste groups besides listing their caste vocations and noting the controversy around Sippis self-identifying as Gaddi. “High Class Gaddis do not consider them as Gaddis. In their opinion they are not of the same race which originally belonged to those areas from where their ancestors migrated to Bharmaur. They consider them as outcastes” (Bhatnagar 1984, 56). Dalits may or may not be part of a Gaddi community or extended generic title; it depends on perspective. However, policy recommendations are overwhelmingly focused on pastoralism (“their profession since ages”) and allied issues of deforestation and pastureland access. Instead of policy recommendations to reduce Gaddi casteism, it argues that “untouchability is not very severe among the different
castes of Gaddis” (Bhatnagar 1984, 58) – manifested only through prohibitions against inter-caste marriage and dining.

A synthesis of these irreconcilable strands leaves us with conflicting definitions of Gaddi as a generic term for high-caste groups and a community including Dalits; with the overwhelming correlation between Gaddis and transhumant pastoralism that, nevertheless, recognizes the sedentary vocations of Gaddi-assimilated Dalits; and with a perplexity about the “controversial” efforts of Dalits to be counted among Gaddis. The report is positioned between Barnes’ exclusivist account of Gaddis as janiū-wearing agro-pastoralists and the growth of tribal multiculturalism as Dalits begin to mount increasingly-vocal ethnopolitical campaigns for inclusion.

More recently, the Indian historian Chetan Singh (1997, 375-77) argues that transhumance required Gaddis to establish economic interdependence with caste-oriented agriculturists and peasant society, through which they adopted “some sort of internal social division.” The tribal pretensions of Gaddi Dalits – termed “village menials […] at the bottom of the social ladder” – are summarily discounted (Singh 1997, 381). Interestingly, he goes on to conclude that sustained interaction with caste-conscious agriculturists never “diluted the consciousness of [Gaddi] separateness. One is, in fact, tempted to argue that it was the very nature of their interaction with the state and settled village communities that prompted them to retain their tribal form of organization” (Singh 1997, 382). Somehow Gaddis exclude Dalits comprising the lowest rungs of their own tribal society; they are both an inegalitarian society with “intricate social divisions” suggestive of “a hierarchy legitimized by Brahmanical ideas” and high-caste nomadic shepherds (Singh 2012, 166). An additional paradox is that transhumance both birthed Gaddi caste distinctions and solidified tribal apartness.
Returning to anthropological scholarship, Kriti Kapila (2008) draws from her fieldwork around Palampur to analyse how elite interests are served by discursively framing Gaddi identity as inseparable from “authentic labor”. In her unpublished dissertation, she argues that Gaddi social stratification is best expressed in differential access to pastoralism “as a mode of production and a way of life” and not through the hierarchical ranking of status groups (Kapila 2003, 29). Myriad examples are given of the centrality of pastoralism in shaping Gaddi collective consciousness, from iconographic, ritual and musical representations of shepherds to the valorization of mobility, the sense among Gaddis that they are travelling people (ghumantu). The benchmark of Gaddi “purity” and a “crucial constituent of the Gaddi world-view” is the yearlong migratory cycle between the highland pastures of Chamba and the Punjab hills (Kapila 2003, 35). Shepherds possessing sizable flocks not only participate in gate keeping labor, they also form marriage alliances and through consolidated wealth ensure dominant class interests. Kapila argues that the discursive centrality of pastoralism shores up Gaddi interests and provides a counterbalance to the perception that traditional pastoralism is less prestigious than new forms of sedentary employment and government service.

Rather than directly analyzing the interdependence of Gaddi castes, including Dalits, Kapila transposes hierarchical caste distinctions onto pastoralism as a lifeway. As the benchmark of authenticity, pastoralism fosters “caste-like status distinction in practice – often expressed in ritual terms – which succeeds in part in countering the emerging image of pastoralism as a ‘non-modern’ or ‘backward’ way of life” (Kapila 2008, 33-4). These “caste-like status distinctions” are analyzed only among high-caste Gaddis, specifically the reassertion of commensal practices between Gaddi Rajputs and Bhatt Brahmans during feasts. Such distancing mechanisms were borne from Gaddi resentment that Bhatt Brahmans accepted OBC status in the 1980s and cut
their ties with Gaddis, who awaited the 2002 awarding of ST status. Her main point is the growth of casteism and an “obsession with ritual purity in everyday practices” are politically motivated and fueled by the “language and the rhetoric of state processes [as] opportunistically deployed by its citizens” (Kapila 2008, 27).

This argument seems equally viable when turned on its head, that is, when analyzing the effects of state recognition on exacerbating social divisions between Gaddis and allied Dalits. From this vantage, community markers – pastoralism and its ritual expressions, mobility, ancestral link to Gadderan – are excluding tropes and checklists of authenticity that further entrench dominant Gaddi interests and disenfranchise aligned Dalits. In the following chapters, Dalit strategies of accommodating resistance and not-so-oblique criticism – in the spheres of politics, spirituality and embodied selfhood – are analyzed against the backdrop of state recognition and excluding claims of authentic Gaddiness. Kapila does not locate these allied Dalits; in a footnote, Halis and Sippis are called “lower caste groups in the region”, leaving it open-ended and essentially irrelevant how Scheduled Castes may participate in Gaddi identity from the tribal margins (Kapila 2003, 51). Elsewhere, she describes Sippis as “a group at the bottom of the Gaddi hierarchy” – poignantly opening a conceptual space for SC Gaddis while jumbling their relative status (Sippis are inarguably considered the “highest” SC Gaddi population, Halis the “lowest”).

Her argument about the growth of “caste-like status distinctions” in everyday life, narrowly confined to the political resentments between high-caste Gaddis and Bhatt Brahmins around Palampur, overlooks the systemic casteism historically practiced by Gaddis towards “their own” (apane āp) Dalits. Many of these Dalits were conscripted by Gaddis as landless tenants (pāocārī) under jajmānī patronage, and their subordinate status as “brought” (leke ānā)
laborers and, therefore, not Gaddi, was recently ratified through their exclusion from tribal recognition. Nothing about these discriminatory and exclusionary practices are new except their reassertion in a political idiom, a pattern seen throughout India (Still 2013).

Given the singular importance of caste in determining SC/ST recognition, in structuring residential and wealth patterns, modes of consanguinity, felt proximity to Gadderan and migration history, association with pastoralism as authentic labor, and, not least, given the myriad ways that casteism has birthed subaltern strategies of resistance and tribal Dalit consciousness – given all these forces which shape Dalit experience in the contested fringe of Gaddi life – I staunchly disagree with Kapila’s argument that caste is of tertiary importance compared to the “lack of access to pastoralism as a mode of production and a way of life” (29). Attention to Dalit experiences highlights how Gaddi casteism shapes their alienation from pastoralism. This underlying cause surely contributes to wealth disparity between Gaddi status groups to the present, along with the symbolic and social exclusions that Gaddi-aspiring Dalits continue to experience.

Therefore, my analysis is indebted to Kapila’s insight about the discursive tropes and hegemonic forms that accrue around perceptions of authentic labor and privilege elite interests. However, I argue that this is most relevant not among the localized dispute between Gaddis and Bhatt Brahmans (not evident in Dharamsala), but among high- and low-caste Gaddis past, present and virtually everywhere. How do these discourses and tropes of authenticity, propelled by the representational politics embedded in affirmative action, obscure subaltern articulations of Gaddiness? Answering this question reaffirms the centrality of Gaddi castes in structuring life chances and proximity to the assumed stuff of ethnic consciousness.
Other scholarly essays at defining Gaddis have fallen into colonial tendencies by saying too much to signify too little. Sharma (2003, 9) irreconcilably defines Gaddi as both a conglomerate Rajput caste and divided into two “basic classes: clean and unclean.” Verma (1996, 39-40) provides verbatim recitations of Rose and Lyall. The same tension remains: Gaddis comprise four classes, including Dalits, although their inclusion by outsiders is mistaken and at variance with Gaddi exclusionary practices. These Gaddi Dalits are later reaffirmed as non-Aryan “menials of Gaddi society” without speculating about their mode of relatedness.

Most recently, Anja Wagner (2013) analyses Gaddi place-making practices and enactments of the Himalayan environment. Her data draws exclusively from Gaddi Rajputs: “I have not collected substantial data on Gaddi speaking lower castes where further [differences in ritual practice] might emerge, although these differences are hard to predict since reference to lower castes apart from their role as cela (oracles/healers) is scant in the literature” (Wagner 2013, 7). She broadly differentiates Gaddis into three caste groups – Bhatt Brahmans, Kshatriyas and “the lower castes or so called Gaddi small castes, namely Sipi and Hali” – but astutely footnotes that “[c]ontemporary local denominations show less emphasis on internal divisions and differences than these older [colonial] sources suggest” (Wagner 2013, 7-9). Her scholarship on identity formation through ritual practice and constructing place through the enactment of kinship never mentions Gaddi social segmentation or the contested place of Gaddi Dalits. Similarly, dozens of recent articles from the varied fields of ethnopharmacology, agroforestry, genetics and seismology cursorily define Gaddis as generic hills people, a largely settled tribe of shepherds, almost never drawing data from Gaddi Dalits or considering their analytic importance.
There is a consistent tendency snaking from colonial texts through current scholarship to recognize social divisions while disregarding the authenticity of tribal Dalits or postulating modes of caste relatedness. I prefer to analyze Gaddi belonging as an interaction between past disenfranchisements and present ethnopolitical mobilizations, between ontologies of being and hegemonic discourses of exclusion. Such a view does not place an undue expectation on the archive to adjudicate the social aspiration of Gaddi Dalits; it rather utilizes critical ethnography to argue that ethnicity is neither static nor presupposed, but a dynamic process involving “organizational routines, institutional forms, political projects and contingent events” (Brubaker 2004, 11). Viewing Gaddi groupness as processual and group boundaries as negotiated is continuous with larger shifts away from essentialized notions of ethnicity (Wimmer 2013; Barth 1969) and caste (Guha 2013). It also advances a constructivist perspective of tribal ethnicity: that there is “no such thing as a ‘tribe’ in the strong sense of the word – no objective genealogical, genetic, linguistic, or cultural formula that will unambiguously distinguish one ‘tribe’ from another” (Scott 2009, 243). Aspects of ethnic identity in Zomia – pluriethnic inclusivity, trait instability, cultural sprawl, absorption of newcomers and ethnic amphibianism (Scott 2009) – resonate with the archival ambiguities and nebulous boundaries that are part-and-parcel with tribal identity in Himachal Pradesh. Many Gaddi Dalits recognize this; their struggle is to discursively reframe ethnic mutability within the emerging tropes of tribal multiculturalism and STD in order to secure not only state recognition but also cultural dignity in their everyday lives.

**Multi-sited Fieldwork with Multiple Interlocutors**

The principal thread running throughout this dissertation is to analyze the production and effects of an exclusionary ethnic order among Gaddis, in colonial literature and scholarly orientations, in
the statist regimes of positive discrimination and in emic articulations of identity. A multi-sited methodology was most appropriate to investigate the spatially-decentered, caste- and regionally-specific attachments Dalits have to Gaddi tribality. To that end, I lived in six multi-caste villages in Dharamsala (and conducted survey work in several more), located in three topographical and sociocultural stratifications: mountain villages along shepherding routes connecting Kangra and Chamba; hill villages, contact zones between Gaddis and the agricultural-based Kangri castes; and plains villages, where the Dhauladhar Mountains feel far-removed from daily life. I conducted fieldwork in slate mines and religious sites, in government offices and scratch-farming villages, in hospitals and cafes, among traditional spirit healers, covert Christian converts, ethnic entrepreneurs and Tibetan refugees. Research sites radiated from McLeod Ganj, tracking how cosmopolitanism impacts tribal performance and injects new variables into Gaddi caste hierarchy and tribal aspiration among Dalits.

By tracing the spatial diversity of Gaddi ethnicity in multiple socio-topographical sites, this project crosses the conventional boundedness of single village studies. Previously, anthropologists have myopically focused on individual villages at the peril of overlooking geographic variations and the development of wider ethnic systems, such as among the Rai and Tamang (Levine 1987, 75). As a corrective, an analysis of interrelated social phenomena and ethnic attachments across space required multi-sited ethnography. Doing so “moves out from single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects and identities in diffuse time space” (Marcus 1995, 96). However, this is not a neo-Marxist analysis of world systems; more modestly, Gaddi identity formation is understood as an unevenly distributed process operating at multiple scales.
This process comes into focus by widening the conceptual aperture, by establishing multiple sites of fieldwork that place village dynamics and pastoral traditions in conversation with larger movements of ideas and discourses. While multi-sited research often involves trans-local linkages across huge cultural distances (Hannerz 2003, 207), this project maintains tight comparative analyses between Dalit consciousness in Chamba and Kangra Districts; between migration flows and caste relations in proximate villages (Kuarsi and Khanyara); and between the socioeconomic effects of differential political status among Jammu and Kashmir Sippis and the “mainstream” Himachali Sippi population, the former granted ST status in 1996, the latter confined to the socially opprobrious and overly-competitive SC status.

Many of these research sites fall under the auspices of Jhandhar, a place name not appearing on maps but crucial to the spatio-cultural orientation of Gaddi life. Jhandhar includes Dharamsala and all Gaddi-dominated low-lying mountain villages on the southern slope of the Dhauladhrs, typically extending to Pong Dam. Occasionally it designates anywhere south of Gadderan, the Gaddi homeland. For non-literate elders in Bharmaur, Jhandhar may even denote Delhi or Mumbai – anywhere not Gaddi. I prefer the restricted use of Jhandhar as Gaddi habitations on the southern spurs of the Dhauladhrs and spreading into the Kangra plains. There is some debate about the etymological origin of the place-name Jhandhar. Most Gaddis conventionally trace its origins to Jalandhar, the demon king who terrorized the righteous and was subdued by Shiva – a story rooted in the Punjab (see Doniger O’Flaherty 1969, 1-44). For Gaddis, Jhandhar is also semantic shorthand for modernity, especially when counterpoised with Gadderan. This connotation is encapsulated in a Gaddi folksong about a Bharmauri husband travelling to the plains.

Wife: You are going to Jhandhar my love (bhora). What will bring for me?
Husband: I will bring coconuts (gari), I will bring dates (chuare).
Wife: You are going to the plains my love. What will you bring for me?
Husband: I will bring a piece of soap (*saban*), a vile of perfume (*atr*) and a handkerchief.

Jhandhar is now famous for much more than soap and tropical fruit. Phillimore highlights several factors that contribute to its unique prosperity: favorable rainfall for agriculture, alluring safety for migratory Punjabis, an expanding middle class and increasing migrant laborer force for road construction and domestic service, army bases and recruitment centers, international patronage flowing to Tibetan refugees, and increased tourism for paragliding (2014, 163). I would add to that list new allurements for domestic tourists, such as the HPCA international cricket stadium and the designation of Dharamsala as a Smart City. Lower Dharamsala recently birthed its first behemoth mall replete with a food court and multiplex movie theater screening western films. The 2010 implementation of the rural tourism scheme “The Story of Every Village” (*har gānv kī kahānī*) has increased flow to Gaddi satellite villages around McLeod Ganj. Commercial flights between Delhi and Kangra provide new connectivity, and blasting is underway to link Kangra and Chamba via a motorable tunnel. The matrix of colonial-era government offices and libraries in Lower Dharamsala continue to attract Gaddi youth with aspirations for civil service. As described in future chapters, the perceived modernity and cosmopolitan character of Jhandhar – radiating from Dharamsala and McLeod Ganj in particular – informs Gaddi tribality, cultural preservation and the ethnopolitical mobilization of Gaddi Dalits.

Multiple fieldwork sites in Jhandhar encouraged multiple research associates and interlocutors. During preliminary research, from January to March 2015, my primary research associate was a Gaddi engineer. The problem of Gaddi enumeration and contestation over Dalit inclusion was first provoked by an innocuous-seeming interview we had with a retired civil
servant. He unexpectedly probed my research associate’s family ancestry and doubted the authentic Gaddiness of his Ghughran clan (al). Walking home, my research associate was irate that an elder would cast aspersions on his tribal origins and suggest that his ancestors were, in fact, Lahauli nomads who incorporated through tribal posing, what he termed “Gaddization” (Gaddikaran). Such disputes about how to enumerate Gaddis, based on what criteria, eventually permeated from the speculative confines of high-caste banter to the urgent situated problems of Dalits aspiring for economic uplift, social inclusion and cultural recognition.

Figure 1.3 Map of field sites extending from Dharamsala in Kangra to Bharmaur in Chamba. Made by author (courtesy of arcgis.com).
From March to December 2015, I worked closely with a Gaddi research associate, Atul, who is now pursuing a PhD in political science. He is a well-establish “fixer” among Gaddi intellectuals; however, our joint reception among Dalits was much cooler and circumscribed, I slowly discovered, than when I researched alone. Despite his broad-mindedness and polished Hindi elocution, Atul was occasionally dragged into stilted caste-based exchanges, and wherever we went he was immediately identified as Gaddi by his Thakur surname. Nevertheless, Atul’s political science background shaped the second phase of my research, from August 2015 to May 2016, when I focused exclusively on tribal heterogeneity and the distributive range of Dalit attachments to Gaddi ethnicity. During this stage, my research was indelibly shaped by two Hali interlocutors, Bihari and Vinay, the former stuck in an administrative quagmire and unable to avail SC benefits, the later a covert Christian evangelist bending biblical hermeneutics around pastoralism, witchcraft torment and otherworldly solutions to social exclusion. They form the biographical backbones of two upcoming chapters. Last, Reeta Purhaan, a Gaddi singer and cultural performer, was instrumental in bringing in a folkloric and aesthetic component; her journey from Phathahar Village to Dharamsala to Yale University through the Fulbright program encouraged me to analyze globalizing shifts in tribal identity as the Gaddi population mushrooms to Goa, Dubai, America and beyond for employment opportunities.

Undoubtedly, these research associates shifted my project away from “traditional” preoccupations in tribal studies and Indian sociology. My intention was to research changes in livelihood, loss of pastureland, interethnic relations, modernization and migration. My research design was indebted to Euro-American scholars who have researched Gaddis since the early 1950s. As I saw it, my contribution would be to analyze modes of relatedness between Gaddis and Tibetan refugees in Dharamsala, the home of the Dalai Lama and a one-time Gaddi
pastureland. Gaddis have engaged in high-profile acts of communal violence against Tibetans, and I wanted to explore refugee precarity and the underlying resentment many Gaddis feel living proximate to richer, more politically-connected refugees.

While this material shapes the final chapters on the Tibetanization of Dharamsala and the performance of cosmopolitan tribality, the larger scope of the project was reimagined through my engagement with Gaddi research associates and aligns with the sociopolitical injustices many face. These injustices are clearly inextricable from the knotty relationship between colonial rule and pre-theoretical commitments within anthropology; as such, they are part of anthropology’s problems and are best addressed through an ethnographic analysis of state recognition. Instead of obscuring the role of research assistants, I found it necessary to write into our relationships. Anthropology as a discipline has so frequently absented fieldwork assistants in published material that some scholars have leveled accusations of institutional social exploitation (Sanjek 1993). In contrast, the following chapters ground generalizations about broad social phenomena in the biographical particulars of research associates and interlocutors. Done successfully, I hope to wed ethnographic reflection, academic knowledge and the situated needs of those in the tribal margin.

I am particularly indebted to the reflexive turn in anthropology – the recognition that anthropology is not monologue, not objectively reading the texts of other people’s cultures from over their shoulders, but rather dialogues between ethnographer and differently-interested interlocutors in a constructed and liminal space of communication. Ethnographic encounter is intrinsically contingent and positioned, and transparently rendering these epistemological dimensions in published writing encourages humanism, holism, and plural interpretations. This approach stresses the collaborative nature of fieldwork and the creative poesis at the heart of
ethnographic writing; simply put, my research pivoted and took shape thanks to the contributions and situated perspectives of my research associates.

**Intersectional Marginalization – Scheduled Tribe Dalits (STD)**

Both the “field-view” and “book-view” of caste are relevant in analyzing the operations of hierarchy and exclusion among Gaddis. The “book-view” privileges the formal divisions of caste expounded in Brahmanical scripture and elaborated by Indologists and philologists. Analyses of caste which are overly invested in this ideal-type fourfold vārṇā system are likely to exaggerate the timeless and unchanging nature of caste along with the uniform acceptance of caste hierarchy across diverse regions (Vaid 2014, 395). Analyzing caste sociality through normative literature particularly overlooks the contemporary shift away from occupational inheritance and pollution-based discrimination. However, the “book-view” of caste has a discursive purchase for Gaddis, especially among ethnic entrepreneurs who shape community sentiment. When Gaddi elders accept Dalits as part of an extended tribal community, they often speak possessively of “our Chamars, our woodcutters, ours tailors, our tantrics.” I argue that this possessiveness has historical origins in jajmānī relations, the unequal effects of which trickle into the contemporary and contribute to the socioeconomic superiority of Gaddis, who maintain a chokehold on ethnic associations, political representation and tropes of authenticity flowing from pastoralism.

This possessiveness is sometimes felt as propinquity, binding Gaddis, Bhatt Brahmans and Dalits to a normative view of interdependent castes expounded by Manusmriti; in other words, a capacious community of STs and SCs bound together by hierarchical interdependence – a contested tribe of castes. At other times, however, the the fourfold vārṇā system expounded by Manusmriti and implicit in Gaddi mythology neatly corresponds with the the state classifications
of SC/ST, creating new idioms of social legitimization and distancing. An elderly Gaddi Rajput, passing his retirement in a local ḍhabā, expounded on the Hindu textual precedence of caste inequality that remains a conceptual touchpoint in village life:

How could a Gaddi [Rajput] go to a Sippi? How could a Gaddi eat from the hand of a Chamar [Hali]? Their quality is low (ghaṭiyā) and we are a high caste (ūnch kom). […] Shiv-ji made the castes at Dal [Lake, below Manimahesh]; if you want to know about it you must go there. Gaddis come from Shiva, he created us and gave us our profession, but he also created the low castes and gave them professions. This matter of caste (jātī-jutī) is why Gaddis are ST and others are backwards (pichare).

Whether to create an embracive tribal community of castes or to emphasize difference in kind, a normative perspective of caste originating with oral scripture and classical Hindu texts remains authoritative among Gaddi elders. In the analysis that follows, the “book-view” of caste is especially relevant in understanding the content and dissemination of casteist discourses and how they perpetuate ongoing social exclusion. Such discourses are affirmed through practice, not an ontological feature of caste organization.

In contrast, the “field-view” is an empirical corrective, grounded in fieldwork, which highlights the contextual and fluid nature of caste, the riot of jātī subdivisions that lead to regional status contestation. Gaddi castes are comparatively recent, the outcome of transhumant mobility and customary interdependence with Hindu agriculturists and peasantry (Singh 1997). Fieldwork among Gaddi Dalits reveals the messiness of status groups and the multi-scalar strategies, individual and collective, of social mobility: legal caste emendations, ethnic associations fighting for tribal inclusion, aspiration through oral narratives, instrumental interpretations of colonial texts, and interpretative contestation – distributed across J&K, Chamba and Kangra – to shift Gaddiness away from normative explanations of caste and towards a model of tribal multiculturalism.
Furthermore, the adoption of Sikhism, Radhasoami and Devi worship among Dalits have textured social belonging with new forms of spirituality and attendant attitudes about purity and status. Although not reductively attributable to sanskritization and the emulation of Brahmanical purity, vegetarianism and teetotalism are (somewhat predictably) their foremost behavioral preoccupations. Such lifestyle choices – often accompanied with a rejection of tribal beliefs and accompanying caste hierarchy – place Dalits within considerations of purity that exceed perceived tribal norms. Whereas Gaddis celebrate sheep sacrifice and intoxicants within a tribal cosmology, many allied Dalits reject these norms and aspire for more abstracted ideals of purity. Accordingly, Gaddis occupy coveted discursive and juridical space as state recognized tribals, although many iconic aspects of their culture are rejected by Gaddi Dalits. It is ironic that while Gaddi Rajputs remain a reference group, much of their tribality is rejected as atavistic and impure by allied Dalits engaged in status emulation. Tribal inclusion does not hinge on exact Gaddi emulation, but rather on state recognition paired with social acceptance and the loosening of caste-based social strictures.

In contrast to the promise of modernity to free individuals of caste and class as they avail themselves of new industrial and urban employment opportunities, scholarship on the persistence of caste frequently emphasizes intergenerational continuity (Vaid 2014, 397). Caste networks remain the backbone of marriage endogamy, and although the link between Dalit hereditary caste and polluting vocation is no longer an ironclad social norm, evidence suggests a direct correlation between caste and class (Kumar et al, 2002, 4096). Among government employees, Scheduled Castes are disproportionately awarded Class III and IV jobs – as clerks, guards or public sanitation workers – often reinforcing their relative subordination in society while giving individuals a tenuous sense of personal achievement and social prestige. The rise of neoliberal
capitalism has led to upward social mobility for some Dalits in the professional sector, although high castes have disproportionately taken such positions (McMillian 2005, 149).

Oftentimes, scholarship on the relationship between caste and status continuity lumps SC and ST together. While generalizations about these most disadvantaged populations highlight the failure of government reservations to establish equal competition between unequal social actors (Vaid and Heath 2010, 156), it obscures the relative differences between Dalits and tribals. By speaking roundly of “SC/ST” populations, it places the emphasis on their status relative to high castes and OBCs; it also suggests an equality-in-difference that obscures how caste exclusion operates within tribes.

It is necessary to carefully disaggregate terms in order to analyze Dalits in the tribal margins. Underway in Himachal Pradesh, from Lahaul to Dharamsala, are grassroots efforts to raise awareness of casteism within tribal formations. These organizations have impacted Gaddi identity by popularizing a term which at first glance appears baffling – Scheduled Tribe Dalits (STD). Such a moniker is treated with hostility among some Gaddis (and non-Gaddi scholars, as well), who consider tribal Dalit an oxymoron. When I posted an advertisement on a Gaddi Facebook page looking for a Scheduled Caste research assistant, a Gaddi tersely commented: “Sir, Gaddi does not come under SC.” I intend to show, however, that caste emulation, multicultural sentiment and ethnopolitical mobilization have carved out a space of (ever-contested) social legitimation for Dalits within the Gaddi worldview. The term STD addresses juridical issues that have arisen with the neat constitutional differentiation of caste and tribe, issues which vary based on tribal configurations and life in and out of tribally reserved areas.

The intersection of Dalit, indigenous (ādivāsī) and tribal (janjāti) disrupts commonsensical understanding of the egalitarian basis of tribal life. In the history of
anthropology, nomadic pastoralism was generally considered egalitarian in organizing descent groups based on segmentary lineages. Although the facile association between tribal pastoralism and egalitarianism was disrupted by Talal Asad’s (1978) comparative analysis of pastoralist and sedentary societies, the idea of tribal egalitarianism remains lodged in popular stereotyping. The sentimentalism that informed the colonial binary between animist tribal egalitarianism and Hindu caste hierarchy has proven an intractable lens through which tribes are represented, and often represent themselves, in the era of reservation benefits.

Gaddis often say that “Gaddis are Rajput,” and their relatively recent Rajputization is imagined as a primordial characteristic of tribal pastoralism. While scholars are savvy to caste assimilation among tribes, often described as a tribe-to-caste continuum, most tribal research highlights a teleological slide from clan-based tribal egalitarianism to mono-caste social organization. An early exception was Sinha (1962, 36), who noted how tribal elites across Central India assimilated into the lower strata of Kshatriya identification as part of state formation. Recent scholarship expressly codes Rajputization as “an idiom of social power, […] a highly mobile social process of claiming military-political power and the right to cultivate land as well as the right to rule” (Bhatnagar, Dube and Dube 2005, 59). Although indebted to their insight, the analysis of Gaddi Rajputization which follows avoids simplistic associations between tribal egalitarianism and the homogenous adoption of Rajput identities.

Few scholars have noted the intersectional identity of Scheduled Tribe Dalits (STD). Notable exceptions include Middleton’s (2016, 98) reference to the petition for Gorkha tribal inclusion among Scheduled Caste groups in Darjeeling; Aggarwal’s (2004, 168) analysis of casteism among Ladakhi tribals; and Bhattacharya’s (2017, 59) analysis of state discourses framing Lahauli Dalit women as both agentive seekers of constitutional protection and victims of
“regressive custom enforced by ‘tribal’ men”. The overall paucity of literature on the subject reflects an assumption within Indian sociology that tribes homogenously assimilate into mainstream Hindu caste life en masse.

Meanwhile, redefining tribe as a community (samudāy) of hierarchical castes, and ensuring the constitutional protection of tribal Dalits, is the project of various NGOs throughout Himachal Pradesh. Their aim is to achieve official recognition of degrees of subalternity. Undoubtedly, tribes are discriminated against in Kangra, where they are reproduced as the racialized other among caste plainspeople. Derisive attitudes about tribal dialects have caused many Gaddis to linguistically code switch to Hindi to obscure their origins, part of a larger program of de-tribalization and Rajput caste-passing that informs everything from naming practices on Facebook to new trends in exchanging mangal sūtra during marriage. To combat urban stigmatization, a Gaddi student group named the Kailash Association began in the 1970s and today boasts thousands of members. Nevertheless, prejudice against Gaddis and other tribes persist. “Gaddis are hillbillies,” I have been told by Kangra dominant castes, “who drink sheep blood and sleep out of doors.” Such localized insults parallel stereotypes of uncivilized and wild tribals across India’s collective imagination (Bora 2010). When paired with data on the continued socioeconomic lag of Scheduled Tribes relative to general castes, a picture emerges of tribal communities in need of positive state discrimination and special constitutional protections as a socioeconomic minority.

In addition to tribal subalternity are further caste-based social vulnerabilities and economic disadvantages. Sukhdev Viswapremi, the president of the People’s Campaign for Socio-Equality in the Himalayas, described how the intersection of Dalit and tribal is overlooked in a scholarly and political context. “Based on extensive research across throughout Himachal
Pradesh, Uttarakhand and J&K, we have found tribes to be heterogeneous. So many people are surprised to find out that Dalits are discriminated against by tribals.” Viswapremi’s NGO operates across Himachal Pradesh and has deep organizational ties to the Backward Class Gaddi Organization (sangathan), whose founding president is a Gaddi-aspiring Dalit. We frequently discussed the psychosocial discriminations against Halis and other Scheduled Castes by Gaddis: caste slurs, marriage exclusions, ritual prohibitions, temple barring and spiritual disorientation. The chapters that follow analyze these social exclusions by recursively looping between state arbitration of ethnic classifications and the microaggressions and identity reformations that shape everyday life in the obscured margins of tribal society.

In this light, Lal Chand Dhissa, the president of the Janjatiya Dalit Sangh, focuses on the lack of political rights among Scheduled Tribal Dalits (STD). In his self-published book, Social Injustices of the Constitution (Samvidhān ke Sāmājik Anyāy), Dhissa presses the case that the constitution incorrectly understands tribes to be homogenous (samajātiya) and mono-caste (ekkhandiyya) (2011, 17). By disaggregating anthropological (nriavīgānik) and constitutional (samvaidhānik) definitions of tribe, and drawing from his personal experience of caste stratification within his Lahauli constituency, he argues for recognition of Scheduled Tribal Dalits. Such status would exceed the current double SC/ST status given to Lahauli STDs (although Dhissa argues that about half of STDs are overlooked for double benefits); however, dual status does not politically enfranchise Dalits. For example, the Beda and Gera communities petitioned for Dalit status although living within a tribal-protected area, and were meaninglessly reclassified in the Scheduled Tribe Order of 2004 as “Independent Scheduled Tribes” and thus unable to avail themselves of SC schemes.
Because of the scheduling of Lahaul as a tribal area, Dalits are left legally vulnerable, unprotected by legislation such as the Protection of Atrocities Act (PoAA) meant to shield Dalits from large-scale targeting. Such legislation considers tribals to be equally marginalized and of equal standing to Dalits; as such it is not applicable in tribal-reserved areas, nor does it recognize tribal discriminations against Dalits. Bhattacharya (2017) describes how a tribal Dalit was unable to register a rape allegation against a forward caste tribal under the PoAA because of the illegibility of her identity as a STD. In addition, the 1996 Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act (PESA) is viewed as hostile to STD inclusion. By reserving pradhān positions to Scheduled Tribes, it abolished special provisions for STDs that were earlier enforced; by ensuring that state legislation “shall be in accordance with [tribal] practices and traditional laws, social and religious systems, and community management of resources,” (Section 4(a)), it legitimizes and propagates systematic tribal oppression against Dalits. In a 2013 written petition to the High Level Committee on Scheduled Tribes, Dhissa describes how PESA “is being used to exploit and repress Scheduled Tribal Dalits (STD)”, citing the example of a tribal boycott against STDs in Lahaul who refused their caste vocation as ritual drummers and found themselves unable to seek redress through PESA.

Although the three aforementioned NGOs are organizationally and ideologically interconnected, Gaddi-aspiring Dalits living in Kangra have at times carried the logic of STD into uncharted territory. Lal Chand Dhissa highlights the need for STD status in tribal-reserved areas of the Himalayas, whereas Dalits push for STD status in the non-reserved district of Kangra. They argue that their current SC status legally bars them from purchasing land in tribal-protected Gadderan, especially Bharmaur. Although out-migration from “backwards” areas has been the traditional norm, new large-scale hydro and mining projects in Bharmaur have begun to
incentivize reverse migration; such incentives fall only to Gaddis in Kangra who, since being awarded ST status in 2002, can now purchase land in Bharmaur. Such practical impediments are secondary to the biting irony that Dalits in Kangra feel they are legally prohibited to purchase land in their ancestral land. While few are wanting to return to Gadderan where they faced generations of entrenched casteism, their SC status is a further reminder of how the state arbitrates, and frequently naturalizes, social discriminations that have both social and juridical consequences. In addition, Dalits in Kangra are virtually unrepresented in state and local politics, unable to compete in ST reserved elections, frequently unable to win in SC reserved elections as demographic minorities within the larger Kangri SC sphere.

Three Theories of Tribalization

Tribalization refers to the process of outside caste groups assimilating into tribal life and, as pertaining to Gaddis, the ways in which Dalit aspiration for ST status shapes their ethnic consciousness and embodied affect. Kalia (1961) was probably the first to coin the term “tribalization” with regards to the adoption of perceived tribal qualities by non-tribal caste Hindus. He isolated three factors in tribalization: non-tribal groups geographically proximate to tribal reserved areas or sharing porous borderlands with tribal groups; lopsided demographic ratios favoring tribals; and the predominance of merchants and government employees who, living apart from the social restrictions of their own status group, more freely assimilated “tribal qualities” (Kalia 1961, 53). In the Jaunsar-Bawar region of Uttar Pradesh, for example, non-tribal Brahmans adopted a carnivorous “tribal diet” associated with the Khasas on the pretense of climate. Khasas, far from aspiring for vertical mobility within caste society, were openly dismissive of Hindu purity and boasted that Brahmans are “learning our ways and customs”
(Kalia 1961, 51). In Bastar, Chhattisgarh, non-tribals adopted meat-eating, alcohol consumption, and participation in animal sacrifice (Kalia 1961, 51-2). And in Khargone, Madhya Pradesh, non-tribal merchants and government employees, who were demographic minorities among tribal groups, adopted Bareli, a tribal dialect (along with slang and kinship terms), tattooing practices and animist beliefs (Kalia 1961, 52-3).

It is important to note how the delineation of such “tribal qualities” has, since colonial times, been integral to establishing degrees of difference based on primitiveness, wildness, and exoticization – part of a larger project of creating and establishing tropes of difference upon which the civilizing project of colonization was premised (Skaria 1997; Chaudhuri 2013, 5). The one-way transference of perceived moral degradation from tribal origins to caste Hindus is dubious, as is Kalia’s claim that cultural changes within the tribes under consideration are attributable to Westernization alone, and is completely divorced from sanskritization and local forms of caste emulation (Kalia 1961, 51). However, Kalia’s scholarship is a first foray into the two-sided cultural exchange at the porous border separating tribal and non-tribal life.

Understanding how Dalits have not only adopted Gaddi cultural idioms but cultivated substantive ethnic consciousness as Gaddi aspirants is, in one sense, a study of tribalization. It depends on perspective. Some scholars argue that clan-based, pre-caste segmentation is the anthropological measure of the tribe. From this nucleus, the adoption of caste hierarchy leading to contestation over Dalit belonging is emblematic of multicultural social inclusion and postmodern destabilization of discretely-bounded social categories by exposing their ideological constructions. “They don’t feel Gaddi, they want to feel Gaddi,” a historian of Himachali tribes cynically hypothesized (Mahesh Sharma, personal comm.). Such a view is consistent with some Gaddis who derisively describe the struggle for Dalit inclusion as Gaddikaran – often
pejoratively framed as the defilement of pure Gaddi tribal life by opportunistic low-status
groups.

Among Dalits, the idea of tribalization – as defined as the gradual assimilation of Hindu
 caste groups into tribal life – is largely accepted by elites, the well-educated and ethnic
 entrepreneurs promoting tribal inclusivity. Putting aside Sippis, the issue is not whether such
low-status groups have been Gaddi since time immemorial; in contrast, Dalits often emphasize
their “tribal” autochthony against comparatively recent Gaddi migration histories from Lahore.
For many Dalits, claims of autochthony/indigeneity are yoked to the scientific aura of colonial
scholarship and are foundational to their petition for tribal inclusion. Doing so paradoxically
affirms the non-Gaddi origins of Gaddi Dalits as evidence of their Gaddiness. They tacitly accept
a re-tribalization thesis: that they were once mountain omnivores, living tribal lives; that they
were conquered by caste Hindus from the plains, who called themselves Gaddis; that they were
assigned untouchable identities through patronage exploitation and hierarchical subordination;
and that social justice entails state recognition of their tribal origins and multifaceted integration
into Gaddi life. Their journey from tribal to Dalit to tribal once again complicates Kalia’s
analysis of tribalization as high-status groups assimilating so-called “tribal qualities” without
loss of caste status.

From the village perspective, however, among scratch farmers, slate miners and day
laborers, tribalization is rarified anthropological jargon that gives further ammunition to Gaddi
purists. They stringently reject tribal assimilation by recounting oral narratives of a brotherly
quarrel leading to ethnogenesis and caste division. Although their identification as Gaddi is
buttressed through caste networks, ethnic associations and the Janus-faced platitudes of
communal harmony advanced by Gaddi politicians to enlarge their vote bank, their quotidian
experiences with Gaddis is often a bitter reminder of their apartness. The mismatch between their felt identity as Gaddi and their exclusion from Gaddi life has varied impact. For some, rejection coarsens resolve, gives it teeth; for others, it creates psychological fragility, so that one’s Gaddiness is shamefully whispered instead of loudly pronounced. For the latter, the tribalization thesis feels like another salvo in the battle of identity politics, another rationale for establishing alterity and weakening communal sentiments.

Tribalization has also been theorized as the forced movement of peasant communities into inaccessible areas and their adoption of tribal lifeways (Chauhan 1978). Gaddis tacitly accept this version of tribalization as it applies to their own collective identities: caste Hindus who were expelled from Lahore and took refuge in remote Bharmaur, where either by divine intervention or ecological assimilation they adopted pastoralism. This version of tribalization inverts the expected telos of tribes inexorably assimilating into caste hierarchy; it also complicates the analysis of tribal integration, as the adoption of mainstream Hindu caste culture may be felt as a reversion to, and reclaiming of, an original and authentic communal identity, and not a loss of tribal lifeway. While Gaddis accept their tribalization, the oral narrative of their origination as caste Hindus in Lahore rarely serves as an active reference point. Gaddi cultural integration into the wider plains culture of Punjab – which has inflected Gaddi dialect with Punjabi, popularized the mangal sūtra and affected ritual practice – is never understood as a return to mainstream Hindu practice. Nevertheless, this secondary definition of tribalization as pioneered by Chauhan captures the discursive framing of Gaddis as a once dominant community, protectors of Hinduism, pushed from the mainstream into tribal seclusion.

The third sense of tribalization is the process of tribal awakening and subject reformation that parallels state appeals for tribal benefits. Kangra Gaddis have undergone a half-century of
ethnopolitical mobilization for ST recognition, accompanied by ethnic associations, political rallies and the cultivation of tribal consciousness. Their rescheduling is part of what Townsend Middleton (2016, 8) calls the “ethno-contemporary” – the uses of state ethnology to adjudicate claims of difference, upon which subaltern communities stake their social aspirations. When ST status was granted to Gaddi Rajputs and Bhatt Brahman alone, the award tore through the wider community. This is an ethnography of that perceived misrecognition, of how Dalits face down tribal exclusion in their daily lives and in relationship to the state as the arbiter of incentivized difference. The contestation over tribal identity, which awkwardly extends colonial logic through state ethnology, political exigency and cultural capital, has taken on an additional caste dimension. Dalits pursue cultural acceptance as Gaddis through state legitimation, suffering from the distortions of misrecognition (Taylor 1992). This suffering materially contributes to the precarity of being Dalit in the tribal margin and is the axis mundi around which the following chapters revolve.

**Design of Study**

This dissertation is the culmination of thirteen years of involvement with tribal and refugee populations in Dharamsala. As an undergraduate, I beatnicked around with Gaddis in Dharamkot and volunteered with Tibetans in McLeod Ganj. I further developed interest in Tibetans while teaching ethnic minorities at Beijing Normal University and, in 2008, living proximate to Samyeling, the Tibetan settlement in North Delhi. Primarily focused on modes of relatedness between Tibetans and Gaddis, I returned to Dharamsala for preliminary research visits in 2011 and 2012. Over 2013 and 2014, I conducted nine months of fieldwork on the tribal-refugee interface and the Tibetanization of McLeod Ganj, a former Gaddi pastoral stopover. On a typical
day, I would meet with my Gaddi research associate and we would attend religious functions, visit ethnic associations or interview villagers on their attitudes about Tibetans. In the evening, too tired to type up fieldnotes, I found myself at a café eating *thenthuk* with Tibetan friends or drinking whisky late into the evening with Dorjee, my Khampa housemate, in our Gaddi-rented home in Amdo Village. Living in a Gaddi village in the periphery of McLeod Ganj allowed me to track the impact of modernization on conceptions of tribality.

My encounter with Gaddi Dalits opened a related avenue of research. The awarding of ST status in 2002 to Kangra Gaddi Rajputs and Bhatt Brahmanas led to redoubled efforts by Dalit ethnic associations to mobilize for tribal inclusion. To my amazement, Gaddi-aspiring Dalits were drawing from colonial Gazetteers, contemporary scholarship and self-authored autoethnographic reports to petition the state for tribal recognition. Interlocutors would dissolve into frustrated tears describing the psychosocial damage of misrecognition and the legacy of tribal casteism. I gradually moved away from contestation between Gaddis and Tibetans and refocused on the effects of affirmative action on shaping tribal belonging. I returned to Dharamsala for six months, beginning in October 2015, reoriented around the experiences of Gaddi Dalits. Tracking the uneven distribution of Gaddiness among allied Dalit castes led to unexpected field sites, including slate mines, village house churches and traditional healer-diviners’ homes. By providing the first ethnographic account of Gaddi Dalits, my intention is two-fold: to narrowly instigate debate among interested scholars about Gaddi processual ethnicity and the hegemonic discourses that serve Gaddi interests and perpetuate casteism; and, more broadly, to understand how aspiration for tribal recognition materially shapes selfhood, spirituality, substantive ethnic consciousness and sociality with neighbors.
Chapter 2 analyzes the tribal aspirations of Halis, a ploughing caste deemed “Class Two Gaddis” by colonial administrators and virtually overlooked in contemporary scholarship. *Jajmāni* relations established socioaffective propinquity between landless Hali tenants, often brought from Bharmaur, and high-caste Gaddi Rajput patrons. Systemic tribal discrimination led some Halis to officially emend their caste certificates as Sippi, thereby raising their social capital as Gaddi aspirants. Others converted to the Arya Samaj in the early 20th century as a strategy of upward mobility. Their pre-Independence adoption of the caste name “Arya” has provided a resilient barrier to availing constitutionally mandated SC/ST benefits. To combat this, some Halis sacrifice their dignity and often empty their pockets on the altar of petty bureaucrats who determine caste emendations, while others advance colonial logic to position Halis as mountain indigenes, the true measure of the tribe.

Chapters 3 and 4 examine how Hali sociopolitical misrecognition shapes spiritual cosmologies and ritual practice. Chapter 3 analyzes the rise of Radhasoami and Devi worship among Halis as spiritual critiques of perceived tribal backwardness. Such conversions remove traditional spaces of social exclusion and obviate the need for Bhatt Brahman *kul purohits* in ritual practice. Instead, Guru-centric devotion, new sacred geographies and ethical reform shape Hali conceptions of spirituality and provide new registers of personal and collective identity. Congregational social dynamics are felt as rebuttals to tribal casteism; moreover, the bureaucratic classifications discussed in Chapter 2 are obviated by new identity documents and new forms of transcendent belonging. Ritual differences between Gaddis and Gaddi Dalits are analyzed as the conflictual negotiation of power and social critique, sometimes leading to structural transformations.
Chapter 4 focuses on the role of Protestantism in reframing Hali social suffering, spiritual torment and political misrecognition; and conversely, how hermeneutic practices align with communal aspiration for Gaddi inclusion. This reframing is sometimes an instrumental, subaltern strategy for stigma management and sociopolitical alienation and sometimes an unconscious tendency to harmonize the “foreignness” of Christian theology with their everyday experience of Shaivism. Drawing from fieldwork in house churches and Christmas reveries, I argue that the emphasis on miraculous healing resonates with Halis because of their structural oppression among Gaddis, often articulated through the idiom of witchcraft.

Chapter 5 jumps from the subaltern strategies of Halis, the lowest Gaddi Dalit status group, to Sippis, a wool-shearing caste most closely associated with Gaddi ritual and pastoralism. Sippis generally reject their subordination as landless peasants and unfree clients under patronage exploitation (pāucārī); instead, they deemphasize tribal casteism and proclaim equivalence with Gaddis. Their perceived status superiority over Gaddi Dalits has led to a sense of Sippi exceptionalism and to ideological impediments to unifying the heterogeneous Dalit groups who comprise the Gaddi community. Sippis consider themselves constitutive of Gaddi society, discursively and practically inseparable from Gaddi pastoralism and ritual. Such views are buttressed by the awarding of ST status to a contingent of migratory Sippis in Jammu and Kashmir. Their inclusion – not as Gaddis, but as a cognate tribe – fuels a sense of exclusivity among Himachali Sippis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how Sippi ST recognition in J&K impacts Gaddi caste relations; and addresses how Hindu-Muslim communalism and Gaddi minoritization shape social cohesion.

Chapters 6 and 7 place Gaddi Dalits in Dharamsala, the most translocal, deeply geopolitical, highly capitalistic and touristic Gaddi “village” on either side of the Dhauladhar
Mountains. We see how Tibetan refugees and sympathetic international tourists shape the enactments of tribal belonging. Such enactments reverberate through Gaddi social networks into the far reaches of rural Bharmaur. Chapter 6 analyzes how Tibetan adaptations to exiled life in Dharamsala impact Gaddi identity. By locating Gaddis within the cosmology of the Ling Gesar, Tibetans exacerbate groupism and communal distrust. By adapting the patronage paradigm, a long-standing structure of Tibetan society, foreign sponsorship flowing to Tibetans functions as a gate keeping device that establishes standards of leisure and personal comportment associated with the West while foreclosing the possibility of Gaddi participation. By Tibetanizing the landscape, visual tropes of “seeing” Dharamsala elevate durable Tibet-centric motifs and obscure Gaddi lifeways. This leads to toponymical contestation between Tibetans and Gaddis in which Gaddi antecedent names are being forgotten along with their ties to place-making mythologies and the pastoral economy. Last, the Gaddi oral narrative of 17th-century forced migration from Lahore is reinvested with new meaning as Gaddis express their physical and psychosocial displacement from Dharamsala by perceived Tibetan “colonizers”. In some instances, the Tibetan influence broadly impacts Gaddi identity; in other instances, it injects new variables into the contestation of Gaddi belonging and directly shapes social aspiration among Gaddi Dalits.

Chapter 7 considers modes of relatedness across the Gaddi-Tibetan interface. By roving across ethnographic experiences, from election booths to interethnic marriages, from the Tibetan café culture to forms of economic interdependence, from racialized violence to fantasies of ethnic segregation, the continuity of historical sentiment erupts in the contemporary. How are cosmopolitan competencies deployed as cultural capital structuring social inequalities between Tibetans and Gaddis? I argue that the Gaddi-Tibetan interface is a crucial social arena for shaping tribal identity, substantive ethnic consciousness and social aspiration. By seeing past the
utopian propaganda and dystopian exaggerations, a richer tapestry of group relations emerges, one which stresses the interdependence of refugee and tribal identity in a fluid field of social competition and neighborliness.

Chapter 8 analyzes the recent awarding of the Smart City designation to Dharamsala and how shifting socioeconomic landscapes impact Gaddi Dalits in their quest for tribal recognition. It briefly introduces the other Gaddi Dalit castes omitted from this dissertation and considers future avenues of research. By way of conclusion, it tracks the impact of modernity on the Gaddi community and the current state of the Gaddi Dalit struggle for sociopolitical acceptance.
The distribution of tribal aspiration among Halis in Himachal Pradesh geographically varies. Some Halis vociferously identify as Gaddi; others live outside the 6th Scheduled Reserved Area of Bharmaur and away from the Dhauladhar Mountains altogether, speak non-Gaddi dialects (primarily Mandiali, Pahadi and Chambiali) and have no tribal pretensions. This chapter analyzes the juridical status of Halis both inside and outside of tribal politics. For those Halis living in the half-assimilated margins of Gaddi life, we consider the historical roots of their subordination within *jajmānī* relations – specifically being “brought” (*leke ṣānā*) to Kangra as landless tenants to perform sedentary, polluting labor. This caused many Halis to obscure their origins by officially registering as Sippis and other regional castes of marginally higher social status. Hali caste consciousness is further fractured by early 20th-century conversion to the Arya Samaj, which entailed officially replacing their caste with “Arya” and left many of those most needing positive discrimination misrecognized and without quota benefits. Hali stigmatization has fueled ethnopolitical campaigns demanding Gaddi tribal inclusion as officially-recorded “Gaddi Halis” based on colonial-era speculation on Hali indigeneity. The liminality of Hali Aryas – some fighting for SC status, others for ST Gaddi recognition – has generated widespread distrust of the state and a sense of futility in satisfying the arcane bureaucratic criteria for assigning benefits. In future chapters, we see how Hali misrecognition contributes to new forms of religious belonging and sociality; this chapter analyzes how early 20th-century strategies for social uplift continue to shape the Hali struggle for self-definition, tribal inclusion and legal recognition.

Halis live in three topographical and sociocultural stratifications throughout Dharamsala: high mountain villages, on ridges and shepherding routes connecting to four passes into
Gadderan; lower hill villages, contact zones between Gaddis and the agricultural-based Kangra castes; and plains villages, extending past the Gaggal Airport, where the mountain-bound tropes of Gaddi tribality are incompatible with the dusty, horizontal landscape. As the elevation reduces from 9,000 to 2,500 feet, mongooses and shaggy Gaddi shepherding dogs give way to lizards, mosquitoes and scraggly street dogs, whilst majestic Himalayan cedar (deodār) forests, once the home of Shiva-worshipping sages, cede to high-rising bamboo clusters and the land of Devi worship.

These ecological and social specificities impact the life chances of Gaddi-aspiring Halis. Those around McLeod Ganj – a Gaddi village of global renown as the home of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan refugees – participate in the drama of globalization, taking Tibetans and foreign tourists into their cement homes as tenants and setting up commercial enterprises when feasible. This sometimes leads to socioeconomic reversals: in Jogiwara village, for example, an aging German businessman constructed a penthouse suite on the top floor of the only Hali home, an ostentatious addition which will legally revert to the Hali family after his death. This financial windfall has transformed the lowest-caste family, owners of a corrugated-iron tea stall illegally encroached on government property, into the envy of neighboring villagers. Meanwhile, Halis living above Khanyara, a defunct slate mine, live in mud homes and struggle with suicide, alcoholism and MGNREGA employment. Halis in villages around Icchi are out of the mountains altogether and are numerically dwarfed by dominant Rajput and Chaudhry castes. Meanwhile, those Halis who are marooned in high-caste Gaddi villages participate in Gaddi social life with varying degrees of social acceptance. “Halis are our Chamar types,” the wife of a Gaddi Rajput intellectual reminded me matter-of-factly, a legacy that continues to circumscribe Hali life opportunities and their tribal assimilation.
Like all Gaddis, most Halis trace their origin to Gadderan. But their migration accounts, like those of all Gaddi Dalits, have minimal relationship to transhumant pastoralism; instead, they describe how they were “brought” (leke ānā) by high-caste Gaddis to perform forms of ritually polluting labor. Newell (1952, 90) describes this process in Goshen, a Gaddi village where three Sippi families were “called” to settle down and perform their caste vocations, a relocation which did not lead to communal unity. Without going into detail, he merely notes that “there was no feeling of responsibility” towards those Sippi families (1952, 90), notable because Sippis are the most tribally assimilated of all SC Gaddis. Halis were not only brought like mobile commodities; along with other Gaddi Dalits they were kept (rakh liyā) by Gaddis as tenants (pāocārī) within a weak system of socioeconomic patronage that paralleled jajmānī relations among non-Gaddi castes. These landless tenants performed sedentary and polluting forms of labor and were systematically alienated from large-scale pastoralism. Halis, like other Gaddi Dalits, struggle to satisfy the discursive criteria for Gaddi tribal inclusion, popularly conceived of as mobility stemming from pastoralism, because their caste occupations kept them wed to the land and, for the most part, broke their relationship to Gadderan.

The caste name “Hali” is etymologically connected to ploughing (hal chalānā), but does not in itself account for their subordination within the Gaddi caste hierarchy. After all, most Gaddis were agro-pastoralists who undoubtedly put hand to plough when exigency required. Throughout North India, ploughing one’s own land is respectable work and not a source of untouchability. Seasonal workers hired to till a zamindar’s field become defacto “Halis” for the duration of their employment – a temporary status that, outside Himachal Pradesh, never becomes an official caste designation. It was not ploughing, but rather their parallel caste vocation as animal carcass removers, as Chamars, which led to myriad forms of caste
discrimination against Halis and has birthed the most resilient Dalit consciousness among all Scheduled Caste Gaddis.

These caste discriminations, narrated in the present with amazing specificity, often exceed the expected range of Himalayan caste practices. An example of this is the compulsory wearing of distinguishing garments as outcastes. As an elder recounted:

Our parents told us about a tradition in the villages that they lived through. It lasted until maybe 1940 or 1945. People used to always wear Gaddi clothes – _colā_ and _dorā_. On our Hali _colā_ we had to wear a black symbol (_kālī tanki_) so that we would be recognized as Halis wherever we went. So we wore a white _colā_, like a Gaddi, but with a _kālī tanki_ on our shoulders. That was a Hali symbol (_cinh_). This was a tradition for only us Halis, never Sippis, never other Dalits. We Halis have always been considered lowest because we were forced to remove animal carcasses.

While this sartorial distancing has receded from everyday practice, clothing remains an active touchpoint for identity construction and exclusion (Tarlo 1996). Even the trademark cap, when worn by Gaddis at a jaunty angle across the forehead, is felt by some Halis as an articulation of self-regard and social authority. “We would never wear our cap like that. It presumes too much,” my Hali friend mused.

In the last chapter, we considered the incongruity of Gaddi classifications by British colonizers as they attempted to reconcile: i) their interest in peasantizing and taxing the mobile group; ii) emic exclusionary definitions by Gaddi Rajputs; iii) scholarly understandings of tribal social organization; and iv) socio-linguistic affinities of “peripheral” low-caste groups aspiring to be Gaddi. Post-independence scholarship has been divided. Mid-20th century ethnographers excluded the low castes (Newell 1967, 21; Phillimore 1982, 20), while more recent scholarship has taken a broader perspective on Gaddi identity, focusing on discursive framing (Kapila 2008) or the unity of language and culture that binds various caste groups within a single community.
(Wagner 2014). Indian historians, on the other hand, remain committed to essentialist views of Gaddi identity that consider the accretion of caste symptomatic of incorporation of the Gaddi tribe, qua Gaddi Rajput pastoralists, into the wider Kangra caste system (Sharma 2013; Singh 2012).

While the “Gaddiness” of Halis and other SC groups has led to oblique speculation, it has never warranted fieldwork. Deploying ethnography, I argue that the naturalization of a Gaddi Rajput social order obscures its contested formation among Scheduled Castes who self-identify as Gaddi or aspire for inclusion. The federal system of positive discrimination operates as a group-external recognizing agent, conferring tangible benefits and “psychological encouragements” to uplift ST Gaddis and unintentionally alienate others (Jaffrelot 2006, 187). This chapter draws on the intimacies of interpersonal village life to understand “group-internal recognizing agents” of Gaddi belonging (Shneiderman 2014, 280).

What follows is an ethnographic account of the struggle and aspiration of partially-assimilated tribal Halis. Among the five SC Gaddi groups, Halis are unique for proudly espousing Dalit tribal consciousness – a strategy which has not, in practice, translated into bonds of equality with other Kangra Dalits. Halis choose between vastly different critiques – either drawing from colonial Gazettes to argue for their tribal indigeneity, or aligning with spiritual reform movements that critique the retrograde tribalness of dominant Gaddi cultural practices. Drawing from the wider Kangra religious milieu, Halis often step outside Gaddi tradition to reframe and, in some instances, to resist Gaddi social ostracism. These critiques run parallel to their unified insistence that Halis are Gaddis and, as such, eligible for less competitive ST benefits. What emerges is an involuted Hali consciousness that is alternatively Dalit and pure,
Aryan and indigenous, SC and ST, and, above all, striving to be Gaddi, in both the eyes of the state and their village neighbors.

**Tribal Exploitation and Hali Servitude**

The *jajmānī* framework of rural social organization was first theorized by Wiser in 1936. Traditional economies across South Asia were based on the hierarchical interrelationship of food-producing and service-rendering castes (Mandelbaum 1970, 161). While some caste groups were paid for labor and services on a contractual basis, and had no entitlement to a share of the crop, overall the *jajmānī* system was conceptualized as uniting “the whole of a local social order, the people and their paramount values” (Mandelbaum 1970, 162). *Jajmānī* relations structured status groups in a functioning whole: Brahmans as ritual specialists, dominant land-owning and food-producing castes as patrons, and a range of low-status groups who expelled symbolic pollutants from the system. This ideal-type functionalism encompassed economic, social, ritual and ceremonial interrelatedness; agricultural workers, in exchange for labor and tenancy, received a fixed share of the crop yield and had their basic material needs met.

Scholars have long disagreed about the social effects and structural basis for *jajmānī* relations. Wiser theorized a harmonious system of caste interrelatedness where each status group was, in turn, superior and subordinate. “Each serves the others. Each in turn is master. Each in turn is servant. Each has his own clientele comprising members of different castes which is his ‘jajmani’” (Wiser 1936, 10). A Christian missionary, Wiser’s sympathy for the Hindu justifications of bonded labor, and the benign functionalism underwriting his theory of complementary caste interconnectedness, may have replicated his theological bias for biblical natural hierarchy and inegalitarian forms of authority (Brass 1999, 238; Wadley and Derr, 1989,
In this light, *jajmānī* relations dialectically resolved the structural opposition between purity and pollution (Pocock 1962; Gould 1964; Dumont 1970): just as a Brahman provides a downward ritual service for upward acceptance of food donations, a Chamar provides an upward service, say, the removal of animal carcasses, for a downward acceptance of a crop share. In contrast, other scholars emphasized the asymmetrical and exploitative nature of bonded labor (Beidelman 1959; Breman 1974, 17). Although the ordered status hierarchy between landlords and tenants, patron families and low-status groups provided reciprocal economic and ritual services, such a system of social interrelatedness was rooted in economic exploitation, as Wadley (1994, 83) describes in early 20th-century Karimpur. More recent scholarship has criticized the “single theoretical core” of *jajmānī* patron-client relations throughout India, preferring to emphasize the substantively diverse, regionally specific forms of socioeconomic interrelatedness that is flattened into a singular trope of self-replicating, “self-contained village republics” across the subcontinent (Lerche 1993, 263; Fuller 1989; Raheja 1988; Kessinger 1974).

Surrounding these debates about the *jajmānī* system – was it solely labor exploitation or a multi-faceted system of reciprocity in which subordinates were both loyal servants to their masters and clients demanding the reciprocal satisfaction of their self-interest – Breman (1974) analyzes the *hāliprathā* patronage system of south Gujarat. His working-class upbringing influenced his emphasis on rural Dalits (1993, vi). Drawing from longitudinal fieldwork, Bremen argued that Dublas were a tribal group subjugated by high-caste Hindu landlords, part of a larger process of tribal groups being slotted as untouchables and placed under a system of unfree agricultural bondage called *hāliprathā*. He traced how high-caste groups, predominately Anavil Brahmins, settled in the plains of south Gujarat and introduced advanced agrarian technologies, which allowed for the systematic exploitation of Dublas and the expansion of the caste system.
into tribal frontiers. In particular, irrigation increased agricultural productivity, and higher yields meant an expanded need for laborers. Ploughing was a central locus of pollution. Legendary accounts from the Ramayana naturalized the purity of Anavil Brahmans as agrarian colonists and Dublas as their bonded laborers. Once a tribe, they found themselves increasingly dependent on landowners and high-caste patrons, and gradually slid into caste servitude.

Two social interdependent poles emerged: socioeconomically well-off Brahman Anavils at the top of the agrarian economy, patrons in the *jajmānī* system; and deprived Dublas on the bottom, suspended between animism and Hinduism. This system of “unfree labor mitigated by patronage” (Breman 1974, 62) comingled exploitation with paternalistic regard for Dubla servants. Due to a growing surplus of landless laborers, Anavil Brahmans slowly uncoupled themselves from the patronage system and replaced social reciprocity with the profitable directives of the emerging market economy (1974, 220). As the population of Dublas grew, the agricultural economy shrunk; laborers accustomed to farming and ploughing were poorly suited for employment in other sectors, and they slid into abject poverty (1974, 217).

These interlocking *jajmānī* and *hāliprathā* systems, at times analogous and mutually constitutive, were operable among Gaddis. In Bharmaur, Newell (1964, 136) described how Gaddi socioeconomic egalitarianism led to an “ill-developed birton” system of *jajmānī* patronage due to demographics favoring Gaddi Rajputs over Brahmans and lower castes. In Kangra, along the southern spurs of the Dhauladhrs, mid-20th century fieldwork highlighted the receding centrality of *jajmānī* relations.

Parry (1979, 45) broadly categorized Kangra tenancy relationships as either *pahu*, house-tenants, or *sajhi*, tenants of agricultural land – both in subordination to the landlord (*bajhiya*). *Pahu* tenants were vocational specialists who exchanged free rent for specialized labor or
household chores and property duties (described as “forced labor”); although clearly subordinate, they entered a “quasi-kinship” tie with the landowner, who acted as “benevolent patriarch” (Parry 1979, 46). *Sajhi* tenants, on the other hand, were share-croppers who received free rent and a share of the crop yield; their labor was considered as “mutual help between friends” and their relationship had “definite implications of equality or friendship” (Parry 1979, 46). The 1955 enactment of the Punjab Security of Land Tenures Act ostensibly protected such tenants from eviction and reduced the landowner’s crop yield to one third; in practice, however, landowners unofficially kept tenants, having evicted them in name alone, systematically undermining their tenancy rights.

![Figure 2.1 An upright plough against a Hali home in Kuarsi village, Bharmaur. Photo by author.](image)

Parallel to these relationships between tenant and landlord, which established quasi forms of kinship and intergenerational familial reciprocity, were a loose network of contractual
ploughmen (*hali*) and farm servants (*kama*). Halis were engaged for the entire season, often by multiple landlords, whose property holdings were too insignificant to warrant owning oxen, whose family members were already engaged in agricultural labor, or whose “high-standing” as Rajputs and Brahmans with aristocratic pretensions were “compromised” by ploughing pollution. Halis often received monetary compensation and free food while employed and rarely stayed with the same landlord past three harvests. Kamas were low-caste menials who received yearly salaries to perform duties ranging from ploughing to household chores, excluding kitchen duties, fetching water, and other tasks which could lead to caste pollution. Although employed on a semi-permanent basis, Parry found no corroborating evidence for hereditary bondage among Kangra Kamas or contractual Halis (Parry 1979, 51).

As these forms of socioeconomic patronage have waned, Parry notes the “paradox […] that the economy tends to be represented in terms of a model of relationships whose pragmatic significance for most households is probably rather marginal” (1979, 82). The continued “conceptual” centrality of *jajmānī* relations – despite the importance of contractual wage labor and the burgeoning remittance economy – led Phillimore (1982, 129) to consider how hereditary caste vocations, if not actively driving the local economy, shapes Gaddi inter-caste neighborliness. His analysis has three relevant prongs. First, nascent Bharmauri ethnicity is shared between Gaddis and SC Sippis and Rihare, despite having analogous service transactions between them and non-Gaddi Dalits. Second, Sippi and Rihare families have *jajmānī* relations with Gaddi Brahman *kul purohits* (whereas Halis, who are numerically insignificant around Karnathu, do not). Third, Gaddi patrons included Rihare and typically excluded Sippis in the donation of biannual grain (*kalothi*) to subordinate non-Gaddi caste groups (*kama* or *kamin*) with whom they shared customary relationships (Phillimore 1982, 133-41). Phillimore’s thesis,
written in the wake of Newell’s confused writing on Gaddi castes and Parry’s seminal analysis of Kangra caste configurations, crucially tracked emerging Gaddiness among Dalits in *jajmānī*-like forms of reciprocity with dominant Gaddis.

**Hali Political and Social Aspiration for ST Status**

Halis living among Gaddis or contiguous to Gaddi villages are unequivocal in asserting their Gaddiness. Halis conceive of Gaddi as a community (*samudāy*) bracketing a set of shared qualities – dialect (*bolī*), dress (*beṣ buśa*), cuisine (*khānpān*) ritual (*rīṭī rīvāz*) and culture (*sanskriti*) – that unite ST Gaddis and SC Halis. Their difference is a matter of socioeconomic status. Halis statistically trail Gaddis with respect to wealth, landownership, educational attainment and status employment (Pattanaik and Singh, 2005).

Although of uncertain provenance, the felt Gaddiness of Halis is not a given. It is actively inculcated by Hali ethnic entrepreneurs who give social shape and political teeth to collective aspiration. In my experience, these ethnic entrepreneurs are neither engaged in projects of constructing social difference and policing ethnic boundaries (Barth 1969), nor are they minority elites who “wish to represent in order to protect their well-being or existence or to gain political and economic advantage for their groups as well as for themselves” (Brass 1991, 8). Based on fieldwork with the Gaddi Dalit Pichra Varg and the Gaddi Hali Mahasangh, the former based in Dharamsala, the latter in Chamba, I found that Hali ethnic entrepreneurs are impassioned social activists of impoverished origins, rarely conversant in English, often farmers and Class Four government employees. They are as likely to court ridicule for their ineffectual forays into political activism as social prestige and monetary kickbacks. Instead of constructing social differences, Hali ethnic entrepreneurs emphasize *cultural sameness* with Gaddis. In some
instances, they emphasize shared heritage as homologies, evidence of common ancestral
derivation; in other instances, they instrumentally emphasize difference to place Halis within an
indigeneity framework.

A representative example of a Hali identity entrepreneur is Dharmdev, a lawyer who
founded the Gaddi Dalit Pichra Varg and advocated for Hali inclusion until his unexpected
passing away. Dharmdev lived next to the Tibetan Delek Hospital and daily interacted with
refugees and foreigners. “You can see this is an isolated location,” he once said, “there are no
Gaddis here, and before the Tibetans came, we were absolutely alone. Growing up I didn’t feel
discrimination from Gaddis, because there were none!”

But all around him Halis lived in the tribal margins. In 2002, when Kangra Gaddis were
given ST status and took to the streets of Lower Dharamsala in celebration, Halis remained at
home. Dharmdev explained the definitional ambiguity at the heart of Hali exclusion.

See the problem is that Gaddi is not a caste. It is a community name under which there
are a group of castes having shared cultural practices. It is a generic name. It is divided
into two parts, Class 1 and Class 2 Gaddis. Class 1 includes Brahman, Rajput, Rathi and
Khatri. They were the pure Hindus who fled from the plains because of Aurungzeb. Class
2 were the locals, they did not migrate from outside. Class 2 includes Badi, Hali, Sippi,
Dhogri and Rihare. In fact, Class 2 Gaddis are the original tribals.

It is clear that Class 2 Gaddis never migrated. Let me show you [brings a copy of the
*Kangra Gazetteer*, 1867, and starts thumbing through it]. This is a big book. Take a look
at the two classes of Gaddis, it shows the number of families and holdings, the total area
cultivated, total revenue, and so on. In fact, whoever did the survey ignored those people
who weren’t producing revenue. We Class 2 Gaddis were very backwards, living in
servitude (*pāo*), so we were misrepresented by the British – it doesn't show our
population correctly. We were completely overlooked by the British-appointed Gaddi
local leaders (*lambredār*) who would represent their own interests. Look here [reading
out loud]. ‘Gaddi is a generic name. Impure Gaddis are also styled as Gaddis.’ See, the
British recognized us. Then why are we not reflected as Gaddis in the Revenue Record?
Ethnic entrepreneurs like Dharmdev not only invoke colonial scholarship in their private musings; they also promote them as reference texts to the broader Hali community. Sometimes villagers would show me their own photocopied *Kangra Gazetteer*; oftentimes they would describe how their relatives and friends also have copies of the *Gazetteer*, which stipulates their inclusion as Gaddis. “I don’t blame the British, they didn’t make these distinctions (*bhed*)”, a Hali elder told me in the company of his sons. “The British wrote that we are one community (*samudāy*) made up of several parts (*ang*). How did we get to this place where ‘Gaddi’ only applies to high-caste people? We want to know who erased the name Gaddi from our caste name Hali in the revenue record. It must have been a powerful person.”

In an ethnographic sense, colonial writing proliferated the complexities and contradictions of Gaddi identity and deepened the ambiguous interrelationship of tribe and caste. This opacity is generative for Halis. It is seen to recast “Gaddi” as neither a high-caste nor an egalitarian tribe, but a community (*samudāy*) encompassing a range of castes and associated occupations. By identifying two classes of Gaddis, the British recognized the Gaddiness of Dalits and naturalized their subordination. Halis largely consider the British colonizers allies in their struggle. Throughout the late-20th century, as Dalit consciousness spread among Halis and multicultural inclusion took hold in some Gaddi quarters (especially when advantageous to their ST petition to enumerate as many Gaddis as possible, including Dalits), the early Land Settlement Reports and Gazetteers became important sites of ethnic authentication. This is not done uncritically. Gaddi Dalits are savvy to the ways in which these texts functioned as instruments of colonial power used to reorganize Gaddi social life under extractive taxation regimes. Doing so propped up Gaddi elites and consolidated pastoralism as a high-caste vocation. What is gained, however, is the sense among Halis of Gaddi belonging – that historical
documents, well-circulated and bearing the marks of officialese and foreign scholarship, saw through dominant ideologies and validated Dalits as an integral Gaddi class.

Appealing to the Gazetteers also encourages widespread boasting among Halis of being indigenous to the Himalayas, whereas high-caste Gaddis are latecomers from the plains. The oft-quoted saying among high-caste Gaddis, *Ujreya Lahore, te baseya Bhamaur* ("after Lahore was deserted, Bhamaur was inhabited"), suggests a forced migration after the invasion of Aurangzeb in the 17th century (Handa 2005, 29). In contrast, the perceived indigeneity of Gaddi Dalits has several social and ideological consequences. Most importantly, it links popular ideas of tribe (*janjāti*) and indigene (*mūlnivāsi*), positioning Halis as proto-tribal. Dharmdev explained tribal as "to live with nature, to eat only what comes from nature."

We *mūlnivāsis* were always like this. There are stories of Halis eating anything in nature, birds and worms even – we were totally omnivorous (*sarybhakshi*). That is a tribe. The Gaddis were never a tribe. The word tribe got connected to shepherding. Fine, they would herd their flocks through the mountains, but they only ate goats and sheep. They had fled Aurungzeb, who wanted them to remove their sacred threads (*janeū*) and eat cow meat. They were pure Hindus who fled, and they intermingled with us tribals. So they became shepherds, but they were essentially outsiders. They were not under the ‘tribe gene.’ That's the main thing. And it accounts for why they kept their distance from us *mūlnivāsis*, like they had tried to do before in Lahore with Aurungzeb. See our histories are different. In fact, Hali history is much more ancient.

Karlsson (2013, 37) traces the growth of indigeneity claims among ST groups in Meghalaya in tandem with the internationalization of the rights of indigenous peoples. He argues that indigeneity claims in the Northeast serve to delineate cultural difference between tribes and to guard against future descheduling. In the Gaddi context, claims to indigeneity are also connected to reservation politics, albeit mobilized by Dalits fighting for Gaddi inclusion. Dharmdev appeals to the perceived backwardness of Gaddi Dalits as evidence of indigeneity, coded as tribalness, and draws a sharp distinction with the Hindu, high-caste Gaddis of the
plains. Those Gaddis fled Arungzeb to preserve their purity, a pattern that, carried into the Dhauladhrs, was replayed as caste hierarchy vis-à-vis jungle-dwelling, Hali omnivores. Accordingly, the mobilization of Gazetteer logic, which first touched upon the oppression of Dalits and their “stylization” as Gaddis, shapes the development of Hali tribal consciousness, argued in the modern idiom of indigeneity.

For many Halis, this issue of tribal inclusion came to a head between 1996, when state anthropologists swung through Dharamsala on a tribal tour, and 2002, when Kangra Gaddi Rajputs and Bhatt Brahmanas were granted ST status. Middleton (2011, 250) analyses how the Ethnographic Survey adjudicates claims for tribal status and, ultimately, “instantiates particular ethnological forms.” He focuses on both sides of the ethnographic interface. On one side, aspiring tribal communities try to “satisfy modernity’s demands for anachrony” through a selective presentation of animal sacrifice and “model villages” thought to exemplify cultural atavism (Middleton 2011, 255). On the other side, government anthropologists search out Tylorian survivals, cultural minutia “understood to be vestiges of a community’s pure antecedent, ‘tribal’ past hidden in the present, yet revealing of a community’s true identity” (Middleton 2011, 259). In such a manner, ethnology naturalizes an epistemic standpoint that privileges the centrality of Hindu Brahmanicalism against which tribal alterity is measured.

Clearly the encounter between Gaddis and state anthropologists not only naturalized tribal alterity; by extending ST status to only high-caste Gaddis, it also naturalized “the ontological and epistemological premises” undergirding caste differences between Gaddi status groups (Corrigan and Sayer 1987, 4). Halis and other SC Gaddis were left feeling culturally isolated, alienated from tribal benefits, and duped by Gaddi leaders. The government surveyors are long gone, but the residual effects linger on through an acute sense among Gaddi Dalits that
government classifications provide a new idiom for caste antagonism and social exclusion. Even the ethnographic survey has sprung a telling rumour among Halis, which highlights the vulnerability of being Dalit in the tribal margins.

When the surveyors (sarvekshan vāle) came, they were not brought to our village. They came to roadside and from a distance our village was simply pointed out to them: “Look at Gaddis living in these poor mud houses, without roads, in threat of mudslides; this is why we need ST status.” And the surveyors saw the condition of us Halis and agreed! But that wasn’t reality. They didn’t even show the Gaddi Rajput and Brahman villages; they showed Hali villages! […] But in the end Gaddis got ST status and they wouldn’t let us stand up with them as equals. During elections Gaddis will tell us – we are all brothers, like Kishan Kapoor [Gaddi BJP MLA of Dharamshala constituency] did – we are all one, but after voting for him we are ignored. It’s like we’re not even Gaddis.

Article 341(1) of the Constitution of India stipulates that “parts of groups within castes, races or tribes” can be classified as Scheduled Castes. This does not console Halis, virtually all of whom experience the gap between SC and ST as state-sanctioned exclusion from Gaddi belonging. This “asymmetrical Constitutional arrangement between SC and ST” (Burman 2009, 167) – that SCs can include tribals but STs cannot include castes – does nothing to provide solace to Halis. They demand either double status (from which they can chose based on quota competitiveness) or ST status.

Around this claim are several Hali NGOs, welfare boards and ethnic associations. In 2012, the Hali Vikas Mahasangh organized a plenary meeting at the Government Polytechnic College in Kangra. Bookended by performances of Gaddi cultural heritage, Hali leaders pleaded with the chief guest, former speaker of the Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly Tulsi Ram, for inclusion within the tribal quota. “We are the second biggest part of the Gaddi community,” the president of the Mahasangh pleaded, “but we remain oppressed (vancit) because of our Scheduled Caste certificate (ānusūcit jātī praṇām patra).” Similarly, the Gaddi Dalit Pichra Varg
has repeatedly petitioned the state government for tribal inclusion. In 2011, they celebrated a partial victory when the state announced intentions to constitute a Hali Welfare (कल्याण) Board to uplift the thousands of Halis across Himachal Pradesh, and to rehabilitate their Hali heritage by shedding adopted caste names. Such a board would allow Hali leaders to streamline petitions to the government officials and demand an equitable distribution of welfare. Despite the announcement, no Hali welfare board has been established as of 2018.

Middleton (2011, 262) argues that ethnic associations advocate for ST status as “the pinnacle of ethnic revitalization, effectively yoking the promise of positive discrimination to their ongoing efforts to refashion their communities into politically viable and socially desirous forms.” This is certainly the case for Halis living in proximity to Gaddis. As Dharmdev told me shortly before his death, “When we receive ST status we will truly feel like Gaddis, and we will proudly say that we are Gaddis first, Halis second. We are Gaddi Halis. This will lead to our social uplift. This alone will replace the inferiority (हें) we all feel with self-respect (अतमसम्मान).” However, Hali identity entrepreneurs also network with pan-Himalayan NGOs which promote dual SC/ST status for STDs (considered only ST under the 1996 PESA act) due to their double marginality. For example, the Kullu-based Tribal Dalit Organization (Janjatiya Dalit Sangh) – primarily focused on ensuring double SC/ST status to Pongis in Lahaul and Spiti and officially striking out their Arya caste affiliation – is networked with Halis throughout Kangra and promotes their tribal integration. As discussed below, the adoption of “Arya” has differently impacted Halis, dividing those Gaddi Dalits fighting for ST inclusion from those Arya-converted Halis living outside the Gaddi tribal area who are petitioning for SC status.
Suffering through Misrecognition: Hali Aryas

Swami Dayanand founded the Arya Samaj in 1875 in Hyderabad (Sindh) as a reformist tradition aiming to modernize Hindu practices. The Puranas and later legends and mythologies were viewed as inauthentic accretions responsible for undesirable social practices such as varṇāśram, idolatry and the oppression of women. Dayanand sought a return to the Vedas and the flourishing of humanity in the Vedic period. This ambition exemplified 19th-century aspirations to modernize Hinduism, to unify disparate practices under a textual hermeneutic stripped of superstition. Achieving this would place Hinduism on equal footing with “Western science as a sign of modernity”, thereby distancing itself from colonial power by grounding authority in an indigenous expression of Indian spiritual rationality (Prakash 2000, 289).

The cornerstone social practice of Hindu modernization was purification (śuddi). From a Dumontian perspective, Brahmans and Dalits bracket a system of structural interdependence, the former producing purity and the later absorbing impurities (cf. Appadurai 1986). Beginning in the late 19th century, however, śuddi was transformed from a practice of everyday purification into a social movement focused on the re-Hinduization of Muslims and Christians (Asani 2011, 104). Until 1889, and largely in contradiction of the professed principles of the Arya Samaj, śuddi ceremonies were conducted by Brahmans on the orthodox basis of the expiation of sin (prāścit) as dictated by Manu. In 1893 the śuddi ceremony was expanded to include “the ceremony of tonsure, or cutting of hair, the offering of the Hom, or fire-sacrifice, investment in a sacred thread, and the learning of the sacred Gayatri mantra, explanation of the Ten Principles of the Arya Samaj, and finally distribution of sweets (sherbet) by the converts to all the present” (Ghai 1990, 48-9).
After changing the śuddi ceremony, it took several decades before the Arya Samaj shifted reconversion efforts from Muslims and Christians to Hindu Dalits, albeit unwillingly. Earlier attempts to perform śuddi ceremonies among several Depressed Classes (including the Dumnas, found in low-lying Gaddi villages) were condemned by the Shudhi Sabha; and the conversion of Dalit-Bahujans by the Hindu Sudhar Sabha in 1907 was similarly rejected (Prashad 2000, 80). Targeting Dalits for Arya Samaj conversion and the promise of social uplift through personal purification would begin in earnest in the 1920s. Dalit groups like Halis were singled out by bourgeois Hindu ideologues and implored to seek liberation through the abandonment of defiling behavior, as described by B.S. Moonje of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1927 as a lack of person hygiene; consumption of leftover food (jūṭhan), meat, and alcohol; and over-indulgence during social ceremonies (Prashad 2000, 82). Although the Arya Samaj blamed the Puranas and mythological accretions for the creation of the caste system, their paternalistic correctives to Dalit oppression emphasized the perceived behavioral deficiencies of the oppressed.

In the decades after the death of Swami Dayanand, the Arya Samaj went through internal processes of institutionalization and theological fragmentation; however, by 1890 there were 55 Samaj Centers across 31 districts and two princely states (including Chamba), which supported the Dayanand Anglo-Vedic College movement (Jones 1976, 155-57). “From the original group of Samajes, the movement spread into the southeastern Punjab, from Multan outward, down along the western border tracts, and finally into the Punjab hills” (Jones 1976, 155). By targeting Halis in the Punjab hills for reform and uplift, the Arya Samaj achieved early success. In the decades before Indian independence, many Halis performed śuddi ceremonies and converted to the Arya Samaj. In successive settlements and land surveys (bandobast), they re-registered their caste name in the Revenue Record as “Arya” and sometimes “Gaddi Arya”. A few elders in
Arya-converted villages still remember the stories of conversion their fathers and grandfathers told them. Bavinder, an elder from a village of predominately Gaddi Aryas located downside from the iconic Chaurasi Mandir in Bhamaur, gave a representative oral history:

Before 1947, a Punjabi Sanskrit professor and Samaji named Ram Sharan Shastri came to Chamba. When he saw the suffering (duḥkh-dard) of Halis, he went from house to house and gave us all the Gayatri mantra [He laughingly recites the full mantra]. If there were any literate people in the village, he gave them a written copy so they would remember it. Ram Sharan said: ‘I’ve now given you a very powerful mantra, you must give up drinking alcohol and eating meat. You must live like a Brahman, wear a janeū, bath properly daily, and with pride say that you are Arya.’ So Halis started to say that they are Arya; out of fear and disgust they erased the name Hali in the Revenue Record. They were Arya, only Arya. You can still see that all the Halis are Arya on the Churah side, in Salouni and Rajnagar, and mixed into Hali villages in Bhamaur itself.

I am unable to track down scholarly references to the language-professor-turned-social-reformer Ram Sharan Shastri. However, he is the central historical personage responsible for spreading Arya Samaj ideology across Chamba, impacting Arya-converted Halis for generations to come. What follows is the most official account I could record of Ram Sharan Shastri’s propagation of the Arya Samaj in Chamba, as vividly recounted by the headmaster of an Arya Samaj school.

During the time of kings, a guru was brought to Chamba from Lahore, whose name was Ram Sharan Shastri. This was before Partition when it was part of Punjab. During that time, the headquarters of Chamba was in Gurdaspur, which is now in Punjab. This was approximately 1932-33. He was a student of Dayanand Saraswati and he heard the principles of the Arya Samaj in Lahore at the Upadeshak Vidyalay. He was a very strict (kaṭṭar) follower of Arya Samaj. He got married in Chamba, had three children, two boys and a girl, and all three became doctors – Dr. Bimla, Dr. Jagdish, and a third.

He was a Farsi teacher. He came here to help translate the Revenue Records which were written in Farsi and Arabic, languages he knew. He taught the office people how to correctly read the records. When he came to Chamba, he saw the high rate of illiteracy, especially among women. They were not allowed to be taught at all. So he struggled against this by starting a school for women, in Chamba, in Chameshani Muhalla, near Halvai Gali. Even now there is an Arya Samaj there in which the school was started. Among the people who studied there were Halis, Sipis and Soi, who stitched the king’s
apparel (cogā). They were believed to be low people. Some of these people are still alive, like Sita Ram, who is about 90 and got an education there as a girl.

When Ram Sharan established the school, the king got angry with him and banished him to Mangala, across the Ravi River. But after some time, Ram Sharan came back to Chamba and was captured. He explained to the Raja about the work he wanted to do, and he was given permission to teach Farsi and Arabic and alongside that to teach the lower castes to 4th class. He gave education at first to four children. Two are still alive, Indrajeet, who lives nearby, and another, who shifted to Kangra. When these first students got educated and started to earn money, they changed their castes to Bhardwaj, Chauhan... They remained SC in the Revenue Record, but socially they adopted higher caste names. Soon another Arya Samaj school was opened in Sarol. He also opened an Arya Samaj temple, about 1940.

Ram Sharan Shastri was a Brahman. He gave to his followers, who were of all castes, the name Arya. Arya recognizes that all humans are born with the same capabilities and rationality. We are not born as elephants or snakes; we are born in the highest position as humans based on the good karma we must have done in previous lives. We came here for a reason. So based on this recognition, SCs all across the region, up to Pongi, began to follow Ram Sharan (including Bharmaur, Salooni, Ghudei, Churah, and then after migration down into Kangra). In the beginning, everyone was taking the name Arya and getting an education, but then after a while society caught up and recognized that Arya, which was a high-caste (svārya jāti), was actually another name for SC. But it is important to emphasize that Arya is not a caste at all.

In Ram Sharan’s life, after all this happened, he renounced (sannayās) and adopted the name Shantanand. After 1950, when the government started giving SC benefits, those lower castes who adopted the name Arya tried to re-enter their original caste names as Hali and so on…

The historical particulars of conversion have faded from the living memory of Arya-converted Hali villagers; but one germane historical anecdote emerged during fieldwork. It speaks to the jajmāni patronage that bound Halis in exploitative subservience to Gaddis, and the contestation, historically accurate or imaginatively remembered, that accompanied Hali uplift.

Upon becoming Arya we Halis left the job of picking up carcasses. Ram Sharan had instructed us to purify. When we refused to do Chamar work it led to a big distress (tangī) among Gaddis. There was a huge meeting held in Chaurasi Mandir, and all the Gaddis of the area called the representatives of the Hali community. This was a long time ago. It was presided over by Tani Ram, a famous Gaddi lambredār who is even sung about in songs. He publicly asked us Halis: ‘Brothers (bhaiyon), I see you’ve left your work.’ Among us was a strong and powerful Hali named Sikh Ram. He said, ‘Sudru left
his work, and he’s a Sippi. We will do the same.’ And Tani Ram said: ‘So you won’t do it anymore?’ And although he beat many Halis, we never did Chamar work again.

It is impossible to verify such an account, although two elders in attendance offered corroborating narratives. What is clear, however, are the myriad socio-political consequences of Arya conversion. While there is general agreement that Arya adoption has not enhanced the social status of Halis, neither among Gaddis nor within the larger regional caste system in which Gaddis have assimilated, it is worth noting how historical amnesia has birthed new forms of self-elevation and tribalization. Most Hali youth are unaware of the link between the Arya Samaj and their Arya caste name; the rituals that accompanied conversion have disappeared, and the Arya Samaj has yielded most of its institutional relevance (apart from granting court marriages and offering an all-India marriage helpline). Because their Arya caste name is so completely severed from its Arya Samaj origins, most Halis now consider it indicative of their Central Asian ancestry. In other words, the collective historical forgetting of Arya Samaj conversion has cleared conceptual space for Halis to link their caste with colonial speculation (especially by Hutchison) that Gaddis are of Central Asian origin (Shashi 1977, 13-4). The Aryanness of Halis is proffered as evidence of their Gaddiness.

At other times, however, Halis invoke their Aryanness to distinguish themselves from the decidedly less “tribal” narrative of Gaddi Rajputs fleeing Lahore. With raised eyebrows and knowing smiles, Halis relish their ancestral connection to the high-caste, nomadic pastoralists of Central Asia. Ironically, the collective forgetting of Samaji conversion has furthered the egalitarian goals of the Arya Samaj, just not as intended. Halis not only savor the purity of their caste name, they also emphasize their firstness in Bharmaur and their ancient connection to (Central Asian Aryan) pastoralism, the dominant Gaddi ideology. While Arya may be of recent
adoption, it is popularly understood as evidence linking Halis with the hoary invasion of tribal Aryans. This association is not merely discursive; O.C. Handa (2005, 24) argues for the etymological link between pashmīnā wool production and Pushan, a Vedic Solar deity associated with the Ravi basin and pastoral ritual. He speculates that the “primitive inhabitants of the region [such as Halis] were the cousins of the pre-Indo-Aryans, if not the Aryans themselves” (Handa 2005, 24). The Gayatri mantra is virtually forgotten, the Arya Samaj temple in Chamba is a fossil relic, but Aryan identity paired with the ethno-logics of state inclusion persists into the contemporary, all manner of unintended meaning trailing in its wake.

Whatever the symbolic benefit of these unintended meanings, they are mitigated by countervailing forms of political misrecognition that has rendered “Arya” synonymous with social suffering and political disenfranchisement. Across Old Himachal – within the tribal belt in Bharmaur and spilling over 100 kilometers west past Chamba and Salooni and approaching the border with Kashmir – many Halis are officially recorded as Aryas in the Revenue Record. As they migrated across the Dhauladhars into low-lying mountain villages, extending east-to-west from Baijnath to Nurpur, they brought their Arya caste name into the Kangra Valley.

The adoption of Arya has further divided Hali consciousness. For example, in Gaggal village in Bharmaur, intermarriage between Halis, Gaddi Aryas and Aryas (variously SC, ST and general) has highlighted their social sameness. The three caste communities – all essentially Halis who aspire to Gaddi inclusion – are saddled with mismatching official designations. Government-issued identity documents, often contradictory or illegible, have led some Halis to cleave tightly to the belief that their written Arya caste is real and meaningful; while for the majority, the documentary effects of the state have led to communal exhaustion and the abdication of any hope for congruency between felt identity, official classification and
constitutional benefits. The erroneous but official (aupcārik) version of reality undergirds and, in a sense, authorizes the social identities daily felt by these Halis.

The divisions between Hali, Arya and Gaddi Arya also shape political participation and the ability to secure reserved employment. When elections are reserved for SCs, Aryas are ineligible to compete. One elder, who had corrected his caste from Arya to Hali, described how his daughter submitted her newly-minted family copy (parivār nakal) in her husband’s SC-reserved pancāyat election and only then could stand for office. When civil service jobs are reserved for STs, Aryas and Halis are ineligible to apply. In 2003, Dumanu Ram’s son was selected for a ST-reserved constable position in the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF). For nearly a decade he provided security to government industrial hydropower plants. When Dumanu corrected his caste from Gaddi Arya to Hali, his son was suspended for producing a false caste certificate and standing for ST-reserved civil service as a SC. Dumanu appealed to the state court in a case that devolved into incomprehensible minutia about the authenticity of documents and their authorizing social identities (LAWS(HPH)-2012-3-89). It might seem like Kafkaesque satire on bureaucracy if it did not entangle those most vulnerable, supplanting much-needed state assistance with legal ambiguities and kaleidoscopic social selves that further erode Dalit solidarity.

**Caste Correction Woes**

For the thousands of Arya-converted Halis disenfranchised from SC benefits, they are faced with the decision to either appeal on an individual basis for legal caste emendation (duruśti) or to continue swimming upstream against the tide of residual casteism. Many struggle to remain buoyant without even the symbolic protections of positive discrimination. With life chances
circumscribed by illiteracy and poverty in remote mountain villages, often kilometers away from motorable roads, the exertion required to amend one’s caste cannot be overstated. This section follows Bihari, my Arya research associate, on his quest for SC benefits through Hali recognition. Although the particulars may vary, Bihari’s story is broadly emblematic of the struggle for recognition facing Halis everywhere, beginning with nearly-forgotten ancestral conversion to the Arya Samaj. Gaddi Aryas are ST, while Aryas, such as Bihari and nearly everyone in his village, are Halis thinly disguised as a svarṇ jāt. This issue began in Chamba, where many thousands of Halis are encumbered with Arya liminality, but often climaxes in Dharamsala, where the Revenue Record Office decides on Hali caste correction appeals from across the state each year.

Bihari always had a way of easing our introduction into Hali villages and putting people at ease. It wasn’t just a matter of shared caste identity; Bihari connected to villagers because of their shared experiences and rural disposition – an excitability, physical sturdiness and even open-mouthed manner of chomping food that is sometimes disparaged among the Dharamsala sophistos as hillbilly (grāncar). Affectionate informalities crept into our working relationship, and Bihari would often interlace his fingers with mine as we gamboled down the dusty backwater roads of Lower Dharamsala. He was fond of gentle teasing, what in Hindi is dubbed making an owl of someone. “Stephen’s dream is to marry a milk-giving water buffalo and live in a mud hut with her in Ladakh,” he would tell villagers to their great amusement, grinning with an unguarded authenticity I came to admire and even unconsciously emulate. I would give it back to him, announcing that Bihari is an avowed vegetarian so long as you don’t offer him chicken tīkhā. After an exhausting day walking between villages, often spaced several kilometers apart, and hours of continuous interviewing, sometimes missing meals (but never without such a
profusion of sugary milk tea and butter biscuits that I felt like an instant diabetic), I would pay Bihari and he would try to return his hard-earned salary. “This is too much fun hanging out with you; I don’t need money. Did you see how happy those women were to speak with us?” We conducted fieldwork among Christian converts, those afflicted with evil spirits, traditional healer-diviners; we canvassed entire villages of Halis who hid their caste name because of historical stigma; we met Hali social activists; we attended marriages together, and got trapped in mountain temples by the monsoon rains. One day we did fieldwork, and the next day we hung out in his rented quarter in Kotwali Bazaar translating audio recordings, a tedious enterprise that Bihari rarely complained about and always had more stamina than I to complete.

As would be expected, a friendship blossomed alongside our professional relationship. After a relationship breakup, Bihari consoled me with the immortal Indian advice to drive away painful introspection with headlong and unceasing devotion to work. When he found out, to his muted chagrin, that his parents arranged his marriage with a 17-year-old, I was there to lend a sympathetic ear. When I hosted a nuālā at the completion of my first fieldwork, Bihari labored with me for a full 24-hours, indefatigably humping mattresses and tenting between the driving road and the mountain temple. And I coached Bihari through every stage of a Fulbright application, editing his essays, helping him file passport paperwork, strong-arming his hesitant professors into writing recommendation letters, and accompanying him to Delhi, his first time in a big city, for the interview and exam. Over two successive years our efforts fell short. While I helped two other Gaddis reach America through the Fulbright program, Bihari had the largest gap to close – a Hali from a mud home in a far-flung village in Chamba, his education constrained by inferior, Hindi-medium public schooling, his parents’ illiteracy and the exigencies of poverty.
Work gave way to friendship, successes to setbacks. Our relationship deepened. No doubt this brotherly affection informs my depiction of Bihari’s life and the emotional immediacy of his social aspirations. My intention is to draw parallels between Bihari’s struggle for SC recognition and the broader issues of political misrecognition and fractured Hali ethnic consciousness. Halis are popularly defined by their caste occupation within traditional jajmānī patronage roles. As ploughers, their caste vocation cuts across ethnic affiliations. Thus, there is tremendous regional variation among Halis: many who live contiguous to Gaddis identify as such, while many living outside of Bharmaur amidst non-Gaddis have no tribal pretentions. Regardless of their tribalization, Halis face uniform caste-based discriminations, and exemplify the migratory pattern of rural villagers pulled into urban centers like Dharamsala. Bihari’s biography as a non-Gaddi Hali illustrates the ascendancy of Dharamsala as a “Smart City” and hub of globalized tourism – a place attracting rural migrants with the hopes of socioeconomic uplift (a theme elaborated on in the conclusion).

The issue of political disenfranchisement arose when I helped Bihari and three Gaddis apply for the Fulbright program. I was fortunate enough to have secured a Fulbright grant for my dissertation research, paying 90,000 rupees a month to live in rural villages requiring as little as 9,000 a month to live at the local standards. During fieldwork, I returned to Delhi to sit on a panel that selected FLTA candidates – Foreign Language Teaching Assistants. About 15 Indians holding M.A. degrees in English and under 30 years old would have the opportunity to teach Hindi while taking courses in English at American universities. Among the 35 candidates we evaluated for the FLTA positions, the overwhelming majority was urban general castes with an education from India’s elite universities – BHU, JNU and DU. The idea dawned in my mind to enlist Gaddis from the Dharamsala regional campus of Himachal Pradesh University for next
year’s competition. Executing that idea several months later, I met Bihari and three other Gaddis in a M.A. English course, all of whom factor into this dissertation. We would meet in the local computer café, and between power cuts, infected pen drives and bootlegged software prone to self-uninstallation, we completed their applications. Something struck me: how the Gaddi Rajput, Bhatt Brahman, and Gaddi Badi students proudly wrote into their ST/SC statuses for required personal essays, while Bihari was uncomfortable to divulge his Hali caste even to us, let alone describe his caste struggle in the application to win the sympathy of evaluators. His application didn’t even list a family name, which among Gaddis is easily correlated to caste. When one of the Gaddi applicants gently prodded Bihari about this, he was at a loss of words.

In private, he later explained the situation to me. Our discussions that ensued shaped our fieldwork in Dharamsala in 2014, and later, in 2016, when I stayed in his village in Saluni District. In what follows, I link Bihari’s sociopolitical liminality – neither SC nor sharing affective attachment to Gaddi tribal culture – to the issue of caste fracturing and the problem it poses for Gaddi tribal integration. Drawing from Bihari’s and cognate testimonials about the insurmountable difficulties of caste emendation (duruśti), I highlight the social humiliations, financial encumbrances, and eventual cynicism that arise in negotiating the neoliberal welfare state. The labyrinthine rules, arcane criteria, and corruption at every stage stymie the efforts of Aryas to unify their Hali consciousness and secure SC benefits. They also demonstrate the cultural and geographical similarities and differences between Halis and Gaddi Halis, and how these factors intersect in their shared quest for political recognition and cultural dignity.

At 27, Bihari has overcome innumerable hardships to reach Dharamsala and doggedly pursue an education and civil service employment. Such attainments would easily surpass the scratch farming and jungle foraging currently practiced in his village. His employment history
began at 14, when he spent the summer of 8th standard in Upper Mugla leveling land for a cell phone tower. The following summer he worked construction in an army cantonment in Dalhousie. The summer after that he remained in his village and humped (borī utake) potatoes from fields to transport vehicles 1 ½ kilometers away. “I made the record for the most carries in a single day: 16 baskets. That fetched me 250 rupees that day.”

Every winter break and summer vacation, from 8th standard through the completion of his bachelor’s degree, Bihari worked as a migrant laborer. During his first year at Chamba College, he juggled his studies and caste correction appeal with migrant work between college sessions. His freshman year, he earned 200 rupees a day laying sewage pipe in Yol Camp, near Dharamsala. His sophomore year, he found work through MGNREGA. In his village, an irrigation tank had been authorized for 80,000 rupees. A team of workers had abandoned the project, and 30,000 rupees remained. Bihari and two friends completed the work in two months. “We built an underground tank from cement and gravel, and for a month there was water; then the pipes got stolen and the tank dried up.”

Bihari’s home includes his mother, father, and sternly affectionate grandmother (dādī), her face grooved with wrinkles. He has three sisters, two of whom are functionally non-literate and were married at 19. The third sister is a spritely 14-year-old who habitually skips school for house chores and agricultural labor. He has two brothers; one fixes mobile phones and the other is a dedicated student in 8th standard trying to follow in Bihar’s footsteps. His father ploughs 12 bighā of land spread out over several kilometers of terraced mountainside, and sells the surplus yield in Saluni. He is a taciturn man, hard working and taken to drink. He studied until 5th standard, at a government school which, to reach, required him to ford a stream (khad) every
day. His mother told him, “If you go to school, one day we’ll find your corpse in the khad.” On her advice, he dropped out.

Bihar’s village of Ghudei is located a strenuous 25-minute hike uphill from the nearest driving road. In the regional caste hierarchy, Halis are positioned below Rajputs and above Chamars and Dhumne; the nearest contact point with Gaddi culture is a Sippi village an hour away. Bihari’s family home is the middle partition of a mud longhouse in which five Hali families of the same bārādarī live. At first the courtyard appears to be a manicured pebble field, but it is the flat rooftop of Rajput homes underneath. Jutting out of the earth with equal spacing are slate chimneys, around which children knock a deflated football. Bihari’s partition has wooden rafters and support columns dividing the space into three rooms occupied by eight family members. Between each family unit, 10-inch square holes (tablī) cut into the mud wall or shaped out of slate reinforcements allow for communication and a modicum of family surveillance. In the neighboring partition, a 22-year-old cousin with his wife and two children live in a fetid single room with two cows, a buffalo and several sheep tied to poles and under makeshift wooden lean-tos. Each house has a tub for making lassī, a spinning wheel, a mud chulhā, and cots.

Poverty exerts itself in the minutia of daily life: the coarse quilts, frayed and unwashed; the parsimonious allocation of ten rupees at a time to buy achār and onions, and the reverence given to each rupee, carefully stored in a cloth pouch; the resistance to female education by dādī and like-minded village elders preoccupied with marriage alliances as a means of enhancing social security; the nonchalance with which villagers pluck stinging nettle (aun) with leathery fingers, desensitized to the hundreds of trichomes that line the edible leaves and inject itch-inducing histamines, discomfiting for hours; the predominance of forest-foraged herbs,
vegetables (*fonfaru*), pickles, and the scarcity of imported rice; the flies that swarm like dirty clouds, one of which settled on Bihari’s face during sleep and caused his eyelid to swell like the punched-in eye of a boxer; the billows of smoke stagnating in unventilated rooms and contributing to lung infections and tuberculosis; the absence of flush toilets; the farm animals shitting in the house. How could Bihari have ever studied in his smoky, dark, loud room, people coming in and out all the time, his *dadī* yelling at him to go thrash the mustard leaf? Despite these material hardships, Bihari remained, if not contented, then joyful. While vigorously soaping up with ice melt trickling down the mountainside, he would belt out Bollywood tunes. “One should bathe in cold, cold water!” was his favorite refrain.

*Figure 2.2* The Dharamsala urbanite returns home. Photo by author.
When I visited in early 2016, I was the first Westerner in Ghudei. After respectfully touching Bihari’s mother’s and grandmother’s feet, we were brought inside, fed lassi and given leg massages. We sat around the stove, where a bedraggled off-white cat luxuriated nearby. After speaking for some time, aided by Bihari’s Hindi translation of their language, which is neither Churahi nor Chambiyali and seems to have no name, dādī asked Bihari if I am of the Gadhvaie caste of Brahmans living in Viskoie, in the north of Himachal Pradesh. They sometimes come to this village as fortune-tellers selling divination and speaking in bookish Hindi like I do. This elicited a belly laugh from Bihari, and it was impossible to explain how far away America is. After dinner, while Bihari’s sister washed our feet around the stove, a Rajput Thakur entered and announced that tomorrow would be compulsory housework (gharoti karne) which, per tradition, every able-bodied villager must work without pay until lunchtime.

Bihari is the scholar of the village. No one even comes close to his level of education: B.A. and M.A. He has become an urban sophisticate, bringing home a computer tablet to the wonderment of his brother (who dissembled it with a screwdriver in a disastrous attempt to “fix” a software glitch); and panīr cheese, a luxury food his mother had no idea how to cook. Not to mention he brought home an American. Bihari’s achievements are put in perspective: his father and fictive kin are mostly alcoholics, and no one places much value on education. He’s had to fight for his education, fight to get out of the village, fight to delay marriage – at 27 he is way over the social limit. In Dharamsala, he fights for 5,000 rupees a month cobbled together from giving tuition to children. It keeps him afloat while he studies for civil service exams. There he is a hillbilly, but back home I see him fully embrace his village mannerisms. With a toothy grin he twists off a walnut tree branch, mashes it with his molars and rubs it vigorously over his teeth for
several minutes, making his mouth yellow but his teeth apparently clean. “I had never even heard of Colgate until I got to college,” he smirks, a leafy twig jutting from his mouth.

Bihari first realized that he was missing out on SC benefits as a first-year student at Chamba College. At the time he was living with a distant relative to save on rent. Whenever he filled a government form, he paid the full fees. “That was the first clue: last year I paid 400 for the HP administration form; if I were SC, it would have only cost 200. Two months ago I filled a form to take the patvār exam [to maintain land ownership records and collect land taxes]; that was 250 for me, but only 100 for SCs. From my first year in college to the present, I’ve never gotten a single SC discount or reserved seat.” Although only 18 years old and away from home for the first time, Bihari convinced his non-literate father to check with authorities about why they were being deprived of SC benefits. After being disregarded during a visit to the Revenue Record Office in Chamba, Bihari’s father hired an advocate to press his case. “That amounted to nothing. He kept saying, ‘come back tomorrow and we can talk,’ and every time I visited his office he claimed to not have our file on hand.”

With lawyer fees mounting and nothing to show for it, Bihari demanded his file and personally visited the Tonkri-language archivist (Tonkri-वाला) at the Revenue Record Office. “‘I have no time; come tomorrow,’ he said, and the next day ‘I have urgent work, come tomorrow.’ I realized that nothing was going to happen. So I slipped him 500 rupees – he accepted it and told me to come back in a few days. I felt confident that he would locate our file.” Between university classes, Bihari returned to the Revenue Record Office to find his file still missing. “So I gave him two kilos of clarified butter (ghī), thinking ‘that should get me something.’” Although the official took both bribes, he came up empty-handed, and after repeated failures Bihari snatched back his file and screamed, “Listen, I will handle the case myself!” Dejected, having exhausted
his options at the village *patvār khānā* and the Revenue Record Office in Chamba, he resigned himself to the hypothetical social prestige and very tangible impediments bound up with his Arya caste name.

The failed process of *duruśṭī* showed Bihari how little his *birādarī* understood their family ancestry. Although socially identifying as Halis, they are officially recorded as Aryas – a name which, for them, has no historical connection to the Arya Samaj nor has any specific timeframe of adoption. What Bihari does know is that his family has conventional ownership of two properties in Chamba district: the first is an ancestral inheritance without documentation, and the second property, where they currently reside, was purportedly bought by his grandfather. Land holdings require that property forms – *katuni* in Urdu but often re-translated in Hindi as *parcā* – be filed at the regional Revenue Record Office. Such forms would indicate the caste of the landowner at the time of purchase. However, Bihari’s grandfather was a Hali tenant, given the property over which he labored due to the implementation of the Tenancy Act. For his family and countless others, the documents which would satisfy the legal requirements for caste correction are simply non-existent. For other Halis, however, there is a clearer path to caste correction: they must produce a *nakal takra* proving that their family was recorded as Hali at the time of the Settlement Report and the Tenancy Act and converted to Arya at a later date.

Hali elders speak openly, albeit generally, about their landlessness, tenancy and patronage exploitation under *hālīprathā* servitude. For the younger generations, however, searching out and securing admissible evidence for *duruśṭī* is not merely a time suck and financial quagmire; it also forces them to confront – many for the first time – the precise nature of their past exploitation. While many Halis are adopting spiritual pathways that encourage dis-identification with caste (as described in future chapters), the *duruśṭī* process may intensify caste identification and the logic
of social hierarchy. Like many others, Bihari was uneasy about unearthing, and identifying with, his ancestral link to patronage exploitation. He prefers to describe how his grandfather “bought” their property, rather than accept that it was granted to him through legislation aimed to empower landless tenants. His eagerness to adopt cosmopolitan competencies in Dharamsala was often at loggerheads with investigating his familial ties to patronage exploitation. Repeated and fruitless encounters with bureaucrats about his caste liminality left him feeling ashamed and bewildered, as if social advancement was predicated on personal debasement. Bihari’s engagement with the “everyday state” in an effort to alter his caste identity only amplified the many humiliations of daily cultural life (Fuller and Bénéï 2001).

Despite these frustrations, in 2015, after being overlooked by the Fulbright committee for the second time, and after our fieldwork unearthed the social disadvantages of Hali caste fracturing, Bihari renewed his quest for duruštī. Together we retraced his steps, beginning with the Revenue Record Office in Dharamsala. The first employee we met, processing papers amidst a mountain of scattered folders, summarily dismissed Bihari as soon as he heard that his residency is in Chamba district. “Nothing will go here. We can’t say anything about that area. Only there you can file a case.” As Bihari pressed his case, I could sense his mounting frustration. Having reached a silenced impasse, I capitalized on my white privilege and social respectability as a foreign research scholar to arrange a meeting with the head officer.

By great serendipity, the head officer was amicable, trained in anthropology, and experienced in tribal research. He allowed us to examine the 237 ongoing Gaddi and Hali caste correction cases currently being processed in his office. About one-third were general caste Rajputs petitioning for Gaddi Kathri ST benefits; the remainder was Aryas petitioning for Hali SC benefits. He also sympathetically reviewed Bihari’s documents and found countless
inconsistencies. How could Bihari’s family own land without an official file in the Revenue Record Office? On what seemingly illogical basis could Bihari be Arya while his grand-uncle is a recorded Hali receiving SC benefits? Why does the land number (kasra) on Bihari’s ancestry chart not include the requisite Settlement year in which the land was first given? He mocked the report: “This is totally bogus; it neither denies nor confirms anything.” He suggested that Bihari return to the District Commissioner’s Office in Chamba and reapply with a combination of circumstantial evidence: the patvārī report testifying to Bihari’s Hali culture and the ancestry chart of his grand-uncle. “You can arrange it through other means” (Other means jo hum abhī jutā sakte hain).

He also advised Bihari to file a Right to Information (RTI) for government information pertaining to Arya caste emendation in Himachal Pradesh. That night Bihari struggled through the English directions to open an RTI account. In his request, he asked, “In Himachal Pradesh, the ARYA caste community is which status – SC, ST or General? I need to know in HP, is there a legal case which has determined that ARYA is in fact HALI and open for SC benefits. […] Before the Settlement in Chamba, HP, ARYA were [sic] which caste – Hali or otherwise?” The following day, he received an auto-generated response: “Since your RTI application is meant for a public authority under the State Government, the same is returned to you herewith. You may file the same before the concerned public authority under the State Government.” Bihari was unsure of some of the English, I had no idea how to proceed, and the matter died.

Months later, with diminished hope we arrived at Chamba Revenue Record Office to meet, once again, with the Tonkri-vālā. Bihari had to psych himself up for another contentious interaction with an official who humiliated him and stood between him and SC benefits. In a cramped archival office stacked from floor to ceiling with moldering records, Bihari once again
explained himself. “O yes, I remember you, you angrily took back your report.” Placing
the bogus report alongside his 2011 application, Bihari responded, “Of course I did. I wasted six
months coming and going here and getting nothing. So now I’ve returned after five years to see
if we can fix this problem.” Bihari requested a copy of his ancestral chart from before the
bandobast, which would presumably verify his Hali caste status. “Give me a new application,
and I’ll check it within a week.” A secretary hovering nearby instructed Bihari to take a serial
number from the arjanaviz in the courthouse, without which an archival request cannot be
formally lodged. The matter satisfactorily delayed, Bihari pleaded to the Tonkri-vālā, who had
turned away from our discussion. “I did all this last time and nothing happened. I live in
Dharamsala; I can’t keep coming back.” Whether it was my inquisitive presence at Bihari’s side,
which often garnered the goodwill of officials, or he was simply in a charitable or contrite mood
– perhaps with 500 rupees and two kilos of ghī in mind – the Tonkri-vālā unexpectedly
announced that he would check right there and then. We followed him into the inner recesses of
the archive, where he slid out a manila paper folder from an unruly stack. While flipping through
to the land holdings of village Ghudei, he said:

At the time of the Raja, Halis like your family worked under a landlord…the castekari
system. The land was not registered under the famers’ names. And then after the
bandobast, the farmers who seeded (bata) the land, they became owners (mālkiyat). If the
land is registered (agar chadi hogī), then your record is available; if not registered, then it
won’t be. After 1978, under 104 the land was registered under the name of the famer.

Thumbing through the Ghudei listings, he said, “Your family is not here. This is not my
problem. This happens all the time: people can’t locate their file and become angry.” Bihari
asked, “But with my Arya caste certificate, can’t you assume that I must be a converted SC even
if you don’t find my family ancestry? Isn’t that obvious?” The Tonkri-vālā closed the manila
folder. “Without the report, I know nothing. I might think that, but without the file nothing happens.” “So that means that Bihari will never get SC benefits his whole life?” I asked. “That’s exactly (vahī) what I’m saying. There are people waiting outside.” That afternoon we conducted lackluster interviews; the pall of dejection and creeping cynicism hung over Bihari’s mood.

In villages bookended by the Jammu border to the northwest of Chamba city and the end of the Gaddi tribal belt radiating around Bharmaur to the east, we recorded dozens of similar testimonials which placed caste correction at the center of narratives of suffering. One morning we met Amar Singh, a Radhasoami Hali from nearby Suiel village. He described his odyssey for SC benefits. After tracking down his family ancestry chart (vanśāvalī) from a distant relative, he

![Figure 2.3 Bihari with sloped shoulders facing another round of bureaucratic humiliation. Photo by author.](image-url)
went to the nearest village accountant (patvār khānā) for a copy of his family settlement records (jamābandī). After several abortive meetings at the Revenue Department in Chamba, he received a Tonkri-language report which showed that his family was Hali before the issuance of the first jamābandī. Amar took the attested documents – none of which he could read, written in Hindi, Urdu and Tonkri – to the Revenue Record Office in Dharamsala; once confirmed, he brought them back to the Chamba Revenue Department, and finally to the Salooni Sub-Divisional Magistrate (SDM) office for the final issuance of the statutory SC certificate. It took three years and, he estimates, cost between 8,000 to 10,000 rupees. “And I can’t tell you how many days I lost (mere bahut din ṭūṭe) without income.” His blood brother (sage bhāī) was included in the duruştī, although his distant and fictive Hali kin remain mired in appeals and aborted efforts for legal recognition.

Similar accounts are numerous in the hills. “I used to joke, when I was a so-called svarna jāt, that we Aryas are higher than tribal Gaddis.” But seven years ago, Chet Ram successfully emended his caste certificate to reflect his Hali ancestry. Unlike Amar Singh, Chet Ram is educated and politically active, a long-time pancāyat committee member who has openly advocated for Aryas to reclaim their SC status as Halis. Yet his efforts were equally mired in corruption, misinformation and undue expenditures. Having only the vaguest idea of his family ancestry and their migration from the Baderwah region of Jammu and Kashmir, the first step in reverting back to Hali status was to learn, through a butcher who would purchase sheep from him, the exact location of the patvār khānā in his supposed ancestral village of Ghata. After going there and bribing the patvārī, he returned to his village pancāyat committee with an attested vanśāvalī and drew up an official report (prastāv). From there, Chet Ram gathered additional documentation from the tax officer (tahasīldār) and, having compiled a full portfolio,
went to the Tonkri-vālā in the District Commissioner’s Office in Saluni. After the Tonkri-vālā failed to locate his records, and intimated a bribe, Chet Ram threatened a lawsuit and called on some of his political connections. Suddenly the Tonkri-vālā found his family file and forwarded his duruśtī appeal to Dharamsala.

It took two years from the time that Chet Ram found his vanśāvalī in Baderwah until he was summoned to the SDM in Dharamsala. “There were 150 of us bundled into one summons – Halis from Jhund and Vasua and so on.” The first summons ended unsuccessfully. Months later he was again summoned, this time on the day of his son’s wedding procession (bārāṭ). “I called a lawyer in Dharamsala, who said he would file on my behalf for 4,000 rupees. Who has that kind of money?” Adopting the strategy of leaning on personal connections, Chet Ram persuaded an officer who was his “known” to give a recommendation to the SDM directly. The SDM office requested Chet Ram’s phone number, but at that time he didn’t own a phone. He gave the number of his Public Works Department (PWD) supervisor, who received a call suggesting that Chet Ram’s duruśtī petition was conditionally possible. “The way he told me, I had the feeling I should send the SDM office a box of sweets.” After deliberation, he decided against bribery, and on the day of his son’s bārāṭ his PWD supervisor passed his mobile phone to him. “Are you in the wedding right now? Congratulations. I’ve done your work, and posted your file to the Chamba DC office. You can pick it up from there after two days.”

There was one last ordeal. “I showed up at the DC office six days later – I had to stay back in the village until then to wash the utensils – and the gatekeeper was a sister fucker (bahancod) who was taking bribes to get quicker access into the building. Seven people got in front of me. Instead of giving money, I grabbed his arm and shouted, ‘This is not your family’s DC Office. This belongs to everyone!’” The commotion that ensued enabled Chet Ram to
immediately win an audience with the District Commissioner. Using a local idiom “bribery leads to advancement” (*banda jai, kuch pakadai*), Chet Ram demanded his file.

It was in the District Commissioner’s Office, after years of anxious waiting and routine debasement, that one last administrative hiccup almost destroyed his hope in judicial redemption – the petty officer who dispenses files from Dharamsala had taken a holiday. “They explained that I would need to return the next day. At that point I almost went crazy. I didn’t scream. I almost broke down.” In one final humiliation, Chet Ram announced to the District Commissioner that his son’s wedding had bled him dry and that he couldn’t afford food and accommodation in Chamba while waiting for his file to be returned the next day. In an act of fellow feeling – remembered more as a humiliation – the petty officer was dragged into the office and Chet Ram, after waiting until 5pm and the last moment until official closure, received his file. Shuffling out of the office, the DC officer slipped him 100 rupees and apologized. “I used that money to stay the night in Chamba. I remember eating alone in a *dhābā* that night. The next morning, I took a bus to Saluni and deposited the file in the Revenue Department. And from that day forward my family has received SC benefits.”

**An Institutional Response**

Accounts of villagers falling into Arya-related legal quagmires led Bihari and me to wonder if the contemporary Arya Samaj took any institutional responsibility. It is indisputable that the propagation of Arya Samaj ideology had the unintended consequences of trapping those most vulnerable within the fluctuating ethno-logics of Indian bureaucracy. We visited the Arya Samaj temple in Chamba to get an institutional perspective. The skeleton staff of volunteers was unable
to move past platitudes and generalities, so we settled for a wide-ranging and highly informative conversation with the principal of the affiliated Arya Samaj school.

Bihari introduced himself by narrating his odyssey for SC Hali recognition, and I emphasized the similar plight of Arya-converted Halis throughout Himachal Pradesh. Because Halis are virtually absent in the contemporary Arya Samaj, the principal was unaware of their dilemma. Although he was receptive to our concerns, and highly knowledgeable about regional Samaji history, as the conversation unfolded it became clear that ideological blinkers prevented him from accepting even marginal institutional responsibility. His logic hinged on three points.

First was a definitional dispute about Arya. “The meaning of Arya is the highest person (shresht),” he said. “Arya is not a caste; it is not anything. Sita called Rama [in the Ramayana] as ‘Arya Putra.’” By replacing the real-world denotation of Arya as a Dalit euphemism with a range of connotative meanings – perfection, self-realization and cognate theological abstractions and mythological references – the Arya Samaj privileges the probity of its ideology over the social and legal effects of its implementation in an existing Indian milieu. The principal repeatedly emphasized how government officials are to blame for not knowing the real meaning of Arya. “Arya has been written in the Revenue Record, but the government doesn’t understand its meaning. It’s not a caste; it’s not a religion. Ask the officials what it means – they won’t be able to tell you a thing about it.”

Second, by considering “Arya” as a spiritual disposition and not as an extant caste, the principal rejected institutional responsibility by enumerating the “natural resources” Aryas possess, foremost among them self-respect and self-realization. He rhetorically asked, “When you are in possession of such amazing natural resources, why would you run after reservation benefits?” I pressed him if all Arya-named Halis possess such qualities that obviate any need for
government assistance. “In the beginning,” he said, “the Arya Samaj wanted to uplift the downtrodden who were discriminated against based on caste. In the beginning, it was this uplift mentality that led Dalits to adopt the name Arya. But now it depends on personal mentality – those with Arya mentalities have no need for benefits. Why would the best (*shrest*) need benefits?” This insistence on abstraction cuts against ethnographic reality. Only in one sense has the Arya tag been beneficial to Halis, when discursively linked with Central Asian pastoral ancestry as evidence of their tribal Gaddiness. Otherwise, Arya merely euphemistically redefines Halis. Gaddis universally understand Aryas and Gaddi Aryas to be Halis by another name. And I never met an Arya with active membership in the Arya Samaj, who recited the Gayatri *mantra* with conviction or wore a *janeū*. Those “natural resources” are merely an abstraction easily negated by the blunt realities of Dalit life.

Last, the principal rejected the validity of caste as a system of social organization and therefore an outmoded measure for administering reservation benefits. The Arya Samaj is a liberation movement, not a religion and certainly not a caste. Dayanand considered the Arya Samaj as a corrective for the post-Vedic aberration of caste, and a rehabilitation for Dalits oppressed by casteism. This institutional rejection of the caste system logically implies that an Arya caste is doubly meaningless – there are no castes, and Arya is a personal attribute and spiritual collective identity. “We believe all people are Aryas. Ram Sharan didn’t tell people to adopt Arya as a caste name, but rather the opposite: to delete their caste names altogether! He encouraged Samajis to affix Arya to their names – such as Vikramjeet Arya – which shows allegiance to the Samaj without having any caste significance.” Following from the absolute rejection of caste, the principal rejected caste-based reservation. “I will put it very plainly: the
Arya Samaj doesn’t want any reservation of the basis of caste of all. Caste shouldn’t exist. The government should give reservation on the basis of IRDP alone.”

Bihari and I were unable to penetrate the principal’s idealist ideology. He maintained that Arya conversion entails cultivating natural resources latent in everyone, which culminates with individuals of the highest moral character and the complete obviation of caste-based government reservations. Although we disagreed, I appreciated his transparency and idealistic fortitude seemingly derived from a genuine compassion for those oppressed by casteism. However, when he made disparaging comments such as, “Why would Aryas run after handouts from the government?” I could sense Bihari’s palpable exasperation. For him and thousands of Arya-converted Halis, their Aryanness is at best an incidental resource. It primarily disenfranchises the neediest; and for those Halis striving for Gaddi inclusion, as many are, their Arya designation drives them nominally closer to the structuring hegemonies of tribal belonging all the while further complexifying their relationship to the state.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I analysed how Halis are historically and socioculturally positioned as Gaddi aspirants. I tracked their legacy as Gaddi Chamars and exploited landless tenants. I described their marginalization as Dalits and how their caste indeterminacy has wrongly disqualified them for SC benefits – a wrong not easily righted. But that is not the end of the story. Hali ethnic entrepreneurs pin their hopes on the unification of a pan-Himalayan Scheduled Tribe Dalit (STD) identity. They hope that by raising awareness of the general features of tribal casteism in nooks and crannies across the Himalayas, the confounding specificity of the Hali case is given appropriate context. This strategy has yet to bear fruit. In the meantime, Chapters 3 and 4 address
how Halis mitigate their social peripheralization through spirituality and the reformation of the self. Chapters 6 and 7 describe how Halis (and Gaddis more generally) draw from the cosmo-capitalism of Dharamsala to recast their social aspiration. Taken together, these spiritual transformations and modernizing aspirations are agentive strategies, unconscious or otherwise, for negotiating social exclusion.

This is not to suggest that Halis are unimpeded in reimagining the sociopolitical systems in which they are embedded. Tropes of Gaddi authenticity and their reification through affirmative action have proven decidedly resilient. Halis lament the fact that, until their status is amended in the Revenue Record, they will remain Halis, not Gaddi Halis, and not members of the tribe. A sense of helplessness, of being duped and excluded, circulates in the recollections about the 1996 state anthropological survey of Gaddis to award tribal status. Halis feel like they were part of the tribe for a single day, when their “primitiveness” was on display to state ethnographers unaware of SC Gaddis. They were exhibit A – their remote villages, their simple scratch farming plots and recourse to little but daily wage labor passed off as “Gaddi” to win ST status for Gaddis under the arcane criteria laid down by the Lokur Committee Report. Such feelings of duplicitous exclusion, coupled with the reality that SC status places Halis in tough competition given the demographics of Himachal Pradesh, weighs heavily on many. Halis often show me their portfolio of crumbling government documents with a sense of bafflement, either unable to read the English forms or unsure how some forms cancel out other forms, how their reservation status is either that which is circled or underlined, or which forms entail which rights. These portfolios of identity documents have a range of significations for Halis as they negotiate the material trappings of the state (Gordillo 2006; Bakewell 2007), oftentimes as indecipherable determinants of who Halis are and just how high they can aspire.
What Halis do exemplify, however, is how, from the very bottom of the system, marginalized at multiple vectors, there is room to improvise. To bend the legal disadvantages of being Arya into the discursive advantages of being self-stylized Aryans, scions of Central Asian pastoral nobility with every right to Gaddi tribal inclusion; and to seek out modern social citizenship in the idiom of tribal backwardness. These practices are sometimes articulated as agentive responses to Gaddi casteism. Often, however, they are decontextualized echoes of British colonial documents and Vedic reform movements, their meanings and objectives dimmed by the passage of time. Their polyvalence is a discursive wellspring for Hali reinvention in the age of globalization and reservation politics.
This chapter analyzes Hali conversion to Radhasoami and Devi (mother goddess) worship as critiques of Gaddi tribal atavism. Centuries of caste-based discrimination, intrinsic to Gaddi social organization, have both ossified Hali impurity and led to myriad forms of caste hiding and subaltern spiritual reforms aimed at ameliorating caste stigma and improving social status. Religious conversion shifts the ground of social inequality, deemphasizing the traditional spaces of social exclusion (such as the inner sanctum of temples and the \( \text{nuālā} \), a Gaddi sheep sacrifice which affirms tribal solidarity against peripheral \( pahārī \) castes) and obviating the need for Gaddi Brahman family priests (\( \text{kul purohit} \)) in ritual practice. Instead, Guru-centric devotion, new sacred geographies and ethical reform shape Hali conceptions of spirituality and provide modern registers of personal and collective belonging. New forms of sociality provide powerful rebuttals to everyday tribal casteism. Moreover, the bureaucratic classifications and enumerations which have politically marginalized Halis – either within the overly-competitive SC quota or outside government assistance altogether – are obviated by new identity documents and forms of transcendent belonging.

The low-caste and tribal adoption of religious reform movements, especially those emphasizing personal purity through vegetarianism and teetotalism, has received much scholarly attention. Srinivas’ (1952, 30) classic formulation theorized how lower-status groups, especially those “in the middle regions of the hierarchy”, act in consort to raise their relative caste status over several generations. These Sanskritizing practices entail adopting mainstream Brahmanical rituals, deities, and personal ethics emblematic of caste purity. Sanskritization is not only concerned with caste mobility within a purity/pollution hierarchy; it is also a “profound and many-sided cultural process” expressed through myriad sociocultural mediums and promoting
cultural and ethical idioms not directly indebted to ideologies of caste (Srinivas 1989, 57). Despite its theoretical capaciousness, Srinivas has come under criticism for attributing agency and intentionality on the part of an entire status group (Shah 2010, 76), and more refined interpretations place the emphasis on the adoption of purity markers by individual subaltern actors and their affines.

Recently, a scholarly effort is underway to understand an intense focus on ethical purity and conversion to Hindu reform movements not as jockeying for social prestige or a reactionary engagement with modernity in the forms of Hindutva nationalism but as pragmatic responses to the quotidian experience of subaltern actors. For example, the Gond adoption of Mahanubhav panth highlights vegetarianism as a practical response to the affliction of witchcraft transmitted through commensality practices surrounding meat-eating (Desai 2008, 106). In the next chapter, I have taken a similar approach of analysing Christian conversion among Halis as both a response to malign cosmological forces, not only witchcraft but also the co-optation and betrayal of Gaddi family deities. It is impossible to ignore the multifarious narratives of spiritual torment that shape Christian conversion, and the link between food as a biomorphic substance and commensal casteism. Likewise, self-narrativizations of Hali conversion to Radhasoami plainly emphasize social transformation and personal purity that often eclipse the ethical norms of Bhatt Brahmanical practice. Desai draws from a cognate study (Skaria 1997b, 140) to argue that the association between subaltern vegetarianism and social prestige jockeying is a fundamental “misreading” and top-down over-attribution of modernity to the more immediate problem of meat as transmitting witchcraft (Desai 2008, 97). To understand how Radhasoami and Devi worship harmonize with Hali experience, I found the data unsupportive of an either/or model that forecloses social aspiration while emphasizing witchcraft, or vice-versa. The logic of singular
etiolgies seems less persuasive than a multi-causal process that weaves together apotropaism, social prestige and the enactment of bureaucratic competencies as concomitant factors in religious conversion and ritual practice.

**The Radhasoami Worldview**

Radhasoami is described as a hybrid movement, both an “individualistic, organizational and empirical” identity pattern thought to be the hallmark of modernity and an “emphasis on personal interaction, transcendence, and trust” associated with esoteric spiritualism (Juergensmeyer 1991, 4-6). It developed through the instruction of Swami Shiv Dayal Singh in Agra in the mid-19th century and parallels reform traditions such as the Arya Samaj. As a new religious movement, Radhasoami takes inspiration from the egalitarianism and devotionalism of the 13th-century Sant Mat, Sikhism and Vaishnavism. Since the mid-19th century, Radhasoami has attracted segments of the urban middle-classes (Babb 1986), specifically high-caste Kayasths and Khatris looking for a “devotional yoga that could reasonably be practiced while living as a shop owner or clerk in colonial India” (Gold 2013, 128). Radhasoamis and Arya Samajis in many cases shared overlapping socioeconomic profiles and similar emphases on Sanatana Dharma (Dimitrov 2007, 89). Since the 1930s, Radhasoami has also attracted Dalits – including Gaddi Dalits, as we will see – searching for a spiritual tradition promising purification, self-transformation and earthly transcendence through chanting, meditation and the grace of a divine guru. Originally an urban movement, Radhasoami conversion has spread into rural villages across the Punjab extending into the Himachal hills (Juergensmeyer 1991, 195-202); associated lineages, such as the Jai Gurudev Movement, have penetrated into rural North India and gained popularity among low-caste and -class converts (Gold 2013, 128).
Adherents, commonly called Satsangis, share a meditational method, faith in a divine guru and sensibility about personal ethics and obviating casteism that became institutionalized through various historical contexts and cultural pressures. This system of belief differs in emphasis between the two main branches of Radhasoami located in Byas and Agra. Nevertheless, the “logic” of the Satsang – “the central propositions that hold the Radhasoami worldview together” – places adherents in a community of faith bound by interlocking worldviews and experiences (Juergensmeyer 1991, 11). Drawing from fieldwork living among Hali Satsangis, I locate the primary Radhasoami concepts – sevā, guru, bhajan, bhandārā, and satsang – in the everyday social and cultural lives of Halis. As demonstrated through Hali conversion narratives, I am particularly interested in how Radhasoami faith rearticulates and at times obviates the psychological scars of casteism and the social fragility of partial and, at times unrecognized, Gaddi assimilation.

Contrary to how Punjabi Dalits find congruency between their village Hinduism and Radhasoami (Juergensmeyer 1991, 196), Halis relish in, and at times even exaggerate, the incompatibility of Radhasoami and dominant Gaddi beliefs. For many that is the point. By adopting a guru-centred, cosmopolitan religion, one which emphasizes clean living, meditation and vegetarianism, Halis have found a powerful critique of the discriminations they face within the Gaddi community. However, their identification with the Satsang runs the risk of alienating them from the very substantive content of Gaddi belonging to which they often aspire. When I asked one Hali Satsangi about tribal aspirations, he answered with a dismissive reduplicative “Gaddi-Guddi, what do earthly identifications matter?” Conversely, squaring Satsangi practices with Gaddi traditions has at times broadened Gaddi identity by decentering Gaddi Rajputs and the ritual trappings of pastoralism. Halis have found in the Satsang a way to shift sacred
geography from the Gadderan – the notional heartland for Gaddis but nucleus of tribal casteism for Halis – to the Punjabi plains and the birthplace of Radhasoami. They rightly associate the more geographically isolated villages of Old Himachal with stronger caste identification (Berreman 1972, 204). For it is where Kangra bleeds into the Punjab and Gaddis mix with a wider cultural and caste milieu that the Satsang can most strongly articulate a new cultural order.

*Sudha’s Story: “Leaving your Caste at the Door”*

For tourists, the Radha Krishna restaurant is similarly to any other family-run joint in Dharamkot offering a verandah of cushions to smoke a spliff. Paper stars dangle from the ceiling and mantra-infused rave beats play over the stereo. The menu reflects the main tourist demographics who visit this quaint village above McLeod Ganj: Indian food for domestic tourists whose numbers are growing exponentially each year, and falafel, hummus and honey pancakes for the many Israelis and backpacker tourists who get a case of the munchies.

What tourists gladly do not know is that the Radha Krishna restaurant belongs to the only Hali family in Dharamkot, a village of Gaddis and Bhatt Brahmins. As such, Dharamkot exemplifies a pattern of monocaste villages seen throughout Kangra, in which servile Halis (*pāū*) once performed customary vocations as traditional healer-diviners, ploughers and animal carcass removers. Halis have long since given up the polluting work of Chamars but, as Sudha explains, its residual effects continue to resonate. She is the paternal aunt (*tāī*) of the owner of Radha Krishna and an ardent Satsangi. Her conversion testimonial to the Radhasoami faith describes the social alienations she and other Halis routinely experience. Our conversations took place over cups of tea in her family home, nestled behind the restaurant, and in chatter after services in the Gamru Satsang.
Two years ago, we [Halis] went to a bridegroom’s wedding procession (bārāṭī) a few houses away. We six went into a room where there were only Gaddis. Suddenly they got up and left, and we were all alone. A few minutes later some other SC people were put in our room. Gaddis sat in the outside rooms and ate, and they served us in our room, us SC people. We were each brought a single plate, already full of rice, sweets, vegetables and lentils, all dumped on at once, because they didn’t want to serve us a second time. Are we animals? Do we deserve our food dumped onto a single plate and given to us at once, in a separate room? We didn’t allow it (gunjaisī); we left without eating. We were so angry. We just said we weren’t hungry, and we left. But they knew what happened.

The next weekend there was another marriage in Dharamkot. I am very shameless (beśaram), so I went again! It’s funny – I left one wedding after mistreatment, but I received an invitation for another wedding so I went. I felt like I should go and give something since we Halis were formally invited. So what I did was I cooked a big meal at my house, peas and cheese and this and that, and we ate before going. I took my sister-in-law and we went together. I said, ‘Let’s go see the procession.’ While we were watching, a woman grabbed both of us and said you two can’t leave without eating. I told her that we already ate at home, which was true. But she saw through this. She grabbed my arm and sat me directly in the middle of all the people who were eating. It ends up that on the day we were mistreated, she was there. She was also a low [caste] woman (nīcī kī laṛkī) and was in the same room and line with us before. She too believes in a Sikh guru, the Nirankari guru. See! When people follow a guru, they won’t tolerate discrimination!

Commensal casteism during functions is not particular to Dharamkot; it is a feature of many villages around Dharamsala. Where the caste composition is inverted, and Gaddi Dalits greatly outnumber Gaddis, there is a near-total moratorium on inter-caste eating during functions. Commensal distancing, the legacy of being Chamars, and the invisibility of being Dalits in the tribal margin, is the larger context in which Sudha describes her pursuit of piety under the tutelage of Guru-ji. “We who are SC and Harijans have a special love for Guru-ji because he repeatedly says that when you enter the Satsang you leave your caste at the door.”

The indignity of being Hali in a Gaddi world is often expressed as a sense of lack (hīn bhāvnā). This is consistent with the psychological profile of many Satsangis: invariably entailing singular or recurring experiences that have “severely mauled [their] sense of self-worth, if not
shattered it completely”; they are on the “lookout for someone, somewhere, to end a persistent and painful internal state. This ‘someone’ eventually turned out to be Maharaj-ji” (Kakar 1985, 847). These distressed seekers find wholeness through “unconscious identification with and an internalization of the idealized guru”, who replaces pain with completion, lack with superfluity, and social insignificance with esoteric power (Kakar 1985, 848). Although a persuasive reading of some Satsangis, Kakar’s analysis probably overemphasizes psychological anguish and deficiency while neglecting the meteoric rise of guru-centered, yogic-based devotionalism among the have-it-all urban elite (Swallow 1982; Jain 2015, 50).

Moreover, Kakar focuses on personal loss, such as the death of a parent or romantic abandonment, and never considers how social stigmatization and casteism are part-and-parcel with Dalit experiences of self-worth. Such deprivations contribute to charismatic recognition and the search for personal meaning and community belonging (Glock 1976; Zablocki 1980). I have never met an adult Hali who has not felt stinging social rejection. Their experience of inferiority might stem from a single formative event, or from the diffuse structural violence of casteism – lacking political representation on Gaddi welfare boards, leadership positions in the student-run Kailash Association, and being excluded from the 2002 ST award Kangra Gaddis. Even village topography expresses the correlation between elevation and caste purity (Baker 2005, 56; Parish 1996, 34); high-caste Gaddi homes often occupy high slopes and ridges and low-caste Gaddis cluster below on less-arable land lacking road connectivity. As seen throughout North India, caste groups are generally clustered together in adjacent residential patterns (Wadley 1994, 262). These social stigmas contribute to the psychological profile of many Hali Satsangis, form the backdrop against which they strive for Gaddi belonging, and propel their quest for an omniscient guru and an egalitarian community of practitioners.
Sudha’s journey ends with the Satsang, but began twenty-one years ago with the new religious movement Brahma Kumari. Literally the “daughters of Brahma”, Brahma Kumari began in the 1930s and teaches the goodness of the soul and its elevation over the body. Temporal distinctions of gender and caste are subsumed under the pursuit of unifying “soul consciousness”. It is notable for the prominence of women in leadership roles and for the equal instruction of both male and female devotees (Whaling 2012, 117). “It was here I began to think deeper about who I am and who I can be,” Sudha remembered. “It was the beginning of a journey into meditation and chanting. I realized the benefit of chanting but also how hard it is. My mind is very active (cancal), and I would immediately think about my social responsibilities. I would think, ‘How is my son?’ and my mind would slide away.” Sudha continued to visit the center in Dharamsala, and the organizational headquarters in Mount Abu, although she struggled with the meditation technique (based on light visualizations at stages of consciousness) and restrictions on passion-inducing (tāmasik) foods.

One day Sudha’s daughter-in-law (choṭī bahu) came to Dharamsala for a wedding and described her recent conversion to Radhasoami. Sudha realized the religious schisms within her own family. “I am a Brahma Kumari, others are Sikh or worship Shiva, and now my bahu is a Satsangi! It divides the family. As the eldest it’s my responsibility to set the example. So I went to Brahma Kumari and told them the struggle I was facing, and they permitted me to leave. This was in 2002. By 2003, I received my first Radhasoami mantra.”

For many months, Sudha went to the Satsang in Gamru, a Hali village below McLeod Ganj. She found immediate solidarity with the Hali believers, many of them relatives, who encouraged her to advance her spiritual quest by visiting the larger Satsang Campus in Paror. Her first visit led to a transformation of consciousness. As soon as the service began, she fell into an
unconscious state of weeping and paroxysm. “The people around me grabbed me because they knew what was going on. And this was all before I even knew a single mantra! But then I knew right away that this road is the strongest.”

“Then I had the feeling to visit Byas. Go right now! I felt an internal pull toward Guru-ji and to eat at a communal feast (bhandārā).” Sudha’s first experience seeing her Guru-ji was overwhelming:

It’s four in the morning. There are lākhs of people surrounding me. I am in a majestic hall, men on one side, us women on the other. There is only the faintest light. The second Guru-ji enters, there is a flood of light, and I feel like we are insects (kīṭānu) before him. And I start to hyperventilate. My heart is racing. I am weeping. He comes in front of the women’s group, but I can’t even see him, I am seated so far away. I just see the light. And I feel an intense connection. He is god and this is the most important moment of my life.

Darśan is integral to Gaddi practice, in both temple worship and through pilgrimage to sacred topographies associated with snake deities and Shiva. However, most Hali Satsangis passively avoid or actively renounce these forms of darśan, associating them with the “backwardness” of animal sacrifice or the limitations of worshiping god with personal attributes (saguna). “In previous spiritual eras (yuga), the gods were present in the world, and you could take darśan from nature itself because it was pure,” a Satsangi lamented while we dug an irrigation pit as a form of selfless service (sevā). “Now we live in the Kaliyug; truth is spoiled and we must live supported (sahārā) by Guru-ji.” This emphasis on taking darśan from a living master is at the core of Radhasoami; it provides the emotional ballast for Satsangis and is requisite for salvation (Babb 1981, 388). Visualization comes through direct contact with Guru-ji, but also through inner visualization paired with surat-shabd-yoga – the technique of realizing the True Self, Essence and Divinity while constrained by human physical limitations. DuPertuis
(1986, 113) argues that rather than seeing charismatic recognition as a primary attribute of deprivation and psychosocial lack, *darśan* unites multiple non-cognitive modalities and allows believers to cultivate and consciously impute charisma to the guru.

By relocating *darśan* in the embodiment of the Guru-ji and inner visualizations, Hali Satsangis achieve two critiques of dominant Gaddi practices. First, they physically distance themselves from taking *darśan* in Gadderan. Whereas Gaddis in Kangra feel pulled to Gadderan by the Manimahesh Yatra and their ancestral temples (*kul mandir*), Hali Satsangis are drawn to Byas. This is expedient for Halis who, although having consanguineous origins in Chamba, have by-and-large cut ties. The ever-elusive promise of modernity found in Jhandhar supersedes the centrality of Bharmaur, mostly remembered as the site of ossified casteism. Often landless tenants locked into sedentary caste vocations as tillers and Chamars, Halis have always felt peripheral to the authenticating discourse of Gaddi mobility. “Do you know the pure Sanskrit word for tribe?” a Gaddi village leader (*uppradhān*) asked me. “It is not *janjāti*. It is *khānābadoś* — nomads who roamed around the mountains. Gaddis are tribal; tribal is *khānābadoś*; Halis were left to till the land. How can they be Gaddi?” This is an inversion of the logic put forward by Dharamdev in the last chapter. Whereas Halis often cite the Gazetteers as evidence of their tribal autochthony, Gaddis point to their mobility throughout the Dhauladhrs as the true measure of tribalness. Meanwhile, Halis rarely claim to have deep ancestral ties to transhumant pastoralism. It is commonly understood that Halis were barred from pastoralism because of their ritual impurity and therefore alienated from customary ownership of highland pastures and flock wealth. By reorienting *darśan* in the Punjab, Hali Satsangis replace a sense of lack – lack of mobility, flocks and pasturelands – with the superabundance of divine embodiment. For Badi and Dhogri Satsangis, relocating *darśan* squarely in Jhandhar lessens the stigma of being *faux-
tribals because of their absence in Gadderan.

Second, Sudha experiences *darśan* as social unification and personal dissolution, as oneness with fellow devotees and loss of individual consciousness; to be as an insect, insignificant and undifferentiated. Kakar (1985, 845) describes this as a shift in consciousness, when social distinctions “disappear in the fierce press of other bodies in an exhilarating feeling (temporary to be sure) that individual boundaries can indeed be transcended and were perhaps illusory in the first place”. The self, having dissolved, unifies with the guru; the embodied form becomes indistinguishable from the formless Absolute. Devotees, overcome with oneness, are often brought to “*darśan* recovery areas” where they are given counselling and medical supervision. Halis describe this spiritual transcendence through “*darśan* stories” bearing striking structural similarities to Christian conversion testimonials discussed in the next chapter. Although fleeting during moments of *darśan*, spiritual transcendence obliterates the illusory self and distances Satsangis from whatever the personal anguish and social discriminations they may face. The dissolution of social categories is not unique to low-status Satsangis; Gaddi believers (demographically insignificant compared to Halis and primarily clustered in Bhamaur) also experience *darśan* in similarly socially-embracive terms. “In my opinion, there’s a Gaddi community, but I don’t care very much about what it entails,” an elder Gaddi Satsangi described. “I accept that it’s a community with Sippis, Rajputs, Brahmans and Halis. Gaddis who follow casteism (*jātipāti*), they care about these divisions.” Gaddi Satsangis are more likely to express similarly broad-minded views about social inclusion and many tacitly accept tribal multiculturalism.

Conversely, such *darśan* stories also feed caste-based stereotypes about Halis by mainstream Gaddis. “These people are totally lacking in discipline and direction until they join
the Satsang,” a Gaddi mused. “Think about wild horses – they run around, but ultimately they can be trained.” Thus, the solace found in the Satsang collective also invigorates dominant Gaddi narratives that Halis are feral and that their low social status is indicative moral abandonment. Vegetarianism and teetotalism, the hallmark personal reforms of Radhausami, are viewed as extreme deprivations among mainstream Gaddis, forms of self-abnegation only necessary for suppressing Dalit animality. When Halis renounce popular Gaddi deities, it often elicits indifferent shrugs. “The Satsangis believe in their sardār. They don’t believe in our family deities, in our snake spirits, in our Shiva or Bharmani Mātā. They won’t even enter our temples. It’s wrong to change their religion like they have done.” Dismissively laughing, this Gaddi mused, “Halis think they are higher than us now! It’s okay, let it be!”

Oftentimes, Gaddis cast suspicion on Guru-centered devotion. In 2010, soon-to-be disgraced Guru Bapu Asaram helicoptered into the Manimahesh Yatra, the most sacred pilgrimage for Gaddis in Bharmaur. His offhanded remark that there are no gems (maṇī) in Manimahesh led to Gaddi riots and the burning of his effigy in Dharamsala. Three years later, in 2013, his arrest for rape and unlawful confinement of a minor was viewed by many Gaddis as the comeuppance he deserved for insulting Shiva and hurting tribal sentiments. The resentment many Gaddis felt for Asaram dovetails with their general distrust for Guru-centric devotion. Expressing a popular sentiment, a Gaddi described how Hali Satsangis are “sucked into the whirl (cakkar) of the Guru-ji; once they join, they are lost to us.”

But if lost to high-caste Gaddis, Sudha would trade it all for the cosmopolitan promise of the Satsang. The local Satsang in Gamru looks like an industrial hanger, with iron beams crisscrossing a tin roof and unadorned white walls. There is a raised platform for the chanter and a large framed picture of Guru-ji. The rationalist functionality and anti-iconography of
Radhasoami centers contrast with the baroque sensuality of Shiva and snake temples throughout Dharamsala and Gaddi family shrines cluttered with iron flagellants (sangal) brought from Gadderan. It is Byas which stands forth as a promise of modernity, of “facilities and foreigners” united under the charisma and divinity of Guru-ji. Whereas the Gamru Satsang feels local and attracts many SC groups, Halis experience Byas as global and exclusive. “It is not so easy to get into Byas,” Sudha described with a wry smile. “You don’t just go and get a mantra. First you go and take information, and sit and meditate and wait for Guru-ji’s voice. Only then do you make a formal date for your admittance slip (parçı). In the end you will get a full identity card with your picture and everything. It has your name and address and means that you are a full Satsangi who has received the mantra and allowed entrance.”

I found important differences between Hali and (the numerically few) Gaddi Satsangis in the emphasis they placed on the administrative exclusivity of Radhasoami initiation. Halis invariable focus on their successful maneuvering through various bureaucratic processes, accompanied by slips, forms, identification papers and cards. Unable to secure ST status – oftentimes, as Aryas, unable to secure SC status, as well – Satsang initiation allows Halis to enact the modern competencies required of quota-availing Indian citizens, albeit within a spiritual bureaucracy. Their invitation, interview and initiation instill a sense of exclusivity and cosmopolitan participation in a global institution. Oftentimes the slips and identity cards function as physical externalities of belonging, documents fetishized as projecting “power created by historical relations on the reified substance of objects” (Gordillo 2006, 172). The clarity of these documents is often appealed to, shown off and exhibited, in the face of messy caste certificates, weakly-photocopied family ancestry charts and mouldering revenue records. Doing so replaces ambiguous and contested tribal consciousness with the unequivocal materiality of Radhasoami
belonging, with laminated documents that are appealed to as hermetically sealed proof of exclusive belonging.

This exclusivity is not only expressed through entrance in the Byas; it also structures the daily interactions Sudha and other Hali Satsangis have with Gaddi neighbors. There was a time when Gaddis would not eat from the hand of a Hali; would not share hookahs with a Hali; would not allow them to sit on their earthen stove or walk on their footpaths or enter the inner sanctums of their temples. Such discriminations have slowed but not altogether stopped. Now many Hali Satsangis replicate some of the same practices of pollution avoidance towards Gaddis that they have historically born the brunt of. Gaddis are impure, taken to caras and alcohol. Their culture is soaked with the blood of animal sacrifices. By way of intentional contrast, Hali Satsangis fixate on personal ethics and physical purity; when hosting nuālās they perform harmless vegetable substitution sacrifices and would never consider taking animal life.

Once, while sitting on the second-floor veranda talking with a Gaddi, a Hali from the downside village passed by below us. We had met at the Satsang, and he craned his neck to make small talk with me, squinting into the late afternoon sun. The Gaddi I was interviewing, feeling the weight of propriety no doubt, invited the Hali to join us for tea. The Hali said he was late and declined. After he left, the Gaddi chuckled, “He is a Satsangi; they refuse to even drink tea with us.” Later that week I visited the Hali, who apologized for declining tea but explained how Gaddis eat meat and only god knows if they imprudently mix utensils and cups while washing.

The inverse is also true. Most Gaddi Satsangis do more than spout platitudes about how all humans bleed red blood; they genuinely place behavioral ethics over assumed caste purity. “Halis are not Halis when their actions are pure,” a Gaddi Satsangi sermonized. “When they go to the guru math, when they have become Satsangis, when they chant the name and have
abandoned dirty work – they are purified.” It is common for Gaddi Satsangis to speak of Hali believers as “household members” (ghar ke ādmī) and to replace inherited caste affiliation with a more fundamental and, in many ways, more immutable distinction: teetotallers and vegetarians to one side, alcoholics and omnivores to the other. This distinction flattens conventional barometers of social status. “Whosoever is a meat-eater – it doesn’t matter what good qualities they possess, how educated they are – they can’t be saved from the tortures of hell.”

![Figure 3.1](image.jpg) A ritualistically chopped coconut offered to Shiv-ji as a substitute sacrifice during a nuālā. Photo by author.

The fraudulent piety of high-castes is frequently assailed in adages such as “those who touch the feet of non-veg Brahmans have all their good qualities destroyed.” Such beliefs are more than theological posturing; they often become embodied disgust reflexes, reshaping subjectivity and parsing up assumed caste hierarchies. For example, a Gaddi Satsangi described
how he was invited to a havan at a relative’s house. He knew the pandit performing the havan was a casual drinker, and when the pandit invited him to tea, he refused. “It’s not that I think that we aren’t all God’s people (mālik ke sāre bande); but I just couldn’t do it. I said ‘Sorry, I have already eaten,’ and slipped away.” Such shifts in commensal sensibilities between and within status groups highlight how Radhasoami membership and the vegetarian fault line are redefining neighborliness.

Radhasoami not only provides a spiritual ideology to rebut dominant Gaddi discourses and practices. It is also a corrective to alcoholism and physical abuse, ailments touching all Gaddi castes. As such, it is viewed by Halis as a practical solution to the cultural glorification of locally-brewed alcohol, especially rice-based jhol and millet-based sur, the intoxicants used by oracles (cele) during divination and possession. The prevalence of alcohol consumption across the Himachal tribal belt (such as fruit-based ghanti liquor in Kinnaur Valley and homemade brew generically called desi dārū) is evident in many Gaddi villages. I am sadly reminded of a Hali who would routinely roam the village at night, besotted, wailing and found the next morning doubled over in a ditch. The social evils of alcoholism are often dramatized at Gaddi cultural events, and Indian social crusaders have proposed tribal prohibition (Shashi 2006, 49; Bali et al. 2011, 143-4). Despite this, many Gaddis, including women at proscribed times, continue to consume alcohol and jokingly call it, along with meat, monstrous food (rākhasī khānā).

Sudha’s story powerfully illustrates how Guru-ji not only transforms individual consciousness and social position but also ameliorates the suffering doled out by alcoholic relatives. The alleviation of alcoholism and drug addiction through Radhasoami contradicts the Gaddi narrative that Gaddi Dalits are most likely to be substance abusers.
Normally my husband was fine, but when he drank he became abusive. One night, he grabbed Guru-ji’s picture and started to beat me over the head with it like this (aiśā). He was beating me so bad that my daughter-in-law tried to restrain him. ‘Don’t you know she’s going to Byas for our benefit, yours too?’ But in his drunken state he totally ignored her. ‘Why do you go? Don’t go; I refuse you to go,’ he repeated over and over while beating me with Guru-ji’s picture. You see, my husband hated Guru-ji. And that night [after being beaten with his picture] I hated him too. I prayed to Guru-ji: ‘You are the master of millions. Look at me. Look at how devotedly I follow you, and look at how I get insulted for it. Lift me out of this world; I don’t want to live anymore with this unhappiness. Take me out of this world. Otherwise, take my husband.’

Right after that, my husband got a terrible sickness. For fifteen days he was in bed groaning with stomach ache. The doctor told him, ‘If you drink one more time, you will die.’ For one month he was lying in bed, nearly dead, too exhausted to even drink. During that time, I prayed to Guru-ji day and night. ‘I didn’t ask for this. I know I told you to take either him or me, but take me. I want to die. Take me to you, but spare him. He’s a good man.’ One day my husband got very serious and said, ‘Take me to Byas.’ We went together, and he ate the communal meal after many days of eating absolutely nothing. We were in Guru-ji’s presence for three days, and after returning to Dharamsala my husband recovered. His health improved. He told me he wanted to take initiation and that Radhasoami is a legitimate path to discovering god. Look, he was sick, he was dying, he was making excuses, he was beating me, abusing Guru-ji. Now he is a Satsangi.

My youngest son was also a heavy drinker. Sixteen years ago, he passed out in a gutter (nālā), and even now he gimps around (latex latex ke chaltā hai). He would eat a single chicken and drink a single bottle in one sitting. When he saw his papa, that he went from death to life again, he took the mantra also. Now he chants daily and plays Guru-ji’s music in his car. Foreigners like him a lot because he doesn’t drink and drive. He became a Satsangi, then my other son, and then five more from my extended family. Everyone drank hard, and now nobody drinks. My husband doesn’t get angry if I want to go to Byas or Paror. If he tries to keep me from going, he knows that Guru-ji will find out. Guru-ji knows everything. He keeps me well.

We began with the discrimination faced by Sudha and her family in Dharamkot. For many Halis in Dharamsala, Dharamkot presents an ironic picture as one of the most economically developed and socially backwards villages in the area. Sudha described how after an abusive situation, she prayed to Guru-ji, “Why are you present in remote villages, where they
have constructed Satsangs, but you are totally absent in this village? We are suffering with
discrimination from our neighbors and drunkenness and need you here.” His response
encapsulates the hope Radhasoami inspires in many Halis as they struggle with the psychic scars
and everyday misrecognitions of their identity (Taylor 1994).

Guru-ji gave the answer in the form of a letter from Byas that was received by the
Secretary of the Gamru Satsang. This was just 15 days after my prayer. It said to search
for land between Dharamkot and McLeod to construct a new Satsang! This was the
answer to my prayer. The Secretary told my son, ‘Guru-ji’s letter has come; please search
for a place.’ I started to ask Gaddis around here for a place to give sermons twice a week,
but everyone refused. This is a tourist place, a business area, and everyone’s income is
from renting rooms.

I was feeling bad about this, but then another letter came from Byas saying that two
Satsangis are personally coming to search out land in Dharamkot. It means that sometime
or other there will definitely be a centre in Dharamkot. Definitely! Because Guru-ji’s
gaze (nazar) has come here, and if nobody will give it, they will buy land. Guru-ji has no
lack; he can afford to buy any land he chooses. For now, the Gaddis don’t care about the
Satsang and mock us. But just wait, when the centre comes, slowly they will all be
invited. Because they can’t just come on their own, they need to be called. Those who
have good luck (kismet), they will get the calling. In the beginning, they might do
whatever they want in their own homes and fake it at the Byas, but slowly they will have
realization and they will forget their bad habits and discriminations. This has already
happened – there are Gaddis now starting to go to Satsangs throughout Chamba.

**Devi Worship and Ritual Resistance**

It is long held that Shiva worship is integral to the construction of Gaddi identity and place-
making in the Dhauladhars. According to Gaddi mytho-cosmology, Shiva created the Gaddis and
transferred the auspicious vocation of shepherding to them (Kaushal 2001, 33). Through annual
pilgrimage, transhumant pastoralism and ritual practice, Gaddis affirm Shiva, his abode in
Bharmaur and his shepherding lifestyle. This process binds Kangra Gaddis to the Gadderan
spiritual topography that they are, to varying degrees, alienated from. It also differentiates
Gaddis from Jhandhari castes, some of whom show an affinity for mother goddess worship.
These cultural differences are performed through contrasting rituals: the Devi jāgrātā for Jhandharis and Shiva nuālā for Gaddis. Wagner (2013, 59) argues that the nuālā, as performed in Kangra, affirms the “sameness” of Gaddis and marks an ethnic boundary with non-Gaddi neighbors.

I want to extend her argument about the role of ritual performance in the construction of Gaddi identity and the negotiation of cultural authority. Halis relate to the nuālā very differently, if at all. I argue that costliness; the association with Gadderan and pastoralism; the centrality of the Brahman family priest (kul purohit); the logistics of commensal restrictions; and, not least, the sheep sacrifice at the center of the ritual, all render the nuālā an expression of dominant Gaddi interests. Wagner is right to point to the nuālā as an affirmation of Gaddis as “Shiva’s people, made into shepherds by him, and coming from his land in Bharmaur, the land of his seat at Mount Kailash” (2013, 60). Doing so allows Kangra Gaddis to point to their distinctiveness from other Jhandhari castes. From the perspective of internal group differentiation, however, the nuālā is a ritual practice that naturalizes the association between Gaddi belonging and the specificities of Gaddi Rajput culture, history and traditional caste vocation. The nuālā as a public performance is situated in what Dirks (1991, 219) calls “a world of hegemony and struggle in which representation itself is one of the most contested resources”. In response to their alienation, Halis are drawn to piety movements that critique the debauched character of the nuālā as a drunken, blood-soaked revelry. I argue that the prevalence of Jhandhari religious forms – Gugga,1 Baba Balak Nath,2 and especially Devi worship – among Gaddi Dalits are, taken together, a critique of caste hierarchy and animal sacrifice that parallels Radhasoami conversion

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1 A popular folk deity in northern India associated with protection from snakebites. Hali affinity for Gugga sometimes led to Gaddi Rajputs reporting that Gugga is a Hali deity.
2 Known as a perfected being (siddh puruṣa), his main temple is in Hamirpur, four hours from Dharamsala. Some Badis consider Baba Balak Nath as a special protector deity of their caste.
and opens new space for Halis and other Scheduled Castes to reposition themselves vis-à-vis dominant ideologies.

I began to doubt the universality of the *nuālā* as a ritual practice after meeting several Gaddi Dalits in their 20s who had never passed a night dancing, drinking and eating fire-roasted consecrated mutton during the ritual celebration. I visited a Dhogri village where nobody could remember the last time a *nuālā* happened. Was it even in their lifetime? My research associate, a 27-year-old Badi, had never participated in a *nuālā*. I found this perplexing because I recorded six *nuālās* in a single summer season living in Dharamkot, a Gaddi village. Until my research interests shifted to Gaddi Dalits, I assumed that the *nuālā*, as stated in the Gazetteers and recent scholarship, is “the Gaddi ritual par excellence” (Wagner 2013, 60). But if Gaddi is a caste-inclusive community, shouldn’t SCs also participate in *nuālās*? What I found, instead, is that Halis rarely give *nuālās*, that when they do there are important ritual variations, and that they are rarely attended by Gaddis. As my research further shifted to a discursive analysis of Gaddi identity, the *nuālā* transformed from a ritual of Gaddi sameness to an expression of Gaddi difference, requiring Gaddi Dalits to accommodate, modify or outright replace with other ritual practices. This parallels Molly Kaushal’s (2004) analysis of another Gaddi public ritual, the jātar, which transitioned from an expression of mythological origin and social bonding to identity contestation between Gaddis and Bhatt Brahmans.

Giving a *nuālā* is a prestige act involving the mobilization of relatives, friends, village neighbors, ritual specialists and musicians. Expenditures for ritual ingredients, the communal feast, tenting and cushions, stereo equipment, and the human personnel (e.g., *kul purohit*, cooks, servers, singers and videographer) routinely topple 30,000 rupees. The cost balloons when you factor in a sheep for sacrifice (11,000 rupees) and alcohol (6,000 rupees). The few Halis I met
who had given a nuālā were more financially well off. Karmu, for example, was able to afford a nuālā after the long-awaited birth of a son because of income renting part of his home to international seasonal tourists. In most cases, Halis emphasize cost as prohibitive.

The term nuālā in Gaddi dialect is sometimes connected to the construction of a new house ( navalā or nayā ghar), although the ritual has a much broader range of expressions (Basu 2000, 30). Sharma (2015, 275) argues that the nuālā was a way of uniting the nine clans (nau al) of the Gaddi tribe through veneration of Dhaudu, the local emanation of Shiva. Because of their transhumant lifestyle, the ritual brought Gaddis together and affirmed a singular sense of belonging. As Gaddis settled in the southern slopes of the Dhauladhars, radiating out from the nucleus in Gadderan to thinly-populated and scattered settlements in Jhandhar, they adopted the caste identities of the surrounding villages. The ritual no longer unified Gaddi clans, but became a site of Sanskritization and caste emulation. Sippi oracles and Rihare musicians were replaced with Brahman pandits, and the conventional meaning of the nuālā shifted.

In everyday conversation with Kangra Gaddis, the nuālā is understood as a nine-person quorum (nau ādmī) comprised of specialized roles: a patron, an assistant who keeps all-night vigil of the alter (kotwāl) and another who distributes sanctified food (prasād) at prescribed times (botwāl), four singers, an oracle (celā) and a Brahman lineage priest (kul purohit), a most problematic aspect for Halis. The jajmān is the host giving the nuālā as a prestige act and in celebration of a boon, often based on a reciprocal promise (sukhaṇ) to Shiva. The botwāl and kotwāl assistants are given red sashes at the beginning of the ritual before the guests arrive, and throughout the night act as supervisors. A group of singers, at least four but often more, are required for singing devotional music. Although they may be professionals belonging to the Rihare caste, they are often music enthusiasts of any Gaddi caste. The oracle may be specially
invited because of his predilection for being possessed by Shiva. Often, however, the celā is an informal actor from among the invited guests who finds himself convulsing (khelnā) through the rhythmic music and gyrating dance.

The Brahman family priest (kul purohit) plays the crucial role in the execution of the nuālā, and it is here that Halis often express ambivalence. All Gaddis employ kul prohits, always Bhatt Brahmans, who arrive in the late afternoon. Wagner (2013, 48) notes the apparent oddity of a required Brahman to officiate over an animal sacrifice, and suggests that the importance of the kul purohit lies elsewhere, in the creation of a pūjā space, the hanging of the woollen thread (mālā) and the performance of a morning ārtī. The kul purohit first constructs the maṇḍala on the courtyard floor, delicately tracing out 32 squares (koṭe) with wheat flour (āṭā). Inside each square is a small pile of rice topped with a whole walnut (akhroṭ). A woman associated with the host will provide a large corn flatbread that, along with a water jug and oil lamp, are placed next to the maṇḍala. The kul purohit then shapes the woollen garland and affixes it to an upside-down Y-shaped branch hanging above the maṇḍala. The host and close male kin are called into the ritual space and, while they chant “Victory to Shiva!” (Shivajī kī jay), the mālā is installed. The installation simultaneously affirms the descent group and provides Shiva with a sacred space to inhabit symbolizing Mount Kailash during the ritual. After the sheep is accepted by Shiva and sacrificed, the nuālā begins with a song that affirms the centrality of the kul purohit:

Which purohit has drawn your mandala? Who has woven your garland of flowers, Shiva?
The kul purohit has drawn my mandala, the garland weavers have woven my flower garland (Wagner 2013, 54).

Sharma (2015, 275) argues that shifts in the ritual transmission of the nuālā have edged out Sippis, who were once the primary ritual oracles; for the past several decades, Gaddi seasonal migration has led to assimilation into “peasant society” and, along with this, culture loss
and the replacement of Sippis as “custodians of rituals” with Bhatt Brahman priests. The opening incantation changed to reflect the prominence of Bhatt Brahmans, and the nine Gaddi clans morphed into the nine planets (navagrah pūjā) familiar with “standard modern Hindu worship” (Sharma 2015, 279). Dhau du is overlaid with Shiva, and Bhatt Brahmans replace Sippis in ritual function (much as Sippis were earlier replaced by Jogis in Chamba). For Sharma, the ritual tracks the “dislocations” and “fragmentations” of Gaddi tribal identity set against Sanskritization and modernizing forces.

I want to highlight a parallel theme: how the nuālā operates as a primary site of caste exclusion for Gaddi Dalits. The ascendancy of Bhatt kul purohits has not only squeezed out Sippis as integral to ritual performance; it has also presented Gaddi Dalits with the impasse of hosting a ritual that requires a non-existent Brahman family priest. For generations, Gaddi pandits refused (and often still refuse) to conduct nuālās inside Gaddi Dalit homes – or if they do it entails commensal distancing practices that humiliate the jajmān. Because of this, the functions of a kul purohit are sometimes replaced by ritual specialists among Gaddi Dalit castes. For example, Badis living in Chandmari have ritual experts among the Chaudreta gotra, who for all intent and purposes replace the Gaddi pandit; likewise, Halis select a joganū (and sometimes called jogi) from among their family members to conduct the ritual. In everyday Gaddi parlance, joganū has the restricted meaning of a groom who dresses in the renunciatory form of Shiva during the marriage ceremony; for Halis, it also denotes the non-Bhatt nuālā ritual expert. For many Gaddi Dalits, the nuālā is so bound up with casteist impediments that it is considered an expression of dominant Gaddi identity and performance of Dalit exclusion. As a response, when Gaddi Dalits host a nuālā it is often executed collectively – that is, abrogating the function of the Bhatt Brahman to a joganū and decentralizing ritual authority to volunteers within their own
At times Gaddi and Pahadi rituals are viewed as broadly comparable, since the *nuālā* and *jāgrātā* are both all-night vigils hosted during marriages or in response to receiving a boon. Other times, however, the difference between the two rituals is emphasized – that the *nuālā* requires a sheep sacrifice and expresses affinity between Gaddis, the Gadderan and Shiva and the *jāgrātā* requires a vegetable sacrifice (usually a coconut) and is directed at the Kangri Mother Goddess. Wagner (2013, 60) argues that these ritual differences are important sites of group differentiation and parallel Gaddi endogamy practices and resistance to being slotted in the larger Kangra caste system.

Attention to Gaddi Dalits, however, complicates the simple dichotomy between Gaddi and Jhandhari ritual forms. Whereas I never met a Gaddi who hosted a *jāgrātā* or heard of such an occurrence, I found that in low-lying villages Gaddi Dalits are more likely to host a *jāgrātā* than *nuālā*. Their affinity to the *jāgrātā* has three prongs: first, the charter myth at the center of the ritual emphasizes caste equality, a theme which resonates with Gaddi Dalits; second, the *jāgrātā* is vegetarian and fits with the Gaddi Dalit critique of animal sacrifice; and third, the association between the *jāgrātā* and Jhandharasu (literally “people of Jhandhar”) is not problematic for Gaddi Dalits, who often experience greater caste neutrality and social mobility in the lower foothills of Kangra as compared with their memories living among more caste-conscious Gaddis in Gadderan.

Devi worship is common throughout India and is especially pronounced in the religious landscape of Northwest India, spreading throughout the Punjab and into Haryana, Delhi and the Kangra side of Himachal Pradesh. Called the Lion Rider Goddess (*Sher-vāli Mātā*) by Gaddis, she is both “transcendent and immanent” – “her functions range from generalized ones such as
creation, preservation, and destruction of the universe to more specific ones such as curing
diseases, and helping people in distress” (Erndl 1993, 4). Her cult balances the abstract esoteric
(tantra) with every day, accessible devotion (bhakti). She is worshiped independent of a male
consort and has the dual nature of placidity and destructiveness (Vaisno and Kali, respectively).

It is widely held that worship of Sher-vālī Mātā emphasizes caste inclusion and
egalitarianism relative to other Hindu cults. Erndl (1993, 9) argues that, compared to Hinduism
as expressed in other regional contexts, Punjabi Hinduism is less hierarchical and puts less
emphasis on caste restrictions and the supremacy of Brahmans. Cultural “flexibility and
adaptability” is seen to be the pragmatic result of centuries of immigration and invasion in the
Punjab (Erndl 1993, 9). Gaddi Dalits often emphasize the positive impact that Jhandhari culture
has had in elevating their social position and increasing their social mobility. Conversely, Gaddis
often refer to the caste mixing and flexible hierarchy of Jhandhar as “mixed up” (mix up ho
gayā), an undesirable outcome of migration and rural development.

If Sher-vālī Mātā is the deity that most closely resonates with the social aspirations of
Halis, the jāgrātā as her central ritual enactment illustrates why this is the case. Jāgrātās are
household vigils in which Devi is invited into an intimate space through the continuous burning
of a wicker flame (jot). Throughout the night devotional music is recited by a group of at least
five performers (mandali). The music, lasting blocks of hours on end, recounts the supremacy of
Devi over evil, her munificence towards devotees and her many manifestations. Sanctified food
is distributed. Representations of the Devi (and other deities) are often rented, either as large
posters or sparkling, electronically-illuminated statues. Jāgrātās begin with a pūjā to Ganapati,
the god of beginnings, and the hosts are given tilak and red strings around their wrists. While
chanting “Victory to the Goddess” (jay Mātā dī), the priest (mahant), a non-Gaddi Brahman,
dangles a piece of flaming cotton above the *jot* until it drops down and ignites for the remainder of the night (*jot pracand*). During *bhajan* and the giving of consecrated food, the hosts hold coconuts over the *jot* until they are slightly charred. Throughout the night they will be broken and pieces distributed as *prasād*.

The central part of the *jāgrātā* is the daybreak recitation of the Story of Queen Tara. It lasts several hours and is teeming with narrative twists. At its core are two sisters, Rukman and Tara. Rukman accidentally breaks her fast by eating meat and is condemned to a series of low rebirths. Rukman performs great acts of self-sacrifice and devotion to Devi as she develops through successive animal and human life forms. The story culminates with Rukman in the incarnation of a sweeper in the household of Queen Tara, the wife of King Haricand. Rukman receives the boon of a male child and in thanks gives a *jāgrātā*. This requires her to appease temple *pandits* on account of her low caste. They agree to officiate the *jāgrātā* only if Queen Tara, who was once her biological sister, agrees to attend and eat *prasād*. Through subterfuge and the miraculous intervention of Devi, Queen Tara attends Rukman’s *jāgrātā* against the efforts of her husband, who is shocked she would attend a sweeper’s function. After, when King Harichand berates her for attending, Devi again intercedes and wins him over as a devotee. He is required to kill his son and a blue horse and eat them both, and through this extraordinary act of sacrifice they are brought back to life. King Harichand builds a Devi temple, and he, his wife Queen Tara, and her sister Rukman, in the form of a sweeper, all attain enlightenment (summarized from oral account and Erndl, 1993, 93-6).

Overall, the myth “comes out overwhelmingly in favor that the power (*sakti*) of the Goddess makes caste irrelevant, as there is no high or low in Devi’s *darbar*” (Erndl 1993, 99-100). This does not mean that the religious justification for caste hierarchy is absent. Rukman’s
series of lower births, although exploited to worship Devi through self-sacrifice, are nevertheless affirmations of the karmic link between sin and caste inferiority. But caste norms are substantially flouted when Queen Tara eats prasād at Rukman’s jāgrātā. Throughout the narrative, it becomes clear that devotion to Devi can purify pollution and invert social hierarchies. Devi’s preference is ultimately for devotees who are low-born or sinful, a message that resonates with Halis and other Gaddi Dalits who find in Jhandhari religious forms a way to cope with and critique their social subordination.

Another aspect of the jāgrātā that appeals to Gaddi Dalits is the embedded story of Dhyanu Bhagat, a 16th century devotee closely associated with the Kangra Jwalamukhi Temple. The first time that I heard about Dhyanu Bhagat was in a Badi village in which there was a jāgrātā that night. The Badi who serves as the pandit of the local temple explained the significance of the jāgrātā. “Sher-wali Mātā makes it clear to us in the jāgrātā that animal sacrifice is not necessary. Whether in the Satya Yug or Kālī Yug, nobody should sacrifice (bali) any living thing. After Dhyanu Bhagat, there should never be sacrifice again. If you want to do something, you can offer a coconut (nāriyal caḍhānā) and that will be an equivalent.” The story of Dhyanu Bhagat is often cited by Gaddi Dalits and speaks to their attachment to the wider Jhandhari religious milieu.

There once was a devotee of the Goddess named Dhyanu Bhagat who lived at the same time as the Mughal Emperor Akbar. Once he was leading a group of pilgrims to the temple of Jvala Mukhi where the Goddess appears in the form of a flame. As the group was passing through Delhi, Akbar summoned Dhyanu to the court, demanding to know who this goddess was and why he worshiped her. Dhyanu replied that she is the all-powerful Goddess who grants wishes to her devotees.

To test Dhyanu, Akbar ordered the head of his horse to be cut off and told Dhyanu to have his goddess join the horse’s head back to its body. Dhyanu went to Jvala Mukhi

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3 Epochs within a four-age cycle in Hinduism, from Satya (truth) to Kālī (vice and confusion, our present condition).
where he prayed day and night to the Goddess, but he got no answer. Finally, in
desperation, he cut off his own head and offered it to the Goddess. At that point, the
Goddess appeared before him in full splendour, seated on her lion. She joined his head
back to his body and also joined the horse’s head back to its body. Then she offered him
a boon. He asked that in the future, devotees not be required to go to such extreme
lengths to prove their devotion. So, she granted him the boon that from then on, she
would accept the offering of a coconut to be equal to that of a head. That is why people
today offer coconuts to the Goddess. (Erndl 1993, 46).

The story of Dhyanu Bhagat is most obviously a critique of animal sacrifice linked to the
munificence of Devi. Doniger (2010, 562) argues that it is a “meditation on the historical
transition from human sacrifice to Vedic horse sacrifice to contemporary vegetarian puja, a
progression already prefigured in the Brahmanas”. By worshipping Dhyanu Bhagat, Gaddi Dalits
draw from Jhandhari religious forms to critique the nuālā. They find in the jāgrātā a ritual that is
structurally similar to the nuālā, but whose content critiques tribal atavism while gesturing
towards modern rationality. My Badi friend continued: “What are Gaddis doing? Just based on
their own taste, based on their own greed and gluttony, they maintain this sheep cutting tradition.
It is because their taste got established (taste ban gayā). But what Gaddis don’t understand is that
Devi’s order is for all devotees, even those who worship Shiva and nagas. After all, they are all emanations of Sher-vālī Mātā.”

The differences in ritual preference between Gaddis and Gaddi Dalits express conflictual
negotiations of power and the critique of social hierarchy (Davies 1998, 142). Gaddi
consciousness is so tightly bound up with the nuālā because of their historical link to pastoralism
and Gadderan; their equal caste footing with Gaddi pandits who officiate over the ritual; and the
ease with which they martial prestige, rely on social relations and raise financial capital. Wagner
is correct to point out how the nuālā marks Gaddi identity vis-à-vis Jhandhari caste groups in
Kangra; however, the dichotomy of Gaddi nuālā and Jhandhari jāgrātā overlooks the complex
entanglements Gaddi Dalits have with dominant Gaddi cultural forms on the one hand and their assimilation into Kangra village life on the other.

**Figure 3.2** Dhyanu Bhagat offering himself to Sher-vālī Mātā. Photo courtesy of jawalaji.in/bhagat-dhyanu-sheesh-katha/.

The affection Gaddi Dalits have for Devi walks a tightrope between their aspirational politics as Gaddi tribals and their ease assimilating into the Jhandhari religious milieu. As Moreno (1985, 104) argues, the attraction of certain deities is not merely reducible to social utility – as if Gaddi Dalits would be deterministically attracted to caste-critiquing Devi worship – but instead speak to a processual view, one in which there is a dynamic of “mutually rewarding
reciprocity between divine and human persons”. But the upsurge of jāgrātā seen across Northwest India, and specially touching Gaddi Dalits in Kangra, shows how marginalized groups gravitate to religious forms that speak to their social realities. These affections can critique social relations and, at times, transform them. As a Badi friend described to me:

What I’ve done is convey a clear message to my whole family that when my marriage happens, there will be no sacrifice. I gave them a condition (śart) – in place of a sacrifice, they can break a coconut. But I won’t get married the old way. In this I am ‘damn sure’. I have firm determination. This is a big deal, because the main occasion for Badis to give a nuālā is when the oldest son gets married. And should Shiva come to me and in an angry voice demand to know why I didn’t sacrifice a sheep, I will tell him that I made no promise (sukhan) to him. So why are you mad? [Devi] Mātā has prohibited it. So why are you mad? I’ve still given out prasād to everyone; what’s the difference? When we begin to realize that we are life, that all animals are life, then we will stop with this uncivilized (asabhya) behavior. The nuālā will continue during some marriages, but the sacrifice will end. After all, Gaddis know about Devi, they just don’t want to follow her.
In previous chapters, I have argued that juridical and everyday deployments of Gaddiness exclude Gaddi Dalits and consign them to the socially opprobrious and overly competitive SC quota. In this view, the discursive framing of Gaddi identity advances a perceived normativity that masks social antagonisms and ideologies of legitimation. This is not merely academic, another salvo in the scholarly fight against identity essentialism. At stake is the ability of Gaddi Dalits to contest local elections in tribal reserved areas; the collective confidence to obliterate the last vestiges of caste prohibition, including barred access to temples, pasturelands and water sources; the state validation of substantive ethnic consciousness, effectively narrowing the gap between Dalit and tribal subjectivity; and the redistribution of government assistance from the "creamy layer” of tribal elites to those most socially sidelined.

The descendants of bonded laborers and inheritors of caste-based vocations felt to be anachronistic in modern time, these Gaddi Dalits have, in fits and starts, mobilized in Dharamsala to broaden Gaddi identity. They argue that “Gaddi” is neither constitutive of only Rajput and Brahman castes nor structurally egalitarian. Instead, the “Gaddi” ethnonym bespeaks a tribal community (samudāy) of unequally stratified caste groups – sedentary and pastoral – loosely unified by the Herderian notion of shared language, culture and attachment to homeland. Such an argument is predicated on the recognition of Scheduled Tribe Dalits (STD) and the conceptual possibility that tribes in modern India are inegalitarian and caste heterogeneous.

This chapter analyzes Protestant conversion among Halis, the lowest Gaddi status group. By attending to their minority experiences, the issue of tribal Dalit incorporation comes into sharper focus. This “bottom-up” approach, common in interpretive political ethnography and
subaltern studies, analyses Hali ethnicity from a social and situational perspective, specifically the way social belonging is shaped by spirituality and exegetical practices. Similar to African American hermeneutics, which deconstruct the white cultural hegemonies built into purported “neutral” readings of the Bible, Hali biblical exegesis disrupts both “common-sense” interpretations and dominant views of Gaddi identity (Wimbush 2000, 15).

It also addresses situated problems of consequence to Hali interlocutors. How has the legacy of casteism, ratified in the ethno-logics of state recognition, shaped Hali spiritual torment? Why are benign familial deities experienced by Halis as malicious and easily co-opted through witchcraft for malign purposes? Answering these questions places attention on how Christianity reframes social suffering, spiritual torment and political misrecognition and, conversely, how Gaddi aspirational politics reframe Christian practice. This reframing is sometimes an instrumental, subaltern strategy to manage stigma and sociopolitical alienation, and sometimes an unconscious tendency to harmonize the “foreignness” of Christian theology with their everyday experience of Shaivism. Drawing from fieldwork in house churches and Christmas celebrations, I argue that the emphasis on miraculous healing resonates with Halis because of their structural oppression among Gaddis, often articulated through the idiom of witchcraft; and that biblical hermeneutics and the materiality of the Bible itself becomes a space of social identity formation.

**Hali Christianity in Dharamsala**

While the effects of conversion to Hindu reform movements are everyday apparent among Gaddi Dalits, Christianity lives underground. The Hali pastor of a house church (*kalisiyā*) described how he named his first daughter. “I searched through the Bible for a name, but they all sounded
totally Christian! I wanted a name that was biblical but not directly connected to Christianity.” He chose Shifa, which means “healing” in Urdu and performs the double interpretative work of expressing Christian miraculous healing (cangāī) and following a Gaddi trend of choosing vogue Muslim names. At the local Saint John of the Wilderness Church, the most historical and conspicuous church in Dharamsala, there are no Gaddis in the congregation of mostly migrant workers.

I had heard rumors of Gaddi Dalits converting to Christianity, but it was always somewhere else: in Tanglewood, in interior Chhatta Bhangal, and never at hand. The Evangelical organization YWAM (Youth With A Mission) has a branch in Naddi (a Gaddi village above McLeod Ganj) that predominately proselytizes to Tibetans scattered around the Tibetan Children’s Village (TCV) school. One-off Christian missionaries regularly come through Dharamsala, like Michael Graham, who distributes his booklet From Guru to God describing his hippie experimentation with Indian religion and his return to Protestantism (Graham 2007).

However, while Gaddis generally hold well-articulated opinions about the mendacious purity of Radhasoami and the social ambitions of Sikh converts, Christianity hardly registers. Most Gaddis in Dharamsala experience Christianity through generic Christmas celebrations, denuded of theological content and fueled by international tourism and the cosmopolitan aspirations of middle-class consumption. Christianity is viewed as distinctly modern, the religion of deep-pocketed foreigners who work in NGOs, study Tibetan language or just lounge around McLeod Ganj partaking in the café culture. This patina of modernity surrounding Christianity as a “western religion” is considered an asset for Hali Christians, even as Hali hermeneutics localize the teachings of Jesus Christ (Yeśu Masīh) to speak to their tribal liminality and exclusion from pastoralism, as we will see.
My first exposure to the Christian community was entirely accidental. Bihari and I were in a cluster of Hali villages in the dusty plains in the southernmost extremity of Dharamsala. The Dhauladhar Mountains loomed far off on the horizon. We were interviewing Sonu and his father, who live in impoverished conditions in Ghurkadi, a Chaudhry village with about ten interspersed Hali households (ṭol). We were inquiring about the range of Gaddi ethnic consciousness in low-lying villages where Gaddis are demographic minorities. Sonu’s father is non-literate and limps from a decades-old fall from a tree while chopping branches for animal fodder. After completing his MNREGA quota, he takes day labor whenever he gets it. His son Sonu is a trained plumber, finished school through 8th standard, literate and ambitious. He was recently selected in an open interview to be a plumber in Dubai through the Drexel Company, and passed his days impatiently awaiting further instruction. “There’s nothing here,” he opined wistfully. “There’s no work and no respect. No Hali in our village has finished plus two. My family has had money problems from the very beginning. We don’t own even a single scooter, let alone a motorcycle or car. You see how my father struggles to walk. So I decided to go to Jalandhar for this interview. I want to start a new system (nayā system banānā).”

Bihari and I were both curious to know more about Sonu’s “new system” in the face of longstanding poverty and lack of social respect. Sonu explained that his family life progressively worsened from money problems and chronic disagreements that became occasionally destructive and were clearly influenced by witchcraft. “We are possessed by ghosts,” (hamko bhūt cadh gayā hai) Sonu realized, and six months ago his family collectively converted to Christianity. This came as a surprise to his Chamba-born wife who, in addition to adjusting to the humidity of the Kangra plains was also pressured into supplanting Gaddi deities with the Christian trinity. Her refusal to join the house church remains a recurring subject of Sonu’s intercession.
In the run up to conversion, Sonu’s brother had overheard stories of a powerful Hali prophetess who was sensitive to black magic and often possessed by her Gaddi deities (devī-devtā). He heard her testimony about how intimately she worshipped her protective family deities (kul devtā) until they were taken over by an enemy and used to destroy her well-being; how she unsuccessfully tried to placate them through traditional healer-diviners (cele); how, in a fit of madness, she roamed the streets, trailed by accusations of insanity (pāgalpan) and prostitution (duśkarm); and how, having been reduced to nothing, she took protection in Yeśu. Sonu recalled his impression upon first meeting her: “She’s an innocent (bholī) woman, totally illiterate. But she can recite long passages from the Bible, word for word, and gets all her power through Yeśu’s soul (ātmā).”

Their conversion didn’t happen all at once; like many Protestant Halis, Sonu struggled to leave his Gaddi deities. But his brother had gone to the house church and testified to the miracles he witnessed: a man who couldn’t walk suddenly got up; a distant relative from Chamba, her body fragmented and possessed and doctors from five hospitals unable to locate the pathology, now restored to full health through Yeśu’s miraculous power. “In the end it wasn’t a big decision, one night we were eating and we all felt the pull to go.”

That Sunday I went with Sonu’s family to the kalīsiyā, initiating a four-month relationship with the Hali Christian community. After a month of torturous waiting, Sonu’s work visa was processed and he left for Dubai. He sends remittances back to his family, who occasionally distribute sweets to the congregants as a way of giving thanks to Yeśu Masīh for his munificence. Sonu’s brother, the initial impetus for the family conversion, stopped attending for personal reasons. After Sonu’s departure, I remained close with his parents, who are regular
church attendees, and the Hali Christian community embraced me as a Hindi-speaking foreigner, cultural Christian and anthropologist.

![Image of Sunday worship service in a Hali kalīsiyā](image.jpg)

**Figure 4.1** Sunday worship service in a Hali kalīsiyā. Photo by author.

Hali Christians are necessarily guarded; their kalīsiyā has been visited by local police and angry neighbors. According to members, they have been harassed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for illegal religious conversion and by pancāyat leaders who complain about noise disturbance from drumming during Sunday morning worship. A year ago, the congregants were accosted by members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). An interim pastor at the time described how they “were praying as a group and three strangers entered and sat down with us. We didn’t know who these people were. Jhonfi told me that they came days earlier and told him about a sick friend. ‘Please pray for him,’ they asked Jhonfi. I knew that they gave him wrong information.” The congregants began to read from the book of Psalms, and the suspicious
visitors made it obvious they had never seen a Bible. When they left, everyone was relieved and no one was surprised when they returned, a few weeks later, and threatened to disperse the community, burn down the church and break bones. Jhonfi, tearing open his shirt and thumping his chest, screamed, “Go ahead, shoot me! Now I understand Yešu and where I will go after death! You want to protest now? Why didn’t you protest before, when we were sick?”

Besides the threat of violence, relatives have sometimes expressed strong condemnation of conversion. Gaddis, when they have any opinion at all, tend to consider Christianity anathema to Shaivism and tribal practice. Mirroring the situation throughout India, Gaddis attack Christian missionaries for unfairly targeting the socially vulnerable without self-reflexively interrogating their own role in perpetuating the very structural discriminations that contribute to Dalit spiritual unrest.

It is a tense time to practice Christianity in Dharamsala. The 2006 Freedom of Religion Act, passed with unanimous support in the Himachal Pradesh legislature, vaguely prohibits inducements and allurements to religious conversion. For many Dalit Christians, the law is Orwellian doublespeak, the Hindutva co-optation of state power that neither protects religious liberties nor safeguards socially liminal Christians from violent reprisals. Himachal Pradesh is the first Congress-led state to adopt anti-conversion legislation, a move widely understood to be politically motivated. Without a single registered case of forced conversion, Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh warned that “unless checked well in time this practice may erode the confidence and mutual trust between the different ethnic and religious groups in the state” (Tribune News Service, 2006). Such anti-conversion laws have swept across Indian states, from Rajgarh in 1936 to Rajasthan in 2008. In 2013, Venkiah Naidu, the General Secretary of the BJP, promised an all-India federal ban on religious conversion, although the Modi-led government has yet to pass
such legislation through the Upper House of the Parliament. Hali Christians practice their faith with unease, facing everyday forms of structural oppression, what Bauman and Leech (2012, 2198) describe as “regularized and routinized in the treatment of Christians and in the framing of Christianity as a threatening minority”.

Because my research is transparently sympathetic to Dalit tribal belonging, I was accepted as a community supporter. Having completed eleven months of fieldwork before entering the Hali Christian community, I already knew distant relatives and friends of many church members. Sonu’s invitation provided me a direct reference and was instrumental in assuring a community on edge. Unlike the intrusion of RSS members, whose mendacious claims to be Christian were immediately belied by their lack of familiarity with church culture and Protestant theology, I was brought up in a tightly-controlled Evangelical household. Until I left the church at fourteen, I attended services two to three times a week, and my education and social circles were distinctly Christian. During fieldwork, I drew from a collective pool of theological touchpoints alien to non-Christians but second-nature to an apostate. My experiences at a rural Pennsylvania church, steeped in a charismatic tradition that encouraged Spirit baptism, prophetic healing, and demonic exorcism, familiarized me with a set of shared practices and concepts that bear striking cross-cultural similarities.

Now agnostic, my subject-position at the kalīsiyā was always researcher first, and when asked about my religious affiliation, I would describe being raised a Christian and now a curious researcher (jigyāsu khojkartā). However, my whiteness marked me as automatically Christian, or at least sympathetic to Christianity, and my presence was often described as emblematic of Christianity modernity and its associations with the West. Those who got to know me as an agnostic, far from being offended or duped, made redoubled efforts to bring me into the inner
workings of the church. “Thank you, Yešu, for bringing Brother Stephen into our lives from America,” Pastor Vinay prayed during one of my first services. Switching from Hindi to Gaddi dialect, he explained the general contours of my research. “God has given each of us our own work, and in other places like America they have their own work, like research, which also fulfills God’s will.”

The kalisiyā is in Q, a Chaudhry agricultural village tucked behind the Kangra Airport. Most members come from adjacent villages, Sko and Dari and Ghudkari, getting dropped by bus at the Gaggal main square and walking 30 minutes into the interior. The location was not chosen arbitrarily. The Chaudhry landlord’s daughter suffers from an inverted spine and femoral anteversion, and after her Christian conversion she began renting their old mud structure to the prophetess of the Hali Christians, Shunta, and her husband, Jhonfi. Shunta is grateful for the cheap rent and association with a fellow Christian, a perceived outcome of prayer, although she continues to intercede for her own permanent residence. “My own home where we can settle down. We used to have a home in Lambu, but our family kicked us out and over time it became stale (sarnē lag paḍha hai) because no one has maintained it (lipāī aur safāī).” In one division of the house they sleep and on Sundays conduct church service, and in the other Jhonfi works fulltime processing corn in a mechanical grinder (cakkī). Although Chaudhry castes have shifted upward in the Kangra caste configuration, largely due to the Tenancy Act and the removal of the stigma of once being Girth, there is a friendly association between Hali and Chaudhry castes throughout the plain villages. While the caste composition of the Christian community heavily favors Halis and other Scheduled Castes, there are a few Chaudhry families who freely mix and share food without overt considerations of caste purity.
The Christian kalîsiyā is organized around the Prophetess, Shunta, whose personal testimony, charisma and evangelizing efforts remain the spiritual ballast of the community. Pastor Vinay renders the Bible accessible to many non-literate members through weekly sermons and is undertaking a Gaddi dialect translation of the Bible. The community of believers (viśhvāsī) is predominately composed of Halis and Chamars. They receive some financial backing from Agape Christian Mission, a South Indian evangelizing non-profit. Focused on tribal conversion and uplift, Agape donates Hindi-language worship books; supports pastor training and community outreach strategies; funds biblical dissemination through audio devices, rendering the Bible available to non-literate believers on audio devices in Gaddi, Jhandhari and Hindi; and continues to fund a lengthy project of biblical translation into Gaddi dialect.

Figure 4.2 Hali Pastors Vinay and Satish releasing Gaddi audio transcription of the Bible through Agape Ministries. Photo courtesy of Pastor Vinay.
While the formal dissemination of financial resources and biblical teaching is dominated by men, the demographics in the kalīsiyā heavily favor women, and there is a sense of feminine inclusion hovering over the daily interactions and intimacies of the community. Shunta, the Prophetess and motivating force for most congregants, is the primary carrier of the Holy Spirit; during Sunday services, at prescribed times between formal preaching (vacan) by the male pastor, she falls into a trance and speaks in tongues, often prophesying to the community of believers or voicing God’s disappointments about the lack of conviction, regular church attendance or private prayer. In both style and content her spiritual reveries conform to conventions of spirit possession among Gaddis channeling indigenous, Hinduized deities.

After the Sunday sermon by Pastor Vinay and the conclusion of the service, the crowd disperses into the courtyard and bamboo thickets to drink tea and have fellowship. Every week a group of believers remains inside the kalīsiyā for individualized prayer, often dominated by Shunta. Her intercessions are lamentations, wailing cries for healing and wholeness accompanied by weeping and the laying of hands. No one doubts her conviction, and her unconditional faith and love is inspirational for new believers. Nathanial Roberts (2016, 186) similarly describes these “two ways of conceptualizing spiritual power” among house churches in Chennai slums: “The first was overt and hierarchical and centered on the person of the pastor. Of equal or greater significance, however, were quasi-autonomous organizational networks among church women”. These two bases of spiritual authority – literate and charismatic male pastors hooked into NGOs and church congregants, largely women, who draw on experiential authority and local prestige – exist in a sometimes complementary, sometimes combative dialectic (Roberts 2016, 186).

And while witchcraft can touch anyone, irrespective of caste and gender, it was Hali women most often afflicted. I found a pervasive femininity in the spiritual emphasis on taking
refuge in the miraculous healing of God the Father, who can mend broken relationships and restore that which was taken away. In his analysis of Dalit Pentecostal conversion, Nathanial Roberts (2016, 92) attributes the lopsidedness of female Christian devotion to structural dependence on men, poverty, and higher rates of self-reporting worry. Although gender inequalities exist among Gaddis, I would argue that the alleviation of spiritual torment is the primary context for Protestant conversion.

I want to unpack these spheres of social organization, keeping the focus on how Christian hermeneutics and practice rearticulate the liminality of Halis as unrecognized Gaddis. This articulation reverberates throughout the levels of social organization, from the financial backing of foreign patrons and domestic NGOs to biblical hermeneutics and the intimately felt experiences of personal freedom and healing. While witchcraft may be overall declining among Gaddis due to its perceived incongruence with modernity – anathema to educational objectives, requiring too much time and effort in these accelerated times (Phillimore 2014) – it remains a tenacious idiom of distress indexing Hali marginalization (Appendix 1). In this light, Halis consider witchcraft distinctly unmodern not because it is an unpersuasive superstition but rather because it manifests in the anachronistic context of caste exclusion and throws up barriers to well-being associated with the flourishing of life. Protestant conversion allows Halis to be “modern” by affectively embracing the pastoral tropes of Gaddi belonging while keeping spiritual tormenters at bay. This situation parallels the paradox Kangra Gaddis faced in their winning appeal for ST status – claiming to be a pastoral tribe as a prerequisite for social citizenship in modern India and as an extractive strategy for gaining state entitlements.
Pastoral Hermeneutics

This section analyzes three Christian hermeneutic moves that recast the tropes of “authentic” Gaddi belonging: shepherding, ploughing and exorcism. I argue that Christian conversion is not an ideational and psycho-spiritual rupture for Halis but rather an inventive extension of Gaddi cosmology, ritual practices and cultural lifeways into Protestantism. Virouland (2004) argues that Magar converts in Nepal experience Pentecostalism as congruent with Tibeto-Burman shamanistic possession rituals. Christianity is seen as revitalizing and integrating extant syncretistic practices and not as a conceptual departure. Likewise, Blandine Ripert (2014) cites Nima Ghising, a globetrotting Tamang pastor whose sermons are widely disseminated on YouTube, as arguing for the conceptual crossover of Tamang and Christian themes of malign spirits and the afterlife. We can locate Hali spiritual crossover between Gaddi aspiration and Christian theology as part of a pan-Himalayan movement of tribal conversions – a movement that as often pragmatically links local particularisms with universalistic themes as creates cultural rupture.

We have seen the tension Gaddi Dalits feel about their alienation from transhumant pastoralism, the gate keeping definition of Gaddi authenticity. Throughout the Himalayas, “Gaddi” is sometimes deployed as shorthand for any pastoral community regardless of tribal affiliation. For those Gaddi-identifying Halis, caste-based exclusion from flock wealth and accessing highland pastures and mountain passes – associated with Gaddi deities and presupposing caste purity – have left Halis and other low-status groups partially assimilated. In some instances, Halis were bonded laborers “brought” (leke ānā) from Chamba and settled in Gaddi villages on the southern spurs of the Dhauladhar Mountains during the 18th and early 19th centuries. Their substantive ethnic consciousness is Gaddi, although their quotidian experience in
Gaddi village life is marked by hierarchical inferiority, ritual separation and vocational differences in mobility. The struggle for tribal status by Christian Halis, some of whom have tangential ties to the affective and experiential aspects of pastoralism, takes on a particular hermeneutic resonance. “When I first heard the story of Yeṣu’s birth, I got goosebumps (rongta kare),” a Hali Christian told me. “Who were the first people to hear the news of Yeṣu’s birth? Shepherds! We call them pāl in our Gaddi language! Those people, who take care of sheep and goats, perform ritual sacrifices (nuālā) and so on. The first people to hear the good news were us Gaddis! Whenever I read this in my Bible, I feel very fortunate (khuś-kismaī) that people just like us were the first to worship Yeṣu.”

This hermeneutic emphasis on pastoralism is not the product of reader reception. Many of the Hali Christians are non-literate, and their conversions were not based on biblical study. Instead, the pastors culled through the Bible for stories, parables and even linguistic expressions that might connect with Hali tribal aspirations. As Satish, an interim pastor, explained:

Because we belong to a shepherding community – Hali is the sub-caste of the main Gaddi tribe – Vinay and I selected the theme of shepherding. And so we translated into Gaddi all the stories related to sheep and goats and put it in an audio device to distribute among the people. Abraham, David, the parable of the lost sheep, the birth of Yeṣu – 30 stories about shepherds in all. You can also find these stories at our website Gaddi.in. After listening to these stories, the people start to think about Yeṣu, that he is not a foreign god, but he is our own God. We are listening in our own mother tongue, about sheep, goats, shepherds, sacrifices and pilgrimages. We Halis feel a special connection, and that’s why we took it as our theme. It’s also about respect: when Yeṣu came as a child, shepherds were the first to hear about it. They gave us such respect.

Respect is central to the lives of Hali Christians. They feel assailed from all sides – disenfranchised from tribal identity by dominant Gaddi castes, thrown into administrative limbo as Gaddi Aryas, and vaguely persecuted on account of their Christian faith. While Gaddis remember Halis as the removers of animal carcasses and landless ploughers and continue to use
the epithet “our Chamar-types” to describe them, Halis emphasize biblical pastoralism as a way
of reimagining their past and restoring their dignity.

Halis feel varying degrees of attachment to pastoralism, a prerequisite marker of Gaddi
belonging. Some described in moving detail the everyday impediments which kept them wed to
sedentary, traditionally polluting forms of labor and unable to participate in transhumance.
Through such a lens, the tropes of pastoralism are synonymous with rhetoric of social hierarchy
and domination – hardly a unifying symbol of cultural identity. For other Halis, however, every
effort is made to link their either their ancestors or community with a history of pastoralism.
Most commonly, a great-grandfather is remembered as a shepherd, or a distant relative in
Bharmaur is described as having owned a flock. On the Kangra side, Halis may boast of having
flocks, although locally grazed in what is aptly called “goat duty” (bakrī duty). For example,
Gaddi Dalit shepherds in Dharamsala make short peregrinations between their plains villages and
the upper reaches of the southern slopes of the Dhauladhrs but rarely if ever cross into
Gadderan for a full season. This contrasts with the dominant ideology of tribal Gaddis as mobile
six-monthers (chemahīne), year-long itinerant pastoralists.

Emphasizing biblical pastoralism broadens the conceptual pathway for Halis to achieve
 cultural dignity within a Gaddi cultural worldview. “The main point is that we aren’t getting
respect in society, so Halis turn to Christianity because of this historical discrimination,” Satish
explained. Non-literate Halis have beamed with pride describing the flock-rearing skills of
David, or retelling with vivid detail Yešu’s parable of the lost sheep – that God is a shepherd who
would leave his flock to save the weakest, the one lagging behind or caught in brambles. These
stories empower Halis and fuse their cultural experiences with a god who is both shepherd, a
theme culturally recognizable and respected among Gaddis, and protector of the disaffected, a
theme resonating among Dalits. Emphasizing pastoralism also renders a “foreigner’s God” emotionally available to Halis who, during Bible study, often struggle to understand the theological minutia of blood covenants and Pauline epistles. In short, Christianity is a medium through which Halis spiritualize the veracity of their tribal aspiration and overlay their political contention that “Halis are a sub-caste of the main Gaddi tribe” with the affective experience of personal salvation.

Ploughing is another salient trope that links the experience of Halis to Christian teaching. Pastor Vinay commonly referenced ploughing as a form of honest labor, requiring diligence and stamina. He often went out of his way to reclaim ploughing as dignified labor and to sever the popularly-imagened link with removal of animal carcasses – the work of Chamars. These references would often emerge as small encouragements. However, one Sunday morning late into the summer, soupy humidity thickening the air, Pastor Vinay gave an extended interpretation of Luke 9:62. It states, “Yešu replied, ‘No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.’” Yešu’s reply is part of a broad exhortation for believers to privilege spiritual pursuit over familial obligations. “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God,” Yešu challenges a nascent believer in the same passage.

I was expecting Pastor Vinay to emphasize the potential social disruptiveness of following Yešu: that a time may come when pursuing Christ may divide families and cleave communities, as indeed it had for many Halis present. Instead, his sermon emphasized ploughing itself:

Everyone here has spent a lot of time ploughing. God knows I’ve done my share also. When we are ploughing, we must pay attention so that the plough doesn’t go outside the line, right? If we look around, it won’t get done the right way (sahī tarike se), right? Therefore, God is instructing us not to get lost in the ways of the world (sānsārik bāton
par), not to invest on the things that will get eaten by worms, but to focus on him. You agree, right? This isn’t me talking, this is God talking to us ploughers, telling us through lessons and examples how to live our lives to grab hold of the things that matter.”

The congregants shook their heads and laughed in agreement. Pastor Vinay was doing more than emphasizing ploughing to make Yešu’s teaching more accessible to Halis. He was also transforming ploughing (and its parallel associations with carcass removal befitting Chamars) from a source of opprobrium, upon which centuries of caste-based oppression has befallen Halis, into spiritual edification. More directly, the resignification of ploughing neutralizes the stigma surrounding the caste name “Hali” itself, which derives from “to plough” (hal calānā). Outside of the kalāsiyā, even among Gaddi Dalit organizations, ploughing had never been described in such welcoming terms.

The last way in which biblical hermeneutics renders Christianity relatable to Halis and reinvests denigratory work with social dignity is through the reinterpretation of the concept of celā. Throughout Hindi-speaking India, celā is often synonymous with śiṣya, the disciple or student of a guru. Traditionally the guru-celā relationship involves an initiation ritual, the transmission of esoteric mantras to the disciple and in return a gift (gurudakshiṇā) to the guru – most famously the low-caste Ekalavya’s bowstring thumb in the Mahabharata. This resonance of lineage-based spiritual transmission lingers, but for Gaddis a Hali celā is synonymous with a traditional healer-diviner (sometimes dismissively called tantra-mantra in what could be translated as witchdoctor). Exorcism is almost exclusively associated with Halis on the basis of caste and family transmission, linked to concepts of pollution and considered distinctly unmodern. In his research on spirit possession among Bharmauri Gaddis, Côté (2007, 91-2) classifies cele as either spirit mediums, endowed with social prestige and found among all status groups, or exorcists, the exclusive domain of Halis. However, as we will see in the next chapter,
Sippis boast of their legendary kin, Trilochan Mahadev, as the authentic and sole celā of Shiva, a narrative that empowers an embattled status group as they petition for tribal status on the basis of their caste purity. Similarly, it could be argued that Halis utilize exorcism as a “symbolic reversal of the social hierarchy” (Côté 2007, 38). Although the ability to remove tormenting spirits through mediumship in theory places the (potentially high-status) client in a subordinate position to the (always low-status) celā, this does not practically transform social relations or overcome the stigma associated with exorcism.

Halis often express perplexity as to why their caste is most caught up with the business of exorcism. As one Hali church member explained to me, “Whatever work is low (gaṭhiyā) – witchcraft and so on – it is contained to our caste, never to Gaddi Rajputs. Why is it that normally Halis are cele and do witchcraft-related work?” He went on to list the renowned Kangra traditional healer-diviners, all Hali. “This might be because there’s no other source of income for lower caste people. Even the cele who have jobs and money now, they learned it from their ancestors when they were totally poor.”

It is within this context of perplexity about the association between Halis and vocational exorcism that Pastor Vinay reimagines what it means to be a celā. During a Sunday sermon, he started casually riffing on mediumship and joking that Halis are cele not by caste vocation but rather by choice as servants and followers (dās aur anuyāyi) of God (Parmeśvar). “We know a thing or two about being cele, don’t we?” The congregants broke out into applause. Although the biblical passage under discussion used śisya to describe the apostles of Yešu – as do all biblical translations – Vinay intentionally retranslated apostle as celā. Doing so recasts exorcism and the wider logic of mediumship and possession, which has so often been a source of torment for Halis. All the visceral associations with traditional healer-diviners, of wasted money and time, of
chicanery, dashed dreams and psychosocial torment, are neutralized. *Cele* are no longer Hindu tantrics who conjure and combat black magic, but rather Christian believers, healed of their infirmities and protected from malign spirits.

To complicate matters, Pastor Vinay described how *cele* are merely disciples, those who come to the *kalisiyā* seeking healing and versed in right action and theology. “Are you only *cele*, only out for healing, only praying in church, or do you want the right (*ādhikār*) of eternal life by being the sons and daughters of Christ?” Congregants were instructed to contrast the rote aspects of being *cele* – the performance of ritual, the slide into habitual practice – with the promise of inheriting the kingdom of heaven, unconditional rights and eternal love. “Like you have rights of land when your parents and ancestors die, so you will have rights under God. It’s important to be disciples (*cele*) of god, but we want to be direct familial descendants to get the rights that are open for all people! As *cele*, we face many challenges, but as sons and daughters of god we receive eternal life and the promise of heaven.”

Earlier I stressed the conceptual and spiritual sameness of Protestantism across cultures; it is also important to flag, however, local hermeneutic strategies that employ generic language like *disciple* to address the uniquely fraught and contradictory aspects of Hali life as tribal aspirants. In this context, Hali Christians reinvest the tropes of witchcraft within an embracive Christian theology of discipleship of *Yeśu*. They also strive to transcend the rote and perfunctory aspects of discipleship in favor of the rights of spiritual inheritance and accordingly supplant their hereditary ties to “unmodern” witchcraft practices.

**The Giver of Help**

There is so much suffering in the world. And we thank you God for keeping us safe, for maintaining our life (*jīvit rakhnā*); there are many people who have not made it to see today, died from diseases and accidents, from so many factors outside human control they
have left this world. We thank you God (śukraguzār karnā) for taking care of us in every moment, in every situation. Hallelujah? Hallelujah! I often hear the testimonies from believers, how we are saved by the hand of God from daily accidents, like falling on the road at night, getting a wound and needing to go the hospital. These things happen all the time, but we live in the grace of God and are saved. He doesn’t permit these things.

– Pastor Vinay

A common moniker of Yešu used by Hali Christians is the Giver of Help (Sahāyak Dene Vāle). God is perceived as guiding every aspect of life, from the quotidian – “I traveled home late last night, but Parmeśvar took me home safely” – to salvation from demon possession and freedom from social injustice. Independent house churches like the Dharamsala kalīsiyā are mushrooming across India, offering charismatic preaching, faith healing and ecstatic forms of worship (Webster 2016, 420-21). Emphasizing personal well being from everyday ailments such as illness and spiritual affliction turns the lens away from “shared caste or tribal problems such as oppression and systemic humiliation. In fact, conversion movements have been rare in the twenty-first century; where conversions do occur, they are generally of individuals and nuclear families.” (Webster 2016, 421). Faith healing and supernatural protection is a prominent thematic, cutting across subaltern Christianity and pronounced among Hali converts (Hedlund 2000; Webster 2007).

Pastor Vinay’s personal testimony of liberation from familial witchcraft fits the general pattern. “I was in a depression and feeling like everything in my life was restriction, failure, unhappiness and fighting. I have no doubt that everything evil that happened to me was because of witchcraft.” Vinay’s paternal uncle (tāū) was a noted celā in interior Bharmaur, where he would often abuse his spiritual power. “He would simply throw some mixture or feed some tainted food, and people would experience a huge loss.” The family was riven by disputes over property inheritance, and Vinay’s parents began to construct a new home on inherited land.
Vinay was eleven at the time; he remembers his mother waking in the early morning to collect stones for the foundation, and the final product, a two-floor mud house. It was nearly complete; only the wooden beams of the verandah needed to be dropped into the tilled soil abutting the foundation. One day, Vinay’s father saw the telltale signs of spiritual warfare half buried in the soil: a mixture of mustard seed and vermillion powder. “My uncle had learned black magic from his father and was targeting us because he was stuck in his old house.” Misfortune struck, one after another, and the house was never completed. “For eight years we lived in an incomplete house. The door was totally makeshift; if someone knocked, it would just break apart. To this day it’s just like it was (vaise kā vaise rahā).”

Vinay’s father lost his job, and they decided to move to Shimla. At the time of their departure, the malicious uncle fed Vinay and his parents some goodbye sweets contaminated by black magic. Shortly thereafter, Vinay’s father became an alcoholic and wastrel, and bickering ruled the home. “We went to cele in both Kangra and Chamba, but it was outside of their control (bas kī bāt nahīn).” One day, alone studying for his 10th standard examinations, Vinay again ate tainted sweets from his uncle’s hand. “What was I thinking? I was young and greedy, and I thought, wow, sweets, I want some!” Vinay failed his exam, and failed it again and again – six times from 2002 to 2006. His ambition to complete +2 was never realized, and he fell into depression. Between lengthy bouts of unemployment, he would pick up MNREGA jobs and part-time hours cutting wood for the Himachal Pradesh Forest Department.

Vinay noticed foreigners attending a nearby church, and one day a lady doctor came to his home and announced free check-ups at that same location. “At the time I thought it would be time-pass, so I grabbed a friend and we went to see what’s happening there.” Inspired by a distant relative in Chamunda who had converted to Protestantism, Vinay began to pray to Yeṣū
for respectable employment. He found a job as a security guard at SBI bank. Two years later, he joined his relative doing biblical translation through the financial assistance of Agape Christian Mission. “Halis become Christian out of necessity. We are in problems, we are sick, we are in the possession of evil spirits (duṣṭ ātmāen), we are in darkness (andhakār), and therefore we have the need for comfort (rahat). After some time, when we find out that we are protected from evil spirits, we realize that Yešu Masīh is the Giver of Relief.”

Pastor Vinay always announces the time for testimonials (samay gavāhiyon kā) after delivering a Sunday sermon. “You can stand and for the glory of God give your testimony of what blessing he has given you in your life these past days.” Testimonials take the shape of a congregant standing and being greeted by the group with an ebullient, “Jay Yešu!” The congregant responds, “Praise the Lord to all of you!” (sab ko Jay Masīh!) Each testimonial is followed by group applause; the congregant sits, and Pastor Vinay validates the testimonial.

“Ask, and it shall be given you,” he cites the beginning of Matthew 7:7. “God protects us, sustains us, promises to give that for which we are seeking. Are there any other testimonials (aur koi gavāhi)?” Vinay implores the community of believers to examine the ways in which Yešu has blessed their lives. “How many testimonies were given today? Four or six? There are so many of us today. And except for one or two, we are all from the same caste community (birādrī). Why do we feel shame about giving our testimony? We need to be praying to God more and listening for him in our lives, and then we will surely find him and his blessing in our lives every day.”

The group falls silent. Pastor Vinay’s understudy stands and gives a collective prayer of thanks for the multifarious miracles, large and small, experienced by those who follow in God’s grace.

The centrality of testimonials was emphasized one Sunday when Pastor Vinay extemporaneously shifted the subject of his sermon. While preaching on the parable of the ten
bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1-12) and the need for spiritual vigilance, he began to widen his interpretation. He emphasized how Yešu gives natural intelligence to those socially marginalized, and how, like the wise bridesmaids who brought extra oil in preparation for unforeseen delays in the arrival of their bridegrooms, Halis and other downtrodden people possess wisdom as God’s chosen. From the wisdom of the elect, it was only one more interpretative twist to circle back to testimonials. With mounting zeal, he outlined how to identify a testimony and impressed upon the congregants how valuable even the smallest testimonials are for the spiritual uplift of the community. “Even one line! Stand and tell us how you were going somewhere, and the bus never came, but someone gave you a lift on their bike. That’s a testimonial!”

For nearly an hour, Pastor Vinay held the congregants in rapt attention as he described testimonials of ascending wonderment. “Today I am giving you so many testimonials. But it doesn’t stop here,” and he would launch into another story. The congregants were most impressed by the Kangri believer who became pregnant after great intercession. As the day of her delivery neared, she felt sharp abdominal pain. The doctor told her that the baby was “totally (bilkul) dead. We can do nothing.” “That is not possible,” she said to her sister, a fellow believer who had taken her to the hospital. “What God gives, he will not take away.” Like God testing Abraham, the doctor held up an ultrasound scan of a limp fetus and implored the woman to permit its surgical removal. “God does not take back what he has promised,” she answered, and forcefully returned home against the doctor’s instruction. A month later she gave birth to a healthy baby in another hospital. The congregants laughed and nodded their heads in affirmation, and in unison responded, “Hallelujah!”

The sermon concluded with Pastor Vinay encouraging congregants to do their own investigations into the miraculous. “It doesn’t stop here. When you have time, there are entire

In-church testimonials can be roughly categorized as pertaining to: a) safety (“I went to Ludhiana for the first time, and there was no problem while traveling and God helped me to get there safely.”); b) avoidance of disaster (“A few days ago I got distracted, and thank God that his concentration always falls on us because my daughter went on the roof and was horsing around, and thank God my landlord heard her and went and grabbed her and brought her inside, and there was no accident and she didn’t fall.”); c) procurement of work (“I was sitting around not getting any work, and I prayed to God, give me anything! I gave God all my anxieties – there should be work! Finally, the phone call came and I got work, and I was so happy that I didn’t even properly hear the name of where I was supposed to go.”); d) family discord (“My family members are always fighting but thanks to Yešu Masīh I was able to pray and not get drawn into it.”); e) spiritual torment (“I went to Bharmaur for work and fell into a depression. I couldn’t eat a thing. I was vomiting. I felt like no one could take me out of my sadness. I went to the hospital, but the doctor did nothing. I was feeling so small. I prayed to the Lord (Prabhu), and he touched my body with his Holy Spirit (pavitra ātmā) and removed the evil spirit.”); and f) negotiation of Gaddi identity (“I returned to Bharmaur, and my relatives were bothering me about how I left our Gaddi family deities. They told me about all the things their deities did for them. I told them, ‘It’s okay, keep your deities, they are not for me. My God created the heavens and the earth and sustains me in health. Before I was sick; now I am healed.’”).

Many of the testimonials are quotidian in nature, spurred on by the pervasive sense among congregants that they are the benefactors of Christ’s munificence – and Pastor Vinay’s unceasing encouragements. “You might be thinking that your testimony is too small, and you
will feel shame to tell it. It’s not as big as when God multiplied the fish. But that’s not true. God tells us that the last shall be first, and those with small testimonies must share them, and they will grow over time into big testimonies.” Alcohol-fueled family disputes, unemployment, travel risk and deteriorated health are common denominators across Gaddi castes, although arguably disproportionately impacting Gaddi Dalits. However, Hali Christians face unique positionality with regard to spiritual torment and the negotiation of Gaddi identity. While historical debates surrounding tribal classification centered on tribal animism juxtaposed with caste Hinduism, Gaddis have long elevated Shiva worship and family-specific Hindu deities (kul devtā) as emblematic of authentic Gaddi identity (Middleton 2016, 73). Although stridently maintaining their caste relationship to the Gaddi tribe, Hali Christians endeavor to be ever-vigilant in rejecting the centrality of Shiva and distancing themselves from ritualistic, often habitual markers of Gaddi Hinduism, such as pilgrimage (vātrā), wearing spiritual threads (mauli) or protective pendants (kavac) having family deities (kul devtā), performing related rituals (nuālā and jātar) or unthinkingly accepting vermilion ritual markings during festivals.

Many Hali Christians not only repudiate Gaddi family deities as part and parcel of Hinduism but also experience their deities as hapless vehicles for malign cooptation by bad-intentioned traditional healer-diviners and evildoers. This form of witchcraft is experienced as an intimate betrayal, smuggled in through the innermost bond of devotee to family deity. Suddenly, the primary source of protection – what Anja Wagner described as “continuously involved (and invoked) in the process of attaining well-being” (2013, 109) – becomes the enemy within. This leads to psychological disorientation as the conceptual framework of Gaddi spirituality is inverted.
It also has cascading social effects which, disproportionately afflicting Halis, become both the performance of and motivating factor for their sense of social exclusion and liminality among the ordered cosmology of Gaddi tribal life. Foremost is the severing of place-based kinship networks. As Gaddis were peasants in Kangra for taxation and surveillance by the British, and availed themselves of new agricultural opportunities, transhumance slowed and has gradually come to a near stop. The regularity of seasonal migration, which for centuries socio-culturally moored Gaddis to the ecological polarities of Chamba and the southern slopes of the Dhauladhar in Kangra, transformed into punctuated travel for pilgrimage, festivals, and social obligations. Whether voluntarily or through lack of socioeconomic capital, many Gaddi homes in Chamba ancestral villages became dilapidated or the ownership title transferred to now-distant kin.

With the juridical and economic link severed, Gaddis transferred an aspect of their family deity – an associated iron whip used in self-flagellation during possession (sangal), a trident (triśul), and diminutive sacred sandals (tiruvādi) – from Chamba to property shrines in Kangra villages. These local, clan-based sites of ritual practice remain powerful evocations of Gaddi origins in Chamba. For example, Gaddis often engage their family deities in reciprocal intercession: if granted an asked-for boon, most commonly the restoration of health, the procurement of a job or promotion, or the birth of a child, especially a boy, in return the thankful devotee will host a jātar or jāgrā in their family temple. This reciprocal gift giving (sukhaṇ) – worldly prosperity for the devotee, spiritual recognition for the deity (symbolized in a goat sacrifice) – is foundational to conceptions of well being among Hindus in India (Srinivas 1976, 321-22; Gold 1988b, 149) and Muslims in South Asia (Uddin 2006, 87). In the context of transhumant Gaddis, it moors clan-based families to their ancestral villages in Chamba through
the ritual centricity of their family deity temples in Kangra. Moreover, middle-class Gaddi families, in some cases their properties in Chamba long lost, their connection to pastoralism tenuous, perform pilgrimage as a way of reconnecting to their ancestral villages. Receiving *darśan* of family deities in Gadderan has an obvious spiritual motivation; it is also a ritual of ethnic revitalization.

When Halis narrate their torment under a maliciously co-opted family deity and their repudiation of Hinduism and conversion to Christianity, there is conceptual slippage between torment as the *basis* for socio-spiritual alienation and torment as its main *evocation*. As we will see, many Christian conversion narratives are framed around witchcraft – often afflicting through the intermediary of a family deity. To be clear: such occurrences happen among Gaddis, as well. For example, some years ago a witch from Karnathu village took possession of the Brahmani Mātā Temple in adjacent Phatihar village. A benevolent form of the Mother Goddess (*Devī*), Brahmani was insensate to the needs of her Gaddi intercessors for several years.

What is unusual, however, is the frequency with which Hali Christians experience their family deities as malicious, easily repurposed for personal vendetta, often predicated on jealousy, through which aggressors torment their victims. Socioeconomic advancements common to more well-positioned Gaddis – a workplace promotion, a household renovation, college enrollment – are experienced by many Halis with countervailing evil. Every hard-earned step forward is met with equal and opposite spiritual resistance with decidedly social motivations. The sense among Halis that their Gaddi family deities are out to harm them – unrelated to reneging on a *sukha*– is both the stated reason for Christian conversion and a poignant, albeit indirect, indictment of ongoing social exclusionary practices. Halis in Chamba, most notably in Kuarsi, are still
prevented from entering some Gaddi temples because their ritual impurity and are everywhere disenfranchised from having family priests (*kul purohit*).

Moreover, Christian conversion solidifies the alienation many Halis feel to Chamba and their ancestral villages *as places*. After all, Halis were landless tenants (*pāū*), first settled on Gaddi land in Chamba (circa 1650) based on the need for sedentary laborers and then were “brought” by Gaddis to Kangra. Halis retain their collective memories of landless tenancy and, consequently, feel more alienated from Gadderan. They are more likely than Kangra Gaddis to have lost all meaningful connection to Chamba. This loss is framed as both a blessing, as Chamba is perceived as having more historically-entrenched forms of caste-based oppression, and a curse, the latest way in which Gaddis have monopolized tribal authenticity (along with the highland pasturelands, crucial for pastoralism, loci of spirituality, also barred from Halis). In this light, renouncing a tormenting family deity is a tit-for-tat recognition of Halis’ fraught spirituality in a Gaddi cosmology and a response to their social and spatial exclusion from their Gadderan origins. I argue that the frequency of Hali spiritual torment is an expression of, and partial resolution to, their subjectivity as Gaddi aspirants, between Dalit and tribe, the inheritors of a legacy of social exclusion, restricted geographical mobility and access to Gaddi ritual forms.

To see the relationship between Gaddi identity, socio-spiritual exclusion, witchcraft economies and perceptions of modernity and multicultural acceptance, the remainder of this chapter analyzes the Hali prophetess Shunta’s personal conversion testimony, which is a composite of an official recording used for proselytizing and extended interviews with her over several months. It concludes with an analysis of the very public Christmas performance of the dangers of witchcraft, the ineffectualness of *cele*, and the protection of believers under *Yeśu Masīh*.
The Testimony of the Prophetess

Shunta always begins her conversion testimonial by describing her childhood susceptibility to her family deity, the goddess Kali. In a crowded marriage or ritual space, even among friends – whenever Kali’s name was uttered – she fell into uncontrollable paroxysms. This “traditional playing” (pāramprīk khelnā) made her a noted celā of Kali, respected in her Chamba village as a spiritual intermediary. However, parallel to this were uncontrollable bouts of possession, physically and mentally deleterious, of sinister origin. “It was always applied by an enemy (duśman). It was black magic (opare rī šikāyat).” The more receptive she became to Kali Ma, the more vulnerable she became to witchcraft. Nevertheless, she maintained a conceptual separation between Kali’s munificence and the malign spiritual forces of witchcraft directing her.

After marriage, Shunta shifted to Kangra and misfortune drove her closer to Kali Ma. Her brother fell to his death while cutting (canganā) the topmost branches of an imposing tree for animal fodder; in sheer agony, sobbing and disconsolate, she laid atop his corpse, embraced him (puṭhi paī gaī) and became ensanguined with his bloody departing spirit. “You see, my horoscope is very sensitive, and his shadow must have gotten attached to me.”

After his death, Shunta fell into despair and loneliness. “I loved him so much,” she tearfully recounted. On Rakshabandan, when women across India tie protective bracelets around the wrists of their brothers, Shunta’s despair overwhelmed her. “He was gone, and I was lost in sadness. So I dedicated (caḍhānā) a beautiful bracelet (rākhī) to Kali Ma in his place. I had such affinity (lagāv) for her. I believed in her so much; she was my life (jān prān). After the dedication, she fused with me. Kali Ma mixed into me; we began to live together as one. Whenever I would receive her possession, she would tell the truth through me about anyone or anything.”
At the time Shunța was living with her in-laws, who have a different set of family deities. Her sister’s husband (jījā), desiring sex with Shunța, exploited the connection she shared with Kali Ma. “He began to worship her just like I did. He began to adore (ārādhnā) her just as I did. He even did sacrifice to her. And then I began to rip myself to pieces (nocne lagī).” Shunța’s testimonial, both the official recording and in personal renditions, emphasizes how Kali Ma was helpless to do her enemy’s bidding. “Before she was on my side, but after my jījā got hooked into her… He was without any religious sense (mazhab)… He began to attack me through her and she was helpless.” Her brother dead, her long-lasting trust in her family deity broken, Shunța was left with nothing but physical violence. “I fought my jījā and beat him with a stick so badly that I broke open his head. News of this even reached the police and newspapers!” In response, her enemy increased his spiritual stranglehold on Kali Ma, Shunța’s only repose. “I will watch you,” he said menacingly. “He put me in his complete control and drove me crazy.”

Shunța recounts how Kali Ma’s appropriation led to her initial torment, but as the months progressed her envious jījā began to put Gaddi evil nature spirits (pahariyā) on her as well. These were male-gendered evil spirits found in Gaddi cosmology – Mama and Banveer. “They would come to me especially when I was sleeping, both at night and during daytime naps. There were men wearing all white and a woman with black hair, and they would sit at the end of my bed. It seemed that Kali Ma and pahariyā had joined forces (ektā ho gae).”

To remove the evil spirits, Shunța required the service of her distant relative, a charismatic Hali celā with a beehive of decomposing dreadlocks tied atop his head, the latest scion in a lineage of tantrics. Nicknamed “Mouse” (Cuhā) among villagers, he performed costly treatments for the eradication of the tormenting family deity and associated evil nature spirits. This required a variety of necessary ritual objects, including a cock, sheep and goat – all donated
by Shunta. “I gave him a whole sack of stuff, and at midnight he went into the cremation ground (śamśān ghāṭ) and performed the exorcism.” No result. Shunta tried another Hali celā in Gamru. No result. Then another, this time a non-Gaddi Dalit celā in Nirvana – “Harijans have very dangerous (khatarnāk) magic” – from whom she received treatment for one and a half years. No result. Desperation mounting, she sacrificed two chickens on two occasions to Sidh Chano Baba and Baba Katak Nath, legendary ascetics of renown in Himachal Pradesh. “I went anywhere I could find treatment. Whenever someone mentioned a place, I went.” No result.

As Shunta’s possession lasted fifteen years, she had a deep reserve of shocking and dismaying accounts of the manifestation of evil in her life. It systematically destroyed everything – her social and intimate relationships, her natural beauty, her reputation. Fifteen years of shaking and screaming (cīndā pandī), of fainting over hot coals in the mud stove while preparing bread, of vivid nightmares and daytime hallucinations, of vomiting up sanctified food, whole and fresh, which carried the malign spiritual intent of her enemies. Her experience is congruent with analyzing spirit possession as “any complete but temporary domination of a person’s body, and the blotting of that person’s consciousness, by a distinct alien power of known or unknown origin” (Gold 1988a, 35). Unlike the restorative overwhelming of consciousness described by Hali Radhasoamis in a previous chapter, Shunta and other Halis describe spirit possession as a painful affliction and the diminution of well being. Such a view is consistent with other analyses of sorcery victimization in India (Desai 2008; Nabokov 2000). Jhonfi, Shunta’s husband, spent large portions of his salary as a corn grinder in dogged pursuit of efficacious treatment. “In my fate (mukaddar) there was no happiness.” At times Shunta described feeling unhuman.

I would sit around and think to myself ‘I want to eat someone.’ My teeth were itching (lukie pende). Just imagine how far I had gone that I was chomping my teeth and thinking about how delicious someone’s hands or feet might be! Then I began to throw stones and fight with people. One time my husband went to harvest the field, and I told him ‘I’m
okay, I feel some weakness but otherwise I’m okay.’ And I went to sleep, and a man in white clothes came and sat on the bed and gazed on me, and I started to shiver (kampan), and I went outside and the balcony was on fire, and my maternal aunt (māsi) was there looking at me. I ran into the village, and all the people made a ruckus and someone called my husband and told him I was going crazy. I was possessed and nobody could touch me. I put a scarf on my head and ran to the bus stand in ripped clothes with crazy big eyes, and got on a bus and everyone seated around me… got up and emptied their seats. I don’t know what I was doing. I was probably mashing my teeth. The conductor came to get money and just looked at me like, ‘What happened to you?’ Those times I could observe everything, I could see reality clearly, but I couldn’t control myself. I was being controlled by Kali Ma. Sometimes I would just get on a bus then get off; sometimes I would get off and be in a random place and just lay on the ground and go to sleep. And my husband would be running after me following me. He would get some other guys to try and grab me, but they couldn’t get me. I was just laid out on the ground, and people recognized me and said, ‘What happened to this nice Gaddi girl?’ There were some ladies trying to help me, but they came to know I was possessed by Kali Ma and they ran away from fear.

Having exhausted her network of traditional healer-diviners, Shunta tried Christianity. Her neighbors, themselves Hindu but at their wit’s end over her intractable affliction, invited a local priest (pādrī). He entered Shunta’s home, and his prayer was met with fierce reprisal. “For four hours I was gyrating all around the room, my long hair was going wild, and I couldn’t get a moment’s rest. Kali Ma was screaming through me, ‘I won’t go, I won’t go.’ And the gents evil spirits were screaming through me, ‘I won’t go, I won’t go’” (using gender-inflected verbs). Shunta’s conversion neither happened that day nor in successive meetings with the pādrī. “I saw the changes coming into believers’ lives, the miracles and healings. I knew that through Yeśu people can get healed, but somewhere I couldn’t break the bondage (banḍhan) of my family deities, of my Kali Ma. I still loved her so much despite her possessing me.”

Shunta kept her distance from the community of Christian believers. “What could I do? I had to be separate from them. They told me to come to Yeśu, but I replied, ‘Look at how powerful my Mātā is, how big my deities are. I was brought up in the family (kul). I can’t change
my religion.’” Despite Christianity’s appeal, Shunta described how she went on the Manimahesh pilgrimage several times seeking relief. “We Gaddis believe Shiva is the biggest god for us, so I spent so much money on the pilgrimage just to ask Shiva, ‘Please remove the evil spirits. Do it for my children. These evil spirits are not allowing me to sleep, to eat, to live.’ But the more I prayed to Shiva, the more an evil soul controlled me. Slowly, slowly I lost Shiva. He is no longer in my eyes.”

Recounting these and other stories of spiritual torment transported Shunta back to a time she wishes to forget. Meeting my eyes with quiet compassion born from anguish, tears smudging dark bands of kohl down her cheeks, she said, “I rarely give my testimony so deeply. When I give it like this it weakens me. When I have to explain, everything becomes fresh. I feel like I’m digging something up (khurdānā).” We had reached the nadir of her torment: having lost faith in Shiva, unable to renounce Kali Ma, trapped in an abusive relationship, the enemy within, she turned to suicide. She ate small quantities of poison but vomited them up each time. She coiled a rope around her neck but lost resolve. “I didn’t want to live that kind of life any longer.” Although Christianity seemed like a way out, abandoning her family deities seemed a worse alternative than death.

Central to Shunta’s conversion narrative is her fastening adoration for her kul devī. There is a sense of bewilderment – how could such a powerful deity be so easily co-opted? How could such impassioned devotion create insecurity and vulnerability? The goddess Kali, prominent in Hinduism, concentrically overlaps with Gaddi cosmology, including deities such as Marali and Gasni. As such, Shunta’s testimony circles around themes of family betrayal and highlights the conceptual slippage between possession by benign deities and malign forces (Gold 1988a, 35). How is it that, in the absence of reneging on a reciprocal promise (sukhan), Halis find themselves
alienated from Gaddi deities, pushed out of the family as it were? Halis and other Gaddi Dalits consciously articulate their grievances of social oppression: a long history of ritual and socioeconomic exclusion propped up by unbending marriage endogamy. These grievances are articulated in the idiom of equal recognition as aspiring ST Gaddis and as humans more generally.

However, Hali spiritual torment, when precipitated by family deities, expresses an unconscious sense of intimate betrayal – that Gaddi cosmology cannot accommodate Dalit devotees. It is neither my intention to reduce spiritual torment through family deities to an expression of Hali social alienation, nor reduce Hali social liminality to an outcome of spiritual torment. I want to flag the parallelism between the spiritual domain of Gaddi belonging and the social liminality of Gaddi Dalits. Analyzing the mutually-reinforcing domains of the social and spiritual is neither an “overarching” theorization which “explain[s] away suffers’ experiences” nor a reductionist “what’s really going on explanation” (Gustafsson 2009, 130). Just as the legacy of war is the context for illness possession in Vietnam, I argue that social marginalization and political dispossession is the context for Hali spiritual torment in the Western Himalayas. What is the place of Halis in Gaddi cosmology and, by extension, the place of Halis in Gaddi society writ large?

Through this lens, spiritual torment among Halis is an idiom of distress, a sociocultural “means of experiencing and expression distress in local worlds [indexing] past traumatic memories as well as present stressors, such as anger, powerlessness, social marginalization and insecurity [...]” (Nichter 2010, 404-5). Such factors shape the culturally-specific expression of Hali distress, both coping mechanisms for ongoing Gaddi exclusion and indicators of “psychopathological states that undermine individual and collective states of well-being”
(Nichter 2010, 405). Both registers are operative among Halis. Conversion testimonials and hermeneutic emphases on spiritual protection highlight the ways in which Protestantism helps to mitigate and regulate the variable expression of idioms of distress.

Shunta’s narrative typifies the jarring psychological impact and spiritual vertigo Halis experience as they recognize that their family deities are afflictive. Like a lover unable to leave an abusive partner, Halis must recognize that their spiritual ballast, linking them not only to their ancestral village in Gadderan but also a generative sense of Gaddi belonging, must be extirpated. Shunta describes the continued difficulty, long after Christian conversion, of eradicating such a wellspring of psycho-spiritual belonging.

Until the teaching of Yešu was completely felt inside me, I remained open to evil spiritual attack. For a whole year after conversion, I was getting harassed by evil spirits. You see, I was still feeling deep love for Kali Ma! And I couldn’t leave her. Christians were continuously praying for me, but I kept on seeing Kali Ma. I realized that although I was going to church my soul was still living for Kali Ma. God (Prabhu) told me, ‘Three spirits are tormenting you in which you continue to believe: Kali Ma, Chanu Baba, and pahariyā. Your enemy has also sacrificed a chicken on your name for Chanu Baba.’

Then I realized all this. Before there was fear of all these things, but on that day they all appeared through my body. I was possessed by each one…shaking…and one by one the spirits cried through me and asked for repentance. They begged Prabhu, ‘Don’t burn us! It’s not our fault, we didn’t come by ourselves, an enemy put us on her! After today we will never come back into her life.’ They were afraid of Prabhu. And that was the end. Prabhu wanted me to realize that my love for these deities was the cause of all my sorrow. In front of Prabhu, Kali Ma conceded to him. She begged for forgiveness. She realized that she is below Prabhu, that she is demonic (śetān) and Prabhu is beneficial (gunkārī) and full of merit. Once Kali Ma realized this, then I realized it as well, and my belief became determined. And from that day, it can’t be beaten.

Shunta’s Christian conversion story is long and byzantine, beginning with forays into and retreats out of church life. Her spiritual torment was infamous, her reputation was in disrepute, and concerned neighbors and believers from several faiths approached her for healing. Shunta
remembers that once a Christian “sister” came to her home and told her, “If you don’t come to the Christian community, you will die. You don’t need to adopt Christianity, just come and have a look.” As she dragged Shunta out the door, her mind was preoccupied with anxious thoughts about the postponed (paure hin) pūjā materials she needed to deliver to a celā – a sheep and some cocks. “Don’t worry about that, just wait; have a look, have a look,” the Christian sister reassured her.

But a deeper anxiety settled in Shunta’s mind. Through the rākhī she had established a bond between Kali Ma and the spirit of her departed brother. What if Yeśu could pacify the tormenting spirits and as a result forever sever their sibling bond? Shunta needed to marshal the courage to fight against Kali Ma, even at the risk of losing her brother’s other-worldly presence. In this way, Shunta’s spiritual disorientation gave way to larger anxieties about the social fallout of conversion. All Christian Halis face similar internal struggles about how to shift from Gaddi to Christian cosmologies without crumbling the social edifices of their lives, without losing their sense of who they are, as siblings, as former residents of Gadderan, as Gaddis.

The Christian community intensified their efforts to remove Kali Ma. “The pādrī began to come to my house for three hours at a time. Kali Ma would possess me and through me scream, ‘I won’t go! I won’t go!’” Her husband Jhonfi jokes that before she was possessed by Kali Ma, and now she is shaking for Yeśu. Shunta, assailed by her family deity, two male nature spirits, extorting cele and solicitous Christian believers, withdrew into solitary prayer. But during an explosive bout of possession, someone anonymously called a pastor at nearby Yol. When he tried to enter the home, Kali Ma violently ejected him from the doorway. He fought to get inside. Shunta’s exorcism would last three days.
On the third day, while away on duty, the pastor’s wife placed a Bible on Shunta’s lap. Shunta gripped it and prayed, “God, if you are there, help me to live. Otherwise, I will kill myself now. I hate this life.” As she is non-literate, she sat with the unopened Bible on her lap. A shadow of light began to extend from the binding, snaking out down her legs and over her chest.

I grabbed the Bible and held it to my breast. I couldn’t see Prabhu, but I felt the Bible talking to me. I hadn’t read it, but I felt something. I closed my eyes and felt that my soul went out of my body, and I became numb. And there was light, and it was touching me wherever I put the Bible, like this [grabbing a nearby Bible and placing it on her head, arms, legs]. And my body became very light. And the shadow left me, and the tightness (jhakāḍā) left my body. I felt like wherever I put the Bible the devil couldn’t touch me. And I had a vision of Prabhu. Normally when the pāḍṛī touches a sick person, they fall unconscious. But I did this to myself. I fell by myself. From that day to today I have belief. At the time I got miraculous healing (cangāṇ) I was totally alone! Prabhu told me to ask for forgiveness for my sins. I was crying and said I am helpless. Then after I got the pure spirit. Whenever the devil attacks me, the pure spirit fights back. After healing, they gave food in the kalisiyā and in the community. They gave a big celebration. I climbed a stage to give my first testimony…I got all choked up and could say nothing. But then I rested the Bible on my lap, and I could talk freely. After this, people began to believe so much in the Bible. Because the Bible is sacred and there are teachings of God in it. I am non-literate (anpaḍh). It is through the pure spirit that I can understand these teachings. Prabhu told me what was in the Bible; I can’t read. When the pure spirit came into me, I felt like it was my own – my own life, my own brother. I felt like Yeṣu gave me a new life. My soul was satisfied, purified.

Christian conversion has given Shunta a renewed sense of possibility. In accordance with prophesy she received during her exorcism, she now travels throughout Kangra and Chamba selling women’s cosmetics and accessories door-to-door. Whenever possible, she gives her miraculous testimony to customers. “I want to write my testimony. If only I were educated! Prabhu has done so many miracles in my life. I know that through my story many will be saved. Everyone who comes to Yeṣu, they are suffering like I did with black magic and evil spirits. They are possessed; they go crazy, like I did: throw things, beat people, break things, and shake
like crazy.” Shunta now instructs possessed Halis about the false allure of local cele. “They can remove witchcraft for only a few days, never permanently. And be careful! They can take it away, but they can also give it!” She warns about the money wasted on treatment and how Yešu heals freely. She now holds a prominent place among Hali Christians as a prophetess. “It doesn’t matter if literate, if smart, if whatever, it doesn’t matter if I’m a fool, I am with Yešu and I can’t be stopped. Gaddi society thinks I’m useless (tucch), even some of the pastors think I’m useless because I’m not qualified. But I know that Yešu is with me.”

In a video recording for local distribution, Shunta’s testimonial is explicitly framed as a Gaddi narrative. It opens with Shunta sitting beside her husband Jhonfi, whose diminutive stature is due to childhood labor and malnutrition. The interviewer instructs Jhonfi, “Okay, praise God! Put on the cap!” Jhonfi affectedly places the Gaddi cap on his head and repositions it according to local Gaddi taste. By doing this, he is overtly signaling his Gaddi identity – much is made in local fashion about the difference in caps between Gaddis and Pahadis, not to mention the ways in which the angle of the cap signals both caste affiliation and personal attitude.

He then introduces himself. “My name is Jhonfi Ram. This is my wife; in 1995 we were married. After our marriage day we never had any good days. After a few days we were getting ill. For fifteen years disease never left us. We were left helpless after worshiping certain deities (ian dane devte puji paji kari na bui churi). These deities (dane devte) never helped us.”

Shunta’s recorded testimony follows in attributing her “broken heart” to malicious deities and avaricious cele. The video concludes with the interviewer flatly stating, “This brother and sister belong to the Gaddi caste. You have heard how an evil spirit grabbed them and how they found freedom in Yešu. Yešu Masih is working among the Gaddi castes...among all the castes. We praise God for we are seeing him in our community. Thank you!”
A Christmas Exorcism

The 2015 Christmas celebration, the first done by a Hali house church independent of the larger Dharamsala Christian community, placed the issue of witchcraft front and center. Easily the highli
ight of the event – enjoyed by all and leading to rousing laughter and shouts of affirmation – was a skit about the miraculous power of Yeśu Masīh to heal the spiritually afflicted. It opens with three women discussing the treatment options for their brother, who has fallen violently ill. One woman proposes a celā, the other a doctor, and the third insists that there’s no benefit in either the doctor, who will misdiagnose a spiritual condition, or the celā, who will milk the afflicted for money and give nothing but a head massage of incense. After promoting the church in Q as an alternative, the woman exits the scene. “She doesn’t know, but look at her giving us advice! She is telling us to leave our deities. We cannot leave them.”

The second scene opens with the two women seated in front of a traditional healer-diviner. Amid bellows from the audience, he is roasted as a charlatan. While dangling ritual peacock feathers he casually asks himself, “Shall I give a full treatment or just do it halfway?” This statement echoes a Hali complaint that cele intentionally drag out treatments to maximize profit and manipulate the victim. He instructs the sister of the afflicted to bring ritual ingredients, a chicken, 5,100 rupees, and a bottle of wine. “Make sure it’s English wine, not local stuff.” He gives her ashes (bhabut) and instructs her to place it under her brother’s bed for temporary relief.

Time passes, and the ladies return with the possessed brother and a bundle of requested ritual ingredients. “Where’s the bottle? I am not seeing it,” the celā asks anxiously. “Okay, okay, I see it now under this stuff” and the exorcism commences. He affectedly burns incense, prays to a mūrti, and rubs his hands together. “The treatment is finished. Now go home. You don’t know how I did it, but you will feel better. If not, come again and bring another bottle of wine.” The
crowd roars! His clients leave, and the celā breaks into diabolical laughter: “Aha! Today I’m enjoying a bottle of wine and a chicken! If these kinds of people keep coming, I’ll soon be rich!”

The next scene opens inside a doctor’s office. The women reframe the spiritual torment of the afflicted brother as biophysical pain, possibly from drinking too much alcohol. This too garners headshaking from the women in the audience who suffer with alcoholic husbands and (predominately male) kin. The doctor ignores her completely. “May I first decorate my office a little? I’ve just opened shop.” He takes his time cleaning and performing a lengthy Hindu pūjā, while the afflicted brother distractedly slumps on the ground. Eventually he takes an x-ray and concludes that there’s nothing visibly wrong with his health. Nevertheless, he prescribes medicine and sends them away. The audience is left with the sense that the rational modernity of western medicine is tainted by the infusion of Hindu practices, the apathy of doctors and their inability to properly diagnose spiritual afflictions.

Figure 4.3 A “doctor” examines the patient and medicine is found ineffectual. Photo by author.
In the last scene, the women accidentally bump into the woman who suggested they go to the house church. “You have spoiled your time and money, given cocks and wine and gotten nothing,” she chides them. The next day is Sunday, and they all enter the house church. Pastor Vinay greets them, “Jay Masih ki!” The women explain the man’s sickness, switching between spiritual and physical models of health, suggesting both witchcraft and alcoholism. Pastor Vinay responds, “I’ll pray for you. You must believe that Parmeshvar is the giver of healing (cangāī). He alone can change our condition, can give us relief. Come, let’s pray: Heavenly father and living God, we thank you. We pray that you give healing for our son here. Whatever the sickness, whatever its cause, we pray that it leaves his body in your name. May your peace and love come upon him. In Yeśu’s name we pray, amen.” The sick brother suddenly wakens from his slumped insentience, “Hey hey, what is happening to me? I am feeling a little better!” “God has healed you,” Pastor Vinay replies.

The doctor comes onto the stage, stethoscope draped around his neck, waving a health chart. “How have you been healed? I see nothing.” The brother now boldly exclaims that he went to church and received healing. Pastor Vinay, breaking the fourth wall, is heard from behind the backstage curtain joking: “Doctor, close up your shop!” He joins the healed brother on stage, along with all the other actors, and the skit ends with an exhortation. “You have all seen that whatever illness comes from evil spirits cannot be removed by doctors and cele. It took only one prayer to Parmeshvar for total healing. No other god can give us healing like Yeśu can. And today we are celebrating his birthday.”

Immediately following the completion of the skit, a church congregant stood and delivered his own testimonial about being possessed by Baba Balik Nath. Visibly nervous, he nevertheless described his torment and how Yeśu saved him from certain suicide. Shortly
thereafter, a visiting pastor spoke about the affliction of evil spirits and the “backwardness” of Hindu exorcism rituals that rely on bird feathers and animal sacrifices. Christianity alone provides full protection in these “modern times” he assures the audience.

The modernity of Christianity is a thematic often stressed among church congregants. Blandine Ripert (2014, 50-53) analyzes the individualization of Tamang Christians in Nepal, their transformation from near-autarky to a culture of economic migration; from reliance on esoteric lamaistic knowledge and spiritual intermediaries to open spiritual teachings freely available for the uninitiated; and from dependence on traditional healers and animal sacrifices to the rise of rationality, the secularization of knowledge and the distrust of “superstition”. As the skit highlights, Hali Christians are also struggling to replace traditional sources of authority, such as village elders and spiritual healers, with modern sources of spiritual authority. Jabs at the chicanery and alcohol-fueled buffoonery of such traditional authorities are commonplace, contrasted with the moralizing Christian sermons against intoxicants. Whereas elders may speak only in Gaddi dialect, which is coded as pejorative and backwards, church services are mostly held in Hindi, a language linked with modern aspiration. Hindi unites Gaddi-speaking and Pahari-speaking church congregants, although it is also the default language of sermons and worship even when the present congregants are all native Gaddi speakers.

From institutional practices to self-reported aspirations among congregants, Christianity is understood to be more efficacious, its theology more rational, its essence more infused with the perceived advances of western technology than Gaddis cosmology and the legitimacy of traditional healer-diviners. This is symbolized by Pastor Vinay’s plastic thick-rimmed reading glasses, a visual reminder of his literacy among a community of largely non-literate believers.
Moreover, through links to domestic and foreign NGOs, Christianization hooks Halis into a sense of national integration and global belonging. It allows them to affectively link up with Gaddi tropes such as pastoralism while stridently rejecting Gaddi cosmology and the Hindu sanction of caste. From this culturally recognizable foundation, both a space of social aspiration as Dalits seeking tribal recognition and a spiritual stronghold against affliction, Halis transcend their parochial lives. They link up with universalizing themes of redemption, individual value and direct modes of intercession reinforced with new forms of technology, such as audio devices, websites and technologies of documentation such as cameras, audio recorders and microphones.

**Conclusion**

On the first Sunday of every month, the community of believers meets for a special communion service called “God’s feast” (*prabhu bhoj*). All those baptized are encouraged to share the blood and body of Christ. On one of the last Sundays of a drenching monsoon season, congregants sit tightly pressed together on the floor of the house church. Afraid to attract the unwanted attention of neighbors, the door is closed and windows are only slightly ajar; a power cut has killed the rotating floor fan and cast the room in shadow and heat. “Today we drink the sacred grape juice and flour bread in remembrance of how Yeśu Masīh gave his disciples (*cele*) his own blood and body,” Pastor Vinay intones. His voice tapers off, and is replaced by the sonorous wailing of congregants. *Hallelujah, hallelujah, dhanyavād, dhanyavād.* Shunta’s voice rises above, “We have done so much wrong, but you are the Forgiver (*Kshamā Karne Vālā*). Whatever sin we have done, we must repent now for it.” For twenty minutes, believers turn inward to purify themselves for communion.
When the house church first organized, communion was administered using one and a quarter inch stackable plastic cups donated by Agape Ministries, the kind typical in American churches. These diminutive cups symbolized the international backing of the church and the intrinsic value of each individual believer. However, one day Pastor Vinay was dismayed to discover that the Christian message of social equality was going unheeded by Halis, some of whom had barred a Harijan believer from entering the church kitchen and touching the church utensils. Such casteist practices are common between SC groups, a “subtle fusion of resistance and collusion [which] deflects some of the implications of hierarchy and appropriates hierarchy for use by the low caste person, transforming it into something that can be mastered and exploited” (Parish 1996, 207-8). In response, Pastor Vinay replaced the individual plastic communion cups with a single, shaped metal cup, forcing congregants to practice transcending caste differentiation every month until it becomes genuinely felt.

Holding the cup to his forehead, Pastor Vinay prays out, “Drop by drop (ek ek chodā) we will all be equal. From one cup, together, we drink his blood. Come, be present in this moment.” He drinks deeply from the cup and hands it to his assistant, who moves throughout the crowd administering communion and wiping the rim after each drink. Some congregants appear uneasy and rotate the cup looking for unsullied surface; others lightly glance the cup with puckered lips. But most believers draw the ridge of the cup into their mouths with complete disregard for who drank before them and to which caste they belong. This ritualization of caste equality affirms a commitment to human dignity that resists instrumentalization and gives moral heft to Hali appeals for tribal inclusion.
As previously described, Hali ethnic entrepreneurs foster communal association with their history of patronage subordination and polluting sedentary labor in order to promote Gaddi Dalit consciousness. Their aim is to carve out a pan-Himalayan juridical space for upward social mobility as STDs. Sippi caste members, on the other hand, emphasize their integral pastoral and spiritual functions within the Gaddi community, and consider themselves as high-caste Vaishyas performing Brahmanical functions. In contrast to the open sores of social subordination shaping Hali tribal inclusion, Sippis emphasize their harmonious and coequal interdependence with Gaddis. Their SC status is considered a legal aberration unbefitting their prominence in shamanistic and ritual practice.

This chapter has two movements. First, it analyzes how social discourses, oral histories and mytho-religious practices are instrumentally shaped around Sippi claims to purity as the matrix of tribal inclusion. Contrary to all other Gaddi Dalits, whose struggle for ST recognition axiomatically accepts their subordination as landless tenants and unfree clients under patronage exploitation, Sippis have taken the metaphorical high ground, deemphasizing caste discrimination and claiming social equality with Gaddis. Their perceived hierarchical superiority among Gaddi Dalits accounts for Halis legally emending their caste name to Sippi, as described later; a sense of Sippi exceptionalism has also fueled ideological and practical impediments to unifying the five SC groups appealing for tribal inclusion. For example, Sippis point to their Brahmanical gotras and family priests (kul purohit) as evidence of their superior social status, and their tribal petition actively excludes Gaddi Dalits. Rather than question cultural hegemonies naturalized through the ethno-logics of state recognition, Sippis mold themselves around and into
dominant Gaddi discourses. Such tribal constructions come at the expense of other low-status
groups. The second movement crosses state borders into Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), where a
contingent of migratory Sippis was awarded ST status in 1996. Their inclusion – not as Gaddis,
but as a separate cognate tribe – fuels ethnic exclusivism among Himachali Sippis. This section
analyzes the impact of government recognition on intercaste Gaddi sociality and addresses how
Hindu-Muslim communalism and Gaddi minoritization shape pastoralism and social cohesion.

Sippis are unique among SC Gaddis for advancing the oral narrative of forced migration
from Lahore. “It was in the time of Aurangzeb,” a prominent Sippi activist began. “He had
decided, just as a small matter – something decided before breakfast – to round up thousands of
Hindus and burn their sacred threads. His goal was to collect 40 kilograms of thread and to
change their religion.” This was a creative variation of the Gaddi saying: “When Lahore was
invaded, Bharmaur was inhabited” (Lahore ujera, Bharmaur basaya). “At that time”, he
continued, “the shepherds living in that region fled to Meeru Varma [in Bharmaur] for refuge.
We Sippis were included.”

Such an account contradicts contemporary historiography about the subordination of
indigenous communities, Sippi included, as Gaddis practiced transhumance between Bharmaur
and Kangra and adopted internal social stratifications from sedentary agriculturalists. It also
contradicts colonial conjecture, of great utility for Gaddi Dalits, about the autochthony of low-
status groups (later called Dalits) in the Dhauladhar Mountains. This dramatically departs from
the Gaddi Dalit strategy of embracing indigeneity as a marker of tribal authenticity within the
pan-Himalayan regime of international rights promoted by the United Nations and NGOs. When
I pressed this point to my interlocutor, he directed me to a passage from a Sippi-commissioned
auto-ethnographic report: “[B]efore the Aryans entered Bharmaur district, some minor (anāry)
castes also used to live here. Considering them as bandits (dasyu), the Aryans captured them. Certainly, these castes – Koli, Dagi, Hali, Dhogri – must have lived here and the people of the Gaddi community came from outside of this district.”

The upshot of lumping Sippi migration history into the dominant Gaddi narrative is twofold: foremost, it affirms authentic Gaddiness as tied to migration and mobility and contrasted with Gaddi Dalits belonging to peripheral, scattered castes indigenous to the mountains. Migration histories have ideological force that buttress discourses about rights and belonging; as such, Sippis align themselves with dominant tropes of Gaddi identity and place their appeal for tribal inclusion in implicit contrast with rabble-rousing, ex-bandit Dalit castes. Relatedly, Sippis lift the theme of religious purity – of preserving Hindu ritual and identity – from the Gaddi migration history and repurpose it for self-fashioning as high-status religious functionaries. Whereas Halis emphasize their “tribal” past as indigenous forest-dwelling omnivores and animists, Sippis align themselves with tropes of Hindu-preserving, mobile pastoralists. Like Odysseus’ flight from Polyphemus, Sippis hope to find success on the underside of sheep.

This discursive framing of Sippi ritual purity has scholarly undertones. Ethnic entrepreneurs have mined colonial texts and academic monographs to cross-reference and substantiate the religious centrality of Sippis. This has at times led to exaggerations and misquotations. Nevertheless, surprisingly inventive forms of self-presentation have sprung from auto-ethnological reports and village re-education projects into the hearts and minds of Sippis – modes of identification that are routinely scoffed at by Gaddis.

First, in opposition to the “commonsense” view among Gaddis that the ethnonym “Sippi” is derivative of either craft-work (śilpi) or sewing (silānā), many Sippis trace their caste
etymology to a corruption (tadbhav) of “Shiva” himself. This direct association with Shiva emphasizes prestigious religious functions over vocational ties to sheep-shearing and thread-spinning. Instead of emphasizing their subsidiary role in the Gaddi pastoral economy, Sippis frame their ritual function as central to tribal practice, and Gaddis as dependent clients. Second, ethnic entrepreneurs speculate about the etymological links between “Sippi” and cognate Shiva-worshiping groups, gaining prestige through vague association. Citing the 1872 Hindu Tribes and Castes as Represented in Benares by the Anglican missionary M.A. Sherring, the historical link between Shivchari and Sippi is explored. The Shivchari allegedly resided at Jangambari and Kedarghat and worshiped Shiva by bathing in ashes, wearing his image and donning a meditation necklace (rūdrākṣaṇa) which translates as “Shiva’s teardrops”. Further etymological corruptions are mentioned, specifically “Shibbi” and “Siddhi”, mystical beings gifted with supernatural powers through devotion to Shiva. These seemingly incompatible hypotheses about caste origination – how Sippis were undifferentiated Gaddis who fled Lahore and Banarasi ascetics and Himalayan mystics – are easily reconciled. After settling in Bhrampur, a Gaddi family dispute (related below) led to ethnogenesis and the slow spread of Sippis throughout North India.

A theme running through previous chapters is the perception among Gaddi Dalits of Jhandhar as offering unique forms of socioeconomic opportunity. Dharamsala stands apart as a beacon of modernity and cosmopolitan promise; the wider district of jumbled village caste configurations, described as “mixed up” due to caste hiding and waves of recent migration, provide liberative spaces of autonomy and anonymity. Although Halis struggle with the legacy of their patronage exploitation, there is near-universal agreement that caste discrimination is more strongly felt in ancestral villages in Gadderan. Kuarsi and Chunhouta are obvious examples
where the spatial layout of village life, from access to pastureland, temples and water sources, remains prohibitory to Dalit Gaddis. Kangra Halis are clear-eyed about tenacious Gaddi caste strictures in Gadderan; they interpret their subordination by Gaddis as evidence not of their apartness but of their integration into caste-cleaved tribal life.

Conversely, Kangra Sippis remember life in Gadderan with nostalgia, where their ancestors were imagined to occupy prominent roles and equivalent social status with Gaddis. In an auto-ethnographic report commissioned by the Gaddi Sippy Utthaan Sanstha, Bharmaur is described as “woven from the natural beauty and geographical contrasts of several castes sharing a single language, social tradition and culture”. Instead of emphasizing caste inequality, Bharmauri life is described in ahistorically egalitarian terms: a place where “people maintain trust in helping each other; [where] each caste has tried to develop a living society without caste discrimination; [where] life swings gleefully (ullās) like a musical”. Instead of highlighting social exclusion and blocked access to pastureland and sacred spaces, Bharmauri life is imagined as “inclusive” (sammilit), where “happiness and suffering are distributed across the whole Gaddi community”. Regardless of caste, Gaddis demonstrate “inexhaustible (aṭūt) trust and respect towards each other”. Such descriptions are littered with high Hindi, written by the president of an ethnic association to the Himachal Pradesh legislature; however, the tone of nostalgic belonging rings throughout Sippi villages and axiomatically divides them from narratives of exploitation embraced by Gaddi Dalits.

Sippi descriptions of Gadderan commonly invoke religious sensibilities. “From sowing the fields and cutting grass to house construction, people keep their religion when it comes to helping each other,” the auto-ethnographic account continues. “Behind this reciprocal (pārsparik) helping is the importance of the role of this area’s religious traditions”. It is notable
how, in another context, Gaddis invoke Hinduism to naturalize their caste superiority and draw on creation mythologies that link pastoralism and sacred geography to Shiva. Halis describe their social exclusion from religious practices, ranging from barred access to sacred highland crossings to an inability to properly execute the nuālā due to ostracism by officiating Gaddi Brahmans. Sippis, however, take tremendous pride in their role as religious functionaries – as shamanistic oracles of Shiva, as cele whose dip in Dal Lake commences the Manimahesh pilgrimage, and as ancestral kin to Trilochan Mahadev, a mythic ancestor deified by Sippis. This pride translates into an argument for tribal inclusion that simultaneously undercuts the struggle of other SC Gaddi communities. Moreover, by propagating the discourse of Gaddi egalitarianism Sippis may be further entrenching dominant interests and alienating themselves from meaningful tribal inclusion.

The legendary origin of Sippis as priestly functionaries is the popular oral narrative (janshruti) of the blood brothers Kaintha and Reetha. Excluding a botched reference (see Sharma 1998, 10), the narrative has never been recorded. What follows is a translated oral account compiled with the abbreviated version included in the auto-ethnographic report:

His name is unknown, but once there was a Gaddi Rajput who had three sons. Of one son, we know nothing. We know that Kaintha was older, Reetha was younger. The father entrusted the elder Kaintha with domestic responsibilities over the cost of running the household. In addition, he began to officiate over Shiva worship (pūjā arcarnā). We believe that the name Sippi is a corruption of Shiva. The younger brother, Reetha, was made a shepherd and given a flock. This reflected the father’s two occupations (peše) – he was a shepherd who officiated over Shiva rituals. He ordered Kaintha to stay at home and worship Shiva, and Reetha, who was younger and smarter, bought 400 sheep and goats and began shepherding in the mountains. While both had flocks, Kaintha followed the Gaddi tradition that the eldest should live at home and take care of his father and property. As Reetha moved about from state to state, earning money and becoming shrewd (cālak) in business, Kaintha remained at home taking care of the family. Reetha would send money home.
After several decades, there became a division in the house. The cause was that Kaintha began to say that he is the equal shareholder of the flock. And Reetha replied that he’s the one doing hard work, sleeping in the mountains, and Kaintha’s got everything settled. He just rings the worship bell (ghantī). The flock was not divided, but the house was. After a few generations, all the Gaddi offspring of Reetha spread throughout the mountains, even down to Punjab, and Kaintha’s offspring stayed only in Bharmaur. Kaintha’s offspring (santân) were called Sippi, and Reetha’s offspring were called Gaddi.

The account of a brotherly dispute leading to ethnogenesis and divided castes is commonly invoked and genuinely felt by villagers. The story of Kaintha and Reetha has widespread acceptance throughout Sippi villages, to such a degree that it is treated as paramount evidence for tribal inclusion in the legislative petition. “It’s an oral tradition handed down to us from our ancestors,” a Sippi youth explained, “but it’s true.” My initial reaction was to consider such stories as figurative shorthand, but as villagers of all ages and educational cohorts faithfully repeated the narrative time after time, I had to check my own prejudicial skepticism. While my inclination is to analyze the instrumental use of oral narratives to position actors within frameworks of collective social aspiration – for Sippis, ST recognition as Gaddi shamans – I could not dismiss that what may appear to be opportunistic historical fungability is, in everyday practice, a heartfelt axiom of caste identity, and, by extension, of selfhood.

Having said that, one additional aspect demands attention. In popular retelling, the story is further embellished to account for the historical division of social status leading to SC status for Sippis. “Gaddis will wrongly tell you that we used to be landless tenants (pāū),” a Sippi elder explained, “and this is the cause of our stigma (lānchan) which made us Scheduled Caste.” The opposing narrative is long and convoluted; it involves an illicit love affair and forbidden child (nazāś aulād) between a Sippi widow and Gaddi landowner (zamīndār). The Gaddi refused legal ownership of the child and vengefully accused the widow of incestuous relationships with
her brother. He initiated a moratorium on intercaste relations – “end hookah, end bread, end children” – which persists to the present. The Gaddi zamīndār curried favor from the Raja of Chamba, and Sippis were demoted in social ranking within the Gaddi community. Thus, a brotherly feud between Gaddi Rajputs suggestively links prehistory with the current demands of state recognition.

“Our Guru”: Trilochan Mahadev and Social Aspiration

“If you hear this story from a Gaddi Rajput, they will tell it to you in another way.” The legend of Trilochan Mahadev does sound different when retold by Sippis; most obviously, the Sippiness of the eponymous hero is not overlooked, as is often the case when retold by Gaddi Rajputs. Sippis deify Trilochan and proclaim him as “their own” guru. He is not merely Shiva’s tailor; his divine selection and tragic deification establish a hereditary link between Balode (Sippi cele living in Sachuin village) and Sippis throughout Himachal Pradesh. “Trilochan was a Sippi, and we are his offspring. Our son-in-law is the son of a major Baloda Sippi,” an elder prefaced before launching into the narrative. Such personal flourishes propel Sippi aspiration for tribal inclusion by highlighting their functional interdependence with Gaddis as ritual intermediaries – not abstractly, but through hereditary bloodlines – a discursive strategy to create propinquity with Gaddis and distance from Gaddi Dalits. The narrative is as follows:

Shankar-ji was walking towards Chaurasi in the form of a wizened shepherd he arrived at Khani and met an old woman (budhiyā). He requested salt for his flock grazing in the high pasturulands at Dhancho. They were a poor Sippi family – what poor family had so much salt on hand? She apologetically refused his request. But Shankar advised her to go inside and check the storage box (kanjal), and when she did her disbelief turned into amazement. The box was brimming with a dense heap of salt! Shankar-ji requested 16 kilograms (man); it was poured into a sheepskin pouch (khalṛū). The pouch was far too heavy for the weary shepherd, who requested that her son, Trilochan, act as a porter in exchange for payment. Trilochan heaved the pouch onto his back, supported by

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4Wagner (2015, 123-4) reflects the tendency for Gaddi Rajputs to claim Trilochan as their own in some accounts.
crisscrossing ropes over his shoulders, and began to follow the old man towards the highland pastures.

Along the way, Shankar-ji created several illusions to trick Trilochan. From the outset, fresh goat feces (taze mingāṇā rai) littered the road, giving the impression that a flock lay ahead. When they reached Dhanchho, smoldering embers and washed utensils suggested that the flock had moved further upland. However, there was no flock and Shankar-ji was enticing Trilochan towards Manimahesh Mountain. Weighed down by the pouch of salt, Trilochan asked the old man, with a trace of complaint in his voice, “How much further?” But Shankar-ji deflected his question and outpaced the boy. He disappeared around a ledge.

There are two accounts of what transpired next. Some say that Trilochan never caught up; he arrived at Dal Lake, at the base of Mount Manimahesh, and neither was the old man nor his flock anywhere in sight. Trilochan found recent footprints at the muddied edge of the water, suggesting that the old man had jumped in. Others say that Trilochan kept pace with Shankar-ji, watched him jump in, and followed him. After all, Trilochan is often described as a simple young man. Regardless of the exact sequence of events, Trilochan dove in and sunk to the bottom, where he entered Patal Lok (Shiv Lok) and came face-to-face with a yogi, his divine visage illuminated by firelight. There could be no doubt: the old shepherd was Shankar-ji.

“Make me a Gaddi coat (colā),” Shankar-ji commanded, and was pleased with the result. Trilochan was employed as the personal tailor to Shankar-ji; he was given the design of a special colā and a place to work. He worked diligently, and as time wore on he began missing home. His wife, what would she be thinking? After exactly six months, he expressed these concerns to Shankar-ji, who permitted him to leave. Shankar-ji hardly gave Trilochan anything for six months of labor, just a pat on the back and he returned his sheepskin pouch with leftover scraps of cloth. As he sent him off, Shankar-ji made Trilochan promise not to tell anyone about his experience. With a sad face, Trilochan set off, disappointed with his reward – a pouch of useless cloth – after giving such dedicated service to Shankar-ji.

The useless cloth weighed down Trilochan as he arduously picked his way down the steep mountain trails. Sighing with frustration, he dumped the pouch over the ledge, dismayed to find out that instead of woolen scraps drifting away chunks of gold spilled from his pouch and tumbled down the mountainside, lost. Gaddis speculate that the name of the place called Dhanccho derives from this spilling of wealth (dhan).

The sound of his flute wafted into his village as he advanced towards home. A pandit sat in the courtyard conducting Trilochan’s six-month death ritual (chamahi). He and everyone else, except his family, scattered when Trilochan arrived like a spectral ghost. His mother had gone blind with disconsolate weeping, but when he returned so did her eyesight. Trilochan was in the unkempt condition of a siddh parūṣ, with scraggly beard and tattered clothes and stinking from head to toe.
Naturally, Trilochan’s wife demanded to know his whereabouts for six months, and Trilochan showed resolve and refused to tell. But you know how persistent wives are in their line of questioning, and she demanded to know everything. Trilochan knew that Shankar-ji had sworn him to secrecy, and he suspected that death was his punishment should he reveal the secret. But he bathed, changed his clothes, and told his wife everything: where he was, what he was doing, with whom. At this point there are two stories: In one account, Trilochan suddenly flew away, never to return. His corpse was found in the Budhal River in Bhaidua village. In another account, Trilochan disclosed his secret to his wife while they sat at the river’s edge, and no sooner did he speak the last word of his explanation that he tumbled into the water and sunk like a rock to the bottom. In any event, he died.

The Sarpanch of the village in which Trilochan died dreamt of Shankar-ji. Trilochan’s death was revealed to him, and he was instructed to retrieve the corpse of Shankar-ji’s devotee. He courageously tried, but to no avail. The corpse has been worn down by the rushing water, like a stone which breaks a waterfall. In fact, the corpse had taken on the properties of stone. It had transformed into the smoothed, cylindrical shape of a śivling. Some Sippis believe the śivlingremains submerged, but those living in Bhaidua village claim that the śivlingis installed at a temple commemorating the place of Trilochan’s death. Everyone agrees that the śivling named Trilochan Mahadev – the devotee of Lord Shiva whose ossified body stands first in the hereditary procession of Sippi cele.

The centrality of this narrative in establishing a space of Sippi belonging among Gaddis cannot be overstated. Gaddi villages in Kangra are lucky to have a single Sippi tailor versed in making traditional Gaddi apparel. As Gaddi vests, hats and blankets are being subsumed in a landslide of cheaper commercial options, the Sippi heritage as Gaddi tailors is being lost. But while Buttico stores selling “authentic” Himalayan ready-mades have rendered Gaddi tailoring economically unviable and as new forms of social aspiration among Sippi youth have left their grandparents’ spinning wheel and loom gathering dust on the verandah, the narrative of Trilochan Mahadev remains a central ethnicity marker.

Trilochan sacralizes an otherwise quotidian profession, allowing Sippis to reimagine their subsidiary role as subordinate sheep shearers in a way unavailable to Halis struggling with the legacy of patronage exploitation. It ennobles Sippi caste consciousness with a deified figurehead, from which many actively trace their ancestry. This is not only a source of local prestige; it
buttresses the self-worth of individuals struggling to feel accepted as “genuine” Gaddis. One elder, having narrated the legend of Trilochan, called his teenage son into the courtyard. “Bring your colā,” he ordered, and the boy returned wrapped in white cloth and fumbling with the black woolen rope belt. Beaming with pride as his son stood at stern attention, he continued, “We believe that this is the style of colā given to Trilochan by Shiv-ji under Dal Lake.” Such psychological encouragements are hard won among SC Gaddis.

Figure 5.1 A Sippi Tailor. Photo by author.

Another important aspect of the Trilochan narrative is the way in which it generates a cottage industry of genre spinoffs. In a manner analogous to the proliferation of Catholic saints, absent the cults of personality, Sippis trade stories of little purchase within the larger Gaddi community about the miraculous doings of Trilochan’s offspring. These stories are barbed critiques of social hierarchy, which correspond with popular village sentiment often relying on
hearsay. Such stories “constitute efforts to neutralize the stigmatizing construction of their caste identity coded and perpetuated by the dominant ideology” (Parish 1996, 117). While the legendary accounts of Trilochan broadly fit within Gaddi oral narrative, these spin-off Sippi “pasts” typically fall short of the set of Gaddi norms which “regulate the inherent debatability of the past in the present” (Appadurai 1981, 218). Although these pasts are not recognizable to most Gaddis and do not register with the Gaddi “normative organization of discourse concerning the past”, they are important sites of identity formation and group aspiration spoken from the tribal margins. The most commonly retold narrative has obvious (and presumably unintended) parallels to the divine earthquake that sprung Paul and Silas from jail (Acts 16:16-38).

You must have heard about the ruined palace in Chamba? Gaddis don’t believe this story. But the Raja of Chamba who lived in that palace – I can’t remember his name, maybe Singh? – he didn’t believe in Trilochan Mahadev and didn’t recognize his descendants. A time came when he even locked four Balode in his palace, direct descendants of Trilochan-ji! It is said that he locked them in a lowly black cell (kāli koṭhrī). From outside the cell he mocked them: “Who would accept this low [treatment]?” That night the Balode prostrated themselves and pleaded (āvāhan) to Shiva. And suddenly there was a huge explosion and the four walls of the palace began to crack and fall apart. Even today the ruined walls are visible. The king saw that the walls were about to collapse. And he realized why. He called the four Balode, whom he had imprisoned, and he fell at their feet and begged forgiveness. He even washed their feet; at that time, the custom was prevalent. The king took the blessing of the Balode, and no further ruin came upon him. It used to be this way: Balode would sit in the road and give blessings to the people. Whenever Sippis were insulted, destruction came; whenever Sippis were respected, blessings came.

Moreover, Sippis hook the Trilochan legend into established Gaddi lore in such a way that contrasts their purity with Gaddi mendacity. Gaddis frequently recount the efforts of a shepherd to crest Mount Mahimahesh. He miraculously carried 101 sheep in his colā, sacrificing one each step as mandated as he advances towards the peak. Merely a few steps away from summiting, he reaches into his colā to discover it empty; nevertheless, he advances forward and
is transformed into stone.

When Sippis retell this story, Trilochan becomes the central motivation for the Gaddi effort. “The real altercation between Sippis and Gaddis began when Trilochan-ji became acclaimed (jayjaykār),” a Sippi elder explained. “At that time, the leaders of the Gaddi caste asked, ‘If a Sippi can go into Manimahesh Mountain and receive an audience (darśan) with Shiv-ji, then why can’t Gaddis go as well?’ So a Gaddi set off for Shiv darśan, only he tried a different method.” The elder recounted the story of the sheep sacrifices, emphasizing Gaddi jealousy. “He was thinking about Trilochan-ji when he advanced those last steps without a sacrifice. ‘A Sippi had darśan; I will also,’ he was thinking.” After he is transformed into stone, the Sippis add a second act: Parvathi appears and questions Shiva as to why Trilochan-ji was allowed darśan while the Gaddi was not. “Trilochan served me with devotion,” Shiva responds. “I know what was in his mind when he jumped into Dal Lake. And I saw what was in the mind of this Gaddi: pride (ahankār).”

These narrative contestations have real-life consequences. The Raihalu sub-caste of Gaddis living in Kansar and other mountain villages above Bhaderwah (in J&K) are considered the descendants of this avaricious Gaddi shepherd who tried to summit Manimahesh and become an equal of Trilochan Mahadev. For as long as anyone can remember, Raihalu Gaddis on the Jammu side are prohibited from going on the Manimahesh pilgrimage. They were given a multi-generational curse (śrāp), whereas the Raihalu Gaddis in Himachal Pradesh have no such prohibition. Although Sippis are slotted below Gaddis in terms of caste ranking, they take great pleasure in ribbing their Raihalu neighbors. Trilochan took darśan of Shiva and his descendants are Balode oracles integral to sacred bathing at Dal Lake. Raihalu cannot even attend the pilgrimage – and when they do, they are punished. Stories circulate about how a Raihalu man
was recently told by a cēlā that he could go on pilgrimage despite the curse. He came back and fell ill with paralysis (laqavā). Some believe that his sickness was because he violated Shiva’s curse; others say that he came back from pilgrimage healthy and that a member of his own caste put black magic on him because they were afraid of how his selfishness might endanger the whole community. He remains paralyzed and no Raihalu has gone to Manimahesh since.

Such oral narratives about the deification of Trilochan and the miraculous lives of his descendants are integral to the construction of caste purity among Sippi ethnic entrepreneurs. Such stories have proliferated among Sippis, who claim Trilochan as “their own” deity. However, there are no accompanying anthropomorphic representations. Instead, Sippis often point to a śivling installed inside their homes or in nearby family shrines and describe its representation as Trilochan. “When he fell into the Budhal River and died, his body transformed into a śivling,” an elder explained. “I have never seen it, but it is kept alongside the river.” While the śivling is widely worshipped among Hindus in the region, and Gaddis are no exception, its aniconic form encourages polyvalent interpretations. For Sippis, the śivling symbolizes the potentiality of Lord Shiva and the historical personage Trilochan, the tailor whose courageous leap into Dal Lake and interim in Shiv Lok led to his deification. By particularizing an omnipresent symbol of aniconic Hinduism in the specifics of caste history, Sippis imbue the śivling with collective aspiration as co-equals among Gaddis.

**Mythic Enactments: Manimahesh Yatra**

The legend of Trilochan becomes the symbolic architecture for the annual Manimahesh pilgrimage, during which devotees venerate the sacred sites associated with his journey and perform ritual ablution (nhauṇ) in Dal Lake (Yadav 2006, 61). Scholars have explored the
vertical spatiality of Gaddi divinity, and the ways in which place-making practices recursively loop mountain topography and Gaddi myth (Wagner 2013; Kaushal 2001, 38). Cosmology, ritual practice, temple architecture, traditional dress, pilgrimage – a synthetic Gaddi worldview is affirmed through place-making practices such as the Manimahesh pilgrimage. Kaushal (2001, 35) analyzes the pilgrimage as an interlocking expression of spatiality, divinity and ecology that “validates and sanctifies the Gaddi identity and their cosmology”.

I want to extend her argument to the ongoing contestation over Gaddi belonging. How are expressions of Sippi self-worth and social aspiration interwoven with the above-described Balode, hereditary oracles whose ritual ablutions in Dal Lake lead to the commencement of the pilgrimage? How is the mythic charter of Trilochan put into practice through place-making practices? And how have Sippi identity entrepreneurs instrumentalized the Balode clan lineage as they shape their collective belonging as Gaddis through auto-ethnographic writing aimed at political reclassification? While the mutually-constituting realms of belief and spatial enactment are important sites of analysis, I want to focus on how pragmatic strategies of social legitimization and state recognition are bundled into mythic practice.

Analyzing the discordant narratives and heterogeneous caste- and class-based practices embedded within Gaddi pilgrimage is apace with recent studies of Himalayan pilgrimage (Sax 1991; Van der Veer 1988; Miles-Watson and Miles-Watson 2011). While pilgrimage creates liminal forms of symbolic interrelatedness that momentarily transcend hierarchical structural ties – as described in Turner’s classic formulation of *communitas* – it can also express different social positionalities. Discrete pilgrimage groups with heterogeneous social backgrounds and incompatible expectations meet on the path to Dal Lake: urban travelers with romanticized fantasies of communion with nature, rural travelers who undergo suffering for divine blessing,
NGOs concerned with ecological preservation, plains Hindus, tribal Gaddis and western backpackers. Social stratifications are marked through consumer choices, from the branded quality of hiking gear to helicoptering to Dal Lake or hiring packhorses and porters.

In addition to these forms of social capital are the ideological stratifications that shape the meaning of pilgrimage for different actors. Numerous religious and legendary narratives are enacted through the mountain hike and sacred bathing. “The landscape caters to a variety of clients and is shaped by each of them in turn” (Miles-Watson and Miles-Watson 2011, 331). Gaddis experience pilgrimage through mythologies of cosmic affirmation. Sippis “read the landscape” through a narrower caste history that links their sense of Gaddi belonging and hereditary kinship to Trilochan. Pilgrims from across India similarly transpose Hindu beliefs onto the landscape. These may be ecological theologies mixed with Western sensibilities about mountain conservation or specific mythic emphases that shape how divinity marks the landscape. Standing on the shores of Dal Lake, Sippis re-enact Trilochan’s dive into the murky waters and deification within Gaddi cosmology; others see Shiva’s ablutions after being spurned by Daksha, his father-in-law, leading to the death of his wife Sita, or the surreptitious bathing of the Pandava brothers, hidden in exile, or the gossamer abstracted lines of Sita’s sacred womb (yoni). “These kinds of narrativisations of the landscape create a connection between past events and present actions that direct our understanding of, and engagement with, the landscape as we reconstitute it” (Miles-Watson and Miles-Watson 2011, 323).

They also form connective tissue with discursive and social propositions, such as the status accorded Sippis within Gaddi social organization. How Sippis experience pilgrimage is the inner nucleus of a larger contestation over their political status as tribal aspirants and social status as ritual functionaries. Understanding how Gaddi identity is enacted through pilgrimage
means accounting for role of Balode in Sippi sociopolitical aspiration. Outside of the tribal belt, their SC status marks them as “not-Gaddi” in popular discourse. Conversely, I want to highlight how Sippis have folded their hereditary link to Trilochan and ongoing ritual centrality into a strategy for social uplift as unrecognized tribals. Their traditional caste vocation as sheep shearsers and tailors has, in contrast to other Gaddi Dalits, proven fertile discursive material for locating their group identity within the tropes of “authentic” Gaddi identity, buttressed by internal discourses and legitimized through the state criteria for tribal belonging.

Most Sippis describe a linear progression, from mythic past to contemporary sociopolitical aspiration. Gaddis fled from Lahore to preserve their Hindu practice; after settling in Gadderan, a family dispute led to ethnogenesis and the subordination of Sippis. Gaddi arrogance and Sippi humility led to Trilochan’s selection as Shiva’s cela; his ancestral line, called Balode, continues to the present and establishes the ongoing ritual purity and vitality of Sippis within the Gaddi tribe, as enacted through the Manimahesh pilgrimage. Reclassification of Kangra Gaddi Rajputs and Bhatt Brahman as ST in 2002 did not extend to Sippis, despite their purchase on tribal qualities (shamanism, pastoralism and mobility). This has led Sippis to assert their purity over Gaddi Dalits and appeal for state recognition as misrecognized Rajputs, drawing inspiration and practical resources from their successful tribal redesignation in J&K, the reverberations of which are seen in caste jockeying among Halis who are legally and performatively Sippi. One Sippi elder succinctly summarized these points: “When Virbhadra Singh [the long-running Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh] goes on the Manimahesh Yatra, he must touch the feet of a Balode and receive permission to bathe. How could this be possible if we are truly Dalits?”

This exceptionalism is yearly affirmed through the Manimahesh pilgrimage. Until Balode
bath in Dal Lake on Janamashtami, having left Sachuin village three days prior, the pilgrimage cannot commence. Their journey begins with a physical transformation – from everyday Sippis to the physical embodiment of divinity. Gaddi garb has dual significations. Within the Gaddi cultural worldview, each garment is laden with symbolic reference: the white overcoat (*colā*) is spun from woolen cloth (*patti*) and is believed to be Shiva’s original garments; the coarse black rope belt (*dorā*) heaps around the waist like the locks of Shiva’s matted hair; and the flat cap (*topī*) sits jauntily askance on the head, representing the peak of Mount Kailash and the side covering Parvathi’s inner sanctum (Kaushal 2001, 36). In a practical sense, however, Gaddi traditional attire is viewed as outmoded and distinctly unmodern – worn during proscribed occasions, such as weddings, festivals and cultural performances. Although the *colā* has cognates among other Pahadi ethnic groups, it functions as a sartorial symbol of Gaddi belonging. The performative and expressive changes that Balode undergo to become embodiments of Shiva are collectively repurposed by Sippis as evidence of inclusion.

As they descend from their village to the transfixing vibrations of the drum (*paun*), they enter the *axis mundi* of Gaddi life, the Chaurasi Temple, which is a microcosm of sacred geography. They journey on to Mount Manimahesh, via Hadsar, Dhanachho, Gauri Kund and several sacred sites associated with Trilochan Mahadev. At the edge of Dal Lake, a sacrificial goat head is lobbed into the waters. After the Balode have finished bathing, pilgrims may enter the water. For one glorious moment, the Sippi Balode are vessels of divinity: devotees throng around them as they offer blessings and prognostications. Kaushal (2001, 38) describes how “[s]uch an empowerment of the low-caste *chelas* helps to suspend the social order and transcend it and return back to it, though not before having validated it through its very suspension and transcendence”.

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I agree that caste transcendence is momentarily achieved through ritual performance, a short-lived achievement that in the mind of Gaddis may merely affirms caste hierarchy. However, emphasis on temporal ritual performance misses how Sippi tribal aspirations are tightly interwoven with the ritual functions of Balode. Throughout the year, dangling like as many loose threads from the Gaddi heartland to the Kangra fringes, the functions of the Balode take on additional discursive heft – to create propinquity with Gaddis (often at the expense of mocking Bhatt Brahman, who must touch the feet of Balode) and to highlight their superior social status over Gaddi Dalit aspirants. This “highness” has shaped the self-perception of Halis, not only because Sippis refuse to join Gaddi Dalit ethnic associations but more fundamentally because status emulation and local caste jockeying inadvertently help to legitimate the Sippi worldview.

**Status Emulation**

On a sultry afternoon, Bihari and I met with a cross-section of Hali women in village X, variously engaged in child rearing, sewing, sieving grain and idle chatter. A wrinkled uncle reclined in a plastic chair sunbathing in the courtyard, nearly senile and uninterested in our conversation. All able-bodied men out of earshot were ploughing the distant fields. We wanted to understand how virilocality impacts women’s perception of caste. Many women shift into X, Pathiyar and surrounding villages in the rural outskirts of Lower Dharamsala as newlywed Halis and, sometimes unexpectedly, find out that their husbands are Sippis and so too will be their future offspring according to the law. This shift actively influences social presentation with neighboring Chaudhries, Dumne and especially Gaddis, who often consider Sippis to be more within the Gaddi fold than other Dalit aspirants. Although both Halis and Sippis remain SC in
Himachal Pradesh, Sippis remain closest to the Gaddi touchability line due to their ancestral link to shamanism. Hali women who marry into these villages must learn to present themselves accordingly, and sometimes to file official caste corrections to bolster their new social personas with state validation.

“We Halis call ourselves as Sippis here. When we left our family homes in Holi, Chunhouta and Lambu, we were Halis, and now we call ourselves Sippis in our in-laws (sasurāl).” The women on the verandah broke out in giggles. A nineteen-year-old woman timidly chimed in: “I just got married, so I’m still a Hali. But I need to change my caste certificate.” The other women teased her: “You’ll be a Sippi soon!” “I didn’t even know about this situation when I got married,” she shot back. “My parents must have known, but I only found out after arriving here. It’s really confusing!”

Bihari asks how this happened. “In the past, Hali elders did it for social benefit. Compared to Halis, Sippis are considered higher. They are not Gaddis; they don’t have ST status. They have SC status like us. But they are closer to Gaddi.” Although these women consider themselves as socially Hali and culturally Gaddi, they attribute the adoption of Sippi caste as a product of discrimination. “Before it was even worse. We couldn’t touch Gaddis. We couldn’t walk near them. Now we don’t share bartan or invite each other into our homes. If they call us to a function, they sit us apart and last. I’ve never sat on top of a Gaddi floor stove. And the condition here is better than in Chamba.”

The higher social status of Sippis compared to Gaddi Dalits is well noted. Sippis roundly refused to share a hookah stem with Rihare or accept cooked food from them (Phillimore 1982, 113). Gaddis may have furtively drank tea with Sippis, but never Rihare – “something more than a tolerated indiscretion” (Phillimore 1982, 122). Sippis were often fed at ritual feasts in the last
sitting in the same row as Gaddis, while Rihare were fed, if at all, around the side of the home or given food to bring home. Sippis participated in village jāgrās and receive prasād, whereas Rihare were “regarded more as village servants fulfilling a task on behalf of the community as a whole than as full participants and contributors” (Phillimore 1982, 149). Sippis benefited from the profitable business of shearing wool and making blankets (pattu), whereas Rihare lacked even peripheral access to flock wealth. Sippis often barred Rihare from entering their homes and conducting business and social transactions in the courtyard. To this day, Sippi oracles command greater respect and relaxed restrictions among Gaddis. Following Parry (1979, 103, 112-3), Phillimore notes the structural similarity between Sippis and Kolis in the wider Kangra caste hierarchy. His study of Karnathu suggests what is obvious in multi-sited fieldwork; namely that Sippis are more included in the Gaddi fold than Gaddi Dalits, especially Dhogris and Badis, who have ambiguous ancestral links to Bharmaur and the Gadderan.

The discrepancy between official records and lived social status has led to fluid and situational identities. Across Kangra, those Gaddi-identifying Halis consider Sippi-converted Halis to be “documented” (kāgazī taur par) Sippis who betray caste unity by hiding in the margins of caste enumeration. Among “real” Sippis, Sippi-converted Halis are considered inauthentic, deceptive and clever; among Gaddis, their Sippiness is no different than Hali Aryanness, a tissue-thin euphemism for status inferiority. Among Chaudhry castes, they are often lumped into a generic Gaddi tribe and differences in reservation status are elided.

To village women, shifting caste identities matter less in terms of self-identification than unchanging clan titles (al). Clan lineages not only structure exogamous marriage alliances; in vernacular usage, they also connote some defining feature – either related to occupation, physical characteristic or, most commonly, place name (usually from Bharmaur, but occasionally clan
titles are conferred in Kangra and reference back to Bharmaur). With the line between Hali and Sippi officially eroded, villagers explain how caste-specific *al* are given precedence.

“Caste…who knows (*na jāne*)? We know each other’s sub-castes: she’s Delkan, and she’s Jurgu,” a woman explained, pointing out women on the verandah. For most, these clan titles are shorthand for caste and birth village in Chamba, oftentimes used as affectionate nicknames. In contrast to the arbitrary division of Hali, Sippi and Arya, *al* are felt by married women to express at least something unchanging, a moniker that sustains their often-nostalgic link to their villages in Gadderan.

Similarly, *gotras* (fictive clans) are universally adopted across Gaddi castes, although they are not equally felt. The classical *gotra* system binds each grouping “by fictitious ties of descent to one or another of the sages (*rishi*) after whom the *gotra* is named. In other words, each person in a *gotra* fictitiously traces his or her descent to a single common ancestor, and two persons claiming descent from the same *gotra*-*rishi* are forbidden from marrying each other” (Jayaraman 2005, 484). While this practice is of Brahmanical origin, Rajputs and Jats across North India have adopted *gotras*, including Gaddis. In vernacular use, Gaddis as high-caste Bhattas and Rajputs are perceived to embody legitimate *gotras* – and are, in practice, incompatible with tribal identity – while discrediting SC Gaddis who have more recently begun emulating Brahmanical orthodoxy and adopting *gotras*. For example, Badis and Halis are often mocked for adopting the Bharadwaj *gotra*, named after Saptarishi, one of the seven patriarchs of Vedic religion.

Presumably because of their caste ranking, *gotra* identification is more automatic and heartfelt, a source of felt prestige among SC Gaddis. As Phillimore noted in and around Karnathu village, Sippis “(perhaps predictably) were more interested than the two high castes in
recalling their gotra” (1982, 107). I found that for SC Gaddis who struggle with mismatching social and official identities – Sippi- and Arya-converted Halis in Himachal Pradesh, and Koli-converted Sippis in J&K – gotra identification is even more pronounced. Surnames may reflect gotra in a way previously limited to Gaddis. Because of the slippage between Hali and Sippi, clan names – both real (al) and fictive (gotra) – take on additional resonance in grounding personal identity. Whereas Halis gently rib themselves and each other over their faux Sippiness (after all, it does not undermine their SC benefits like Arya conversion), there is an intensification around the realness of one’s al and gotra.

For many decades, emphasizing clan titles over protean caste identities was only externally challenged by Gaddis. Recently, however, group-internal efforts are underway to instrumentally reidentify with caste. This has led to open campaigns to reclaim Halis who identify otherwise. Fifteen years ago, several prominent Hali identity entrepreneurs arrived in Pathiyar for a presentation on Hali identity. During their rally for caste unity, backed by MLA Tulsi Ram, and accompanying chants of “become Hali!” (Hali bāno!), caste hiding was openly addressed. It was described as a form of ethnic dilution that obscured the Hali population during village enumerations and further impeded entering the tribal quota. “Rakesh [the president of the Hali Vikas Mahasangh] came from Chanhouta,” a woman remembered, “and Comrade Pratap came from Gamru, and they told us to abandon all this Sippi-Suppi.” The use of Hindi reduplicative signals a kind of game being played around Sippi identity, trappings of reality signifying nothing.

Villagers had grown accustomed to considering their caste identity as an inherited misnomer of little functional significance. Now they were being told that their caste was a crucial marker of cultural heritage, collective memory and demographic significance. For the first time,
villagers were confronted with an ultimatum. On the one hand, they could maintain the official charade of their Sippiness while interpersonally emphasizing clan identities, a strategy of Sanskritization which might, over generations, lead to higher social status within their immediate village surroundings. Doing so would deemphasize Hali unification efforts and reframe ethnicity around the high-caste ritual functions attributed to Sippis. This would be anathema to Dalit consciousness espoused by Hali ethnic associations. On the other hand, villagers could petition the state for caste corrections, opening their circumscribed lives to cascading frustration and financial loss as they try to navigate government bureaucracy. Success would entail officially replacing Sippi with Hali and pretensions of ritual purity with overtures of Dalit oppression. Such a move would likely confirm their SC status, even though ethnic entrepreneurs believe that raising awareness about STD liminality will provide the firmest legal springboard for achieving tribal status for Dalits and, in some cases, Dalit protections for tribals. They argue that strengthening Dalit consciousness among self-affirming Halis would eventually lead to social acceptance and more prestigious social benefits.

Several years have passed, and pleas for caste unity routinely fall on Sippi-named Halis. But to no avail. “We felt like if we point out our Hali caste, we would become useless (bekār),” a woman explained, drawing affirmations from the other women on the verandah. They appear content to base their presentational social identities on real and fictive clan names – and as a result nostalgically link up with their childhood homes and blood relatives in Gadderan. Hali men are equally unmoved by pleas of caste reconversion. The logic of STD seems too quixotic and divorced from everyday practicalities. The likelihood of successfully moving down a conveyor belt of recognition from Sippi-named Halis to Halis to Gaddi Dalits to STDs receiving tribal benefits seems too remote; the process too arduous and confounding. The loss of even the
flimsiest form of caste prestige as official Sippis induces too much social vulnerability.

Meanwhile, the greater assimilation of Sippis in tribal life, and their constructed caste superiority over Gaddi Dalits, often stymies a sense of shared Dalit experience and is conveniently manipulated by dominant Gaddi interests. I agree with Parish (1996, 207-8) that the reduplication of hierarchy posturing among Sippis (spilling into Hali emulation) both mitigates some of the psychic and social damage of impurity and turns it into a resource for self-elevation. It also prevents Gaddi Dalits from unifying and finding strength in greater numbers.

The Tribal Scheduling of J&K Sippis

In 1992, a legislative act was passed in Jammu and Kashmir to amend the 1989 Scheduled Tribe Order. It ordered the scheduling of four new tribes: Gujjar, Bakarwal, Gaddi and Sippi. This amendment increased the number of tribes in J&K to 12, including the Ladakhi Buddhist tribes such as Mon, Changpa and Brokpa. At the time of awarding ST status, Gaddis in J&K numbered 39,124 and Sippis at 6,195. Their population, spread across villages in Doda and Kathua districts and settled in Udhampur city, was 13 times less than the combined total of Muslim Gujjars and Bakarwals, who comprised about 8% of the state-wide population (Registrar General of India, 1987). Gaddis and Sippis live dispersed in mountainside hamlets two hours above Bhaderwah city. Kakol and Kansar account for approximately 85 families, and a handful of others are scattered in Bharo, Dhamnuda Bharai, Seri and Banjala. This section draws from data collected during two months of fieldwork in Bahderwah town and adjacent villages in Doda district, and from interviews with Gaddi intellectuals based in Udhampur.

The Sippis of J&K experience their Gaddiness in complimentary and contrasting ways with the Sippis of Kangra. Although granted ST status in 1992, Sippi ethnic entrepreneurs
continue to pressure the Government of J&K with appeals, bolstered by auto-ethnographies, for Koli inclusion as concealed Sippis. Analogous to caste conversion practices among Halis in Kangra, the Koli population in Shipota and Udhampur intermarry with Sippis, speak Gaddi dialect and for all non-official purposes are locally considered Sippis. However, their exclusion from the ST award has generated anti-BJP sloganeering from across the political spectrum, from Sippi elders to leaders of the Jammu Kashmir National Panther Party (JKNPP).

As this section explores, J&K Sippis also channel their struggle for social validation and caste equality through ritual and legendary oral accounts. Intermarriage between Gaddis and Sippis is unheard of, and segregated sacred spaces, cremation grounds and eating practices at functions are the continued norms of social hierarchy. The awarding of ST status to J&K Sippis, not as an integral part of the Gaddi community but as a separate tribe unto itself, paradoxically enshrines difference as a means of social equality. This separate-but-equal government solution reflects social realities that are neither separate nor equal. Scheduling Sippis as an independent tribe has divided the Sippi community between gratefulness and resentment about the so-called “and wall” (aur kī divār) – Gaddi and Sippi Tribes, plural – that further beclouds Sippi identity and impedes Gaddi acceptance. Most Sippis privately fret about being tribal but not Gaddi given their interdependence with Gaddis. They feel that the government award has further entrenched perceived differences and impeded the birth of a multicultural Gaddi order.

On the other hand, the spectral threat of Islamic separatism and ethnopolitical mobilization have led to an othering “us-them” opposition that bolsters social solidarity between generically Hindu Sippis and Gaddis. In strong contrast with the situation throughout Himachal Pradesh, where pastoralism is widely viewed as atavistic and has happily been replaced with sedentary wage labor (especially in the tourist sector), J&K Gaddis genuinely lament the loss of
pastoralism. They blame the rise of Islamic militancy in the early 1990s for restricted pastureland access and a culture of jungle terror that stripped them of a profitable profession and communal identification. The social minoritization of the J&K Gaddi community – as a tribal band alienated from the Bharmauri heartland and tenuously connected to identity markers – is further reinforced by the perception of Islamic demographic, social and legislative dominance. As such, social cohesion between these hierarchically scaled castes is stronger than in Himachal Pradesh, buttressed by shared feelings of terror and distrust at Muslim neighbors and an opposing government administration.

Kansar village is a hamlet without motorable road connectivity perched above Bhaderwah town. During a month of fieldwork in early summer, I often chatted with passers-by. “I have to buy new sneakers every three months,” a schoolchild joked while running his palm over the smoothed sole of his shoddy footwear. A college student complained that he is underperforming on exams because of wasted time in transit. Every morning and early evening, about 30 Sippi students and many more adults traverse the “up-down” (ūpar-nīce) that connects them to the widened employment opportunities, educational facilities and sociopolitics of Bhaderwah. Bhaderwah city is nicknamed the “Kerala of J&K” by locals for its historic degree college, high literacy rate and contribution to the arts. Accordingly, some Gaddis from Kansar village have abandoned their property and agricultural fields and surrounding mountain villages and taken up permanent residence in Bhaderwah. With the notable exception of Shiv Kumar, a respected Sippi ayurvedic doctor (vaid) with a shop in Sairi Bazaar and a home at the city perimeter, Sippis are largely unable to buy or rent accommodation in the city. As a result, an hour down and two hours up are wasted in transit.

In the past 28 years, political conflagrations have uncomfortably closed the gap between
Bhaderwah city and Gaddi mountain villages. On May 21st, 1990, members of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) opened fire, allegedly without provocation, on thousands of mourners participating in the funeral procession of Molvi Muhammad Farooq, the spiritual leader (mirwaiz) of the Kashmir Valley and chairman of the All Jammu and Kashmir Awami Action Committee. En route to the Eidgah Martyrs Graveyard in Srinagar, the procession was allegedly shouting pro-Kashmir slogans when it reached the Gowkadal Bridge and met with gunfire. There were 21 official fatalities. In response, dozens of Bhaderwahi youth allegedly absconded to Pakistan to undertake resistance training. “Most Muslims sided with the fighters (mujahid) and rejected the military presence,” a Bachelor's student born after the events described to me. “They returned to Bhaderwah and received our sympathy,” even as, he continued, local Muslims and especially Gujjars and Bakerwals suffered harassment at their hands. In 2017, Masood Ahmed Beigh, the Jammu and Kashmir State Human Rights Commission Deputy Superintendent of Police, released an interim report holding 15 CRPF officers guilty of indiscriminate massacre (Kashmir Convener 2017).

In the past decades, military brutalities and the excesses of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) in Srinagar have impacted Bhaderwahi communalism and led to spill over violence in Gaddi villages. Beginning on August 15th, 1992, guerrilla-style insurgencies claimed the lives of 180 civilians within two years in Doda District, including Muslim informants and Hindu shepherds (Baweja 1994). Communalism intensified in 1994 when, in the span of a week, Swami Raj Katal, the BJP district Vice President, and Ruchir Kumar, RSS leader and political firebrand, were both assassinated in Bhaderwah. While Hindus retaliated by assaulting Muslims and razing their homes, the Border Security Force chased insurgents into mountain preserves.

In Kansar village, a splintered hole in a wooden verandah beam is the last visible marker
of the ensuing gun battle between Sippis and fleeing militants. According to the Kansar lambredār, militants fired warning shots into the air while encircling Kansar Sippis and Gaddis huddled in houses, armed with knives and a few misfiring firearms called “twelve anklet bells” (barahbor) due to their arcane loading mechanism. Until early the next morning, the lambredār exhausted the fifty or so rounds of ammunition stockpiled from surrounding homes. Eventually three Indian soldiers slipped into his home and overwhelmed the militants with superior firepower. They fled to nearby Dandi village, where they were apprehended.

Figure 5.2 Sippi boys in Kansar showing the remnants of militancy on village life. Photo by the author.

“It is told (sunī sunāī vālī bāt) that a captured militant described to the police how in our village he was followed by a woman, dressed in blood red, sometimes darting in front and back
and side-to-side, always escaping his gunfire. We believe that this woman is Chandi Mata”, the lambredār continued, the protector deity of Kansar renown for slaying a local monster (rākshas), whose gigantic calcified molar tooth remains enshrined in the local temple as oracular evidence.

For most Gaddis, either the perception of Islamic violence or first-hand experience with militants is the stated background for in-group tribal belonging. Although Bhaderwah is not a site of intense communalism, pastoral tribes periodically find themselves caught in the crosshair of Hindu-Muslim violence. The assassination of Ruchir Kumar was a watershed moment. More recently, however, Quranic verses were allegedly found packed inside exploded firecrackers in Sairi Bazaar in the aftermath of Dassahera, a prominent Hindu festival. A photograph circulated on social media of charred Quranic verses spilling out of blackened firecracker shells. From the floor of the Jama Masjid, leaders of the Anumani Islamia called for a ban against Hindus. “Those of you feeling so much emotion (jazbā) about this injustice should not buy even one liter of petrol from a Hindu”, a Muslim described to me. The Hindu families most prominently involved in anti-Muslim hooliganism (pange kā kām) are not Gaddi, and in general Hindu and Muslim shepherds are viewed as affected bystanders or conscientious objectors in the political wrangling of the “Hindus Unite” sloganeering of the Sangh Parivar or the anti-state agitations of Jamat di Islami and Anjumani Islamia.

The social fallout of the threat of Islamic militancy, real or perceived, is the notion among Gaddis that caste-based discrimination is effectively consigned to the past. Parveen Jariyal, president of the All Jammu and Kashmir Gaddi Sippi Tribes Welfare Association, bluntly declared that since the 1990s the only meaningful social division is between Hindus and Muslims. “Before militancy, Gaddis treated Sippis just like they do in Bharmaur – discrimination (chutachāt) at feasts and on stoves. But militancy in Bhaderwah has nearly eliminated Gaddi
discrimination. We are now part of a two-party system: Hindu versus Muslim.”

During bouts of communal intensification, Sippis and Gaddis formed alliances borne from fear of wandering militants in the dense underbrush between mountainside villages. “We would only travel down to [Bhaderwah] in groups of fifteen. It didn't matter then who was Gaddi [Rajput] and who was Sippi. We were in something together.” Such fears are directly correlated with abandoning pastoralism as a viable lifestyle. The maximum damage during militancy happened to Gaddis because our entire profession (pāśā) was undermined”, Parveen continued. We had to sell our flocks; we couldn't even go into the mountains. Many of us had to abandon our homes and fields. Only the bravest Gaddis would dare go into the mountains to reason with the militants, saying ‘We are poor; please excuse us and our flocks.’ But after several Gaddis were murdered, even the bravest could not overcome the restrictions. You see, we decided as a community that life is more important. It was our loss. I tried to graze my flock secretly (chupchup ke), but I too gave it up.

Such nostalgia for pastoralism is unique to J&K Gaddis, primarily associated with Islamic militancy but inseparable from the perceived inadequacies many J&K Gaddis feel as tribals without flocks, sheep sacrifices and ties to homeland. Anxieties over belonging are often displaced onto Muslim neighbors.

Across Bhaderwah, Gaddis downplay caste discrimination against Sippis by emphasizing shared distrust of Muslims. Sippis also emphasize the perceived common threat of Muslim separatists, although not to the extent that it completely ameliorates Gaddi discriminations. Parallel communal fraternity is evident between Gaddis, Gujjars and Bakerwals, as all shepherding people, regardless of religious affiliation, are impacted by militancy. Routes are impacted by the closing of the Line of Control and, emboldened by AFSPA, the BSF sometimes mistakenly fire on shepherds. As Gujjars and Bakarwals moved into the higher reaches of the Pir Panjal range for seasonal migration, they were often “sandwiched” between armed insurgents
and additional suspicion/surveillance from Indian armed forces; this quickly led to more than 39 percent of shepherds abandoning their profession in the early years of conflict (Suri 2014, 58-9). Hindu Gaddis faced even more precarity leading their flocks to highland pastures. Fraternity between Hindu and Muslim shepherds, both unwittingly caught in the crosshairs of escalating state violence, leads some mainstream Bhaderwahi Muslims to denigrate Muslim shepherds for their neutrality and willingness to sympathize with Hindu Gaddis. Gaddis often invoke a communal comparison: the social solidarity between Gaddis and Sippis are analogous to that between Gujjars and Bakerwals.

From the outset of research in Bhaderwah, a primary goal was to understand if the awarding of ST status to Sippis ameliorated social stigma and provided communal uplift and inclusion as Gaddi. This is, after all, the plea of Gaddi Dalits throughout Himachal Pradesh. The data suggests trends in both directions. On the one hand, the intensification of some village customs reflects caste solidarity, such as the caste-reciprocal bringing of wood during funerary rites and death rituals (dāg). Militancy had undeniably pushed Gaddis and Sippis closer together and overlaid the rapid loss of pastoral lifeway with the sometimes-imagined and always-exaggerated patina of nostalgia and victimization. There is a rough economic equality within the Gaddi community; although some Gaddis have enough wealth to shift out of their village hamlets and into urban centers, many Sippis have availed themselves of interest-free loans, civil service employment and reserved university seats through the ST quota. Compared to the widening class cleavages in unevenly modernizing Dharamsala, Bhaderwahi villages are marked by only muted economic disparity.

On the other hand, Kansar typifies caste organization both in residency patterns and in segregated cremation grounds (śamsām ghāt) – Sippis are constrained to use Jaishu Nala,
whereas Gaddis choose between Naintu Kund and Duggi/Dandi. These separate cremation grounds are conventionally justified through the legendary account of two brothers divided by caste vocation. An elderly Gaddi woman explained, “Sippis want to have marriage relations (kurmāi) with us Gaddis. They say we are equal. But we won’t allow it; they are separate from us. I refuse to make relations with them. We [Gaddis] don’t attend their lifecycle ritual celebrations (marne jīne). We will give bartan, but we don’t share food. I don’t ever allow Sippis to come near my stovetop, and whenever they come I give them a chair and feed them but not near the kitchen. Child, this is a big difficulty (musībat).”

Figure 5.3 Displays of tribal unity and public protest for more equitable distribution of the Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) and the establishment of a Gaddi/Sippi university hostel. Photo courtesy of Parveen Jariyal.
She later offered me snacks, joking, “It is okay, child, we are clean (succe); you can eat from our hands.” Sippis oftentimes described how the greatest perpetrators of untouchability are not Rajputs but Gaddi Rajputs, with proximity and cultural sameness birthing new forms of resentment and distinction. This Freudian “narcissism of small differences” that leads to the exacerbation of minute distinctions in the maintenance of ethnic boundaries is best summarized in an oft-quoted idiom among Sippis that “brothers are the natural adversaries of brothers” (bhāī bhāī kā vairī hotā hai). Pocock (1972, 67) earlier identified how close affines and blood relatives can become intense sites of rivalry and status differentiation among agricultural castes in Gujarat.

Such exclusions extend to temple access. On the second floor of an animal shed in the village of Rindayu is a Chandi Mata temple, called Chound Mata by local Gaddis. She is a ferocious form of Shakti, a personification of divine feminine power. There are no lights or windows in the temple, and one must use a torch to take darśan of Shiva’s silver tridents and Chamunda’s golden representation, which was stolen but returned some years back. My guide, Subhash, explained to me as we crossed the threshold from outer to inner room that Sippis, Kolis and other SCs are not allowed to enter the mūrti room. “If they somehow enter by accident, without knowing that they shouldn’t, then Chound Mata will show forgiveness. But if they enter knowingly, this is very bad, and they will be punished by Mata. She is very powerful (śaktiśālī).”

After darśan, Subhash and village elders recalled some of the feats associated with the local manifestation of Rindayu Chound Mata. In one case, a Brahman temple priest with leprosy performed renunciatory acts (tapsyā) for Chound Mata for 24 years, surviving on neither food nor water. One night he had a vision of a young woman (kanyā) and was healed. In another case, a Brahman fell and shattered his jawbone. He could eat nothing and was slowly wasting away in
bed. Out of frustration his wife removed her marriage nose ring (nath), customarily done after the death of a husband, and threw it in the mud cursing Mata, “What difference does it make if I do this now or later; he’s basically dead either way!” That night Mata came, again in the form of a girl (kanjak) and healed her husband. When his corpse was cremated many years later, a calcified jawbone – some say it was made of iron – was found in the ashes. Such supernatural tales form the basis for Chound Mata worship in Rindayu and justify caste exclusion.

When I spoke with Gaddis about the temple exclusion of Sippis and Kolis, I met with a variety of justifications. “That has nothing to do with discrimination,” an elder lectured me. “You saw Sippis beat drums (nagara) at the outer entrance to the temple? Well, they must have made a mistake playing the drums at some point, maybe one- or two-hundred years ago, no one remembers now, but based on their own karmic actions they were barred (vārjit).” Others suggested that the tantric power of Chound Mata simply overpowers individuals of inferior caste, and the prohibition is for their own protection. Another justification was that Gaddis never actively bar access to the temple and that low-caste communities self-monitor and -exclude.

I was dismayed that most Kolis I interviewed passively accepted their exclusion. One afternoon I participated in communal roof building (laddi). In Himachal Pradesh, Gaddis call this event “going to build a roof” (laiṭar pāṇā gaṇā). It is similar to the Gaddi village-wide assistance offered during the cultivation of individual rice fields (juār) in Himachal Pradesh. On that day, Kolis were present, broken into two teams competing to fill their half of the roof first. From outer to inner, roof construction is multi-layered: a second coating of outer mud (chokadi); a first layering of mud (shyarn); a layer of twigs (sathar); quartered wood lattice (balj and barga chal); supporting pillars (tham) and stone foundational supports (pral). The mood was festive, the labor eased with local brew. We worked from two to six, teams collectively pulling baskets (kild) and
shoveling dirt and frequently breaking to sing Dhogri-language songs (*bakh*) reserved for joyous occasions. On hand was the local chiropractor (*ang caḍhāne vālā*; Dhogri: *calada*) to analyze fractures and work-related sprains and cracks accordingly.

Downhill, in clear view of our construction site, was the Rindayu Chound Mata temple. During a break I casually asked the workers about their relationship to Chound Mata. After meeting Sippi ethnic entrepreneurs determined to reschedule Gaddi-speaking Kolis as ST Sippis, I was surprised by the lack of Dalit/tribal consciousness among some Koli villagers. Some expressed no objection to remaining in the peripheral antechamber of the temple while beating the drums; a few actively justified their exclusion. “Mata has her good reasons for denying us. I don’t want to raise any objections. She is very powerful and we must follow her rules.” Gentle encouragements to de-spiritualize their social exclusion fell on apathetic ears, as did comparisons to Hali exclusions from the Gaddi Kuarsi Nag temple and legal complaints lodged in Chhota Bhangal to forcibly desegregate temple access.

These vignettes of ritual casteism, when put in conversation with the awarding of separate ST statuses, has generated the discourse of the so-called “and wall” (*aur kī divār*) – occasionally called the “and line” (*aur kī rekhā*) – that paradoxically recognizes the tribalness of Sippis without validating their Gaddiness. The campaign to award ST status to Gaddis at first did not include Sippis; in 1976, political mobilization began when a villager named Thakur Das registered the Gaddi Sabha, an association that purposefully excluded marginal Gaddis. Among them were Gadde Brahman (called Bhatt in HP), Sippi, Koli and Rihare castes. Concessions were later made to include Sippis as a separate but culturally-aligned tribe. According to Thakur Das’ account of the formation of the Gaddi Sangh, MLA Mangat Ram Sharma recommended the exclusion of marginal self-reporting Gaddis. “It was in 1989. He said, ‘Gadde Brahmans
shouldn’t get ST status. They are Brahmans. Leave them out. Rihare are only about 250...some in Bani and Visant Garh. Leave them out.’ At the time, I didn’t know that Sippis were also named Koli, so they were also left out of the petition.”

Definitional ambiguities and political calculations have plagued Gaddi enumeration from the beginning. This has sometimes translated into “Gaddi” being an umbrella moniker that, in everyday parlance, includes Sippis; other times, especially in media and government documents, officialese is parroted to emphasize communal distinction. Leadership within the All J/K Gaddi Sippi Tribes Welfare Association (GSTWA) has vacillated between communal inclusion and tribal exclusion; the current president, an affable Gaddi businessman, has unified Gaddis and Sippis around shared grievances against the state for consigning both Hindu tribes to a minuscule one percent reservation under the sub-categorization of Scheduled Tribe Others (STO). Their shared predicament regarding state recognition, set against a backdrop of favoritism to Muslim pastoralists, obviates caste hierarchy and official designations of tribal separation. Ongoing disputes about the establishment of Gaddi/Sippi-reserved Welfare Boards and university hostels provide yearly grist for public demonstrations of tribal unity never seen in Himachal Pradesh.

While most Gaddis vocalize political and religious externalities as foremost in shaping social solidarity, I argue that anxious belonging as J&K Gaddis is equally important. Thakur Das, who began the Gaddi Sabha and was instrumental in appealing for a Central Government survey, hinted at such anxieties while recounting how state recognition shaped – even created – Gaddi tribality.

In 1987, I was invited by the Central Government to Jammu to showcase Gaddi culture. I was instructed to bring whatever stuff was necessary to do a cultural presentation. This really bothered me because our Gaddi traditions and rituals were totally lost in J&K after our migration here. You can still see it all in Himachal, but here the language and music and dress got mixed (madgam). So I wrote back with the excuse that I’m poor and can’t afford to come. I live in a remote area! Some weeks later, I received an official at my
house who personally invited me and assured me that expenses would be accounted for. All my worries came back to me then. Somehow, I went and presented Gaddi culture. A few months later, the Gaddi Sabha received a letter. Four IAS officers would travel through Balore and Udhampur to assess the petition for Schedule Tribe status. This gave me even more botheration. I called together my secretaries. We found an old Gaddi woman who had lived most of her live in Bharmaur, and she trained some of our youngsters. See, we lied about so many things. I can just tell you straight. Those youngsters needed to learn some Gaddi language, since we've left our own language (chūṭ gayī thī). They needed to learn how to wear colā. Our ancestors must have worn it, but we’ve lost it. They needed to know about sheep, but who has sheep now? Militants (habsī) were sacrificing (halāl kar dete) Gaddis, demanding sheep, so we had to leave our profession. So our youngsters had to learn how to act and be Gaddi.

Such anxieties are not confined to ethnic entrepreneurs alone, but are widespread. Gaddis with economic means are overwhelmingly shifting down from mountain villages to urban centers, such as Ram Nagar and Udhampur, where they trade knowledge of Gaddi language and customs for educational and employment opportunities conducted in Bhaderwahi, Dhogri and Urdu languages. They anxiously lament cultural loss while participating in demographic relocations that further alienate Gaddis from the tropes of tribal pastoralism. One ethnic leader complained about language loss in his office, and then at home sheepishly introduced me to his teenage daughter who spoke to me in Hindi and English and admitted she was never taught Gaddi dialect.

The nuāḷā, a hallmark of Gaddiness back to the colonial record, is rare even in the mountains. Chattrari hosts the sheep sacrifice every four years, but family priest officiates; the cotton thread (māḷā), the symbolic home of Shiva for the evening, is replaced with a generic fire pit (havan) officiated over by a Gadde Brahman; Gaddi-language folk songs are replaced with Dhogri-language devotional music (bhajan); and Shiva-centric nuāḷā rituals are replaced with Chound Mata-centric jājrātās. Beginning in 2010, government restrictions on sheep sacrifices during pilgrimage to Bharmaur have further alienated J&K Gaddis from the cultural heartland.
The 300-400 Gaddis who yearly pilgrimaged seventeen days to Bharmaur, routinely performing animal sacrifices (*paśu bali*) whenever they halted (*dera*), have dwindled considerably.

While Sippis in Himachal Pradesh eagerly look to J&K for inspiration in their pursuit of ST inclusion, the relationship is not reciprocal. Throughout J&K, Jewan Lal is the first and only Gaddi MLA in state history; the lack of political representation makes Gaddis feel that government initiatives overwhelmingly favor Muslim STs. These anxieties reached a crescendo in 2016, when the Government of India sharply increased the J&K Tribal Sub Plan (TSP) to about 44 million USD (100 *kror*). Gaddis and Sippis have publicly protested the distribution of funds, arguing that their consignment to OST has handicapped them in competition with STGB (Gujjar and Bakerwal). Among the fourteen counted tribes of J&K, including Ladakh, only Gujjars and Bakerwals have coveted Welfare Boards, and they are routinely accused of receiving preferential treatment from the Muslim-dominated government. In all these ways, J&K Gaddis experience anxious belonging, betwixt and between Kashmiri and Gaddi identities but accepted as neither.

Sippis are further suspended between identities: STO in J&K as a separate tribe, ST in Chamba as a part of the Gaddi community living within the 6th Schedule, and SC in Kangra. Their caste boundaries are notably porous due to status jockeying, with Sippi-converted Kolis in J&K and Hali-converted Sippis in Kangra. One end has caused political agitations for government reclassification, the other has ironically propped up Sippi purity claims through caste emulation by Halis. Contestation over tribal belonging – with either a retreat into or out of Gaddiness at the center – has led to fractured social identities backed up with mismatching administrative categories. This is not only a Gaddi story; the Denotified Criminal Castes (*Vimukt Jātiyān*) are classified differently based on state:
For example, in Maharashtra, the ‘Phanse Pardhis’ are included in the STs, but their counterparts, the Haran Shikaris or Gaon Pardhis are categorized under the VJNTs (Vimukta Jatis and Nomadic Tribes, as they are called in Maharashtra). Similarly the Kaikadis in the Vidarbha region are grouped under the SCs but those from the rest of the state are under the VJNTs. The same Kaikadis are categorized as STs in Andhra Pradesh. One of the most populous tribes, the Banjaras or Lambadas (and their sub-sections) are included in the VJNTs in Maharashtra but categorized as SCs in Karnataka. Such anomalies are plenty (Bokil 2002, 1).

In this chapter, I argued that the state arbitration of social identities has generated similar classificatory anomalies among Gaddis and Gaddi-aspiring Dalits, like Sippis. These federal status irregularities have shaped Sippi political mobilizations and substantive ethnic consciousness at the most intimate scale of rural Himalayan life. Sippis are drawn further away from a shared Dalit identity with Halis and other SC groups in the exploited tribal margins and closer to a fantastical vision of Bharmauri life as free of caste discrimination, where life “swings gleefully like a musical” and Sippis are treated with dignity as shamans. The propagation of myths surrounding Sippi Trilochan Mahadev, Shiva’s first oracle, and his blessed offspring further reinforces their exceptionalism in a spiritual idiom – as does the Manimahesh pilgrimage, during which time Sippi Balode have central ritual functions and Sippi-centric mythologies are emplaced and physically engaged with.

In the next chapters, we return to Dharamsala and consider how these classificatory anomalies and strategies for tribal inclusion are transformed by cosmopolitan aspiration and the elusive dream of modernity. This involves shifting into a Tibetological framework as we consider Gaddiness in the context of the Tibetan diaspora. How does Tibetan refugeehood become a backdrop for tribal articulation? How have the successful efforts of Tibetans to receive foreign patronage, cultivate cosmopolitan competencies and redefine the cultural landscape impacted tribal belonging – not only for Gaddis but for Gaddi Dalits, as well?
In the last three decades, in large part because of research restrictions in China-controlled Tibet, every nook and cranny of Tibetan diasporic life in Dharamsala has come under scholarly appraisal. The upshot has been an academic decentering of Gaddis that parallels the erasure of their cultural geography and their everyday exclusion from cosmopolitan competencies. The mid-1990s Hollywood fascination with Tibetans corresponded with scholarly intensification of the accessible and vogue Tibetan diaspora in South Asia. The Richard Gereification of Vajrayana Buddhism, the makeover of the Dalai Lama into an arena-packing divine rockstar and the transformation of Dharamsala from a Gaddi pastoral stopover into a spiritual Disneyland has profoundly impacted Gaddi neighbors.

These trends are paralleled by several legal and cultural factors contributing to the wellbeing of exiled Tibetans and their perceived cultural superiority, sometimes experienced as racism, against Gaddis. Legislation pertaining to Tibetan refugees, specifically the Order Regulating Entry of Tibetan Nationals into India (SRO 1108), is considered favorable to Tibetans, so much so that some scholars consider Tibetans “privileged compared to other refugees living in India” (Bentz 2012, 85). This privilege stems from treating Tibetans as foreigners eligible for renewable Registration Certificates. Meant to address the few Kham and Amdo Tibetans fleeing the early stages of the invasion of the People’s Liberation Army, SRO 1108 remained valid into the 1960s and applied to the successive migrations that followed the Dalai Lama’s arrival in 1959.

Parallel to this legislative advantage Tibetans have had over Burmese, Sri Lankan and Afghan refugees in India, they have also been the recipient of land donations from the Central
Government and several state governments. In the early 1960s, when the transit camps Buxa Duar and Missamari were beset with material hardships, health epidemics and negative population growth, the Central Government and several state governments donated land for more lasting Tibetan refugee settlements. These settlements flourished due to the determination of Tibetans to become self-reliant and the multi-sided assistance Tibetans received from the Indian Government and various NGOs and foreign support groups. Moving between Tibetans and Gaddis, I would often hear two versions of the same story. Tibetans tell a teleological account of exile to prosperity. They emphasize their perseverance to suffer through displacement and the dangerous indignities of high-altitude road construction work. Gaddis emphasize the role of the Indian government and foreign patronage, leading to entitlement expectations and welfare dependence. Both views are within the historical margin.

Early Tibetological ethnographic accounts extolled the socioeconomic formation of agricultural settlements such as Mundgod (Palakshappa 1976; Goldstein 1978), where resentment from peripheral Indian communities was minimal and Tibetans pursued non-assimilative strategies of cultural preservation. On the other hand, Dharamsala, an overnight bus ride from Delhi and situated in the low-lying Dhauladhar hills abutting the Punjab, was viewed as a quasi-urban Indian hill station. As Dharamsala morphed into a locus of political struggle and cosmopolitan life, Tibetans living there were viewed by researchers as inauthentic carriers of traditional culture (Prost 2006, 235). However, a scholarly reversal in the mid-1980s (Nowak 1984; Saklani 1984) brought refocused attention to Dharamsala. De-territorialized claims of state sovereignty, cosmo-capitalism and international tourism, far from alienating Tibetans from the tropes of cultural authenticity, became generative sites of scholarly analysis.
This is partly due to disciplinary blinkers and methodological biases: quite naturally, Tibetologists study Tibetans. It is not uncommon to meet Western graduate students and credentialed researchers fluent in Tibetan and happily ambivalent about South Asia. They typically cluster around Tibetan language schools, the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) and Tibetan Library, Tibetan Children’s Village (TCV) schools, the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts, and one of over 60 NGOs focused on Tibetan refugee assistance. Often, and not to their detriment, the Indian milieu is coincidental to their research design.

Not surprisingly then, Dharamsala has become synonymous with the geopolitical center of the Tibetan Government in Exile (TGiE), one of the most concentrated centers of NGO work in the Indian Himalayas (McConnell 2016; Salmela 2014), and a cosmopolitan stopover for spiritual tourists, scholars and journalists. Above all, Dharamsala is discursively inseparable from the home-in-exile of the Dalai Lama, who embodies the continuation of the Lhasa politico-religious order. Dharamsala Tibetans living in the shadow of the Dalai Lama’s palatial abode squarely fit within a Shangri-la framework that treats Buddhism as the foremost authenticating trope of Tibetan identity (Klieger 2002, 5). Proximity to the revered spiritual leader becomes integral to claims of authentic Tibetanness, a logic extending to second- and third-generation Tibetans born in exile. For all these reasons, the autochthonous claims of Gaddis hardly register as a meaningful subject of inquiry, their anxieties about culture loss amidst intense globalization drowned out by the strumming of the sgra-snyan and the cries for a free Tibet. It is uncommon for Tibetologists to mention Gaddis by name, even in book-length monographs, and the casual reader is left with a general impression that Dharamsala is a demographic mix of Tibetans and generic “Indians”.

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It is partly from personal experience that I highlight the Tibet-centricity of research in Dharamsala. My first long-term stay in 2007 was to volunteer with Tibetans and study Buddhism. After a year working in Beijing and travelling surreptitiously throughout Tibet, I returned to India to pursue Tibetology. I first lived in the densely populated Punjabi Basti in Delhi, across the street from the Majnu ka Tilla Tibetan settlement. Several times I visited Choglamsar, a Tibetan settlement camp in Ladakh. But beginning with my first backpacking trip in 2003, it was in Dharamsala that I found myself at home: watching Tibet documentaries in a makeshift cinema in the basement of a vegetable shop, teaching English at LHA Charitable Trust, jamming to Metallica at Seed Cafe with drunken Tibetan youth. I patronized Tibetan-run restaurants, the places with the best tsam pa pancakes, chili pizzas and steamy kri mog. I lived with New Arrivals. I attended public teachings by the Dalai Lama and dabbled in meditation at the Tushita Meditation Center, a Tibetan-founded branch of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT). During my first several trips to Dharamsala, I had only faint ideas about Gaddis.

It was only after I refocused on South Asian anthropology that I could revisit Dharamsala with a fresh perspective. My landlord was Gaddi, as were all the taxi drivers and wait staff in hotels and restaurants. Amdo Village may be full of Tibetans, but why do Gaddi locals call it Dusalni? How do western engagements with Tibetans collude against or disenfranchise Gaddis? How, after all, does the intense trans-locality of Dharamsala shape conceptions of tribal identity?

In the following two chapters, I reconceptualize Dharamsala through a subaltern tribal perspective: that is, how Gaddi place-names, subjectivities, and conceptions of and strategies for well being are impacted by Tibetan neighbors. By emphasizing the Gaddi experience, my hope is two-fold: to de-familiarize the traditional subjects of diasporic Tibetological research, such as
refugeehood, belonging, nostalgia and Dharamsala itself, and to contribute an admittedly unrepresentative but vital portrayal of Gaddis, who remain the primary subject of ecological anthropology and pastoral economics. What it means to be tribal in Dharamsala reverberates through Gaddi social networks into the far reaches of rural Bharmaur. It is indisputable that the parallel roads of McLeod Ganj represent the most trans-local, deeply geopolitical, highly capitalistic and touristic Gaddi “village” on either side of the Dhauladhar Mountains, dissimilar from anywhere else in the Gaddi-speaking world; as such, it connotes the apex of Gaddi modernity. Rather than treating the non-representativeness of Dharamsala as a scholarly detriment, I argue that it provides a unique opportunity to inject myriad urban and cosmopolitan variables into tribal life, blurring the urban-rural distinction that usually cleaves South Asian anthropology.

In the first section, I analyze three interlocking historical factors that shaped the Tibetan-Gaddi interface from its very inception. First, how early early Tibetan settlers in Dharamsala drew from the oral epic Ling Gesar to locate Gaddis within a specifically Tibetan cosmology and how this mythopraxis furthers communal distancing. Second, how adaptations of long-standing structures of Tibetan society, such as foreign patronage and devotional circumambulation, shape conceptions of work and leisure and influence how Gaddis socially aspire. Last, how discourses about Tibetans are transposed from Western minds onto the cultural geography of Dharamsala, a shaded way of “seeing” that obscures Gaddi lifeways.

In the second section, I take up three aspects of Gaddi oral history that invoke Tibetan neighbors. First, how toponymical contestation and changing place-names have severed the cohesion of Gaddi spirituality, topography and lifeway. Second, how Gaddi elders remember the arrival of Tibetan refugees in 1960 and how they contrast the early years of Tibetan deprivation
with the middle years of Tibetan merchants trading baubles for Gaddi heirlooms and heritage markers. Third, how the Gaddi oral narrative of 17th-century forced migration due to Muslim incursion is reinvested with new meaning as Gaddis express their physical and psychosocial displacement from Dharamsala by perceived Tibetan “colonizers”.

With this patchwork of interlocking histories on both the Gaddi and Tibetan side, the next chapter draws more from fieldwork than the archive to analyze neighborliness across the Gaddi-Tibetan interface. By roving across ethnographic experiences, from political elections and the café culture to racialized violence and fantasies of ethnic segregation, the continuity of historical sentiment erupts in the contemporary.

By emphasizing Gaddi perspectives, these chapters leapfrog the Shangri-la utopianism that lingers in Tibetology and land us squarely, I hope, in the unfamiliarity of modern tribal life. Tibetans living in McLeod Ganj often express wearied ennui, a sense of bored insufficiency in the face of unfulfilled aspirations abroad. Most youth hope that social networks or political asylum programs will lift them out of Dharamsala to the West; and recent scholarship argues that Dharamsala has become an important site of Tibetan on-migration (Frilund 2014). In contrast, Gaddi youth migrate into Dharamsala as the nearest embodiment of Western modernity, a place of imagination and redefinition. Like Sister Carrie shifting from Wisconsin to Chicago in Dreiser’s urban novel, Gaddis often find themselves awash in a superabundance of urban materialism and social overstimulation. A name as familiar as McLeod Ganj, affectively loaded with Buddhist symbolism and political freedom, takes on a contrasting spiritual and cultural hue when restored to its original Gaddi name, Talu. Because the idiom of refugeehood is in many ways synonymous with Tibetans, it takes on an altogether unexpected valance when Gaddis describe their own sense of forced exclusion from the cosmo-capitalism engulfing their one-time
pastoral stopover. In this view, Tibetan refugees are not merely a vulnerable population – the victims of Chinese atrocities, their cries for an autonomous Tibetan homeland falling on increasingly insensate ears – but also Western-backed agents and merchant-monks, propelled by the visible support of spiritual tourism and the invisible machinations of geopolitics and shadowy media interests.

Figure 6.1 A Gaddi youth in a recycled pro-Tibet t-shirt, unaware of its meaning. Photo by author.

Moving between Gaddis and Tibetans – the former my scholarly preoccupation for more than six years, the latter instrumental in shaping my humanist sensibilities at a formative time in my early adult life – proved to be the most methodologically fraught aspect of fieldwork, in a sense more complicated than moving between Gaddi status groups. Although Gaddis and Gaddi Dalits are loosely unified by a commonsense Herderian conception of shared language and culture, the greatest impediment to researching low-status groups was Atul, my Gaddi research
associate, whose presence made for stilted social interactions. By working with research
associates of the same caste I was studying, I found myself able to meaningfully connect with
interlocutors in such varied climes as Dhogri slate mines, Hali churches, Badi Goan beach resorts
and Gaddi pasturelands.

However, Gaddis could be unforgiving when I was caught red-handed with Tibetan
friends or strolling out of the Namgyal Temple. The community was vigilant as to where I stood
as an avowed ethnographer of Gaddis: generically lumped in with all the other Tibetophile
foreigners or around the mud stove common in Gaddi kitchens. Towards the end of my first
fieldwork year, January approaching and my only threadbare sweater having never quite dried
out from monsoon rains, I bought a Navy-blue sweatshirt from a Students for a Free Tibet shop.
Embossed on it were the words “Pray for Tibet” and two hands folded in prayerful supplication.
Wearing it I was endlessly ribbed by my Gaddi friends. My sweatshirt was treated like a sartorial
betrayal. I covered it up with a Gaddi kamrī, a woolen vest that has fallen somewhat out of
local fashion, but even-handedness did not automatically assuage Gaddi concerns. It required constant
vigilance to research Tibetans while not exacerbating Gaddi sensitivities about being
overshadowed by a vogue refugee population.

I found even more resistance when I explained to Tibetans that I was primarily
researching Gaddis. I was commonly asked: “Why waste your time with them?” or “What makes
them so special?” or “But Dharamsala is the home of Tibetans.” Gaddis are generally aware of
this cultural posturing that is not muted by Thank You India Day or the gesture of collecting
street-side litter on Gandhi Jayanti. I often felt shy to describe Gaddi society or even speak Hindi
in front of Tibetans, as if I had tipped my hand. When I asked directly about their Gaddi
neighbors – in full transparency of my research agenda – I faced either detailed accounts of
Gaddi shortcomings based on personal experience or nothing at all. It was routine to have to explain to Tibetans, even those settled in Dharamsala for the better part of a decade, who the Gaddis were; they had never heard the name and, in some cases, were proud of their inability to differentiate between Indian ethnic groups. Pahadi, Gaddi, Punjabi, Valmiki, such social divisions were often irrelevant to Tibetans. Some Tibetans simply admitted a lack of interest in the myriad confounding ethnicities comprising Indian society, but others argued that undifferentiating between Indian ethnic and status groups was emblematic of broad-mindedness – of transcending caste and creed. In short, a half-century of scholarly neglect forced me to give frequent assurance to Gaddis of my sincerity in researching their culture, while Tibetans needed none whatsoever.

What Tibetans often required, quite to the contrary, was ideological adherence to an assumed order of things. Henrion-Dourcy (2013) contrasts the fieldwork milieu in Tibet versus Dharamsala and challenges the assumption that researching Tibetans in the South Asia diaspora is free from methodological problems. Conducting fieldwork on ache lhamo folklore in Tibet required her to take an officially “unofficial” identity with regards to state bureaucracy, securing academic affiliation and the balancing act of publishing politically sensitive testimonials. In Tibet she needed to downplay her cultural knowhow and sympathies for Tibetan Independence in order to avoid the suspicions of Chinese government officials. In Dharamsala, however, she often found it necessary to demonstrate her linguistic and cultural competencies to win over some wary Tibetans disillusioned with the glut of foreign sympathizers and extractive researchers. Moreover, foreign researchers are pressurized to shape their research agendas around an unwavering support for the “unrequited political aspirations” of Tibetans, at times conflicting with social scientific neutrality (Henrion-Dourcy 2013, 211). Contradicting the
official discourses promulgated by the TGiE leads to social ostracism and barred access to politicians and government-sponsored public events. In such an environment, accessing divergent voices and overcoming politically correct platitudes about exiled life becomes a primary research impediment. Because of the political and emotional sensitivities of researching a dispossessed people, “external researchers are seen in a positive light as long as they are unequivocal advocates of the official views” (Henrion-Dourcy 2013, 212).

Such was the experience of C.P. Ramanam, a professor of anthropology at a prominent Delhi university. Before my first extended fieldwork trip in Dharamsala, I met with Dr. Ramanam to discuss his 2003 dissertation work on Tibetan identity formation. His research was never published, and he had shifted focus to a “primitive tribe” in Madhya Pradesh. In his office he dusted off a ringed photocopy of his dissertation and let me thumb through it. But citing it was out of the question: he had run afoul of the TGiE, who had supported his research with a grant and housed him for free in a government bungalow near the Tibetan Library. Upon completion of Dr. Ramanam’s dissertation, which he assumed was in lockstep sympathy with the general aspirations of the diasporic community, he received a letter from an Argentinean requesting a copy. Later that year, a photograph Dr. Ramanam included in his dissertation of a Shugden rally in McLeod Ganj was reproduced without his permission. Dorje Shugden is considered by some a protector deity within the Gelukpa tradition and a demon whose propitiation is anti-Dalai Lama by others. The pro-Shugden magazine spuriously framed Dr. Ramanam as a Shugden sympathizer and misrepresented the nature of his research. Dr. Ramanam was already on tenderhooks with the Tibetan establishment for an article he published about the unregulated “Chang trade” in Majnu ka Tilla. The TGiE notified him that his research was not in the promotion of Tibetan interests and that he should refrain from returning to
Dharamsala or ever publishing his dissertation. “The situation really ate me up,” Dr. Ramanam said as he re-shelved his dissertation. “I had to change academic affiliations. I abandoned my research on Tibetans. My advice to you is: don’t take anything from the TGiE, not scholarships or special access passes or even free meals. If you do, you’re stuck with their supervision of your work.”

I was in India on a Fulbright-Nehru with affiliation at the Institute of Chinese Studies (ICS) in Delhi, an offshoot of the Center for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) focused on China-India border areas. Whenever I met with Tibetan officials, I received consent for the interview through IRB protocol, emphasizing my Ph.D. candidacy at an American university. I rarely volunteered that I was affiliated with the ICS, lest the name alone advance a misunderstanding about my support for Tibetan autonomy. In such a milieu, bumping up against “omnipresent” political ideologies in all areas of cultural life, the refugee community can be critically engaged – internal tensions teased out, dissident voices explored – as long as there are no “frontal attacks” on the overarching aspirations of the exile community (Henrion-Dourcy 2013, 212-13). It is my fervent hope that in deconstructing the place of Tibetans in Dharamsala with an eye towards Gaddi identity formation, my research is viewed not as a “frontal attack” but as broadly sympathetic to the statelessness of Tibetans and their diasporic struggle in South Asia.

Gaddis in the Gesar World

The Ling Gesar is an epic cycle of more than a million verses, considered to be the longest in the world, about King Gesar’s supernatural birth and marvelous conquest of powerful demons, called don, who tried to thwart the realization of dharma. The trickery and escapades of King
Gesar particularly resonate with Tibetans living in Kham in Eastern Tibet who thematically locate their martial culture and political autonomy in the epic (Samuel 2002, 178). King Gesar is several emanations and personalities rolled into one: an earthly king (rgyal po), the tripartite Bodhisattva Rigsum Gonpo, the historical form of Guru Rimpoche and the adopted son of a non-Buddhist folk mountain deity (Samuel 2002, 184). The polysemy of the Ling Gesar points to the assimilation of both Tibetan and Indic sources and the vagaries of its production and dissemination throughout the ethnographic Tibet, including Ladakh, Sikkim and present-day Pakistan. Shamanic bards (babdrung) often recite it as narrative prose with interspersed ballads.

The Ling Gesar enjoys a controversial place among Tibetans. “It’s a fiction at best, myth at worst. Definitely not a historic figure,” one prominent Tibetan refugee told me. “UNESCO does not consider Gesar a historic figure, but they put Golok in Amdo as his symbolic birthplace. In the 1994 Kalachakra initiation in Mundgod, the Dalai Lama said that there couldn’t be Ling Gesar stories without a real king called Gesar. I couldn’t help laughing.” Conversely, many Tibetans celebrate the Ling Gesar not only as a historical reality but also as an epic through which everyday reality is interpreted. In the documentary film A Gesar Bard’s Tale, Dawa Drakpa, a bard who received the gift of recitation at thirteen, describes how modern industrial pollution was foretold in the ancient epic. The desecration of sacred places, the impermanence of life and the many occasions of suffering are thematically extracted from the Ling Gesar. When the Yushu Earthquake ravaged his village, killing thousands and reducing homes to rubble, Dawa understood its supernatural origin through the Gesar. “People are taking treasures from the mountains; this is the root cause of storms and quakes.”

While Tibetans debate whether the Ling Gesar is the historical account of an incarnate Bodhisattva king or a fecund source of fantasy and entertainment, there is little doubt about the
continued vitality of the oral epic in the lived experiences of Tibetans. Condoned by the Chinese
government as apolitical, Ling Gesar studies are flourishing in academic journals across China.
Despite this, Samuel (2002, 187) notes how the Ling Gesar is far from apolitical and is often
interpreted as critiquing modernization and the ongoing desecration of Tibetan tradition by the
Chinese. Moreover, Samten Karmay (1995, 313) argues that the Ling Gesar narrative structure,
which broadly traces the incorporation of defeated ethnic minorities into the beginnings of a
centralized state under King Gesar, reflects the political transition from tribal society to a Tibetan
“kingdom with many vassals and with a chief now styled as a universal monarch”.

It was to my astonishment to discover that among some Settler Tibetans the Ling Gesar
cosmology is actively extended in Dharamsala to encompass Gaddis. This section analyzes how
a Gesar episode – that of the evil King Lutsen’s hatred of the Dharma and his eventual death by
King Gesar – provides a conceptual template for some Tibetans to understand the ongoing
communal strife with their Gaddi neighbors. This association began in the 1960s when Tibetans
first apprehended Gaddis in McLeod Ganj and surrounding villages but is still an active
reference for some Tibetans struggling to understand long-standing patterns of ambivalence (at
best) and communal violence (at worst) with local Indians. I argue that linking Gaddi agro-
pastoralists to the Demon-King Lutsen places Gaddis in a specifically Tibetan cosmology, in a
structured system of significance that exacerbates communal distancing and throws doubt on the
karmic and moral stature of Gaddis. Thinking about the Gaddis through the lens of the Gesar
epic helps some Tibetans to understand their cultural and material prosperity compared to their
Gaddi hosts, which in turn naturalizes Gaddi marginalization from the café culture and broader
cosmo-capitalism emblematic of modernity.
The Ling Gesar broadly describes how the world was once plagued with evil spirits (don) who tried to slow the spread of the Dharma. After failing to prevent the Buddha from reaching enlightenment, they turned their necromancy to block his teachings and drag all sentient beings into the hell realms through ignorance and sin. By way of magic potions and incantations and episodes of poisoned bowls that perverted the reception of the dharma, these don did everything in their power to wreak havoc on people’s lives. The Gesar story is fundamentally about the re-establishing of Buddhism in Tibet by destroying the four main don, associated with directional borderlands, who had subdued the dharma kings and entrapped humans in a web of suffering and ignorance (Kornman et al. 2012). The chronological order of the Gesar is structured around King Gesar’s victory over the “four adversaries of the four quarters”, around which there are minor episodes of subduing eighteen tribes. It is worth noting that the eighteen tribes are explicitly Tibetan, whereas the four primary demons are associated as foreign kingdoms – China in the east, India in the South, Iran to the west and Turkestan to the north (Karmay 1993, 241). Gesar is born with the mission of killing the four directional demons who have long opposed Buddhism and in doing so conquer foreign lands and peoples.

Set against the backdrop of warfare in the propagation of the dharma, there was an Indian princess living near Manali who was married to a nine-headed don. He lusted day and night to stamp out every trace of the dharma. He had a great thirst to extinguish Buddhism so as “not to leave even a single letter remaining and never to see any being wearing red clothes or with their hair shaved”. He sired three sons – Michung, Tsachung and Auchung. As he lay dying, the nine-headed don promised his kingdom to whichever son could completely obliterate the Dharma. The elder sons could not promise the full destruction of the Dharma; however, Auchung, the youngest, “promised that there would not be even the sound of a single Dharma word left.” On
the strength of his promise he was coroneted as Lutsen Gyalpo, the ruler of *nagas* and mountain spirits. During his enthronement ceremony the cannibal Lutsen preferred the offering of horse carcasses and human blood to the typical gifts of gold and silver.

Although associated with the North, many versions describe King Lutsen as ruling in India (Natasha Mikles, personal comm.). He ruled over the hills of Northern India associated with *naga* spirits, of which Dharamsala is very much a part; his subjects were shepherds and mountain villagers. One legend describes Atak Lumo, a shepherdess of King Lutsen who becomes a warrior and appears in Lake Nam Tsho engulfed in rainbows (Bellezza 2014, 142). At first opposed to King Gesar, Atak Lumo eventually becomes his ally and rules over eastern Changthang. For the most part, however, the inhabitants of Lutzen’s kingdom are simple Indian shepherds.

The death of King Lutsen, a major episode in the epic, encompasses many hours of bardic narrative at its most comprehensive. Below is a summary of the main events from Alexandra David-Neel’s oft-recited original 1933 edition (130-43).

King Gesar is reminded by Padmasambhava of his mission to kill the cannibal demon Lutsen, who has enslaved locals and sworn to impede the spread of Buddhism. He sets out on horse, alone, and sights Lutsen from a distance at Mount Hachong Tsigu. Gesar transforms himself and his horse into cairns and observes Lutsen “wandering through the solitudes in search of a being to devour for his meal” (132). Having passed, Gesar and his horse transform into their natural forms and reach Lutsen’s kingdom.

He is met by Lutsen’s wife, Queen Dumo Mesang Bumche, who is quickly seduced by Gesar’s flirtations, marriage proposal and promise of eternal paradise in the afterlife. She digs a hole in the kitchen, and as soon as King Gesar is hidden away Lutsen returns, empty-stomach and full of premonitions of doom. It is the year of the Dog, the year according to prophecy of Lutsen’s doom. But is it this year of the Dog, or in twelve or twenty-four years? To find out, Lutsen performs divinations (*mo*) and is misled by Queen Dumo into believing that his vision of King Gesar buried underground in his own kitchen amidst cookery is actually a vision of King Gesar rotting in a hell realm amidst torture devices. Satisfied, Lutsen sleeps and Queen Dumo rouses King Gesar from the hole and
instructs him how to kill her husband. “On Lutzen’s forehead there is a very white round mark, that is his vital spot. Shoot your arrow at it and he will die instantly” (137). King Gesar pierces the spot and Lutsen expires in his sleep. King Gesar aids him through the Bardo realms and, purified, he attains the Western Paradise.

The next day, King Gesar is surrounded by Lutsen’s warriors. He quickly subdues their revengeful intent with a mere show of his supernatural weapon. They fall prostrate before him and enter into his service. However, while King Gesar remained in the castle the warriors beclouded his mind through exposure to defilements, such that he forgot his ultimate mission. For six years he remained in the castle, stupefied by the treacherous wizardry of his subjects. Finally, King Gesar is released from his magical bondage by Chenrezig and, against the protests of Queen Dumo and against his promise to marry her, he returns alone to the Kingdom of Ling, triumphant in battle.

In Tibetan oral renditions of this episode, the freed slaves of the cannibal demon Lutsen are given backstories as shepherds and physical descriptions, which in the early days of exile structured perceptions of Gaddis. How I first encountered this sentiment in the Tibetan community is worthy of a brief digression.

My first meeting with Tenzin was by chance while in a hired taxi heading to an interview. I often used the same driver, Anu, a corpulent and good-natured Gaddi with deep connections across Dharamsala. We bonded over a harrowing trip together to the Golden Temple in Amritsar in typhoon floods, the car practically floating like a boat, and ever since then he was my go-to driver. On that day we met near the bus station and were driving out of town when he stopped at Dolma Chowk and began to chat with an elderly Tibetan clutching a bouquet of plastic flowers. They were chatting in Hindi, and I overheard the Tibetan say that he was returning home. Anu hesitated, wanting to invite him into the car but unsure of my reaction since I was paying the fare. I threw open the door and with gratitude Tenzin accepted the ride. Before dropping him at a retirement home near the Dalai Lama complex, Tenzin explained that Gaddis are generally untrustworthy and that Anu and Gerung, a Nepali driver who married a Tibetan, were preferred
by most Tibetans. I was intrigued by Tenzin’s volubility and depth of introspection on a subject rarely broached by former CTA employees.

Our felicitous meeting in the taxi deepened as we met over cups of tea. Tenzin had retired in 2008 and was happy to pass the time in conversation. Through our time together, he described the enduring humiliations of living amidst inhospitable Gaddi hosts. As someone educated in Norway and posted for 24 years in Mundgod, founding many of the “technical aspects of the agricultural system there” – deals with the Swiss Technical Corporation and Indian government, and the reclamation of about 3,000 acres of land – Tenzin had a broad perspective on the place of Tibetan refugees in the West and the socioeconomics of disparate Tibetan settlements within India. It was through Tenzin that I first recorded the significance of the Ling Gesar in placing Gaddis within a Tibetan cosmological order.

Tenzin’s experience of Dharamsala began in 1962, when his parents sent him to the Tibetan Transit School in Dharamsala to ensure his safety during the Indo-China war. Of that time he remembers Dharamsala as a wasteland, as “nothing at all”.

There was virtually nothing going on. The Gaddis were in such poor shape. They were wearing this big horrible white costume – we call it gera in Tibetan. Now take a look at them; you might notice they don’t wear their costume anymore. We Tibetans feel that it is because of our coming here that Dharamsala has become developed and internationally known. It is because of the Tibetan refugees who have come. But the Gaddis don’t think like that; they say it is God’s gift, things are changing so we are changing. But it is because of us.

Such an account of Dharamsala as a mountain wasteland inhabited by backwards jungle-dwellers, and Tibetans as civilizing discoverers, fits within the meta-narrative of Tibetan exceptionalism one commonly runs up against in casual conversation with Settler Tibetans. It is in such a world of cultural backwardness, where dress is indicative of moral decline and arrested
progress, and the wooded mountain slopes conceal the sinister unknown, that the Ling Gesar takes on a particular relevance. Tenzin explained it this way:

Actually, in Tibetan history, this is the one community who is supposed to be the shepherds of a demon in the Ling Gesar. Du Achung Gyebo [also known as King Lutsen], he was a fierce monster told about in our epic Ling Gesar. When King Gesar killed the monster and released the shepherds working for him, he saw that they wore a long rope belt, like the Gaddis used to wear in their traditional costume. When Tibetans arrived in Dharamsala, they realized that in fact the Gaddis are Achung Gyebo’s shepherds. The Gaddis are the people who rear the sheep of the monster. These Gaddis! This is traditionally, by root; I don’t mean all these Gaddis now…but initially! The Gaddi race comes from there. This is what we Tibetans say, especially elders from the central province [U-Tsang]; I don’t know how Indians tell their history. If you go deeply you will find out about it. There was a time when King Gesar conquered Du Achung and ruled over even Dharamsala!

Marshall Sahlins (1981) uses the concept of mythopraxis to analyze how mythic enactments informed the reception of Captain Cook in Hawaii as an ancestral spirit, a form of Lono. He argues that Polynesian cosmology provided the “cultural presuppositions, the social given categories of persons and things” through which Hawaiians experienced Captain Cook as a sacrificial divinity (1981, 67). In reproducing these cultural attitudes through practice, however, they were transformed. Extending Saussurian linguistics, Sahlins argues that the meaning of semiotic signs is not synchronically determined, but rather constituted through practice “from which arise unprecedented forms and meanings” (1981, 6). Similarly, the vagaries of putting “culture into practice”, of objectifying categories of thought in the context of unprecedented culture contact, can lead to the revaluation and transformation of structure (1981, 36). While the categories of perceiving reality might be properly enacted, the outcome could be functional redefinition; “reproduction ends as transformation” (1981, 67).

Mythopraxis is a useful way to understand how Tibetans draw from the Ling Gesar to understand their Gaddi neighbors. While reinterpreting the Ling Gesar in the context of Gaddis
and the hardships of exiled life did not lead to structural transformation of Tibetan culture, we can see how its pragmatic extension is a contributing factor to the coarsening of inter-communal sociality. Experiencing Dharamsala as a once-conquered Tibetan fiefdom and the Gaddis as the freed slaves of the sworn enemy of the dharma do not bode well for establishing bonds of trust and shared aspiration. As a semiotic sign, the “long rope belt” (dorā) worn by Gaddis has a range of emic functions as a coiled pillow, a source of heat and back support and a functional rope handy for shepherds (Sharma and Sethi 1997, 50). When referred to as Siva-ri-seli, it also symbolically links Gaddis to Shiva and their homeland, Bharmaur, through an association with Nath Jogis (Sharma and Sethi 1997, 51). However, when the semiotics of the Gaddi rope belt is refracted through the Tibetan Ling Gesar and put into practice, especially during unprecedented first contact, it reshapes the interpretive structure of the oral epic and produces real-world consequences.

I was surprised how vague associations arose during conversation with Tibetans about Gaddis. “Yes, this may be so; there is actually a temple in Manali which proves the account in the Ling Gesar,” a Tibetan academic confided. I was often told that the Tibetan Library has evidence of the connection between King Lutsen and Gaddis, a claim I never verified.

The extension of this logic may lead some Tibetans to rationalize perceived Gaddi misbehavior and penury on karmic grounds. “Naturally if you are from that sort of root, of course there will be consequences,” an elder Tibetan shared with me while strolling around the Kora. This may contribute to the general feeling among Tibetans that something is particularly rotten in Dharamsala compared to other Indian settlements; that Gaddis are less cooperative and completely devoid of the proscribed sensibilities required of a host. “Local Indians [around Bylakuppe in Karnataka] are more genuinely hospitable, and treat us as guests. Here…Gaddis
lack the basic sensibilities to build trust,” a Tibetan friend shared with me, his sentence trailing off like a question. Even in Delhi I met Tibetan scholars who argued for a link between the Gesar and Gaddis.

Appealing to the Ling Gesar to contextualize this perceived innate privation among Gaddis also carries with it an economic ideology. Tenzin bluntly stated what other Tibetans more delicately feel about the evident economic gulf separating them from Gaddis. “Gaddis complain about Tibetans getting sponsorship, but that is our karma. We are getting the fruit of our hard work – when we entered India, our leaders including women were working in public spaces from day one, while Gaddi women stay at home combing their hair and getting fat.” In short, Tibetan karma dictates prosperity in exile while Gaddi karma, amorphously linked to their servitude under a cannibal demon-king opposed to Buddhism, dictates indigence at home. Grounding the structural imbalance between Tibetans and Gaddis in the Ling Gesar is not a ubiquitous touchpoint among all Tibetan refugees in Dharamsala. The Tibetan diaspora is too internally divided into experiential age- and socioeconomically-based cohorts to singularly reflect such an interpretation of the oral epic. It is notable, however, how many Tibetans – elderly Settlers, academics and New Arrivals steeped in mythologies about Indians – filter their experience of Gaddis through the Ling Gesar. Even more notable is the complete absence of scholarly attention this matter has received among Tibetologists in Dharamsala, especially those focused on cultural preservation and assimilation. For in Dharamsala one episode of the Ling Gesar has, since the earliest arrival of Tibetans in abject poverty and total unfamiliarity with their Indian surroundings, taken on additional interpretative heft as Tibetans struggle to live alongside their Gaddi karmic and ethnic counterpoint.

The Resurgence of Patronage
While the interpretive extension of the Ling Gesar to account for diasporic life has flown under the scholarly radar, much attention has been paid to the ways in which Tibetans in exile have built up a robust informal economy drawing from the historically antecedent patron-client paradigm (*sbyin-bdag*). Patronage is a recurring structural motif in Tibetan society, which affirmed communal solidarity and increased prestige by accepting foreign aid. This practice has been adapted to diasporic life, and Tibetans have established a thriving informal economy of receiving foreign sponsorship (*rogs ram*) that may be both an expression of Tibetan identity and a Braudelian structural continuity of pre-diasporic Tibetan society. As Klieger succinctly puts it, “the *mchod-yon* (priest-patron) dyad in native Tibetan history is a heuristic device that not only explains the relationship between the developing theocratic state and its perceived outside supporters, but is itself a species of broader social institution of *sbyin-bdag* (client-patron) reciprocity which permeates all aspects of Tibetan life” (1989, 3). After diving into the historical specificities of how state patronage (*sbyin-bdag*) has been extended to the ubiquitous practice of foreign sponsorship (*rogs ram*) in Dharamsala, I want to resurface and explore the ways in which Gaddi neighbors experience this dyadic economic relationship.

Far from being understood as part-and-parcel with Tibetan society, foreign sponsorship is felt by many Gaddis as an undeserving economic injection, entirely favoring Tibetans, which drives economic disparities and communal resentments. Expectations of foreign patronage permeating Tibetan diasporic life are equally noticeable in their absence among Gaddi tribals. Parallel to this shadow economy of foreign sponsorship is the real economy in McLeod Ganj, of branded high-top sneakers, skyrocketing rent and a cornucopia of high-end consumer goods. The one entails the other, converting Western dollars into a Tibetan cosmopolitan *habitus* which facilitates easy engagements with foreigners and recursively loops back to additional
sponsorship. This closed system of patronage is integral to material belonging in McLeod Ganj and accommodates Gaddis only insofar as it requires local labor in menial positions, making the cappuccinos and not drinking them. A typical Gaddi monthly salary has little buying power in the cosmo-capitalism of McLeod Ganj, as Atul, my research associate, was surprised to find out when he went casually window shopping for hiking boots.

Attending to the patronage paradigm avoids the two extremes of Shangri-la idealizations: Tibetan culture as timeless, unchanging, and forged in mountainous remove, on the one hand, and Tibetan society as decimated by Chinese cultural genocide and diasporic assimilation, on the other (Lopez 1994; Brauen 2004). The historical evidence, contrary to images of Tibet as an archaic isolate, shows a robust system of suzerainty; the ethnographic evidence highlights Tibetan cultural preservation in the diaspora over and against an encompassing model of assimilation. Against such essentialisms, Klieger follows Marshall Sahlins by arguing that Tibetan culture is forged through the “continual process of interpretation and negotiation of meaning between ‘historical preconceptions and practical circumstances’ (Sahlins 1981) and between those on the inside and outside of identity parameters” (Klieger 1992, 15). Likewise, Tibetan identity markers persist in the South Asian diaspora through adaptationist strategies that are compatible with long-standing structures of Tibetan society, such as the stretching of oral narratives to place Gaddis within an ordered Tibetan cosmology.

The argument for continuity-with-modification is not particular to the patronage paradigm. Lau (2010, 972-3) analyzes how the Tibetan sensibility of cham po (“brothers all agree with each other, are together”) shifts in the Indian diaspora from supporting fraternal polyandry to a Bollywood-infused desire for love marriage, and Swank (2014, 77-8) traces discursive contestation around religious circumambulation (kyamkyam) as it has grown in the
diaspora to include a loafing lifestyle antithetical to notions of community service (*shapshu*). While both Tibetan romantic and leisure practices funnel into Gaddi awareness and arguably shape conceptions of the good life, I want to keep the analytic lens on patronage as the foremost Tibetan structuring sensibility impacting Gaddi everyday life. Beginning with early Mongol patronage, the Tibetan theocracy and wider monastic community received foreign patronage in return for spiritual blessings and esoteric teachings. Due to the exigencies of exiled life, however, this strategy is no longer the purview of monasteries and the theocratic state alone; now lay Tibetan refugees accept Western patronage in a manner “ideologically compatible to other major events in their long history” (Klieger 1992, 16). Far from one outlier contention that Tibetan refugees are becoming “quickly assimilated into their host cultures” (Grunfeld 1987, 26), accepting foreign sponsorship is in itself an expression of Tibetan cultural continuity that persists, even thrives, on the conditions of statelessness.

Tibetan patronage (*sbyin-bdag*) developed from Hindu conceptions of the relationship between renounacer and gift-giver (*sramana-danapati*), according to which the renounacer absorbs negative *karma* inhering in alms and confers symbolic merit or spiritual instruction to the giver. Hindu and Jain alms giving has long interested anthropologists as a seeming inversion of Maussian gift-exchange theory. Mauss argued that gift giving establishes and maintains social interconnectedness through reciprocal obligation. In contrast, an ideology of the free gift is correlated to marked divisions of labor and an “ethnicized salvation religion”, which shift reciprocal expectations from this world to the next (Parry 1986, 466). By refuting the dichotomy between gifts and commodities, the former “necessarily personal, reciprocal, and social binding”, Laidlow (2002, 46) argues that the social significance of Shvetambar Jain alms giving is precisely that it does not create personal obligation.
Drawing from these debates, Tibetologists have struggled to understand how interleaving secular and spiritual boundaries structure notions of hierarchy and reciprocity in Tibetan patronage. Ruegg (2004, 10) argues that the hierarchical ranking of the religious preceptor-theocratic state and lay donor-outside force depends on “the exact circumstances prevailing contingently at a given historical time and place”. At times both halves of the dyadic reciprocity may be equivalent in standing, while in ritual instances the preceptor-theocratic state may be considered superior over the donor and vice versa. By operating in the blurred interstice between ritual and pragmatic temporality, Tibetan patronage allowed the preceptor-theocratic state to receive outside aid and, at times, remain socially dominant and unconstrained by this-worldly reciprocal obligations.

Although the patron-priest relationship with the Qing dynasty ended in 1911, global Buddhists, Tibet sympathizers and interested governments have become modern patrons to diasporic Tibetans who, albeit laity, have adopted the priestly roles in preserving Tibetan identity (Lopez 1998, 206). This allows Tibetan refugees to receive patronage while maintaining superiority or at least equivalency. Patronage does not make Tibetans ideologically subordinate but is interpreted as an opportunity for foreign “laity” (as popularly imagined) to accrue good karma through spreading Buddhist doctrine. Undoubtedly refugees are taking creative license by inserting themselves into the privileged position of sbyin-bdag. This imaginative shift involves Tibetan refugees conceptualizing their hardships as structurally equivalent to voluntary monastic renunciation. To this end, settler Tibetans may interpret leaving their homeland and diasporic struggle as akin to religious renunciation (Klieger 1992, 20). In order to understand how sbyin-bdag is recast as foreign sponsorship (rogs ram) among refugees in South Asia, it is necessarily to flesh out the historical underpinnings of this durable Tibetan ideology.
According to the historical narrative penned by Tsepon Shakabpa and now considered authoritative by Tibetan nationalists, the patronage was first established between the Tibetan and Mongol “nations” in the early 13th century at the Sakya Gonpa (Klieger 1992, 23). Scholars often refer to sbyin-bdag, the patron-client dyadic relationship, as mchod-yon, the priest-patron relationship, the latter being a “state-level expression” of the former (Klieger 1992, 19). Mongol forces led by Chinggis Khan had conquered parts of the Tangut Empire, and fearing invasion the Tibetan rulers sent a delegation to arrange peace terms. Tibetans paid tribute to the Mongols only until Chinggis Khan’s death in 1227. Consequently, his grandson, Godan Khan, invaded Tibet in 1240, but instead of demanding a financial tribute requested qualified Sakya lamas to travel to Mongolia and provide spiritual teaching. Thus, Sakya Pandita traveled to Mongolia and tutored the court in Buddhism; in return, the Sakya sect was endowed with “temporal authority” over Tibet (Klieger 1992, 25). From this Tibetan perspective, a “protocol” was established whereby successive Khans would provide military protection to the Tibetan state and authorize singular authority to the Sakya lamas (who were locked in sectarian competition), and in return the Sakya lamas would legitimate the Mongolian rule “in their own territories and those which they formally subjugated (such as China)” (Klieger 1992, 26). Accordingly, when the Fifth Dalai Lama received Gushri Khan, he physically enacted the mchod-yon dyad by accepting gifts while seated in a superior position upon his royal enthronement. Tsepon Shakabpa creatively extends this “protocol” all the way back to Emperor Ashoka, the Chakravartin ruler of the Maurya Empire (322-185 BCE), a move viewed as revisionist history by many contemporary Tibetologists.

Such a historical construction is certainly framed in the interests of Tibetan nationalism; the Chinese account (abstracted from Furen and Wenqing’s Highlights of Tibetan History) never
mentions the establishment of *mchod-yon* between the Tibetans and encroaching Mongols. Instead, Mongols are viewed as “bringing all nationalities under a central government” and “subjugating local independent regimes” (Klieger 1992, 27). Mongol patronage never provided political legitimation to Sakya lamas, but rather demonstrated that Tibet had “become a vassal territory of Mongolia” (Klieger 1992, 27). Shakapba’s narrative of Mongolian patronage is decried as “distorted history” in support of a “separatist clique” (Klieger 1992, 28). These historical debates are outside the scope of my argument, but it is important to note how marshaling historical evidence for nationalist ends is foremost an act of selective remembering (Renan 1882, 80). Pragmatic forgetting allows for the suppression of violence that parallels political formations: Chinese violence, for example, in euphemistically reframing their violent takeover of the “Outer Domains” in the language of individual freedom and modern development; and Tibetan violence, albeit symbolic, in shaping propagandistic versions of national identity around Shangri-la conceptions of compassion and non-violence which elide the “long history of socially and culturally sanctioned codes of honor and revenge, and the celebration of weaponry and fighting as a performance of masculinity in some parts of Tibet” (Yeh 2007, 655).

These discourses soak through successive layers of historical amnesia, nationalist reconstructions and personal identity formation and take on additional meaning in diasporic relations with Gaddis foils. The continuation of patronage in the South Asian diaspora not only unequally shapes Tibetan and Gaddi life chances, but also recasts economic dependency as munificence and gift-receiving as predicated on unique cultural and personal attributes. Such a mentality may contribute to what various authors describe as entitlement among Tibetans, a cultural superiority that expresses itself in a collusive relationship with foreigners (Saklani 1977;
Diehl 2002; Prost 2006). In this light, while foreign sponsorship may be understood by Tibetans as an extension of patronage that affirms group solidarity, it is felt by Gaddis as arbitrary and exclusionary.

In short, the patronage paradigm, having historical antecedents in the Mongolian invasion, became a structural template for the Tibetan state to subjectively interpret and physically negotiate subsequent invading forces. This is especially the case with the mid-17th century Manchu Empire. Throughout the Qing Dynasty, Vajrayana Buddhism was not privileged as the universal dharma; rather Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism all vied for political power in China and were held in delicate balance. Against this equivalency, the theocratic Tibetan state, helmed by the Dalai Lama, considered its relationship to the Manchus, especially the Emperor Qianlong, to be compatible with the “Buddhist ideology of the Universal Monarch of an Enlightened Age” and the perceived patronage of the Qing Dynasty (Klieger 1992, 46).

An important feature of mchod-yon is the non-hierarchical reciprocal relationship between patron and client. Although the Emperor Qianlong was viewed as a Universal Monarch, his standing never exceeded the spiritual authority of the Dalai Lama’s theocratic government. Contrary to Han interpretations, Tibetans maintain that even during Manchu domination both parties maintained equivalency. An examination of Tibetan scroll paintings (thangka) shows an iconographic equivalency between Buddhist monastics and Manchu emperors: if Tibetans considered a Qing Emperor to be Manjusri (the Bodhisattva of transcendent wisdom), then it reasons that the Manchu government could not exceed the Dalai Lama’s rank as Avalokitesvara (the Bodhisattva of compassion) (Klieger 1992, 52). Bodhisattva lineages are not scaled hierarchically.
Another way of conceptualizing this relationship, variously enacted throughout Tibetan relations with outside forces, is between the Tibetan guru and imperial *ckaravartin* (Ruegg 1991, 451). Thus, the Tibetan allegiance to the Manchu emperor partitioned temporal and spiritual power. With the demise of the Qing dynasty and the Manchu emperor, patronage was broken and Mongolia and Tibet entered into treaty to recognize each other’s mutual independence. The newly-established communist government deposed the emperor and undid the metaphysics of divine appointment and proceeded to claim the so-called “Outer Domains” of Manchuria, Mongolia, East Turkistan and Tibet.

In response, Tibetan nationalism arose with its modern accoutrements (anthem, military bands and national flag) and sought out *mchod-yon* with British colonial ambassadors in India who feared a Russian incursion across the porous Indo-Tibetan border (Klieger 1992, 68). Britain’s larger goal was to recognize the ambiguous terms of Chinese suzerainty and to keep Tibet as a buffer from Russian expansion. Colonel Francis Youngshusband was sent to Tibet to establish trade and entered Lhasa in 1904 after several military skirmishes with the isolationist-oriented Tibetans. The Dalai Lama fled, but an appointed Regent signed a peace treaty (the Anglo-Tibetan Convention) and British forces returned to India. Historically speaking, this British incursion into Tibet was experienced by Tibetans as aggressive and undesirable; however, from a presentist perspective, the Anglo-Tibetan Convention has become a crucial event among Tibetan nationalists (Klieger 1992, 71). Simply put, it signals the sovereignty of Tibet to make treaties with other nations. Although compelled by British invasion, signing the Convention has in retrospect been viewed as foreign diplomacy. Moreover, Article IX of the treaty guaranteed that Tibet could not be ceded to another power without British consent. This position would be quickly muddled by mollifying agreements between the British and Chinese
Past the ambiguity of mutually nullifying political pacts between Britain, Tibet and China, Klieger maintains that it is “reasonable to suggest that the Dalai Lama was seeking a *mchod-yon* relationship with the mighty British empire” (Klieger 1992, 73). However, the British never intended to provide patronage to the Tibetans if it risked Chinese retaliation.

Tibetan efforts to reconstitute the structural continuity of *mchod-yon* first with Britain and subsequently with various Western countries after 1959 has unintentionally resulted in transformations to both the patronage paradigm and Tibetan society as a whole (Klieger 1992, 75). Most crucially, the metaphysical reasoning of extending bodhisattva status to foreign emperors did not extend to the British monarch; and the “monastic feudal political structure” was slowly reconstituted according to secular western models (Klieger 1992, 75). Moreover, “the attempted reproduction of *mchod-yon* in exile and its orientation towards the West has been the source of its own structural transformation” (Klieger 1992, 83). This is evident by the laity accumulating surplus foreign aid efforts to democratization that culminated in 2011 with the appointment of Lobsang Sangay, the first elected prime minister of Tibet. The current systems of patronage benefiting lay refugees without monastic intermediaries are novel in Tibetan history. The continuity-with-modification of diasporic patronage provides foreign aid in a way ideologically compatible with Tibetan cultural preservation and nationalist rhetoric.

Unarguably, the reciprocal patronage between Tibetans refugees and Western sympathizers provides the material and ideological mechanism that fuels cosmo-capitalism and shapes conceptions of selfhood among Dharamsala Gaddis. While many Tibetologists consider patronage one aspect of Tibetan cultural preservation, others consider it to be inextricably linked to statelessness and psychologically pernicious. In an article posted to *The Tibetan Political Review* on September 12, 2012, Maura Moynihan, the daughter of former New York Senator
Patrick Moynihan, warned against Tibetan “dependence on a narrative of victimization [as] a means to generate sympathy and exoneration, and to sustain a model that appeals to donor agencies”. She argued that Tibetans in diaspora suffer from “protracted refugee syndrome”, as defined by the UNHCR as, in part, being “able to receive assistance, but […] prevented from enjoying those rights […] that would enable him or her to become a productive member of society. […] The prolongation of refugees’ dependence on external assistance [which] squanders precious resources of host countries, donors and refugees” (UNHCR 2004). She cites the South Asia Human Rights Documentation Center findings of a Tibetan refugee “meta-narrative focused on religiosity and suffering” emanating from the TGiE and refugee assistance programs which hampers individual enterprise and traps Tibetans in homogenizing discourses.

Additionally, Audrey Prost analyzes how foreign sponsorship (rogs ram) both opens new economic opportunities and reaffirms the economic dependence and self-estrangement of refugeehood. Rogs ram generally refers to the foreign support given to Tibetan refugee children for their education, families for their subsistence, nuns and monks for their monastic education, and traditional artisans and medical practitioners for the propagation of their craft. Besides this, rogs ram may involve personal interaction through foreign travel (the sponsor visiting their sponsored Tibetan family/student in India or vice versa) or ease the “time consuming and arduous” yearly renewal of the mandatory Indian residence card (unhcr.org). Prost highlights the vulnerability of Tibetan recipients who, if their lifestyle fails to comport with Western idealizations of Buddhist anti-materialism, are liable to suddenly lose their sponsorship. Rather than seeing patronage through the positive valance of Tibetan cultural preservation, Prost identifies ways in which Tibetans emphasize the interpersonal exchange of economic and symbolic capital in order to combat the “stigma of dependency” (Prost 2006, 250). On this
account, sponsorship locks Tibetans into a meta-narrative of victimization and poverty and “prescribed forms of behavior expected of refugees” (Prost 2006, 244). This economic entrapment is deepened by what Sherry Ortner calls “discursive subjectification” – to be “framed by a certain kind of discourse” that objectifies Tibetans as ascetic and non-violent panaceas to the ennui that plagues the West (Ortner 1995, 184). However, by focusing on dyadic cultural seduction between Western foreigners and Tibetan refugees, the local milieu is overlooked, specifically how quizzical Gaddis calibrate their own modern aspirations in light of the example set by cosmopolitan Tibetans comporting themselves as world renouncers.

In other words, the maintenance of sponsorship requires Tibetans to conceal how infusions of Western dollars translate into symbolic capital within a prestige economy that is rigged against Gaddis. Tibetan refugees must remain “poor” vis-à-vis Indian standards in order to receive wire transfers, which easily dwarf a typical Gaddi salary. This balancing act is not as hard as it sounds; the influx of Indian urban merchants from Bombay, Delhi and the Punjab and the massive development underway in the byzantine streets of McLeod Ganj all work to paint a distorted picture of generically rich Indians and comparatively poor Tibetans. Many foreign tourists cannot distinguish between the Indian economic elites who most profit from tourism and Gaddis who are often consigned to menial labor or, conversely, to earning ever-diminishing salaries from small-scale agro-pastoralism. The conspicuous consumption of domestic weekend tourists remains an unrealistic socioeconomic baseline that erroneously places Gaddis in hierarchical superiority over Tibetan refugees. Most foreign sponsors are completely unaware of just how little Gaddis can earn, not only the menial class of hotel clerks (nauker) and MNREGA day laborers. For example, my Badi research associate who has a Master’s in English earned about 60 USD (4,000 rupees) per month teaching at a reputable private school. Many Gaddis
earn comparable salaries, and, consequently, foreign sponsorship to Tibetans functions as a gatekeeping device that establishes standards of leisure and personal comportment associated with the West while foreclosing the possibility of Gaddi participation.

In this section, I have analyzed different Tibetological perspectives of foreign sponsorship. Klieger, Lopez and Reugg find structural continuity between current expressions of *rogs ram* and the historical establishment of *sbyin-bdag* patronage between the Tibetan theocracy and outside forces, while Moynihan, Prost and several human rights organizations highlight the psychological toll of overreliance on foreign sponsorship in driving a victimization narrative. Tibetologists may be right to analyze how *rogs ram* produces “resentment of foreigners” through financial dependence predicated on the performance of authentically Buddhist, world-renouncing refugees (De Voe 1981, 93); however, my analysis focuses on how Tibetan sponsorship foremost instigates Gaddi resentment. Such resentments manifest in innocuous joking, such as the Gaddi joke that the Tibetan mantra *om mani padme hūṃ* is actually “Oh Money Pay Me Soon”. They also manifest in a sense of Gaddi psychosocial displacement amidst a home they feel they’ve lost and an economy they feel is rigged against them. The effects of Tibetan sponsorship shape the immediate context in which Gaddis aspire for an enlarged sense of self against their contrasting identities as tribal. By promoting a triangular analysis of Tibetan patronage that takes seriously the Tibetan-Gaddi interface, a new dynamic comes into focus: how Tibetan patronage influences Gaddi conceptions of the material and aspirational limits of tribal life.

**Discursive Entanglements**

Just as the cosmology of the Ling Gesar and the interdependence of patronage recede into early Tibetan history, so too do Western discourses accruing around perceptions of Tibetans. This
section analyzes the historical shifts in Western discursive framing of Tibetans, often vacillating between fascination and disgust. Instead of re-litigating the argument that western discourses imprison Tibetan subjectivity in looping cultural mimicry and hybridization (Lopez 1998; Thurman 2001; Shakya 2001; Dreyfus 2005), I want to pivot to the role of these durable discourses in shaping the cultural geography and experiential terrain of Dharamsala. Doing so brings into focus how cultural seduction and mimesis between Tibetan refugees and Western sympathizers negatively impacts Gaddi self-perception and sense of belonging (Adams 1996, 24). By focusing on the social interaction between Tibetans and Gaddis, the presumed dyadic relationship of Tibetan self-definition by way of the West and its tangled discursive projections takes on a triangular dynamic. Tibetan identity is sharpened – ethnic distinctions made more poignant – as Tibetans socially interact with Gaddis. In this process, aided by Western representations and neighborly antagonisms, a mystical vision emerges of McLeod Ganj as the embodied essence of Vajrayana Buddhism and its associated virtues of tranquility, dispassion and studied meditativeness. In such a world, Gaddis are viewed as imposters and antagonists.

A discursive analysis of social identity begins with the constructivist truism that the material world becomes meaningful only through linguistic mediation. Foucault (1997, 199) describes how discourses establish prescriptive norms and, by extension, a range of exclusions: “Discursive practices are characterized by the delimitation of a field of objects, the definition of a legitimate perspective for the agent of knowledge, and the fixing of norms for the elaboration of concepts and theories.” Such a view shifts us from an analysis of representative objectivity to an analysis of the forms of power authorizing discursive representation. As Milton Singer (1972, 12) underscored in his analysis of Western visual imagery framing India, such stereotypes reflect more about the collective psychological makeup of the holder than any ontologically reality.
With that in mind, the analysis that follows eschews pursuit of the “real” Dharamsala and the “real” native subjectivity of Tibetans, but rather analyzes how certain “representation regimes affect the discursive production of Tibetanness” (Anand 2007, 16).

Herodotus is attributed with the first European reference to Tibet when he described a tribe north of India which collects, at their great peril, gold nuggets unearthed by ants larger than foxes (MacGregor 1970, 259). This early reporting is often treated as purely fanciful by contemporary scholars and indicative of the hearsay accounts of Himalayan regions in ancient times (Fisher 1985, 100), although evidence suggesting that tunnel-burrowing marmots in nearby Baltistan that unearth gold dust may yet vindicate Herodotus. Since then, imperial travel accounts have established the range of discourses about Tibet that, through repetition, became deep psychic grooves by which Tibetans are constructed in the Western imagination. Even the most distracted stroll around McLeod Ganj highlights the continued prevalence of these discourses.

In the same way that discourses of the Orient became self-actualizing through the quasi-scientific methods of orientalist empiricism, travel accounts of Tibet accrued on top of each other, drawing inspiration from and confirmation within a small coterie of explorers and Western imperial ambassadors (Said 1978; Ludden 1993). Early trips to Tibet by George Bogle (1774) and Samuel Turner (1783), both sent as emissaries of the East India Company in the geopolitical context of the tumultuous Anglo-Bhutanese War, did not open Tibet to commerce but instead provided a dumping ground for British projections. Tibet was constructed as a “complexion oppositorum, […] a rich complexity of contradictions and oppositions [which] provide the basis of Tibet as a sacred place in the Western imagination” (Bishop 1989, 63). These binary oppositions included: a Buddhist system that was both rational and superstitious; a political
system that ran on monastic absolutism while maintaining wild democratic support within Tibetan society; a moral system that was both elevated and produced “dirt, idleness and mindless uniformity […] conspicuous on a daily level”; and a general mood of contentment undercut with tumultuous monastic political intrigue (Bishop 1989, 63). These oppositions lodged firmly in the early English imagination, and there remained while Tibet’s border was officially sealed for the next century. This period of closure churned up durable fantasies about Tibetans as the mystical product of high-altitude isolation, free from the material aspirations plaguing the industrial West.

Mid-nineteenth century discourses about Tibet formed against the backdrop of Ruskin’s innovative aesthetic approach to landscape and mountain topography, Darwinian evolutionary theory, and the expansion of photography and mountaineering as a leisure activity. Tibet was a lacuna on the world map, a place that needed to be surveyed and scientifically comprehended, given coherence amid the global rise of nationalism and imperial travel (Bishop 1989, 98-99). Tibet, not unlike McLeod Ganj and other British hill stations, was configured in the Western imagination as a place of life-giving mountain air, the absolute antithesis of industrial smog and the claustrophobic rise in European tourism that had demystified the Alps (Bishop 1989, 115).

During this period, discursive representations of Tibet increasingly fixated on Buddhist superstition and irrationality, the sexual licentiousness of Tantrism, and the growing conviction that monastic rule and theocratic bureaucracy were exploiting everyday Tibetan peasants – a powerful discourse which contributed to the fantasy of foreign liberators. This is the origin of the “New Age Orientalism” that discursively frames Tibetans, both in Tibet and the global diaspora, both in Western popular representations and in scholarship (Lopez 1994). Tibet is seen as an imperiled Shangri-la, a mystical abode of fantastical contradictions, and Tibetans are constructed
as passive non-agents in need of sponsorship (*rogs ram*) to preserve their “authentic” Tibetan culture.

Between 1875-1914, British travelers in Tibet “represented the extreme vanguard of an extroverted, aggressive, expansionist culture which valued above all else involvement in the world, individuality, earnestness and will” (Bishop 1989, 137). Europe was experiencing tremendous social upheaval due to industrial modernization and the intensification of imperialism abroad. Tibet became the fantasy place, replacing earlier fascinations with Tahiti, the Arctic or the source of the Nile (Bishop 1989, 143). Travel writing from this period focused on discursive tropes of Tibet as an existential Unknown needing to be cartographically explored; an Underworld, full of grotesqueness and monstrous behavior, where religion had perverted natural sentiment; a timeless place, either medieval or prehistoric (based on Tibetanoid physiognomy and rumors of atavistic, half-evolved Yetis); a land of pre-rational and pre-responsible natives who, like children, more directly express the unconscious than conscious mind (Yung’s Red Book is a prime example of this discourse); and a theater of nothing where “the landscape and the people where the backdrop, but the script was written by Westerners as they enacted their own hopes and fears” (Bishop 1989, 170).

Between WWI and the cinching of the bamboo curtain with the Dalai Lama’s exile to India in 1959, Western travel writing about Tibet became highly self-aware as a genre, self-reflexively harkening back and playing with tropes established in earlier accounts (Bishop 1989, 198). Western discourses focused on the inevitability that Tibet’s fragile civilization, considered the last on earth, would be decimated or rendered inauthentic by foreign tourism. By mid-century, Western tourists were replaced with Chinese communists as the vehicle of Tibetan cultural extinction, and Tibet “was merely drawn into the mythic drama as the other side of the
equation: the ‘Most peaceful nation on earth’ versus ‘this soulless regime’” (Bishop 1989, 209). Despite these fears, Tibet was more than ever the West’s discursive opposite, no longer a place of backwardness or contradiction but now the shining utopia epitomized by Hilton’s famous book turned into Hollywood blockbuster *Lost Horizon*. The discursive divide between the West and Tibet remains fuzzy, however, as the utopian character of Shangri-la is less attributed to indigenous esoteric knowledge than the consorted efforts by expat Mahatmas to preserve Western high culture as the world totters on the edge of cataclysmic warfare (Lopez 1998, 5).

These valorizing discourses about Tibet, while expressing ambivalence about Western civilizational attainment, begged unfavorable assessments of nearby India: De Riencourt compares Tibetan “gaiety and humour” to Indian “unsmiling faces”; Chapman expresses gratitude about leaving behind the “impenetrable sly hostility of the Bengali Babu” for the “smiling oblique-eyed faces of the [Tibetan] hillmen” (Bishop 1989, 236). The utopian character of Tibet has carried into the present, where Tibetan refugees, now accessible in South Asia, bring Tibet to tourists and slake their interest in esoteric Buddhism through the establishment of spiritual centers. Dharamsala thus becomes a “theater of inner revolution” akin to Mecca or Gethsemane, the best chance for “nurturing a spiritual renaissance” that will amend the excesses of modernity (Chopra 2007, xii).

These heterogeneous constructions of Tibet in the Western imagination act as memory traces, originating with explorers and colonial ambassadors yet firmly anchored in genres of recording and aesthetic appreciation, from Tibetology to Tibet-centric tourism in McLeod Ganj. Each period discussed is marked by discursive emphases that are adapted to specific social needs and conditions of power. On the whole, however, the framing of Tibet is generally patterned on the development of sacred space: “an initial, vague feeling of numinosity; then the discovery and
establishment of a boundary-zone; followed by the creation of a center, or series of centers, as axis mundi; then its consecration as a fully formed sacred place or temenos; and finally its eventual decay, degeneration and abandonment” (Bishop 1989, 247). In his exhaustive compendium of mytho-fictional discourses framing Tibet, Martin Brauen (2000) classifies source material into four heuristic historical periods: Utopia, when missionaries and explorers sought out oriental utopias; Shambha-La, epitomized by Theosophy; Shangri-La, when European monastics resided in Tibet and preserved the spiritual core of Western high culture; and Dharma-La, marked by the Tibetan diaspora and the commodification of Tibetan Buddhism.

Anand (2007, 21-36) steps back from this discursive history and theorizes psychosocial periods in the colonial construction of “Exotica Tibet.” He argues that a culture of surveillance, which allowed imperialist discourses to masquerade as dispassionate scientific facts, paradoxically fueled a perception of the inaccessibility and inscrutability of Orientals. An obsession with classification and differentiation allowed colonial ambassadors to justify their subjugation of non-Western people according to their lower stage of civilizational attainment. Through a series of oppositions, Tibetans became overdetermined signifiers. By vacillating between poles of debasement and idealization, oppositional discourses of Tibetan filth and theocratic serfdom coexisted with Tibetan utopianism and a fantastical Tibet of Aryans, Nazis, Theosophical masters and lost Christians and Jews. In such a world, the legendary Prester John, a Nestorian priest who was chronicled in the Middle Ages to rule over an oriental utopia, was sometimes thought to be living in Tibet (Brewer 2015, 248). Similarly, Tibetans were imagined to be at once temperamentally infantile and inheritors of tantric esoterica, libidinous and monastic.
Western discourses also manipulated time, called chronopolitics, rendering their culture as timeless and Tibetans as living in a mountain hermitage unaffected by secular space and time (Anand 2006). Lastly, and most importantly for understanding Tibetan ethno-commodification in Dharamsala and its broader impact on Gaddis, discourses about Tibet revolved around Western self-affirmation and self-criticism, either Western superiority or lack. By viewing Tibetans through what Sherry Ortner calls the “benevolent side” of Orientalism regarding Sherpas, positive stereotyping acts as a critical foil for knowing oneself (1999, 150). It was with such a mentality that the first published western account of McLeod Ganj set in motion Tibetcentric ways of apprehending McLeod Ganj as a place.

**The maṇḍala of McLeod Ganj**

Understanding how these durable discourses got woven into a construction of McLeod Ganj begins with Thomas Merton, a Kentucky Trappist monk who visited the Dalai Lama in 1968. During his stay in McLeod Ganj he kept a meticulous and evocatively beautiful diary, which was published after his accidental death from electrocution just a few weeks after leaving India. His *Asian Journal* is the first Western account of McLeod Ganj that brings together historical discourses about Tibetans and puts them at play in a diaspora context, in a specifically Gaddi world.

Upon reaching Dharamsala, his first diary entry, dated November 1st, has the tone of a pastoral tinged with communal darkness. We see what may be the first recorded interaction between Gaddis and Tibetans. While ambling through the Deodars, “twisted as in Chinese paintings,” Merton relishes in the tranquility of a Gaddi shepherd playing a flute (Merton 1968, 79). Nearby are Tibetans, some singing while constructing a mountain hut, others thumbing
rosaries and building devotional cairns (maṇi). And then, inexplicably punctuating the tranquility, the “Indian goatherd knocked over one of the piles for no reason” (79). Merton registers this act of malice without guessing at the motivation of the offender or the context. The reader is left to imagine why a Gaddi shepherd would deface a Tibetan devotional cairn in front of Tibetans earnestly in prayer. It seems portentous that the earliest account of the Tibetan-Gaddi interface describes an act of provocation.

During Merton’s five-day sojourn in Dharamsala, he describes feeling “very much at home with the Tibetans, even though much that appears in books about them seems bizarre if not sinister” (82). Tibetans are “beautiful, loving people” (92), […] “all quite impressive” (103). Clearly, Merton is trying to deconstruct some of the discourses and exoticizing misreports of Tibetans by previous travelers, and views his visit to Dharamsala as distinct from the rabble of uninformed Western tourists, the “blue haired ladies” and “rich people who have nothing better to do than come up here out of curiosity” (92). Gaddis speak to us from the margins of the text, like the sound of bickering women from a nearby cottage that Merton overhears mixed with the “soft guttural mantras of the crows” (84).

Merton’s diary is wide-ranging, describing his several meetings with the 33-year-old Dalai Lama and other lamas, eating dinner in crummy restaurants and even using Saturday’s newspaper for toilet paper. Interwoven throughout are aphorisms about the pan-religious symbolism of the maṇḍala and its meditational use in quelling the mind and gaining Buddha consciousness. The maṇḍala is a representation of the esoteric focal points (cakra) of the human body and metaphor of universal stillness. He describes how a famous lama (the Khempo of Nangyal) answered Merton’s persistent questioning about maṇḍalas with only vague reference to their “esoteric secrecy” (94). Merton is largely concerned with the symbolism of the maṇḍala,
but on November 5, he interpreted McLeod Ganj itself through what he calls a “mandala awareness of space” (105). In this regard, Merton becomes the earliest, and not unexpectedly most eloquent, esoteric cartographer of McLeod Ganj, externalizing a spatial vision that has become a template of how spiritual tourists encounter the place.

The ‘mandala awareness’ of space. For instance, this mountain, where a provisional Tibetan pattern of dwellings and relationships has been, very sketchily, set up. You get oriented by visiting various rimpoches, each one a reincarnation of a spiritual figure, each one seated in his shrinelike cell, among tankas, flowers, bowls, rugs, lamps, and images. Each rimpoché figures henceforth as one who ‘is seated’ in a particular plane, near or far: the Khempo of Namgyal Tra-Tsang high up on the mountain with his little community. Ratod Rimpoche just up the hill, a quarter of a mile from here, near the official headquarters of the Dalai Lama administration. The little tulku, who can hardly be imagined as sitting still for very long, higher up, just below the khempo. And the Dalai Lama himself in a sort of center, where he is certainly very ‘seated’ and guarded and fenced in. Thus what was for me on Friday a rugged, non-descript mountain with a lot of miscellaneous dwellings, rocks, woods, farms, flocks, gulfs, falls, and heights, is now spiritually ordered by permanent seated presences, burning with a lamp-like continuity and significance, centers of awareness and reminders of dharma. One instinctively sees the mountain as a mandala, slightly askew no doubt, with a central presence and surrounding presences more or less amiable. The rimpoches were all very amiable. The central presence is a fully awake, energetic, alert, nondusty, nondim, nonwhispering Buddha (106-7).

Merton’s mandala awareness of Dharamsala clarifies that which seems unruly, makes systematic and holistic that which seems disparate, makes eternal that which seems mutable.

Gaddi culture and topography are disharmonious; twice in the diary Merton refers to gunfire at nearby shooting ranges, possibly from the firing wall at the village Chandmari. He alludes to the “mock warfare” that exists “outside and below the mandala” (107). The unspecified wildness and base materiality of Indian McLeod Ganj is overlaid with a Tibetan symbolism that purifies it. The Gaddi villages that cascade in every direction, the Gaddi shepherds with their well-trodden routes and grazing grounds connecting Dharamsala down to the Punjab and up across the
Dhauladhrs into Chamba, the Gaddi names of places, the interrelated snake temples that link Kangra Gaddis to their ancestral home in the Gadderan – these are only some of the Gaddi cultural geographies of McLeod Ganj that are obscured by an oblong *maṇḍala* composed of Tibetan spiritual leaders centered around the Dalai Lama.

Merton “instinctively” sees Dharamsala as an ordered *maṇḍala* composed of Tibetan lamas, but perhaps here he misspeaks. Instinct connotes a spontaneous mode of perception divorced from experience and learning, a naturally arising sentiment. But Merton’s perception of McLeod Ganj is forged through his spiritual orientation as an ecumenical monk, his eagerness to comprehend Tantric Buddhism and associated symbolism and, on an experiential level, his opposition of Tibetans as other-worldly ascetics with Indians as bickering, militaristic, spiteful – in short, with Indians living “outside and below” the *maṇḍala*. Spiritual tourism, which dates back to the flight of the Dalai Lama to McLeod Ganj but accelerated in the 1990s, is inspired by Merton’s *maṇḍala* awareness, an esoteric portrait that paints Tibetans in pastels and overlooks, or subtly devalues, Gaddis living parallel lives.

It is no coincidence that Swati Chopra, an Indian pop-spirituality writer, uses the metaphor of the *maṇḍala* in her 2007 spiritual travelogue *Dharamsala Diaries*. She writes, “The mandala of Dharamsala represents a unique encirclement of several worlds—of the dharma, of wanders, of refugees of the spirit. A weaving together is taking place on this mandala that is bringing the seeker in conjunction with the knowledge she seeks […]. If there is thirst, Dharamsala presents the possibility of slaking it” (Chopra 2007, xii). Writing 50 years after Merton, Chopra recycles the *maṇḍala* metaphor to the same effect. The “several worlds” of the *maṇḍala* is nothing more than a recursive loop between Tibetan patrons and foreign clients, not a plural community including Gaddis and Gaddi Dalits, let alone the Gujjars, Gorkhas, Sindis,
migrant laborers and the spectral absence of what was once a Muslim population, fled or killed during Partition, who also constitute planes of the *mandala*. The spiritualization of McLeod Ganj – not maliciously, but thoroughly – naturalizes a Tibetan Buddhist worldview and cluster of discourses about Tibetans and Indians that influence how foreigners apprehend McLeod Ganj and how Gaddis and Tibetans relate to each other and their shared home.

Chopra’s spiritual travelogue of Dharamsala is the latest manifestation of discursively framing Tibetans as ascetic, peace-loving panaceas to Western consumerism – even as the impact of capitalism and unfettered development is unmissable in McLeod Ganj. Such ways of seeing Tibetans mimetically bleed into Tibetan subjectivity in the ritualistic engagement between refugees and sympathetic sponsors, volunteers and curious travelers (Adams 1996, 17). Merton visited McLeod Ganj long before it transformed into a tourist destination, but his spiritualization of the landscape is now part-and-parcel with the seduction, imitation and cultural branding at the nexus of interactions between Tibetan refugees and Western tourists – an engagement which is felt as “collusive” by Gaddis (Dielh 2002, 110). In this drama, Gaddis become the undesirable tribal foil, temperamentally opposed to Tibetan cosmo-spirituality, outcasted from the Tibetan *mandala* of Dharamsala.

**What’s in a Name?**

The Tibetanization of Dharamsala is more multisided than durable Western discourses transposed onto a spiritual cartography. Place-naming practices and symbolic geographies are also crucial to the construction of Tibetan diasporic identity. Anand (2000, 277) analyzes how the Tibetan “culturoscape” of Dharamsala – the reproduction of iconic Tibetan place names, the popularity of nicknames like Little Lhasa and Dhasa – expresses “diasporic longing for homeland”. One
scholar recently went so far as to suggest that such nicknames may express grander Tibetan
ambitions of homeland “reclamation and restitution in exile” (Siganporia 2016, 66) – an
argument that takes on additional heft when extended to Gaddi sentiment.

While Tibetologists are attuned to diasporic name places as integral to projects of Tibetan
nostalgia, national belonging and cultural preservation, such a restrictive view misses the “spatial
politics of naming” in the wider Gaddi milieu (Rose-Redwood 2011, 34). Opening the aperture
reveals how Tibetanized place names are “embedded in intricate cultural interrelations and
tension-filled conceptions of space” (Vuolteenaho and Berg 2009, 9). By emphasizing how place
names are socially embedded processes expressing the micro-politics of power, what emerges
are complex forms of social agonisms between Tibetans and Gaddis. By offering three
ethnographic examples of toponymical contestation, I hope to refocus the debate on how Tibetan
diasporic landscapes disrupt the set of existing Gaddi social relations that are integral to their felt
construction of place. Instead of conceptualizing places as neat spatially-bounded areas, what
emerge are local conceptions of place inextricable from “articulated moments in the networks of
social relations and understandings” (Massey 1991, 28). I will go on to argue that place names in
Dharamsala “do some of the heavy work of naturalizing and reinforcing the dominance of
existing social orders” (Vuolteenaho and Berg 2009, 14).

The first and most straightforward ethnographic example of the social antagonisms
embedded in place naming is Dusalni, a Gaddi hamlet that spills down the hillside from Bhagsu
Road. A Gaddi village that was ravaged in the 1905 Kangra Earthquake, it was, until the late
1980s, nothing remarkable: a cluster of mud homes loosely interdependent with a dozen nearby
SC and ST Gaddi villages. The elders describe coming from Gadderan as far back as their great-
grandparents, pastoralists who settled on the fertile southern slopes of the Dhauladhrs. Even
now Bihari Lal sends his son to do flock duty in small grazing lands between bramble bushes and recent development, and twice a year Gaddi shepherds pass through on their cyclical pastoral run between highland Chamba and the area around Pong Dam. No one possesses family ancestry charts (vansāvali) dating back to the earliest migration, but it is reasonable to imagine Dusalni as one of those “promiscuous” clusters of bedraggled Gaddi homes described by Barnes at the time of the colonial annexation of Dharamsala. Based on conversations with the pradhān and elders in the community while living there, the name Dusalni has no specific meaning in Gaddi dialect. There are no legendary accounts of a great yogi in Dusalni, as we will see in the nearby village of Jogiwara, no stories of war or snake deities. At the time of my fieldwork, Dusalni’s renown was limited to the factoid that it allegedly boasted the oldest Gaddi in Kangra.

And yet, Dusalni as a place name has become an embattled topic among Gaddis. Beginning in the late 1980s but accelerating in the early 1990s, the mono-caste village dislodged from its previous interdependence with the downside villages and became a satellite village of the quickly-growing McLeod Ganj. A steady stream of Tibetan refugees and rising rental costs had ruptured the boundaries of McLeod Ganj, leaving impoverished Tibetans looking for affordable alternatives. Close behind were mostly European backpackers on shoestring budgets in pursuance of a more relaxed and mountainous Tibetan environment that matched their expectations of Dharamsala.

The Gaddis of Dusalni, having benefited from their caste superiority over Halis and Badis in nearby villages equidistant to McLeod Ganj, cashed out their flock wealth and got the jump on cementing and expanding their mud homes into guesthouses, transforming Dusalni into a Tibetan satellite village. Their homes were the first to provide long-term accommodation to Tibetan refugees at discounted rental prices; since then, SC Gaddis in adjacent Heeru and Gamru have
followed suit, erasing the visible economic disparities of the early 2000s. Because Gaddi villages are not necessarily built up around public centers, Dusalni seems to smudge into Heeru below and Mithanal to the northwest. The village name Mithanal translates from Gaddi as “sweet creek”, although the fetid monsoon runoff rushing through the depressed spine of the village has not been potable for decades. Locals conveniently blame Tibetan overcrowding.

Largely on account of the Dalai Lama being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989, McLeod Ganj in the early 1990s was a hub of international tourism and large-scale commercial construction. At the same time, a third general wave of Tibetan refugees came via Kathmandu to Dharamsala, looking for assistance and the Dalai Lama’s blessing. Coming largely from Amdo, alongside Tibet’s porous eastern border with China, many of these refugees lived seminomadic lifestyles. In contrast to so-called “Settler Tibetans” (gsnas bca’) who arrived between 1959 and the early 1960s, these Amdo refugees are referred to as “New Arrivals” (gsar ’byor pa). Because of the Lhasa-centricity of Settler Tibetans in Dharamsala, these New Arrivals are often treated as Sinicized facsimile Tibetans, fluent in Chinese and lacking the urban polish of Lhasa Tibetans. With rental prices skyrocketing and subjected to open hostility from Settler Tibetans, whose homes are centrally clustered in McLeod Ganj, these New Arrivals took accommodation in Dusalni. Often without knowing a word of Hindi or Gaddi dialect, they found themselves sharing the intimacies of domestic life with Gaddis.

Around that time, Tibetans began referring to Dusalni as Amdo Village. The nickname spread to backpacker tourists and began showing up in blogs and travel guides. Soon the name Dusalni was used exclusively by Gaddis and Amdo Village became ascendant among Tibetans, foreigners and Indian merchants. One New Arrival, reminiscing about his first weeks in Dharamsala in the early-2000s, described how he settled in Amdo Village in a Gaddi-owned
guesthouse. “I called a TV satellite company in Lower Dharamsala and asked them to come and put a line into my room. The man asked where I live, and I replied ‘Amdo Village.’ He replied, ‘If you live in Amdo Village than ask a Chinese to put in your cable wire! This is India, and you live in Dusalni.’ Dusalni? That was how I came to realize the Gaddi name of where I live.”

Meanwhile, many Tibetans I spoke with, even those Amdo Tibetans living in Dusalni, have never heard the name Dusalni. While Gaddis in Dusalni have drastically improved their economic standing on account of Tibetan tenants, these material improvements only go so far to balm their wounded self-respect. The popularity of the name Amdo Village, which has largely erased Dusalni, has become a flashpoint for Gaddi resentments about their sense of psychic displacement in a Tibetanized landscape.

The second ethnographic example comes from across the valley from Dusalni. Jogiwara is a similarly sized mixed-caste Gaddi hamlet that has enjoyed road accessibility to McLeod Ganj since the colonial period. Jogiwara Road and Temple Road run parallel through the center of McLeod Ganj, fusing into Khada Danda Road at a sharp downturn descending to Kotwali Bazaar in Lower Dharamsala. In late June 2015, in honor of the Dalai Lama’s 80th birthday, the Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh Virbhadra Singh announced that Jogiwara Road would be renamed Potala Road. As July 6 approached, a green English-Hindi signboard christening Potala Road was installed that gave a historical footnote: “Potala Named After A Holi (sic) Hill in South India meaning ‘Abode of the Avalokitesvara’ (Buddha of Mercy).” Notwithstanding the Kafkaesque misattribution, for which no one at the Lok Nirman Vibhag claims to know a thing, a statement was posted on the CTA website on June 23, 2015, stating, “The new Potala Road has a powerful symbolism of His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s return to the Potala Palace in Tibet from this Potala Road in Dharamsala, reflecting the fervent prayers of all the Tibetan people residing
inside and outside Tibet to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama return to Tibet with dignity.” In
addition to its mnemonic function, Potala Road emphasizes its centrality in Tibetan cultural and
political life, linking the Tibetan commercial and residential hub in McLeod Ganj to the midway
Gangchen Kyishong complex of TGiE offices and the TCV School below in Gamru. Google
Maps has erased Jogiwara Road, and Potala Road has already taken hold in the English-speaking
local vernacular.

What exactly does Jogiwara mean to Gaddis, and how does this act of official
“toponymic silencing” endanger its local connotative meaning (Harley 2001, 99)? How does the
Tibetanization of Dharamsala not only obscure Gaddi spiritual geographies but also subtly inflect
caste posturing and religious conversion among Gaddi Halis in Jogiwara as they aspire for full
sociopolitical inclusion within the Gaddi tribe? To answer these questions, I examine the
importance of Jogiwara for Heera Lal, the senior member of a Hali family with ancestry dating
back to the early colonial annexation of Dharamsala. In 2014, more than a year before the Dalai
Lama’s 80th birthday brought Potala Road, Heera Lal gave me a tour of his property and
explained the etymology of the place name Jogiwara. Taking me into a gated enclosure behind
his home, he explained:

This is our Jogiwara Temple, which is a very historic place. It is situated on about 60
*kanāl* area of land belonging to our Hali family from the time of my great-grandfather,
who settled here from the village Swaai in Chamba. The temple is believed to be 500
years old and the tree, who knows, a thousand years maybe. Above this rock there is the
tomb (*samādhī*) of the yogi named Tirthnath, who buried himself alive (*zindā daphā*) in
this earth at this exact place. He went into a meditative pose under the ground and
voluntarily took his last breath. We believe that if someone locally has received any
special powers, then he does through the *darśan* of Tirthnath. And it is from this very
yogi that this village and the road leading up to McLeod Ganj Chowk receives its name
Jogiwara – the complex (*bāṛā*) of the yogi Tirthnath. Yogi and *bāṛā* make Jogibara. We
tell the story of how so many jungle-dwellers (*mūlṇivāsī*) used to come to this place and
do chanting (*jap-tap*). At that time, this place was just a Gaddi place. Tirthnath was no
Gaddi; he was a yogi, and nobody knows his history. We only know that when he felt it
was time to leave this world he threw a gold coin from some great height and said that wherever it lands there his tomb should be built. It landed in this place; he went into a yogic trance here and asked people to cover him with soil. He was released, and from that day until today his tomb remains the same. Because this is a place of worship, women are not allowed above his tomb. Tirthnath is a celibate sage, not a married man (śādī śudā). So women are not allowed to worship him.

Tirthnath was alive at the same time as Guru Nanak-ji. It is said that when Guru Nanak-ji came to this region, he visited this place where Tirthnath was living, and they conversed with each other. Therefore, this Deodar tree [which houses the samādh] is very pure to our family, and we never use its wood for the kitchen stove. It is only used for havan and other rituals.

Consistent with the view of place names as “pegs on which to hang descriptions,” the legendary personage of Tirthnath and his voluntary death (samādhi) is the direct historical etymology of Jogiwara. Supernatural occurrences and strong attachments to divinity, often expressed through the physical intimacy of spirit possession, are locally interpreted as the effect of the yogi named Tirthnath. Yet what interested me more was how Madan Lal, the third generation of Sikh-converted Halis in Jogiwara, pays special reverence to Tirthnath as having personally conversed with Guru Nanak. As described in earlier chapters, Gaddi discriminations against Halis have led to multiple strategies of social uplift, from conversion to Christianity, Arya Samaj, Radhasoami and Sikhism, resulting in fractured Hali-caste consciousness along geographic and sociolinguistic fault lines. For the five Sikh-converted Hali families in Jogiwara, custodianship of the samādh increases their local prestige and affectively connects them to Guru Nanak. Jogiwara, in this light, is a multivalent place name connoting the intersection of spirituality and social discrimination these Halis faced as one-time Hindu-believing Gaddi Dalits.
As Tibetans and Indian state officials in 2015 celebrated Potala Road in light of the Dalai Lama’s birthday and the larger mnemonic significance of the Potala Palace in orienting Tibetan diasporic nostalgia, the everyday references to Jogiwara Road as a publicly-organizing signpost began to fade away and along with it layers of connotative meaning. Gaddis may feel further disoriented in a Tibetanized landscape, while Halis are faced with deeper feelings of personal inadequacy as they are continuously disenfranchised from ST status.

![Figure 6.2 The samādh of Tirthnath on Jogiwara Road. Photo by author.](image)

The last example of toponymical contestation in Dharamsala is amazingly absent in scholarship: the multivalent connotations and social antagonisms embedded in the name McLeod Ganj. The place name was established in the 1850s, when David McLeod, the Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab, annexed Dharamsala and constructed British military garrisons in Bhagsu and Chandmari. How has renaming a colonial conquest nearly, but not completely, erased the original Gaddi name? What social signifiers remain embedded in the Gaddi name for
McLeod Ganj? Lastly, how has the Tibetan mispronunciation of McLeod Ganj had the unintended consequences of resurfacing the spectral absence of Muslims? To answer these questions, I follow Karam on a tour of Gaddi McLeod Ganj.

“Close your eyes and imagine McLeod having three families,” Karam says as we walk together under an umbrella in the pre-monsoon downpour. A retired Gaddi Rajput serviceman who spent his career posted outside Himachal Pradesh, Karam now lives in a retirement community down the mountain alongside wealthy Gorkha and Rajput military families. We met in McLeod Ganj for the yearly satyanārāyan kathā pūjā in his ancestral home, which is oftentimes the only thing that pulls him up the mountain. Before the Tibetans came, before tourism and traffic clogged up the roads and turned dense forestland and a colonial lattice of parallel roads into a commercial hub, McLeod Ganj was his “motherland” as he affectionately calls it. “We were the sole permanent Gaddi inhabitants here. Now I try to come as little as possible. I have to accept the development, but I don’t want to see it.”

The loss of Karam’s childhood home is compounded by the recent loss of his wife. When we meet his eyes are sunken from mourning and betray a hint of annoyance at the traffic that delayed his arrival and the overcrowding that forced him to park in a tourist parking garage. To whittle away the tedium of retirement and the pain of loss and change, Karam practices the Art of Living and writes nostalgically about Gaddi culture. He recently showed me an essay he wrote about the fierce loyalty of Gaddi dogs to their shepherd-owners (puhāl). Through thick and thin, leopard attacks and mudslides, Gaddi dogs stay at your side. I sensed that for Karam these dogs represent an old Gaddi order, proud reminders of a stable Gaddi way of life that is nearly extinct in rapidly changing Dharamsala.
Our loop of McLeod Ganj begins in what was the central hub fifty years ago and is now a non-descript barber shop. Between Temple and Jogiwara Road, long before there were shops, there was a massive tree ringed by a slate platform. At the base of the tree was a representation of a Gaddi deity and an iron flagellator whip (sangal) brought from Gadderan. Karam explains how the original Gaddi name of McLeod Ganj is actually Talu, a name derived from the platform (tīyālā) that afforded shade and a view into the Kangra valley. Talu was a meeting place for Gaddi shepherds preparing to cross Indrahar Pass, for Gaddis moving their domesticated animals to proximate highland pasturelands (goth) during the monsoon, and most commonly a hangout place for Gaddis from nearby villages, a central place where one would rest after a laborious walk hauling household supplies from Kotwali Bazaar or First Bazaar. “It was a prominent place to meet in a time when we didn’t have phones or easy connection between villages. We always knew that on Sundays we would meet our friends at Talu under the tree with the big branches.”

Figure 6.3 A nearby tīyālā in Lower Dharamsala, similar in shape, if not size, to the massive Deodar tree and raised stone sitting platform from which Talu received its name. Photo by author.
At some point in the 1970s the ṭiyālā was razed to make space for first a Tibetan stupa and then, when the price of land shot up, commercial shops. I suggest we ask the barbers if they remember the ṭiyālā, but Karam wants to move on. “Not one shopkeeper here knows the history of Talu. They came after development began.” While McLeod Ganj is internationally known, Talu is disappearing; besides Gaddi elders and taxi drivers, the name has limited resonance within the larger community and is absent in books, signposts, even on the Internet.

We walk to Dolma Chowk, a Tibetan medical dispensary where Temple and Jogiwara roads intersect. “There used to be a big football ground just here. I remember we would play football with a tennis ball. We would kick around without shoes, and I broke and re-broke my toe so many times that even now it juts out.” He points to the hill behind Dolma Chowk, where a cluster of high-end government hotels yields to the main cluster of Tibetan homes. “Back there the Gujjars would come with water buffaloes. Now there is the Surya Hotel.” Coincidently, the week before, I interviewed a 93-year-old Gujjar living in Sudhair who, until the mid-1980s, was the last to lease this land for his buffaloes.

We loop onto Jogiwara Road, and Karam shows me where three Muslim families once lived. Their homes are now a medical dispensary and two Tibetan restaurants. The original wooden framework sticks out amid the cement constructions on either side. “It was before my time, but elders talked about Muslims in Talu. They fled during Partition.” Stories circulate, as recently as the early 2000s, of Muslims returning to McLeod Ganj to see their ancestral homes, now restaurants and hotels. Land transactions of former Muslims properties are conducted by the WAKF board in Lower Dharamsala. We turn onto Bhagsu Road and note the Tibetan Welfare Office, which was allegedly once a masjid and is under petition by Muslim scholars for reparation (Qasimi 2000, 526-31). Wedged between Bhagsu and Jogiwara Road is a hovel of
Tibetan shacks with makeshift plumbing and electricity and cats pattering over tin roofs.

Allegedly there was once a Muslim cemetery here, and rumors circulate of a gravestone that sometimes emerges after monsoon sliding.

Kashmiri merchants and sympathetic Islamic scholars have a specific grievance about the alleged misuse of the historical McLeod Ganj Masjid by the TGiE. During winter months, Kashmiri porters travel to McLeod Ganj to find work in the main chowk; among them, a handful of devoutly practicing Muslims keep prayer rugs in plastic wrappers below the bus stand and perform namāz in the garbage-strewn jungle. It would be too costly and time-consuming to travel to the Jama Masjid in Lower Dharamsala. On the other hand, Muslim merchants and porters believe that Settler Tibetans, by mispronouncing McLeod Ganj as Maulana Ganji have recovered the earliest, true name of the village. Maulana Ganji connotes a Muslim religious scholar (maulānā) and harkens back to the flourishing of Islamic life before Partition. The legacy of Islam has nearly disappeared – one Gujjar family remains in Sudhair, and a few others remain in Fatehpur and Norbalinga where they have replaced Hindu Rihare as ritual oboe-like instrument (śahanāī) players. However, when Muslims hear the Tibetan mispronunciation of McLeod, it is understood as an act of collective remembering with political significance. Just as Dhasa functions as a mnemonic of homeland for Tibetan refugees, so Maulana Ganji mnemonically restores the place of Muslims in a Tibetanized landscape.

We return to Jogiwara Road, and Karam shows me his family properties. Karam has three brothers; they all received an equal share of land on which each brother has at least one shop or restaurant. The Internet cafe is on its last gasp, supplanted by tourists searching out cappuccinos and free WI-FI for their laptops. There are plans to convert it to a restaurant. The massage parlor remains popular, especially among Punjabi weekend tourists looking for something memorable.
with a female masseuse. Karam ensures that all male clients are paired with male masseuses, a policy which costs him considerable business. He refuses to sell his properties to outside developers. His family is one of a handful of Gaddis that did not sell their properties during the tourist boom of the 1990s and maintain direct business in Talu.

As we walk to his car in the parking garage, Karam points up to the cloud-covered mountaintop, where a strip of green is visible. “That place is called *Talu wale ka goth.*” In Gaddi dialect, *goth* means a grazing ground (*carāgāha*). "Some people call it Garoth. That is my family land, where we would take our cows and buffalo during the start of the rainy season. Our family has given it up, but I’m told it’s still in use by shepherds.”

We return to the car park, and as Karam pays his parking ticket he says, “You know, the land we have on Jogiwara Road was not our original land. We have documents that our family once lived right here,” pointing down at the multi-floor car park and bus station. He tells me how his great-grandfather had farming land here that the British forcibly bought around 1850, shortly after annexing Dharamsala. Through the rain he points past the car park, to a terraced slope where tourists toss their trash and Kashmir porters go to pray in the daytime. “You’ll also find an irrigation-based water source down there and even the slate courtyard (*angan*) of our first home. This place is a dump now.”

He is not only referring to the unsightly car park and bus station, but also across the street where a cement edifice crumbles away. Construction was halted because the contractor welched on his contractual obligation to build a mall with a parking lot to relieve some of the congestion. He built just the mall. Now it stands opposite the car park like an abandoned open-heart surgery, its walls gashed open and tagged with graffiti, the occasional home of Tibetan drug addicts and street cows. “My family used to live right here; now it’s trashed, the first place you see when you
Karam looks tired as he drives off the car park, monsoon rains smudged across the windshield, into a line of tourist traffic.

It is striking how Karam conceptualizes Talu as vertically linked up into the mountain grazing pastures and down to Kotwali Bazaar, and horizontally linked as an access point to nearby Gaddi villages. I am reminded of the way Gaddis relate Heeru and Bhagsu, nearby villages, to Kuarsi village in Chamba through the worship of Indrunag and his extended family. And virtually all the Gaddi labor in McLeod Ganj and tourism-friendly adjacent villages comes from outside, especially from the underdeveloped villages in and around Kareri, past Naddi. This relational view of Gaddi cultural geography stands in stark contrast to the dominant perceptions and experiences of McLeod Ganj. Low-paid migrant workers flow into McLeod Ganj from Chhattisgarh and Bihar, young women dressed in distinctively non-Himachali saris shuffling buckets of stone into crushers. Kashmiris set up profitable shops selling jewels and shawls; amid the confusion of consumption in McLeod Ganj one realizes that many hawkers of Tibetan wares, especially Buddhist scroll paintings (thangka), are Kashmiri Muslims. Migrant workers and shopkeepers are seasonal and, although their wealth and class status could not be more different, both communities often experience McLeod Ganj as a short-stay economic bubble.

Many foreigners experience McLeod Ganj as a standalone island refuge where they can escape unwanted attention from Indians, where English-speaking Tibetans are more relatable, especially for women tired of aggressive eyes. Tibetans imagine McLeod Ganj as a singularity, a vortex of cultural commodification and tourism that privileges their uniqueness as refugees and the embodiment of Tibetan Buddhism. It is popularly assumed that history begins with Tibetans, and that the name Dharamsala – which in Hindi carries the association of a temporary shelter during pilgrimage – was conferred on the town after the arrival of Tibetans. Recent scholarship
argues that some Tibetans now think of McLeod Ganj not only as home, but as more authentically Tibetan than Sinicized Tibet. Such strong affective attachments to place rarely incorporates, or empathizes with, the fragile interlacing of cultural meaning Gaddis like Karam attach to Talu or with the ways in which Gaddis feel excluded from the drama of cosmopolitanism that unfolds between Tibetans and foreigners in their erstwhile motherland.

Karam is not a sentimentalist ineffectually complaining about the tsunami of globalization and development that washed away his childhood memories. He inherited great respect for Tibetan ingenuity from his father, who was instrumental in helping Tibetans assimilate in the early years. Rather, Karam is the last living memory of Talu, the last Gaddi born in McLeod Ganj before the arrival of Tibetans. His experience of Talu as a well-placed Gaddi hangout in relationship to downside bazaars and the highland grazing circuit is nearly lost, as is the name Talu itself, which I have yet to find in any Gaddi literature or online. Although Karam has adapted his properties to tourism, his way of seeing McLeod Ganj is not merely extractive. When he looks into the miasma of tourism and commercial shops he sees a slate-encircled Deodar tree above it all, giving shade to Gaddis looking for a view and a familiar place to rest among friends.

**Mobile Discourses of Refugee Identity**

Islamic history is implicated in another unexpected entry into the Tibetan-Gaddi interface. The Gaddi oral narrative of 17th-century forced migration at the hands of marauding Muslims is reinvested with new meaning as Gaddis express their physical and psychosocial displacement from Dharamsala by perceived Tibetan “colonizers”. Gaddis respond to the victimization meta-narrative and patronage paradigm embedded in Tibetan expressions of refugeehood by
pragmatically extending collective memories of their own refugeehood. ST Gaddis have a long-standing oral narrative of a forced migration from Lahore to Chamba to avoid the onslaught of Aurangzeb (1658-1707 CE) and the threat of Muslim conversion. This pretext for migration is often recited by high-caste Gaddis on both sides of the Dhauladhrs: “After Lahore was destroyed, Brahmaur was inhabited” (*Ujreya Lahore, te baseya Bharmaur*) (Handa 2005, 29). In Dharamsala, where power inversions blur traditional assumptions of authority and subalternity, this quasi-historical oral account of Gaddi origins takes on an urgent affective register. This is not to suggest that Gaddis aspire to return to Lahore, now in Pakistan, to a homeland imbued with nostalgia and collective memories (although Gaddi auto-ethnological expeditions to Lahore and Rajasthan have been undertaken). Rather, I want to highlight how refugeehood is a capacious signifier deployed by Gaddis to not only express their psychosocial displacement in a Tibetanized landscape but also to socially aspire to a lifestyle of cosmopolitan mobility, fluid identity and material comfort. For many Gaddis, the everyday suffering of stateless Tibetans remains obscure, in part because anti-assimilationist tendencies have contributed to the segregation of lived experience between the two communities. By speaking predominately to the English-speaking West, Tibetans fail to convey their hardships in an idiom likely to be heard by Gaddis. This leaves many Gaddis with the perspective of refugeehood as self-maximizing victimization and a prerequisite identity-marker in the cosmo-capitalist marketplace.

In McLeod Ganj’s satellite villages, Gaddi resentment of Tibetans is an everyday expression. “I don’t like Tibetans,” a Gaddi Badi complained. “I don’t like their culture. I don’t like their whole system of eating, of praying. Once I came back from the army, and there was a Tibetan tenant in my house. He was okay, he was a monk (lāmba) – but I evicted him anyways.” Beneath these grumblings is a deep sense of social displacement and physical alienation on
account of demographic changes and shifts in the symbolic geography of Dharamsala, as outlined earlier. Refugeehood among Gaddis becomes not just a historical claim about fleeing Lahore in centuries past but, as one Gaddi elder expressed, an everyday state of mind.

Tibetans are not refugees (śāṛṇārti); we are the refugees! They are the owners (mālik). They have built five-floor homes. When we build a little hut (jhopadī), the government comes in and closes us down. If we want to build a big house, it takes 3 years. The government makes us do this and that – use a certain kind of mud, adhere to a districting map, and so on. But Tibetans are given permission to build up their homes all over Dharamsala, and they can put up a big hotel in just 6 months. It is we who are the refugees! We are living on our own land. This is our Dharamsala. Tibetans have so much money that worms eat through the notes and they don’t even care. I am telling you directly. It is obvious that the Tibetans live better than us Gaddis, have taken over most of the economy, and have all kinds of opportunities for education and going abroad that we don’t have. You are the first foreigner who has come talking to us. We are uneducated and don’t know English like the Tibetans do. How can we speak with foreigners…it has to be in Hindi. Tibetans are the thing here.

Gaddi alienation from Tibetan informal economies is central to the ethnographic examples given in the next chapter. I conclude by noting how Gaddi claims to refugeehood operate as a subtle mode of caste differentiation. As discussed in Chapter Two, Gaddi Dalits interpret the colonial Gazetteers as evidence of their firstness, and accordingly link their petition for tribal status to global indigeneity rights. Gaddis, on the other hand, position themselves as forced migrants, protectors of high-caste Hinduism, and construct tribal identity around pastoral tropes of mobility. Through this lens, the positive valance accorded refugeehood in Dharamsala affirms the existing caste hierarchy by tying Bhatt Brahmans and Gaddis to a narrative of mobility and forced migration and Gaddi Dalits to a narrative of autochthonous jungle dwelling. The powerful allure of refugeehood in Dharamsala has inverted the traditional place of firstness in establishing tribal identity and provided a further social handicap in the tribal recognition of Gaddi Dalits.
Settler Tibetans remember how in the early years of exile, the Dalai Lama warned Tibetan refugees against planting saplings in Dharamsala, for by the time they took root and grew into shade-bearing trees, the Tibetans would have returned to an independent Tibet. In 2011, the dream of repatriation by Settler Tibetans fading, the artist Tenzin Rigdol smuggled 20,000 kilograms of Tibetan soil across the border to Dharamsala for his celebrated exhibition “Our Land, Our People.” If Tibet would remain unfree, Tibetans would resoil Dharamsala in its likeness. At the completion of the exhibition, Tibetans carried away the soil to their homes like the sand of a swept-up maṇḍala – the latest twist in the maṇḍalization of McLeod Ganj. Some venerated the Tibetan earth in house shrines, while others mixed it into their backyard gardens and allowed plants and trees to take root.

Despite these efforts to ground the Tibetan diaspora, the name “Dharamsala” is suggestive of its Sanskrit etymology as a temporal resting place, a place not firmly rooted. Many Gaddis, who discursively frame themselves as “roamers” (ghumantu) and “six-monthers” (chahmahīne), split their time between seasonally mild winters in low-lying villages around Dharamsala and summers in their ancestral homes in Chamba. Tourism cycles throughout the year, peaking in the pre- and post-monsoon months, and consumer desires, from handicrafts to spiritual and leisure experiences, are met by a range of itinerant Kashmiri merchants and porters, Punjabi businessmen and low-skilled laborers from both remote Gaddi villages and further afield, from Chhattisgarh, Bihar, and Rajasthan. From October until early March, many Tibetans leave Dharamsala for seasonal “sweater markets” in hundreds of Indian cities, where they hawk clothing bought wholesale in Ludhiana. Many New Arrivals matriculate into Tibetan schools and
NGOs in Dharamsala before repatriating, relocating abroad or shifting to another settlement in India. For many, Dharamsala is not a home as much as a respite from harsh winters to the north or scorching heat to the south, a place to temporarily graze one’s flock in nearby pasturelands, to study and earn money, to hear the Dalai Lama’s public teachings, to smoke *caras* and, for many Israeli backpackers, to decompress after compulsory military service.

Dharamsala emerges as a translocality, a place of diverse and mobile ethnic assemblages, caste configurations and class distinctions, where a patchwork of Gaddi cultural life interleaves with the nexus of the Tibetan diaspora in South Asia. In their argument for a multiscalar analysis of translocality, Brickell and Datta (2011, 6) emphasize the “material, embodied, and corporeal qualities of the local – the places where situatedness is experienced”. Conceptions of cosmopolitanism – of openness to cultural difference and a sense of global belonging – are enacted and reconfigured in specific localities, in specific sociocultural contexts with varied social actors. In Dharamsala, incongruous tableaus emerge of how globalization compresses time and space in what was once a Gaddi pastoral stopover. Inside CTA offices, computers are routinely targeted by Chinese cyber espionage (Stiennon 2015, 11), while along the wooded perimeter of the compound, Gaddi women with sloped shoulders forage for treefall to feed their livestock. In mixed Tibetan and Gaddi villages, rumors of Chinese spies sowing social discord mix with traditional accusations of Gaddi witchcraft. In Dharamkot and Bhagsu, Jewish centers of worship for Israeli backpackers employ Gaddi cooks trained in kosher food preparation. In McLeod Ganj, local Muslims backed by Kashmiri merchants protest the alleged appropriation of a historic *masjid* by the Tibetan Welfare Office. A romantic relationship of several years between an Australian soul-searcher and Gaddi guide is ruptured by witchcraft and ends in heartbreak. A Hali roadside tea vendor (*cāivālā*) learns chess from a German tourist and trains
his daughter, who is now the only female representing Himachal Pradesh in all-India competitive matches. In Naddi, the missionary organization Youth With a Mission (YWAM) evangelizes to local Gaddis and posts videos on YouTube about perceived demon propitiation among the Dalai Lama clique. Tibetans protest in the streets the alarming rise of self-immolations in Tibet due to repressive Chinese rule (Shakya 2012). Such pairings of local and global across the ethnic and sociocultural spectrum have sprouted the discourse of “cosmospeak” among Dharamsala residents and visitors as a “means of navigating and communicating within a place reconfigured by suffering generated by a multiplicity of losses and desires” (Schiller and Irving 2015, 15).

This chapter analyzes how cosmopolitan competence is deployed as cultural capital structuring social inequalities between Tibetans and Gaddis. By meeting Gaddis and Tibetans in voting booths, hospitals, performance art exhibitions and western cafes, ranging over ethnographic examples from political scapegoating to fantasies of ethnic purging, a fuller picture emerges of a contested cosmopolitanism – of a worldview, practice and competence that furthers Tibetan anti-assimilation in an Indian milieu and hierarchically scales Tibetan and Gaddi social aspiration. Extending the historical framework delineated in the last chapter, I argue that the Gaddi-Tibetan interface is a crucial and largely overlooked social arena for shaping group identity, substantive ethnic consciousness and social aspiration. By seeing past the utopian propaganda and dystopian exaggerations that bookend assumptions about the Gaddi-Tibetan interface, a richer tapestry of group relations emerges, one which stresses the interdependence of refugee and tribal identity in a fluid field of social competition and neighborliness.

Building from an earlier analysis of how benevolent forms of Orientalism and Tibetophilia frame Dharamsala as a locality, I focus on the structural asymmetries between Tibetans and Gaddis shaping their conception of, and participation in, cosmopolitan expression.
Tibetan refugees are often experienced by foreigners as *de facto* cosmopolitans; diasporic life, hybrid identities, flexible citizenship, fluency in English, social ease with tourists, foreign sponsorship, globe-trotting, cappuccino-sipping, iPhone-using monks and lamas – all of these characteristics, bound up with cultural mimesis and discursive representations, render Tibetans to the average Westerner as identifiably and obviously cosmopolitan. Gaddis, on the other hand, are awkwardly suspended between the lingering effects of colonial paternalism and self-perpetuating discourses about their tribal backwardness that consign them to the margins of the translocal marketplace. And Gaddi Dalits, feeling betrayed by the Indian government when tribal benefits were allocated only to Gaddis and Bhatt Brahmins, have replaced an absence of ethnic validation with the spiritual abundance of Christianity, Radhasoami, Arya Samaj, Sikhism and a host of other socio-religious identities that express cosmopolitan aspiration.

**Cosmopolitan Competence and Social Aspiration**

The openness to difference and enlargement of self at the heart of cosmopolitan worldviews are attributed to the founding father of Greek Cynicism, Digoenes of Sinope, who famously asserted that he was a “citizen of the world” (*kosmopolites*). An iconoclast who taught through irreverent action, Diogenes elevated “natural” canine behavior over the shackles of human tradition; prone to social inversions, he once taunted the citizens of Sinope, who had sentenced him to exile for the debasement of currency, to a life sentence of parochial living at home. This disposition of self-enlargement through openness to difference was given a more robust exegesis under the Stoic Hierocles, who conceived of selfhood as a series of affinities (*oikeiosis*), of concentric circles ranging from oneself and nuclear family to distant family, local groups, fellow citizens.
and, ultimately, humanity at large. Cosmopolitans are those who “draw the circles somehow towards the centre” (Naussbaum 1993, 3).

From these hoary philosophical origins, the meanings and practices of cosmopolitanism have proliferated in the humanities and social sciences (Beck and Sznaider, 2006). Following Vertovec and Cohen (2002, 9-14), cosmopolitanism is analyzed through six predominant characteristics: a sociocultural condition, a philosophical worldview, a political project for building transnational institutions, a political project for recognizing multiple and hybrid identities, an attitudinal or dispositional orientation, and a mode of practice or competence. This taxonomy remains current across multiple fields (Nowicka 2011; Salazar 2010; Pieri 2014).

To analyze how the triangular interface between Gaddis, Tibetans and tourists instantiates cosmopolitanism as forms of cultural capital and techniques of social hierarchy, I want to focus on the last two perspectives; that is, cosmopolitanism as a disposition backed up by various practices and competencies. By attending to how cosmopolitanism is put into practice in specific civic and commercial spaces and in everyday interactional contexts, I draw attention to the instrumental and locally differentiating aspects of cosmopolitan posturing. As this chapter will explore, the self-evident, all-embracing cosmopolitan ethos of Dharamsala performed by Tibetans and intuitively grasped by foreigners often masks antagonistic attitudes against Gaddis, Tibetan fears of assimilation, and Gaddi anxious belonging as a category-defying SC/ST hodgepodge in modern India. Conversely, I highlight the unexpected moments in which groupness is transcended by plural conceptions of well being and openness to aesthetic and spiritual otherness. Such forms of intergroup relationality, often by local non-elite actors, are variously described as “bottom-up cosmopolitanism” (Hannerz 2004) and “rooted cosmopolitanism” (Appiah 2006).
Scholarly analysis of the Gaddi-Tibetan interface is strongly divergent. On one side, Maura Moynihan (1997) highlights how “relations between the Tibetan refugees and their Indian hosts are as fine an example of peaceful co-existence of two distinct ethnic and cultural groups as can be found anywhere in the world”. This perspective is extended by Atreyee Sen (2015, 100), who argues that ethnic relations in Dharamsala exemplify a kind of “crude cosmopolitanism”. Without mentioning the Gaddis by name, she argues that Indians and Tibetans in Dharamsala resolve inter-communal conflicts “through a process of negotiation and acceptance” and the maintenance of a “cordial cosmopolitan gloss” that keeps the tourist economy flowing. She focuses on the circulation of discourses about cosmopolitan practices and aspirations of global identity among Tibetans refugees set against the Dharamsala backdrop of “continuous human traffic, a cauldron of cultures and a melting pot of global ideas and ideologies brought along by travelers, tourists, academics, activists, journalists and worldwide followers of the spiritual leader” (Sen 2015, 88). Tibetans are obviously cosmopolitan, calibrating their identity and aspirations in a forced diaspora around global tourism and media exposure, but so are Gaddis through a “rooted tolerance, a worldview that was not the product of their own mobility, but of their community’s ability to change itself by building relations with others travelling through their static world” (Sen 2015, 96). In contrast, shot throughout this dissertation are ethnographic examples of the ongoing importance of mountain mobility – real and discursive – in framing claims of tribality.

Sen’s analysis comports with the general feeling of marketplace tolerance, NGO do-gooderism and political activism that unites virtually all ethnic groups in Dharamsala apart from Gaddis, Kashmiri porters and migrant day laborers. It is commonplace to participate in self-congratulatory discussions among Tibetans and tourists (domestic and international) about the
cosmopolitan character of Dharamsala, where travelers, merchants and stateless refugees with varied backgrounds exchange overlapping conceptions of spirituality, politics and personal ethics. Such attitudes are emblematic of cosmopolitan consciousness, including “elements of self-doubt and reflexive self-distantiation, an awareness of the existence and equal validity of other cultures, other values, and other mores” (Werbner 2006, 497-8).

On the other side, scholars have noted, often with a hint of surprise, the cultural disjuncture between Gaddis and Tibetans that sometimes flares up into communalism (Saklani 1977; Diehl 2002). Many Gaddis have grown resentful over the rise of “rich refugees” through the exchange of Tibetan Buddhism for international financial sponsorship. Foreign sponsorship (rogs ram) is an economic strategy for negotiating the seemingly paradoxical aim of preserving traditional Tibetanness while accommodating modernity and foreign influence (Prost 2006, 248). The chill out café culture of McLeod Ganj is almost exclusively for Tibetans and tourists. Gaddis, if present, are usually behind the scenes in kitchens or on the cleaning staff, and their salaries are far too low to indulge in expensive loitering, just as their lack of English fluency keeps them sidelined. While all Dharamsala residents partake in leisure time, Tibetan youth have transformed spiritual circumambulation around the Dalai Lama Temple into a cultural expression of roaming around (kyamkyam), often accompanied by friends, sometimes to meet foreigners, chill in cafes, and window shop in Western import shops (Swank 2014, 78) – leisure activities that remain culturally distinct and often economically unviable for Gaddis. For many Tibetans, cosmopolitan sensibilities extend only to the border of Gaddi life. Gaddis represent the fringe of Indian society, the backwardness against which cosmopolitan values are measured; placed in the broader South Asian context, Gaddis become part-and-parcel with the negative framing of Indians by Tibetan merchants who emphasize Indian baseness as an ostensible basis for
displaced fears of cultural assimilation (Lau 2009, 85). As the next section analyses, Gaddi communalism against Tibetans often conflates local resentment over Tibetan visibility with expressly political struggles for reservation benefits.

**Tibetan Scapegoating**

These resentments and negative stereotyping periodically boil over, culminating in several high-profile intercommunal rapes and outbreaks of violence. On May 15, 2015, a Tibetan was non-lethally shot in front of the Tibetan Reception Centre. And on the night of October 30, 2015, a Tibetan was stabbed to death in the company of his girlfriend by three Gaddi boys on Bhagsu Road, in front of Hotel Tibet. In the immediate aftermath, Tibetan anger on social media platforms took an often communalist tone, emphasizing the backwardness of Gaddis, their aggressive and boorish nature, and their continued ill treatment of Tibetans. In Facebook memorials, Tibetans vented their anger by calling Indians “bastards” (*kamīne*) and, in a message posted directly to the killer’s Facebook page, threatened in Hindi, “If you don’t go to jail for the rest of your life, I will kill you myself.” In response, the Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), the governing body of Tibetans in exile, accused “some mischievous individuals […] of spreading messages on the social media to disrupt peace and harmony between the Tibetan and the local Indian community.”

Burned into the consciousness of both Tibetans and Gaddis is the 1994 murder and ensuing communal riots. A Settler Tibetan named Yeshi Chophel, at the time apprenticing at the Arts and Metalcrafts Centre, allegedly gloated about Pakistan’s victory over India in a cricket match. He taunted a Gaddi boy, a near relative of the incendiary BJP Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) Kishan Kapoor. A skirmish ensued, and the Gaddi boy was knifed to death.
Within hours the Centre was besieged by a mob of mostly Gaddis, and Tibetans scattered into nearby villages seeking refuge. More than twenty years later, Hali families in Jogiwara and Heeru recall how their compassion towards Tibetans placed them in the dangerous crosshairs of inconsolable members of their own community. That night the mob terrorized Tibetan students and teachers blockaded in the Lower TCV School; one Gaddi I interviewed showed me a scar on his stomach where he was impaled with an iron bar as he drunkenly tried to climb through a second-floor window. At that time the school was woefully unprepared for this kind of calamity; nowadays it is surrounded by an imposing spiked iron wall, and classrooms on the second-floor are barred like those in a prison cell. The school now sits like an embattlement, a fortress on the hill, on the periphery of usually placid Gaddi village life. But in 1994, while a town famous for non-violence burned with ethnic communalism, Tibetans were left completely exposed. To disperse the gangs of disaffected Gaddi men, a military curfew was imposed in Dharamsala, during which Tibetans were physically attacked, their property vandalized to accompanying chants of “Death to the Dalai Lama” (*Dalai Lama murdābād*).

In his analysis of the murder and subsequent rioting, K. Dhondup, the eminent historian, poet, and one-time firebrand president of the student Communist Party in Chandigarh, gave the fullest first-hand account of the devastation and efforts made to quell the powder keg of ethnic violence. In an essay for the *Tibetan Review*, Dhondup (1994) describes how Tibetans in Dharamsala have become “high-profile refugees, much written and talked about. The smallness of the place, the petty mentality, the rising profile and economic prosperity of the Tibetans which some have always flaunted, do not go well together.” He emphasizes how Tibetans like Yeshi Chophel, “raw and untamed youth” who matriculate into such Centers, are “ignorant and innocent victims of cultural fantasies visualized and shared by outsiders who have no idea of
what Tibetan culture means and what young Tibetans aspire to.” Although Dhondup was in fading health and would die the following year, his essay remains an impartial account of the sociocultural factors leading up to the April 1994 violence.

However, it is worth noting that his description of Dharamsala at the beginning of the essay is illustrative of the historical posturing, discursive fantasies and Tibetanization of place that fuels Gaddi resentment. While Penny-Dimri (1994, 292) flags inequitable welfare as the “key factor that triggers such culturally-defined conflicts”, I would place equal importance on the kind of one-upmanship implicit in Dhondhup’s description of Dharamsala as “one of the most backward hill tops in the whole of Himachal Pradesh”, a common Tibetan depiction which renders Gaddis as hapless tribals and Tibetans as cosmopolitan saviors. Moreover, Dhondup extends the Ling Gesar logic of Tibetan firstness by arguing that “the present Gaddi community immigrated to these hills with their sheep over 300 years ago from elsewhere. Yet wandering Tibetan Buddhist ascetics and translators had set foot on these very hills and valleys long before that.” It is important that wealth inequality does not overshadow these aspects of Tibetan self-narration and place-making practices in Dharamsala that exacerbate ethnic tensions. Even K. Dhondup, renowned for his even-handedness and integration into the elite Indian academic and political circles in Delhi, unconsciously parrots the very Western discourses he so-clearly criticizes in other domains. Although correct to see Yeshi not as a cold-blooded killer but an “innocent victim of cultural fantasies”, Dhondup fails to analyze his own fantastical construction of Dharamsala, partly inspired by Western discourses of Shangri-la and unintendedly resonating with, to my continued amazement, Chinese propaganda about bringing civilization to barbarous mountain indigenes.
Another full account of the murder and rioting is described by Keila Dielh (2002, 120-23), who arrived in Dharamsala five months after the incident to begin ethnomusicological fieldwork on nontraditional music among Tibetan refugees. However, all of the above accounts were written through Tibetan and Tibetological perspectives, and none incorporate fieldwork among Gaddis. Drawing from a series of interviews with Raman, a prominent Hali riot leader who clashed with Tibetans and the police in the aftermath of the murder, I highlight how Gaddis perceive Tibetans as political substitutes and proxies of an inaccessible sociopolitical order. In the unrestful decade preceding the designation of Scheduled Tribe status, Dharamsala Gaddis expressed their grievances with the Indian government by speaking through Tibetans, a strategy congruous with the geopolitical leveraging of Tibetan refugees as symbolic capital against the Chinese government.

Raman and I would often sit in his roadside tea stall discussing life over a chessboard. As it is too far down the mountain to attract foreign tourists, his regular customers are a mix of Tibetans and Indians. Given Raman’s closeness to some Tibetan regulars – a chess-playing Tibetan monk proficient in Hindi is a daily customer and has close ties to Karam’s family – I was surprised to learn about his prominent role in the 1994 anti-Tibetan riots. When the subject was first broached, in the presence of Tibetan customers sitting within earshot of our recorded conversation, Raman spoke in generalities. But when the last customer stepped into the winter darkness, and we were left alone, relying on solar panels and kerosene lights to illuminate his unregistered dhābā existing off the government power grid, Raman became specific about his grievances against Tibetans and, more pointedly, against the Indian government. A self-described Hali social activist (sāmājik kāryakartā), his framing of the Gaddi-Tibetan interface
takes on additional heft when considered alongside the ongoing struggle for Gaddi Dalit inclusion.

The murder happened in 1994. You see Gaddis throw punches and insults, but Tibetans carry around knives and aren’t afraid to use them! There was already a lot of pressure between us, and it exploded. Gaddis were already feeling angst (ākroś) towards the Tibetans. When the murder happened, I became the leader of the riots in this area. We cornered Tibetans and reminded them of how our ancestors greeted and helped the first Tibetans who arrived here with nothing. We reminded them that we are the original inhabitants of this place. We are the owners. We exist. For years they treated us like nothing, lighting a fire of anger inside of us. We had to stop them, otherwise the next generation of Gaddi youth would never forgive us for doing nothing while our home was taken over. You see, we are two communities, but people are people: we all have red blood. The problem is when one community starts to think of themselves as bigger, as better. They didn’t teach themselves; they had great teachers: England taught them; Germany taught them; America taught them; Australia taught them. And mixed in with the Tibetans were some bad elements who support China and wanted to spread rioting. They caught a spy (jāśūs) just behind my house, and down at Norbalinga also.

The situation had gotten bad, and I did what I did to alert (sacet) the government about the wrongs that were being done here. We sent a warning (cetāvanī) to the government that you shouldn’t think of us as peaceful tribals living happily in the mountains. We too can do anything if disrespected. We opened the government’s eyes to our struggle. We said enough. Before politicians would come to Dharamsala to get votes from us [Gaddis] and money from the rich Tibetans. It’s true. We don’t have money, how can we give donations? With one hand they gave us a lollipop, with another hand they systematically exploited us (soṣan). They made empty promises. Go check out McLeod Ganj and see how much of the development benefits Gaddis. So we got angry. How dare politicians come here and take our votes and then, that same day, sit in Tibetan or Panjabi hotels, not even in public spaces.

For example, one day the Union Minister, George Fernandez, came to Dharamsala. And what did he do? He told us local people to please stop the violence, relax. These are refugee people. And then he went right to the Tibetans – he double-crossed us, and this just made us angrier. There was a great injustice being done against us local people. The government was ignoring us – the roads were crap, there wasn’t drinking water, the schools were bad. So of course, the tension [between Gaddis and Tibetans] was increasing. It already was bad. Imagine I come to your house, in your country, and I tell you, ‘you are nothing.’ How would you feel, what would you do? You might say, ‘Okay brother, go from here. I am fine.’
I do not want to belabor the point, especially given the heightened sensitivities in the wake of the senseless murder of Tsultrim Chokden in 2015. Raman attributes Gaddi resentment (ākroś) to Tibetan cultural superiority, collusion with foreigners, and Chinese-sponsored spies and sowers of social upheaval. The very aspects of Tibetan behavior that are lauded by Western theorists and tourists alike as cosmopolitan, an openness to diversity and competency in deploying context-specific forms of cultural knowledge, are experienced by Gaddis as dismissive cultural chauvinism and techniques of social distancing.

Although specific grievances are lodged against Tibetan posturing, Raman expresses a sentiment common among Gaddis that Tibetans are accessible and acceptable targets to lash out against when the real object of rebuke is the ineffectual Indian government. Gaddis take pride in differentiating their peaceful struggle for tribal recognition from the more violent Gujjar agitations in Rajasthan and Gorkha sub-nationalism in Darjeeling. However, as their petition lingered in bureaucratic limbo from the reorganization of Himachal Pradesh in 1966 through the early 2000s, Gaddi resentments against the government took a more direct expression in the quickly-rising fortunes of proximate Tibetan refugees. Instead of considering Tibetan independence and Gaddi tribal recognition as allied causes – both relying on similar claims about indigeneity and cultural distinctiveness – Gaddis look to Tibetans as geopolitical cause célèbre who have suffused quotidian village life with political posturing emending from the TGiE. An unintended effect of the TGiE’s campaign to confer non-legally binding Tibetan citizenship to refugees, operating in the interstices of sociopolitical life without territorial sovereignty (McConnell 2013, 978), is to create an exaggerated perception among Gaddis of the political clout of Tibetan refugees. Although intimately felt, the institutionalization of refugee identity is poorly understood by Gaddis at a remove, with little effort from the TGiE to educate the local
population about the psychosocial cost of political liminality. As a result, Gaddis often confuse the politicization of refugee identity with an expression of political power itself. The Tibetan enactment of cosmopolitan values, such as flexible citizenship and hybrid identities, becomes a symbolic expression of political clout and social prestige that drives Gaddi resentment.

**Power of the Vote**

In a related register, I spent the weeks in the run-up to the 2014 national elections conducting fieldwork at political rallies. On Election Day, May 7, 217 Tibetans in Dharamsala exercised their newly-won right to vote. Although Tibetan voters compromised approximately 20 percent of the 943 registered voters at the Bhagsu voting station, the environment was dominated by Tibetans. *Voice of America* sent video-journalists to interview first-time Tibetan voters and stage pictures of Tibetans holding up their blackened fingers; the *Hindustan Times* sent a local affiliate; and other semi-official Tibetan intellectuals, if not voting, were present to document this occasion and give interviews. The poet Tenzin Tsundue, conspicuous in his red bandana, refrained from voting but later described the event and voiced his concern that the Indian citizenship implied in electoral participation would weaken the moral authority of Tibetan independence (Tsundue 2014).

Throughout Election Day, I watched the political pageantry from inside the school courtyard that housed the voting center. After casting their votes, Tibetans lingered in the courtyard, absorbed in the historical novelty of participating in an Indian election and attendant media spotlight. They served tea to each other and brought me into their discussion in a mix of Hindi, English and Tibetan about their motivations for voting. One Tibetan confided that voting was not an expression of Indian patriotism or a desire for Indian citizenship but rather done to
boost his chance of immigrating to the West. This was affirmed by many Tibetans present; for example, one described how his quest for Indian citizenship was about replacing his RC card with a proper passport so that he could migrate to America, where his siblings were already resettled. There was not total consensus. Dolma, my former English student, arrived in her best chu ba and could not contain her excitement about voting for the first time in her life. She had no plan to relocate, although her distant relatives are in America. Instead, she described in polished Hindi about how her decades of work experience in Gujarat as a clothing vender has given her an indebtedness to India, even a sense of Indian belonging, and shaped her support for Modi, the former Chief Minister of Gujarat who became Prime Minister in a landslide election victory.

Recent scholarship focuses on the collective effervescence on Election Day, the “communitas” that suspends the rules of normal social order and brings instead a rare flower of egalitarianism” (Banerjee 2011, 94). In the face of corruption, intractable government bureaucracy and systemic cynicism about the role of government in civic life, the physical act of voting itself, and not the election result, best expresses the “fundamental values of democracy—citizenship, duty and rights, equality, cooperation, the ability to imagine a common good—values that are otherwise wholly missing from the polity” (Banerjee 2011, 95). Put another way, voting can unite diverse social and ethnic groups through shared participation in shaping collective values and community standards; for a brief time, the social norms governing group interactions are replaced with democratic communitas.

In contrast, Election Day at the Bhagsu voting center affirmed the lack of mutuality between Tibetans and Gaddis. It reproduced the longstanding resentments that Gaddis already feel about being overshadowed by media- and politically-savvy Tibetans, some of whom were voting with the intention not of democratic solidarity but of affirming difference and leaving
behind India for the West. The media broadcasts of Tibetan refugees voting on Election Day largely focused on how Indian citizenship might delegitimize the Independence struggle by rendering Tibetans as diasporans and not refugees. Many reports affirmed the cosmopolitan character of Tibetan refugees: how Tibetans, with raised blackened fingers symbolic of voter participation, mix chameleon-like into South Asian society and how they embody the “intellectual and aesthetic stance towards of openness towards divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity” (Hannerz 1990, 239).

For another perspective, I pulled aside Gaddis as they snaked through the voting line and asked them about the changing legal landscape for Tibetan participation in elections. Many had no idea that Tibetans could vote and looked with astonishment at the media frenzy in the courtyard. Others reiterated that refugees are not eligible to vote, and therefore those voting must be Lahauli or Ladakhi. Far from electoral participation binding Tibetans and Gaddis together in a temporary *communitas* that expressed “democracy’s ideals of egalitarianism and cooperation”, it merely crystallized their lack of civic engagement. What appeared in the media as Tibetan cosmopolitanism – of moving in and out of varied cultural registers in everyday practice, of hybridity and multi-territoriality – was misrecognized by Gaddis or felt to be opportunistic. One Tibetan pulled me away from the crowd and ominously said, “Gaddis don’t even know that Tibetans can vote; they are seeing it now, and they are going to wake up tomorrow and be even more jealous of us because they’ll think that one day we’ll buy local land and be a powerful vote block that can rival them.” Far from unifying Gaddis and Tibetans, electoral participation only highlighted the separate social trajectories of both communities.
I was taken aback when Tashi, a young employee at a Tibetan NGO, accused fellow Tibetans of overt racism against Gaddis. “I wouldn’t use the word racism,” I pressed her, trying to differentiate between a Tibetan tendency towards cultural superiority that disregards Gaddi lifeways and an everyday structuring ideology of racial superiority. Tashi shot back, “I absolutely would. I’m in the room when Tibetans talk about Indians.” She went on to describe how color-based racial discrimination against Indians has been amplified by decades of uneasy coexistence. “It’s all in the intonation; the Tibetan name for Indians, gyabe, is already a bit insulting, but often we sling the name at them, gyaaaaa. That’s meant to hurt.”

Tashi’s critique extended to the psychology of Tibetan refugees and their sense of entitlement to Dharamsala as their home in exile. “We always have the victim mentality. We expect everyone to treat us as victims. Poor us. But it’s been decades since we’ve come into exile, and we’re so privileged in comparison to other refugees in India and around the world.” In contrast, she expressed a critique of the place of Tibetans in Dharamsala that I had never heard from other Tibetans. “Obviously this is their [Gaddi] land, so it’s understandable they feel like we’ve stolen something from them. They must feel like we’ve taken it over, basically colonized it.”

Tashi’s intuition about a pervasive sense of Gaddi displacement in Dharamsala corroborated my fieldwork data from Gaddi satellite villages. She saw through the miasma of established opinion that Dharamsala was an uninhabited wasteland turned into a money-minting tourist destination for the munificence of Tibetans and Indians alike. Tibetans often recount a discovery narrative of Dharamsala that celebrates the Tibetans as humane colonizers, establishing civilization and economic enterprise where once Gaddi indigenes subsisted in jungle.
huts. Such a view of the civilizing impact of Tibetans ironically parallels criticisms of the Chinese invasion of Tibet found at every film showing, café discussion and CTA circular throughout McLeod Ganj. However, without cognitive dissonance most Tibetans critique propagandistic Chinese caricatures of the liberation of Tibetans from theocratic feudalism and base subsistence while thinking of themselves in similarly mytho-salvific terms vis-à-vis their Gaddi neighbors.

Although I was struck by the candor and force of her views, I was not wholly surprised. I connected to Tashi through social media after reading her rejoinder to Mila Rangzen’s controversial article about systematic ethnic prejudice by resentful Gaddis against vulnerable Tibetan denizens of Dharamsala. In the comments section, Tashi flipped the picture, placing equal responsibility on Tibetan material “flashiness” and hot-headed willingness to escalate altercations to physical violence. She extrapolated from the discriminatory treatment of New Arrivals by Settler Tibetans to the communal distrust of Tibetans towards Gaddis that rests below a thin veneer of purported Tibetan “open-minded[ness]”.

We met over coffee at a Korean Restaurant in Dusalni/Amdo Village and she explained how her hybrid identity as an Indian-Tibetan and diverse educational and social background shaped her self-reflexive worldview. She was born in Darjeeling to second-generation Tibetan parents. In her childhood she received a formal education from several TCV schools throughout the Himalayas and informally met Tibetan members of parliament and community leaders through family connections. She described her “cosmopolitan” friend circle as comprising Tibetans, foreigners (dbyin ji), Punjabis settled around Dharamsala for business and Delhites from her recent graduation from Delhi University. In her second year, she wrote a poem “Half Blood” about her identity at the intersection of Tibetan ethnicity, Indian sensibilities and political
statelessness. Her hybrid identity recently resurfaced while writing an online article about the cultural appropriation of Exotic India in a Coldplay music video. “I started out writing as a Tibetan, but my narrative voice shifted to Indian by the end. My Tibetan friend found it problematic, but for me it was proof that I feel Indian. This probably explains why I have lots of Indian friends and never exclude myself from Indian life.”

Despite feeling Indian, Tashi’s interactions with Gaddis were limited to taxi drivers, two Gaddi students admitted to Upper TCV during her secondary school days (of which she is still connected to), and the occasional cat-calling and eve-teasing she faces from Gaddi men on the congested streets of McLeod Ganj. “It’s subtle, so that you can’t go back and even fight with them, but you feel it. And if you walk on the same street at the same time every day, you start to get scared that someone is tracking you. I mean, I personally know a Tibetan girl who was raped by a Gaddi taxi driver.”

Considering various socioeconomic matrices, such as educational attainment, mobility, age cohort and Hindi fluency, such limited interactions between Tibetans and Gaddis is unsurprising. What stood out in Tashi’s narrative is the weight she put on Western foreigners as bridge-building intermediaries between Tibetans and Gaddis. Most of the Gaddis she knows by name – including a burgeoning friendship with a Gaddi woman – she met through contacts at Illiterati, a high-end café established by Hans, an eccentric European with an unusual biography. After a brief career as a shepherd, Hans courted a Bhatt Brahman woman in a satellite village of McLeod Ganj. They were married, settled in Dharamsala and had two children. Their marriage ended in bitter divorce, and Hans’ foray into Gaddi life remains a cautionary tale among Dharamsala Gaddis of the oil-meets-water cultural differences between tribals and foreigners.
This tale would be tragically repeated some years later when a Gaddi from Dharamkot married a tourist and migrated with her to France, only to return a year later divorced and spirit possessed.

Hans’ reputation remained on the razor’s edge of Gaddi respectability, and he leaned on local contacts to open Iliterati and staff the restaurant with Gaddi cooks, cleaners and waiters. The exorbitantly priced menu guaranteed that customers would be tourists or Tibetans, while the restaurant’s atmosphere exemplified the cosmo-capitalism enshrouding Dharamsala. Imagine Hans casually directing employees in Hindi; his children dropping in with their Gaddi care provider and speaking equally at ease in Dutch, English and Gaddi dialect; Tibetans sipping cappuccinos and mixing it up with Western journalists or Dharma students; the Butterworths and Sedwicks – in short, Dharamsala’s most established Western families, with ties to either the colonial past or the earliest arrival of Tibetan refugees – as frequent customers. Thousands of books line the walls, and a World Cup qualifying match is playing on the flat screen TV. The venue gets rented for film screenings and lectures about Tibetan independence, but at night hosts a boozy $50 buy-in of Texas Hold ‘Em poker. Hans intuitively sympathized with the frequently overshadowed Gaddis and went out of his way to treat his employees as respected equals. Tibetans and foreigners had to buy in for poker night, but when a Gaddi employee busted, Hans was liable to buy him back in.

Contrary to the café culture in Dharamsala that reinforces the subordinate position of Gaddis as wait staff and cooks and Tibetans as owners or paying customers, Illiterati and a handful of other Western-owned establishments open up spaces of mutual cosmopolitan aspiration. These establishments are not merely consuming cosmopolitan tastes; similar to ethnic minority-owned cafés in the Himalayan borderlands of Yunnan, such hangouts also produce forms of cosmopolitanism and cross-cultural competencies otherwise unavailable to Gaddis.
(Notar 2008, 619). This takes unexpected forms: for example, the Chabad and Jewish house in Dharamkot and Bhagsu Nag are staffed by Gaddi boys who have learned Kosher food preparation. On Friday afternoons, Gaddis prepare the *shabbat* dinner alongside Jewish volunteers and their Tibetan (boy)friends. Tableside kneading of *challah* dough and chopping vegetables place Tibetans and Gaddis in unusual proximity, often leading to a joking solidarity and covert quips in Hindi about the strangeness of Jewish custom. The specialized knowledge of kosher laws and a familiarity with Hebrew places the Gaddi boys in the know, and for a moment they may feel on equal footing in a space of cosmopolitan exchange. Unlike the typical hierarchy of café culture, Gaddis and Tibetans are equally brought to the table, in this case the kitchen table. This can lead to unforced moments of transcending the ethnic and socioeconomic groupness that often keeps Gaddis feeling unevenly matched against the cool assurance and confident demeanor of Tibetans.

Such was Tashi’s experience at Illiterati, a Western establishment that opened novel spaces of inter-ethnic communication and sensitized her to Gaddi displacement. “You must not be very popular among other Tibetans,” I joked at the end of our discussion. “Obviously not!” she retorted. “Nobody likes to point out these things directly. I have to hold back my opinions a bit, but you would be surprised how I speak my mind, and how sometimes Tibetans even agree with me!”

While Tashi highlights racialized forms of discrimination against Gaddis as a multi-ethnic cosmopolitan, situated between Indian and Tibetan identities, other Tibetans criticize the CTA for whitewashing structural forms of Gaddi intimidation and physical violence in Dharamsala. Most prominent is Mila Rangzen, who argues that the CTA and popular media have systematically foreclosed the discussion about the “ethnic crisis” between Tibetans and Gaddis.
Media outlets like *Phayul* have purged their online archives of articles about group violence, such as the rape of an elderly Tibetan nun in 2005, and the Tibetan Women’s Association remains largely silent on the issue. More recently, when a Tibetan man was beaten and sexually humiliated by (non-Gaddi) Indians at the ill-reputed Black Magic disco, Tibetan government officials allegedly hushed up the matter by not filing a FIR and ensuring there would be no legal investigation. In a personal communication, Mila divided Tibetans between official (CTA and NGO employees) and non-official residents of Dharamsala. Their collective silence is the “fear of being tracked down and made to pay socially, physically or politically. The CTA is of the view that those who talk about it are out to create disharmony between the two ethnic communities.”

As a naturalized citizen of the USA, however, Mila does not fear the social consequences of disrupting the official discourses and highlighting the “indignity, insecurity and uncertainty” of living in Dharamsala. His writing, often bitingly critical of Tibetan officials, has brought him expected condemnation from the CTA which, in a stamped circular, referred to Mila’s claims as “false, unsubstantiated and provocative”. Bolstering these claims are the ways in which Chinese-run anti-Tibetan propaganda websites, such as Tibet Online, have cherry-picked Mila’s writing and republished them as evidence of the “bitter life” and “inhumane treatment inflected upon the Tibetans by local Indians” in Dharamsala. Meant to arouse debate about the vulnerability of Tibetan refugees as they move in a Gaddi world, Mila’s social criticism is useful for the Chinese statist narrative that seeks to discourage Tibetans from imagining a social utopia in Dharamsala and to paint a picture of vicious communalism and stark life opportunities in exile. Perceptions of Dharamsala are as oppositional as fantasies about Tibet – cosmopolitan and communalistic, mystical and consumeristic. Dharamsala seems to be perpetually gesturing outside itself. Gaddis
define themselves by their ancestral villages in Bharmaur, and villages remain clustered around caste formations and deity worship transposed from over the Dhauladhar Mountains. Tibetans often play the visa lottery and hope to migrate to Western countries (Frilund 2014).

Mila’s most controversial and strongest-worded criticism came in an essay published in the *Tibet Telegraph* provocatively titled “Is Dharamsala Safe for Tibetans?” (June 12, 2014). This essay would reappear in many social media platforms after the October 2015 murder. Mila begins by heaping praise on India. “No government or people on earth have ever helped exile [sic] Tibetans more than the government and people of India have done for the past six decades.” But his abstract praise for India is countered by the bulk of the essay, which details the “racial hatred, envy and jealousy of the local Gaddis” and blames the CTA for silencing the Tibetans who speak out against the “ethnic persecution that is violating our basic human rights”. What follows is an impressionistic detailing of the violent “deteriorating social condition” experienced by Tibetans: a Tibetan thrown off a balcony and paralyzed without any legal action brought against the perpetrators; Tibetan nuns sexually assaulted by Gaddi taxi drivers; and Tibetan New Arrivals, late on rent payments, beaten with pots by Gaddi landowners. Accompanying violence are daily acts of humiliation, like a Tibetan man “threatened with a severe whipping by a skinny 12 year old [sic] Gaddi boy for parking his car on the roadside near his store in lower Dharamsala”. The Tibetan was helpless to respond in the face of “scores of idle Gaddi onlookers […] with the fire of hatred raging in their eyes, itching to give him an unfair, aggravated mob assault for which there is no legal consequence”.

Among the list of grievances are some of the “dozens” of negative experiences Mila personally suffered with Gaddis, like being assaulted for “breaking a twig from a small skinny dead eucalyptus tree lying near a vertical rock on which I was painting a 20 feet tall Free Tibet
slogan that could be seen from miles away”. On another occasion, he was traveling on a bus when a Gaddi man tried to unseat an 8-year-old Tibetan boy. The boy sat firm and received repeated slaps on his face from the Gaddi man. Mila immediately began to brawl with him, and “in the next instant the bus stopped, and a dozen Gaddi passengers were all over me and I was once again mobbed unconscious and dumped along the roadside.” These critiques run parallel to everyday accounts of Tibetans, which include sexual humiliations and physical vulnerability – verbally teased, urinated on, targeted by gangs, systematically disenfranchised from public spaces.

As Mila sees it, the denigration of Tibetans is the misplaced frustrations of Gaddis who prematurely sold off their ancestral land to non-Himachali businessmen. Now Gaddis – “money spent, uneducated” – focus on the Tibetans as rich refugees, “easy targets” with little legal protection, when their real complaints should be turned to the extraction of wealth by avaricious Indians (epitomized by Black Magic, with its beefy Punjabi bouncers and blatant disregard for local customs). Compounding the problem, the hilly, cramped topography of McLeod Ganj puts Tibetans and Gaddis in daily interaction with each other, like it or not. These observations correspond with my fieldwork among Gaddis, which is detailed below, although Mila’s two-fold solution – Indian citizenship and ethnic segregation – is hotly debated among Tibetans.

In a stunning flurry of imaginative force, Mila imagines Tibetans pouring out of Dharamsala, leaving the town bereft of its spiritual core. Tibetans would relocate to Tibet City, a fenced-in community “far away from the locals.” He goes into amazing detail describing a fortified Tibetan citadel, purged of Gaddis, a fantastically hermetic safety zone that would encourage a flourishing of Tibetan culture. He calls for a “30 foot high 3 feet thick concrete wall” with an inner fence of “thick metal bars 20 feet high for social, economic and ethnic
security reasons. Those few local villages in the land that we are going to get on lease or buy can be compensated by moving them to abandoned Tibetan settlements.” While Mila’s rendition of a Tibet City, inured from Indian contamination, built atop the land of forcibly relocated locals, is particular to his own imagination, it taps into a widespread fantasy of many Tibetan refugees who feel physically vulnerable and, bolstered by international media attention and Tibetophile tourism, often culturally superior to their Gaddi tribal neighbors. This superiority is encapsulated in the way Tibetans often speak of their discovery of McLeod Ganj. Tibetans of all age cohorts describe their arrival in McLeod Ganj as the birth of civilization – sentiment that uncomfortably echoes Chinese propaganda about the 1951 liberation of Tibetans from monastic feudalism and fetid living conditions. Thus the myth of uncivilized Gaddis living in a barren wasteland meets the fantasy of abandoning McLeod Ganj for a fortified Tibet City in South India, self-sufficient and entirely insulated. Such ruminations take us far afield from the “willingness to engage with the other” emblematic of cosmopolitan values (Hannerz 1990, 239).

**Everyday Vulnerabilities – Real and Perceived**

Both Tashi’s perspective of racially-tinged Tibetan superiority and Mila’s analysis of Gaddi communalism against vulnerable Tibetans are ethnographically valid. On the first point, the most prevalent discourse among Gaddis is about Tibetan opportunism, that behind the veil of exaggerated refugee hardship is a script for “looting” foreigners and amassing great wealth through posturing. The relative wealth of Tibetans has been noted by several scholars (Penny-Dimri 1994; McGuckin 1996, 102) and is often viewed as the result of uneven welfare assistance to Tibetans, leading to communal resentments (Prost 2006, 243). Saklani (1984, 378) notes the cultural elitism among Tibetans, “along with the understandable confusion among Indians who
believe that refugees are beggars and should not be building new cement houses and driving around in four-wheel-drive jeeps.” And Diehl (2002, 110) observed how Western tourists and Tibetan refugees have a shared disdain “for the day-to-day realities of India—hardship, corruption, poverty, and filth—[which] is an important ingredient in the often-romantic collusion between these groups”.

Anecdotally, the subject of Tibetans would sometimes spontaneously arise among my Gaddi interlocutors and friends. Over a bottle of whisky, I heard a story with wide circulation of the first BMW in Dharamsala, owned by a Tibetan. “He was a simple monk, not even the Karmapa or a rich merchant. For us BMW is a big brand name.” Gaddis often point to branding as a crucial marker of Tibetan elitism. “Look at Tibetan shoes: Puma, Adidas, Timberland. And what do we wear? Moti, Bada and Columbus. Indian brands!” Tibetan-run import fashion stores lining the congested streets in McLeod Ganj become, for Gaddis, overcharged sites of consumer cosmopolitanism. A close Gaddi friend, a wealthy village leader with ancestral property in McLeod Ganj and prominent roles in the Indo-Tibetan Friendship Association and the Dharamsala Taxi Union, described how Gaddis face subtle forms of discrimination as they socially aspire. “Once I went to the underground market in McLeod Ganj three years ago to buy a purse for my wife. I was browsing around and the Tibetan worker said to me, ‘These are expensive handbags, are you sure you want to buy one of these?’ I replied, ‘I came to your shop to buy something. What do you mean expensive? Do you know who you are talking to? If you talk again like this, your shop won’t be open much longer!’ Such practices of socioeconomic labelling, matched with an ostentatious manner of wearing their wealth, is often felt by Gaddis as both symbolic of Tibetan consumer cosmopolitanism – a broad-minded expression of and familiarity with global flows and trends – and a gate keeping tactic that disarms foreign tourists.
and marks Indians as the visible Others. Scholars have variously described this overt display of consumer goods to further cosmopolitan aspiration as “banal cosmopolitanism” (Beck 2002) and “consumer cosmopolitanism” (Hannerz 2004).

It is not surprising, therefore, that Gaddis accuse Tibetans of purposefully tarnishing their reputation to foreign tourists. “Tibetans warn foreigners that Indians are very cunning people. They tell foreign girls that Indian men are very dangerous. I have heard Tibetans say time and again, ‘Indians are not good’ (rgya gar mi yag po ma red).” Gaddi youth feel like their interactions with foreigners are compromised by Tibetans who exaggerate the badness of Indians or devalue their presence altogether. “I’ve heard Tibetans scolding their child, ‘Don’t do that, otherwise Indians will beat you!’ If you feed this to children at a young age, they will have this confusion in their blood. Foreigners coming here can’t help but feel the anti-Gaddi environment. They adopt the same feeling.”

I found this to be the case with many Tibetans I spoke with about my research, who often expressed confusion as to why I would want to research Gaddis at all. This can be put quite bluntly; one Tibetan woman, who had lived in McLeod Ganj for six years but never heard of the Gaddis by name, outright said, “Indian culture is inferior to our Tibetan culture in every way.” Gaddis experience this as collusion between Tibetans and foreigners, negatively shaping their interactions with Tibetans and putting them on guard with foreigners. An anecdote told by a Gaddi friend encapsulates how Tibetans are perceived as poisoning the well and colluding with foreign tourists to render cosmopolitan expression outside of the Gaddi purview:

In 2001, I used to work in an ISD/STD shop in Nor bu gling ka. Back then people didn’t often have cell phones, and it was super expensive to call Tibet, something like 24 rupees a minute. And the connection was bad; while talking the line would often beep, beep, jump and cut out. That obviously wasn’t my fault. I was just working in the shop. One day a foreign girl was using the phone to call America when the line cut. The bill came – it wasn’t much, a few rupees – but she got angry at me. I guess she didn’t get a chance to
talk to anyone, even though the line was connected. As she was paying the bill just then a Tibetan walked by, and they started to talk in Tibetan, not realizing that I too know Tibetan. He said, ‘Indians are thieves’ (rgya gar mi rkun ma red). I grabbed him and we started to fight, and other Tibetans broke us apart but actually supported me. Because, see, Tibetans might think this way about us Gaddis – that we are dangerous or thieves – but the Tibetan who I was fighting with was a New Arrival, and Tibetans call them ‘toilet’ (gsang spyod) and have no respect for them. In the end the girl gave the money and said ‘Sorry, sorry’ and left.

What one ultimately feels in Dharamsala, after peeling away the politically-expedient veneer of ethnic cooperation peddled by the CTA, is an absence of neighborliness and the expectation of self-maximizing behavior. Impatience and the attribution of malicious intent is the norm regulating everyday encounters with the ethnic Other. A Gaddi teacher, late to work one morning, inattentively parks his car in front of a shuttered storage space adjacent to the CTA complex. He rushes down the mountain to school, all the while thinking, “It’s not really a shop. It just opens occasionally because there are some Tibetan materials placed inside; it’s some kind of distribution center rarely opened. It won’t open, and even if it does, there’s enough space for people to walk between my car and the shop.” He returns as soon as he can, during his lunch hour, to find two punctured tires. “Tibetans had bent open the window, unlocked the car, put down the handbrake and shifted the car away from the shop. Fine. But why vandalize it? I admit I shouldn’t have parked my car there. It was a human mistake!” As he drives his car down Kharadanda Road, avoiding potholes and steering on pancaked tires, hoping not to drive off the steep embankments, which occasionally claim the lives of inattentive drivers, his resentment grows from an everyday village qualm to ethnic collectivism:

I am so tired of Tibetans taking our land for their government and then targeting Gaddis who live and work nearby! The Himachal Pradesh government might have given them that land. I don’t care. That is our property, Gaddi property, and why am I risking my life driving to a tire shop down a steep mountain on flattened tires? Those sister fuckers! They are living on our land, eating our food, drinking our water, draining our resources, and yet they have no human feelings towards us Gaddis.
The slashed tires may be plugged and the car restored, but the experience of Gaddi inferiority, the escalation from a minor social infraction to a lifelong communal resentment, is unlikely to dissipate. “Whatever sympathy (lagāv) I had towards Tibetans, it evaporated like water,” the teacher told me. “It’s gone.”

Meanwhile, on the Tibetan side, Wongmo, an Indian-born veteran teacher at the Tibetan Transit School (TTS) in Kandi, Lower Dharamsala, described some of the hardships New Arrivals face adjusting to an alien environment. “The main problem is Hindi. Not being able to speak makes them vulnerable. They get targeted by traffic police; they have to give additional bribes to get official paperwork. They get ripped off by taxi drivers and shopkeepers; the bus conductors take an extra five rupees off them when they travel locally.” An inability to speak Hindi marks Tibetans as easy targets, as newbies to an Indian system of negotiation and opportunistic price inflation; the upshot is not only economic, handicapping those who are often most socially vulnerable, but also a feeling of emasculation among young men struggling to transition from welfare recipients and 20-something high-school students to valuable contributors to Tibetan society. Consigned to experience in silence the Hindi-speaking India outside Tibetan enclaves, they often report feeling Gaddi aggression through manners of speech and physical gestures.

Weekend excursions from TTS to McLeod Ganj, where New Arrivals practice their broken English with tourists, or to nearby Dari, where they stroll through the local bazaar, often lead to compromising situations. Wangmo described how the shortcut road between TTS and nearby Dari, which runs through tea gardens, is particularly dangerous. “Indians are sometimes waiting for students, who can’t speak Hindi or defend themselves, and sometimes money gets snatched and girls get groped. We discourage a single student to go alone. The New Arrivals feel
so insecure here – almost every Monday they tell us stories from the weekend about being poorly treated by locals. We give them tips, like don't go alone, or we teach them Hindi in their free time, like last week I was teaching them ek, do, tīn.” With Hindi excluded from the official TTS curricula – which emphasizes English and Tibetan in anticipation of New Arrivals on-migrating to Western countries, repatriating to Tibet or shifting to settlements in South India – and with generic courses on Indian society skipping over an introduction to Indian tribal life – New Arrivals find themselves linguistically, intellectually and experientially vulnerable.

After completion of TTS, those Tibetans who remain in Dharamsala often filter into Gaddi homes as tenants. In villages such as Dusali (Amdo Village), these New Arrivals find themselves without the cultural and linguistic competence to stand up for their renter’s rights. Consequently, Tibetans make informal rental agreements during lulls in international tourism, especially in the winter and monsoon months, and then face eviction as their apartments can garner higher rent during peak tourism. Gaddi landlords are equally likely to evict Tibetans who default on rent payments; Lhundup, a New Arrival who lived in Dusali for three years, recalled how his Tibetan neighbor fell onto hard times and appealed for a rent extension. The next day, he returned home to find two padlocks on his door and no place to stay. When he marshaled the rent money from friends, the Gaddi landlord capriciously raised the rent citing violations of an imaginary rent agreement. In other instances, Gaddi landlords have reportedly turned to physical violence, as the case when a Tibetan woman brushing her teeth over the railing of her balcony, an everyday practice in India, accidently spit toothpaste on the balcony below. The irate Gaddi landlord began pulling her hair and slapping her while she screamed out apologetically, and several Tibetans had to step in to protect her. In this case, as in many others, New Arrivals fear the Indian police and fail to level FIR charges against the perpetrators (Macdonald 2013).
There are many instances of Tibetan vulnerability. Gaddi youth sometimes urinate on defeated Tibetan rivals after physical altercations (Atreyee Sen, personal comm.). The Bhagsu Temple swimming pool is policed by Gaddi hooligans who intimidate away Tibetans. Disaffected Gaddi gangs have terrorized Tibetans from at least 1989, when Tibetan boys, vastly outnumbered, were beaten and humiliated outside the now-defunct Memory Video Hall. Gaddi gang violence, often perpetrated by taxi drivers against Tibetan men who are accused of inappropriately dating across ethnic boundaries, reached a crescendo in 2007; since then, under pressure from Tibetan boycotts, the Dharamsala Taxi Union has made efforts to discourage violence against paying customers. However, as the following vignette shows, a history of violence mixed with gossipy misinformation often exacerbates communal distrust and converts innocuous social interaction into brushes with danger.

One night after eating at Lung-Ta, a Japanese restaurant which doubles as a Tibetan NGO, I began to walk to my house in Lower Gamru, a Hali village below the Tibetan Library. Through the darkness I saw the outlines of the crowd commonly found on the upper stretch of Jogiwara Road: Tibetan youth wearing a motley array of clothing – cowboy hats, Converse shoes, Team Tibet sweatshirts, and skinny jeans – ducking into Seed Café for a night of Michael Jackson karaoke and boozing; Western foreigners, mostly women, alone and in small groups, shuffling from their volunteer work and spirituality courses to relax at a café; and Indians, the Punjabis in oversized touring vans, and Gaddi men on foot going to the main chowk for time pass. Mid-October in Dharamsala has crisp evenings, and I briskly walked downhill towards the jungle shortcut home. I focused on planting deliberate steps with my battered Bata flip-flops.

Where Jogiwara bends into Temple Road, a woman materialized from the darkness and latched onto my arm, squeezing it from sheer terror. She was talking first in exasperated Kham
dialect and then switched to Mandarin. I know neither. I fumbled through my pocket and
switched on the makeshift “torch” on my mobile phone. She was wearing jeans and a black puffy
jacket, and her eyes were wildly alert. Slowly I realize that she is a New Arrival. Amid a flurry
of Mandarin, she said “Uncle” in Tibetan and Gangkyi, the nickname for the complex of CTA
offices and adjacent Badi village of Khulaid. “English, LHA, class, Tibet, late, home.” Slowly
we came to an understanding. Her panic-stricken face gave way to a broad grin, and her clenched
fingers relaxed around my arm. I changed course, and instead of cutting through the mountain
footpath to Gamru I escorted her on Kharadanda Road to the CTA about twenty minutes below.
She intentionally kept to the far side of the road, and although she clutched a smart phone she
never dared to use the torch.

After a few minutes, a pair of descending headlights pierced through the darkness and
elongated our shadows on the pavement. Instead of passing, a taxi slowed to our pace; through
the open window, the Gaddi driver inquired, “Library?” in English. In the passenger seat was
another Gaddi youth smoking a cigarette. In simple Hindi, I said, “No thanks. It’s a nice night.
We’re going for a stroll, but thanks for the offer.” (śukriyā bhāī, mausam pratikūl hai, ab ham
bas sair kar rahe hain, magar puchne ke liye śukriyā). He replied, “No worries, as you like” (koī
cakkar nahīn, āpkī marzī). The exchange lasted twenty seconds and seems completely
innocuous.

Not to Phurbu, her face contorted in fear and her grip tightened around my arm. “No, no,
no,” she repeated in exasperated English. She even marshaled the ubiquitous and lexically
protean Hindi phrase, “Celō, celō” to the driver. She looked terrified. The taxi was inching away,
but stopped when the driver heard celō, unsure if its dual meaning: both a cohortative, a verbal
mood expressing exhortation in the sense of “let’s go together” and an imperative baldly
expressing “go, leave us.” The driver repeated, “Library?” with a raising intonation, and I reiterated that we were walking. As he drove off, Phurbu began chanting, “Indian bad, Indian bad,” like a mantra for refugee survival.

She saw something else. A car approached, piercing through the protective cover of darkness. Two Indian men demanded something, perhaps muffled by the radio. Shouldn’t a taxi have only a driver? The road was empty; the threat real. She has probably heard about Gaddi taxi drivers molesting nuns on the way to Thosamling Nunnery. She probably knew about the Nirbhaya rape-murder in Delhi, about separate metro compartments for women, and the ogling and slut-shaming of Northeastern and Tibetan women. She probably saw that Gaddi women rarely work in public and never walk the streets at night. I was reminded of a Gaddi youth I met earlier that day, who described his booze-filled trips to McLeod Ganj in pursuit of Tibetan girls. He boasted of having been romantic with Western women, but he wanted a Tibetan girl “just to taste”.

Until that moment, I had never been in the company of a Tibetan New Arrival at the moment when India induces a panic, when footpaths through Deodars conceal ominous threats. To lighten the somber mood, I called a Chinese friend in California who is a Tibet sympathizer. Phurbu seemed relieved to speak in Mandarin. I discovered that she is from Chengdu, in Dharamsala to study English at LHA and Tibetan culinary arts. She had no local friends but lived with a monk who is like an uncle to her. She hoped I could give her English lessons.

Having arrived, she invited me into the monk’s home; the monk is cooking chicken thukpa in a t-shirt and rolled down robes. She offered me a glass of Coke, and I struck up small talk with the monk, first in English and then in Hindi, to better understand Phurbu’s situation. Through annoyed grimaces he replied, “Don’t ask, I don’t like questions and talk.” I awkwardly
laughed off his curtness and mentioned that I walked with her from McLeod Ganj because she was afraid. “Why did you help her? She’s fine alone.” He glared menacingly. He dismissed me with a hand gesture towards the door and then turned his ire on Phurbu. I returned the fizzing Coke to the table and sidled out the door.

These are the small moments that illuminate how Dharamsala can feel for Tibetans. Phurbu feared Indians and turned to me as a Westerner and assumed ally. The monk treated me with confusion and suspicion. Despite being obviously Caucasian, speaking Hindi throws even Indians on occasion. Maybe he was protecting her identity from prying strangers who could compromise her security. Or maybe he found it uncouth to bring home a foreign boy.

Walking home I passed a drunk Gaddi man on an unpaved road. No lights, no torch. While passing we both picked the same side and bumped into each other. I smelled the booze, but never feel threatened. I imagined how Phurbu might have felt in the same situation.

**The Lion (Man) Roars!**

In early afternoons during the tourist season, Tsering Dorjee, the self-titled Lion Man, distributes fliers on Jogiwara Road advertising a live show. “Come see a Himalayan celebrity”, it proclaims. “Experience Tibetan traditional song and dance, unique local acts and much more.”

Monochromatically dressed in red pants, a red satchel bag slung over a red t-shirt – on which is embossed a close-up picture of his broad-smiling face – and a white studded belt and white, hand-shaped retro rocker sunglasses, the Lion Man epitomizes the cosmo-capitalism of Dharamsala. He intrepidly approaches foreign tourists, hands them a flier and encourages them to check out his performance that afternoon at 6pm at the nearby Yongling Kindergarten. Long-term expats in McLeod Ganj have either seen his shtick or heard rumors of sexual face humping.
and Shia LaBeouf-like postmodern performance art. He is widely rumored to be a male prostitute and to have an elderly British girlfriend who takes him vacationing in Thailand. Even New Arrivals routinely dismiss him as “crazy”.

Naturally, my curiosity overcomes me and one early evening I descend the Yongling Steps and am met at the door by an elderly, hunched-over Tibetan woman in a chu ba. Tourists trickle into the cement classroom and sit cross-legged in rows across the floor; by the time the Lion Man makes a subdued entrance, 30 minutes late, the room has filled up with 38 foreigners. Besides a Taiwanese couple, everyone appears to be Western. He slides through the audience collecting the 150-rupee admission fee in exchange for an official-looking red ticket and Free Tibet sticker. His show, which lasts 45 minutes, will generate 5,700 rupees; put in perspective, his one-time haul matches the average monthly salary of many Gaddi laborers.

Today the Lion Man is dressed in purple Converse shoes, red cargo shorts and a white Tibetan flag t-shirt. After collecting the entrance fees, he moves to the front of the room and, in affected gestures, overlays his western clothing with a silky, long-sleeved stod thung and flowing chu ba. Sartorially positioned as a cosmopolitan Tibetan, he introduces himself by way of personal testimony: how in 1998, at the age of 15, he and 37 others undertook a perilous two-week escape from Tibet, arriving in Nepal with frostbite only to be apprehended by the police. They shared a jail cell for three days, men and women crammed together sharing a single toilet, until they were released by the CTA. The Lion Man moves through the crowd, showing each audience member a faded picture of him as a child sitting astride a donkey in front of the Potala Palace. “I do this performance to save money so that I can come to the West to continue dancing.” The audience is about to realize that they are not paying for Tibetan cultural preservation, as they might have thought given the official setting; instead, they will become
participants in a performance about displaced cosmopolitan identity, boundary crossing and social aspiration.

The performance begins with a five-minute dance matched to traditional Kham folk music. Next, the Lion Man begins to whirl, methodically at first and then in frenzied gyrations, to the accompanying repetition of the \textit{om mani padme hum mantra}. As the manta drones on, reverberating off the tight cement walls, the Lion Man continues to whirl in a display of sheer physicality, his ponytail ripping through the air, his fingers expressing different \textit{mudras}. This continues for several minutes, amounting to nothing less than a meditation on the Sisyphean redundancy of spinning: spinning stories of Tibetan displacement calibrated to Western ears for profit; spinning a Sanskrit \textit{mantra} associated with Avalokiteshvara into the soundtrack of ethnocommodification endlessly looping through the Tibetan shops selling tourist baubles along Temple Road.

After several minutes, his breath grows laborious, and his pace slackens. “The rest of my performance will be modern,” he announces, less than 10 minutes after beginning. “Now I dance to break borders.” Signaling the end of tradition, he approaches his first participant. The audience is about to realize that the Lion Man is not merely speaking about breaking through the Chinese takeover of Tibet, the border dispute at the heart of Tibetan exile; squatting down and pressing his face directly against the unsuspecting face of an elderly tourist, the Lion Man wants to demolish the boundary between him and us, between Tibetans and the foreigners who travel great distances to experience them. For several seconds the room remains silent as the two men stare into each other’s eyes, their noses pressed together, the Lion Man’s tangled hair draped across the foreigner’s forehead. He appears stunned. After fifteen seconds, the Lion Man leapfrogs to an adjacent tourist, and again the bridge of his nose fuses with hers, his forehead
presses against hers, the physical gap breached between tourist and toured. He continues to leapfrog down the row, leading progressively harder with his face until he pushes a woman backwards and, never breaking the physical contact of their faces, lays atop her with raised legs suggestive of canine humping. Surprised laughter erupts from the backpacking crowd; several foreigners, including the elderly man first selected and the Taiwanese couple, retreat outside and watch the performance in safety through openings in the barred windows. When my time comes, the Lion Man tosses my glasses aside and presses me down onto the ground. His hair and perspiration streak across my face; his breath flows into my parted mouth and spills down my cheeks.

“Okay, now I will do the last act, which is more interesting I think. I need you all to be more open.” Stilted giggles arise from the audience. The Lion Man selects a woman in her 50s and stands her up in front of the crowd; he head butts into her chest three times, walks ceremoniously around her, kisses her on the forehead and sits her down. He scans the audience for the two burliest men. Slinging one over his back in the Firefighter’s Carry and the other tucked under his armpit, he picks them off the ground and spins a few times. Many of the tourists in the room will be picked up, massaged, compressed or otherwise physically jostled. Some end up heaped on the floor in embarrassed laughter after being dropped or intentionally pushed down. One woman awkwardly tries to hike up her pants while the Lion Man parades her around; one man finds himself elevated by the squat Lion Man reaching under the front of his crotch and securely grabbing onto his buttocks from behind.

To conclude the performance, the Lion Man slinks onto the floor, his body writhing in contortions while he strips off his Tibetan formal wear down to his western clothes. This is the reveal: reminding the audience of his subject positionality as hybrid Tibetan refugee and
cosmopolitan. He violently jerks off the ground and throws himself face-first into the wall. He clutches the cloth belt of his chu ba in his left hand, which streams through the air and lightly slaps against the cement. First, he sashays the belt between his open legs in a sexually suggestive pose; then he corkscrews out of his t-shirt and uses the rope to tie it against his face, obscuring his vision. He now looks like a criminal facing execution by firing squad, sweat snaking down his bare chest. Next, he loops the cloth belt around his protruding tongue and pulls it taut, silencing his muffled cries. Tossing the belt behind him, he begins assaulting his facial orifices with his trademark plastic retro sunglasses. Grimacing like a man possessed, he jabs the arms of his sunglasses deep into his nasal cavity, down his throat, into his ear canal, as if enacting the ambivalence and self-nullifying force of Western materialism and the sartorial imperatives of cosmopolitan belonging. As a finale, the Lion Man lights toilet paper dangled from his shorts and erupts in a corybantic rage, reminding us of the many cases of Tibetan self-immolation in the pursuit of independence. “Thank you,” he gasps and invites us to take group pictures for social media. “Come again tomorrow, for free, just please bring new people.”

I ask some tourists lingering in the school courtyard about their experience. An Australian replies, “Maybe I’ve been conned, and maybe I’ll never forget it and it’s the best 150 rupees I’ve ever forked over.” Through 2016, the Lion Man’s performance has been personally experienced by thousands of tourists, and seen by many thousands more on YouTube and through written accounts on travel blogs and social media.

Based on my frequent meetings with Tenzin Dorjee, I have come to see his performance as both the epitome of cosmopolitan competence and a critical riffing on, even undermining of, the cosmopolitan encounter. Competence in the sense of a “built-up skill in maneuvering more or less expertly with a particular system of meanings and meaningful forms” (Hannerz 1990, 239).
In their analysis of transnational competence – those capacities that allow social actors to “traverse and interlink levels (urban, rural, national, regional)” and recognize the “permeable status of physical borders and intangible boundaries” – Koehn and Rosenau (2010, 5-9) outline five competencies in interpersonal engagement: analytic, emotional, creative/imaginative, communicative and functional. While the Lion Man characterizes aspects of all five competencies, his boundary-crossing performance exemplifies three capabilities in particular. His ability to manage multiple identities, to widen his disposition and render himself vulnerable in a transboundary context, and to read the emotional cues of audience members with different cultural backgrounds requires emotional competence. His capacity to draw inspiration from a medley of cultural influences, and rearticulate through performance a transboundary synthesis, requires imaginative competence, and his proficiency in English and nonverbal cues, penchant for cross-cultural dialogue and facilitating “mutual self-disclosure” requires communicative competence. Such cosmopolitan competencies in translating difference and negotiating transboundaries, while uniquely enacted by the Lion Man for local notoriety and self-advancement, are distributed across experiential cohorts of Tibetan refugees in Dharamsala.

Gaddis, on the other hand, would never dream up such an enterprise; they rarely exhibit identity entrepreneurship and cosmopolitan competencies in global encounters. More to the point, Gaddis lack the cultural capital with which the Lion Man blurs the distinction between aesthetic performance and the violation of social norms. Gaddis are often treated as interlopers in Dharamsala, as incongruous with the expectations of the cosmopolitan encounter. When the Lion Man bait-and-switches a Tibetan “traditional” performance for a showing of quixotic self-flagellation and unsolicited head-butting and leg-humping, it is based on the assurance of a sympathetic crowd. A crowd composed of Western individuals with like-minded political and
ideological sensibilities, perceiving Dharamsala through centuries-old inherited discourses and fantastic cultural projections. Tibetans know that westerners visit Dharamsala to encounter Tibetans. Gaddis have no such assurance.

The initial set-up of the performance establishes the Lion Man’s Tibetanness through dress and narration only to undermine it. Taking advantage of the collective celebrity of Tibetan refugees to fill a classroom with paying tourists, the Lion Man promises cultural difference recognizable in the marketplace of Tibetan ethnocommodification while subverting tradition and emphasizing cultural sameness with foreigners. Khampa folk music fuses into Goan techno music, Tibetan clothes are shed for Western counterparts, and a narrative of exile transforms into the promise of on-migration to the West. The performance externalizes the struggle of cultural
belonging among New Arrivals, accused by Settler Tibetans of being culturally inauthentic and treated by Gaddis as alien. They ultimately find their authentic selves picking through the flotsam of Western cultural influence.

It also externalizes and subverts the dialectical expectations of tourists and Tibetans. Adopting Mary Wiesmantel’s (2001, xxxi) analysis of Andean racial hierarchies, Sammells (2014, 128) argues that foreign tourists in Bolivian indigenous markets instantiate the “vicious binary” between guest and host. Within these social encounters, class-based distinctions are affirmed: guests as “leisured and moneyed outsiders” and hosts as “locals who provide services in exchange for money” (Sammells 2014, 135). By shucking off tradition and humping paying tourists, the Lion Man eviscerates the binary gap separating tourists and Tibetans. Although this may elicit momentary anxiety for those present, the Lion Man is only forcing his captive audience to have the “authentic” experience they seek. He takes the logic of ethno-commodification and New Age Orientalism to its extreme by offering up his naked body and mortifying his flesh. For those foreigners who engage with Tibetans to enact a cultural infatuation or offer succor or shed their ennui as middle-class leisure tourists, the Lion Man offers an antidote: the unexpected intimacy of being pinned to the floor, of being tasted and felt, ogled and burnt. At the same time, the Lion Man enacts his hybrid identity as a New Arrival with Western aspirations; his physical invasions are enactments of reconciling competing selves, of pressing into and fusing with the objects of his desire. Although some foreigners may feel conned, the performance reconciles the unconscious motivations for their being there.

When viewed in the broader Gaddi context, the performance highlights the ways in which the instrumentalization of vogue Tibetan ethnicity fuels economic inequality. There is no equivalency for even the most opportunistic Gaddis to commodify their tribal identity for
marketplace consumption. Cosmopolitanism is as much an embodiment of class privilege, benevolent Orientalism and forms of attendant social capital, as it is a genuine worldview of openness to difference. Because of the popular conflation of cosmopolitanism with English language, Western cafes and easy engagement with foreign tourists, Gaddis earning typical salaries are unable to buy into the spaces in which cosmopolitanism are trafficked: export shops, international film festivals, expensive cafes specializing in cappuccinos, where Tibetan monks with iPhones are often seen being hosted by Western patrons and English tutors.

**Cosmopolitan Exchange**

Although cosmopolitanism implies global citizenship, much research is on discrepant, vernacular, bottom-up cosmopolitanism by non-elite actors (Werbner 2008; Hannerz 2004; Clifford 1997). Cosmopolitans are not necessarily mobile elites but also those who cultivate an openness to global flows circulating through their local environment. The cosmopolitan consumerism evident in the cafes of McLeod Ganj does not reflect the ways in which Gaddis, in particular, aspire to be cosmopolitan in their engagement with Tibetans. Gaddis express aesthetic openness to cultural difference and inhabit interstices between divergent cultural practices in ways that are muted and resist self-congratulation – in short, in ways that fail to register with the lingo of “cosmospeak” of Tibetans and tourists. These muted cosmopolitan practices include shepherds who sell milk from auspiciously white colored goats to makers of Tibetan medicine (*bod kyi gso ba rig pa*), women who provide birthing assistance to expectant Tibetan mothers, and crossover spiritual practices, such as Gaddis who visit Kandro La, the Tibetan medium for the Tenma Oracle who resides in Dharamsala and provides fortunetelling and spirit healing. As
the following vignette highlights, these crossover spiritual practices can lead to reformations of the self and hybrid cosmo-tribal identities.

I often met Jeevan *pandit* by chance when our paths crossed at a house ritual or birthday party. Jeevan recently took over the functions of *kul purohit* from his aging father. Only 33-years-old, full of charisma and a little bit of showmanship, Jeevan became a good friend and natural interlocutor. Normally we would discuss his experience as a Gaddi Brahman and ritual expert, and Jeevan officiated over the *nuāḷā* I hosted towards the end of my first extended fieldwork. Given his importance in the everyday ritual expression of Gaddi Hinduism, it was to my great surprise when, over dinner at his house, he showed me a laminated pictured of his “Guru-ji” – a corpulent and broad-smiling Tibetan monk! Their chance encounter in 1999 has blossomed into a relationship of mutuality and shared respect. Their exchange of theological learning and the centrality of Guru-ji in the self-narration of Jeevan’s spiritual maturation embodies the most organic and deeply-felt cosmopolitan exchange between a Gaddi and Tibetan I discovered in many years of research; it also typifies how an important minority of Gaddis – those working as TCV bus drivers, accompanying Tibetans for wintertime sweater markets throughout India, even, in rare cases, intermarrying with Tibetans – practice situated cosmopolitanism outside of diasporas identification, travel or direct displacement.

Jeevan first met Guru-ji when he was strolling around Nadir, his village above McLeod Ganj. A Tibetan monk approached him, clad in red robes and, speaking Hindi, asked for help collecting branches. “So I climbed up a nearby tree, and Guru-ji told me which branches to cut down. While cutting the branches my sickle (*darati*) broke. You know how important a *darati* is for a Gaddi. Guru-ji saw this and gave me 20 rupees for the broken *darati* and for helping him. You can’t imagine – 20 rupees was a lot of money at that time!” Later that night Jeevan told his
father about the encounter with the wise and generous Tibetan monk. Based on his father’s encouragements, Jeevan began to visit Guru-ji in his meditation hut above TCV on the shortcut road to Dharamkot. “I would watch him meditate, watch his lifestyle, and I became certain that he possesses great wisdom.” Sometimes they would discuss the theological similarities between Shaivism and Vajrayana Buddhism while grazing cows together; more often, however, Jeevan the boy, and then Jeevan the aspiring pandit, would sit silently taking darśan of his Guru-ji and, after some time, slip out the door with a simple, “Namaste.” “Right on the door it says, ‘No Entry’ (āne ka man) to keep away tourists who are walking around in the mountains. He needs to concentrate on his meditation. But he always allows me inside, because I am in his heart and he is in mine.”

Jeevan describes the religious fraternity (dharm kā rištā) that binds him to his Guru-ji.

“While my Guru-ji is alive, my duty (dharm) is to serve him (sevā) in whatever way I can. I feel like I can’t leave him. From that day when I cut branches for him, to today, the years have passed – I am 33 now – even still I can’t leave him. We are deeply connected (lagan lage), like thirsty people are attracted to water.” Although Jeevan’s Brahmanical duties extend across several villages stretching down to Gamru at the fringe of Lower Dharamsala, he makes a point to visit Guru-ji’s meditation hut ever two or three weeks. Jeevan attributes much of his early success as a kul purohit to the munificence of his Guru-ji. “From the time that I became connected with Guru-ji, my work as a pandit has expanded. All the time people are calling me for my services. I’ve become famous here in Dharamsala and am called through half of Himachal Pradesh.”

One day I bumped into Jeevan pandit, who was hurriedly weaving through traffic on Temple Road heading towards Lower Dharamsala. I was totally unaware of the personal misfortune that had befallen his mentor and friend. Two months earlier, a bull impaled Guru-ji’s
groin and he had received 47 stitches. The wound became infected, and Jeevan was going to visit Guru-ji at the Tibetan-run Delek Hospital. I accompanied him down the mountain and into a hospital recovery room with several patients. Jeevan had been several times before and threaded through the beds to the corner where Guru-ji was sitting upright smiling.

Jeevan placed a box of juice on the table and immediately began to chide him, “Every day I am doing pūjā for your recovery! Last week I went to your home and angrily yelled at your neighbors, ‘How did you allow him to get hurt? How did you allow him to walk to the hospital alone?’” A nurse taking the blood pressure of a nearby patient overheard Jeevan and began laughing. “And that bull who impaled Guru-ji…We Gaddis are Hindus, and we do pūjā to cows. But even still, I was about to take a pipe and saw off the horns! At least I wanted to saw them down a bit so he couldn’t harm anyone else. But Guru-ji restrained me.” Guru-ji laughed, “But Jeevan, pandits shouldn’t think like this! You know that a cow will one day become a human. And anyway, it’s in the cow’s nature to do like this.”

Figure 7.2 Jeevan pandit consoling his Guru-ji in the Delek Hospital. Photo by author.
For the better part of an hour, Jeevan sat on the hospital bed with Guru-ji. They mostly argued as friends: about Guru-ji’s brashness to feed an aggressive bull, who had already impaled several Gaddis and Tibetans; about his stubbornness to drag himself alone to the hospital; about his misplaced sympathetic intention to feed the bull again when he returned home. Jeevan asked Guru-ji for spiritual advice. He had taken home a wounded bird he found on the roadside to his displeased wife. He tried to clean the wounded wing, but it was unable to fly. “So I did a pūjā and left it in a quiet place to die. Was this the right thing to do?” Guru-ji replied, “Yes, that was the right thing to do. You can’t take the life prematurely. That is a sin. The pain it was feeling, that is natural.” I interjected about the ethics of allowing a dying creature to further suffer. Jeevan, bolstered by his Guru-ji’s confirmation, explained that it is a sin to take life. “By feeling pain, the bird will pay (bukhtān karegā) his duty.”

The spectacle of a Gaddi Brahman sharing an intimate moment of friendship with a recuperating Tibetan monk was not lost on the several Tibetan patients and nurses who congregated around us. When Guru-ji’s lunch tray was delivered, I nudged Jeevan to go. He signalled for another minute and drew his body into a meditative pose and recited a mantra for the well being of his Guru-ji, who laughed and began eating. “You will not be in this hospital in a few weeks, but if you are, I will come and visit you again.”
Fieldwork in Dharamsala quickly subverted expectations about tribal life. Internationally renowned as the political epicenter of the Tibetan diaspora in South Asia, domestically known as a salubrious getaway, the character of Dharamsala seemed anathema to everyday perceptions of tribality. While sipping cappuccino in a Hollywood-themed café and using WIFI with the password “GlobalUnity”, the 2002 awarding of ST status to Kangra Gaddis took on a funhouse quality. The official criteria for tribal inclusion as set forth in the still-used 1965 Lokur Committee Report – including (i) primitive traits, (ii) distinctive culture, (iii) geographical remoteness, (iv) shyness of contact with dominant communities and (v) backwardness – was absurdly irreconcilable with the rapid development of Dharamsala (Lokur 1965).

These absurdities crescendoed in May 2016, when Himachal Pradesh Urban Development Minister Sudhir Sharma announced a 25-lakh rupee scheme (approximately $40,000 USD) for rebranding Dharamsala. Perched atop a prominent hill, spelled out in giant white capital letters spanning hundreds of feet, DHARAMSALA will be loudly proclaimed as the Indian alternative to Hollywood. Perhaps rightfully so. In the past year, hundreds of travel articles have been written about the premier destination for spiritual tourism and cosmopolitan hobnobbing. Salman Khan was spotted lounging at the Bhatt Brahmin-run Family Pizzeria in Dharamkot, a tranquil village satellite near to McLeod Ganj. Recently, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal arrived in the same village for a ten-day Vipassana session to improve his chronic asthma. He would return to Delhi feeling “fresh and energetic.”

Every year, the Dharamsala International Film Festival brings in thousands of tourists for independent cinema screened at the Tibetan Children’s Village and the nearby Tibetan Institute of the Performing Arts (TIPA). Big name actors and directors will surely be in attendance,
traversing roads which, according to local lore, were macadamized by Hollywood Tibetophiles Goldie Hawn and Richard Gere. These western luminaries take repose in Glenmoor Cottages, tucked alongside the Dalai Lama’s palace, where they have been seen lunching with the likes of Martin Scorsese, Pierce Brosnan and Paul Simon.

The cosmopolitan flavor of Dharamsala does not always engender comedic banalities and benevolent orientalism. Following the 2010 Pune bombing by the Indian Mujahideen, which targeted a German Bakery adjacent to a Jewish Chabad house and killed 17, anxiety has taken root among some tourists. This anxiety is especially marked among Israeli backpacking youth who disproportionally comprise international tourism. Although seeking to distance themselves from the Israeli military jingoism and the ongoing conflict with Palestinians, these backpackers often travel in tight collectives that reproduce a “military mode” (Ben-Ari 1998, 116). Their extended stay in Dharamsala is a Westernizing practice which allows Israelis to associate to cultivate a western perspective both abroad and at home (Noy 2004, 82). This manifests as an opposition between rejecting social norms and embracing collectivism – an “independent collective” (Maoz 2007, 127-35). This collective “tends to be patriotic, to keep to themselves, and to dismiss both the locals and other nationalities” (Maoz 2007, 135). However, on September 29th, 2014, Israeli backpackers saw through their parochialism to the broader world.

On that day a Gaddi boy raced up to me and announced that a Dharamkot Jewish (yahudi) synagogue had been bombed by Islamic militants. While his claim was exaggerated through the village rumor mill, it was true that the Indian Mujahideen released a video in response to increased attacks in Gaza which singled out Dharamsala by name as a potential target. This triggered a massive increase in police presence around the Chabad Center in Dharamkot. Standing out like a sore thumb among Gaddi homes, the Chabad Center was constructed as a
near-replica façade of 770 Eastern Parkway in Crown Heights, New York, the central headquarters of the Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic Movement. As police flooded in, Israeli backpackers ran out, leaving Gaddi homestays empty during the high season. Gaddi employees were sent home from the kosher kitchen. A war in Gaza and a menacing video on YouTube had impacted Gaddis living on the southern slopes of the Dhauladhar Mountains. Trying to make sense of it all, a rumor began that Israeli backpackers had feuded with Kashmiri shopkeepers on Temple Road in McLeod Ganj, triggering police protection from anticipated rioting. This local explanation seemed more comprehensible to Gaddis, many of whom remembered rioting against Tibetans in 1994 that led to a citywide curfew and military intervention. The event highlighted the unique precarity of being tribal amidst the time-space compression of globalization. The speed of social life in Dharamsala, arguably faster than anywhere else in the Western Himalayas, sets the tempo for being tribal amidst international tourists, Tibetan refugees and the Indian government.

Further modernization plans are underway in Dharamsala. Himachal Pradesh University has cordoned off a large section of sloped land between Dusalni and Gamru for a new central campus. Hotel construction, paying no heed to height regulations, continues unabated. The most egregiously illegal edifices were “sealed” by the Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board and remain without utilities. Meanwhile, the surrounding villages of Tillu and Chola have been washed out by landslides, largely due to improperly drained runoff water that loosens the colluvial strata of topsoil. The military garrison in Terra Lines was leveled by a landslide, attributed by geologists to leaking septic tanks from McLeod Ganj. Below, Badis in Chandmari village worship Gari Wali Mata, the Landslide Goddess, whose temple was ironically washed off the mountainside in recent landslides.
Seismographers give dire predictions. Dharamsala is situated in a Category V earthquake prone area, the highest in India, and recorded fifteen tremors between 2011 and 2013 alone. On April 4th, 1905, a 7.8 earthquake ripped along a low angle fault line running through Kangra, cleaving McLeod Ganj and surrounding villages. It overtook unsuspecting villages, leaving more than 20,000 humans and 53,000 domestic animals dead, destroying aqueducts and disrupting farming and local economies (Ambraseys and Bilham 2000, 45). In Dharamsala alone, 1,625 people died: 15 British, 112 Gorkhas and the rest presumably Gaddis (Gazetteer 1908, 302). The Kangra Earthquake would become the largest in the Indian Himalayas to date, killing twice the number of people as the recent devastation in Nepal. On the centennial of the Kangra Earthquake in 2005, at the precise moment the ground split open, 6:19am, Dharamsala residents congregated in cricket grounds and open public spaces, anxiously waiting for the inauspicious time to pass. There was no earthquake. Tibetans, for their part, employ spiritual means to ward off catastrophic disaster. Four directional earthquake stupas flank the boundaries of McLeod Ganj, and a mantra to Guru Rimpoche and his retinue of elemental Dakinis is regularly chanted to ward off natural disasters. But as development tries to encourage and accommodate an ever-growing influx of tourism, every soaking monsoon and ground rumble is a reminder of the fragility of economic development and cosmopolitan aspiration.

These aspirations have been recently thrown open to new potentialities. In December of 2015, Dharamsala was selected in the Smart City Mission (SCM) competition, a Modi-inspired development scheme intended to modernize 109 cities across India. From 2018-2022, approximately 150 million USD (1,000 kror) will be invested in Dharamsala alone, including 21 multilevel parking lots, 4 bike sharing stations, 35 electric buses and 120 bus shelters, LED street lights, CCTV and free WIFI everywhere, 90 kilometers of new footpaths, a convention center
and a mountaineering institute. The plan even includes treehouse hotels for eco-tourism. The winning proposal was christened as “Divine Dharamsala” and every effort was made to brand the city as the mystical abode of the Dalai Lama. Great fanfare was made when development workers from the aptly titled Global Shapers met with the Dalai Lama to get his urban planning recommendations. He sensibly suggested rainwater harvesting, earthquake-resistant construction and rural investment. In a note penned in Tibetan, he tepidly endorsed the development proposal. “As an elderly man who has lived in Dharamsala happily and in ease and comfort for over 55 years, I appreciate your plan to turn Dharamsala into a Smart City and pray for the fulfillment of your goal as desired.” Snuck into his note is a sense of nostalgia for the sufficiency of the pre-modern.

Figure 8.1 “Congratulations Smart City Dharamsala: Transforming Dharamsala Together”. Photo by author. Dharamsala would go on to receive the central government grant in December of 2015, only to have their inclusion be legally challenged by the Municipal Corporation Mayor of
Shimla, who was unexpectedly beaten out. Dharamsala fell out of the 20 selected cities across India due to a failure to follow proper legal procedure. Protests and store closures followed, and in May of 2017 Dharamsala was re-selected in the “Fast Track Competition” that gave awards to 12 additional cities, from Lucknow to Port Blair. Sudhir Sharma, the MLA of Dharamsala, would be vindicated for submitting a proposal for his home constituency and not the obvious choice Shimla. In the days following the selection, he was praised in op-eds and public celebrations for repaying his constituents with the promise of modern amenities and national recognition.

To bolster the application for Divine Dharamsala, the municipal council was transformed into a municipal corporation. Nine Gaddi villages were absorbed into the corporation, and the applicant population size swelled from 22,500 to 55,000. Village pancāyats are slated to be automatically dissolved in the upcoming election, and Gaddis will now need to fight in larger ward elections with diverse caste compositions and less representational SC/ST reservations.

At the time of the initial award, I had already completed several months of fieldwork in newly corporatized villages, such as in Khanyara and Dari. Across those villages, pancāyat meetings had overwhelmingly ruled against incorporation into Divine Dharamsala. The echo of the ethnographic survey of 1996, when state anthropologists swung through Dharamsala on their Gaddi tribal tour, came resoundingly back into the contemporary. Gaddis had successfully navigated the state criteria by highlighting the tribality of Kangra Gaddis, what Middleton (2011, 250) aptly describes as aspiring tribal communities trying to “satisfy modernity’s demands for anachrony” through a selective presentation of ritual and village life thought to exemplify tribal primitivism. Some Gaddis simply call it exaggeration. Consequently, Gaddis were granted ST
status, and all the entailments of paradoxical modernity it entailed, while Gaddi Dalits were omitted from the application altogether.

History was repeating, first as tragedy, now as farce. Gaddi anticipation of becoming Smart Citizens was refracted through lingering resentment among Gaddi Dalits that their enumeration was intended to bolster an application which did not serve their own interests. Exacerbating their distrust was the reality that Gaddi Dalits had the most to lose by joining the Dharamsala Municipal Corporation. Their 100 days of guaranteed employment through the NREGA scheme would disappear. This was particularly damaging in Khanyara, where the 1994 government closure of open-pit quarries due to ecological degradation increased Dhogri reliance on government assistance (Marh and Pathania 2008).

Accompanying this concern were others, that the proposed development schema would primarily benefit Lower Dharamsala, McLeod Ganj and immediately adjacent tourist villages, while in peripheral villages utilities would become costlier and property taxes would quadruple. For some, the promise of modernity was too risky a gamble. To quell concerns, Sudhir Sharma promised that the discontinued NREGA scheme would be amply replaced with The Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission, and that inclusion in Divine Dharamsala would bring newfound resources and opportunities. Gaddi villagers remained unconvinced. The irony of shifting overnight from a rural employment scheme to an urban renewal mission was not lost on many, highlighting the absurdity of everyday negotiations of state assemblages and classificatory schemas.

Gaddi Dalits were right to be concerned. The reality of the Smart City Mission is that it promises urban utopianism while unevenly distributing development benefits, not only in Dharamsala but across India. Bhanu Joshi, a researcher for the Center of Policy Research in
Delhi, estimates that the Smart City Mission allocates 70% of development funds for the benefit of 4% of the city’s population. “Simply monetizing the land and building fancy enclaves does not make a city inclusive or sustainable or smart.” With benefits accruing to those well-positioned castes and classes, others argue that “Smart Cities could result in destructive forms of inner-city competition” and lead to extreme gentrification.

This is not only a Gaddi story. Dharamsala recently followed the lead of Indore and Bhopal in demolishing plastic lean-tos and corrugated iron huts under the guise of urban modernization. Between 800 and 1,500 residents of Charan Khad, mostly Rajasthani migrant workers settled in Dharamsala for over thirty years, were evicted this past July. Until 2015, the slum existed in the literal shadow of the nearby behemoth HPCA cricket stadium, as much an iconic fixture of Dharamsala in the minds of most Indians as the Dalai Lama. The property is now earmarked for a municipal corporation office, and corruption allegations swirl around the lackluster effort to relocate the impoverished and now displaced former residents of Charan Khad. The chaotic informalities and unplanned exuberance of temporary residence are paved over with a pastiche of modernization; developers “pretend that here is a city with no poverty and unemployment, where global capital is welcome and can operate without constraint” (Watson 2015, 37).

One government scheme, the 2015 Smart City Mission with its promise of neoliberal investment and modernization, is experienced by Gaddi Dalits through the historical betrayals and lingering distrust from the forty-year campaign for ST status among Kangra Gaddis. How the tropes of modernity and the reach of development are perceived to extend or restrict life chances are shaped by class cleavages within Gaddi castes. Status groups not only have different conceptions of modernity, they also have different structural relationships to its attainment.
These class differences within status groups partially account for how ethnic entrepreneurs manage the circulation of social aspiration through tribal reforms.

In other words, urban branding campaigns, public demonstrations, planning committees and proposals backed by international investment firms unevenly mobilize Gaddis along class- and caste-based matrices. Gaddis on the right side of the digital divide, possessing property, cultural capital and political representation, are best able to imagine their own lives improved through the modernizing agenda of the Smart City designation. Conversely, Gaddi Dalits suffer under long-standing structures of social misrecognition. Their resentment towards the Indian government for ratifying hegemonic formations of tribal belonging cannot be disaggregated from their distrust in mandatory citizenship of Divine Dharamsala. Their resistance is not open mutiny but everyday forms of critique and non-compliance described in earlier chapters—“rumor, gossip, disguises, linguistic tricks, metaphors, euphemisms, folktales, ritual gestures, anonymity” (Scott 1985, 137).

Such critiques try to neutralize the power differential between status groups. Tribal recognition has refigured Gaddi subjects, opening the promise of Smart Citizenship through the paradoxical performance of an anachronistic criteria of their backwardness—shepherding, primitive technology, animism and so on, through which they received tribal benefits in 2002. Meanwhile, the pursuit of tribal inclusion among Gaddi Dalits has engendered forms of communal exhaustion, an intended effect of late liberalism. Their empirically-based petition for state assistance, a far cry from the tribal performance of Gaddi Rajputs, remains unheeded, their double disadvantage as STDs ignored. In this light, it is easy to see why the liberatory discourses of modernity that swirl around Dharamsala feel distant from the lived realities of many Gaddi Dalits. Their concerns are decidedly more quotidian: loss of pancāyat self-rule and NREGA;
weakened representation through district ward elections with more diverse caste assemblages; and further impediments to attaining ST status by being lumped into an urban renewal scheme.

The unequal distribution of social aspiration shot through the Divine Dharamsala Smart City award highlights how Gaddi status groups have different conceptions of and structural relationships to modernity. Here I am less interested in classical formulations of modernity as a meta-category of analysis than in “concepts, ideals, and practices of something called ‘modernity’ [which] exist and are continually appealed to in people’s economic endeavours, political projects, and identity craftings” (Osella and Osella 2006, 570-71). In this light, I argue that Gaddi conceptions of modernity are shot through with ambivalence.

For many Gaddis, modernity entails extracting benefits from the Indian state through their nascent ST designation, engagement with the cosmo-capitalism of McLeod Ganj, increased prosperity and the complete overthrow of transhumant pastoralism from a vocation to an authenticating communal trope. Pursuance of modernity has led to predictable anxieties about social rupture and the speed of cultural transformation; it has also had the unintended consequences of inculcating the language of victimization and refugeehood. For many Gaddi Dalits, the structuring framework of modernization is bound up with the ethno-logics of state reservation and the struggle for social citizenship. The paradox of struggling towards modernity by insisting on backwardness is incised on their everyday experiences. These experiences unfold amidst the intense translocality of Dharamsala, which has thrown open new discursive and material opportunities availed by Gaddi Dalits in their pursuit of tribal recognition.

The Omitted
In this dissertation I approached an understanding of Himalayan tribal identity through an analysis of subaltern actors and contestatory forms of modernity that frame Dharamsala as a place. The aim was to track the emergence of Gaddi Dalit identity and re-describe tribal social organization from the vantage of partially-assimilated, low-status actors. This involved analyzing the deployment of oral histories, folklore and colonial texts by ethnic entrepreneurs, community elites and everyday villagers. It also tracked the spiritual terrain of ethnopolitical aspiration.

Through this lens, the enactment of bureaucratic competencies and the obliteration of caste subjectivity in Radhasoami have a particular resonance with Gaddi Dalits, as does the vegetarian critique in Devi worship and the freedom from alienating and harmful Gaddi cosmologies in Protestantism.

These processes play out in villages in and around Dharamsala. Rather than overlook Dharamsala as an irregularity, an unrepresentatively modern milieu that distorts tribal authenticity, I engaged with the discursive histories and place-making strategies through which the locality emerges. This processual approach to the construction of place centered on the dynamics of ethnic groupness between Gaddis and their prominent Tibetan refugee neighbors. The negotiations of ethnic boundaries reframe Tibetophilia emanating from the West and provide a new perspective on tribal belonging amidst modernity and all the elusive promises it entails.

Although a Gaddi story, I tried to conceptually separate Gaddi Dalits and focus on the impact of toponymic contestation and cosmo-capitalism on their nascent tribal subjectivity and demands for juridical recognition.

The most glaring analytic shortcoming is the absence of Dhogris, Badis, Rihare (and Kolis in J&K). Alongside Halis and Sippis, these Scheduled Castes are partially-assimilated Gaddis with their own fascinating internal dynamics and strategies for tribal inclusion. We must
see these groups in their own exclusions, with their own ethnic markers and strategies for social incorporation as Gaddis. Sometimes their identities as Gaddi aspirants are intermeshing. In some locations, ethnic entrepreneurs have consciously inculcated Gaddiness among villagers; in other locations, contingencies have brought Gaddi Dalit groups together or further apart from each other. As the Gaddi “tribe” has transitioned from an exclusive segmented identity to a caste hierarchy to an inclusive (and ever-contested) community, we must see where Gaddis have rallied around excluding discourses of authenticity and where they have coalesced with Dalit communities and opened new spaces of belonging. The advantage of a multi-sited approach spanning Jammu, Chamba and Kangra was to broadly track the emergence of Gaddi Dalit consciousness across all self-reporting Gaddi Dalit castes and avoid making community-wide generalizations about Gaddi shepherds or mono-caste villages. The weakness was that it generated so much data and opened so many lines of inquiry that in retrospect such a project was better conceptualized as a collaborative endeavor.

Gaddi Dhogris live in Thathri village and Khanyara town, about 13 kilometers northeast of Lower Dharamsala. They may have been original inhabitants of Bara Bhangal, brought into the Gadderan and the Gaddi orbit by the British during mid-19th century deforestation. They later migrated into Jhandhar, speak Gaddi dialect, perform nuālā rituals and participate in Gaddi Dalit ethnic associations. They trace their caste etymology to the British-owned Kangra Valley Slate Company and their vocation as washers (ḍhonā) of slate remnants for the collection of gold fragments. Some claim that their caste name is an exonym applied by the British to former Lohars.

Thathri village remains a picturesque cluster of mud homes situated at 2,000 meters and without motorable road access. However, sustained open-pit slate quarrying has buried much of
the vegetation in slate remnant landslides (ghār). Every piece of extractable sturdy slate (nīla) requires churning up several feet of unusable layers (marorgī) marred with chip files and red mineral accretions. Mountainsides are now buried under shifting slate refuse, on top of which Dhogris precariously walk to and from their village. Mining was officially banned in 1997 by the Shimla High Court (Ahmead 2007).

Despite this, many Dhogris continue with their caste vocational livelihoods. Many are physically maimed by premature gunpowder blasting. Many have cracked their front teeth from tumbling down steep inclines and cannot afford dentures. Many have untreated tibia fractures from getting caught in sliding refuse rock sharpened through spear (jhabbal) extraction. Many face arbitrary extortion from government officials and have no legal recourse when cheated by customers. Their intertwining vocation as miners and consciousness as Gaddi Dhogris are increasingly pushed further into the margins of social citizenship. At the beginning of each quarrying season, Dhogris perform a sheep sacrifice for Sloti Mati, the slate manifestation of the Mother Goddess.

Their precarity as Gaddi aspirants cannot be overstated. While Chambiali Dhogris firmly identify as Gaddi, their Mandiali counterparts, settled in nearby villages like Karota and Slate Godown, do not. Their diminutive population and limited endogamous marriage options have led to intermarriage and cultural hybridity between the two Dhogri populations. To rejuvenate the Gaddiness of Chambiali Dhogris, a civil servant in Thathri village constructed a temple dedicated to the Gaddi deity Kelang Wazir (Shiva’s son Karttik). This effort was born out of his own personal humiliation. In 2008 he visited the Kelang Temple in Kugti village in Bharmaur and was denied use of temple cookware based on his ritual pollution. He returned home, humiliated and furious. To ensure against further Gaddi casteism he built an imposing cement
temple on his property, installed a Kelang Wazir mūrti consecrated in Bharmaur, the Gaddi heartland, and is now reinforcing the Gaddiness of all Chambiali Dhogris through effortful ritual practice. While spiritual reawakening is underway in Thathari, many Dhogris across Dharamsala have invested their social aspirations in the issuance of a Dogra Class Certificate – intended to allow height dispensations to Indians living in border regions. Like the fetishization of government-issued identity documents seen among Halis, Dhogris are turning to the confounding trappings of the state for new forms of belonging. Analyzing all these factors that shape the Gaddiness of Dhogris requires a dissertation in its own right.

Gaddi Badis are vocational carpenters predominately living in a cluster of remote mountain villages (Sairi, Kareri, Rava, Ghera and Khari Bahi), little smudges of habitation glimpsed from Naddi on a cloudless day. These villages are a mix of Gaddi, Sippi, Badi and Rathi castes. Badis are unique among Gaddi Dalits for having assimilated into tribal life in Jhandhar alone. To the best of my knowledge, very few Badis live in Bharmaur, and those in the Gaddi heartland may have recently migrated from Kangra. Consequently, Gaddis are more dismissive of their tribal aspirations than they are towards other Scheduled Castes and Badis are more inconspicuous in ethnic associations and political rallies.

Because of their geographical remoteness and shifting attitudes about scratch farming (connected with invasive plant and monkey infestations), many Badi young men have shifted to McLeod Ganj and taken up tourist-related service jobs. Since at least the 1960s, the remote Northwestern corner of Dharamsala has been tied to the Tibetans in Dharamsala through the sale of milk. Gaddis from Kareri and Badis from Khari Bahi would daily strap metal pots containing 20kg of milk on their back and walk four hours by goat trail to McLeod Ganj. They would distribute milk to Tibetan customers, spend the day in the market and return home by foot before
nightfall. A Gaddi Rajput named Cant Ram from Kareri is the last mountain-traversing milk-seller. Except for inclement weather, every day for the past 35 years he carries milk from pasturelands four hours away to mostly Tibetan clients living near the Tsuglagkhang, the Dalai Lama’s temple and estate.

While the ready availability of packet milk has nearly eliminated this source of income, Badi men have migrated in huge numbers into McLeod Ganj and surrounding tourist villages. Among all Gaddi Dalits, Badis are the most likely to work under Tibetans during the seasonal sweater market, in places as far-flung as Hampi, Varanasi and Madurai. The impact of seasonal tourism on Badis cannot be overstated. It structures their sensibilities, aspirations and lifeways, along with redefining what it means to be nomadic (ghumantu) in modern India. With places like Naddi, Dal, Bhagsu and Dharmkot hopping in the summers and vacant during unforgiving winters, hundreds of Kangra Gaddis shift to Goa from November to April. Given their small demographics, Badis are vastly overrepresented among these Gaddi migrant workers. Some spend the entire year following tourists, from Dharamsala to Goa to Manali or Leh, and return home for two weeks out of the year. Attention to this cohort of Gaddi men, mostly from Dharamsala, highlights how Himalayan tribals seek redefinition in the larger world and, ultimately, back at home (Sharma 2014).

I conducted two months of fieldwork with Gaddi Badi seasonal laborers in Goa. Interestingly, the effects of working in tiny Goa, not far off the equator, were mostly to reinforce the Gaddiness of Badis through social media networking with proximate Gaddi migrant workers and the expected recoiling from the exotic beach culture and into the familiar lap of Himalayan tribal belonging. Such effects depended on work location (beachfront versus roadside; hippie enclave versus upscale resort), personal sensibilities, English proficiency, social networking
skills and the vagaries of the work itself. Some Gaddis came for novelty, others for personal transformation; some saved their salaries over several seasons and have businesses plans in Dharamsala, others send their salaries home as remittances to support impoverished family members; some are frugal, limiting expenditures to toiletries and phone recharge bills, others blow through their salaries imitating tourist lifestyles. Nearly all follow the same route from interior villages to McLeod suburbs to Goa. Much remains to be said about the tribal integration of Badis, the most footloose of all Gaddi Dalits. In Dharamsala, there is only one Rihare family remaining. With the passing of the last generation their traditional vocation of playing an oboe-like instrument (śahanāī) during Gaddi rituals has ended.

**Gaddi Futures**

Where do Gaddi Dalits in Dharamsala currently stand in their struggle for recognition? A formal amendment to include Scheduled Castes within the Gaddi tribal quota seems distant. Dozens of petitions have reached deaf ears in the legislative assembly. In the first months of 2018 alone, Gaddi Dalit organizations have hosted several high-profile rallies publicly voicing their demands for political inclusion. The Hali-led Himalaya Gaddi Union sent a demand letter to Gaddi MLA Kishan Kapoor demanding the tribal inclusion of six sub-castes (upjātiyan) by affixing “Gaddi” to their names in the Revenue Record. Colonial documents such as Barnes’ *Report on the Settlement in the District of Kangra in the Trans-Sutlej States* (1862) were prominently highlighted as evidence for the division of the Gaddi community into two classes including Dalits.

The unification of the various SC factions under a single demand remains the primary difficulty. Sippi and Hali ethnic entrepreneurs have irreconcilable strategies for caste uplift,
Badis lack political organization, Rihares are demographically insignificant and Dhogris are resisting their assimilating through intermarriage into the wider Lohar caste identity centered in Palampur and Mandi. Despite these impediments, the intensification of political activism by Gaddi Dalits suggests that neoliberal reforms in India have not erased the desirability of reservation quotas. During a rally in Baijnath, Dhogris vowed sit-in protests (dharnā) in district headquarters in both Kangra and Chamba until their demands for Gaddi recognition are met. Such demands are unlikely to produce the violence seen among Gorkhas in Darjeeling and Gujjars in Rajasthan. Frustration about caste-based poverty, social alienation and political injustice may be intensifying – a recent article warned that disaffected SC Gaddis are prepared to “take every effort” (har sambhav prayatna) to gain ST status (Jagaran 2018) – but lack of charismatic firebrand leadership has led to only symbolic gestures and token rewards.

Meanwhile, public sentiment is gently bending in favor of social acceptance of Gaddi Dalits. A monthly Hindi magazine called The Ice Range (Him Shrinkhālā) circulates throughout Kangra educating Gaddis about the cultural geography of Bharmaur and their own dialect, history and religion. In an article entitled “The Gaddi Secret” (Gaddi kā rahasya), Gaddis are described as a tribal community comprised of all four varnas sharing similar cultural, linguistic and religious attributes (Lal 2009, 6). The article is remarkable for the repurposing of classical Hindu textual articulations of caste and the matter-of-fact inclusion of Sippis, Badis, Halis and other Gaddi-aspiring Scheduled Caste groups. They are generically described as Gaddi Shudras. While it is noted that Gaddi Rajputs and Brahmans do not share kinship (nātedarī) ties with lower castes, their everyday sociality is described as normal. They sit together during feasts; all have equal access to pasturelands and temples. They live intermixed with great respect (mānsammān). It concludes by recognizing the uniqueness of Gaddi social organization. “The
Gaddi community is unique in the world because people of all four varnas live together. They are a symbol of loving emotion and unity” (Lal 2009, 7). Although exaggerated, such claims do important discursive work in shaping public sentiment and normalizing Dalit inclusion.

Progress is often two steps forward and one backward. For example, the student-led Kailash Association has ratified a broadly inclusive platform for Gaddiness based on self-identification and shared language. I would often meet Gaddi Dalit friends at the yearly sponsored cultural events and nuālās. They would be clandestinely crowded together in the back of the tent haltingly joining in the ethnic reveries. In 2015, however, when a Badi ran for president of the Kailash Association, Dalit participation crossed an invisible barrier between passive enrollment and active leadership. A whisper campaign spearheaded by a rival Gaddi Rajput candidate tagged his opponent as too much Badi and not enough Gaddi. His support eroded among the dominant Gaddi electorate and he was defeated. From its inception in the 1970s until today, high-caste Gaddis and Bhatt Brahmans have held every elected office in the Kailash Association.

Sometimes ethnic inclusion is cynical political calculation. During the 2014 national elections, I accompanied candidates from both BJP and Congress parties as they canvassed villages around Dharamsala trying to take credit for the awarding of ST status to Kangra Gaddis in 2002. In public speeches they condemned the exclusion of Gaddi Dalits and averred their commitment to representing Gaddis from all castes. Ultimately, Gaddi Dalits were forced to throw their support behind the less disingenuous of the two parties and hope that this time their voices will not be drowned out in the Gaddi vote bank. Political breadcrumbs in the form of banal platitudes and empty promises exceed the openly derisive exclusion of Gaddi Dalits from the Gaddi Welfare Board and Wool Federation.
Caste exclusion remains predictably resilient in the domain of marriage. Himachal Pradesh ranks second least among all Indian states for inter-caste marriage – 2,226 between 2009 and 2014 (Rana 2016). It appears that the statewide policy of incentivizing inter-caste marriage with 50,000-rupee rewards has not significantly impacted caste endogamy. This is especially true in rural areas and among Gaddis. Gaddis engage in rich folkloric fantasies about inter-caste and – community marriage; the most oft- recited romance is of a Gaddi shepherd Bhunku and Sunni, a Lahauli damsel. After a wintertime courtship in her village, Bhunku is pulled into mountain pastures to graze his flock. Like Radha pining for Krishna, Sunni heart-achingly sings of her departed love and the possibility of reunion.

Another Gaddi folksong describes in dark hues the beauty of a Chimba girl and her suicide due to an unspecified crime, perhaps a caste transgression. Chimba is a prominent Sikh occupational caste locally known as calico printers (Singh 2014, 84). They traditionally migrated from Samba town in Jammu into Bharmaur to sell Gaddi women handmade fabric for sewing luńcařī, ghūṇḍū and other traditional clothes (Handa 1998, 132).

Clothes washing Chimbo girl
Clothes washing Chimbo girl, the king climbed [the mountain] for hunting
You swear Chimbo, the king climbed [the mountain] for hunting
To see the feet of my Chimbo, like golden shoes (khadoân)
To see the legs of my Chimbo, like the new growth (kandalu) on the banana tree
You swear Chimbo, like the new growth on the banana tree
To see the waist of Chimbo, like the curved gadiya
You swear Chimbo, like the curved gadiya
To see the face of Chimbo, like the full moon
You swear Chimbo, like the full moon
The king grabbed Chimbo by her arm and locked her in his fort (beda)
You swear Chimbo, the king put you in his fort
In midnight Chimbo, in full darkness
You swear Chimbo, what did you do
You lost your life Chimbo, what did you do
You swear Chimbo, you did a crime (julm)

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5 For a Hindi-Gaddi TV production of Bhunku and Sunni, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AthRqynHplw.
Between 2013-17, I recorded two marriages between Gaddis and Gaddi Dalits in Dharamsala. Both were considered violations of social norms regulating the joining of families of equal status. In one case, disability played a crucial role. A Gaddi woman and Hali man met in a sign-language course for deaf students. They both converted to Christianity and fell in love. When the woman’s family tried to arrange her marriage to a non-deaf Gaddi man, she threatened suicide through hunger strike. They were allowed to court marry and she maintains close ties with most family members.

In another case, a Bhatt pandit tried to intimidate a Gaddi man into abandoning his betrothal to a Hali woman. The pandit instructed the Gaddi family to attend a jātar at the Samra Nag Temple in Ranuh Kothi in Bharmaur and request a story recitation from the presiding pūjārī. This was the precondition for permitting the marriage. The story described how a Hali man abused (cherchār) the presiding nag deity and he and his family members all suffered untimely deaths. “The message was clear: if a Gaddi marries a Hali, bad things will happen.” Two weeks before their marriage the Gaddi parents warned their son, “If something goes wrong, you will be the reason” (tum kāran banogi). Such psychological tortures remain commonplace deterrents to caste exogamy and reinforce the otherness of Gaddi Dalits. Inter-religious marriage is equally rare: five Gaddis have married Tibetans since their arrival in Dharamsala in 1960, one Gaddi woman recently eloped with a Muslim to Rajasthan where she contracted tuberculosis and remains socially ostracized, and a handful of Gaddis have dated or married western tourists.

The impact of modernity on Gaddiness is evident in changing attitudes about folk music. Kashmiri Lal is the last of a dying profession, one of two remaining Hali bards (ghurāī) in Kangra. In October he visits Dharamsala on a village tour extending across Jhandhar, performing for monetary donations and harvested grains (vīj). With one hand he strums on a six-stringed
guitar (khajarī) and with another he drums on the ḍhaulkī. “I got into music when I was a boy. My two elder brothers were servants in Delhi sweeping floors and cleaning plates. I had just failed the third grade, and my father was about to send me off to the same fate.” But a Hali bard arrived from interior Gadderan. Kashmiri Lal immediately felt an affinity for the ghurāī, his music and especially the salary that could be earned as a travelling minstrel. “For six years I studied under him, at first just banging on the cymbals (kansi). But in the end, I learned the importance of music for my caste. I learned how Halis were bards in the time of gods and kings (bhagvan aur rājā). I learned all the devotional songs (bhajan).”

Shifting sensibilities in Kangra have led to the near-disappearance of Hali bards and the rise of Gaddi radio singers and studio recordings. Kashmiri Lal’s services are less and less sought out at Gaddi celebrations, replaced with touring groups with names like “The Himalayan Band” or “The Big Band” offering trendy Punjabi and pahārī music. In response to his growing irrelevance, Kashmiri Lal penned a ditty entitled “Bad Times” that has circulated widely within the Gaddi community. The lyrics give voice to Gaddi anxieties about cultural preservation and tribal authenticity amidst neoliberal developments in Dharamsala. They also highlight the sense of moral waywardness and social displacement facing Halis as they aspire for tribal inclusion and social respectability through spiritual transcendence. Some verses include:

Bad times have come / nobody listens to devotional music or stories / everybody is busy doing this or that / in every home there’s a TV with a cable connection

A beautiful lady is brought home after marriage / as soon as she arrives she lays down on the bed to rest / she’s got no respect for her parents-in-law / as soon as she arrives she removes her veil / poor mother-in-law cleans the utensils / poor father-in-law tends to the cow / and the daughter-in-law orders them to prepare a bed for her / bad times have come

A wife tells her husband to bring make-up and nail polish and new suits / she just can’t adjust to her in-laws, and demands a separate house / new times are here

Boys sit around smoking cigarettes, chewing guṭkhā and sucking on liquor / a son asks
his father to arrange his marriage / put my name on the land documents or we won’t serve you / we arrange the ticket for your grave / new times have come

Against the rapid changes in family organization, gender relations and employment opportunities, Kashmiri Lal’s song taps into what Bhrigupati Singh describes as a “politics of dignity”; that is, how low-status groups aspire to better lives through the daily negotiations of “older and newer forms of refinement and coarseness [...] within the ethics and aesthetics of everyday life” (2015, 146-7). As we have seen, Halis aspire for Gaddi inclusion even as they adopt Protestantism, Sikhism, the Arya Samaj, Radhasoami and Devi worship as vehicles to critique the perceived atavism of Gaddi tribalness and associated forms of ethnic belonging.

Many Gaddi women describe a cinching of gender freedoms compared to their female ancestors associated with modern propriety. Folkloric accounts of gallivanting shepherdesses feel a distant cry from the circumscription of domestic life. Many Gaddi gender conventions have come under patriarchal scrutiny. Some men complain about the uncouth sexual teasing between the wife (bhābhī) and her husband’s sister (nanand). The Gaddi tradition of Black Month (kālā mahīnā) is frequently criticized as superstitious and even anti-capitalistic (Divya Himachal 2014). During kālā mahīnā, newly-wed women must return to their ancestral homes during the month of sawan (mid-July to mid-August) to protect their mothers-in-law (sās) from inauspiciousness and sickness. Most newly-wed women look forward to this temporary return to familiarity. Throughout North India, newly-married Hindu women return home to enjoy the monsoon rains and celebrate Tij (a festival notable for its folkloric emphasis on female empowerment). However, in some Gaddi quarters, especially among the elite, kālā mahīnā is curtailed to preserve the propriety of the newly-weds. In addition, the commonplace sexual teasing of men during marriage (Wagner 2012) has slowed in villages around McLeod Ganj. The
singing of “abuses” (gālī) at weddings is common throughout North India as a means of deflating formality with levity (Raheja and Gold 1994, 45-6). Gaddis are no exception, and Reeta and I recorded eight gālīs commonly performed. For example:

Black-and-white water jug, where is your lower part (pointing at the groom’s genitals)?

Hey [Groom’s name]! Where did you leave your bumps? Why are you seated without your bumps?

O I gave my bumps to my sister. That’s why I’m sitting without them.

Black-and-white water jug, your bottom part has broken off!

Hey [another male in groom’s party]! Where did you leave your nose (repeating with different groomsmen and different body parts)?

While sexual innuendo and sanctioned joking aimed at the groom remains a mainstay of Gaddi marriage, these practices have come under fire in McLeod Ganj, Dharamkot, Bhagsu and Naddi – the villages with the most influx of western tourism and most emblematic of the dream of Gaddi modernization. A prominent businessman from Bhagsu described how he forbade such reveries as a precondition for betrothal. He expressed his condemnation in starkly personal terms, stressing the shamelessness of women mocking men’s genitals. The emphasis on controlling female expression may be driven by displaced anxieties about the rapid changes facing Gaddis amidst intense globalization.

Such anxieties are hard to contain. In early 2014, the Kailash Association hosted a university-wide Gaddi cultural event that attracted thousands. The highlight of the event was a dramatic performance that highlighted the importance of balancing modern aspiration with the preservation of Gaddi tradition (Appendix 2). The audience was heavy-handedly implored to wear traditional Gaddi clothes, teach their children Gaddi language and feel pride about their tribal identity even in Hindi-speaking cities.
Only a few months later, the Himachal Pradesh High Court banned animal sacrifice in places of public religious worship. “The practice of animal and bird sacrifice is abhorrent and dastardly,” the ruling declared. Primarily directed at buffalo slaughter in Kullu, the ban sent tremors throughout the Gaddi community in Dharamsala. Elders described miraculous changes in rain – stopping just before an international cricket match, starting after a long drought – that demanded a sheep sacrifice to Indrunag. Puja recounted the defeat of cannibal jungle monsters by Bhagat Rana from Bharmaur as divine sanction for sheep sacrifice and a modern alternative to human sacrifice. Temples dedicated to the extended family of Indrunag – three brothers, five sisters and countless nephews – constitute a spiritual topography of Dharamsala that directly links to Kuarsinag in Bharmaur (Vyas 2008). Propitiation through animal sacrifice interlocks these sacred sites in Dharamsala. Gaddis began to wonder if the Radhasoami and Devi critiques espoused by Gaddi Dalits were right and the nuālā was incongruent with modern times. Although the ban was rescinded by the Indian Supreme Court the following year, Gaddis continue to internally debate the modernity of public sheep sacrifice. In 2014, walls of the iconic Chaurasi Temple in Bharmaur were plastered with pro-vegetarian and anti-bali posters by anonymous activists, a dramatic critique of tribal barbarity at the axis mundi of Gaddi spiritual life.

As modernity encircles Gaddi spirituality, subjectivity and gender norms – both a sense of putative communal aspirations to be sought after and the unintended consequences of historical contingency and runaway globalization – political enfranchisement and constitutionally-mandated entitlements are increasingly central to Gaddi conceptions of well-being. A paradox of recognition noted by many scholars of affirmative action is that the rising needs and expectations for state support among quota recipients have collided with the federal
turn away from its socialist roots and towards neoliberal policies (Middleton 2016; Povinelli 2002; Kapila 2011). Jayal (2013, 307) goes so far as to rightly assert that “there is a peculiar sense of *déjà vu* about these [social citizenship] debates in the context of contemporary Indian politics, with the banner of social rights now being raised by the leadership of the Congress Party and the National Advisory Council, while the first priority of the government is its strong commitment to neoliberal economic reforms”. As inequalities spike in modern India, the welfare state and federal entitlements are pushed to their limits.

Quota-mandated benefits remain the central arena of Gaddi communal aspiration; the Dharamsala District Library is daily packed with Gaddi youth cramming for civil-service exams that would place them in much-coveted positions in security, foreign services, the post office, the railway and so on – culminating with the ever-elusive Indian Administrative Services (IAS), the continued benchmark for social prestige. Budding Gaddi scholars draw from their ST status to continuously retake the Junior Research Fellowship (JRF) exam until they secure the requisite score and receive a stipend to pursue a PhD.

Since being awarded ST status in 2002, Kangra Gaddis have only intensified their expectations of the state to ameliorate poverty and provide a helping hand in their pursuit of modern social citizenship and its material trappings. For example, in August 2017 Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh insulted BJP State President Satpal Satti by saying that “Even the Gaddi community has a president” (*Adhyaksh to Gaddi community ka bhi hota hai*). In retaliation to this perceived communal slight, as if tribal leadership is ludicrous, Gaddis protested in the streets of Dharamsala. This led to police baton (*lāṭhī*) charges and sensational images of bloodied Gaddis splashed across national media. Ten days later, the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST) arrived in Dharamsala to conduct an investigation into alleged tribal atrocities.
Such cases highlight not only how politicians wrangle for the 18,000-strong Gaddi vote bank in a constituency of 73,506 voters but also how Gaddis as newly-minted tribals draw on additional forms of federal protection. Gaddi Dalits as Scheduled Castes are not protected under the NCST – only the most recent case of Dalit disenfranchisement and precarity as partially-assimilated tribals.

Meanwhile, with Punjabi and Delhi businessmen dominating development in McLeod Ganj and many satellite villages, many Gaddis are resentful that marketplace capitalism and the explosion of tourism has primarily enriched outside investors and Tibetans. Gaddi resentment about the extraction of wealth from their one-time pastoral stopover not only fuels antagonism against Tibetans and a race for cosmopolitan competencies necessary to thrive among tourists, it also bends the hope of Gaddis further towards the federal welfare state and positive discrimination.

Throughout this dissertation, I analyzed the awarding of ST status to Kangra Dalits as naturalizing discourses of tribal purity that excluded Gaddi Dalits. In that sense, the reservation system has failed to uplift the most disadvantaged and to recognize their cultural dignity and emergent place of belonging as Gaddis. This post-2002 misrecognition has only further obscured the double marginality of partially-assimilated Dalits within a purportedly egalitarian tribal segmentation. It has entrenched caste markers and legitimized hierarchical exclusion. It has also exacerbated the rift between Gaddis and Gaddi Dalits by injecting the state ethno-logics of recognition – part of a larger trend of reservation politics aggravating divisions between vulnerable minorities (Teltumbde 2012, 15).

In another sense, however, the shortcomings of the reservation system have provided the rallying point for Gaddi Dalits, in all their idiosyncratic historical and cultural formations cutting
across five castes, to begin to unite under increasingly-vocal ethnic associations powered by the pan-Himalayan logic of STD. Tribalism – what in the West describes identity balkanization and the rise of political partisanship – is in the Indian Himalayas a contested process of recognizing tribal heterogeneity and hierarchy by politically enfranchising the former and fighting to ameliorate the latter. Multicultural tribalism is shedding the taint of being a scholarly contradiction in terms and doggedly, in fits and starts and against great ideological resistance, becoming a structuring force in everyday life.

This dissertation followed these formal political dynamics into the intimate domains of sociality and spirituality. I hope to have conveyed these personal reformations in the tribal margins. Time will tell if Gaddi belonging will continue to bend towards multicultural Dalit inclusion or insist on excluding tropes of authenticity. The next generation of Gaddi Dalit ethnic entrepreneurs must decide to either rally together for state recognition as doubly marginalized STDs or continue to divide through status jockeying at the bottom of the Gaddi caste hierarchy. In the meantime, Dharamsala will inexorably change. Tibetan on-migration to the West may accelerate with the passing of the 83-year-old Dalai Lama and sustained western interest in Vajrayana Buddhism (Frilund 2014). Coupled with the Smart City designation and booming domestic tourism, Gaddis may be more entrepreneurially motivated to commodify their tribal identity and rebrand Dharamsala as a Gaddi locality. Time will tell how the unprecedented collision of modernity and tribal fashioning in the Western Himalayas will produce new kinds of intersectional identities and new expressions of rooted cosmopolitanism.
Appendix 1. Some symptoms of Gaddi-centric spiritual torment and treatments by two Hali traditional healer-diviners

Cela Karam Chand of Pathiyar, son of cela Pratiya Ram.

Learned tantra-mantra from his father. It is their family profession (khandani pesa).

“It’s like if a house collapses and a murti is buried in the rubble. Humans won’t be able to dig it out from the rubble and restore it. It’s the work of Devta. She does it. For Devta, Halis are not low. We do her work.”

1) HALI: Old man from Holi. He had body pain. Treatment: kala rot and uni dhaga with mantra spoken into it.

2) HALI: Family from Holi. One boy, 16, pain in back. And not interested in his studies. He mother gave 101 rupees to cela. And cela gives kampan. And his brother lives away from the house and doesn’t want to come home often or live at home, which creates tension for the mother. Then he gave prediction about his mother, that the mother wants to go to the artificial water hole (panihar). And she said, yes, sometimes I feel that way. And cela said: make a promise (sukhan) for banni mata, and if it happens you give a jatar. She agreed. And then the cela told her to come back on Tuesday and he will give the full treatment (elaj).

Cela: “There is a lady who is lady who is living below their house. She is doing black magic.”

Lady: “Yes, I suspected that.

Cela: Your deity (devat) is not supporting you because they are angry.

Lady’s husband: What should we do? We already gave a jagrata.

Chela: You gave jagrata arevare (without all distant relatives). And there is uchat (dusht aatma) in the house it creates a lot of problems. Is it true or a lie?

Husband: yes, it is true.

Chela: You are thinking a lot about the family, but your mind is not in your control and sometimes you feel disturbed (ashant). tera man bhavigana tabara ju ta chad. Have you any questions?

Husband: The elder son doesn’t come to my house.

Chela: You should do treatment, come back on Tuesday…

3) HALI: Boy from Holi. He has sir bhaari and dil na laagna, two days are okay, then 7 days sick. The cela said it’s not opera sopra, and gave dhaaga.

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Because of regional variation and disagreement about the proper use of diacritic marks when Romanizing Gaddi dialect, I have chosen to forego diacritics in appendices 1 and 2.
4) CHAUDRY: Woman. 12 years ago she got married but is unable to conceive. Doctor told her that she cannot naturally produce any child. So she went to the cela, brought havan dhoop with red string (bhed ka dhaag), cashews (kaaju), elaichi, cardamom, kali mirch. Chela took havan dhoop and opened all the stuff and wrapped it into his mala, in his hand, and did prayer, and said: meditate on Mata, and he returned havan dhoop to the woman. He made her a dhaga. After he checked her veins (navs) and said, “after two months you will get a child.”

5) DHOGRI: Boy from Slate Godown. First, cela checks his pulse (navs dekhna), and tells the boy he has kidney stone. The boy says no. The cela says yes. Then boy accepts it and shows all his medical documents, including x-rays, which show he has kidney stones. Then cela is happy and tells me how this is a miracle, and he could know from veins alone. Then the cela shows the glass jar with old patients’ kidney stones. And he gave Ayurvedic medicine to him. And told him not to eat saag, amrud, bhaingin and tomato. And he made a list of herbs: 100g pakhara ved; 100g shora; 100g bakara; 25g javaakhaar.

6) CHAMAR: 18-year-old girl from Baijnath studying in Palampur College. She has phulberi (skin pigmentation disorder – surajmukhi grast). She is coming for 4 months, alone, and the cela is giving her herbs and check her body, behind her ears and on her legs. The girl tells us that her condition is not from birth, but is recent, and it’s improved a lot because of the cela.

7) CHAUDRY: Shopkeeper with a business problem. He opened a new clothing shop and there was little business. His friend living in Ludhiana had gone to the cela before, and got some good results and told the shopkeeper to go but keep his name a secret. Cela gave seeds (sarson ke dane) and said: In the evening you should put it into the lota and early in the morning you should spread the water inside the shop, and then no jaadu tona can create a problem for you. And he put vanchikaran ka sindoor on the shopkeeper’s forehead, and said, “The customer will be attracted to your shop now.” And then gave some practical advice about how to sell the clothes – if you buy something at 100, don’t sell at 200, sell at 140, and then when you have a customer base you raise the prices.

8) HALI: Two elderly women with shani ki samasya. One gave 11 rupees to the cela. Cela gave dhaga and gave ma-ki-dal and said you should tie it into a black cloth and throw it under a pepal tree. He also said to burn deepak under the pepal tree.
Cela Himta Ram of Darnu, third generation (*pardada tak*) cela.

Retired clerical civil servant. He always asks the name of the patient to create intimacy. Whenever they leave money, he says “don’t bother!” and jokes that he is on government pension and it’s a matter of selfless service (*seva*).

“I don’t know myself what this thing is. It is the grace of Mata (*ye ma ki daya hai*). It’s some divine gift given to my ancestors down to me. Is it true or false? I don’t know. I am telling the exact thing, I swear on Mata (*ma ki kasam*). I don’t know myself what I have. In my heart there’s neither haughtiness (*abhimaan*) nor knowledge about it. What is it, I don’t know, but it is the *maherbani* of Mata who speaks through me and it is true and the people believe it. This is not a question of my sinful stomach (*paapi pet ka saval nahin hai*). I have pension and don’t need any money. I give *vibhooti* and *daga* and the people get healed.”

9) GADDI RAJPUT: Mother and Son from Chola. Tormented by bad shadows (*buri chaaya padna*). Cele spoke a mantra and gave *vad ka dhaagaa* and *tika*, and he gave a packet of herbs (mixed called *dhunee*) — *goda mud* (for increasing fertility); *shivjata* (for ghosts); *gay chap* (for cows to give milk); *kasturi, kesar* (for *havan*); *ghugimaan* (for *buri chaaya*).

10) BADI: Husband and wife couple from Bhongotu. The wife is tormented by bad dreams. Cela made *havan ki dhunee*.

11) RAJPUT: Woman from Chadi. Suffering from bad dreams and eating meat in dreams. Cela did ritual of peacock feathers (*mor pankha khada jhapta kiya*). The husband was there also, and Cela told him not to drink alcohol. Gave 50 rupees.

12) SC?: Husband and wife migrant workers from Chhattisgarh living in Gamru. They described witchcraft as the cause of intense domestic fighting, alcoholism. Woman suffering from joint/backbone pain. Cela gave *elichi* and *mantra*.

13) GADDI: Woman came with rice pouch. She’s worried that her cow and buffalo are no longer giving milk. Cela mixed *sindoor* into the rice and returned it, but advised that there’s no problem with the livestock. The problem is her own mind’s misconception (*man ka vaham*). Woman said: “The cows give little milk but when we come here, the problem is solved.”

14) HALI: Radhasoami husband and wife sneak in from X. I have interviewed them many times and know them well from the Satsang. They brought *dori* (*dhaga*), and explain about their son’s stubbornness (*zidd*).
15) HALI: Woman from Chadi. Her daughter was recently posted as a police woman, but in the nighttime she suffers from night anxieties. Cela gave sandoor and said to apply tika.

16) BADI: Woman from Ghera, visiting with child in tow. Cela said that a bad woman’s evil eye (nazar) has gotten attached to the child. Now the boy is suffering from a bad shadow (bura parchava). Gave dori and dhuni in a mixture of ghugiman (for releasing evil spirits). He rubbed down the body of the child. She gave black cloth (of her brother’s) and 30 rupees. The cela told her to come back and bring her brother. The cela told her that her brother should also consecrate something for Kelu (Kelang) Devta, a Gaddi deity.

17) GADDI: Man from Kotwali. Described an event from 2 days ago. “I was sleeping in bed but suddenly I fell down onto the floor. I got up and back into bed, and I fell out again, and I didn’t sleep for 3 days. Not at all.” The cela said that kiru wala pahariya (mama-ji) was responsible. Gave secret treatment and requested I not record it.

18) GADDI: Mother and daughter from Naddi. Daughter is still barren after two years of marriage. Cela checked hand lines (hast) and waved peacock feathers and told her next month when she has her period (rajodharam) she should come back to the cela. Cela gave 7 color dori, and he touched it to 5 body parts and spoke a mantra and gave it to her. And he used a conch shell (bada singha) to mix sandoor and kasar, and put the tika on her thumb. She put her thumb directly on her bellybutton (navi). The mother brought elachi; the cela took it and chanted a mantra and returned it. Woman gave 10 rupees and some packets of biscuits. The cela then invited them for lunch – it was the lunch break – and she gave a reason they can’t eat that he later described to me as an “evasion” (talmatol). The mother said, “I’ve come here from my house and I have already taken tea and food, and I am in a hurry to go to a wedding. I have to give bartan.” The incident highlights how Hali celas are ritually empowered but also feared and, at times, discriminated against. Their spiritual authority does not often translate into social status. Likewise, in Kuarsi Village, the main celas of Shiva who receive his possession during rituals are Halis since at least the past four generations. This empowers Halis and they speak about their pure bloodline and direct connection to Shiva. But Gaddis are unmoved; it does not translate into the raising of Hali social status.

19) BADI: Two women and one child from Chandmari. The woman is desperate for a child; three times she has had miscarriages around the 4th month. Cela gave her elachi and dori. Advised that when her next period happens, she should return. He put tika on thumb and she put it on navi. And then he did panka over the boy and said, “There is witchcraft (opra), but there is also a body problem (sharirik samasya). He advised her to take the boy to the hospital and also to worship her family deities. He gave her a wish (manata maanaana). Meanwhile, the boy anxiously played with a piece of paper wrapped around his fingers and laughed when he received the peacock feathers.
20) HALI: Woman with son. She crossed over a stream (*khad*) and is feeling constant anxiety now. Cela said it’s the problem of Betal. He gave her a *dori* and told her to bring *elachi* and currants (*dakh*) and come back after some time.

Appendix 2. Skit recorded at the 2014 Kailash Association Gaddi cultural fair. Translated with the assistance of Reeta Purhaan.

A Gaddi mother and father are sitting on a stage consoling their daughter-in-law (*bahu*). In the background is their home. Their son named Ghasitu enters drunkenly.

Father - (angrily) Come here!
Ghasitu - Father (*chache*)! I bow to you! *Chache pranam* (falling down drunk)!
Father - (Showing stern love) Stand up my child!
Ghasitu - Yes father, tell me.
Father - Why did you beat my daughter-in-law (*nuh*)?
Ghasitu - Beat! She was spreading rumors about my friend’s wife eloping with another man!
Father - Then you’ll kill her for spreading rumors?
Ghasitu - I won’t stop until she does (trying to beat her again)!
Father - Tell me one thing. Where is the lamb (*challu*) that was in the storeroom (*obri*)?
Ghasitu - (feigning ignorance) Which lamb?
Father - Which lamb? The one you took away; your mother saw you.
Ghasitu - O that’s bad. What exactly did she see, *chache*?
Father - That you took it away.
Ghasitu - *Chache*! I was drinking with my friends. We cut it up and fried it (*rard*) for snacks (*olang*).
Father - (surprised) What?
Ghasitu - (naughtily) We fried it up (*rard*).
Father - What fried?
Ghasitu - *Chache*! We needed fried snacks to go with our drink!
Father - (angrily) I’ll show you fried snacks! Bloody boy (*Ram Jadiya*)! You cut up the lamb I took grazing (*chaarna*) every morning (he forcefully kicks Ghasitu).
Ghasitu - (trying not to topple over) Oh! How is this *chacha*? Your kick is solid like a shepherd’s (*palla*)!
Father - Next time you come in my house drunk, I will kick you out!
Bahu - Give him a few more kicks and then he’ll figure it out!
Ghasitu - What is happening in this home?
Father - (angrily) Nothing is happening, my child! You are being remanded by your father. How many times do I have to tell to fear both your father (*budea*) and policemen (*kudea*)!
Ghasitu - I’ll never drink; this is enough beating.
Father - Come on! I’ll give you one more hard kick!
Ghasitu - No! No! It’s enough!
Father - (Extending his leg for one last kick) One more and you’ll fly all the way to Lower Dharamsala!
Ghasitu - No chache! You’ve kicked me all the way to here!
Father - Will you leave alcohol or not? Show me your remorse by rubbing your nose in the ground. After all your name is Ghasitu (to rub)... so rub (ragarna)!
Ghasitu - (rubbing his nose) See! Now I’ve rubbed all.
Father - (affectionately) Ok! Go to your room. Go and sleep my child.
Ghasitu - (asking for his wife) Should I bring her with me?
Father - She’s already gone (hiding in the corner).
Ghasitu - Why are you hiding there? Come here!
Ghasitu’s wife - (pretending to cry) Will you beat me again?
Ghasitu – (affectionately hugging her) Now I’ll not beat you. Who had beaten you? Come here.
Father - (loudly calling his wife) mundre! Mundre! (mahasti and mundre are disrespectful terms for calling wives that denote male authority among Gaddis).
Mother - What happened now?
Father - These two are gone (Gahsitu and wife). But where is our eldest son (dagi) and his wife?
Mother - Somewhere…they are coming. You know there’s a lot of traffic at Bhagshu!
Father - God knows! Like our ancestors they are also lying. Are they in traffic or doing whatever else?

Scene changes. Dagi’s family arrives from Mumbai and is approaching the house.

Aedi (grandson, nickname for Adithiya) - Oh! Mom you are looking very beautiful (in English). What is this dress?
Aedi’s mother (Dagi’s wife) - (complaining) My child! Beautiful? I know I am looking beautiful, but it’s so heavy that it’s hard to even walk. You’ll come to know about it when I’m unable to go anywhere and you have to carry me around (complaining about wearing nuachari because she’s from the city)!
Aedi- (irritated) Dad! Tell her, friend (yar), she is looking very gorgeous (in English). By the way, where we are going (in Hindi)?
Dagi- To our own home my son!
Aedi’s mother - Hurry up! If not than your grandfather will rebuke us too much.
Dagi - (calls loudly) House owners! House owners!
Father - see who is outside? Who is calling to us?
Dagi - hey house owners (gharwaleyo!)
Ghasitu’s wife - Hey brother! Here you are (touching his feet)!
Dagi - Bless you! Bless you!
Ghasitu - (touching the feet of Dagi’s wife) And sister are you fine?
Dagie’s wife - Hug me, hug me.
Ghasitu’s wife - Sister! Did you forget? In our culture we touch feet (paer bandede)!
Dagi’s wife - No, no! We are sisters (darani in Gaddi; devrani in Hindi – younger brother’s wife, Ghasitu. She is asking why to touch the feet when they are roughly in the same position as in-laws).
Ghasitu’s Wife - Come in, come in.
Aedi - Oh mom! Who is she? What a beautiful lady (in English)!
Dagi - Not lady… she is your aunt.
Aedi - Oh aunt (hugging her)!
Ghasitu’s wife - What do you teach your kid?
Aedi- Ok! Ok!
Dagi - Touch her feet, touch her feet (Aedi respectfully touches her feet).
Ghasitu’s wife - (giving aashervaad) Live happily (raji reh)! Come in, mother and father! My elder brother and sister have arrived!
Dagi - Father (touching his feet)!
Father - Bless you, bless you. Where were you stuck?
Dagi - There was traffic. The car was stuck in a jam. Mother! I touch your holy feet.
Mother - This is my Dagi. When did you arrive and where is your wife?
Dagi - Just now we arrived. She is outside.
Dagi’s wife - Namaste father (hands folded)!
Mother - bow (undhe) and touch his feet!
Dagi - How can she bow? She has a lot of back pain now from wearing that heavy thing!
Father - Bow Ha! This is not your fault; this is all the fault of this man (pointing at Dagi)! If you want to control your buffalo, you have to beat down the pole again and again to keep it tightly bound (Gaddi idiom); and to control women you likewise have to keep beating them on the head (mehin re khund tai ian mundre mund jhakade rhen ta khare bunde na ta tyar bunde ine ine jhund) (the audience laughs).
Dagi - What to do, father? According to the times, we now let women have some control over the family.
Father - Look at your mother. Until today she is like that, like that (drawing a picture of a “healthy” – euphemistic for “fat” – figure in the air with his hands)
Dagi - Your’s is like that. Mine is also like that. It is all in keeping. I keep her in my hands.
Mother - It is enough, Dagi! Where is my little doll (chuniya)?
Dagi - He is not a kid anymore. His name is Aedi.
Mother - What? Pradi (misunderstanding the name because it is not Gaddi)?
Father - (sounding intelligent, trying to piece together the name) Maybe they were walking on the far side, so they named Pradi (in Gaddi, pradi means the far side of anything, like the corner of a room or the far side of a river or road).

Dagi - It isn’t Pradi. It’s Aedi!

Father - Maybe there is something in his heel, so he’s named as Aedi (in Gaddi and Hindi, aedi means “heel”).

Aedi - One second… I am chatting with my girlfriend (hanging up the phone) (in English).

Father - (to Aedi) Come here my child.

Dagi - Aedi! Meet your grandfather.

Aedi - Hi grandfather, how are you (He shakes hands)?

Father - don’t shake my hand, my child. Come and give me a hug (gala e lagana).

Aedi - Dad! He is holding me too tightly!

Dagi - My son! These are old-time people; they do like this and hold tightly (kaske).

Aedi - But I do like his dress very much (Hindi-English mix).

Father - (confusingly) What he is saying? I can’t understand anything.

Dagi - Father, he asked which dress you’re wearing because he likes it!

(Aedi examines the dress up close, touching it)

Father - (confusingly) What is he doing, why is he removing my clothes and looking at it so closely? Does he want to make me naked?

Dagi - No! No! He isn’t like that; he’s looking at how nice your clothes are!

Father - Why is he looking at my dress? What beautiful dress? Why is he wearing those tight trousers (suthani, commonly worn under chowlu, but more like tight jeans in this case)? And why is hair like that (ruffled)?

Dagi - This is the fashion today, father!

Aedi - (asking about his grandmother) Who is this lady?

Dagi - She is your grandmother.

Mother - Oh my doll (chuniya)! Where are you? Are you fine, my grandson (potaru)? Child are you fine, come you have become very weak (dubala). What is this curse (kop)?

Aedi - Why are all the ladies are wearing this dress (in English)?

Mother - What is he saying?

Dagi’s wife - Child! This is our cultural dress.

Aedi - Ok! This is our culture (Hindi, with “culture” in English).

Dagi’s wife - Yes!

Aedi - But you never told me about this before!

Dagi’s Wife - Why should we have told you about this before? You were living in Bombay where these things hardly happen.

Father - Today he’s definitely going to strip me naked; he won’t let me go!

Aedi - I like the dress very much, I want to wear this dress also (in Hindi).
Dagi’s wife – What will you do with this dress? Everyone will laugh at you if you wear it!
Aedi - Nothing like that, mother. We must have some knowledge about our culture. I like the unique style of grandfather. (in Hindi, with “unique style” in English).
Father - What he’s saying? I couldn’t understand anything. You don’t teach him Gaddi?!
Dagi - Yeah, and after teaching him Gaddi, I’ll let him be disrespected (jhand karvana) in the city? I also have to show my nose (face everyone) in the city.
Father - So don’t I have to show my nose to everyone in the village (implication being the grandfather will be ashamed to show off his grandson who doesn’t know Gaddi dialect)?
Dagi - Your nose is fine.
Father - How will I speak with my grandchild? Nose, Nose? Like Ghasitu you both need some special discipline.
Aedi - What is grandfather saying?
Dagi - He asked why you do not speak Gaddi dialect (in Hindi).
Aedi - Oh, language! What do I know? Grandfather, my parents must know (about why they didn’t teach him).
Father - Yes! They both messed with the whole story. (katha bigari)
Father - (crying) How will we speak with our kid? We can’t speak with him… they don’t allow us to speak with him (he approaches to touch him affectionately while crying).
Aedi - Ok! Speak from a distance.
Father - Look at this little doll (chuniya). He doesn’t want to even come under our shadow (saye).
Mother - What is he all wearing?
Dagi - (to his wife) Madam! This is all your fault (galti)!
Dagi’s wife - Why is this my fault?
Dagi - Then whose fault is it?
Dagi’s wife - I haven’t taught him, but why haven’t you taught him also?
Dagi - I didn’t teach him because that’s what you wanted (tere bonle par)!
Dagi’s wife - If I taught him Gaddi, and if you brought your colleagues home for a meal and imagine he speaks in Gaddi in front of everyone… then everyone will laugh and you will give it to me (balna).
Dagi - The things my father are showing us today, before they were not visible to you.
Dagi’s Wife - At that time (of educating Aedi in Mumbai), I didn’t think about your father.
Aedi - Mother! Why are you both quarreling (in Hindi)?
Dagi’s wife - Child! Your father said that I haven’t taught you anything. But you can speak Hindi and English and you can operate a computer (in Hindi).
Aedi - That’s right.
Dagi - But he can’t speak his own (apni apni) Gaddi language. If I had time, then I definitely would have taught him.
Dagi’s wife - What should I do? I educated him according to your math (saab – from Hindi hisab).

Dagi - But now math has become unmath (besaab).

Dagi’s wife - Why unmath? My son (dabu) is nice (khara) (Dagi and wife speak in Gaddi with each other and Hindi with Aedi).

Dagi - He’s nice? Our heart knows his qualities, but you won’t let us (Dagi and his father) show our face to the village people (because their Aedi doesn’t know Gaddi language).

Aedi - Let everything go, father! I want to learn our culture. I want to wear my grandfather’s dress.

Dagi - No problem son! Now we’ll go to our village and live there and not return to the city. We will give you our dress and also teach you about the rest of our culture. (in Hindi, but “culture” is always in English).

Dagi’s wife - (to audience) I made the mistake that I didn’t teach Gaddi to my son, and now I don’t want that you make the same mistake. You must teach your children Gaddi. The children can study English and Hindi in school, but you must teach them Gaddi at home. Don’t make my mistake; make sure to teach them Gaddi! Thank you.

Aedi - (to audience, now speaking Gaddi) - Very good! Our Gaddi people often feel very shy to show our culture in front of others. And we end up repressing it (davai kari rakh de). Today we all students have gathered for a skit to show you about our culture (sanskriti). The culture we have, it’s a great (badiya) thing. It’s very rich. So please, advance our culture (aago badan). Thank you! Bol Bhole Shiv Shami ki Jai!

Audience - Jai!

Aedi - Bol Bhole Bhagsu Nag ki Jai!

Audience - Jai!

Aedi - Bol Bhole Kaylang Wazir ki Jai!

Audience - Jai!

The play ends with repetitious chanting of Gaddi deities as the affirmation of Gaddiness.
### Glossary of Foreign Terms

**Hindi**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ādivāsī</td>
<td>indigenous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ang caḍhāne vālā</td>
<td>village chiropractor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apane āp</td>
<td>possessive “our own” designating social affinity through hierarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aur kī divār</td>
<td>the discursive “and wall” dividing Sippi and Gaddi tribes in J&amp;K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bārāt</td>
<td>the groom’s procession</td>
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<tr>
<td>bartan</td>
<td>reciprocal gift exchange</td>
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<tr>
<td>beṣ buṣa</td>
<td>traditional clothing</td>
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<tr>
<td>birādarī</td>
<td>community of caste and kin</td>
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<tr>
<td>bolī</td>
<td>dialect</td>
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<tr>
<td>cangāī</td>
<td>spirit healing</td>
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<tr>
<td>carāgāha</td>
<td>pastureland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>celā</td>
<td>Gaddi spirit medium, Hali exorcist, disciple of Christ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chahmahīne</td>
<td>literally six months; the practice of seasons transhumance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chulhā</td>
<td>earthen stove</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

359
darśan the visual nadir of experiencing divinity

devī devtā deities in Gaddi cosmology

duruṣṭī correction (of one’s caste); legal emendation

duṣṭ ātmāen afflict ing spirits

Gadderan the Gaddi name for Bharmaur, their ancestral homeland and the summertime counterpoint to Jhandhar

Gaddikaran Gaddization, the process of Dalit assimilation into the tribe

gālī teasing curses of the groom and male relatives by the bride and female relatives, often with sexual overtones

gavāhī Christian testimonial

ghumantu travelers and wanderers

hal calānā to plough

hāliprathā system of bonded labor

har gānv kī kahānī “The Story of Every Village” rural tourism scheme

harijan a term popularized by Gandhi for Dalits, now considered condescending

hīn bhāvnā an inferiority complex; a sense of lack

jāgrā nighttime goat sacrifice ritual

jāgrātā North Indian all-night ritual to the Goddess

jajmānī patron-client exchange between unequal castes
janeū sacrament sometimes worn by high castes

janjāti tribe

jāsūs spy, referencing the real and imagined embedded Chinese spies that sow discord among Tibetans and Gaddis in Dharamsala

jātar daytime pilgrimage to a temple and celebratory sheep sacrifice

Jhandhar literally “plains”; the Gaddi counterpoint to the Gadderan encompassing Kangra district roughly to Pong Dam and representing modernity, caste flexibility, winter pasturelands and diluted Gaddiness

jījā sister’s husband

jūṭhan polluted food

kāgazī taur par official documentation

kālī tanki the black mark sewed into Hali colās marking them as ritually inferior

kālī yug the degeneration of humanity in the last era of the Hindu cycle

kalīsiyā Protestant house church

khānābdoś nomadic gatherers

khānpān traditional cuisine and eating habits

khelnā to play; to gyrate from spirit possession

kshamā karne vālā literally “The Forgiver of Sins”; Jesus Christ

kul purohit Bhatt Brahman lineage priests for Gaddis and Sippis but not Gaddi Dalits

laqavā paralysis, sometimes connected to spiritual torment
leke ānā  
“brought” Gaddi Dalits from Bharmaur

lipāī  
whitewashing

māikā  
marrried woman’s natal home

mandala  
a diagram of the cosmos; a Western discourse framing Dharamsala and excluding Gaddis

mūlanivāsī  
indigene

nāriyal cadhānā  
to offer a coconut substitute for an animal sacrifice

pādrī  
Catholic priest

pahārī  
non-Gaddi mountain ethnicities and languages

pancāyat  
system of local self-governance

panḍit  
a Brahman scholar

parmeśvar  
Lord, Jesus Christ

pāśā  
traditional profession

patvārī  
civil servant who keeps land ownership records and collects local land taxes

pichare  
backwards, undeveloped

prabhu bhoj  
Christian communion service

prāsad  
sanctified food offering

pūjā  
ceremonial worship

rakh liyā  
“kept” landless tenants
rākshasī khānā literally “monstrous food”; a jesting Gaddi description of meat and alcohol

rītī rivāz customs and rituals

saguṇa divine manifestation with form

śahanāī a double-reed wind instrument similar to an oboe and traditionally played by members of the Rihare caste

sahārā taking comfort in divine protection

śahāyak dene vale literally “The Giver of Help”; Jesus Christ

samādhī entombment

śamśān ghāṭ cremation ground

samudāy generic community term inclusive of Gaddi Dalits

sanskriti culture

śārṅārtī refugee

sarvbhakshī omnivorous

sasurāl in-laws’ home

satsang literally “to associate with truthful people”; the Radhasoami community

satya yug the Age of Truth and flourishing of humanity

shreṣṭ literally “the best”; those individuals who have adopted the Arya Samaj

śivling the aniconic representation of Shiva and Trilochan for many Sippis
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>śuddī</td>
<td>Arya Samaj purification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sūrat-śabd-yoga</td>
<td>the basic principles of self-attainment in Hindu esoteric philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>suvidhāen</td>
<td>modern amenities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>svarṇ jātī</td>
<td>upper castes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ātī</td>
<td>father’s elder brother’s wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tāmasik</td>
<td>denoting food thought to advance moral vice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tantra-mantra</td>
<td>witchcraft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tāū</td>
<td>father’s elder brother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vacan</td>
<td>religious sermon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vanśāvalī</td>
<td>family ancestral chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>varṇāshram</td>
<td>classical four-fold division of Hindu society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>viśhvāsī</td>
<td>community of Protestant believers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yahūdī</td>
<td>Jewish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yātrā</td>
<td>pilgrimage</td>
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</table>

### Yešu Masīh
Jesus Christ

#### Tibetan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>babdrung</td>
<td>shamanic bard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bod kyi gṣo ba rig pa</td>
<td>Tibetan medicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text</td>
<td>Translation/Explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cham po</td>
<td>“brothers all agree with each other, are together”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dbyin ji</td>
<td>foreigners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>don</td>
<td>demons who resist the spread of Buddhism in the Ling Gesar; also, negative emotional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>states that humans are particularly susceptible to during the last ten days before the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tibetan Buddhist New Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangkyi</td>
<td>shorthand for Gangs chen skyid shong, the CTA headquarters located between McLeod</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ganj and Lower Dharamsala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gnas bca’</td>
<td>Settler Tibetans, those Tibetans who sought refuge in India in the early 1960s and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>settled primarily in Mussoorie and Dharamsala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gsar ’byor pa</td>
<td>New Arrival Tibetans as of the mid-1990s, often from Kham and Amdo, who face distrust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>from Settler Tibetans on account of their Sinicization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kyam kyam pa</td>
<td>a form of spiritual circumambulation transformed into a cultural expression of roaming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>roughly equivalent to the Indian idea of “time pass”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mchod yon</td>
<td>the priest-patron reciprocation that structures Tibetan engagement with outside forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and is heuristically expanded in the diaspora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mo</td>
<td>a form of Tibetan divination involving the casting of dice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nor bu gling ka</td>
<td>Norbalinga Institute in Sidhpur, dedicated to Tibetan cultural preservation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>om mani-padme hum</td>
<td>six-syllable mantra associated with Avalokiteshvara and riffed on by some Gaddis as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>blatant ethno-commodification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rogs ram</td>
<td>foreign patronage to Tibetan monastic institutions and laity in the diaspora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rgyal po</td>
<td>an earthly king</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sbyin bdag</td>
<td>Tibetan state patronage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shapshu</td>
<td>community service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

365
tsam pa  roasted barley flour

Gaddi

al  clan lineages which structure exogamous marriage alliances and often connote some defining occupational, physical or geographical feature

badḍī caddī  a barten-related expression of social relatedness

cangaṇā  chopping branches from treetops for animal fodder

chāche  literally uncle, but commonly used for fathers by children emulating their elder cousins

chalū  baby lamb

chamahī  six-month death ritual

chuṇīyā  a name of endearment for children

chūtachāt  untouchability

ciṇḍā pandī  paroxysms related to spirit possession and torment

colā  traditional woolen cloak worn by men

dāg  caste-reciprocal ritual of collecting wood for during funerals

ḍhaulkī  drum used by Hali bards

ḍorā  black woolen rope belt with pastoral associations, considered by some Settler Tibetans to be evidence of the subjugation of Gaddis under Du Achung Gyebo in the Ling Gesar

drāṭī  sickle
*ghār* slate remnant landslides

*ghūndū* Gaddi veil derived from Hindu *ghūnghat*, essentially a dupaṭṭā wrapped around the head and tossed over the shoulders

*ghurāī* Hali bard

*guṭkhā* tobacco

*jogāṇū* groom dressed as ascetic form of Shiva; Hali ritual specialist who presides over the *nuālā* in place of a Bhatt *kul purohit*

*juār* village-wide assistance offered during the cultivation of individual rice fields

*kālā mahīṇā* custom of newly-wed women returning to their ancestral homes during the month of *sawan* (mid-July to mid-August) to protect their mothers-in-law (*sās*) from inauspiciousness and sickness

*kanjāk* girl

*khajārī* six-stringed guitar used by Hali bards

*khalṛū* a sheepskin pouch

*kuṛmāī* marriage relations

*laiṭar pāṇā gaṇā* the ritual of “going to build a roof”

*lāṃbā* Tibetan monk

*luāncarī* Gaddi female ankle-length dress of red and green patterned cotton

*mahāsti* disrespectful/affectionate term for calling wives that denote male authority

*marne jiñe* social intimacy during lifecycle functions
marorgī    unusable slate

mingaṇā rai    goat feces

nhaun    sacred bathing

nuālā    a community-affirming, all-night sheep sacrifice ritual celebrating Shiva and affirming the link between Gaddis, Gadderan, Shiva and pastoralism; also a contested ritual performance disenfranchising Gaddi Dalits

oprā soprā    witchcraft

opare rī śikāyat    witchcraft

pahariyā    nature spirits in the Gaddi cosmology

pair bandadai    to touch feet, a sign of respect

pāl    shepherd

pāūcārī    system of unfree clients under patronage exploitation

sukhaṇ    a promise made to a deity that in return for a boon the devotee will show thanks through a ritual celebration, usually involving an animal sacrifice

ṭiyālā    raised platform around a Deodar tree; the basis for Talu, the Gaddi name for McLeod Ganj

vīj    harvested grains
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Craig, Jeffrey. 2001. “‘A fist is stronger than five fingers’: caste and dominance in rural north India.” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 26:217-36.


Phillimore, Peter. 2014. “‘That Used to be a Famous Village’: Shedding the past in rural north India.” *Modern South Asia* 48(1):159-87.


Rose, H.A. 1911. *A Glossary of Tribes and Castes of the Punjab*. Volume II.


Still, Clarinda. 2013. “‘They have it in their stomachs but they can’t vomit it up’: Dalits, reservations, and ‘caste feeling’ in rural Andhra Pradesh.” *Focaal* 65(12):68-79.


ANTHROPOLOGIST

Defended dissertation (August 2018) on Gaddis of Dharamsala, and the impact of Tibetan refugees and cosmopolitan aspiration on tribal performance. Analyzed how Gaddis negotiate statist classificatory regimes in everyday domains of spirituality and ritual, class, and caste. Focused on how Tibetan patronage, increasingly from East Asian Buddhist and civic organizations, shapes Indian belonging and resignifies cultural landscapes. Experienced instructor teaching university students, professionals, and refugees in America, China, India, Vietnam, and South Korea.

EDUCATION

2010–2018  Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), Cultural Anthropology  
Master of Arts (MA), Anthropology, May 2013  
Syracuse University, New York, USA  
Advisor: Dr. Susan Wadley

2002–2006  Bachelor of Arts (BA), Anthropology, summa cum laude  
University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA  
Advisor: Dr. Robert Hayden

2005  University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad, India

2004  Semester at Sea Study Abroad Program, Asia, Africa, South America

ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE EDUCATION

2013  American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS), Jaipur, India  
Fall semester Critical Language Enhancement Award for Advanced Hindi  
Four hours a day for five months

2013  American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS), Jaipur, India  
Summer Foreign Language Area Study Fellow for Advanced Hindi  
Four hours a day for two months

2011  American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS), Jaipur, India  
Summer Foreign Language Area Study Fellow for Advanced Hindi  
Four hours a day for two months

2010  South Asian Summer Language Institute (SASLI), Wisconsin, USA  
Summer Foreign Language Area Study Fellow for Intermediate Hindi  
Four hours a day for ten weeks

2009  Landour Language School, Mussoorie, India  
Completed Intensive Hindi Primer  
Four hours a day for three months

(CONTINUED)
## PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018–Present</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>Hanoi, Vietnam</td>
<td>Contribute to research design, proposal drafting, literature review, and draft paper editing for iSEE, a Hanoi-based NGO working on urban migration of Chinese-origin ethnic minorities. Focused on stigma and marginalization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008–2009</td>
<td>Biographer</td>
<td>Busan, South Korea</td>
<td>Wrote biography of Dr. Jun Dae Ju, a retired army lieutenant and pioneer of mental health in Korea.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Course Titles</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| 2018–2019    | Lecturer                        | University of Bremen | Anthropology 300: Forced Flight and Migration in South Asia  
|              |                                 |                  | Anthropology 100: Introduction to Anthropology                                                                     |
|              |                                 | Spring 2018      | Lecturer, Vietnam National University, Hanoi  
|              |                                 |                  | Anthropology 400: Ethnographic Writing in Western Anthropology                                                       |
| 2016–2018    | Teaching Mentor                 | Syracuse University | Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLAS) Academic Orientation                                                  |
|              |                                 | Fall 2017       | Lecturer, Pitt in the Himalayas, Mussoorie, India  
|              |                                 |                  | Anthropology 1737: Tribal Identity in the Himalayas  
|              |                                 |                  | Anthropology 1750: Tibetan Culture and the Tibetan Diaspora                                                        |
|              |                                 | Fall 2016       | Lecturer, Syracuse University, New York  
|              |                                 |                  | Anthropology 200: Diversity in the Modern Himalayas                                                                  |
| 2013         | Teaching Assistant              | Syracuse University, New York | Anthropology 111: Introduction to Cultural Anthropology, 2 sections                                               |
| 2012–2013    | Teacher                         | Syracuse University Program for Refugee Assistance (SUPRA) | Taught citizenship courses for Bhutanese refugees                                                                |
| 2008–2009    | Teacher                         | Language School of Continued Education, Pocheon, South Korea | Taught ESL classes for professionals and university students                                                    |
| 2006–2007    | Teacher                         | Beijing Normal University, Beijing, PRC | Taught critical writing for graduate students, 3 sections  
|              |                                 |                  | Literary emphasis on American Transcendentalism and Utopian Literature                                            |

(CONTINUED)
TEACHING EXPERIENCE (continued)

2006–2009 Private Tutor, China, India, South Korea
Clients included professionals, university students and primary students

2005 Private Tutor, International Educational Academy, Hyderabad, India
Shakespeare tutoring

INVITED GUEST LECTURES


• “Tribal Dalits and the struggle for state recognition.” Lecture given at Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, Delhi, India (December 5, 2017).

• “Spiritual Disneyland and Gaddi Identity.” Lecture given at Landour Lecture Series, Mussoorie (October 10, 2017).

• “Fractured Caste Consciousness and the Problem of State Recognition in Himachal Pradesh.” Lecture given at Nepal and Himalayan Studies Seminar, Kyoto University, Japan (June 26, 2017).

• “Tribal Cosmos: Gaddi Modernization in Dharamsala.” Lecture given at South Asia Center, Syracuse University, New York (October 18, 2016).

• “Taalu – A New Perspective on McLeod Ganj.” Lecture given at Tibet Society, London, United Kingdom (July 16, 2015).

• “The Pursuit of Tribal Recognition of Himalayan Dalits.” Lecture given at Institute of Chinese Studies, Delhi, India (July 30, 2014).

• “Groupness and Neighborliness Among Tibetans and Gaddis.” Lecture given to Loyola Program, Dharamsala, India (July 15, 2014).

• “An American’s Experience with Hindi.” Lecture given in Hindi at Delhi World Book Fair, Pragati Maidan, India (February 22, 2014).

• “Transcending Cartesian Assumptions about Sex and Gender.” Lecture given at Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China (January 5, 2007).
### GRANTS & SCHOLARSHIPS

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
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<th>Award Amount</th>
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<tr>
<td>2016–2017</td>
<td>Foreign Area Language Study (FLAS) grant for dissertation write up</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Bharati Memorial Grant for secondary fieldwork in Kashir</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015–2016</td>
<td>Syracuse University Graduate Assistantship for dissertation writing</td>
<td>$16,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013–2014</td>
<td>IIE Fulbright Award for dissertation fieldwork in India</td>
<td>approximately $21,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010–2013</td>
<td>Foreign Area Language Study (FLAS) grant to study Hindi at Syracuse University with Dr. Tej Bhatia</td>
<td>$45,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Roscoe-Martin Grant for fieldwork</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Bharati Memorial Grant for preliminary fieldwork</td>
<td>$800</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Foreign Area Language Study (FLAS) grant to study Hindi at AIIS center in Jaipur, India under Dr. Achyuta Singh</td>
<td>$3,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>Foreign Area Language Study (FLAS) grant to study Hindi at University of Wisconsin, Madison under Dr. Mithilesh Mishra</td>
<td>$2,500</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>USS/Toretti Research Grant to study Jewish anti-Zionists (Neturei Karta)</td>
<td>$3,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>University of Pittsburgh merit-based Semester at Sea Scholarship</td>
<td>~$7,000</td>
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### ACADEMIC SERVICE

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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>Fulbright Selection Committee Volunteer Member, Delhi</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Made preliminary selections for FLTA Hindi teaching assistants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012–2013</td>
<td>Academic Integrity Board Volunteer Member, Syracuse University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adjudicated allegations of academic violations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(continued)


**Stephen Christopher Johnson**

**Language Skills**

- **Fluent:** Hindi, Pahadi
- **Limited Proficiency:** Japanese, Urdu, Italian

**Publications**


**Publications in Preparation**


- Christopher, Stephen. “‘Scheduled Tribal Dalit’ and the emergence of a contested intersectional identity”, 2018.

**Workshops**

- Tibetan Landscapes. Co-organized with Trine Brox at Center for Contemporary Buddhist Studies, University of Copenhagen (November 16, 2018).


(Continued)
CONFERENCES PRESENTATIONS

- “Postcolonial ethnography: Reflections on dialogical methodology.” Paper accepted at International Conference for South East Asia, National University Hanoi, Vietnam (January 19, 2018).


REFERENCES

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