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‘That used to be a famous village’: shedding the past in rural north India.*

Short title: ‘That used to be a famous village’

Peter Phillimore
School of Geography, Politics and Sociology,
Newcastle University,
Newcastle Upon Tyne,
NE1 7RU.
UK.
Email. peter.phillimore@ncl.ac.uk

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‘That used to be a famous village’: shedding the past in rural north India.

Abstract

This paper examines the changing reputation of one village in Himachal Pradesh, India, looking back over thirty years. This village has long had a singular identity and local notoriety for its association with *jadu* (‘witchcraft’). I argue that in this village the idea of ‘witchcraft’ as a potent malignant force is now losing its old persuasiveness, and with this change the village is also shedding its unwanted reputation. Against claims for ‘the modernity of witchcraft’ in various parts of the world, I argue that in this case at least witchcraft is construed as distinctly un-modern. The capacity of *jadu* to cause fear, and equally its value as an explanatory idiom, are, I suggest, being overwhelmed by social changes whose cumulative effect has been to reduce the previous insularity of this village and greatly widen the social networks of its members. I pose two main questions. Why should this village have held such a particular reputation? And why should it now be on the wane? Linked to the second is the relationship between this decline and local understandings of ‘modernity’. In developing my argument around the specificity of an unusual village I also consider the significance of ‘the village’ as both social entity and, formerly, one cornerstone of the anthropological project. Finally, I reflect on the methodological openings of long-term familiarity with a setting, exemplified in the iterative nature of learning ethnographically, as the children known initially in early fieldwork become the adult conversationalists of today, partners in interpreting their own village’s past. In exploring their explanations for the decline in the salience of *jadu*, the pivotal impact of education, and the pressures of ‘time’ created by the ‘speed’ of modernity, are both salient.

Introduction

This article reflects on one facet of social change in a single village in north India, specifically the causes of and accompaniments to the gradual decline of an unwelcome and stigmatising reputation. The village in question is in Kangra, a district in Himachal Pradesh which straddles the transition between lower Himalayan foothills and higher mountains. The reference I make to ‘shedding the past’ is an allusion to a reputation which has dogged this one village for decades, perhaps longer – its reputation for *jadu*, typically translated locally (and more widely) as ‘witchcraft’, and sometimes as ‘magic’. I suggest that in this village, which I have known on and off for over thirty years from the time when I first lived there undertaking doctoral fieldwork, the idea of ‘witchcraft’ as a potent malignant force is now losing persuasiveness or credibility; and with this change the village is losing its reputation in the locality as a singular kind of place. The argument I shall develop addresses the much discussed relationship between ‘witchcraft’ and modernity. Against claims for ‘the modernity of witchcraft’ in various parts of the world, I argue that in this case at least witchcraft is better seen as distinctly un-modern. The capacity of *jadu* to cause fear, and equally its value as an explanatory idiom, are, I shall argue, being overwhelmed by social changes whose cumulative effect has been to reduce the previous insularity of this village and greatly widen the social networks of its members. That insularity was both the condition for and the consequence of its reputation as a hotbed of *jadu*.

Changing attitudes towards the idea of *jadu* are one aspect of a much more profound transformation, whose local features I seek to delineate. In exploring what modernity means and entails, I give particular weight to the importance families attach to expanding educational opportunities, which are now being readily seized upon, and to the experience of time, notably the pressures its ‘speed’ creates. Both are pivotal in local accounts. Two key questions need considering in this analysis. Why should this village have held such a particular reputation? And why should it now be on the wane? Linked to the second is the further question of the relationship between this decline and the idea and experience of ‘modernity’. In developing my argument around the specificity of an unusual village, well known as distinctive in the area, I also reflect on the significance of ‘the village’ as both social entity and, formerly, one cornerstone of the anthropological project.

In a different vein, this article owes a good deal to hindsight. I did not set out to study *jadu*, or choose this one setting because of the village's reputation. Indeed I would probably have avoided it if I had known, which would have been my great loss. My data were acquired fortuitously, at least initially, and for many years I was ambivalent about this material, as I shall discuss below. Yet in subsequent visits over the years the subject of *jadu* has kept recurring, which in itself invites reconsideration.¹ Every visit has brought up new stories, or rehearsed old accounts but told anew with an unfamiliar emphasis or with new accompanying detail. Inevitably this leads to reflection on earlier misjudgements, or where in retrospect a different emphasis seems more appropriate; such reflection spurred not only by new data but equally by new directions in anthropology and the social sciences generally, and by the shifting perspectives of friends and informants as they grow older. So this paper is also a commentary on my own still evolving understanding, and the uncertainty I have had at times over what to make of some of my ethnography. These general uncertainties familiar to ethnographers are also accentuated in a case such as this, where a discourse like *jadu* is often addressed obliquely, sometimes by implication only, or occasionally in snippets of vehement or distressed memory. *Jadu* has never been a topic which is lightly discussed, even now; invariably it was mentioned warily and discreetly within the village itself and its immediate neighbourhood. Consequently this is also a paper about the methodological challenges of silences and evasions.

The village in question – which I'll call K – was a large one by local Kangra standards, with a population in 1980 of around 550. Perched on a steep mountainside overlooking a wide valley leading into the expanse of the Kangra valley itself, it is some six miles from the nearest town and main road. Its position does not offer a great deal of scope for expansion, with many of its houses packed together in a congested, almost urban manner; but equally it has not noticeably contracted over the last thirty years. From the time that a settlement was first established in the 19th Century, K has been a Gaddi village. Gaddis form a distinctive 'ethnic group' (a simplification in itself which I will return to below) who are best known in the area as migratory shepherds, not least because one product of the colonial period had been to consolidate Gaddis' identity as *the* shepherds of the region par excellence. In the literature – official and social scientific – Gaddis are commonly referred to as agro-pastoralists, to indicate the importance of farming as well as herding, or as transhumant pastoralists, to indicate the seasonally-driven nature of the shepherding cycle of movement. By no means all households in fact have flocks of sheep and goats. But there used to be a higher proportion of shepherding households in K than in any other Gaddi community in Kangra, and I believe that is still the case, even if that proportion has fallen with time. The continued vitality into the 21st Century of this 'traditional' – and for households with larger flocks still lucrative – occupation does not preclude large numbers of Gaddis from doing other kinds of work, of increasing variety, and even thirty years ago I found plenty of boys and young men (for the herding is largely a male activity) who were not in the least attracted to the acknowledged rigours of living out-of-doors with their family's animals year after year.

There is now a good deal more ethnographic writing on Gaddis than when I did my original fieldwork. Recent authors have focused, as I did, on the shepherding economy, and the relationship between kinship, marriage and caste. At least three writers have examined aspects of Gaddi shepherding recently²; while a fourth, Kapila,³ has focused attention on marriage and

¹ Doctoral fieldwork took place for sixteen months in 1976-1978 and for a further three months in 1980. Subsequent brief visits have been in 1987, 1997, 2002, 2009, and 2011.

² Minoti Chakravarty-Kaul (1998), 'Transhumance and customary pastoral rights in Himachal Pradesh: claiming the high pastures for Gaddis', *Mountain Research & Development*, **18**, 5-17; Vasant Saberwal (1999), *Pastoral politics: shepherds, bureaucrats, and conservation in the western Himalaya*. Delhi: Oxford University Press; Richard Axelby (2007), 'It takes two hands to clap': how Gaddi shepherds in the Indian Himalayas negotiate access to grazing, *Journal of Agrarian Change* **7**, 35-75.

kinship, and the constitutional position of Gaddis in state systems of classification of caste and tribe. Significantly, all these authors, but Kapila most of all, make the relationship between Gaddis and the state central to their work. Gaddis' identity as an ethnic group is beyond the scope of this article, though it has been emphasised through the markers of language, occupation and (until quite recently) dress. Hindus with their own limited set of castes, Gaddis are nevertheless regarded by their neighbours as standing outside or alongside the wider caste arrangements of the region, rather than as enmeshed within it.⁴ This is in fact a point where Kapila and I disagree, for she insists on Gaddis' 'traditional distance from the caste system', while arguing that 'caste-like social practices' are becoming ever more apparent.⁵ Although I am sceptical about this distinction between caste and caste-like, it stems in part from her persuasive reading of the successful campaign recently by Gaddis in Kangra to secure the state's recognition as a 'Scheduled Tribe', which is an issue I return to at the end of this article.

Kangra as a district would be seen as modestly prosperous by many in India. Several factors are interlinked here. The Kangra valley has always been renowned for its fertile soil and high rainfall, making agriculture an attractive proposition. Seen as a safe haven during the Punjab troubles of the 1980s its population has steadily expanded with migration from that state, in a sense creating and certainly greatly expanding a new urban middle class. That modest wealth has itself made Kangra a popular destination for much poorer migrants from Bihar and Rajasthan, drawn to domestic service, building work, or work on the roads, which not so long ago Himachalis would have done themselves. For instance, the new trend towards building showers and toilets in K is mainly being achieved through Bihari or Rajasthani labour. The area has also had strong links with the army, both as a source of recruits and also as home to a number of large army bases, a reminder that the Pakistan border is not far away. Indeed the army has long been a vital prop to the Gaddis' shepherding economy, purchasing their animals for meat on a considerable scale. The district is also dotted with Tibetan settlements and monasteries, and is home to the Dalai Lama. The nearest of these monasteries is half a dozen miles from K. Among other things, the Tibetan presence means that Kangra is a popular destination for large numbers of international tourists, and a magnet for international funding, fuelling a succession of building projects which rely on the labour from outside the state which I mentioned above. Many tourists also come to trek, often nowadays with Gaddi guides. The most recent tourist attraction is paragliding; at certain times of the year residents of K see paragliders from numerous countries overhead (or occasionally landing nearby). To sum up, therefore, K is not now a particularly off-the-beaten-track kind of spot, though it used to be seen as isolated and was only finally connected by road a few years ago. Nor is it especially poor, though any relative wealth it may formerly have had owed more to the income from pastoralism than to agriculture, for land-holdings were generally small.

A reputation for *jadu*

'That used to be a famous village'. These words were spoken in 2009 by a Kangra taxi driver, and he meant 'infamous'. He was speaking of K, which was some fifty kilometres from his own home and a place he had apparently never visited. I asked him why, though I could guess the answer. He started with a disclaimer, keen to stress that things must be very different now, not least I think because assertions or accusations of witchcraft are serious matters in India (to accuse a person of witchcraft is a criminal offence), and he wanted to emphasise that he was

³ Kriti Kapila (2004), 'Conjugating marriage: state legislation and Gaddi kinship', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, **38**, 379-409; Kapila (2008), 'The measure of a tribe: the cultural politics of constitutional reclassification in North India', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, **14**, 117-134.

⁴ Jonathan Parry (1979), *Caste and kinship in Kangra*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, pp. 103, 120.

⁵ Kapila, 'The measure of a tribe', pp. 124, 126.

speaking of the past. ‘But in earlier times, 40, 50, 60 years ago, K was known for some people who knew *tantra*...many people would avoid going there, they feared to go there’. I asked if he was referring to *jadu*, a word familiar across much of northern India, and he replied that he was. He did not know of any particular instances of *jadu* there: what he knew of was this village’s past reputation. The taxi driver was himself a Gaddi. Thus even though he lived the other side of the district it was perhaps not so surprising that he should be familiar with Gaddi gossip. I doubt if someone who was not a Gaddi, living a similar distance from K, would even have heard of the village. I was especially intrigued by this spontaneous reference to K’s past because it echoed an earlier conversation, a fortnight before, with an elderly man named Dilip,⁶ who spoke of his one and only visit to K as a boy back in the late 1930s when he said that no-one wanted to go there because of its frightening reputation for *jadu*. Dilip, like the taxi driver, had also used the word *tantra*⁷ to indicate the form of occult knowledge *jadu* entailed. The young, in particular, he said were fearful of it then, seventy years back, though what exactly was feared was rather vague. Dilip was not a Gaddi. But he lived much closer to K than the taxi driver, so his local knowledge was not surprising. In fact, as a keen local historian, he knew a good deal. Among various stories was one recounting a confrontation between the malign power of a ‘witch’ in K and the worshippers of Gugga, a popular Kangra deity, at some point in a hazy past. This ‘mythic’ account evoked the taming of uncontrolled occult power for collective benefit, and spoke by implication of the domestication of a whole village, brought with a struggle into the ‘civilised’ fold of Kangra ritual orthodoxy.

Dilip, the local historian, had started this conversation in 2009 by asking me why I had chosen to do fieldwork in this particular village, and whether I had been aware of its singular reputation when doing fieldwork originally. Certainly I had soon become aware of it, although as I mentioned earlier I had not known when first selecting it as a place to live in. While I start with these two outsiders’ views of K’s notoriety, this was definitely not a matter of a highly stigmatising reputation held by outsiders which was unacknowledged or denied within the village itself. On the contrary, this was a reputation which few if any within K ever sought to reject or minimise, even if in the past they were rarely keen to talk about it. Most recently, the topic cropped up unsolicited one day during my visit in 2011, as I sat in my old courtyard with my daughter, talking with three young men, who spoke regretfully but matter-of-factly of how fear of *jadu* had in the not so distant past pushed a number of households to leave the village for good. One of these young men, moreover, also made a point of saying how very well known in the area K had been for *jadu*.

There were to be sure differences between the views of those within and outside the village. Viewed from within the village, *jadu* was in the recent past regarded as a disturbing and potentially dangerous but hardly daily reality to negotiate; from outside by contrast the enormity of living with *jadu* could be painted in more lurid colours. Moreover, if *jadu* is taken as an idiom of ‘othering’ then we might distinguish the view of those outside K, for whom the village as a whole was a tainted ‘other’, from the view of those within the village, for whom the tainted ‘others’ were more specifically identifiable, sometimes neighbours, sometimes associated with another part of the village. Despite these small differences in emphasis, however, the conversation I referred to at the end of the previous paragraph indicates that external stereotypes about K feed into residents’ own perceptions, for residents know all too well how their village was and still is seen by others.^{8 9}

⁶ All names are pseudonyms.

⁷ I use the term *tantra* (and later *mantra*) in their ‘local’ sense, as proffered by my informants, rather than following the scholarly lineages of these concepts. See also note 45.

⁸ For instance, a friend from K recently told me that at college in the 1980s fellow students who knew of the village would sometimes ask him what it was like to grow up there, given its reputation.

⁹ Re-reading my field-notes from thirty years ago, I was reminded how many conversations had taken place with outsiders about my choice of K as a place to live. Several people in neighbouring villages or the nearby town

In my experience, while few adults in K would volunteer much information thirty years ago on the subject (I recall only two adult informants who were willing to talk in more than asides), the children I knew then were more talkative, albeit still wary and careful to choose their moment. Many a rather furtive conversation about *jadu* had taken place with children around our hearth as my wife and I cooked or in winter tried to keep warm, and my field-notes are filled with my accounts of these conversations. These took place with the children who lived in the same part of the village as our house, and invariably they would be preceded by a quick check outside to make sure nobody was listening. Even reassured that nobody was overhearing us, none of the children dared refer to those individuals supposed to be ‘witches’ by name, and would direct me geographically by location – up, down, beyond, next to, yes there, using the names of ‘innocent’ individuals to assist their directions. Nor did they want me to name names either, even when I had acquired them from other sources. *Jadu* was about suspicions, never open accusations. So I had much of my early education about *jadu* and its dangers from children. I learned that in practice those suspected, called *dain*, were always women, that they were said nearly always to harm near-neighbours (who may or may not be kin, but in K usually were), and that while their methods were unknown their effects were always intentional and malign, driven by envy (there was no benign or unwitting *jadu*). The evil eye (*najar*) was just one part of their repertoire. *Jadu* practitioners, I learned, could be of any caste, and were said to cause illness in their victims, or often, in the case of women, infertility; while another common target was also reputed to be a family’s livestock, causing illness, infertility, or death. Suspicion was a matter of hindsight, when there was something untoward to be explained. Finally, on one night a year there was apparently a spectacular mountaintop battle between witches and local deities nearby in the neighbouring district of Mandi, invisible of course to the innocent, a battle in which K’s *dains* were said to be prominent (a story which to my surprise I heard repeated in 2009 by my historian acquaintance, Dilip).

I do not want to suggest there were no sources other than these children. First and foremost there was the notably public occasion of a regular village-wide ceremony (known as *jagra*) where the village medium (*chela* or *gur*) would become possessed by all six of the village’s deities in turn, uttering exhortations, judgements and predictions. On one particular occasion, Ajiapal, the foremost of these local deities and generally the least benign, railed at ‘his’ subjects in K through his medium condemning them for harbouring witches in their midst and tolerating the amount of *jadu* practised in the village. To villagers’ evident astonishment, Ajiapal asserted that there were no less than 32 *dains*, though he did not name any, and he expected them to desist, implying dire consequences for village flocks otherwise.

Moreover, and more unnerving for the family concerned, a young man named Madan with whom I was friendly had a breakdown, leading his family to consult a traditional healer-diviner (also called *chela*) as to the underlying cause of the affliction. However, he and others in his family told me at the time that this was unfolding that the *chela* they had approached was too frightened to visit K because of its reputation for *jadu*, insisting that the exorcism rituals should take place in a nearby village out of the reach of such troubling mystical power. And that is what duly happened after various postponements. It might be one thing to have *jadu* diagnosed as the cause of an individual’s suffering during such a ritual; to have a general fear of *jadu* in this village invoked in advance, as the justification for holding it elsewhere, seemed a powerful statement to make about its reputation.

Despite these instances and my various conversations I hesitated to make much use of this material. Because so much of my ethnography about witchcraft came from children, I was uneasy about relying on it, thinking at the time that I was at the very least open to the charge that I had been taken in by embellished childhood imagination. I knew also as I wrote up my

were clearly puzzled why I had selected K given its somewhat unnerving reputation: some spoke euphemistically of the village’s renowned ‘backwardness’ rather than being direct, though it was obvious what they had in mind.

thesis that there were many gaps in my knowledge. For example, I could not attempt, as Alan Macfarlane had done in Nepal¹⁰, a rough classification of symptoms or diseases with different sources of ‘mystical’ action – say by ‘ghost’, ‘witch’, or aggrieved ancestor – just one detail in my ignorance about the process by which suspicions came to point towards *jadu* rather than some other possible cause. Furthermore, despite the large anthropological literature on ‘witchcraft’ in Africa, there was then rather a meagre literature relating to ‘witchcraft’ in India, which in itself served to reduce my confidence to pursue the topic. Moreover, and as big a factor as any, I was keen to resist the familiar anthropological temptation at the time to dwell on the supposedly exotic. To write about *jadu* in K seemed to perpetuate those stereotypes we claimed we wished to dispel. Though the deconstructive moment when anthropology first examined its own tendency to exoticise and essentialise had still not quite gathered momentum, the early signs were there nonetheless. In consequence, I avoided writing about *jadu*, unsure what significance to give it.

The subject of *jadu* has cropped up in conversation only sporadically in subsequent visits. Nevertheless, on each visit it has arisen. Wary of exaggerating its importance, and conscious that this might still be a sensitive topic, I have waited for others to initiate discussion of *jadu*, only then pursuing it with some fascination. Most commonly the topic has arisen with those I had first known as children, or with their children, now themselves young adults. And when talk has turned to *jadu*, I have felt obliged to think again about my own earlier ambivalence surrounding the importance of the subject. The most striking difference from the time when I had lived in K was that the conversations of the last few years have largely looked back at something that was now seen as belonging to the past. The two conversations with outsiders in 2009, with which I started this section, in a sense reflect this allusion to the past. But more telling, of course, are the impressions of K’s own residents or former residents. I mentioned my conversation with the local historian, Dilip, to a friend from K named Mahesh. He had been one of those children from whom I had learned much many years previously, and he agreed with the ‘back in the old days’ or ‘in times gone by’ emphasis of Dilip’s story. Things had moved on now, was the tenor of Mahesh’s judgement in 2009, shared by others also, and K had changed.

Even so, I am conscious that as recently as a visit in 2002 the subject of *jadu* had cropped up as a current anxiety in the course of one long and animated conversation with this same friend, Mahesh; and it is worth reflecting on the evolution in his views about *jadu* over the relatively short period since then, as revealed in the ensuing anecdote. He had been talking in 2002 about the new house he and his wife had had built a few years earlier, not in K but an hour’s walk away down in the valley below. There were plenty of attractions to the new location: it was beside a metalled road (K was not at that point connected by road), surrounded by better land, and closer to the local town and its facilities, including the English-medium school their children were attending. Another big attraction, however, was that it took his new family out of K, away from what he saw as the jealousies, anxieties and suspicions associated with *jadu*. Why, he asked, did I think his family had moved? Why did I think his brother Badri was in the process of moving away? Why had Madan’s family (the young man I mentioned who was taken to consult a *chela*) also eventually moved away, and relocated in the valley below? The answer, Mahesh insisted, was because of *jadu*. And did I remember how his own mother had been very anxious when we had taken our eldest son as a toddler to a part of the village where she believed several *dains* lived? Another striking detail in that conversation – striking because it related to the recent past – came when Mahesh said that several members of his family were uneasy about the cause of his elderly father’s death in K the previous year. He was inclined to attribute it to *jadu*, and connected it to one or two other mysterious happenings

¹⁰ Alan Macfarlane (1981), ‘Death, disease and curing in a Himalayan village’, in Christoph von Furer Haimendorf (ed.), *Asian highland societies in anthropological perspective*. Delhi: Sterling, pp. 79-129.

(notably the tail being very puzzlingly cut off one of their cows after her death). He readily conceded that this was no more than an uneasy suspicion, but wanted me to know that his unease was shared by others within the wider family still living in K. This admission was all the more arresting coming after our conversation had switched abruptly from an excited discussion of Mahesh's recent posting in the heart of one of India's major commercial centres.

It is hard to know how to much weight to give to the juxtaposition of these contrasting views a few years apart, voiced by one articulate individual: animated anxiety about a still credible threat of *jadu* in 2002, and a more relaxed readiness to conclude a few years' later in 2009 that *jadu* was now a thing of the past. I am struck also by another contradiction between what I heard from Mahesh in 2002 and what he said in 2009. During the earlier visit, he had speculated that 'modern life' may be intensifying the urge to use the malign powers of *jadu*, rather than acting to dilute such forces. He said this reflecting on why his father might have been a victim. In earlier times, so his argument went, *jadu* was seen as a last resort, and, he suggested, even those with the power to harm (the *dains*) were inclined to be cautious in playing with these powers. But modern life was about instant results, immediate gratification, and such caution was one casualty. Perhaps he was thinking aloud, searching speculatively for a pattern to troubling events; but I had been intrigued at the time to hear *jadu* counter-intuitively assimilated to the language of consumerist desire.¹¹ That occasion in 2002 has proved in fact to be the last time I have heard *jadu* spoken of as a present threat. Even on that visit, and certainly subsequently, it has been countered by a much more consistently heard view to the effect that modern life was finally weakening the grip of *jadu* in K. The rapidity of change in modern life left no time for *jadu*, or so I was told on several occasions. *Time* was the key, a point I shall return to later.

The wider context

At this point, I turn to recent writing on 'witchcraft' or 'sorcery' in India, journalistic and ethnographic, to place the example of K in a larger context. In Indian politics and news media, witchcraft generally surfaces as 'witch-hunting'. This is portrayed, often by NGOs campaigning to raise public awareness, as a severe recurrent problem in certain parts of the country: notably in the far north-east, as well as extending from parts of Bihar, Jharkhand and Odisha west to Rajasthan and Maharashtra.¹² It is typically presented as a problem of poverty most acute in 'tribal' (*adivasi*) communities, where despite national legislation criminalising accusations of witchcraft, beatings, rape and murder are inflicted on individuals who are almost always women and more often than not widowed or elderly. This is far from being simply a commonplace media depiction. The same portrayal is evident in the deliberations of the Planning Commission on the Scheduled Tribes for instance.¹³ Thus, in public discourse witchcraft has a primary reference to groups either characterised as *adivasi* or as marginalised, or both, coupled to highly gendered violence against those accused of witchcraft.¹⁴ So serious has witchcraft-related violence been in a few of these areas that in 2008 there were even

¹¹ There are echoes here in the Africanist literature on witchcraft, which I come to in the next section.

¹² E.g. <http://indiaunheard.videovolunteers.org/mukesh/defenceless-woman-branded-witch/> (accessed 3 July 2012).

¹³ Government of India Planning Commission (2001), Report of the Steering Committee on Empowering the Scheduled Tribes. For the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-2007). SI. No. 5/2001. New Delhi: Government of India, pp. 48, 65.

¹⁴ Two recent examples from national newspapers: first, from the Deccan Herald (14 May 2012), headlined 'Witchcraft claims lives of four women in Jharkhand':

<http://www.deccanherald.com/content/248943/witchcraft-claims-lives-four-women.html>

second, from the Hindustan Times (13 April 2012), headlined 'Woman branded witch, tortured in Rajasthan':

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/Jaipur/Woman-branded-witch-tortured-in-Rajasthan/Article1-840143.aspx> (both accessed 3 July 2012).

suggestions that education about witchcraft should be introduced in Assam's primary school curriculum.¹⁵

The ethnographic literature is not extensive. It both lends support to, but also complicates, this public rhetorical association of witchcraft or sorcery with groups outside or on the margins of the Hindu world. The majority of such studies do indeed concern largely *adivasi* localities. Bailey's account of witch-hunting in Odisha is a case in point.¹⁶ Sundar's data from Chhattisgarh also come from *adivasi* communities.¹⁷ Macdonald, on the other hand, expressly sought to "address the dearth of research [on witchcraft] conducted in non-*adivasi* areas" of the same state.¹⁸ From further west, Desai's recent ethnographic analyses of responses to witchcraft beliefs in eastern Maharashtra, and Skaria's historical account of anti-witch violence in the late nineteenth century in two areas of what is now Rajasthan and Gujarat, both concern *adivasis*.¹⁹ Yet two accounts from opposite ends of the country have no such *adivasi* associations: Sax's discussion of rituals of aggression, including sorcery, in Garhwal, and Nabokov's of sorcery in Tamilnadu.²⁰

Two additional points are worth highlighting from this literature. The first concerns the role of the state in assertively countering occult beliefs and practices, through the law and the media, in areas where 'witch-hunting' and 'witch-killings' are identified as major public issues.²¹ These are contexts in which agents of the state make considerable rhetorical use of the idea of modernity and what being modern entails, to assert that witchcraft beliefs have no place in the 'modern' world. The second point relates to the ontology of occult activity. There is a distinct contrast between those writers emphasising the constitutive or restorative potentiality of such practices (like Sax), and those who emphasize the destructive, exclusionary force of occult affliction (like Nabokov). Nabokov's argument is in part a dialogue with Kapferer,²² summarised in her statement that 'Kapferer's idea that people actively strive to regenerate or reconstitute themselves does not account for the complex relations and situations of disempowerment that, for Tamil sufferers, constitutes much of the experienced pain of sorcery victimization'.²³ It is her emphasis on the sense of pain felt by those who believe themselves to be afflicted which chimes with my own data on people's responses to fears of *jadu* attack in K.

A word is salient here about recent anthropological theorising of witchcraft generally, looking beyond India. For anthropologists today, writing about witchcraft raises questions which go to the heart of the postcolonial critique of the discipline's history. In a nutshell, is the very attention anthropology still gives to what we label 'witchcraft' a failure to escape the

¹⁵ See Hindustan Times 19 November 2008, Education section: <http://www.hindustantimes.com/Lessons-on-witchcraft-for-Assam-kids/Article1-352734.aspx> (accessed 16 August 2011).

¹⁶ Frederick Bailey (1997), *A witch-hunt in an Indian village, or, the triumph of morality*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

¹⁷ Nandini Sundar (2001), 'Divining evil: the state and witchcraft in Bastar', *Gender, Technology & Development*, 5, 425-448.

¹⁸ Helen Macdonald (2009), 'Handled with discretion: shaping policing practices through witch accusations', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 43, 285-315, especially p. 289.

¹⁹ Amit Desai (2008), 'Subaltern vegetarianism: witchcraft, embodiment and sociality in Central India', *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 31, 96-117; Desai (2009), 'Anti-"anti-witchcraft" and the Maoist insurgency in rural Maharashtra, India', *Dialectical Anthropology*, 33, 423-439; Ajay Skaria (1997), 'Women, witchcraft and gratuitous violence in colonial western India', *Past and Present*, 155, 109-141.

²⁰ William Sax (2009), *God of Justice: ritual healing and social justice in the central Himalayas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Isabelle Nabokov (2000), 'Deadly power: a funeral to counter sorcery in South India', *American Ethnologist*, 27, 147-168.

²¹ Desai, 'Anti- "anti-witchcraft"'; Macdonald, 'Handled with discretion'; Sundar, 'Divining evil'.

²² Bruce Kapferer (1997), *The feast of the sorcerer: practices of consciousness and power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

²³ Nabokov, 'Deadly power', p. 162.

thoughtless reproduction of the discipline's old obsession with the alien and exotic?²⁴ Or alternatively would the failure be not to attend to the relevance and subtle transformations of 'witchcraft' manifest in some parts of the world, as if in thrall to a kind of ethnocentrism that cannot look beyond witchcraft's label as 'exotic'? The wave of writing on the subject over the last two decades suggests that anthropologists generally incline to the latter view. Most ethnographic writing on 'witchcraft', both recent as well as in the past, has focused on sub-Saharan Africa or New Guinea. The literature on Africa has been particularly notable for suggesting the salience of witchcraft to modernity. The sheer ubiquity of witchcraft beliefs in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa has invited reassessment of the earlier assumption that witchcraft and modernity would be incompatible; and this in turn has led a number of anthropologists to argue that modernity has opened up new possibilities and arenas in which witchcraft beliefs can flourish.²⁵ Some have argued that the politics of the post-colonial state has in itself fostered the conditions for witchcraft to flourish.²⁶ Certainly not all anthropologists writing on witchcraft and sorcery in Africa share these views.²⁷ However, I refer to this substantial body of literature here to throw into relief that this example from northern India does not support such a general argument. It would, I contend, be very hard to argue for the 'modernity' of *jadu* in the context of this particular Kangra village.

A singular village?

It is fairly common in Kangra, as elsewhere, for individuals to have a reputation for possessing some kind of spiritual or occult power.²⁸ What is unusual in this case is that it is the village which has had the reputation, and its own residents commonly acknowledged this collective identification. I never heard any suggestion that there were one or two particularly renowned individual *dains* in K; it was their collective presence which was emphasised. This state of affairs points not only to questions about distinctiveness of place and village identity, but also invites us to reflect on the epistemological status of the 'village' in anthropology. My initial fieldwork took place at the end of the era when working in a village was still a commonplace in anthropology. Even if the artificiality of 'the village study' of late functionalism's heyday was being increasingly exposed at the time (in an Indian context, by Dumont above all), a good many anthropologists still gravitated towards rural settings for their fieldwork, even as they imagined that they would themselves avoid the supposed intellectual blinkers which had come to be associated with such a location. The notion of multi-sited ethnography – which was to promise one escape route – was then still in the future. Today, multi-sited ethnography is sufficiently established that both its potential advantages and its possible limitations are better recognised. Multi-sited ethnography has not, of course, put an end to ethnography in rural settings; nor was it ever envisaged as likely to do so. Nevertheless, it was presented as a more

²⁴ See Blair Rutherford (1999), 'To find an African witch: anthropology, modernity, and witch-finding in north-west Zimbabwe', *Critique of Anthropology*, **19**, 89-109.

²⁵ Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (1993), *Modernity and its malcontents: ritual and power in postcolonial Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Peter Geschiere (1997), *The modernity of witchcraft: politics and the occult in postcolonial Africa*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press; Henrietta Moore and Todd Sanders (eds) (2001), *Magical interpretations, material realities: modernity, witchcraft and the occult in postcolonial Africa*. London: Routledge; Harri Englund (2007), 'Witchcraft and the limits of mass mediation in Malawi', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, **13**, 295-311.

²⁶ Geschiere, *The modernity of witchcraft*; Michael Rowlands and Jean-Pierre Warnier (1988), 'Sorcery, power and the modern state in Cameroon', *Man*, **23**, 118-132.

²⁷ For example, Rutherford, 'To find an African witch'; also Maia Green and Simeon Mesaki (2005), 'The birth of the "salon": poverty, "modernization", and dealing with witchcraft in southern Tanzania', *American Ethnologist*, **32**, 371-388. Also relevant is Pascal Kum Awah and Peter Phillimore (2008), 'Diabetes, medicine and modernity in Cameroon', *Africa*, **78**, 475-495.

²⁸ E.g. Jonathan Parry, *Caste and kinship in Kangra*, p.176.

open framing of the complexity of ‘the field’ than could be achieved in a single setting. Its advocates, above all George Marcus²⁹, saw it assisting recognition of mobile lives harnessing fluid networks across ever-extending geographical range. As a corollary, it led ethnographers further away from the notion of ‘the village’ as social entity at a time when many had already started to theorise the relationships between village, region and state.³⁰ Multi-sited ethnography fitted, moreover, alongside the shift from earlier thinking of social relations as structured, to a newer appreciation of social relations as continuously emergent. And it offered one answer to the methodological challenge implicit in novel conceptions at the time such as ‘space-time compression’³¹. More colloquially, multi-sited ethnography was seen as an urgently needed attempt to catch up with the world as it was portrayed in the media, popular culture, and other academic disciplines, as a world in motion, even in rural contexts. Along the way, ‘the village’ in a sense became a redundant anthropological category.

Interestingly, however, a number of writers have recently reassessed the analytical potential of the village. India’s villages have been one important spur to this reconsideration.³² One of the most penetrating contributions has come from Matei Candea, whose qualified defence of the village setting also involves critiquing what he sees as the unacknowledged holism implicit in multi-sited ethnography, the very accusation to have been made against the village study.³³ It is against this background that Candea restates the case for working in a single setting, exploring this through his own Corsican fieldwork and what he admits is ‘the hackneyed image of the ‘village ethnography’.³⁴ He does so as a way towards what he sees as a more realistic epistemological modesty of aspiration, arguing for the ‘bounded field-site’ as a deliberate ‘self-imposed limitation’, one which obliges us to see where we do fieldwork as an analytically ‘arbitrary location’ in which the very ‘incompleteness and contingency’ of our chosen setting itself helps us challenge those totalising assumptions implicit in the promise of multi-sitedness.³⁵ Nonetheless, so dated has the idea of ‘the village’ become in anthropology’s own imaginary that Candea approaches the topic of his own village setting in Corsica with, to use his own words, ‘calculated irony.’³⁶

Yet even while accepting that analytically the notion of the self-contained village is an anachronistic fiction, it would be hard to deny that villages *do* exist which local judgement depicts as unusual, idiosyncratic, or unusually self-contained.³⁷ Candea’s argument has particular interest in relation to a village such as K, which is both self-defined and externally imagined as an inward-looking place, set apart from its neighbours by topography and social

²⁹ George Marcus (1995), ‘Ethnography in/of the world system: the emergence of multi-sited ethnography’, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, **24**, 95-117; Marcus (ed) (1999), *Ethnography through thick and thin*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

³⁰ This development had been anticipated by the Manchester tradition of anthropology, exemplified in an Indian context by Epstein. (T. Scarlett Epstein (1962), *Economic development and social change in south India*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.)

³¹ David Harvey (1990), *The condition of postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change*. Oxford: Blackwell.

³² E.g. Diane Mines and Nicolas Yazgi (eds) (2010) *Village matters: relocating villages in the contemporary anthropology of India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press. Moreover, from elsewhere in South Asia, Stacy Pigg had earlier emphasised how, in Nepal, the rhetorical emphasis within government on ‘the village’ as the generic object of ‘development’ assured its continuing prominence as an analytic category, in a way that anthropologists too easily overlooked (Stacy Pigg (1992), ‘Inventing social categories through place: social representations and development in Nepal’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, **34**, 491-513.)

³³ Matei Candea (2007), ‘Arbitrary locations: in defence of the bounded field-site’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, **13**, 167-184

³⁴ Candea, ‘Arbitrary locations’, p. 180.

³⁵ Candea, ‘Arbitrary locations’, p. 180.

³⁶ Candea, ‘Arbitrary locations’, p. 175.

³⁷ Mines and Yazgi make a related point in saying that ‘the village is not a priori a bounded ‘whole’ (although it may be made as such by villagers sometimes)’ (Mines and Yazgi, *Village matters*, p.10).

outlook. For as he acknowledges, mountain villages are especially easy to represent in terms which reinforce old stereotypes. He has Corsica in mind when he alludes to 'the classic image of the high-perched mountain village...', both warm, intimate community and forbidding rocky stronghold.³⁸ But this is also a reasonable depiction of K's setting.

Reputation, modernity and time

To be a place where *jadu* is part of common explanatory currency hints at tensions which at times become oppressive. But it is a currency of whispers, of unspoken suspicion, anxiety and, I believe, avoidance. So difficult to voice outside a small circle of trusted kin, one wonders how these suspicions get transmitted. It is important in this connection that there is no significant ritual economy built around *jadu* and the suspicions it arouses. Astrologer-diviners may be relatively plentiful in the area, but it would be hard to argue that there are ritual specialists whose livelihoods depend critically on dealing with *jadu*, and who could in a sense give voice to it.³⁹ Suspicions alone by their nature do not create a ritual apparatus of the kind that outright accusations would necessitate. Thus there is not a great deal for the ethnographer to get hold of by way of ritual practice, any more than there is much to get hold of for those who believe they are possible victims.

Nevertheless, I turn now to consider why K should have sustained its association with and reputation for *jadu* for so long, before moving on to address the factors which signify why *jadu*'s hold over people's consciousness now appears to be waning. One factor that has, I think, been important within K is its layout. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that K's congested physical layout has played a part in fuelling tensions, and intensifying jealousies or suspicions. In the same way, there are acute difficulties of avoidance when relationships break down. These are precisely the circumstances which a *jadu* discourse fosters and upon which it feeds. No reminder is needed that petty jealousies and friction are the bread-and-butter of village life the world over. But physical proximity often makes matters worse. K's cheek-by-jowl compactness is highly unusual in an area where settlements are typically much more dispersed, with small hamlets dotted about, and with some distance from neighbours beyond one's closest kin. Perched on its steep mountainside, no other village in the area had such a large population living so compactly or, one might say, so claustrophobically. The word claustrophobic is mine, but the sentiment was quite commonly voiced that people lived too closely on top of one another, making this one reason why some families sought to move down to the valley below (though it was rarely the only reason).⁴⁰

Two other factors reinforce a sense of K's distinctiveness viewed from within, and its separateness viewed from without. First, K has been highly unusual in the degree to which its families have sought marriage partners within the village in the past. For a bride to be married within her natal village used to attract considerable opprobrium in Kangra, and is still generally frowned upon as less than ideal, principally because it subverts the logic of inequality between the two sides to the marriage embedded in hypergamy.⁴¹ A tolerance of village endogamy, by contrast, linked to consciously-held egalitarian values which were – and still are – expressed in

³⁸ Candea, 'Arbitrary locations', p. 177.

³⁹ The outburst by the devta Ajiapal at the village *jagra* which I mentioned in the second section was to say the least unusual, a ritual voicing of a problem in a public and collective context where the entire village came together. But it was a general accusation, not one which was associated with a ritual economy for dealing with *jadu* suspicions.

⁴⁰ In making these remarks about K's layout I lay myself open to the charge of depicting the village in precisely the terms familiar from an earlier era in anthropology, to hark back to the previous section. Nevertheless, I am also conscious that studies of urban environments take as axiomatic that urban design and layout do indeed influence human sociability and consciousness: the transformation of cities is premised on such a conviction.

⁴¹ Jonathan Parry, *Caste and kinship in Kangra*.

Gaddi marriage choices.⁴² But even so, K was clearly a local anomaly in the extent to which marriages were arranged between partners who had grown up in the same village. I can only speculate whether this unusual state of affairs might have been a form of inadvertent closure created by a degree of reluctance on the part of families in other villages, either to contemplate allowing their daughters to marry husbands in K, or consenting to brides from there for their sons, due to its unsavoury reputation. But the long-term effect was to reinforce the village's position as a place apart, which did things its own way. A further factor also deserves mention here: K's identity, both within and outside, as an archetypal Gaddi shepherding village. Gaddis have been known in the region as migratory shepherds, as I said earlier, even if flock ownership has declined in many Kangra villages.⁴³ But K has had – at least until recently – a particularly strong association with a livelihood and way of life seen by the wider Kangra population as at best quaintly traditional and more judgementally as out-of-date and even backward.

Thus, I suggest that K's reputation in the area for disvalued traits rested on more than *jadu*, even if *jadu* was its most emblematic characteristic. In a perhaps subliminal manner, K's physical separateness, the economic and spatial separateness of the shepherding way of life, and the social separateness reflected in the unusual willingness to find marriage partners within the village, all reinforced a sense that this was a village unlike others. From outside, *jadu* was what made this 'otherness' notorious.⁴⁴

Seeking explanations for K's long-held reputation for *jadu* – lasting over many decades – is necessarily somewhat speculative, and not a circumstance where there are local explanations to draw upon. Within K or outside it, the association with *jadu* was simply a given, and not something which might be explained. By contrast, there is more to go on when considering the changes that are the focus of this paper, conveyed by the past tense in the title, for there are at least some local views put forward as reasons why *jadu* is now seen to be a discourse on the wane, despite a general sense of reluctance to talk about such a topic.

I was told on several occasions that modern life was simply too fast for people to have time for *jadu*. *Jadu* was considered to take time and demand patience. It meant learning particular kinds of *mantra*, so it was said, and nobody – least of all the young – now had the time to spend learning the skills of such ambiguous arts. If children today wanted to learn about *jadu* they would watch a film on DVD, so I was told; they are unlikely to start learning *mantras*.⁴⁵ A changed experience of time was repeatedly adduced to make sense of the declining or indeed defunct place of beliefs about *jadu* in people's lives in K. Modern life was described in familiar images of speed or haste, of pressing demands, of family life as attenuated by distance, with certain members of many families living away in cities or posted in other parts of the country. Thirty years ago, the main occupation to take men away from their locality (shepherding apart) was the army. While that remains a popular option, there are now numerous ways in which men are finding work in Delhi or other cities in the north-west, and moreover taking their families with them more commonly than before. It is no longer so

⁴² Kapila, 'The measure of a tribe'.

⁴³ A point also made by Kapila, 'The measure of a tribe'.

⁴⁴ Prasad, in discussing the way ethnographers have disguised village names with pseudonyms, speaks of the way that such 'fictionalization' has commonly emphasized the typicality of the village in question, giving it 'the connotation, "any village whatsoever"' (M. Madhava Prasad (2010), 'The imagined village', in Diane Mines and Nicolas Yazgi (eds) *Village Matters*, p. 257). As is evident, this article is about a village which is emphatically not 'any village whatsoever'.

⁴⁵ There is an ambiguity in my data on this point. While my informants in K itself tended to say in the past that the techniques of performing *jadu* were unknown, more recent discussions have usually made reference to learning *mantras* and in some examples linked the practice to *tantra* (mentioned earlier). Whether this difference reflects people's uncertainty and is thus guesswork, or whether alternatively it reflects an unconscious quasi-sanskritising instinct in the representation of such practices, I could not say. I am grateful to Helen Lambert for pointing out the ambiguity.

unusual for weddings in K to reunite families dispersed across different cities. The children of these families come back to their roots in the village from the experience of city schooling and with city outlooks and stories, and, while some of them clearly find the experience of returning uncomfortable and disorientating, such occasions also extend the web of connections linking K to a sense of a larger India, to the nation as a whole. My point is not that this is novel in itself; only that what has been typical across much of India should at last be occurring in this formerly atypical village.⁴⁶

The changed valuation of education in K is a key part of so many narratives I heard. One of the reasons why *jadu* is increasingly regarded as a thing of the past among those I spoke to was that universal education was believed to be weakening such ‘backward’ fantasies. It is a familiar trope around the world, with ‘modern’ knowledge seen as supplanting ignorance and superstition.⁴⁷ Recent articles by Jeffrey, Jeffery and Jeffery on the hopes invested in education among Dalit and Muslim young men in Uttar Pradesh paint a picture of both its enormous attractions – ‘the iconic significance of ‘being educated’ – and considerable disappointments when it proved hard to convert into secure employment opportunities.⁴⁸ In K, it is too early in the process for disillusionment to be widespread. Moreover, while the young men of the lowest caste share a comparable disadvantage to those in Uttar Pradesh, the majority of Gaddi young men do not. But an equally important part of the enthusiasm for education in K, as in its environs, relates to the opportunities which have opened up for girls, an instance of a larger success in Himachal Pradesh.

Thirty years ago, most boys in K attended school to matriculation, though attendance could become very erratic as they grew up, while a number went with the flocks from a young age, thereby missing school altogether. At that time, few girls were permitted to stay at school through to matriculation, and typically school attendance fizzled out during the high school years. Over the last generation or so that has all changed. All children in K attend school through to matriculation, and increasingly both sexes are then going on to college securing BA degrees and recently even MAs also. The era of couples both of whom possess postgraduate qualifications has arrived in this village which was not so long ago a local byword for the supposedly ‘backward’ or ‘traditional’.⁴⁹ In this, K is following the trajectory of developments in literacy and education within the larger Gaddi community, as well as across the district and the state.⁵⁰

It has been striking to witness what these wider social and demographic trends mean when translated into family choices and expectations. Those who I had known once as children, often given little encouragement to bother with schooling, now attached great importance to the schooling of their own children, and its continuation to a college education. The rare adults who, a generation ago, had imagined that education was a path to new opportunities for their children now felt vindicated at last. One woman in particular, Koshalya, who lived across the

⁴⁶ See Vinay Gidwani and K. Sivaramakrishnan (2003), ‘Circular migration and rural cosmopolitanism in India’, *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, **37**, 339-367. As they note, migration is a vital way through which people imagine their nation and their part in it, and it is ‘central to the production of modern citizens’ (p. 364).

⁴⁷ There may also be an unacknowledged reference in this context to the significance of education for girls, considering that a *dain* (‘witch’) is almost always imagined as female.

⁴⁸ Craig Jeffrey, Patricia Jeffery and Roger Jeffery (2004), “‘A useless thing!’ or ‘nectar of the gods’? The cultural production of education and young men’s struggles for respect in liberalizing North India’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, **94**, 961-981, p. 975; also Craig Jeffrey, Roger Jeffery and Patricia Jeffery (2004), ‘Degrees without freedom: the impact of formal education on Dalit young men in North India’, *Development and Change*, **35**, 963-986.

⁴⁹ See Kapila, ‘Conjugating marriage’, for an analysis of the shift in ideals of conjugality among Gaddis in Kangra, which is associated with this wider change in educational aspiration.

⁵⁰ In Kangra, 74 per cent female literacy was recorded at the 2001 Census, putting the district third out of twelve in a state, Himachal Pradesh, which had improved its performance to rank fourth overall in India. <http://himachal.nic.in/tour/census.htm> (accessed 16 August 2011).

courtyard from the house we had rented, is an ideal exemplar. Her husband was a shepherd and little concerned with schooling his children. But she herself had moved up the mountain slope at marriage from a hamlet in the valley below, bringing her natal family's much greater expectations about the importance of education. On one occasion in 1977 she had in exasperation dumped her second son in my arms and asked me to take him to the village's primary school, when for the umpteenth time he had wriggled out of attending and turned up to hang around our house instead. She had been adamant that since our presence was the distraction, it had to be my responsibility to ensure he got to school.⁵¹ I cannot think of many other women in K at that time who shared her views and hopes. The eldest of five sisters, she was followed into K in due course by two younger sisters marrying in, who held, I think, broadly similar values (if not so insistently held as by their elder sister). Over subsequent years two of them have moved back down the mountainside from whence they came, bringing their families with them. But along the way they together nurtured in what was then rather unpromising ground a new set of expectations about the value of education. Thus between them these sisters have contributed to the larger shifts in outlook reflected in Himachal Pradesh's rapid rise in female literacy. Those three sisters have had eleven children: eight have so far gone on to a college education, and of the three remaining, two are still at school. Only the eldest, a daughter, did not, and she, probably the most academically inclined in the family, was I think born just too early to be allowed to take up the opportunity.

I would not want to suggest that this is entirely a consensual process. In one of the lulls which punctuate wedding ceremonies I listened in 2009 to a matriarch named Brahmi, from the same kin group as the three sisters mentioned above, rehearse her well known views about the behaviour of her grandchildren. This was an animated conversation among a forceful group of women, all closely related, but the floor belonged to this particular woman, in her eighties and none too well at the time. This did not stop her berating one grandson in particular, who was in the army, though he stood for others, not least two of his three brothers. The bone of contention was a familiar one far beyond this locality, about the way in which education and new kinds of work seemed to detach children from their cultural roots, and with it from their elders' oversight and guidance. Of her four grandsons, two were in the army, one was a pharmaceutical rep, and only one, who had never bothered with school or been pressed to bother, had followed his father into the shepherding life which had until recently been the mainstay of the family economy (and was still highly lucrative). The grandson who inspired particularly strong feelings spoke good English, and his grandmother disliked it when he used his English in the village or on family occasions. He had already spoken to me of his desire to apply for promotion to become an officer, for which he said he would need better English (and we were talking mainly in English), and he admitted that this was a bone of contention with his forthright grandmother.⁵² The gap between the two was all too plain, and this proud matriarch now found herself evidently bewildered by her grandchildren's lives in a way that she had probably never been by her own children's. Not that Brahmi was bewildered into silence – far from it. Nonetheless, as in so many other parts of the world, education and new kinds of employment opportunity had brought misgivings as well as enthusiasm, as old and young found themselves strange to one another in ways which probably were not so manifest in previous generations.

⁵¹ The boy in question, Arjan, now works as a technician in Delhi. Visiting him in 2012 and meeting his two young children for the first time, I brought along photos of their father as a child. These stunned his daughter, who looked visibly shocked at this image of her father as a dishevelled youngster. 'They don't realise all they have now', he said to me, laughing affectionately at her reaction. While I was there we phoned his brother, also a college graduate, who told me of his recent visit for work to one of the former Soviet Union republics.

⁵² Relevant here is discussion of the influence of 'the somewhat paradoxical figure of the 'rural cosmopolitan'' (Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan, 'Circular migration and rural cosmopolitanism', p. 343).

Two aspects of ‘modern’ life – the impact of education and the pressures of time created by its ‘speed’ – were thus explicitly invoked by friends and informants as factors explaining the decline of *jadu* in K today. But these local causal explanations stress a basically rationalist case against *jadu* (greater education means that fewer people ‘believe in’ it as an idea or have the time for it). This still begs questions about the experiential reaction to profound social change and how that impacts on the idea of *jadu*. Here that familiar imagery of the ‘speed’ of modern life is crucial.⁵³ For it seems to me that the ways in which change is experienced as ubiquitous and intense has helped to overwhelm *jadu* as an explanatory idiom. There is today so much to question and explain in a world where change is experience-near, even in a once-remote village like K, that *jadu* is being swept aside, becoming less and less imaginable as a useful potential explanation. Even comparatively recently, during my own fieldwork at the end of the 1970s, change was, relatively speaking, that much more experience-distant, still sufficiently separate from (and not disruptive to) the intimacies of daily life such that the language of accountability for illness or loss could meaningfully make use of the concept of *jadu*.⁵⁴ By contrast, the last decade or so has seen a host of visible emblems of social and economic incorporation into the wider social milieu from which for so long K seemed to stand apart: the new road which at last now links to K (after years of half-hearted attempts thwarted by monsoon landslides); the mobile phone masts standing both ends of the village, and the rapid familiarity of mobile phones themselves in virtually every household;⁵⁵ and the various school uniforms of the children, once a rare site indeed.

Conclusion

The changes I have described and sought to account for here fit within a larger trajectory of rural Indians coming to consider themselves a part of the modern nation. But to do that, people have to be drawn into processes which help create them as modern citizens and consumers. This is, we know, highly uneven in the way that it occurs, and K is an example of a community whose relative insularity has slowed and complicated such incorporation in the wider society of Kangra, Himachal Pradesh and India as a whole.⁵⁶ I have argued that in K the persistence until recently of a belief in the power of *jadu* belongs with a set of circumstances which together fostered a degree of isolation within the local area. The congested layout of a large village on a steep hillside only recently reached by a road;⁵⁷ the unusual acceptance of village endogamy in

⁵³ Ambiguities in the experience of time is central to Jeffrey’s discussion of young men and class in Meerut (Craig Jeffrey (2010), ‘Timepass: youth, class, and time among unemployed young men in India’, *American Ethnologist*, 37, 465-481). Although his main emphasis is on young men resigned to ‘passing time’, he also refers to moments of panic and accelerated time and ‘feelings of temporal anxiety’ (pp. 466, 477), a parallel with the reactions I describe here.

⁵⁴ I say this even though I was doing fieldwork during the Emergency, with all the intrusiveness in personal lives that period entailed through the notorious male sterilisation campaigns. Gaddi shepherds proved remarkably elusive to government at that time.

⁵⁵ The advent of the mobile phone is another factor accentuating this gap between the generations. While the hillsides around K make good sites for the necessary masts (and have created a new source of work for a few as mast-caretaker), mobile phone ownership and use within the village still seems relatively restricted. It is no surprise that many more young men than young women have mobile phones. But among the latter, those educated to college level are almost invariably being given one. There may thus be opening up an interesting and in the long run potentially significant distinction between more and less educated young women: for the college girls are thus acquiring the opportunities for a personal life beyond close family scrutiny denied to their sisters who do not take studying to the post-school level.

⁵⁶ Kapila, in both ‘Conjugating marriage’ and ‘The measure of a tribe’, provides an insight into aspects of this same experience among Gaddis living elsewhere in Kangra.

⁵⁷ Starting fieldwork during the Emergency period, one attraction of K was precisely that it was not connected by road, for I had been told – and indeed had seen for myself – that government officials engaged in the sterilisation campaign at the time were disinclined to bother with remoter places a jeep could not reach. That

practice, at odds with convention in the wider Kangra society; and the deep identification with a livelihood and way of life, pastoralism, seen by many (and certainly by the state) as outdated: these were the prime examples of a social milieu which stood apart from the Kangra mainstream, to a degree which no other predominantly Gaddi village seemed to do.⁵⁸ Of all the many aspects of modernity which might in principle loosen such inwardness and facilitate the decline in the idea of *jadu*, I have argued here for the importance of widening educational opportunity, notably for girls. This, as it happens, is an arena in which as a state Himachal Pradesh has had considerable success, and K might stand as an exemplar of what this policy commitment has helped to achieve. For while education is not the only avenue into that connectedness which K has not had before, it is the most effective channel for access to employment away from the immediate area, and to the cultural capital coming from non-Gaddi social and economic networks. Equally it is one key to the changing character of marriage, as Kapila has shown.⁵⁹

Yet there is also an apparent paradox to consider in putting this shedding of the past in K within a larger context. I noted earlier that witchcraft or sorcery in the public imagination of India is strongly associated with 'tribal' or *adivasi* communities, and a good deal of the ethnographic literature on this topic in India relates to groups so identified. Among other things, this allows a stereotypic association of 'backward' beliefs with 'backward' peoples, reaffirming the absolute otherness of both. The case study presented here does not fit within such binary simplification. And yet, matters are not quite so clearcut. For popularly, Gaddis have in fact been regarded as a 'tribe' in Himachal Pradesh, by virtue of their identity as migratory shepherds.⁶⁰ Administratively, government recognised Gaddis as a Scheduled Tribe in Kangra's neighbouring district, Chamba, in the late 1940s, but not in Kangra itself, although that legal distinction would not have been familiar to many people among the wider Kangra population.⁶¹ The anomaly of scheduled tribe recognition in the one district but not in the other was for several decades a focus of political campaigning to bring Kangra Gaddis the same 'recognition' as their Chamba kin. This campaign gained momentum in the 1990s as the politics of recognition, or reservation politics, became such a powerful instrument of economic benefit and social advancement across the country.⁶² At the turn of this new century, this campaign bore fruit, and Kangra Gaddis now indeed have the constitutional and administrative recognition as a Scheduled Tribe that accords with their long-established and common identification as a 'tribe' in everyday parlance. Thus paradoxically the shedding of an old reputation for *jadu* in K has gone in parallel with this district-wide campaign for recognition as a scheduled tribe, the very social category most typically associated with 'witchcraft' in India. Yet this is but one aspect of a bigger paradox, whereby a claim for political recognition as a

proved to be the case in the time remaining before the 1977 election, 700 feet of climbing from the road end being the disincentive people in K hoped it would be. My worry had been that if I was in a village easily accessible to any official calling in connection with the sterilisation campaign in the early days of fieldwork, before there had been time to cement familiarity and a measure of trustworthiness, my purpose and explanation for being there might be called in question.

⁵⁸ One reviewer for this journal questioned how confident I could be about the singular identity I claimed K had. Because of the localised nature of fieldwork, it would be foolish to overstate any claim for its uniqueness. All I can say is that local knowledge in the part of Kangra in question seemed invariably to accord K a special reputation.

⁵⁹ Kapila, 'Conjugating marriage'.

⁶⁰ This was reinforced by such additional markers as language and a 'traditional' style of dress which was associated with their pastoralist livelihood.

⁶¹ Kapila, 'The measure of a tribe', p. 123. As she states, scheduled tribe status was granted in Chamba because Gaddis were administratively identified as migratory pastoralists; Kangra, on the other hand, was at that time part of Punjab (until absorbed within Himachal Pradesh in 1966), and, in Punjab, government at the time held that there were no 'tribal' groups.

⁶² Kapila, 'The measure of a tribe'. p. 123.

‘tribe’ may itself exemplify the work of modernity, highlighted in the principle of claiming economic rights and entitlements from the Indian state. Here Gaddis have followed a well-trodden path.⁶³

Jadu is not only a difficult topic for the people of K and their social networks; it is also an elusive and challenging one for the ethnographer. The hindsight I alluded to near the start of the paper owes much to the changes in my relationships with people and families I first knew in K (not all of them still resident there), and the ways we jointly objectify the past. The children I knew best are now themselves middle-aged and locally quite influential, their parents now elderly, and their children often college-going, mobile-phone users asking me to tell them my recollections about the village in the past, as if that history of personal familiarity is in itself a curiosity to be amused by. At some point I stopped thinking of these emotional connections, which lie dormant for a while and are then renewed, as a continuation of fieldwork. Yet this is an ethnographic account, grounded in the familiar disciplinary combination of closeness and distance, and it does necessarily entail constructing a sense of ‘the field’ over time, which is a distancing device in itself. That field is less bounded than it once was in my mind, product both of the way that personal lives have moved on and away from the courtyards where first I got to know people, and of the way that thinking about the ‘local’ has changed dramatically within anthropology over the same period. And while ‘the field’ may be an anthropological trope, a para-ethnographic echo of its objectification goes on when my friends hark back, in the reminiscences my visits occasion, to reflect on the changes they, like me, seek to make sense of – of which the decline of *jadu* is one part. The field is thus to some degree at least mutually constructed as a historical object.

Dipankar Gupta⁶⁴ has argued that, for modernity as a project to be successful, it is necessary for the grip of memory over collective lives to be relaxed: modernity, he insists, requires forgetting the entailments of the past, casting their shadows over the present. Such calls to forget have a chequered history. But amidst the now considerable anthropological and historical literature on memory and loss, which stresses the centrality of memory to the forging and sustaining of identity, Gupta’s more sceptical position is well summed up in his approving reference to ‘what John Updike once fetchingly called the “mire of memory”’.⁶⁵ My paper is not directly about memory or its burdens; but it is about the problematic entailments of the past, and the idea of shedding the past, my subtitle, carries a similar implication to Gupta’s. For what I depict here is the way that in one localised ethnographic case the conceptual language of the past for navigating through tensions in social relations provided by *jadu* no longer seems to carry much conviction in a fast-changing present. In this process, *jadu* is like any diagnostic technology which becomes out of date, loses its purpose, and is gradually discarded – in this case largely unnoticed and certainly unregretted. If this seems to have been relatively easily achieved it is needless to say not because jealousies and suspicions have disappeared. But it may have helped that there has been no significant ritual economy built around *jadu* and the suspicions it arouses, as I noted earlier. Without being materialised in such a ritual apparatus, *jadu* can slip almost unnoticed into insignificance, associated and objectified as a feature of K’s unusual past rather than being a stain on its present.

⁶³ Kapila, ‘The measure of a tribe’. In a rapidly growing literature on the politics of recognition, see also Alpa Shah (2007), “‘Keeping the state away’: democracy, politics, and the state in India’s Jharkhand”, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, **13**, 129-145; Sanjay Ruparelia (2008), ‘How the politics of recognition enabled India’s democratic exceptionalism’, *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, **21**, 39-56; Rochana Bajpai (2010), ‘Rhetoric as argument: social justice and affirmative action in India, 1990’, *Modern Asian Studies*, **44**, 675-708; C. Townsend Middleton (2011), ‘Across the interface of state ethnography: rethinking ethnology and its subjects in multicultural India’, *American Ethnologist*, **38**, 249-266.

⁶⁴ Dipankar Gupta (2005), *Learning to forget: the anti-memoirs of modernity*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

⁶⁵ Gupta, *Learning to forget*, p. 16.