

CHAPTER 5 CLIMATE IDENTITIES

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Chapter Abstract

Chapter 5: Climate Identities

This chapter discusses how climate change as discourse can affect how governance occurs in practice. It outlines how the intimate governance of the environment and development might affect how people see themselves as 'unaware'. It proceeds to discuss how climate change is not only affecting the seasons, the soil and the forests, but that it carries the potential to mould how people view themselves in relation to the world.

Chapter 5 Climate Identities

The Basant season of spring stretches through the lunar month of Phālgun, corresponding to mid-February to mid-March and into first half of Čaīt in late March. With just over one month's durée, spring is shortest season in the village.

The mornings in spring are increasingly lukewarm, as the sun will more often gather strength to break the layer of fog, making the morning baths a less panicky task. The jug of cool water is poured carefully from a plastic ten-litre bucket, skilfully distributed to cover a whole-body scrub, lather and rinse. After the bath, a thorough cleaning of the mouth follows. This is normally done outside, whilst slowly wandering about or hunching down for an early morning chat. Some brush their teeth with market-bought toothpaste and a toothbrush, others prefer the 'dental stick', a freshly picked twig from the Neem-trees of the vicinity.

Closer to seven, a small bell is rung, indicating that Prakash's mother, Bhagwati, has initiated the morning worship (pūja) in front of the household shrine. The first bread is always given to a cow (or a buffalo in the lack of a cow), for Krishna and for auspiciousness. The men, back to separate seating, are served next. Sitting cross legged on the woven beds of the common room, or straight on the cool concrete if feeling warm, they watch a local news-broadcast flicker in dusty colours on the boxed television set whilst eating. The women will, after men and children are served, sit cross legged on the earthen kitchen floor, as the housewife prepares the bread with clarified butter, salt and chili, and refills cups of tea as they eat. Whilst others get ready for a day of work, in the house, in the forest or in the fields, the housewife can finally eat. The leftovers are given to the 'house dog', the semi-tamed dog who is never cuddled, but always fed. In return, it will - almost certainly, at least if awake and in the mood - bark when strangers approach and keep the bands of macaque monkeys away from cereals and food grains drying on the roof.

The women, and the men who have no paid labour, tie scarves around their heads to shield from the dust and go about their business. The factory workers have already left off on their Bajaj's or Hero Honda's (light motorbikes) with their lunchboxes hanging around their neck. Children walk off to the local primary school, or down to the cul-de-sac where they are most likely picked up by a bus, a bus that usually, but certainly not always, runs all the way to the end of the district road. Their hair, long for the girls, short for the boys, never budges an inch. Their shoes are always black, preferably shining - but more often worn (and several sizes too big, because they have been inherited or bought to fit for years to come).

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After the cool winter with its occasional rain, there are flowers everywhere. White, from the neem, yellow and orange from the lantana bush. Those women who have the land, will hand-till manure into the soil of their kitchen gardens, and plant lady fingers, coriander, and fenugreek (methī), which is dried and used both as a spice and as medicine. The fenugreek especially it is thought to prevent the increasingly common occurrences of diabetes (sugar bīmārī). Tomatoes are still being harvested from the winter's growing season, but there are few of them left now. Soon, tomato-based dishes will give way to white soups, thickened with chickpea flour, with bites of the local radish (mūlī).

As the wheat sown in winter slowly matures, one must be careful not to mistake the green and the fresh, unripe wheat (kanak) for grass fodder. The wild antelope (nīlgāī) and the swamp deer (barasingha) are not that picky eaters, so the men move out on their fields to protect their crop against the night-time grazers. From midnight to dawn, the farmers stay awake, and try to scare the bovids away with flashing lights.

On the advent of Āit, the days grow warmer, and the wheat is turning yellow. The first large harvest of the season is the mustard. Earlier on, some of its leaves had been harvested for the regional spiced green vegetable dish served with the yellow maize bread (sarson ka sāg), but now the plant has turned white and dry. For weeks, there will be the rhythmical hammering of the wooden bats on the rooftops, beating the mustard bellows for the tiny, black seed to pop out. Some seeds are kept for spices, the rest is pressed in a machine somewhere and made into oil, used both for food and hair.

One day, two female teachers who previously had been stationed in the village as part of their rotational duty, stopped by the household. I remember being called to greet them. I found the women of the house gathered in the backroom, where Prakash's daughters shared a double bed. The teachers were sitting cross legged on the bed, and asked me to sit with them, whilst the women from my household sat on the floor. Curious about my business in the village, they began asking me about myself and my husband. Answering, I took good care to not mention my husband by his name, but instead I referred to him as "Jon's father". I had been taught by the women of the house never to speak his name, as every time I said it out loud, one year would be taken from his life. When the teachers heard how I spoke, they looked at each other and immediately burst out laughing, proceeding to mock those ways of speaking and behaving that the village women had taught me was polite and good behaviour. They proceeded to inquire, and scolding the villagers for making me braid my hair and not wear it loose, as city women would these days, and were aghast that I did not dare to whistle indoors (or in the village) (I had been told not to, as it could attract malevolent spirits). All of this was ridiculous, they said. Later in the day, when the teachers had left, I met Nirmala outside our room. I wanted so badly to tell her, that no matter what the teachers had said, I did not see her inferior to them, and that she would always have my respect. In my rickety Hindi, I tried to convey the meaning of her being equal to the teachers as best as I could. She just shook her head, disapprovingly. "They are not like us. We will never become equal. We are just people of the soil (mittī)", she said, and returned to her work.

These days, everyone worked late with refining the ginger, which had been drying white under the sun for over a month on the roofs. Whole families sit on the rooftops during the day now, cutting and drying the ginger in manual, webbed turning-machines, making the air of Rani Mājri rich with ginger debris. The dust makes the nose bubble with sneezes, and men and

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women tie scarves in front of their faces as they work. Perfectly dried, the ginger is now ready to be sold to a trader in Delhi, at 2000 Rs. a kg. The landowners pool their lot after weighing and measuring their contributions. After the first part of spring harvest is over, and the school exams all have been completed, many enjoy the short break before the harvesting of the wheat. Many children will be away for school holidays visiting relatives, the lack of play and crying and laughter makes the village feel empty for a week or two.

About now, the dry maize and rice-grass fodder from the rabī harvest will come to an end for many of those who have buffaloes and cows, increasing dependence on wet fodder. The decline in fodder affects lactation for many cattle, and people begin to complain about lack of milk. In the evenings, that are increasingly warm, the sounds of the petrol-driven threshing machines that mix the dry and wet fodder fill the air. The old, manual ones are quieter, only creaking a little in their rusty joints. When the threshing machines have stopped, a longing peacock's call breaks the silence of night.

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Even if I never observed others being as directly crude in their face to face conversations as the case of the teachers above, villagers were often talked about and approached as *backward*. This was based upon being perceived as living in a world immersed with ghosts and customs without scientific explanations. Certain practices and beliefs could thus reinforce a certain stereotype of the rural hill villager as being in need of *awareness*, campaigned in the projects, schemes and stunts described in Chapter 3. But what kind of an awareness is that? What makes it so different from other ways of being aware? And why does it matter?

Being Climate Change Aware

For an international traveler in Delhi and Chandigarh of 2013, climate change was “everywhere”. In the high-street markets selling imported global brands such as clothes by Nike, Adidas and Benetton, or mobile phones and televisions from LG, Samsung and Nokia, climate change with environmental connotations would show up on posters, on calendars, along the street one could pass signs advertising for new ‘eco-friendly’ and ‘green’ neighbourhoods and at the hotel there would be gentle reminders to save the environment on hotel doors. Reading a local, English-written newspaper, or when strolling about in the urban malls, the words ‘climate change’, ‘living green’, and ‘eco-sensitive’ was certainly everywhere to be seen for tourists and locals dining and shopping in air conditioned hotels and malls. Amongst the Indian lower middle-class citizens in Chandigarh with whom I was acquainted, however, the term *global warming* was used more often than climate change.

“Seven years back we could not sit outside like this, it would be too cold. Now - it is like this, with the global warming and everything”, Smita, our middle aged Jat Sikh landlord sighed, as we sat on the patio in front of her house in the mild December sun of 2012. Her neighbour too, a landowner with a large farm estate further south in Haryana, was genuinely worried. The worst thing about farming these days, he said, was the government’s slack taxation on imported foods from China, but global warming on top of that, had made his former occupation almost impossible. “(...) It has become all unpredictable. One year it will rain too much, and fields will be flooded, then the next year there is drought (...). It’s the global warming”, he said, shaking his head.

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Asking around in the cities about concern for the state of the environment or about climate change, indicated that most people thought environmental issues certainly were an issue, for sure, but on a global scale, and somewhere else than in Chandigarh. A middle school teacher in Rani Mājri, upon interviewing her in her Chandigarh home, said that people in the city would never be truly concerned about environmental decay, as the environment, from their perspective, looked 'all right'. The villagers of Rani Mājri least of all, she said, who *lived* in the greenery. "Those people who travel out, they will think differently about things" she said and continued, "such as with your snow in Norway, becoming less, that is how *you* notice the global warming is taking place". Student volunteers working explicitly with raising environmental awareness, would argue the same. There were several associations working on environmental issues in the city, like Deeksha, Sapling, the Environment Society of India (E.S.I.) and the international 'Association Internationale des Étudiants en Sciences Économiques et Commerciales' (A.I.E.S.E.C.). They were, according to their webpages at least, variously engaged in recycling, tree-planting and general awareness-raising through school workshops and "awareness-camps". The then leader of AIESEC's environmental branch, a young, male economy student from Punjab University, admitted that there had been little enthusiasm amongst people. At university, he explained, little awareness-raising was going on. He himself had become "aware" of climate change and its effect on the environment from watching the Indian Discovery Channel. He thought that the 'greenery' of the student's surroundings was in fact blinding them from what was happening. "Living here one does not see the problems", he explained.

In Rani Mājri, few actively used, or were acquainted with the word *climate change*, *global warming* or *environment*, with a few notable exceptions. The lack of transmission of the climate change word, thus partly reflect quite well why the villagers appeared 'unaware' of climate change. Their lack of education could also explain their apparent unacquaintance with the associated issues with pollution, environmental deterioration and global warming. However, environmental pollution was already being talked about as *pradushan* (*pradūṣaṇ*), which became apparent when talking about the qualities that made life good, or bad, living in the "greenery".

Life in the "Greenery"

People would often say that despite being rural, they found the village a good place to live. For the youth, the village was good because it had family and friends, and a large city at a reasonable distance for education and shopping. For the adult villagers, not that interested in the latest trends or fashion, other aspects were better here than elsewhere, such as the closeness of family bonds, and being able to keep good relations with their deities. In fact, and quite interestingly, everyone would say that they also appreciated the absence of waste, pollution, and smog of the cities. Rani Mājri was regarded as good, for example, because the surroundings of the village were peaceful, or calm (*śantī*), as it lay at a distance from industry, large, motorised roads and crowds. Its slightly elevated position in the terrain also mattered as to why Rani Mājri was a good place to live. An elevated place would most likely be cool, with cool air and cool water, which always were positive qualities. The presence of wind would also make the sky clear (*sāf sūraj*), as in having no fog, nor smoke (*dhuām*), which was also regarded positive. The benevolent combination of peacefulness, elevation, wind, and coolness was thus used to describe why Rani Mājri was a good place by the people who lived there, or to describe

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somewhere even better. A visiting uncle of one of the S.C. girls with whom I was acquainted, for example, described his home village as “even better, [my place] is even more peaceful. We have almost no cars, and our water is always cold [compared to here]. In the winter, we do not even need a fridge to keep our food fresh!”, he added. This was not disputed. Many of my village friends also expressed a wish to travel higher up into the mountains to “see the view”, (or thought that I should go), to experience the coolness of the water and air.

Tidy surroundings were also a positive trait of village life. Clean, or clear (*sāf*) surroundings that were not overgrown or untended, and not littered with waste (*kūrā-karkaṭ*, or *kūrā* for short) were pretty, or nice. *Kūrā* was seen as refuse, or waste, from household and farming activities, such as plastic, paper, cardboard, cloth, ceramics, etc. The shrubs and undergrowth of the forest, or a neglected field, or a marketplace for example, were not *sāf* surroundings. If I remarked on litter gathering on hill sides, people did agree that it was indeed *ganda*, filthy, and they did not particularly like to see it gather around the village. But seeing that there was no waste disposal system, the villagers had nowhere else to throw waste and sweepings than in the *kuhl* and into the shrubby hillsides (that were untidy, anyway). Luckily, the village’s altitude helped in removing waste and sweepings. When the monsoon arrived, the masses of water would bring the waste in the *kuhl* down and away, and shrubs would overgrow much of that which stuck more permanently. As such, Rani Mājri was thus only *temporarily* polluted by litter, it was not a state of lasting and permanent condition, as was the case with the cities and the markets of the plains.

The plains, especially cities on the plains, had more of the qualities that made a place unattractive. In fact, those with relatives in the cities, such as a few S.C. families, would take bring home young city children and babies to nurse over summer, to relieve them from heat and disease. As the qualities of coolness, movement of air and calmness would reinforce each other, then heat, stillness of air and noisy crowds, tended to reinforce each other too. A Lohar farmer with whom I was acquainted, would for example ask me if I did not find Chandigarh to be too hot and uncomfortable in April? I would agree, and he would say; “The city has a lot of pollution (*bahut pradūṣaṅ hotā hai*). It is better here, here there is air/wind (*havā*), it is clean (*sāf*)”. Unclear air from exhaust, factory pipes and automobiles would not blow away, they explained, since the cities of the plains lacked wind. Stillness of air and stillness of water was also thought to bring about disease. Summer in the cities of the plains was associated with flies, bad smells, and the exposure to illness (*bīmārī*). Flies, and particularly mosquitoes, were known to lay their eggs in shady and moist locations, typically for quiet ponds and backwaters, and for places kept unclean or untidy, which the city markets epitomised. The insects of the cities were also known to carry malaria and dengue, which I was told the village mosquitoes did not. Nirmala would for example say that the malaria mosquitoes were only in the city “because it is so dirty (*ganda*) there. Dengue is also there, but not here”, she said. “Only the itchy ones are here”.

However, this state of overall superiority of environmental wellbeing was perceived to be under constant stress. This became especially clear when talking about food. The Pahaṛi potatoes, for example, were by both city and hill-folk preferred over the plains-potatoes, which were regarded as too sweet. Not only was the taste regarded as better, but the food of the rural, highland kitchen garden was thought better for your health too. When Chandigarh’s middle-class people (or their servants) went shopping for hill-farmer ‘fruits and veg’ in farmers markets, they would always look for hill-produce. The I.I.S.W.C. researchers would buy hill

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farm produce off the counter for private consumption, and the city dwelling middle school principal would regularly buy fresh buffalo milk from Prakash. There was also a clear correlation made between increased incidents of diseases such as cancer and diabetes the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides in food production, and this was a source of great concern in Rani Mājri. The villagers of Rani Mājri did not read the science¹ behind the allegations, but many had heard about the large news-stories, like the one in 2013 about the 22 schoolchildren in Bihar who died after their midday school meal had been poisoned by a pesticide, either done by accident or, as rumour would have it, intentionally (CNN 2013).

In the past, farmers would tell me, they used to fertilise only with cattle dung. However, the yield was scarce. During the 1980s, however, fertilisers and pesticides (Litt; *khetī kī davāī*: field-treatment) were introduced by 'the government people' (*sarkāri log*). In the beginning they would use only a little; a tad here and a tad there, and the results were impressive, the yield in bounty. But as the years passed, development halted, and the only thing that helped was to increase the treatment. The last 15 years they had begun to use "very much *davāī*" and many were thought to have become ill from eating local foods too. The village shopkeeper told me that someone had recently gotten ill from drinking tea. This was, he claimed, because of the sugar in it, which had come from a plot in the village they knew had received far too much fertiliser. Although a few of the people I spoke to, like Prakash and his brothers, would shrug at the talks of people becoming ill from the chemicals calling it nonsense (*bakwās*), many others perceived the difficult situation to have become more acute with the last fifteen years (since 1998), and were genuinely worried. A Rajput father and his teenage son in discussing the matter of chemical fertilisers with me, described half-jokingly, half seriously, that just like the father – who was smoking the thin cigarettes known as beedis – the earth had gotten addicted to the chemicals. Like the beedi, they were pleasing, but in the long run, they were poisonous too. "In the maize, in the wheat, in the ginger; there is this poison - even in the milk that you give your son to drink – the animals will eat the grass fodder from the fields, so the poison ends up in our milk, too", the farmer said. "What happens if you stop?" I asked. The farmer shook his head. "We cannot stop. For years, the soil will not produce enough, and we will have no food to eat". The consequence would be starvation.

Another concern was the expanding industrialisation of the area. One of the Lohar farmers I talked to about village prospects, would explicitly worry about the factories encroaching towards village land. "Everything will be dirty (*ganda*), and all the smog (*dhuwāñ*) that will come with it..." he said, shaking his head worried. They were aware of the regulations of the "Eco-Sensitive-Zone" in which the village was located, but there seemed to be less faith in it being a permanent protective measure. These worries were connected to demands made by the Haryana Chamber for Industry and Commerce, for 'free industrial zones' to boost industrialisation and growth. In such zones, industries could be allowed to buy land directly from the farmer.

In the village, most, if not all of those I interviewed on the issue, were also worried about the forest waning. The S.C. population would tend to blame the landholders of the central village for depleting the forest (as they did with the loss of water). "They have fields and land (*khet aur zamīn*), so why do they have to use the forest? If they stop using it, it will regrow!", a S.C. woman said grudgingly, when we talked about measures to keep the forest. The Rajputs, however would mainly blame the government. According to the old Lambardar, in the days of

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his youth, the village fields might have given a marginal yield, but the goats would graze the forest adjoining the village, where fodder, fruits and berries were readily available. The trees of the forest were used for Ayurveda medicine, but with the forest disappearing, the interest for it amongst the younger generations has waned too, he explained. Now, he sighed, no one remembered how to get the medicine that was in the trees and the plants.

“[Those days] it would rain a lot, on an 8-8-day cycle. It made everything clean. And all these fruits were to be found in the forest: the mango, guava, jujube, the *koronta*, *medheer* and *kangoo*². There were many animals too: sparrow, crow, deer, antelope, cheetah, peacocks...there is less of everything now. First came the hunters that killed the animals. The government said nothing. Then the British Raja cut the forests down. Now all that is left is the reserved forest”.

(Retired village Lambardar, born around 1940)

I also found the villagers drawing a very strong correlation between forest and rainfall, and what the elderly Lambardar argues above is in line with the desiccation theory,³ that forests ‘draw’ or help produce, rain in clouds, and that deforestation thus causes ‘desiccation’, a thorough drying up. This was a notion most villagers saw as a fact, and that they shared with the local development officer Mr. Sharma and the scientist R.C. Gupta at S.P.A.C.E.; who both argued that if there is more forest there will be more rain, and with the rains come clouds that cool the earth.

Despite these real felt concerns, outside a few dedicated offices, “no one really cared”, to cite one of the scientists at I.I.S.W.C., about the environment of the Shivalik Hills. This reflects how little the environment seems to concern the Indian middle class (and Indian media) in general (e.g. Ranjan, 2019 a, b). In the Yale-funded Study on Climate Change Communication by A. Leiserowitz and J. Thaker (2012) this same tendency of being aware of global warming, but not linking it explicitly to environmental issues or human emission of greenhouse gases is pointed out. The study shows that even if people in India respond to surveys saying they observe changes in the overall weather and climate patterns, they do so “without understanding the broader issue of global climate change”, and that the level of awareness on climate change and its related issues were especially low amongst the illiterate (where they find that 50% have not heard of climate change), contrasted to those with high school graduate degrees (where 13% responded that they had not heard about it).

Confirming Leiserowitz and Thaker’s 2012 study, in Rani Mājri of 2013, climate change in its scientific guise was, indeed, a relatively unknown concept, although global warming, was not. The apparent unawareness of the word or concept of climate change could not be purely about the villagers’ lack of English proficiency. Most government officers were at least relatively local, and many spoke the local dialect, or the more centralised Hindi when executing the campaigns, schemes, and projects. To be aware of climate change, seems to be more than being aware of a word. It seems the awareness draws upon a configuration of processes: global warming, carbon emissions and environmental decay, and their relation, where humans are active mediators who tinker with the ecological balance as benevolent or malevolent agents.

In 2013 at least, it seemed that the exposure to the particular configuration of human emissions-global warming-environmental decay was conveyed through higher education and international media. Climate change as a concept, thus belonged to those well-connected people, in the well-

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connected places. The villagers of Rani Mājri were not that well-connected. If they went to Chandigarh, Panchkula or the Rajiv Gandhi Technology-Park, it was to seek treatment at a cheap government hospital or stand for hours in line at the public service offices, or once, upon my initiative, to apply for a job (but the girls did not even pass the front gate). They would never visit any hotels informing the traveling guests in English about the precarious state of the Shivalik hills, nor would they visit the upscale markets or air conditioned shopping malls, where “eco” and “green” choices were pushed in English at every café, restroom and store. None of the active student environmentalists I met during my stay expressed a wish to visit the hills and concentrated their activism on projects in urban city schools or recruiting city children for ‘awareness camps’. It rather seemed like no one would travel into the more peripheral villages of the hills unless they had family still residing there. In fact, when we told people in Chandigarh, be it the shop-keeper, the washer man or college lecturers that we were going to live in a Shivalik hill village, we were immediately warned of “backward”, “drunken” and “criminal” people. The local media would regularly reinforce the image of the unruly and drunken hill villager, mostly males accused of murder, theft and rape, and the image was rarely adjusted by actual encounters. When I at one point discussed the cloudburst and the devastating landslides in Uttarakhand with an acquaintance in Chandigarh, and told him that in Rani Mājri, people thought that the flood had to do with the anger of Shiva (see Chapter 6), he shook his head in disbelief; “There are no educated people in the villages. This is about science!” (Lit: “*Paṛhe-likhe log nāhīn haīn gānw maīn. Yah science ke bāre mem hai!*”).

To be exposed to the concept of climate change, it would be through the scientists or public officials going to the village for work or research, or through media and public education. As we saw in Chapter 3, the teachers refrained from teaching the students about the environment, seeing they already lived in “the greenery”, and asking the public officers, NGO workers and teachers about why they did not talk to the villagers about issues of global warming in relation to the environment or to climate change, there was a tendency to excuse the lack of dialogue with farmers in these areas upon them being “backward”, “underdeveloped” and “undereducated”.

Television was by far the information network that would reach the most, but the villagers would only afford to subscribe to the ‘cheaper’ channel packages airing a few local news channels, and entertainment: religious shows, soap operas or music videos. The radio was a relic which was, together with land-line telephones, a remnant of the past, and never used during my stay. Few would ever see an English written newspaper, and in fact, even local newspapers were by 2013 not purchasable in the small village shop. Aadit, a young man from the Lohar caste, was far more exposed to the concepts than anyone else I met. One day I stopped by to see him and his wife Gina, who had recently given birth to their first born, a baby-girl. They had withdrawn to their bedroom to watch the TV, and I was invited in to see the girl. Soon he began to flick between the channels. His family was the only one I was aware of who could afford the more luxurious channel packages, and to be kind he found an English-speaking channel for me – the Indian Discovery Channel. It was incidentally displaying dramatised images of the melting snow and icecaps of the Himalayas. “In 30 years, there will be nothing left” the TV presenter said, in that highly dramatised voice that characterise these popular science shows. “Look”, Aadit said; “that’s global warming” (*global warming hai*). A newly educated insurance agent from an urban college, Aadit would collect and record rainfall-data for the I.I.S.W.C. and managed their more technical equipment in their absence.

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Neither his father however, nor his wife, knew anything about “global warming”. Very few (if any) villagers born before 1985, seemed familiar with the concepts of “climate change” or “environmental” either. It was easier for people who worked with development or conservation, it seemed, to talk to the villagers about things they could more easily relate to – the forest, the water, the soil.

The middle-aged taxi driver whom we often used to travel to and from the village, would often sigh and said he pitied the farmer’s children, crammed into buses and over-filled auto rickshaws on their way to study in the plains’ colleges. They are being bypassed literally, and metaphorically, he said, as we drove past them in our private car. Being Pahari, then, was not only being from, or off the mountains – it was to be different – a certain difference in lifestyle in stark contrast to the perceived ‘progressed’ lifestyle amongst the urban population.

These stereotypes of the hill peasant have a history, and they interweave with a particular relationship with the hill villagers and the forest, or wilderness. This follows, as I see it, a longer history of urban–rural relationships in India. The British colonial government associated forested (*jangli* or *jungle*) landscapes with the absence of civilisation and positioning the people living in these hills as the 'other' of western civilised culture (Dove 1992:243, see also Agrawal, 2005 and Knudsen, 2011). The Indian state continued the colonial practices and aligned forest and hill (rural) people firmly on the side of “nature⁴”, and the plains (urban) people on the side of “culture” (Dove 1992:239). On being Pahari back in the mid-1960s, Berreman (1978) in his fieldwork in rural Garhwal, now a district in Uttarakhand, notes how “the Pahari represent a way of (...) exhibiting a number of distinctive features of social organisation, religion, economy, and technology sufficient to make them seem quite strange, unorthodox, and *jangli* (“uncivilised”) to the people of the plains” (Berreman 1978:330), and even today, the alignment of rural, forest people with wilderness and disorder, persists, as people who do not “obey the norms and laws of the country” (Dove, 1992:239).

Their backward state was obviously constituted by their ‘traditional’ way of life, with outdated customs and practices, or worse, poor impressions of ‘modern’ ways of life. Rekha, who married into the village at the time of my stay, explained it quite well when she told me about her difficulties of adjusting to the life in the hills. Not defining herself as a Pahari (she came from a small farm on the nearby plains), she compared her natal home to her new home in the following manner:

You know, this is a hilly area. People here are not progressive thinking...thinking things like...women should not have employment (*naukri*). My village is on the plains, our thinking is more like in the city. There, a woman can ride on a scooter, and have a job. Life is easier.

Rekha, 22

They were seen to lack many amenities of modern lifestyles, such as washing machines, water-heaters, air conditioners, accessible markets, broadband internet connection, but also awareness, of fashions, trends and changing ideologies, be they of women’s rights, plastic waste or ecologically grown foods. That this backwardness had become deeply rooted in their sense of selves, was expressed quite clearly by Nirmala’s comment, above, and many in the village would describe themselves as “backward” to me, and the complex feeling of being left ‘behind’

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is somewhat characteristic for the “postcolonial condition”, argues Gupta (2000). But being rural also seemed to entail a certain relationship with the past, and with what was popularly referred to as “the greenery”, the forest, the hills. This was also, quite interestingly, becoming a part of being Pahari that was idealised by certain parts of society, as being more sensitive folks, gentler perhaps, and more “in touch with nature”.

Deprived of Science, Bestowed with Eco-Sensitivity?

When I talked to the highly educated and globally-oriented youth engaged in charity, non-profit NGOs, or studies at university, some would express a longing for the ‘simple’ rural ways of living, which the hills seemed to epitomise. A small, upper class minority of young adults would also actively seek experiences with “the wild” through trekking outside the tourist trails. As Tsing (2005) describe the provincial Indonesian “nature lovers” to be part of a class formation, this would also be true for this segment of young, urban Indians who, alongside international visitors, would actively seek “eco-lodges” etc. In fact, in 2010, a whole 64.8 million rupees (app. \$ 1 million) was set aside for Eco-Tourism activities in the state; log huts, tented accommodation, nature trails etc. All done, to cite the 2010 Haryana Chief Minister, Mr. Bhupinder Singh Hooda, “to bring people closer to nature” (Haryana Government 2010).

Following the global trend of sharing experiences on social media, the Indian “nature lovers” also expressed their longing for, or experiences with, “real” nature through large sharing platforms like Facebook and Instagram, or in personal blogs like the impressively comprehensive “Hills of Morni” by A. Dhillon, (aka Mornee Tramp). I cite:

The laid-back life on the hills is the closest one can get to paradise. (...). The absence of traffic and the stink of the urban chaos. The clouds that swim into your homes. The simple hill folks. (...). It’s no coincidence that all the sages and rishis of ancient India sought the refuge of the hills for quietude and for experiencing divinity. There is something about hills that brings calmness to the heart. The experience of being ‘in-sync’ with nature and God. (...) The road to Morni takes you nowhere else. There is no money to be made. No room for the profiteers. But there is romance. There is peace.

(Mornee Tramp 2016)

This portrayal of the hills and their peoples in tourist advertising online seems to have grown over the years. The travel-inspiration profile “HeaveninHimachal” on the social media platform Instagram, for example was established in 2018 and had by 2020 over 30.000 followers. The profile provides daily updates from Himachal Pradesh through stunning images, promoting the scenic tourist destinations of the region as well as images depicting “proud Pahari culture”, such as women making *makki ki roti* (traditional round flatbread of corn flour) or dancing local dances in scenic environs. Their posts are in a contemporary tone of environmental concern, and are always signed “Hills Are Vulnerable, Say No to Plastic, Snacks And Water Bottles. Save Himalayas Don’t Litter on Mountains. Help Your Mother Nature, Help Yourself. PROUD TO BE PAHARI” [Sic] (Heaven in Himachal 2020).

For this segment, nature has become transcendent and romantic, and is as such characteristic of what Tsing finds to be a “key distinction of cosmopolitan youth” (Tsing, 2005:130). As the

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same social media platforms now boasting “Pahāri pride” were also increasing in popularity amongst the handful of older youth in Rani Mājri with access to smart phones (often a Chinese low-market brand), a reflecting self-portrayal to that of Instagram-friendly village life appeared. To be taken pictures of in the fields, or in the kitchen cooking wearing the every-day traditional *shalwār-qamīz* suits was certainly not the scene they wanted to portray. If a camera appeared in those settings, teenagers especially would turn away or veil. The waterfall of the village, however, was a popular site for taking pictures with one’s smart phones, and to be shared on social media. Here, girls would smile, laugh, and strike playful poses for the photographer. These image sessions were well staged, in more elaborate and new *shalwār-qamīz* suits, wearing perfect makeup, sometimes even posing with their hair in ponytails with a puffed front (called ‘fancy’ style), and in western style outfits like tight fitted pants and T-shirts. The girls were always in touch with trending colours, patterns and styles, even if they seldom could afford to follow them. Serene landscapes, such as waterfalls, or open mountain views were considered beautiful (*sundar*) backgrounds that could be photo-montaged into their wedding photos or on pictures posted on their Facebook and Instagram profiles. The village youth’s self-representations thus largely reflected the idyllic images taken by visitors to the hills.

As the relationship between ‘progress’ and the ‘past’ is complex, undoubtedly ever-changing, and the self-identity of any Shivalik hills farmer hard to capture and express by a foreign anthropologist, I still believe my observations do carry some relevance towards noting, perhaps, a changing reflection of what being Pahāri means to the Pahāri themselves.

Nevertheless, people did seem unacquainted with science, as well as with the grand theories of how the world worked. Especially the young and the women with whom I spent time with, would for months only answer “I do not know”. If I asked why they would give me caraway for my stomach pains, or why they added organic manure to a field every fourth year, or why one shouldn’t walk the trail towards the waterfall in mid-day sunshine, or why chemical fertilisers were bad, the most common response was that I should ask their husbands, or even the “educated people” (i.e. not them). It didn’t occur to me at the time, that they saw their kind of ‘knowing’ as representing all that made them “backwards” in the eyes of teachers, scientists and government officers, the educated people that knew the ‘right’ reason, for these things to work. When villagers are unable to explain why they use branches from the Neem-tree to keep their gums and teeth from decaying, it was just as “backward” as acting awkwardly respectful when meeting an Anglo-Saxon visitor, and leave his or her handshaking “hello” hang for a shy and traditional “namaste”. Only after I had spent a good four months in the village, did women trust me enough, to tell me the about “superstitious” rituals, fear of ghosts, or their stance on local political or social issues (it turned out that women too, had strong opinions on the local parties shifting alliances with the Bharatiya Janata Party (B.J.P.) and the Indian National Congress Party), the level of corruption in government education, and what imported goods from China did to their local economy. One could thus be easily fooled that the villagers – women and lower castes especially, in lacking the language or the boldness to express their knowledge - did not wield any form of theoretical or abstract knowledge of the world. That is a faulty conclusion to draw. I would argue, that even for many males, the lack of sharing their views or theories, had more to do with the genuine insecurity about whether their knowledge was validated by an accepted authority, such as a scientist, a teacher, a government employee or the Brahmin priest. They were, sadly enough, afraid that I would laugh at them or scorn them for being uneducated – as they were used to.

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This ultimately hyphens the role of what kind of knowledge is needed to be aware of climate change. What 'kind' of knowledge that should be allowed to inform your perception of the world, thus also the *whys* and *hows* of global warming, play a central part in crafting what could be called "climate change identities". This relates to how people's, especially rural or village people's knowledge about the environment for example, often appear polarised in a dichotomous relationship between 'scientific' knowledge and 'traditional' knowledge. These dichotomous forms of knowledge continuously reappear, both in scientific studies on Indian 'environmental awareness', and well as in Indian everyday conversation, politics and policy. The debate around whether Hindus have an essentially different concept of pollution to "westerners" because of a conflation of ritual and physical dirt must be briefly addressed here. Older people in the village would use the word *gande* (lit.: filthy, dirty, foul), not 'pradushan', when describing garbage or smog from factories. Incidentally, they used the same word, *gande*, when describing the S.C.s, soil, or nail clippings. But does the conflation of the word, dirt/filth extend to conflate ritual and environmental pollution in to one? My own material does not indicate such a thing. On practical level in Rani Mājri at least, people seemed quite clear on the difference between ritual and physical pollution. Here I follow Haberman (2006) who, doing fieldwork amongst worshippers of the environmentally polluted River of Yamuna, argues that that if these are at all related, it is because the environmental degradation of the Yamuna is both an ecological problem, and a religious crisis (Haberman 2006:1).

The dichotomy however, of 'spiritual or religious knowledge' and 'modern or scientific knowledge' appears mainly in two guises. The first, is arguing that the western, scientific kind of knowledge somehow eradicate the local, traditional kind by imposing a different sort of rationality, one that is context-independent and more universalist. In some cases, this argument has been an important tool for vocalising marginalised people's right to be heard. Argyrou (2005) for example, has pointed out in his critical book on 'environmentalism', that the dualism has enabled certain people, on the basis of their lifestyles as 'non-western', to portray themselves as "victims of a monumental historical misunderstanding", and "as living embodiments of an urgently needed ethic of respect for nature, as repositories of a simple, yet profound wisdom that the West has long lost in its heedless march for progress" (Argyrou 2005:viii). In these more extreme cases, certain archetypes of knowledge might even appear as more 'natural' to certain cultures than the other. For example, some studies argue that the Hindu, or Indian (i.e. non-western) mind is 'traditional' in its essence. Nelson (1998) for example, indicates quite clearly in his edited reader on Indian religion and its relationship to ecology, that the essential Hindu tradition is entirely "eco-sensitive". He further argues that the 'traditional' people of India live in a "Hindu universe, [which] though under siege, is still very much alive" (Nelson 1998:7, italics added). This rhetoric carries much sentiment for Hindu nationalists, and the blurring of the boundaries between religious environmentalism and Hindu nationalism is well known (see Nanda 2002 and Mawdsley 2010). Here, I appreciate the works of Scott (1998) and Turnbull (2005), as well as Hastrup (2013) who argue that the abstract and practical forms of knowledge are messier, more closely related, and more complex in their archaeology than how they first appear. Although I sympathise with the notion that certain forms of knowing the world are indeed vanishing as generations that held them die out, and the new generations are unable to reproduce them because the context in which they grow up are so different, I am deeply uncomfortable with the essentialisation of Hindu eco-sensitivity, or what we might call the oriental ecologist approaches (Bruun and Kalland 1995, Huber and Pedersen 1997). The idea that environmental perceptions are more 'spiritual' in the religions of the "East" than in the protestant and capitalist nations of the "West", is as naïve as it is

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reductionist. Even if the Hindu deities do dwell in the Shivalik Hills, there is no guarantee they would want to preserve the environment for human benefit nor do they seem to align with the current discourse of Sustainable Development (see Adams 2009). Berti (2015) describe a case where a North Indian deity's dwelling place was declared part of the Great Himalayan National Park in 1999. The deity, through a human medium, disagreed on the park rules to forbid all access to the forest to preserve it (Berti 2015:120). The conflict of interest of the human medium aside (which would in any case only underscore the will of the local, Hindu population), Berti's main argument is still that there is no guarantee of a god-controlled nature concurring with the ecologist argument. In some cases, a god-controlled nature might very well be "the main argument that prompts villagers, with their gods, to oppose the way an environmental protection policy is implemented" (Berti 2015:13).

The second guise of a polarized view on knowledge, could be used to argue that people's practices and perceptions about forests or weather or farming are 'traditional' in a destructive sense, where their 'unawareness' cause a detrimental effect upon the environment.

Only after being 'modernized' and 'aware' after institutional transformation, can they be trusted to self-govern (Adams 2009). This relates quite explicitly to the kind of awareness propagated by the government in the 'junctions' described in Chapter 3. At its worst, the segregation of knowledge into 'traditional' and 'modern', can serve to simplify and essentialise "westerners" and "easterners" alike. The consequence might very well be, that people appear as alienated species with competing and conflicting ways of knowing the world. It is time to look at how climate change as a concept with a certain configuration in history in a more discourse-oriented approach.

Climate Change as a Discourse

As I outlined in the introduction, knowledge about climate change, what it does and how to best address it, is transmitted through a myriad of sources. It passes through state government offices, through United Nation-roundtable discussions, editorial offices, and non-governmental organisations, to mention a few. It is here that climate change data on ocean acidification and increased global temperatures departs from being numbers and graphs in models, charts and meteograms stops being just a name for a climatological phenomenon, and appears entwined with corporate and diplomatic interests, state self-determination rights and human rights. In a bewildering nexus of interrelated issues, climate change is thus increasingly addressed as a wicked problem, not only because there are so many unknown factors to the ecological dialectic of how species depend on external factors, but in that it ceases to be a scientifically objective measure of the meteorological condition of the globe, and becomes a social, political and economic issue. One expression of this, is how climate change appears more and more as a meta-discourse, encapsulating and surpassing the complex relationship between development and conservation, and providing instead an encompassing worldview of how the world 'best' proceeds. It is here, that scientific facts are caught up in *climate change discourses*, embedded and reinforced by decades of conflicting interests and visions of societies should or should not develop in relation to others. An example of how that happens, is Myanna Lahsen's work on how this discourse of climate change gets tangled up in more complex global relations of trade, national sovereignty, and policymaking in Brazil (Lahsen 2009). Through tracing forest resource management policy implications in the context of climate change, Lahsen indicates that knowledge of climate change as a physical, real process with potency to foresee into the uncertain future has become more than just a scientific fact, it is also becoming an essential

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element of political rhetoric, and for moving substantial amounts of money through the funding and financing of institutes, projects, and business enterprises. Climate change as discourse wields structural power.

To address climate change as a discourse is important, as Leichenko and O'Brien (2019) argue; addressing the discourse is to address what understanding of what kind of problem climate change appears to be, and subsequently the appropriate action taken. In his 'Archaeology of Knowledge', Foucault (1995) explains his use of discourse as knowledge being caught up in a system of references, a group of statements that belong to a single system of formation (ibid:108). As Foucault's notion of power is elusive, and "not located in a privileged place or position, but in the relationship itself" (Deleuze 1999:26,27), discourse too, is neither to be found here nor there, but in the relation and the actions that derive from it. The discourse is then manifesting "as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1995:49). With Foucault, many discourses can thus be said to exist at the same time, competing in a discursive field. To argue that there is a discourse of climate change then, still allows for people to disagree on the technicalities around its cause and consequences, as long as they participate in the same "conceptual field" (ibid.:126). It does not have to be that certain statements are hushed into silence on purpose, but rather, that they exist under "the positive conditions of a complex group of relations" (Foucault 1995:45). These relations can be seen with Foucault as being primary, i.e. independent of discourse (in the case of climate change, that the globe is warming at unprecedented rate), and secondary: what can be said about it (for example, why is climate change happening, and what ought be done about it). These secondary relations depend on discourse, a certain contextual web of "true" statements. The discourse of climate change then, will consist of a particular, and presupposed way, of looking at the process of global warming, one that defines what is possible to talk about as being the primary driver or the ultimate solution of climate change. How the local discourse of climate change unfolds, in other words, shapes the awareness of the problem.

Let us here pause here. Climate Change as phenomenon is defined by experts and takes place within a certain discourse where humans play a central role in mitigating or increasing its effects upon the globe. Climate change awareness is something that is being campaigned about, by a wide range of actors. The U.N. has been one of the foremost institutions asserting the need for climate change knowledge and policy with all governments, and they have been particularly influential in shaping the discourse of climate change through their Climate Change Panel Environmental Program, and through their own non-profit communications bureau, G.R.I.D., dedicated to communicating environmental and climate change awareness in political and decision-making networks (see, for example G.R.I.D.-Arendal, 2020). U.N.E.P. also provides lessons in the field of global awareness-raising, in a program that even received the 2007 Nobel Prize Prize (with Al Gore) "for their efforts to build up and disseminate greater knowledge about man-made climate change, and to lay the foundations for the measures that are needed to counteract such change" (The Nobel Foundation, 2014). Although a leading actor, the United Nations is not alone in generating international discourse on environmental issues. Individual states, too, wield much of the same power, accepting or declining advices from the United Nations, they formulate their own climate policies and build political careers on environmental policy or climate change adaptations. What is all this awareness for, one might ask?

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A few years ago, there seemed to be an assumption among scientists that the reason why people did not change their behaviour to more sustainable living, was their lack of knowledge. The knowledge argument was by Norgaard (2011) found insufficient as explanation (she suggests instead states of denial), but the global community still seems adamant that knowledge – or awareness rather – is key. The European Climate Adaptation Platform Climate – A.D.A.P.T. (2015) states that the intention of climate change awareness campaigns is “to achieve long-term lasting behavioural changes”. All over the world powerful actors of state, religion and market, are directed at changing human behaviour. But what kind of behaviour do they want? Is it a different kind of behaviour than the kind of behaviour which, in Rani Mājri, appeared as explicit instructions on how to live their lives, ranging from how they best should do their farming, to how they could save water when brushing their teeth?

In the discourse of climate change, as in both the development and the environmentalist discourse, people are expected to gain what anthropologist Kay Milton (2002) calls a “planetary concern” (Milton 2002:170), aimed to mobilise, on behalf of overall humanity, action that produce a sustainable future for humans on planet earth. This is no less than what Tsing (2005) has called a ‘universal dream’, the “something we cannot not want” - another example of which is world peace (Tsing 2005:8). In this case, the aim is to solve problems implicated by climate change, mass extinction or pollution. The idea of the universal, however, is thought to belong to a western mindset, and “contrasted with more local or indigenous forms of knowledge and being” (Tsing 2005:8), inherent in a modernist paradigm.

As we have seen above, in India, the discourse on climate change does not appear without historical context, neither does it appear independent to other discourses. It is rather seen to draw heavily on those of development and environmentalism described in Chapter 3, enveloped within the one of climate change, and enforced through the trope of sustainable development (Griessler and Littig 2005). As Dubash (2012) in his edited volume on climate change and policy argue, both the developmental and the environmental discourses can be said to have been appropriated on the state level, engulfed by climate change as one encompassing approach (ibid.:7–9,16). As Argyrou (2005) argues, to educate people into an ‘environmentally aware’ state, is very much related to notions of modernity. This relation, he argues, produces “the same sort of global power relations and the same sort of logic that marks the modernist paradigm at its core” (Argyrou 2005:x). Inherent in the western, scientific discourse around climate change, with its associated implications and its mitigations, is a notion of how humans should and ought to relate to the environment and our fellow beings. These discourses as we have seen, firmly place humans “at two’s” with nature. This is rather ironic, as following Ingold (1995, 2000, 2011), Chakrabarty (2009a, 2009b), Hulme (2009) and Rosa (2019) for example, disengagement (or lack of change in behaviour) might rather be looked at as being a problem of humans perceiving themselves as being ‘removed’ from ‘the climate’ through insisting that humans are disconnected as it were, from their environs. This detachment leaves dispassion, thus no true agitation that can make humans change their current unsustainable behaviour. This, argues Ingold, has been central to the contemporary environmental crisis, because it entails a humanity that no longer immerse itself within the world, but rather removes itself from it. This act of removal, however, must be taught.

As discourses affects the capacity of a system’s structuring power on the individual, can climate change as discourse change how people think about themselves? As we have seen, the sole

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reason for awareness-raising in Rani Mājri, drew its force from on the villager's lack of scientific, technical, and rational form of knowledge. According to Agrawal (2005), a transformation happened through the Kumaonis self-regulation, one that changed how people "think about their actions, positively or negatively, in relation to the environment" (ibid.:17), thus crafting an 'environmentality'. To Agrawal, environmentality was what let the colonial, and the post-colonial Indian state shape, or form, 'environmental subjects': "people who have come to think and act in new ways in relation to the environment", or: "for whom the environment constitutes a critical domain of thought and action" (ibid.:16). To understand how, Foucault's notion of 'governmentality', upon Agrawal's concept builds, is useful here. Foucault (1984, 1995) was intrigued by how power works upon individuals and groups as subtle coercion, making people do what is wanted of them, often without knowing that they do, as a 'microphysics of power' (Foucault in Foucault and Rabinow 1984:183). Governmentality refers to 'conducting oneself' according to a kind of governmental rationality, exercised by the state to improve its populations. In line with Foucault's notion of power and the body, Agrawal then proceed to argues, that he particular kind of environmentality might even change how people "think about their actions, positively or negatively, in relation to the environment" (Agrawal 2005:17). It could also very well indicate that the campaigns on 'awareness' have the potential to craft climate change identities.

I argue one would be wiser to see knowledge of the world in which we are embedded, as a 'motley' or a 'bricolage', and not as opposing, polarized worldviews. This is also Scott's central argument (Scott 2008). With Scott, the concept of *mētis* (practical) and *techne* (theoretical, abstract) are not in fact competing versions of knowledge, but rather knowledge-practices that sometimes act regardless of *techne*, and sometimes in accordance with it. Thus, knowledge can be both 'theoretical/abstract' and 'practical/concrete' at the same time. These two forms of knowledge, the abstract and the practical kind, are always related and always interacting, in all societies, at all times (Turnbull 2005, Ingold 2000, 2011 and Scott 1998), but in various degrees at different times and contexts. This dissolves the concept of there being an indigenous, traditional or modern knowledge. As Cruikshank (2001) observe when looking into climate change knowledge amongst the scientists and the locals of Tinglit, North America, if 'local' knowledge might appear vague, subjective, context-dependent and open to interpretation to a scientist, then the local Tinglit, "are quite likely to characterise science in similar terms: as illusory, vague, subjective, and context-dependent, and open to multiple interpretations" (Cruikshank 2001:390). This is not unlike the approach to all knowledge essentially being 'local', as argued by Turnbull (2005). With Turnbull, knowledge is seen as a 'motley', or as 'assemblage' of many components. We would be wiser to see knowledge manifest, or take shape, "in the moment of practice" (Scott, 1998:332). This way, knowledge becomes a sort of 'bricolage', recombining all the time, continuously building on itself, like a coral reef. It might branch out here and there, sometimes adjusting and adapting to context, but in practice, it is knowledge all the same. With Turnbull then, we should rather see western science as an ideological marker in the creation of the 'other' (Turnbull 2005:7), where scientific knowledge underpins the celebration of 'modernism' as supposedly synonymous with development and social improvement (ibid.:7). If we now return to the premise for climate change awareness campaigns, my ethnography show that the villagers of Rani Mājri knew very well, and wielded knowledge, of the dialectic process between human action and inaction, as well as the accompanied changes in weather, seasonality and environmental decay taking place. Although the scientific climate change idea arguably had diffused rather poorly in Rani Mājri, it was certainly not because of a lack in the capacity for 'abstract thinking'. This, we have seen, had

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more to do with how their 'traditional' way of life was approached across a dissonance between humans and their surroundings that the people of Rani Mājri themselves did not experience. If the villagers saw themselves as 'backward', it was not because they did not wield theoretical or abstract knowledge. It seems to rely more on their knowledge of the world not being validated by an authority (i.e. a scientist or any other 'properly educated' person, such as a Brahmin *pandit* or a college teacher.

What they were unaware of, was a specific discourse of climate change, the biophysical, or technological explanation of global warming and the increased politisation of this awareness. They were also unaware of the peculiar segregation made in this technoscientific discourse between culture and nature, humans and their environment, as in Rani Mājri, there were rather strong indications of their correlation. This also gives room for an alternative take on what climate change is, why it happens, and what to do about it. Would we comprehend their perception of climate change better, if we approached climate change as having to do with socio-political inflictions on the ecology and environment, *and* with social relations to those actors of good and bad nature around us? The next chapter will attempt to do so

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Endnotes Chapter 5

¹ There is a ready availability of medical studies pointing out the effects of pesticides and fertilizers in farming in India, studies which have contributed to this fear.

² I have not found any translation of *koronta*, *medheer* and *kangoo*

³ This is a matter which has been in dispute for many years and evidence for this theory is contradictory, but there are studies that point to its validity, see e.g. Makarieva et al. (2013).

⁴ On nature as a product of western tradition, see e.g. Cronon 1996a; 1996b and Descola 2013