

# The Women of Himachal Pradesh

*a photo-essay by Brenda Cranney*



*Shakuntala: There has been a nursery in the village for ten years. The government plants chil pine but you don't even get any grass from it. No one ever asked me what kind of trees I need. The forest used to be thicker. Now it will disappear in a few years.*

I have just spent a year in the rural areas of Himachal Pradesh, India meeting and talking with Pahari women from several villages. One woman asked if women in Canada would come to know about her life. When I told her yes she said "that was good. Women should know about each other's lives." Women living in the rural areas of the mountains of Himachal Pradesh face daily challenges in coping with their environment, with poverty, and with discrimination. I hope this photo-essay portrays the women as the active subjects that they are, challenging the oppressive representations of poor women, of *harijan* women, of rural women in India.



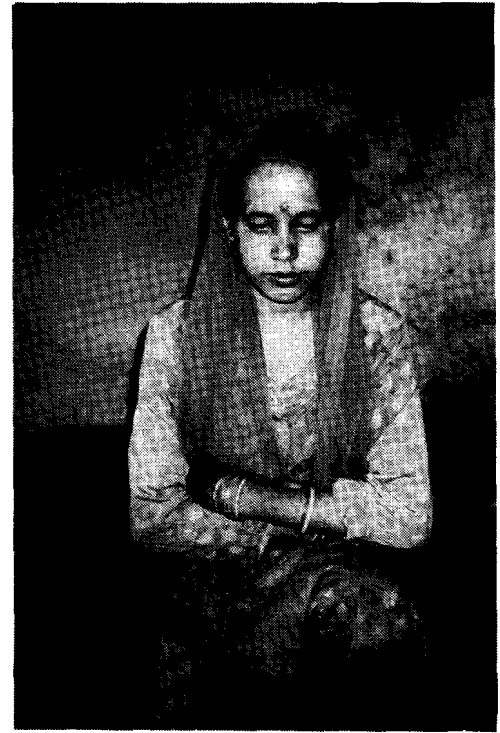
*Teja: I was the most beautiful girl in the village. I had many 'boyfriends.' I am alone now. My husband is no longer. We had twelve children but they all died at birth. I take care of myself.*



*Kalabiti: When I had my first child and then second I thought I wouldn't have anymore but then Uma came along. Then when Uma was six years old and I didn't have anymore I thought that I would not be able to have anymore, but after six years I got another. I was in a lot of pain so they took me to the hospital. Then I thought of having an operation to stop having children. My husband didn't allow me. Then when Anju was ten months old and I got my period, without telling anyone, I took a nurse from Ghana Hatti with me, got on a bus, and went to get the operation done. I told the nurse to have mine done first as I had small children to tend to at home....My husband was angry but I got it done. One has to look after one's self....It is better to have a smaller family. I have to take my children with me when I cut wood. I carry one and my five-year old son carries one on his back. The others hold my hand.*



*Meena: When I get up in the morning first of all I fair the oven, make breakfast for the children and their father, milk the cattle, take the cow for grazing in the forest and bring back the grass. After taking a meal I rest for sometime and in the noon I go back to the forest to bring the leaves for the cattle. We have only two bighas of land. It isn't enough to feed us. We work in the fields and when we finish our work we go to work in Ghanna Hatti. I don't know what to do. What we make during the day, we eat off by the night.*



*Meera: I married my husband when I was 17. He was 50 and he had another wife who was 40 years old. I am now 26 and still don't have a child. I got medicine from the doctor but I quit taking it. His second wife is getting older and she has children from another marriage but not from him. I do most of the work in the house and collect the wood and fodder. I lack a child.*



*Nirmala: I had an operation after five children. I needed one more boy. You can see that by waiting for a boy I got four girls. Two of the girls stopped their studies at 14 years because we need them to help at home, to collect fodder and wood.*

*Several of Brenda Cranney's photographs appear throughout this issue, as well as on the front and back cover.*