

**Changing Streams of History  
from the Himalayan Ranges:  
Orientalist Encounters to Post-  
colonial Concerns, with  
Particular Focus on Uttarakhand**

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The word Himalayas means the abode of snow in Sanskrit and is the highest range of mountains in the world. They form the northern boundary of the Indian subcontinent and run over 2700 km through Kashmir, northern India including Sikkim, Nepal, Bhutan and southern Tibet. History is replete with examples of how hordes of diverse ethno linguistic communities crossed over the Himalayan ranges into the subcontinent. It is from the Himalayas came the pre-Aryans and the successive waves of Scythians and Islamic invaders. The socio-cultural norms and ways of life having their origin in and beyond the Himalayas have influenced the people's life patterns, especially the religious system of the land from earliest times to present day. Over the years much has been written on this region by social scientists and geographers. Therefore, any new writing on the Himalayas is both an interpretative exercise and also a compilation of a new corpus and where both the distinctions between the primary and the secondary sources are blurred we constantly use new categories with the benefit of hindsight. Both geographical and ethnographic studies have been baffled on account of the remote location, difficult terrain, and extreme ruggedness of the region. The present paper looks at the Issues and trends in the writing of the history of the Himalayas with special focus on Uttarakhand and highlights some of the areas that need special focus in today's context. This is attempted by trying to locate the major strands that have created a paradigm of the Himalayas.

Uttarakhand, formerly Uttaranchal, state of India, located in the north-western part of the country. It is bordered to the northwest by

the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh, to the northeast by the Tibet Autonomous Region of China, to the southeast by Nepal, to the south and southwest by the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, and to the west by a tiny segment of the Indian state of Haryana. Its capital is the north-western city of Dehra Dun. On November 9, 2000, the state of Uttaranchal—the 27th state of India—was carved out of Uttar Pradesh, and in January 2007 the new state changed its name to Uttarakhand, meaning “northern region,” which was the traditional name for the area.

### **Orientalist and Colonial Writings on History and the Himalayas: 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

In the eighteenth century, the growing administrative responsibility of the East India Company necessitated its officers to be familiar with the laws, habits, customs and history of the Indian people. The initial efforts in this direction culminated in the establishment in Calcutta in 1784 of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Sir William Jones (1746-94) and Charles Wilkins developed keen interest in Indian literature and culture. However, the greatest impetus to Indological studies was given by the German-born Scholar F. Max Mueller (1823-1902). His effort gave rise to the idea of a common Indo-European homeland and heritage. Several early orientalists like Max Mueller spoke glowingly about the unchanging Indian village communities. They depicted India as a country of philosophers and believed that the Indian mind lacked the ability for political and material speculation. They stated that the ancient Indians lacked a sense of history and were accustomed to despotic rule. The Western scholars stressed that Indians had no notion either of nationhood or of any form of self-government. The Christian missionaries led by Charles Grant and the Utilitarian’s like James Mill did not share the early orientalist view of India and are said to have created “Indophobia” by describing Indians as barbaric, irrational, and having no concern for political values. They described Indian society as unprogressively stagnant. Vincent A Smith was the best known of the British-administrator historians. He made a systematic survey of early Indian history. Smith believed that India had a long tradition of oppressive despots and exaggerated the ruthlessness of ancient Indian kings. He described Kautilya’s penal code as ‘ferociously severe’. Thus, the British scholars had different perceptions of early India. They wrote with a view to justify colonial rule and its exploitation of Indian resources thus distorting historical evidence in the process.

It was in this period that writings on the Himalayas came up, but these were more around the geological features. It was Captain Herbert who conducted the mineralogical survey of the Himalayan country

between Kali and Sutlej in 1818 and gives a general account of the physical characteristics of this region (Herbert, J.D. 1842). He described the country north of India as a large central space strongly marked by the feature that it was little intersected by rivers whilst from its side flowed the streams that united it to form the greatest rivers in the world. Temporally the Vedas offered the source of the Indic civilization and also its limits and with the loss of Gandhara, the Himalayas was seen as both an ecological and cultural boundary of the abode of Hinduism and also of the remote past. The remoteness made the essence of Hinduism purer here to locate.

Later General R. Strachy, in his paper on the physical geography of the Kumaun and Garhwal read before the royal Geographical Society in 1851, pointed out the fact that the Himalayas were a broad mountainous slope of the great Tibetan table land descending into the plains of Northern India (Mahanta, 1997: 3). E. T. Atkinson published, *Notes on the History of Religion in the Himalaya of the N.W. North-western Provinces of India* (Atkinson, 1884).

Having taken cognizance of the Himalayan physiographic features attention was then diverted to assessing the certain key factors in people's life, polity, ecology, culture, development and changes in these. In this exercise we see the origins of the Himalayan club and Himalayan studies in Darjeeling but what differentiates the western Himalayas is the correspondence between exploration and ethnographic reports. Thus, the texts were a result of exploration, ethnographic rendering and of a 'romantic school (as opposed to enlightenment)' interpretation.

### **Indian Writers Emulating the Orientalists**

One of the major factors which have influenced a lot of Historiographical writings is the Orientalists. The orientalists have always studied the subjects as the others justifying the reason for the subordination. To a large extent knowingly or unknowingly we have internalised these ideas. Edward Said speaks of the Oriental discourse in connection with India as a discourse which assimilates this discourse of the west without challenging it. It carries forward this hegemony by imposing the same values and weakness on its objects of enquiry and rendering them marginal (Said, 1978).

A book that was published in 1978 was *Lepchas of West Bengal* by Das. Most of the language throughout the book reminds one of Dalton, Hooker, Hunter and Mainwaring who wrote on the Lepchas. They often sought services of the Lepchas, Bhutias and Nepalese as servants and companions, servants and bestowed on them epithets like they being cheerful, helpful, amiable and careful. Das also uses a similar language.

He says there are no lanes and by lanes in Lepcha village and they have no concept of drainage system but the hilly tract does not pose any drainage problem (Das, 1978).

Another interesting works that has come up recently includes, R.N. Thakur, on Himalayan Lepchas. He starts by saying that a knowledge of tribes, race and caste is important in order to have an efficient administration and as a strategy of development (Thakur, 1988: 1). The scholar does not distance himself from the state and there is no recognition of the fact that humans play a very important role in both the material culture and the process of knowledge. In a significant chapter on the significant three: The Lepchas, the Bhutias and the Nepalis, there is a focus on the British policy of divide and rule. He does not find any point of similarity in these groups. He goes on to say they are primitive, their agriculture technology is primitive and their literacy levels are very low and their rate of population growth is very slow. Orientalists like A.Campbell, WW Hunter and Dr. Graham had written in the same tone almost hundred years earlier. Unfortunately, he does not write anything about lepcha script as the lepchas are the only tribal community to have an indigenous script which is one of the markers of a state society and the large number of lepcha prayer books did not enter into the discourse on them. After independence if we look at the writings on Uttarakhand we see diverse strands of discussion.

### **The Period after Independence: The 50's: Focus on Political History**

Immediately after independence there were a large number of works that focused on Political history. These works helped in focusing on the political development of the region. Uttarakhand is a land steeped in many layers of history, culture, ethnicity, and religion. Ancient rock paintings, rock shelters, Palaeolithic stone tools (hundreds of thousands of years old), and megaliths indicate that the mountains of the region have been inhabited by humans since prehistoric times. Archaeological remains also support the existence of early Vedic (c. 1500 B.C.) practices in the area.

Aside from what has been learned from such archaeological evidence, very little is known about the early history of Uttarakhand. Early scriptures mention a number of tribes that inhabited the Garhwal and Kumaon regions of what is now Uttarakhand. Among these early residents were the Akas, Kol-Munds, Nagas, Paharis (Khasas), Hephthalites (Hunas), Kiratas, Gujjars, and Aryans. The Paharis were the dominant group in both the Garhwal and the Kumaon areas until the coming of the Rajputs and high-caste Brahmans from the plains

around the 13th century. The collapse of the category of 'race' after world war II in Europe was not understood by many of these writers as they found it to be a convenient label though they used ethnicity to describe the social formations. This led to a lag and thus the peopling of the Himalayas was seen as a layer of races leading to flawed premises.

The call for a separate statehood for Uttarakhand must be seen in the light of the historically independent identity of this region. From the earliest times until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century Kumaon managed to maintain its economic, political and cultural identity. Thus the idea of regional autonomy and independence which was a part of the demand of the Uttarakhand movement, is not a new concept to the hill people but is firmly established in Kumaon's early history ( Atkinson, 1973, Sanwal, 1976)

A main feature of Kumaoni history is that for several centuries from the Middle Ages till 1790, the region formed a central, autonomous and relatively isolate kingdom. The first rulers were the Katyuris, possibly a small khasi tribe from Garhwal who moved to Almora district. By 10<sup>th</sup> century the centralised political authority of the Katyuri dynasty was replaced by several small kingdoms ruled by different tribes. During this turmoil, Chands, a Rajput family from north India entered Kumaon and set up a dynasty in Champawat around 953 A.D. However dynastic infighting and other struggles divided and weakened the Chand position and in 1790's the Gurkhas marched to Kumaon, meeting little resistance. The Gurkha occupation of Kumaon ended in 1815 when the British gained political authority over Kumaon. Kumaon now became a specific division within the wider framework of India and the British Empire. During this period the hazardous terrain was cleared and brought under cultivation, many dangerous animals hunted down, roads and bridges built linking north India to the Kumaon region and this region was integrated into a larger politico economic entity.

It was only in post-independence India that the Uttarakhand region began to receive significant attention in the regional literature, when the autonomous princely state of Tehri-Garhwal was incorporated into the United Provinces of India in 1949. With the adoption of a new Indian constitution in 1950, the United Provinces was renamed Uttar Pradesh and became a constituent state of India. Grappling with a large population and a vast land area, the government of the new state—seated at the south-eastern city of Lucknow—found it difficult to address the interests of the people in the far-northern region. Unemployment, poverty, lack of adequate infrastructure, and general underdevelopment ultimately led the people of Uttarakhand to call for a separate state shortly after the creation of Uttar Pradesh. Initially, protests were weak,

but they gathered strength and momentum in the 1990s. The tension reached a climax on Oct. 2, 1994, when police fired on a crowd of demonstrators in the north-western town of Muzaffarnagar, killing a number of people. In this exercise the other was the plains and a rich vocabulary of oral texts that were free from restriction created are referent and the larger narratives were read against this background of the simple hill folk versus the plainsmen.

### **The Period of the 60's: Focus on Land Systems and Trade and Commerce**

The writings on land systems and agrarian settlements in the Himalayas cannot be separate from the mainland. The old elite of the Mughal empire Muslims, Rajput's and their Kayast elite who owned more than 60 to 65 percent of the land in the provinces were losing land, social, economic and political power to those characterised by Sir Auckland Colvin, as the "mere rubble of the political building" the trading and moneylending castes, Vaishyas, Khattris, Kalwars, and in case some Brahmins whose gains in land had been immense over the 19<sup>th</sup> cen, particularly in its last thirty year (Robinson, 1973: 81).

During the pre-British days people enjoyed rights over the forests and forest produce. They had to pay a tax to the state for grazing their animals in kind in the form of various animal products, hand crafted items such as baskets, wooden utensils and mats. People practised shifting cultivation known as *kureel*, *katil* or *Khil*. Before the coming of the colonial system different local communities with partly agrarian, partly pastoral and partly barter trade economies had open access to all kinds of natural resources. Traditionally most important landowners depended not on any legal rights but on the actual influence they exercised on village people. Government revenues and some customary fees were collected by the Village Pradhan, who in turn reported to a higher authority Patwari (in charge of a Patti or group of villages)., who held police duties as well as the responsibility of assigning free labour for public work (Batten, 1851).

The Colonial rule in Kumaon began in 1815, when the Britishers replaced the Gorkhas. Kumaon was now governed as a Non regulating area to start with, then as Assam rules, Jansi rules and finally under the sections of Scheduled District Act, 1874 (Tolia, 2009: 187). The Colonial interest in Kumaon was to search for raw material and find a market for their surplus industrial goods. It also wanted to assure its access into the forbidden land ( Mac Groger John, 1970: 195). Until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Cen the British were interested in maximising the land revenues in the hills. They made efforts at expansion of

agriculture so that revenues could increase. By 1850's there was an interest in forests for the demand for timber had increased. Till 1850's the Deodar and Sal forests were seen as a rich source of revenue. In 1858, Henry Ramsay the Commissioner of Kumaon discontinued the contract system and took over the forests. The forest Act of 1865 and 1878, further facilitated this control over forests. With the reservation of large tracts in 1879, people were granted only limited rights in reserved forests. In 1893, all unassessed land outside the reserved forests was constituted as the District Protected Forests and began to be regulated. This brought village pastures and forests under State regulations. Between 1903-1906 these were further divided into closed and open forests. The closed forests were under strict regulation for their timber was useful for railway sleepers. By 1911 large areas of civil forests were brought under reserved category. There was a agitation by the people in 1921-22 and after the formation of the Kumaon forest Grievance committee only small portions of reserved forests was De reserved (Dangwal, 1998 : 350). The forests were now divided in to class I, which were relaxed and class II which were strictly controlled by the Government. Colonial forestry affected the hill agriculture in two significant ways. Reservation of forests made expansion of arable land difficult. In the hills where forest fertility was low, arable expansion was the only way to offset population pressure. However due to restriction of forests and restrictions on arable expansion, cultivated areas stagnated in the first half of the 20th century, leading to an agrarian crisis. Secondly, large scale commercial exploitation and changes in the composition of forests affected the quantity and quality of inputs transferred from forests to croplands resulting in the decline of forest fertility and thus deepening the agrarian crisis (Dangwal, 1998: 349). Many of the refugees from Pakistan settled in Dehradun and the settlement records of the government along with the land redistribution along with a rising number of court cases and the primacy of the agrarian economy influenced this outlook.

The historical trade routes linking south Asia with central Asia and South East Asia traverses this region. Ideas, goods, services and groups having an extended history of travel across the length and breadth of the Himalayas transform it into a transnational multicultural space. It goes without saying that this region is a mosaic of different religious, cultural and political systems (Arora, Jayram, 2009: 2).

### **The Period of the 70's and 80's Focus on Caste, Culture and Religion and Identity**

The ethnic and caste composition of the people of Uttarakhand reflects its fluid history. In Garhwal and Kumaon, lower castes forming one-

fourth of the population have been traditionally and anthropologically associated with the original inhabitants of the hills. The numerically dominant Khas Rajput's and Brahmins migrated sometime in the last millennium from central Asia, but were later supplanted by even higher strata of upper caste groups that arrived from central India following the widespread conflict of the medieval period. Although the British period saw social reforms encourage the upward mobility of Khas Rajput's into the ranks of these Asli ("true") Rajputs, Brahmin sub castes generally chose to retain their hierarchies. The lower castes also saw little change in their subordinate position until recently, when political movements from the rest of India began making major inroads in the region (Negi, 1995).

Although predominantly Hindu, beliefs in Uttarakhand have traditionally been generally heterodox, reflecting an admixture with ancient indigenous practices. Caste differentiation has been far more informal with many taboos over food and commerce more relaxed than in the plains. Interestingly, no indigenous trader caste has emerged, as the economy has remained agricultural with the Rajputs as the primary cultivators and landowners and the scheduled castes as the main service providers in a three to one ratio. A counterweight to the commercial domination was the electoral assertion and thus the focus of not merely caste but politicised caste. Commerce in towns and along pilgrimage routes of Uttarakhand has instead been taken up by *Banias* from the plains.

The cultural complex of the Himalayas can be differentiated into multiple cultural regions. The cultural complex here is both vertical and lateral. While vertical variation primarily flows from ecological factors, lateral variations are mediated by migration and ethnicity. The settlement patterns, occupation and ways of life of the population are a reflection of human population and adaptation to climate, relief and ecology. Except for inhabitants of the arid wilderness on the northern flanks and the dense forests of the eastern ranges, where the people are fierce and warrior-like – they successfully rebuffed the British armies during the Raj era - the Himalayan people are essentially peace-loving. In spite of the adversities of Himalayan life, the people of this region are strikingly joyful in temperament. The Triloknath temple is a standing example of religious unity. Here the Buddhists worship *Avalokiteshwara* while the Hindus worship Lord Shiva. Both communities participate in all the functions.

The Himalayan communities have a wealth of traditional art forms and crafts, that include thangka painting, wood carving, carpet weaving, and traditional music and dances. These art and craft forms follow a

distinct Himalayan style that is indigenous to the Himalayas, characterized by Tibetan, Nepali and Kashmiri religious cultures and span the areas under the sway of these particular cultures. Himalayan style art is generally religio-aesthetic in nature, and comprises the iconography, composition, symbols and motifs drawn from the forms of religions of Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. Crafts of the Himalayan region are in keeping with the available resources, climatic conditions and terrain of the Himalayas. The seclusion of the region and the long periods of hibernation during the severe winters allows considerable time for crafts work. Most crafts also serve certain functions, for clothing, food, and various social, cultural and spiritual traditions, and the isolation of the Himalayan worlds has necessitated self-reliance in their production. Many Himalayan communities therefore developed superior craftsmanship- in bamboo & wood carving, silver and gold articles, weaving of shawls, carpets and rugs.

Mountain regions had developed a rich base of indigenous traditional knowledge that is being rapidly eroded under the forces of modernisation, as new methods/ sciences make inroads and local value and promotion of Indigenous traditional Knowledge declines. Although 'visible' as exotic, for touristic purposes, they are 'invisible' and appear to lack credibility enough to be recognized at par with mainstream systems. This has in turn led to the erosion of many traditional agricultural, medicine, food, education systems and knowledge and loss of many languages, under the onslaught of external influences after the exposure of these regions to wider population and influences. For example, the Lepchas in North Sikkim are now labelled as the '*Vanishing Tribe*' because their indigenous systems of medicine, art, culture, livelihood practices, language etc. are fast eroding as they have been pushed to the peripheries of their own lands in Sikkim and Darjeeling.

### **Women in Uttarakhand**

There have hardly been any significant writings on women though women are discussed as a part of main stream history of Uttarakhand. The geographical environment influences not only the living conditions, food and drinks, clothing and ornaments of its men and women but their faith and beliefs and socio-cultural traditions as well (Sharma, 2009: 96). The initial Kumaon society was tribal and hunter-gatherer, in course of time transformed into a pastoral, agrarian, traders etc. and thus became part of the process of state formation. The various social groups which came in various periods of time brought with them strong caste formation and introduced the stratification and proclaimed themselves as superior. This changed scenario led to the emergence of

Brahmins and Rajput's as ruling class and local as their subjects. This reconstruction of social order had significant impact on defining the space for women. We find tribal women exercising greater freedom in participating in various social and economic activities. The absence of man folk for trading purposes for a longer period compelled women to shoulder family responsibility and the condition forced her to accept various challenges to manage family as well as community. Under such situation women exercise greater freedom in participating various social and economic activities. Interestingly she was also engaged in various trade and business of the family. We also find there was less inequitable division of labour among men and women. The Khas in the Kumaoni society had primitive family and social organization and their family laws were free from Brahmanical influence. The Khas family was patriarchal and was governed by customary laws. Woman was considered no less than a chattel her marital relations and her position was no different than a purchased slave. In fact marriage was performed for fulfilling the economic and social needs. With the establishment of dynastic rule in Kumaon, the status of women declined further. Many social groups considered it important to marry the girls before the attainment of puberty. Strict rules were maintained to observe the purity of their sexuality. The emerging Brahmanical system with increasing agricultural practices made women further victim of oppressive and exploitative measures that grew with time in Kumaoni society. The military feudalism of Gorkhas had shown tyrannous and cruel attitude towards women and she was seen as a private property. This period witnessed many abominable practices eroding her status completely in the society.

The earlier settlers in Kumaon evolved ways and means for livelihood interacting with their environment and organised themselves in their own socio-cultural groups accordingly. It is an established fact that during the second millennium BC. this area was subjected to a great migration. During this period the *Khas*, the *Darad*, the *Tanganas*, the *Kirats* etc had settled widely in this part of the country' (Sharma, 2009: 125). The *Kirats* were nomad-pastoralist who subjugated the *Kols* and impelled them to move to other areas. The *Jads*, the *Tolchha*, the *Marchha*, the *Jauharis*, the *Darmis*, the *Byansis* and the *Chaundsasis*, the *Banrajis*, the *Lool Rauts*, the *Tharus-Boksas* are present representatives of Kiratas. The Khas compelled their rivals either to accept their dominance or to move to higher mountain valleys and to Tarai. With the ascendancy of the *Katayuris* later around 8<sup>th</sup> century AD, emerged first ever organized political dynastic system in the region (Pathak, 1988: 102). After a brief transition, in 13<sup>th</sup> century two important dynasties emerged in this region—the *Chands* in Kumaon

and the *Panwars* in Garhwal. Needless to say that all these ruling clans emerged from the local Khas society.

The social groups inhabiting the higher Himalayan valleys of Kumaon were the pastoral-trader, were commonly known as *Shaukas* while the agri-pastoralist *Tharus* and *Bokshas* were occupying the swampy lands of Tarai. There was also a small tribal community, the *Banrajis* living in the mountains. The *Shaukas* for a long have been practicing transhumance and were engaged in trans-Himalayan trade. The mobility of men folk had significant impact on the life of *Shauka* woman. In fact due to the absence of men folk for longer period women had no other option then to shoulder the family responsibility. The conditions forced her to manage all the domestic affairs of the family as well as community. Many time women had to tackle difficult problems and take important decisions on their own initiatives. In fact such condition and training made them not only self-reliant but capable also (Pant, 1935: 1897-89). As compared to other social groups in Kumaon, the status of women in Shauka society was much higher. She was having greater freedom in participating in various social and economic activities. In fact, it was due to the absence of the tradition of keeping women in seclusion from social affairs. Such customs as were prevalent in other communities were entirely unknown to this society. It may be because of the nomadic life of the people in which it was not possible for a community to seclude women. Pant mentions that like Tibetan women, the women of Byans valley were actively participating in various trade and business activities of the family. Their involvement in economic affairs, particularly in business in local trade fairs of Jauljibi was one such example. (Pant, 1935: 188). It is worth to mention that the *Shaukas* were not primarily the agriculturalists, which essentially require hard menial work. Unlike women in agriculturalist societies, the *Shauka* women were not engaged in intensive physical labour in the fields as it was the minor and secondary activity. The less significance of agriculture in *Shauka* life was fact main reason which elevated women's status in that community. However the production system in which *Shauka* economy was based was directly linked to the wool and animal husbandry. While men were engaged in trans-Himalaya trade and tedious work of animal husbandry, the women had employed themselves in weaving and manufacturing woollen fabric. There was not inequitable division of labour among man and woman.

The elevated status of women could be seen at the time of meals in which no discrimination was made between male and female. It was a common practice in *Shauka* family that all the members including females would eat food together. The customs of *Dam-Tara* (bride price)

or *Adla-Badli* were some of the peculiar features related to marriage among Shaukas. Although, families having good economic status were influenced by Brahmanism, (especially the Joharis) they did not prefer the custom of *Dam-Tara* and followed the *Kanyadan ritual* for marrying their daughter in which the girl was given without seeking any bride price. However getting a bride through the ritual *Kanyadan* was often considered disgraceful, particularly among those who could pay the price. (Sherring, 1905 : 98). The Brahmanical patriarchal system in the region emphasized the rituals associated with caste purity by maintaining women's chastity. The woman was seen as symbol of purity of family and community and her sexuality was linked to the concept of purity. If a man from lower caste would establish physical relation with women of upper class it would endanger the purity of the entire caste, therefore it was considered important to preserve the sanctity of blood purity (Bhatt, Sharad, Bhatt Jaya, 2009: 51).

Before the advent of colonial rule in this region the custom of child marriage was quite prevalent. Especially the girls of upper class were married before they attained puberty as it was considered that they would fulfil these religious and family duties as well. Women worked very hard in this society. She had to break up the clods of earth, transplant weed and reap. She pound the paddy into rice, carried the manure from the sheds to the distant fields and fetched water from the spring. She also cut and carried huge loads of grass and fuel from the forest. In addition to this outdoor work. She had to grind corn, milk the animals and cook for the whole family. She must take the men folk their meals in the field, sweep out the bray chop up the fodder, feed the cattle as well as look after children. In short, she does not plough, dig or drive, but there is no longer other form labour which she does not practice or ordinarily adorn. For her there is no slack season; the whole of the year is spent in hard toil (Pant, 1935:191). Obviously, the importance of women in the agrarian economy made marriage as an acknowledgement of economic necessity. It seems by the end of 18th century the practice of keeping the two wives became essential for hill cultivator. Further the social perception may be understood from the fact that a man's social status, wealth and prosperity was also being measured by the number of wives he was possessing (Pant, 1935:190).

The feudal state whether under the Chand or the Parmars patronized several abominable practices such as the system of *Deochlelie* and *Nayak*. On the one hand the system of slavery thrived under these regimes while on the other hand it encouraged the practice of prostitution among the *Nayak*. The privileged section of the society

encouraged and enjoyed the practices of keeping people for household work. The *Chhyorie* were employed to assist the family (Dabral, 1968: 371). It is said that during this period people from lower strata of the society were forced to offer their daughters to the temples as *Dyokee* or *Deo Chyelee*. In some villages there was a tradition of offering the elder daughter of the family to some deity in other caste too. Dabral mentions that in *Nag Patti* and *Malli Kalifaat Patti* of Garhwal there was a custom of offering the first daughters to the temple of Durga Devi in Kalimath. Such girls were called *Devi Kee Rani*. Their obligation was to be at the service of temple priests. There are references of offering daughters to the temples of *Badrinath* and *Tungnath* (Dabral 1968: 111). There are references of fair being organised in Ranihat in Garhwal where the girls were formally trained to become *Deo Chelie*. Dabral writes that these *Deochelie* were brought up as Devdasi under the careful and watchful protection of the temple priests. Such girls were destined to spend their whole life in the service of temple and singing and dancing in praise of the deities. Such girls were later set off to awful practices of prostitution by Nayak.

The copper plate inscriptions of the Chand kings refer to certain taxes as *Nath-Nathali*, and *Autali*. A peasant (landowner) who has no male child to inherit his property is called *Auta*. When an *Auta* died, his entire property was taken over by the feudal lord of the area- the Raja or the state sequestered the entire property under the provision of *Nath-Nathali*, or *Autali*. (Dabral, 1971: 138-146). In this scheme of vesting property in the state, the unmarried girls and the widow of the deceased were also clubbed as a property. Thus, their destiny was handed over to the feudal power compelling them to live their entire life as slave. Interestingly if such females were married, the sums paid for them as bride price was deposited in treasury. Raturi remarks that the custom of *Autali* again reflects the position of women here. (Joshi, 1929:112). The system of *Autali* was seen by peasantry as one of the most oppressive provisions of the time in Kumaon.

Under the Gurkhas status of women exacerbated relentlessly, plummeting to the level of a slave as well as an article of trade. Sale and purchase of women became common affair during this period. The historical accounts reveal that thousands of men, women and children were sold or forcibly sent to Nepal. Dabral remarks that there was no single feudal family which did not keep both men and women slaves. Treating the slaves as human was seen as an act of lowering status of the families and insult to it. There was heavy demand for slaves in Nepal for domestic help and agricultural work. Therefore Gorkha officials were exporting women to Nepal. At the time of seizure

of Langurghari, thousands of men and women were captured by Gorkhas and sent to Nepal as slaves (Dabral, 1971: 140).

A good example to illustrate the deterioration in the status of women may be seen in the *Gunahi* (Dabral, 2003 :83). For instance a person committed an offence he was fined for his offence as a punishment. It was under the discretion of Gurkha official to decide the nature of *Gunahi* (fine). In case the accused failed to pay *Gunahi* (fine) imposed on him, his wife and children were auctioned to recover the fine. In such circumstances the victim had no other option then to offer his wife and other women of the family to these officials. Woman and children were seen as a private property. Sometimes the Gurkha officials were keeping such people as a slave in personal capacity. With the mother, children were also brought under slavery. Besides women slaves, even the Gurkha soldiers were also keeping one or two boys or girls for carrying luggage. Many times to avoid the rage of Gurkha officials, the parents with heavy heart were reluctantly offering their daughters to these people. (Dabral, 2003: 242). Thus, it appears that oppressive attitude of society towards women was further consolidated by the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The post-colonial concerns of Uttarakhand region where research needs to be focussed can be summed up as, Environment and Disasters, Marginalisation, Gender, and Globalisation and development.

### **Environment and Disasters**

Today there is a need to focus research on, the contextual sources of environmental change; conflict over access; and the political ramifications of environmental change. In a world where environmental problems assume growing political significance, this form of integrated understanding is long overdue. The global political economy determines how both policy issues inherent to the conservation and development debate need to continuously be re-operationalised in order to remain politically acceptable. This argument is used to identify three recent trends in conservation, which we have termed 'neoliberal conservation', 'bioregional conservation' and 'hijacked conservation'. Possibly, the fiercest battles are fought over the issue of the human dimensions of biodiversity conservation. On an abstract level this entails the wide range of relations between humans and 'nature'. On a more practical level this often comes down to the issue of how to deal with (local) people living in and around PAs and important or threatened biodiversity. The community-based conservation (CBC) narrative asserts that it is possible and preferable to strike a balance between the needs of local people and the conservation of nature (Adams and Hulme,

2001). This is challenged by voices advocating a protectionist approach or 'fortress conservation' with people separated from certain landscapes because they are inherently incompatible (Oates, 1999; Terborgh 1999). Although similarities in language used by many different actors and conservation-development policies might suggest the opposite, in practice, implementation has rarely followed one narrative or model to the extreme. In fact, different narratives, models and approaches are constantly overlapping and competing, which makes the boundaries between them fuzzy and hard to identify in practice. Different studies have discussed this overlap through the analysis of narratives and counter-narratives (Hutton et al. 2005).

Two diametrically opposed views in social science literature can be identified. On the one hand, Foucauldian approaches generally hold that discourse entails 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972: 49). On the other hand, historical materialist approaches would contend that (unequal) material realities give rise to discourses that support and justify the (material) inequalities that benefit capitalist elites (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism has turned land, fauna and flora into '*natural resources*' whereby their principal value is their exchange value and their right to existence based on what the market is willing to pay for them in monetary terms (McAfee, 1999). According to Liverman (2004: 734): 'this move to commodify nature and market its services is a massive transformation of the human-environment relationship and of the political economy of regions and landscapes'. Based on this transformation, Murphree (2000: 10) has identified several 'enduring challenges' for biodiversity conservation that according to him 'have taken on particular forms and acquired growing salience in our recent environmental history'. The first of these deals with the equation of natural supplies and human demands. The second is the actual commercialisation of nature, more commonly known as 'payments for environmental services'. First the demand and supply issue. The basic dilemma is as follows: once human demands outweigh the supplies nature can provide, some kind of management control becomes necessary to balance the two. Historically, there have been many localised examples of human demands outweighing natural supplies. However, the strains on this management control seem to have become much more severe in recent times. These strains include increased levels of technology for the exploitation of nature, demographic changes, the increasing distance between production and consumption (and thus decreased visibility of environmental destruction), changing cultural habits, etc.

The landslide disaster in Uttarakhand is very recent. An unusual

aspect of this disaster is the degree of uncertainty of the magnitude of the losses, with estimates from politicians for example ranging from 1,000 to 10,000 people. The tragedy of Char Dham was waiting to happen. The cloudburst and subsequent impact was simply the proximate cause. Uttarakhand has witnessed human disasters and natural calamities in four of the past seven years. It's an active seismic zone, prone to earthquakes. It's prone to landslides, given its riverine geography, avalanches and hailstorms and we witness this year after year during the monsoons. The state is nestled in India's ecologically fragile zone and is the hub of temple tourism. Neither the geography nor the cultural context can be changed. But the risks can be better managed. The combination of natural and human-induced factors—adverse climatic conditions to environmental degradation fuelled by non-scientific development practices accompanied by a burgeoning population—make the risks worse. There is a need to look at this aspect holistically and historically.

### **Displacement and Marginalisation**

There is a close relationship between culture and nature. People of the hills negotiate regularly with nature using their cultural knowledge to sustain their livelihoods. When communities are separated from their natural settings because of the development interventions, the relationship between nature and culture gets ruptured. In the new alien environment they have to again realign themselves and reorganise their lives. This has happened many times in the Himalayan region when people are displaced from their natural habitat due to human intervention. When communities are removed by the state from their natural settings, for example from forests and landscape declared as protected areas, how does one understand ecology, the relationship between culture an environment. The Uttarakhand region has seen a number of such displacements with the Tihiri dam, the Van Gujjars from the Rajajaji Nationsl Park to Pathri and Gaindikhatta. Traditionally the Gujjars a nomadic pastoral community depended on the forests for their livelihood and their culture evolved in this way. During the summers they moved into the mountains (*Paad*) and returned to the plains (*Des*) in winters to provide fodder for their Buffalo herds. When the Uttarakhand State Forest department declared a stretch of the forest as a protected area this lead to the separation of the nature and culture (Pandey, 2012). In recent years, the Himalayas have been shaken with examples of development projects like hydropower dams, limestone mines and roads usurping right of communities over sacred landscape and seriously endangering not only culture but basic livelihood and survival. This has led to the sudden loss of an entire

resource base, owing to a majority of development projects in these mountains, uprooting people physically and culturally. Sadly, the developmental process consisting of an Environmental Impact Assessment does not take into account social and cultural costs of a developmental project. Therefore, local peoples' concerns regarding marginalization, the need to preserve landscapes for religious and spiritual beliefs, do not find value in the cost benefit analysis of neither the project proponents nor the Government.

### **Gender**

Himalayan women usually enjoy a much greater level of freedom than in other parts of India. They participate equally with the men in agricultural practices and in cultural activities, and there is no seclusion of women as is seen in the plains of India. Society in the higher altitudes is quite liberal albeit male dominated; lower Himalayas has a more conservative society. Mountain women carry out all sedentary activities including farming, gathering fodder and fuelwood, etc., while men manage herds and carry out trading activities. Hobart Counter writes about the women in the hills as being neither too short nor too tall. He remarked that these women are not kept in seclusion like the upper caste women of the Hindus in the mainland. (Hobart, Daniel, 1835: 44-45).

A hallmark of Uttarakhand life in recent times has been its money-order economy. The large-scale out migration of men in search of employment in the plains or in the army has dramatically altered the demographic balance and culture of the region. While men predominate in urban centres, the interior rural districts are amongst the few in all of India that contain significant female majorities. The patriarchal system still predominates, but due to their inordinate role in the local agricultural economy, women also enjoy more personal freedoms than their counterparts in the plains. However, their daily workload far exceeds that of men who are largely relegated to visiting the village from their work in the plains or passing the days gossiping in the village square (Pande, 1996). The *Uttarakhand Mahila Manch* (UMM) or Uttarakhand Women's Forum, the preeminent political front of women in the separate state movement and long-time affiliate of the UKD was critical of its ally for the lack of women candidates. Given the massive involvement of women in the separate state movement, this political disenfranchisement at the cusp of power was all the more galling as it seemed to echo past experiences with movements that relegated women to the background once their objectives were achieved. (Jena, 2004). Women also participated in large numbers in the Chipko movement (Pande, 2018). Yet as in the Chipko, anti-Tehri dam, and various anti-

mining struggles, the sacrifices of women activists were submerged once again to the vested interests of male politicians and the conservative status quo. These are aspects that need to be highlighted.

### **Globalisation**

The concept of globalisation is one of the most discussed phenomena of the last two decades. In an age where the advance of technology continuously increases the speed and volume of people, goods, ideas and information across the globe, posing that something globalising is taking place is seemingly very straightforward. And even though some observers argue that in the past there have also been 'phases of globalisation', Held and McGrew (2002: 2) contend that: 'although contemporary globalisation has elements in common with its past phases, it is distinguished by unique spatio-temporal and organisational features, creating a world in which the extensive reach of global relations and networks is matched by their relative high intensity, high velocity and high impact propensity across many facets of social life, from the economic to the environmental'. Some of these have already been in effect for long and globalisation has just reinforced them, or provided the context under which they could thrive. In the discourse on globalisation, the twin contributions of the Himalayas are the idea of gross national happiness by Bhutan and the Chipko movement in Uttarakhand that reinterpreted the idea of 'progress' thereby challenging the western teleology and thus forcing us to look towards an Indian model that could be read from Indian hermeneutical tradition.

Firstly, globalisation has literally and mentally created space and time to regard the natural environment in a more globally holistic way. One specific effect of this has been the assuaging of the importance of the state and international borders in international environmental governance (Biermann and Dingwerth 2004), which is very likely an effect of this same trend in international governance studies in general (Held and McGrew 2002). Consequentially, we have seen the rise in popularity of bioregionalism (Fall 2003), ecosystem and landscape approaches, global environmental governance (Biermann and Dingwerth 2004) and perhaps most recently, Trans frontier Conservation Areas (Buscher, Dietz, 2005). All these are trends in nature conservation or environmental governance that surpass the nation-state as the ultimate organisational unit and thus regard international boundaries as something 'unnatural' (Webster, 2007). Finally, globalisation cannot be understood without analysing its antonym of localisation. In fact, many influential authors pose that this dialectic between localisation and globalisation is perhaps the most defining feature in understanding current-day global affairs (Held and

McGrew 2002). The mountains and its people have so far been either totally neglected from what was proposed to be a 'democratic' process of development or were taken for granted as top-down, homogenized processes of development were thrust on them. Development, as is characterized mostly in terms of western concepts of societal relationships or the human-nature interface have had a substantial effect in dramatically changing the existing institutional structures traditionally existing within mountainous communities. It is changing values and behaviours, and younger generations in particular, are forsaking their traditional culture to adopt mainstream cultures that they perceive to have significant economic and social benefits. There has been a gradual loss of variant customs, practices and languages. Education, for example has been focused on mainly a western, English or Hindi-based curriculum that alienates the child from its immediate environment and leaves it wanting to be part of an urban, city-like population inept at adapting to its own surroundings. Hence these are some of the issues that need an urgent address for a holistic history of this region. Many of these issues have been addressed in the recent past and yet the question that remains is the preservation of the ecology of the Hilly regions vis a vi development . In short the Himalayan experience is the one of the best expression of a regional particularity that synthesises the nationalist ethos in creative expressions that are available as 'different' historical sources which have to yet be fully deciphered.

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