



**NMML
OCCASIONAL PAPER**

HISTORY AND SOCIETY

New Series

37

Stratification in Kumaun circa 1815–1930

Vasudha Pande



Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
2013



© Vasudha Pande, 2013

All rights reserved. No portion of the contents may be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the author. The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed herein are those of the author and do not reflect the opinion of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library Society, in whole or part thereof.

Published by

Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
Teen Murti House
New Delhi-110011

e-mail : ddnehrumemorial@gmail.com

ISBN : 978-93-83650-01-9

Price Rs. 100/-; US \$ 10

Page setting & Printed by : A.D. Print Studio, 1749 B/6, Govind Puri
Extn. Kalkaji, New Delhi - 110019. E-mail : studio.adprint@gmail.com



Stratification in Kumaun* circa 1815–1930

Vasudha Pande**

Stratification in the Pre-Modern Period

In the early nineteenth century, the Kumauni caste system still retained its regional and historical specificity. Stratification in this region had emerged out of the lineage system, which had prevailed till the fifteenth century.¹ The lineage system had been based upon an agrarian system dominated by Khasa community life and collective decisions had prevented the emergence of great inequalities.² Agricultural production under the lineage system had allowed only for a distinction between peasantry and artisanal groups. The religious belief system of this period also prevented the emergence of a clear cut ritual demarcation between the artisans and the peasants, who continued to share a common village life.

It is only from the fifteenth century, that the agricultural system was able to sustain non-productive groups, who were dependent on labour services of others and who were able to institute a system of slavery or agrestic serfdom. (Atkinson, Delhi, 1882:620) This entailed the reduction of artisan groups to servile status, thereby making their enslavement or serf status possible. The caste system that evolved under the Chand kings was premised upon a three

* Kumaun refers to the Kumaun Division of present day Uttarakhand. It includes the districts of Almora, Bageshwar, Champawat, Nainital, Pithoragarh and Uddham Singh Nagar. (This was the Kumaun district of Kumaun Division from 1815–1930.)

** Vasudha Pande is presently a Fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

¹ The term rath which means family and lineage is to be found in practically every dialect of Central Pahari also in T. Pandey *Kumauni Bhasha aur uska Sahitya* Lucknow 1977 p. 375 and P. Joshi ed. *Sira Desh Ko Davthar* Kanpur 1996 pp. 45–53.

² The importance of communitarian traditions like Vajrayana and Nath based upon shamanic practices, obviated caste stratification.

fold hierarchy³ — the upper caste groups who did not till their own fields, the Khasa peasantry which continued with its lineage system and form of agricultural production and third, the Doms who were the artisanal castes — considered polluting by all the upper castes.

The Kumauni caste system was different from the four-fold Varna system — it was a triadic hierarchy which can be represented schematically as follows: (Sanwal 1976: 38)

The Traditional Hierarchy of Castes in Kumaon

<i>Division</i>	<i>Ethnic political category</i>	<i>Caste</i>	<i>Sub caste or occupational group</i>	<i>Varna</i>
Bith	Asal-jat Or Thul-jat Thakur-Rajput or Kshettri Khasi	Bhalbaman	Chautbani Pachbiri	Baman
Dom, Dum or Kulberi		Pitali, Hali or Khasi- Baman Khasi-Jimdar Line of pollution (Khalait)	Kshatriya	Koi Tamat Lwar Orh Bhul Pauri Baruri Sani Bakhari Chimari Chanyal Hanki Das-Dholi Damai Auji Hurki-Badi Mirasi Nat

³ Rudra Chand Deva, *Traivarnik Dharma Nirnayanam*, manuscript attributed to the sixteenth century, in the Government Collection of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta. G. D Pande, who read this manuscript notes that it is incomplete and does not provide a comprehensive picture of the caste system. It appears that this was the first attempt to work out an occupational hierarchy, which was also in consonance with the Varna system. The manuscript devotes most of its space to a description of the Brahman way of life. It is also concerned with the placement of the progeny of mixed Varna marriages. The great interest in the consequence of mixed marriages indicates that this was prevalent.

Notes:

1. Unbroken lines in the above scheme denote connubial exclusiveness. Broken lines denote relatively frequent intermarriage. Women follow the arrow, more often in the direction of unbroken ones and less frequently in that of the broken ones.
2. The Doms were not divided into any formal named castes. The named occupational groups were also castes in the sense the Pitali or the Kshetri, for instance, were. The terms *khalait* and *mang-khani* describe the economic relationship which these two “classes” of Dom had with the Bith and have been used with the scheme to facilitate discussion.

The Chand state system fostered the division, by sanctioning revenue free grants to its nobility, which allowed total control over the tenant peasantry. A large number of these grants were located in the Tarai, but jagirs were also granted in the vicinity of Almora, that is in Baramandal, Pali and Gangoli. (Dabral Dogadda 2047VS:192–226) These grantees reduced the cultivating peasants to *kainis* and made them cultivate sir land as *sirtans*. (Joshi et.al. Almora1992: 247) The Khasa Brahman contradiction was clearly articulated in the court politics of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁴ It is possible that some Khasa lineages were granted upper caste status as a consequence of this politics. The Gorkha interregnum displaced a large number of upper caste families whose superior caste status was premised upon political power and revenue free grants. Yet, the Gorkha period continued to recognise the ritual superiority of the Brahmans, who were inducted into the administrative system, given favourable positions, and granted 50% exemption on all duties and taxes.⁵

⁴ Shivanand Pande, *Kalyan Chandrodaya Kavya* manuscript courtesy Dr. G.D. Pande, and N.N. Mishra edited *Kalyan Chandrodaya* Almora not dated.

⁵ P.R. Sharma, Caste, Social Mobility and Sankritisation: a Study of Nepal's Old Legal Code, *Kailash* Volume V 1977, No 4 pp. 277 to 298.

It is during this period that upper caste superiority which had been based upon revenue free grants now articulated distinctions based upon lineage and immigration. The caste consciousness of the Brahmans and the Thakurs was reasonably well developed and formulated by this period. These groups who wanted to locate themselves in north Indian Hindu society now traced their origins to places like Kannauj, Jhansi, Jhusi, Maharashtra etc.⁶ The Khasas on the other hand were rooted in local structures, and were identified by their village of residence, having patronyms invariably derived from the names of their village.⁷ (Sanwal, Delhi 1976: 45) Yet, they did have a sense of a larger system, because of marriage links. They had a well developed lineage system and were interconnected at the regional level.⁸ (Galey, Almora 1992:173–237). The Khasas were therefore an intermediate group who could aspire to higher status by being granted the sacred thread but who could also be enslaved for transgression and reduced to serfdom. They had as yet not articulated a clear cut caste consciousness, except in relationship to the service castes, the Doms.

The Doms, on the other hand, were restricted to the locality by the prevalence of cross-cousin marriages and by the negotiation of marriages for them by their masters — the Gosains. Not only were the Doms limited by the constraints of the local, but they were also divided amongst themselves by an internal hierarchy.

⁶ M.Pande, *Sankshipta Kurmanchal Rajya Varnan Aur Simaltiya Pande Vanshavali* Almora 1925, Manuscript, handwritten which describes the various Brahman lineages and traces their origins- Bar Khori Pande-Kannauj; Gautam Gotri Pande- Kangra; Galli Joshi- Kannauj; Bharadwaj Gotri Pant- Konkan; Parashar Gotri- Deccan; Bharadwaj Gotri Pande-Awadh; Upamanyu Gotri Mishra- Prayag; Garga Gotri-Unnao; Bhatt Vishwamitra Gotra- South Telang; Shandilya Gotra Pathak-Awadh; Jha and Ojha- Mithila to Nepal and then Askot, Karnatak, Krishna Gotri Vashisth- Karnataka.

⁷ Sanwal cites Atkinson and notes that the names of the Khasa Brahman are chiefly derived from the villages in which they live.

⁸ J.C. Galey, *Hindu Kingship in its Ritual Realm, Himalaya, Past and Present* Volume 2 Almora 1992 pp. 173–237.

The only Dom groups that practised endogamy were the religious practitioners, the Das-Dholi-Damai. Therefore, though all the Doms were considered as ritually polluting by the upper castes, they were not a single homogenous group with a distinctive caste consciousness.

The agrarian structure of the pre-modern period can be broadly divided into two categories—villages under the control of the Brahmans and other state functionaries who had received them in rent-free assignments, and villages cultivated by lineages which had reclaimed land from the forest. The rent-free villages were under the control of the *jagirdar* who was also incharge of civil and criminal administration. (Regmi, Delhi, 1978:107–109). Those who controlled rent free lands referred to themselves as Thuljaat and claimed that they were ritually superior to the common peasants because they did not cultivate their own land. Their sir lands were cultivated by agrestic serfs known as *haliyas* or slaves. A section of the Thuljaat lineages lived in urban or semi-urban centres, and were members of the administrative elite. The peasantry in these villages was given the status of tenants who could not be evicted from their land as long as they paid their customary dues.

Over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries under the Gorkhas and the British, there was a tendency for land under this category to decrease with the resumption of land by the Gorkha and British authorities.⁹ Nevertheless some families retained their lands and were under pressure to increase their sir land to prevent tenants acquiring legal rights. The temples also controlled a certain portion of the land and it appears that the condition of the tenantry, in the temple lands was also deteriorating during this period.¹⁰ On the other hand, a large amount of the land was under the control of the peasant producers who cultivated the land themselves, and

⁹ *Pre Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued 20 December 1855, Kumaun Mafidars- 62, Whole villagers and plots 134, Assessed Area -2676 bisis.

¹⁰ J.O' B. Beckett *Settlement Report of Kumaun*, Gunth villages yielded Rs 8447 per annum, and sadabart villages, whose revenues were devoted to charitable purposes, yielded Rs 5800 per annum.

were usually linked to other members of the village through lineage ties. These peasants usually came under the category of Bith, and were known as Khasa. The distinction between the Brahmans and the Rajputs in the Khasa category was fluid and even Brahmans of the Khasa caste were inferior to the Rajputs of the Thuljaat castes. In multi-lineage villages marriages between lineages were allowed, and a sense of village solidarity was fostered and developed. (Berreman 1963: 203, 229–30). The artisanal castes were a necessary adjunct of both kinds of villages, and were usually relegated to the margins of the village or inhabited a small hamlet adjacent to the village, usually on a slightly lower elevation.¹¹

The best description of caste in a village setting in the nineteenth century is provided by Mountaineer. Though he describes a village in Garhwal it could easily be applied to a village in Kumaun...

to describe the inhabitants of one large village or a cluster of small ones, gives a good idea on the entire population. There is generally one or more families of Brahmans, who officiate at the religious ceremonies, fix the days of marriage and betrothals, for commencing any particular work, setting out on a particular journey, casting horoscopes etc., but they have not entirely the influence possessed by their brethren in the plains. A blacksmith is indispensable, he makes and repairs the agricultural instruments and for this receives from each family, yearly, a certain fixed quantity of grain of about sixteen pounds from each harvest. The shoemaker is supposed to supply every male in the village with a pair of shoes yearly and to receive a certain quantity of grain from each family...one or two families or carpenters and masons, the two trades always been linked are located in almost every village but only a few of them work regularly at their trade... the *jumaries* are musicians attached to the village temple. (Mountaineer, London 1860:162–163).

¹¹ Field work in Kumaun, also remarked upon in the Van Panchayat Records of Satkhol and Nathuakhal.

Mountaineer provides schematic picture of caste in the region which was predicated upon a ritual difference based on the division of society into Bith and non-Bith. The Bith castes could share food with certain restrictions, but did not interact with the artisanal groups. Yet, there was no taboo on “flesh or any other thing roasted at the fire, parched grain, fruit and everything that does not require cooking may be eaten by all classes together.” (Ibid. 17). Thus village solidarity was maintained and was manifest during festivals and other activities, in spite of the divisions of caste.

Though caste distinctions were visible in the pre-modern polity yet the boundaries between castes were fluid and open to negotiation and to a large extent were dependent on political equations. The Dharmadhikar could provide for enhancement or reduction of caste status of individuals and groups. British rule changed this, it brought with it administrators who were trained to classify information about “natives” and who were required to provide definitive information about British subjects. Inquiries about caste and ethnicity formed an important part of their investigations. In the early years of British rule the administrators did allow aspersions against caste to be brought before the government. From 1824, 27 cases were adjudicated; in 1825, 77 cases; and in 1837, 7 such cases were brought before the courts. (Tolia, Almora 1994: 60) Gradually this was discouraged, but the authorities realised that information about castes was necessary for understanding native psyche. British rule, therefore led to the development of two contradictory tendencies—it refused to recognise caste distinctions in the legal sphere, yet it probed its informants for detailed information about caste, and thereby legitimized it.

The State and its Emphasis on an All India Model

The Brahmans were the only literate group who were conversant with local records and who also claimed knowledge of the scriptures. The early administrators therefore tended to rely on them for their information about local society. Though the East India Company’s state and the post-1857 dispensation recognised the historical specificity of Kumaun, nevertheless, the administrative structure was determined by larger policy perspectives and the need to develop a uniform system.

This perspective on caste was part of a broad understanding of the Varna system with its hierarchy of castes—Brahman, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Sudra. The local administrators had realised from the outset, the fact that the Kumaun situation presented a variation of the textual understanding of caste. They may have noticed the absence of the trading community the Vaishyas, and the problem of ascribing the Khasas to a particular Varna. This is apparent in the confusion about ascription of caste to particular groups in the 1865 and 1872 Census.¹² For example the 1865 Census recorded Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras classified as the Khasa and the Dom as Sudras in the Garhwal Census, whereas in Kumaun the Khasas were enumerated as Kshatriyas with the specific appellation of Khasa. In the 1872 Census the Khasas were classified as Kshatriyas and in the 1891 Census for Almora a distinction was made between Khas Rajputs and other Rajputs.¹³ In Kumaun in 1865, Doms were classified with Muhammadans in the miscellaneous category. In the 1872 Census they were enumerated according to occupation and only 7,351 were classified as Doms. This was rectified in the 1881 Census, by which time, caste ascriptions had probably been more clearly formulated not only by the Census enumerators and the official machinery but also by the people.

According to the 1865 Census, caste distribution was as follows¹⁴

1. Brahmans without distinction	41,658	11%
2. Thakur	95	0.02%
3. Khassias or hill Rajputs	2,04,190	55%
4. Vaishyas	2,988	0.7%
5. Shekh Sayed, Pathan, Mughal	519	0.13%
6. Miscellaneous Muslims Doms	1,18,833	30.8%
7. Total population	3,85,790	

¹² W.C. Plowden, *Census of the North Western Provinces*. Allahabad 1867.

¹³ *Census of Almora District*, Collectorate Library, Almora.

¹⁴ W.C. Plowden, *Census Report IV*, N.W.P 1865, Table III extract from General Statement No IV Allahabad 1867.

The problem with British officialdom was that they confused Varna categories with caste and in the search for Varna groups in Kumaun they were unable to translate the specificity of the Kumaun caste system into appropriate Census categories (based on Varna).

According to the Census of 1872, the percentages of different castes were approximately as follows¹⁵

Immigrant Brahman (Bhalbaman)	3%
Khasa Brahman	22%
Immigrant Rajput (Thakur Rajput)	11%
Khasa Rajput	29%
Doms	23%

The development of caste consciousness and the emergence of caste organisations in the late nineteenth century all over India is well documented. The specificity of the Kumaun trajectory is related to its historical context, which was gradually eroded and replaced by an all India framework. By 1996, K.S. Singh who conducted an anthropological survey found uniformity in Kumaun with most people returning themselves either as Rajputs or Brahmans.¹⁶ The specific context of Kumaun had disappeared without a trace. The history of this change can be documented and is part of the changes that occurred in Kumaun during the colonial period.

The Thuljaat Brahmans

As discussed earlier, the Thuljaat Brahmans were a caste conscious category from the seventeenth century. The construction of family genealogies which traced the family back to regions outside Kumaun had become prevalent during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. E.T. Atkinson was informed by Rudra Dutt

¹⁵ These percentages have been calculated from the figures quoted by Atkinson Volume III, part II, pp. 420 to 438.

¹⁶ Personal communication.

Pant about the history of various Brahman families. He noted that the Pants ascribe their origin to Maharashtra, whereas the Pandes are said to have come from Kot Kangra, the Garggotri Joshis claim to have been Chaubes of Dundiakhara in Awadh, whereas the Angiras Joshis claim to have come from Kanauj, the Tiwaris claim descent from Gujarati Brahman, the Upadhyayas considered themselves descendants of Shri Ballabh of Kanauj, the Pathaks declared that they had come from Sansaran Pali in Awadh and the Dugal from Kanauj etc.¹⁷

E.T. Atkinson's researches into the Kumaun caste system led to the formulation of a historical origin for the caste system. Unlike the earlier justification for the caste system based on divine origins, Atkinson provided a thesis which appeared historical and was clearly linked to an understanding of contemporary political and power equations. According to this understanding the Doms were the earliest settlers of the region and were subjugated by the Khasa after whom the area came to be known as Khasa Desha. The Khasas in turn were subdued by Brahman and immigrant Rajputs who introduced the caste system, wherein the Khasa were relegated to a lower status than the immigrants and politically more powerful upper castes. This accounted for the fact that the Khasas ranked lower than the Thuljaat. This model of subordination, based upon a semblance of historicity was accepted by the modern intelligentsia of Kumaun.

B.D. Pande who wrote *Kumaun Ka Itihas* half a century after E.T. Atkinson, reiterated the model provided by the *Gazetteer*. (Pande, Almora first pub. 1938 reprint 1990: 509–632) B.D. Pande also cited Rudra Dutt Pant, and repeated the information provided by E.T. Atkinson. B.D. Pande's information however is much more elaborate and provides detailed genealogies. A similar hand written manuscript was given to me by M.P. Joshi.¹⁸ It is probably a copy of Rudra Dutt Pant's compilation. Though B.D. Pande was a

¹⁷ E.T. Atkinson, *The Himalayan Gazetteer*, Delhi 1981, Volume III, part II, pp. 420 to 430.

¹⁸ M.P. Joshi, Reader, Department of History, Kumaun University, Almora.

nationalist, opposed to colonial rule, he did not follow through the implications of Atkinson's formulation, which justified imperial rule. Implicit in the hypothesis was an understanding that the British conquerors were superior to the vanquished, even to the Brahmans and Kshatriyas. The theory of immigrant status, therefore became implicated in colonial historiography and was accepted even by the nationalist intelligentsia.

The importance of these genealogies did not decline in the half century between E.T. Atkinson and B.D. Pande, because caste distinctions were now confined to these claims. It is also possible that the colonial formulation of distinctions between Khasa and Thuljaat which was codified by Panna Lall in 1920 also had an impact on the Brahman groups.¹⁹ In this he noted the names of Brahman families who could be regarded as Thuljaat. A large number of Brahmans were probably missed out by Panna Lall, which created problems of social mobility for those who did not find themselves in list A of Panna Lall. Both, Panna Lall's *Kumaun Customary Law* and B.D. Pande's *Kumaun Ka Itihas* were not well received by the Brahmans because they circumscribed attempts at mobility of a large number of Brahman lineages.²⁰

R.D. Sanwal, a sociologist who studied the caste system in Kumaun during the 1950s also noted the hierarchy of immigrant Brahman and Rajput at the top of the social order. He brought into clear focus the link between political power and ritual status which had been a part of the pre-modern order. He found that according to the Panchayat rulings, if a Thuljaat individual became an *asami* or tenant he lost his Thuljaat status. (Sanwal, Delhi, 1976: 34). Yet, like others before him, he followed E.T. Atkinson's model for an explanation of the Kumaun caste system. He

¹⁹ Panna Lall *Kumaun Local Custom*, Allahabad, 1920 p. 10.

²⁰ Critique of Panna Lall is to be found in *Shakti* and in the proceedings of the U.P. Legislative Council. B.D. Pande's *Kumaun Ka Itihas* evoked demonstrations by the Dalits, and his ethnographic description was resented by a large number of groups. His daughter late Sushila Pande attributed his defeat at the 1936 elections to the hostility evoked by this version of Kumaun history.

remarked that “the Bhalbaman were exempted from land and other taxes, formal education was the sole prerogative of the immigrant Brahmans who kept the arts of reading and writing to themselves. The immigrants alone were entitled to hold offices at the court.” (Ibid: 28–29). R.D. Sanwal pointed out the problems faced by the “immigrant Brahmans” during British rule, they lost their rent free lands and were compelled to find other occupations of which government service appears to have been the most popular. He also suggests that the Thuljaat Brahmans also took up priestly functions, which they had originally disdained. The evidence for this is not provided, either by Sanwal or by A. Fanger who accepts Sanwal’s formulation.²¹ It is not possible to substantiate Sanwal’s hypothesis, but it is likely that those who switched to the priestly function also lost their Thuljaat status, because so far during my field work I have not met any priest who claims to be a Thuljaat Brahman.

Though Sanwal did not question Atkinson’s formulation about the power aspect of caste, he was able to raise some doubts about the translation of immigrant status into high ritual status. He noted that “the Chauthani, whose ancestors had come to Kumaun from different parts of India at different times, could not have transferred their individual caste status to Kumaun, for no two Brahman sub-castes, not even the highest, from two different regions in India have a method of establishing social precedence in relation to one another. The original status position of a sub-caste in the regional social hierarchy is rendered meaningless by breaking away from the territorial base, especially when such breaking off by migration is sporadic and involves small numbers. Hence, in Kumaon such immigrants had to define their status rank afresh and privileged as they were politically and economically, they came to occupy the highest socio-ritual status which they perpetuated by systematic intermarriage amongst themselves. Those of the immigrants who failed to obtain political and economic privileges and power came to occupy the next lower

²¹ A.C. Fanger *Diachronic and Synchronic Perspectives on Kumaun Society and Culture*, Ph. D dissertation, Syracuse University 1980.

sub-caste status. But none of these groups became completely closed groups. Political privilege and not birth alone being the original recruitment criterion, it was indeed difficult to maintain the exclusiveness of these groups. This scheme of things which made ritual status subservient to and dependent upon political and economic status permeated the entire system of socio-ritual status assignment in Kumaon.” (Sanwal, Delhi 1976: 40). Sanwal thus indicated the problem of immigrant status and was able to locate its emergence in and around the various centers of Hindu political power like Kali Kumaun (the seat of the early Chand kings) Gangoli (seat of the Mankoti kings) Askot (seat the of the Katyuri Rajbars) and Almora in Khas-parja (seat of the later Chands). He also found an absence of the Chauthanis in the western and north western region of Kumaun. The immigrant status of the Thuljaat was therefore linked to a specific territorial location within Kumaun. This had been noted in the late nineteenth century by Goudge, another British administrator who noted that “high caste Brahmans are mainly confined to Joshis, Tiwaris, Pants, Upretis and Pandes. They are divided into various families according to local distinctions for example the Pants of Gangoli, of Syunara, the Joshis of Selakhola, Gali Chinakhan, Jhijhar and Daniya, Pandes of Patia etc., according to the village from which they originally came. The high caste Brahman families have been for generations in the service of the Kumaun Rajas or the British government and have representatives settled in Almora”.²²

The uncritical acceptance of immigrant Brahman origin by colonial ethnographers, nationalists, and even academics can be understood only contextually. It has been perpetuated by upper castes who continued to dominate the political and social scene not only during the pre-colonial and colonial periods but also in the post-colonial. It was also difficult for research scholars to determine the historicity of ancestors who belonged to a much earlier period. The authenticity of the Vanshavalis was also

²² J.E. Goudge *Final Report of the Assessment of Almora District*, Allahabad, 1903, p. 6.

accepted because of their semblance at historicity for four or five generations. Many of them also used Sanskrit and were able to appear to be of ancient origin. M.P. Joshi was able to expose the fallacy of immigrant origin when he collated a large number of Vanshavalis of Brahmans who claimed to have come with Somchand in the tenth century.²³ (Joshi, Almora 1990: 201–244) He noted the difference in the number of generations of the various Vanshavalis, and attempted to locate them in a historical context by studying them in the light of copper plate inscriptions. He was able to establish the mythical nature of Som Chand and thereby concluded that the Vanshavalis were also mythical.

The Brahman presence in this region can be dated to the post-Mauryan period that is from the second century B.C. which witnessed the performance of a number of Yajnas.²⁴ During the Gupta period the Brahmans probably established their Ashrams in the upper reaches of the mountains. (Dabral, Dogadda 2052VS: 479–509). The Katyuri records of the ninth and the tenth centuries mention land grants to temples and it is possible that the Brahmans were part of their court (Ghildyal, Srinagar, 1981: 55–82). It is in the Khasa records of the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries that a clear reference to Brahmans can be found and it is during this period that they would appear to have established their presence (Adhikary, Jaipur 1988: 52). In the initial phase the Brahmans and the Ashrams were probably confined to the ridges which were not malarial like the valleys as is evident from the divisions amongst the Brahmans of Garhwal, Sarola the residents of the mountains are considered superior to the Gangaris residents of the valleys. (Raturi, Tehri, first published 1928 reprint 1988: 69–70) R.D. Sanwal also found the Brahmans in the ridges, where they were safe from the aul or malarial fever of the valleys. (Sanwal, Delhi 1976: 145).

²³ M.P. Joshi Kumaun Vanshavalis, Myth and Reality, *Himalaya Past and Present* Volume I Almora 1990 pp. 201 to 244.

²⁴ K.P. Nautiyal, B. Khanduri and R. Bhatt, Uttarakhand Ka Puratattva, *Pahad* 3 and 4 pp. 1 to14, archaeological excavations have unearthed evidence about Yajnas performed in the Garhwal region as early as the second century B.C.

It is during the rule of Rudra Chand in the sixteenth century that Kumaun elites initiated the imposition of caste rules on Kumaun society. Probably the Brahmans who were able to acquire political power became Thuljaats during the Chand period. The prominence of some of the Brahman families can also be linked to knowledge of mantras, tantras and yantras. The importance of Brahmans in the pre-modern polity was also linked to their knowledge of astrology and the solar calendar, which would be required for all agricultural and pastoral operations.²⁵ (Upadhyaya, Bareilly 1979: 90 to 283). This knowledge would have been recognised by the Khasa who would have granted them higher ritual status. Brahman preeminence was contested by the Khasas and the factional politics at Almora during the Chand period was divided along Khasa and Brahman lines. It is probable that in an attempt to prove their ritual superiority the Brahmans acquired genealogies which helped them assert their secular authority over the Khasas. The acquisition of immigrant status was thus a later fiction which obscured the varied origins of Thuljaat families who were interlinked by ties of commensality and intermarriage.

What was the historical role played by the Thuljaat Brahmans during the colonial period? How did they articulate their consciousness of caste? Did they form any organisations and did they operate as a political group? There is no evidence of any specific Brahman organisations though the overall hegemony of Brahmanical Hinduism is evident from a number of sources. They did not operate as a political group though they did exercise a reasonable amount of power even during the colonial period. The erstwhile jagirdars continued to exercise adjudicative powers through the nineteenth to the early twentieth century.²⁶ They also tried to increase the amount of Sir land under their control. Many of the wealthy Thuljaats were able to retain their economic position

²⁵ Only two stories refer to Brahmans. Purakh Pant is referred to as an unusual Brahman, because he was a great warrior, in the other story the Brahman provides information about agricultural operations- the solar calendar.

²⁶ Field work—Dholigaon, near Debidhura, where the Pande family, continued to adjudicate civil matters till as late as the 1930s and 1940s.

in the village by taking to money lending. They articulated a clear cut caste consciousness by refusing to dine with any other but the Thuljaat.

It was the Thuljaat Brahmans of Almora who appear to have taken the lead in establishing the Shiv Raj Sanskrit Pathshala. A catalytic role was played by B.D. Joshi Sadar Amin in establishing the Pathshala; he also donated money for two rooms at the Mission School. He belonged to the family of the Joshis of Danya who had been Kanungos from the period of G.W. Traill. The Thuljaat families were also at the forefront of the confrontation between the missionaries and the Hindus. Raghubar Dutt Joshi, the boy who was to be baptised by the missionaries belonged to the influential families of the Joshis of Jhijhar. His proposed baptism was resented by all the prominent Brahman families that is the Joshis of Jhijhar, Galli, Pants of Syunara, Pandes of Champanaula, Pande Khola etc.²⁷ This created tension between the Brahmans who were considered loyalists such as the Joshis of Chinakhan and Danya who had received the patronage of the British authorities, and those who did not favour colonial rule. This debate was revived again in the early 1920s when D.D. Pant launched a campaign against a number of mal-practices amongst the Brahmans, particularly against expenses at weddings. The Progressive Party, established in May 1924 favoured social reform and was critical of the Swarajists for their feeble attempts at change. In response to this, *Shakti* published an article arguing that the Late Leela Nand Joshi of Chinakhan was the first to initiate reform against conspicuous expenditure at weddings, which was resisted by Gouri Dutt Joshi and Badri Dutt Joshi, and noted that this issue apparently led to boycott of certain lineage groups of the Brahmans. The *Kumaun Kumud* which was launched by D.P. Joshi also sustained the division amongst the Thuljaat Brahmans of Kumaun.²⁸

²⁷ L.D. Joshi *Diaries 1867–1912*, Archives of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

²⁸ *Shakti* 20 May 1924.

Another episode which affected the Thuljaat Brahmans of Almora and Kumaun was the furore created by the return of Bhola Nath Pande from Japan, in 1910. A public decision announced that Bhola Nath Pande and his family would be ex-communicated because he had travelled overseas. All attempts by Bhola Nath and his family the Pandes of Pattia to pacify orthodox sentiment were of no avail. He underwent a purification ceremony at Kankhal in Haridwar. He appealed to the Raja of Kashi, the Mahamahupadhyaya Pandit Sudhakar Dwivedi, who accepted his expiation. A *Vyavastha Patra* was published, which noted the sanction of a large number of Brahmans—Laxman Dutt Sharma, Acharya Ghananand Pant, Padma Dutt Sharma, Badri Dutt Pande, Kashi Ram Sharma, Lokmani Tripathi, Kashi Dutt Sharma and Pitambar Pant.²⁹ The *Vyavastha Patra* also mentioned the names of all the Kumauni Brahmans, who supported B.N. Pande. These were Badri Dutt Joshi, Hari Dutt Pant, Jai Dutt Pande, Mathura Dutt, Chandra Ballabh Pant, Ganga Dutt Pande, Purushottam Pant, Badri Dutt Pande, Hira Ballabh Pande, Krishna Nand Pande, Krishna Nand Joshi, Jagannath Pande, Ram Dutt Tripathi, Ram Dutt Pant, Kevalal Nand Joshi and Rajiv Lochan Joshi. In spite of this mobilisation, B.N. Pande was not accepted back into the community. The ignominy of this persecution proved too much for him and he died in 1913. He was mourned by many upper caste Brahmans who referred to him as Kurmanchali Abhimanyu.³⁰ The conservative group of Brahmans now initiated the establishment of the Sanatan Dharma Sabha in opposition to the activities of the Arya Samaj. L. D. Joshi referred to this group in his *Diaries* “they will follow blind traditions. They do not know what it is to march with the times. Hinduism cannot have more dangerous opponents than these men”.³¹ After this episode we do not find any specific references to Thuljaat Brahmans.

²⁹ *Vyavastha Patra*, published N.K.P.C. 26 December 1910, pp. 1 to 3.

³⁰ *Almora Akhbar* 1913.

³¹ L.D. Joshi *Diaries 1867–1912*, Archives of Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

The Khasa Brahmans

The colonial period marked an important change within the ranks of the Khasas because of a disjunction between the Khasa Brahmans and the Khasa Rajputs. According to available evidence, there was a remarkable absence of division between the Khasa Brahmans and the Khasa Rajputs in Kumaun and Western Nepal during the pre-colonial period. By the time of P.N. Shah, however, we find references to the Jaisi Brahmans, who are distinguished from the upper caste Brahmans.³² P.N. Shah was particularly opposed to the Jaisis and attempted to control them through a number of regulations.³³ They were required to pay fines and were not entitled to perform religious ceremonies. Gradually, however the Jaisis were able to overcome these injunctions and were regarded as an important component of the Gorkha polity.³⁴ For Kumaun, we do not find any references to Khasa or Jaisi Brahmans prior to the colonial period.

Who were the Khasa Brahman and what was their role in the social context of Kumaun during British rule? It is difficult to arrive at any conclusion about the origins of Khasa Brahman families. B.H. Hodgson suggests that they were the progeny of Brahman males from Khasa females. (Hodgson, Varanasi, 1971: 37–44). They therefore acquired the patronym of their father, but were allocated to the Khasa caste. The famous Kalu Pande at P.N. Shah's court came from a similar background.³⁵ (Ibid. 38).

³² *Regmi Research Collection Vol. 2*, Nepal Research Centre, Kathmandu p. 277.

³³ *Regmi Research Collection Vol. 2*, pp. 279–280.

³⁴ *Regmi Research Collection Vol. 2*, p. 284.

³⁵ “In the reign of Ram Sah of Gorkha, an ancestor of the present dynasty of Nepal, an ambassador was sent from the Durbar of Gorkha to that of Mewar, to exhibit the Gorkhali Rajah's pedigree and to claim recognition of alleged kindred. The head of the renowned Sesodias, somewhat staggered with the pedigree, seemed inclined to admit the relationship, when it was suggested to him to question the ambassador about his own caste as a sort of test for the orthodoxy or otherwise of the notions of caste entrained in the far distant, and, as had always at Chittor or Udaypur

These Khasa were not regarded as different from Khasa Rajputs, and in the 1860s, Mountaineer found intermarriage and commensality between the two groups, which denoted that the overwhelming criterion for determining identity was not the patronym but Khasa, which constituted a caste/ group in itself. Even G. Berreman, who conducted his field work in Garhwal in the 1960s remarked upon the intermixing between the two groups and noticed that intermarriage between the two groups did not create any serious problems. (Berreman, California 1963: 229). In the early years of the nineteenth century, therefore, Khasa was prevalent. This gradually changed over the nineteenth century, as the term Khasa was often substituted by Khassia which acquired a pejorative connotation.

The contradiction between the Khasa and the Thuljaat Brahmans during the pre-colonial period was a power struggle about control of the Chand kingdom. Even then the ascendancy of the Thuljaat Brahmans as late as the eighteenth century required the support of a Khasa faction. (Mishra, Almora not dated: 12). This group of Khasas was able to assert itself and probably acquired a higher caste status. During the Gorkha period when a large number of Thuljaat Brahman families lost their rent free lands, the landed Khasa may have been able to assert themselves as a group. The Gorkha kingdom however gained ideological supremacy to the Brahmans by its acceptance and implementation of the Hindu order. It was probably this which led to a proliferation of families claiming immigrant status. The Gorkha kingdom chose these Brahmans for administrative positions, and this probably resulted in the emergence of a small group of Khasa Brahmans, a category emphasizing Brahman status and differentiating themselves from Khasa Rajputs.

been supposed, barbarous Himalaya. The ambassador, a Khas, who had announced himself as belonging to the martial tribe, or Kshatriya, thus pressed, was now obliged to admit that he was nevertheless a Panade, which being the indubitable congomen of a tribe of the sacred order of Hinduism, his mission was courteously dismissed without further enquiry.”

From its inception, British rule does not appear to have recognised any difference between Khasa Brahman and Thuljaat Brahmans. It was difficult for British administrators, schooled in shastric lore to accept the fact that a section of Brahman could be subordinate to the Kshatriyas in ritual terms. In 1865 the Brahmans of Kumaun and Garhwal had been classified as Brahmans without distinction and they constituted about 10.8% of the population. When E.T. Atkinson tried to compute the number of Khasa Brahman from the 1872 Census, he found that the Khasa Brahmans constituted 22% of the total population and the Bhalbaman/Thuljaat constituted a mere 3% of the total population. The increase in the total Brahman population from 1865 to 1872 by almost 15% appears quite large. This can be accounted for by a large number of Khasa Brahmans who had earlier declared themselves as Khasas now opting for the status of Brahman. (Atkinson first published 1882 reprint Cosmo 1981 III part II: 420–421).

A. Fanger argues that during the nineteenth century a number of the Thuljaat joined the ranks of the Khasas, because of problems in finding haliyas or ploughmen.³⁶ His hypothesis appears to be that a large number of the Thuljaat (Bhalbamans) Brahmans joined the ranks of the Khasa Brahmans and took to ploughing their own land. R.D. Sanwal, on the other hand, emphasises a different process. He focuses on the refusal of the British to sanction outward symbols of caste difference such as the mandatory brass bangle which had to be worn by the Khasa Brahmans. He notes, that “the titles Pitali, Hali or Khasi, all referring to the same Brahman caste, are avoided by member of the caste they are intended for... the establishment of the British rule completely changed the conditions under which the Pitali had acquired their caste titles. The new rulers discontinued the formal enforcement of such rules as the wearing of a brass bractlet, a symbol of lowly servile status.” (Sanwal, 1976:149) He argues that during the colonial period the Khasa Brahmans emulation of Thuljaat practices eventually, made it impossible to find any Pitali of Khasa

³⁶ A.C. Fanger *Diachronic and Synchronic Perspectives on Kumaun Society and Culture*, Ph. D dissertation, Syracuse University 1980. pp. 235–236.

Brahman in Kumaun except in the isolated pockets of Danpur, Askot or Kali Kumaun. Sanwal's hypothesis is supported by historical evidence about the interlinkage that was being established by the colonial state's recognition of both Thuljaat and Khasa Brahmans as Brahmans.

During the nineteenth century, urban, semi-urban, educated, and wealthy Khasa Brahmans were able to dissociate themselves from the Khasa Rajputs and Khasa-jimdars. By the early twentieth century, a number of Khasa Brahmans were asserting Brahman/Bhalbaman status. The appellation Khasa was no longer favoured and it suited the Khasa Brahmans to drop the Khasa appellation. British policy also facilitated the merger of the Khasa with the Bhalbaman to form a single Brahman group. During the late nineteenth century British authorities like Ramsay were disillusioned with the modern intelligentsia over the issue of missionary conversions. They perceived the Brahmans as the main opponents of their social influence, and decided to encourage other caste groups. The preeminence of the Brahmans was resented by other groups, who were also in search of government jobs after acquiring English education. These groups observed quite correctly that Brahmans dominated this sector. L.D. Joshi had also remarked that "it is only government service that our educated men hanker after also because they do not find any other openings... government cannot provide posts for all of them and the result is that many of them in despair begin to lead a life which is by no means honourable".³⁷

The *Samai Vinod* had articulated its dissatisfaction with British policy regarding employment of natives. As early as 1877 it noted "at least some members of proven ability and merit should be inducted into the civil service, and added that it could not understand "why natives were excluded from the higher grades of civil service".³⁸ British policy, however, continued to exclude

³⁷ L.D. Joshi *Diaries 1867-1912*, Archives of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

³⁸ *Vernacular Newspaper Reports* 10 February and 3 March 1877.

Indians from the upper ranks of the services, and the number of petty clerkships available remained limited. Over the years, the number of educated unemployed appears to have increased and also the disaffection of the educated was registered by the colonial authorities. This was noted by E.S. Oakley who said that “English educated men whose numbers are vastly in excess of the requirement of government ... consider themselves ill-treated and deceived.” (Oakley first published 1905, reprint Nainital 1919:48).

The merchant and trading classes, designated as Vaishyas by British authorities had acquired English education and were interested in getting government jobs. This was also because of the decline in the trade between India and Tibet and the limited opportunities for trade in the region. It appears that “not long after (the school episode) a dispute arose between the Brahmans and the Vaishyas of Almora. The Banias believed that the Brahmans were the favoured class with the government because they monopolised all government appointments. They thought that many of them had received English education but none of them had got any responsible appointments with government... the then Commissioner of the division at once took up their side and made it a policy to transfer the Brahmans from Kumaun as far as he could”.³⁹ The policy of promoting other castes besides Brahmans was noted by *Almora Akhbar* which reported “our correspondent expresses regret at the existing mutual ill-will and jealousy among the different classes of the community at Almora and advises them to live in peace and amity, otherwise Kumaun.... soon be reduced to ruins”.⁴⁰

In 1898, a rumour was rife in Almora that the local residents, especially Brahmans would not be admitted to the public service and that those already in service would not receive promotions. This was supposedly in response to a petition submitted to the government by some members of the Almora community.⁴¹ It was

³⁹ L.D. Joshi *Diaries 1867-1912*, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, Sketch of Social Affairs in Kumaun.

⁴⁰ *Native Newspaper Reports North Western Provinces* 14 June 1899.

⁴¹ *Native Newspaper Reports North Western Provinces* 1 November 1898.

rumoured that they were assured by the official concerned that their complaint would be addressed. When the Lieutenant Governor visited Almora in November 1898, the Brahmans also submitted a memorial, requesting him to increase the number of jobs for local people, and also sought a clarification about official policy towards the Brahmans.⁴² They were told that the government had not issued any instructions proscribing Brahmans. This memorial aggravated the matter, and the Vaishyas in particular appear to have been offended that they had been referred to as petty traders in the memorial. The situation was serious and “matters have now come to such a pass that the members of one community do not salute those of another when they happen to pass by one another”.⁴³

The tension between the Brahmans and the other castes between 1898 and 1899 is well documented in the *Almora Akhbar* which said that Colonel Grigg was appointed Commissioner in 1894; he strongly opposed local Brahmans and refused to appoint them in official positions. It states “with the view to breaking the alleged official clique, he transferred the office clerks in a body and replaced them by others imported from the plains”⁴⁴ In another article entitled “Opposition to Brahmans at Almora” it referred to the resentment voiced by non-Brahmans who are anxious to qualify themselves for public services.⁴⁵

This feeling of animosity towards Brahmans did not die down easily and reports about discouragement of Brahmans by colonial authorities continued to be published. P.C. Wyndham, Commissioner of Kumaun continued Colonel Grigg’s policy and in 1916 the *Almora Akhbar* again reported the misfortune of the Brahmans.⁴⁶ In his reminiscences, G.R. Kala remembers his first meeting with P.C. Wyndham when he was sub-Deputy Inspector of Schools.⁴⁷

⁴² *Native Newspaper Reports North Western Provinces*, 17 January 1899.

⁴³ *Almora Akhbar* cited in *Native Newspaper Reports* 10 January 1899.

⁴⁴ *Almora Akhbar* 4 April 1899, *Native Newspaper Reports*.

⁴⁵ *Native Newspaper Reports North Western Provinces* 12 April 1899.

⁴⁶ *Almora Akhbar* 11 December 1916.

⁴⁷ G.R. Kala *Memoirs of The Raj*, Delhi 1974 page 12.

(Kala Delhi 1974:12). The first question he was asked by Wyndham was who are you? He answered “sub Deputy Inspector”. Wyndham then asked him, “Are you a Brahman or a Rajput? When he replied that he was a Brahman, Wyndham noted “I see Brahmans everywhere.” In another encounter, Wyndham was on his way to a hunting party when he met G.R. Kala and a policeman Har Swarup. When he saw them he was furious, because he had seen the face of a Brahman and the red turban of a policeman; he therefore cancelled his outing for the day.⁴⁸

Wyndham’s prejudice against the Brahmins was clearly spelt out. When he discovered that in his office 4 of the 7 clerks were Brahmans, he decided to transfer most of the Brahmans. *The Bharat Mitra* advised the Brahmans employed in these offices to assert their dignity and resign in protest.⁴⁹ Others could go on leave and Brahmans should henceforth not apply for government jobs. It was not possible for Brahmans to resign or go on leave because there was no possibility of any other gainful employment. There were exceptions like Bhagirath Pande who joined the forest division in 1916. Since his Conservator was against the Brahmans, he resigned after a year. However, his financial situation was such that he could not continue without a job so he joined the Collector’s establishment in Nainital where his work was appreciated. He eventually resigned from government service in 1920 during the Non-Cooperation movement.⁵⁰

The issue of discrimination against Brahmans by colonial authorities was taken up by the *Almora Akhbar*, which raised the question: “why does the government discriminate on the basis of religion and caste?”⁵¹ The editorial cited various reports in the *Almora Akhbar* from 1913 to 1916 in which the same issue had been raised.⁵² It said that jobs should be given on the basis of

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 41.

⁴⁹ *Almora Akhbar* 19 February 1917.

⁵⁰ Bhavani Dutt, Svargiya Bhagirath Pande in *B.D. Pande Smarika* ed. D. Pande, Almora 1984 pp.279–281.

⁵¹ *Almora Akhbar* 19 February 1917.

⁵² *Almora Akhbar*, 23 June 1913, 28 July 1913, 19 April 1916, 30 October 1916, 18 December 1916 and 25 December 1916.

merit and not on the basis of caste. In 1919 a poor Brahman lad lamented the fact that he did not get a job because he was a Brahman.⁵³ This was the result of official discrimination which can be traced back to the last decade of the nineteenth century.

Though British policy appears to have encouraged the merger of the Khasa with the Bhalbaman, yet the Thuljaat resented the Khasa Brahman's attempt at status mobility, and as a consequence the tension between the Nandhoti (Khasa Brahman) and the Lamdhotis (Bhalbaman) became particularly acute during the early twentieth century. In a three-part article in the *Almora Akhbar*, Krishna Joshi noted in 1913, that there was no difference between the Brahmans and that the problem of high and low is irrelevant. In the third part of this article he lashed out against the Thuljaat Brahmans for their false pride.⁵⁴ In the same year an article in *Almora Akhbar* entitled "Dwij and Coolie Begar" came under heavy attack because it said that the upper caste Brahmans had never performed *begar*, which could only be demanded of the Khasiyas.⁵⁵

The tension between the two groups intensified because in 1916 the government set up a committee to ascertain local Kumaun customs on subjects like inheritance, marriage, legitimacy, joint property, adoption, partition, etc. This generated a heated debate about which groups would come under the jurisdiction of local custom. The Thuljaat Brahmans and Kshatriyas argued that they followed the Mitakshara school of Hindu Law, "whereas Khasias, Khasa Brahmans, Doms, Nayaks etc., were known to follow peculiar local customs".⁵⁶ Official investigations began around September 1916; this stimulated a great deal of interest in genealogies and prompted discussion about the role of immigrant Brahmans in pre-colonial Kumaun history. The *Almora Akhbar*

⁵³ *Shakti* 9 December 1919.

⁵⁴ *Almora Akhbar* 28 July 1913, 4 August 1913 and 8 September 1913.

⁵⁵ *Almora Akhbar* 8 September 1913.

⁵⁶ V.A. Stowell to S.P. O' Donnell, D.O Number 387, dated 29 -1916, cited Panna Lall, *Kumaun Local Custom*, 1920.

of 1916 and 1917 was full of references to Brahmans—for example in an article on the *Kurmanchal Kavya*, (*Kalyan Chandrodaya Kavya*), Pandit Ram Dutt Jyotirvid referred to the large number of Brahman families who were employed at the Chand court.⁵⁷ There was further reference to the Tripathis of Bisharh Gaon, and to the historicity of Som Chand, and to the great scholarship of Rudra Dutt Joshi. It would appear that the inquiries being conducted by Panna Lall regarding the Bhalbaman families in the Kumaun region had caused the ferment.

The tension between the two Brahman groups was evident during the 1920 elections to the U.P. Legislative Council; the contest was between G.B. Pant and Rai Bahadur Narayan Dutt Chimawal. This election clearly articulated the Khasa Brahman and the Thuljaat/Bhalbaman contradiction. The canvassing before the elections created a lot of ill-will between the two Brahman communities. The Brahmans of Chami village (N.D. Chimawal's village) organised a Brahman Samiti with Lakshmi Dutt Shastri as its Chairman. Prem Ballabh Pande reported that a certain group (referring to Chimawal's supporters) was blatantly exploiting the caste issue.⁵⁸ It is interesting that this kind of mobilisation probably led to the defeat of G.B. Pant (considered a Thuljaat). D. D. Tewari who compiled his historical and political notes on Kumaun in this period castigated British rule for favouring and appointing "men of low birth to high positions." (Tewari, Lucknow, 1923: 57).

It was around this time that the ferment caused by Panna Lall's inquiries about Khasa customary law was coming to the fore. This compilation of customary law in Kumaun was part of a colonial strategy to drive a wedge in the growth of a common Kumauni identity. It is probably for this reason that Panna Lall was critiqued by all sections of the Kumaun intelligentsia. G.B. Pant, raised the issue in the U.P. Legislative Council in 1924 wherein he said that Panna Lall had included many preposterous things in his books

⁵⁷ *Almora Akhbar* 14 August 1916.

⁵⁸ *Shakti* 25 May, 21 September and 12 October 1920.

which cannot be found anywhere else. Mukandi Lall also supported his contention and referred to the imaginary customs noted by Panna Lall.⁵⁹ L. D. Joshi in his famous tract the *Khasa Family Law* also noted that Panna Lall missed the fundamental difference in the religious and ethical evolution of the two classes of people, the Hindu and the Khasas. (L.D. Joshi, Allahabad 1929:44). We find that even those Kumaunis who accepted the difference between the Khasa and the Brahmans were not in favour of the report. It is apparent that a major change had occurred in Kumaun society and that Khasa rules did not find any takers, at least amongst the intelligentsia.

The 1920s therefore witnessed a debate between the Thuljaat and the Khasa Brahmans. In an article on “Agriculture and Brahmans” Surendra Dutt noted that the agricultural land of Kumaun is divided into a large number of small *hissedharis*.⁶⁰ He noted that a large number of the *hissehdars* are Brahmans. Many of these Brahmans find it difficult to sustain themselves and supplement their income by taking up employment as peons, chowkidars and cooks. A large number of them however consider agriculture as their primary activity, and many of them are in the habit of maintaining *haliyas* (ploughmen) for their agricultural work but of late it has become very difficult to find *haliyas* and to this can be added the problem of maintaining bullocks for ploughing. Many Brahmans are too poor to afford all this and live a life of great hardship. He said that many of them would be willing to start ploughing their own fields but are afraid of ostracism and of being delegated Khasa Brahman. This was clearly an appeal for overlooking the distinction between the Bhalbaman who did not plough their fields and the Khasa Brahmans who did.

In the post Panna Lall phase some sections of the intelligentsia mooted the idea that all Brahmans be considered of the same rank.

⁵⁹ Resolution Bringing Kumaun under the Civil Jurisdiction of the High Court, *U.P. Legislative Council Proceedings* Volume XX Allahabad 1925 pp. 186–198.

⁶⁰ *Shakti* 14 September 1920.

This was probably the consequence of Panna Lall's inquiries which reduced the Bhalbamans to an insignificant number of eleven lineages and also a response to colonial policy of discrimination against Brahmans. The 1920s saw the publication of a large number of open letters regarding Brahmans and caste status addressed to Kurmanchali gentlemen, by G.D. Pande, S.D. Pande and P.B. Joshi.⁶¹ This period also saw a growing interest in Vanshvalis and a large number of families claimed that they were important functionaries of the Chand rulers.⁶² B.D. Pande's article on the Hindus of Kumaun which referred to the fact that Khasa Brahmans and Rajputs accept bride price was not approved of and was rebutted by Indra Singh Nayal.⁶³

Social activists were concerned about this division within the Brahman ranks. As early as 1924 at a meeting of the Kumaun Parishad at Bageshwar, Harsh Deva Oli, Khimanand Upreti and B.D. Pande sponsored a resolution which stated that Brahmans should plough their own fields.⁶⁴ The idea was to overcome the difference between the Thuljaat and the Khasa Brahmans which was primarily premised upon those who ploughed their own fields and those who did not. There was severe resistance to the idea and H.G. Pant was one of the greatest critics of this proposal. It appears that B.D. Pande very upset with this response and submitted his resignation to the Congress Committee.⁶⁵ The Congress Committee refused to accept the resignation. However his resistance had the desired effect, it initiated a debate about the significance of the injunction against ploughing by Brahmans. This debate was carried out in the weekly *Shakti*.⁶⁶

The debate continued and in February 1927 Parasher was cited in support of the argument that the Brahmans who had taken to

⁶¹ *Shakti* 10 June 1924.

⁶² The first Vanshvali- M.Pande, *Sankshipta Kurmanchal Rajya Varnan Aur Simaltiya Pande Vanshvali* Almora 1925.

⁶³ *Shakti* 30 June 1925.

⁶⁴ *Shakti* 12 February, 20 May, 12 August and 26 August 1924.

⁶⁵ *Shakti* 26 August 1924.

⁶⁶ *Shakti* 6 May 1924 carried an article upon the false division between high and low amongst the Brahmans.

the plough had not degraded themselves.⁶⁷ Durga Dutt Shastri did not agree with this view, and said that Parasher had been misinterpreted.⁶⁸ Haldhar (pseudonym) wrote a long and satirical piece on the division of labour and its relationship to caste, and then fulminated on the changed circumstances of the twentieth century.⁶⁹ Ram Dutt Jyotirvid, the highly respected astrologer, noted that in Kumaun 90% of the Brahmans plough their fields and this reality should be recognised and accepted.⁷⁰

Narayan Dutt Sati was also exercised about the issue as were reformers like Gauri Dutt Pande Vaidya.⁷¹ While the debate about division between Brahmans continued through 1927 and 1928, it was eventually terminated by H.G. Pant, who made a symbolic gesture of ploughing at the Bageshwar fair, in January 1929.⁷² His revolutionary action was supported by Pandit Rai Sahab Durga Dutt Pant as being in accord with changing times.⁷³ This meant that the distinction between Khasa and Bhalbaman was no longer recognised in the public domain, which now gave an edge to the numerically preponderant Khasa Brahmans. By the 1960s, the dissociation of the Pitali Brahman caste from its ethnic linkage with the Khasi-jimdar was complete, and Brahmans emerged in local politics as a distinct group, self-conscious and articulate.⁷⁴ (Sankrityayan, Varanasi V. S. 2015:153). The distinction between the Khas Brahman and the Khas Rajput was also elaborated in the cultural sphere and by the middle of the twentieth century anthropologists were directed by some respondents to the separate domains of Brahmans and Rajputs.⁷⁵ (Berreman, in Modie and

⁶⁷ *Shakti* 2 February 1927.

⁶⁸ *Shakti* 2 April 1927.

⁶⁹ *Shakti* 9 April 1927.

⁷⁰ *Shakti* 23 April 1927.

⁷¹ *Shakti* 30 April 1927.

⁷² *Shakti* 19 January 1929.

⁷³ *Shakti* 29 March 1929.

⁷⁴ He notes, nowadays no Brahman is prepared to accept Khasa antecedents.

⁷⁵ "Khas include both Brahman and Rajput caste, each somewhat socially isolated from the other, each somewhat culturally distinct, although they share more with one another and interact more with one another than either does with any Dom caste".

Lall edited, Delhi 1981:243).

The Thakur Kshatriyas

The emergence of the Thakurs in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Himachal Pradesh, Garhwal, Kumaun and western Nepal is well documented in the folklore of the region. Prayag Joshi refers to the fact that the region of Shor was known for its nine Thakurs. (P. Joshi 1990:1). R. Sankrityayan has also described the Thakur phenomenon in great detail.⁷⁶ (Sankrityayan, *Pahad* 1994: 92–93). The Thakur's authority was based upon the lineage system. As described by anthropologist J.C. Galey, the dominance of the Thakur was based upon a process where by the local chief succeeded in uniting his house (lineage) with a temple through the identification with its main god or even through the replacement of the local god by his clan's one. (Galey, *Almora* 1992:200). He then became the Thakur or Lord and was called after a term normally used to address a divinity. The dominance of the Thakur lineage over a territory automatically placed the other lineages in a subordinate position. The hierarchy that emerged from this situation formed the basis for the organisation of Khasa society.

The introduction of a caste hierarchy into this system did not displace the lineage system. The Thakur lineages continued to exercise power in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and gradually acquired immigrant status through Vanshavalis with the support of the Brahmans thereby appropriating Kshatriya or Kshetri status. Particular lineages were recognized as Thuljaat, which was superior to the Khasa (both Brahman and Rajput). The rule of marriage exogamy however necessitated marriage with other lineages and there is clear evidence about the existence of

⁷⁶ His writing documents the emergence of Thakar Shahi in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the Himachal region. This coincides with the decline of the centralised Khasa kingdom which dominated Kumaun and Garhwal from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, and the emergence of smaller polities in the region under the control of the Thakurs.

lineage hierarchies. As Rai Bahadur Pati Ram noted, “the Kshatriya caste in this country is like a large banyan tree, stretching its wide spreading branches over hundred of castes and sub-castes and covering with its innumerable leaves the high as well as the low classes of Rajputs.” (Rai Bahadur Pati Ram Delhi 1992: 68).

The translation of this multiplicity into the Varna/Jati model was a difficult exercise and remained extremely nebulous. A large section of Kumaun society therefore fitted into a Thakur-Khasa continuum, which had a vertical aspect in its relationship to caste, though the lineage system on which it was based was primarily organised on a horizontal axis. The notion of purity pollution infused Kumaun social system with ritual notions of commensality, which were linked to the stratification of lineages. (R.D. Sanwal, Delhi 1976:108–109).⁷⁷ Food taboos were enforced between

⁷⁷ “In Kumaun, as elsewhere in India, the most important status relevant distinctions between different occupations have traditionally centred on the ritual attributes the latter have been invested with. These occupations can be summarized and tabulated as follows:

Traditional hierarchy of occupations in rural Kumaun

I. Suddha

A. Philosophical and spiritual teaching and learning	Astrology and medicine	Bureaucratic occupation	Superintending priesthood
--	------------------------	-------------------------	---------------------------

B. Domestic priesthood	Supervisory temple priesthood	Military	Landowning
------------------------	-------------------------------	----------	------------

II. Bhal

A. Caretaker temple priesthood	Assisting priesthood (to the domestic priesthood)
--------------------------------	---

B. Agriculture/horticulture	Cattleherding	Domesticmenial
-----------------------------	---------------	----------------

III. Neech

A. Khalait

1 Hempen bag manufacturing; Copper and iron-smithery; Carpentry	cloth-weaving; Mining and smelting	Oil-pressing; Stone-masonry
2 Basket and mat making; Bellows-driving; Agricultural menial service	wood turning; Sieve and making	pot making; Village

various castes, sub-groups within the caste and between different lineages.⁷⁸ (Ibid: 60 and 162) Marriage with an inferior lineage was permitted, but commensality was not recognised, this meant that the husband could not have rice and other such foods cooked by his wife or mother from an inferior lineage. This also translated into other ritual practices. For example, a marriage in which bride price had not been paid to the former husband was not recognised as valid, and the husband and children from such a marriage could not consume food cooked by their wife or mother. The ceremony for the payment of bride price could be performed many years later, it would then sanction the induction of the woman into her husband's lineage and the family could then consume food cooked by her. Notions of high and low were thus translated into food taboos.

The significance of the Thakur-Khasa continuum has been explained by R.D. Sanwal, who divides the Kshatriyas into the senior and junior members of the royal lineages. He noted that the junior members of the Manral, Rajbar, Sahi, Malla and Kala Koti descendants of the Chand and Mankoti houses not only intermarried freely amongst themselves but also effected marriage alliances with the non-princely section of the Kshetri with whom they shared important offices.⁷⁹ Members of the reigning royal lineage took brides from but did not give brides to the non reigning royal lineages. However such unions did have status relevant consequences for the offspring. If the father was not a rich man,

3. Religious music and drum playing

B. Mangkhani

Public entertaining

Begging (from clean castes only)

IV Asuddha

Leather-working and tanning;

Scavenging

⁷⁸ R.D. Sanwal refers to the ritual of chul-halan (literally entry into the hearth) after which food cooked by her became acceptable but only to the husband and adult children. Her husband's lineage mates continued to avoid eating food cooked by her.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 50–51.

then it was difficult for the son to secure proper caste brides, and the process of bringing in wives from the inferior groups once begun, led in three or four generations to the loss of Thakur status and informally to relegation to the Khasa/Jimdar category. Sanwal therefore notes that the Kshatriya caste was constantly losing more members than it was acquiring and its numerical strength was never very large. G.D. Upreti lists 26 families whereas Panna Lall two decades later lists only three.⁸⁰

The Thakur's position was dependent on an exercise of power, and loss of authority led to a consequent decline in status, also because the Thakur's prerogative was linked to the supremacy of his lineage god. In the unsettled state of the eighteenth century, it is possible that many changes occurred in the structure of the aristocracy. The decline of the aristocracy with the growing monetisation of the economy was further aggravated by the conquest of Kumaun by the Gorkhas. The Gorkhas did not encourage the local Thakurs, or incorporate them into the administrative system, unlike the Brahmans. The marginalisation of the landed elites as a consequence of the growing importance of the Sahus and the controllers of capital meant that the Thakurs lost out on economic advantage as well as secular power. The Chands had lost control over the prosperous Tarai, which came under the control of the Nawab of Awadh. During this period the family of the Chands was divided into two groups, with one family regarding the Pandes of Patias as their Gurus whilst the other recognised the Silwal Joshis as their Gurus. The family was divided into the Chands of Almora and the Chands of Kashipur.

The advent of the British, also did not improve the situation. The British did not restore the local aristocracy, and recognised only the superior status of the Chand family. The Almora lineage was granted a pension of Rs 250 and also given a *jagir* in Almora along with two villages in Moradabad. The lineage, till 1930, can be worked out as follows (Pande, first published 1938, reprint Almora 1990: 440–442).

⁸⁰ G.D. Upreti cited in B.D. Pande reprint 1990:582–589 and Panna Lall republished, 1942 p. 10.

Mahendra Chand

Pratap Chand

(Almora *jagir*, two villages in Moradabad along with a monthly pension of Rs 250)

Nand Singh

(Deputy Collector pension reduced to Rs 125 per month.)

Bhim Singh

Tahsildar, no pension

Rajendra Singh (died young)

Anand Singh (Member, Legislative Council).

The Kashipur lineage can be worked out as follows (till 1930)

Lal Singh

Jagir of Kilpuri, which was exchanged for land at Chanchat and Bajpur

Guman Singh

Zamindari of Rudrapur and Gadarpur

Shib Raj Singh

Shifted from Rudrapur to Kashipur, supported British during 1857 and was granted land at Badhapur.

Hari Raj Singh

Uday Raj Singh Anand Singh

The traditional influence of the Chand family in Kumaun continued through the nineteenth century, and the Almora lineage continued to inaugurate the Nanda Devi festival. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, their authority was further eroded, because of the advent of the critical modern intelligentsia. Shiv Raj Singh, was granted the title of C.S.I by the British authorities, and nominated a member of the Viceroy's Legislative Council. However, the intelligentsia of Kumaun was very disappointed with

their representative, because of his comments on the C.R.P.C. Amendment Bill in 1883. The *Almora Akhbar* noted, “Although he sits in Council as our representative, he is always ready to injure us. It is idle to expect justice and impartiality from a man who owes his present position to flattery and subserviency.”⁸¹

By the early years of the twentieth century we find Anand Singh (next in succession) was well favoured by the intelligentsia because of his nationalist views and was popularly referred to as Deshbakht (Patriot). Anand Singh was nominated to the Legislative Council in 1920 and asked questions in the Council about labour levies in Kumaun.⁸² Anand Singh was also involved in the formation of the Kumaun Parishad. His position within the Parishad was not premised upon traditional authority and in the run up to the 1923 elections; his candidature was not endorsed by the Parishad. H.G. Pant from the Congress who contested the election against him won with a large number of votes. The tally of votes was H.G. Pant 11,128, Anand Singh 4,518.⁸³ From this account it is clear that Chand and Thakur’s authority had declined. What was the consequence of this change for the social fabric and how did it influence the emerging caste structure of Kumaun?

In the first Census of 1865 we find that the number of Thakurs returned as Kshatriyas was extremely limited. Out of a total population of 3,85,790 the Thakurs were a mere 95 that is 0.02% of the total population. By 1872 the Rajputs of Kumaun were returned as 57,250. It appears that in 1865 it was probably only the Chands who were returned as Thakurs, but by 1872 a large number of other lineages found that they could also assert themselves as Thakurs and as a consequence the number of Kshatriyas increased.⁸⁴

⁸¹ *Native Newspaper Reports North Western Provinces*, 29 March 1883.

⁸² *U.P Legislative Council Proceedings*, 1920.

⁸³ *Shakti* 18 December 1923.

⁸⁴ Compiled from the Census of the North Western Provinces, 1865 and 1872.

E.T. Atkinson, who compiled a list of the Rajputs from the 1872 Census, noted the septs which had a membership of more than one thousand. These were the Bhotiyas, Chandrabansis, Kinwars, Kathis, Manurals, Negis, Tamotas etc.⁸⁵ (Atkinson reprint Cosmo 1981 Vol III part II: 431–438). He noted that those who claimed descent from immigrants from the plains were the descendants of the Surajvanshi Katyuris and the Rajbars of Askot, Jaspur, Manurals and the Chandravanshi descendants of the Chands represented by the Raotelas were scattered all over the district. He also found that neither Rajwars nor Manurals will as a rule eat food cooked by their women with the exception of certain articles. He said, “They will not touch any vegetables mixed with curds and cooked by their women; at least such is the custom of the better classes”.⁸⁶

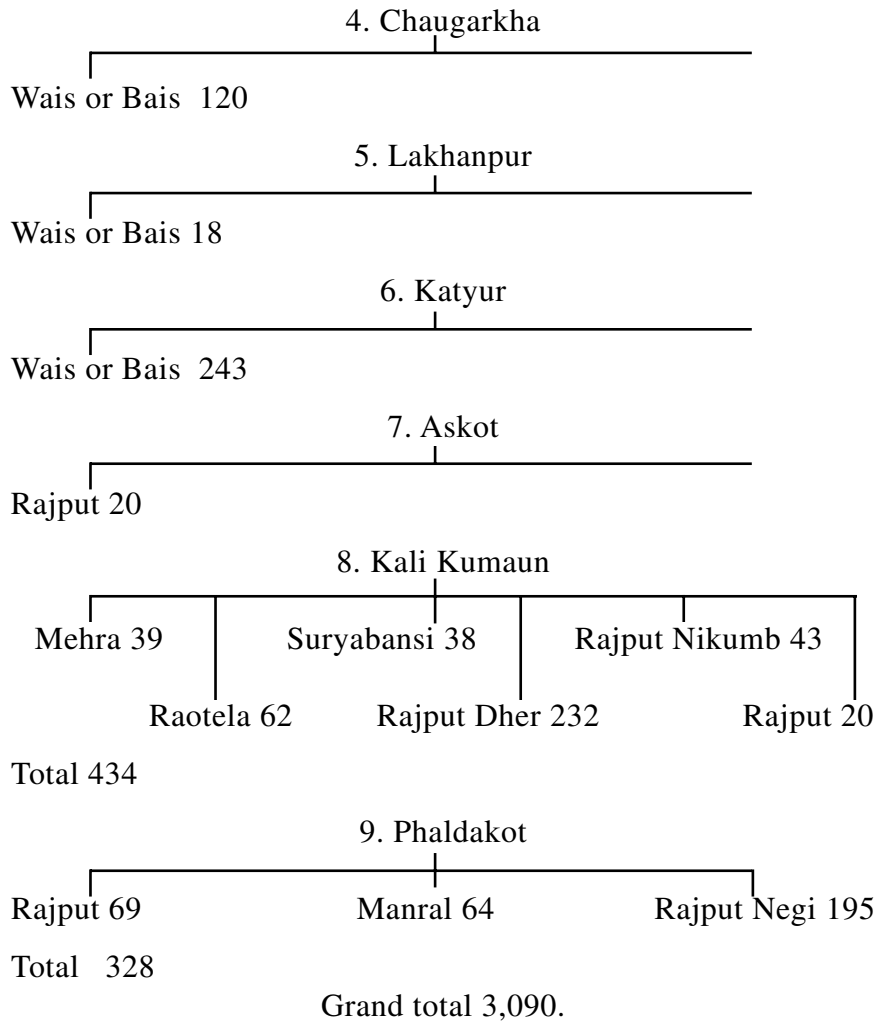
It appears that over the nineteenth century a large number of lineages emulated these practices and a much larger number claimed membership of the Thakur caste. The 1891 District Census for Almora provides us with a detailed list of the Rajput families, in contrast to the Khasa Rajput families.⁸⁷

1. Baramandal		
Wais or Bais 91	Chaudhari 143	Rajput 115
Total 349		
2. Pali		
Manral 416	Rajputs 1,034	Chauhan 55
Total 1,505		
3. Gangoli		
Raotela 73		

⁸⁵ E.T. Atkinson the *Himalayan Gazetteer* reprint Cosmo 1981 Volume III part II page 431–438.

⁸⁶ E.T. Atkinson the *Himalayan Gazetteer* reprint Cosmo 1981 Volume III part II page 432.

⁸⁷ Compiled from the District Census of Almora 1891.



This figure which does not include Thakur residents of Nainital is a modest estimate and differentiates the well established lineages from other lineages claiming Rajput status. It is important to note that the term Rajput was used by the upwardly mobile Khasa groups who could not claim Thakur ancestry.

We thus find that the nineteenth century reversed the process of decline in Thakur numbers and saw instead a decrease in the number of Khasas. A large number of families now claimed Thakur status, by emulating the Thakur practice of retaining ritual supremacy even after bringing in brides from inferior lineages.

This required the maintenance of the food taboo, a practice which appears to have become prevalent during this period. The internal division within the Rajputs of Kumaun, their agrarian location, and the ineffectiveness of the Thakur elites prevented the emergence of a strong well articulated Rajput identity in the early years of the twentieth century. It was much later, in the 1940s, that Debi Singh Kubarbi along with others of the Kumaun Rajput Shiksha Parishad launched an offensive against this practice and claimed Kshatriya status for all Kumaun Rajputs⁸⁸ (Sanwal, Delhi 1976 :60).

The Khasa-Kumaun Rajputs

The debate about Khasa origins is a vexed one and like all such debates about origin inconclusive though not irrelevant. The historical antecedents of the Khasas, have been traced back to the *Vayu Purana*, *Mahabharata*, *Markandeya Purana*, *Varahasanhita* etc.,⁸⁹ the evidence provided by these texts is not

⁸⁸ “Cultural homogeneity at the caste or sub-caste level which is an important characteristic of a true caste system was lacking in the case of all the castes and sub-castes in Kumaun, but in no case does it seem to have been lacking to the degree it did in the case of the Khasi. There were several reasons for this. Their widespread distribution, lack of communication between different regions, inter-regional hostility and intense local loyalties, diverse ethnic and cultural antecedents and above all the political subordination of the Khasi which made it possible for the ‘rulers’ to force a variety of occupations on the former, particularly in areas where they were under the active political domination of the Thuljaat, all contributed not only to the emergence and perpetuation of cultural diversity within the Khasi category but were also instrumental in multiplying incipient class-like sub-castes within the Khasi group”.

⁸⁹ The earliest writings on the Khasa, in the colonial period, are those of B.H. Hodgson, Khasa origins were also discussed in great detail by E.T. Atkinson. E.S. Oakley also refers to the Khasas in his work, but by this time, that is, during the twentieth century, the Kumaun intelligentsia started articulating its own version and understanding of Khasa. Codification of customary law in 1920 made the issue more significant, and during the 1930s the intelligentsia of Kumaun and Garhwal borrowed from Atkinson and wrote about the Khasa in Hindi for example H.K.

conclusive, the debate can therefore only be resolved by looking at local historical evidence like copper plates, bhuja patras and chronicles. It is during the period of the tenth and eleventh centuries that the Khasa identity developed and was articulated. We find references to Khasa in the Katyuri copper plates, the Khajuraho Inscription of Yasho Varman Chandela, in the Bhagalpur copper plate of Narayanpala, in the Bangarh copper plate of Mahipala, in the Dinajpur copper plate of Madanpala (Dabral, Dogadda V.S. 2047: 60–80) and in the *Kavya Mimansa* of Rajshekhar. (Dabral, Dogadda V.S 2052: 468). Most of these inscriptions and Rajshekhar's tract can be dated to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. G. Tucci's work on Western Nepal and Tibet based on Tibetan chronicles has enabled scholars to locate the emergence of the Khasa kingdom in the twelfth century; (G.Tucci, Rome 1956: 129–130). Surya Mani Adhikary provides a detailed description of the Khasa kingdom based upon archaeological and epigraphic evidence.⁹⁰ (Adhikary, Kathmandu V.S. 2043: i–xliv) Contemporary research from western Nepal indicates that the Khasa kingdom of the eleventh to fourteenth centuries was a powerful kingdom which controlled western Nepal, Kumaun, Garhwal and Lakhamandal. It was based upon agricultural production in the valleys of the Himalayas and organised around a lineage system (Adhikary, Jaipur 1988: 92–99).

The Khasa social organisation retained its tribal structure, and during the early medieval period the lineage system underscored a strong egalitarian village community. The Khasa identity was predicated upon a religious belief system (Vajrayana and Nathpanthi) in consonance with this form of collective organisation. The introduction of the caste system in the fifteenth

Raturi, Pati Ram, B.D. Pande and Badri Shah Thulgharia. The local intelligentsia cited E.T. Atkinson and relegated Khasa origins to a pre-historic period, thereby underplaying the significance of Khasa in contemporary local traditions.

⁹⁰ It enlists and transcribes copper plate inscriptions and other chronicles from Jumla, Dotee, Bajhang, Darna, Bajura, Musikot, Dullu, Piuthan and Palpa.

century had a limited effect upon the Khasa peasantry. Only the Khasa peasants whose land was granted on a revenue free tenure were actually brought within the ambit of Brahmanical norms. Political and social changes during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries probably affected the Khasas and a section of them tended to emulate Brahmanical traditions. (Briggs Delhi 1973:353 and Pandey, Delhi 1997:612–615). The Khasa distinction from the Dom (Dalit) was emphasised and artisanal groups were relegated to a lower status. These developments however, did not erode either the lineage system or the sense of village brotherhood that prevailed amongst the Khasa peasantry. The eighteenth century, however, witnessed another development which affected the elite sections of the Khasas, and this was the Brahman formulation that the Khasas should be considered Sudra. (R.D. Sanwal 1976:43–47). This was not accepted by the Khasa elites at the Chand court who conspired to remove the Brahmans.⁹¹ The Brahman Khasa contradiction probably hastened the demise of the Chand kingdom.

It was the Khasa and their cultural system which provided the base for the unification of the middle Himalayas under the Gorkha kingdom.⁹² During the Gorkha period, the ideological supremacy of the Brahmans was established, and the Khasas adapted to this. The Gorkhas implemented caste directives, and supported caste ideology.⁹³ This period therefore witnessed the division of the Khasa peasantry into two groups the Tagadhari and the Matawali. The affluent Khasa adopted the sacred thread and were able to

⁹¹ Mishra, Nityanand ed, *Kalyanchandrodaya Kavya*, Almora 1992 (composed by Shivanand Pande) pp. 45–53.

⁹² The Khasa diaspora which began in the fourteenth century gradually took the Khasas eastward towards Kathmandu and southwards into the Tarai. The Khasa agricultural system based upon rice production and pastoralism transformed mid-western Nepal and Kumaun and facilitated the emergence of the Gorkha Empire.

⁹³ *Regmi Research Collection*, volume I–XXXVIII.

assert a non-Sudra and consequently non-Khasa identity.⁹⁴ (Sharma, *Kailash* 1977:282). The Tagadhari (sacred thread-wearing) group dropped the appellation Khasa and adopted the title Chetri/Kshetri. P.R. Sharma noted that by 1854 when Nepal's Legal Code was authorised the term Khasa for the Tagadharis had been replaced by the term Chettri. This title continues to be used in western Nepal, and Kumaun.⁹⁵ (Sanwal Delhi 1976:44).

The transformation of the Khasa of the early nineteenth century to Kumaun Rajputs of the mid-twentieth century is probably one of the most significant changes in the social history of Kumaun. The Khasas constituted the largest section of the Kumaun populace; they were the peasants who formed the back-bone of the economic order. According to the 1865 Census, they constituted 53% of the total population of Kumaun. This excludes the Khasa Brahmans who were included in the Brahman category. In spite of their numerical preponderance the Khasas of the nineteenth century were unable to articulate a strong Khasa identity because of a host of problems, which can only be understood in the historical context of Kumaun.

⁹⁴ P. R. Sharma, 'Caste, Social Mobility and Sanskritisation; A Study of Nepal's Old Legal Code', *Kailash* Volume V 1977, page 282

Tagadhari	= Twice-born castes. (literally thread-wearing castes)
Matawali	= Drinking castes
Pani na chalne chhoi chhito halnu napanne	= Castes from whom water could not be accepted, but whose touch does not require aspersion of water.

Pani na chalne chhoi chhito halnu parne	= Untouchable castes.
--	-----------------------

The Tagadharis who occupy the apex position in the above diagrammatic presentation consisted of several caste groups and their sub-groups. Their linear hierarchical order is as follows:

1. Upadhyaya Brahmans (Purbiya and Kumai)
2. Rajputs (Thakuri in common language)
3. Jaisi Brahmans
4. Chhetris.

⁹⁵ Refers to the Kshetri, noted that during the Chand period a section of the Khasa were raised from Shudra to clean caste status, the Kshetri.

This was probably linked to the growing dominance of the Brahman historical tradition in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which granted primacy and superiority to those who claimed to be of immigrant origin. The Khasas who were located in the local rural context could not establish such claims. The Brahman tradition, which claimed to go back to the period of Som Chand, argued for its dominance till as far back as the tenth century. In this manner Khasa history was relegated to an obscure pre-Brahman antiquity. The Khasas lost their claims, and their history was overtaken by the Brahmanical version. The Khasa interregnum (after Som Chand) was now regarded even by professional historians as “a period full of general discontent and political strife. Almost all the aboriginal tribes, bigger or smaller, seemed to have raised their banner in revolt, which could not be checked due to the lack of any powerful personality. We have a thick veil of oblivion over this period.” (K.P. Nautiyal, Varanasi 1969: 69).

It is probably during the nineteenth century that the Khasa as a self-ascriptive term went out of vogue. The early colonial records refer to the peasants who were required to provide labour services as Khassia.⁹⁶ The fact that Khassia became synonymous with porters may be linked to developments during the Gorkha period when the Tagadharis with the Brahmans were able to articulate stronger sense of caste dignity. Though G.W. Traill refers to the porters as Khassias, in his reference to caste he does not mention the term Khasa but uses the term Rajput. (Traill, 1851: 137–234). It suggests that the term Khasa as a self ascriptive term was not used even in the second decade of the nineteenth century. R. Heber refers to “the Khasiya inhabitants of Kumaun who pretend to be all Rajputs of the highest caste and are very scrupulous about matters of caste identity.” (Heber, Carey, Philadelphia, 1828:393). J.B. Fraser also found “almost everyone calls himself a Rajput;

⁹⁶ *Pre-Mutiny Records, Revenue Letters Issued*, the term Khassia continues to be used still till 1853. Refer Judicial Records of the Nizam Adalat of North Western Provinces Volume III number 2, and is also to be found in the Census records till as late as 1931.

some of those who honestly confess to inquiries say that they are coolies of the lowest class, chamars or shoemakers.” (Fraser, first pub 1820, reprint Delhi 1982:71). A similar process appears to have been at work in western Nepal. B.H. Hodgson and E. Vansittart also refer to the term Khasa, but by the mid-nineteenth century it had been completely replaced by the term Chettri.⁹⁷ (Sharma, *Kailash* 1977: 283).

The 1865 Census provides evidence that though the term Khasa had acquired a pejorative connotation, yet the Khasa aspect of caste identity was recognised, and the Chettri or Thakur Rajputs were returned as 95 or 0.02% of the total population, whereas the Khasa Rajputs were returned as 53%. By 1872 the figures had completely changed. The Chettri or Thakur Rajputs had increased in number, and the Khasa Rajputs appear to have declined. In 1865 the Thakur Rajputs constituted a mere 0.46% of the total number of Rajputs; by 1872 they formed 31.5% of the total number of Rajputs. Even in terms of proportion of Rajputs to total population, the Khasa Rajputs came down from 53% to 30% by 1872. It is possible that the 1865 figures are unreliable, because this was first Census of Kumaun but the large variation in the figures does indicate that there is also a deliberate strategy to enumerate a large number of Khasas as proper Thakur Rajputs. The term Khasa was not favoured, and it is possible that the urban, semi-urban educated and wealthy Khasa was able to identify with ritual superiors, the Thakur/Chettri Rajputs.

Rai Bahadur Patiram also noted the change in the Khasa of Kumaun. He said that they have forgotten their origin and adapted

⁹⁷ P. R. Sharma, ‘Caste, Social Mobility and Sanskritisation; A Study of Nepal’s Old Legal Code’, *Kailash* Volume V 1977 p. 283 footnote 17. “Khas is the common name by which the Chhetris of Nepal were known until recent times. It is regarded as an affront to address a Chhetri by this term now-a-days. The Code at one place significantly mentions: “From here on Tagdhari Khas Jat has been granted the Ilkap (this word is probably a corrupt for of the Persian Khitab, meaning title) of Chhetri Jat. In committing this to writing in documents one should first write the name of the person, then his *thar* (clan) after that the Ilkap of Chhetris: Code 89:50 page 393”.

themselves to their Hindu neighbours and settled down to ordinary community life and are now the local Rajputs. (R.B. Pati Ram, 1992:192–194). By the 1880s, some of the Khasa Rajputs had acquired the sacred thread, and as E.T Atkinson noted, some of the Khasias wear Janeo of three threads, others of six threads and other do not put it on at all. By this period, that is by 1884 “none will call themselves Khasiyas; all style themselves Rajputs, and many say they were settled in their present villages before Brahmans and Rajas came”.⁹⁸ We thus find that by the end of the nineteenth century there was a growing assertion of the Khasa as Rajputs. By the time of the 1901 Census Mr. R. Burn noted that the Khasiyas are wearing the sacred thread and are claiming connection with the Brahmans and Rajputs of the plains in order to better their social status.⁹⁹

The economic consequences of British rule also favoured the growing importance of the Khasa Rajput. British rule focused upon the agrarian economy and it consciously strove to marginalise the non-cultivating elites.¹⁰⁰ The focus on the agrarian aspect of the economy for revenue purposes brought the peasantry into the centre stage. British policy encouraged extension of cultivation, which increased the amount of land that the peasant could cultivate. The increasing shortage of labour for agricultural operations, gave the peasant a bargaining position with the upper caste non-cultivating elites. The erosion of the village community and the growing importance of individual families, also promoted differentiation between the peasantry and facilitated the emergence of a wealthy and prosperous section amongst the Khasas who could articulate demands for an enhancement of

⁹⁸ Cited in L.D. Joshi, p. 47.

⁹⁹ *Census of India* 1901 Vol.XVL North West Provinces 1902 p. 565.

¹⁰⁰ Landowning castes in Kumaun, compiled from J.O’B. Beckett, 1867–1873, Rajputs were 60% of total cultivating population. Proprietors-Brahmans 29,632; Rajputs 59,570; Baniyas 1,370;Doms 4,115; Khayakars. Brahmans 7,427; Rajputs 19,437; Baniyas 604; Doms 9,119.

status.¹⁰¹ (Joshi, 1929:321–325). The growing differentiation in the Khasa ranks is documented by R.D. Sanwal who notes the entry into the Khasa fold of new groups like the Danu, Dotiyal, Shauk or Raut, which added a third group to the earlier distinction between the old and the new Khasas. He therefore found that “the members of the Thakur-Jimdar wear a janyo of six strands. The educated and well to do Khasi Rajput also wear one of six strands, but the poorer ones only of three. Members of the third ‘prestige circle’ (Danu, Dotiyal and Shaukas) generally wear one of three strands, if at all.” (Sanwal, Delhi, 1976:166).

British administration was also to a certain extent responsible for the pejorative connotation of the term Khasa. In the early years of the nineteenth century, administrators were appalled not only by the custom of slavery, but also by the system of bride price. The concomitant of bride price was the woman’s ability to disengage herself from her first husband by finding a paramour who could pay recompense to her husband or his family.¹⁰² English officers regarded the elopement of the woman with her paramour as abduction. Subsequently they realised the social context but were nevertheless horrified by this practice of ‘adultery’. Their response to this ‘barbaric’ practice was echoed by Brahman groups who favoured dowry and prohibited remarriage of the widow. The practice of levirate, widow remarriage and divorce, which were all linked to the institution of bride price, were therefore now identified as uncivilised and the term Khasiya now acquired a social dimension which synchronised with the economic identification of the Khasiya as the provider of compulsory labour services.

¹⁰¹ Kumaun, unlike Punjab, did not foster a strong sense of village community. Customary law of Punjab led to rather different consequences: “the hissedars has been recognised as full owner for over a century now in Kumaun as against his agnates. They have not power left to challenge alienations of ancestral land such as the agriculturals in the Punjab process.... Communal bonds regarding alienations have largely vanished, but the family bonds remain.”

¹⁰² *Pre-Mutiny Records Judicial Letters* Volume 25–45; Volume 12, 21 November 1839, the letter notes that bride price was about Rs 100 and could be paid in cash or grain.

Gradually, administrators changed their attitude and were more responsive to the specificity of Khasa custom. With the help of local people they were able to identify particular customs and implement them through the special administrative provision of Kumaun as a Scheduled District. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Kumaun customary law was recognised as specific and was implemented in the Kumaun Zillah Courts.¹⁰³ A Sadar Amin was appointed for providing assistance to the British on matters of custom though his advice was not binding. (Whalley reprint 1991:101–114). V.A. Stowell was involved with the systematisation of *Kumaun Rulings*, and worked out an understanding of local customs. (Stowell 1966: 42). This process was further elaborated with the appointment of Panna Lall to study and codify customary law.

By this period, however, the growth of the Kumaun intelligentsia led to the development and articulation of a consciousness which was critical of bride price and levirate.¹⁰⁴ Though the intelligentsia ostensibly endorsed the remarriage of widows, yet it was not particularly committed to implementing widow remarriage. The intelligentsia, clearly did not support the system of divorce and remarriage linked to the system of bride price, it advocated monogamy for men and women and was committed to a patriarchal family system which stressed chastity and fidelity. We therefore find two opposing trends regarding Khasa customs. On the one hand, the British authorities were encouraging the assertion of a Khasa identity which was distinct and opposed to a Brahmanical world view. On the other hand, the Kumauni intelligentsia was agitating for the transformation

¹⁰³ References to these practices are to be found in the proceedings of the Zillah Courts, 1849–1855 and in the Faujdari Bastas at the Almora Collectorate till as late as 1945, officially till 1947.

¹⁰⁴ *Samai Vinod* cited in *Native Newspaper Reports North Western Provinces*, 27 September 1873. It noticed the vicious practice of the father receiving consideration, that is, money from the bridegroom's parents, prevalent among the zamindars of Kumaun and urged the government to put a stop to this.

of this identity and the custom on which it was based. The colonial authorities wanted to continue with Khasa custom; whereas the modern intelligentsia wanted to distance itself from these practices and incorporate the reformed groups into the Kumauni/Brahman fold as an integral part of the composite Indian nationalist project. The Khasas however, were not simply passive spectators in this contested domain about what constituted Kumauni. They refused an identity based primarily upon Khasa customary law, and asserted Kshatriya status by claiming to be Rajputs. They preferred the appellation Rajput because it had an all India resonance, and eventually (by the 1940s) they accepted the nomenclature of Kumaun Rajput.

Though the Rajputs had dropped the self-ascriptive term Khasa, it would take sometime for it to become defunct in local parlance. E.S. Oakley, a Christian missionary, who arrived in Kumaun in the early years of the twentieth century noted that caste distinctions were recognised, and expressed even in the salutation with which people greeted each other. He noted that, “Brahmans when they meet each other salute with ‘Namaskar’ (salutation). When Brahmans meet Kshatriyas, or persons of royal rank and descent, they say ‘Jaya dyo’ (victory to you). When they meet Rajputs and Khassiyas they say ‘Rama, Rama’. All the above will answer ‘Pailayo’ (I touch your feet) to a Brahman who greets them with ‘Swasti’, ‘Ashirbad’, or ‘Kalyan’ (blessing, or success). A Dom will say ‘Meri syo’ (may I serve you) to all upper or Bith castes, who will reply ‘Ji rao’ (live on). An elder Dom, however, will say to a younger one ‘Ji jas’ (live grandly)! A common salutation is Salam (peace), used by and to Mohammedans and Christians, and Bandagi (service).”¹⁰⁵ (Oakley, 1905, reprint Nainital, 1990:240). He also noted a number of local sayings which refer to the Khassiyas such as “a Khassiya when addressed politely turns surly”, and “the Khassiya is so simple that he will demand a long coat in exchange for a cap”, etc. (Ibid: 260)

¹⁰⁵ E.S. Oakley, *Holy Himalaya* first published 1905 reprint Nainital 1990, p. 240.

During this period (the early decades of the twentieth century) the use of the term Khasa was being contested in the public domain. The debate in the columns of *Almora Akhbar* in 1913 is symptomatic of this development. In a series of articles on compulsory labour services requisitioned by the colonial state, the *Almora Akhbar* referred to the memorial presented by the ten adjoining villages of Almora which had always been exempt from this oppressive levy because of the upper caste status of their residents.¹⁰⁶ The article referred to a well known adage which noted that the Khasa was the king's Dom/serf, this meant that the Khasa had to provide services to the king as the Dom provides to his Gosain.¹⁰⁷ This article raised a storm of protest, and the next issue of the *Almora Akhbar* had to explain the context in which the argument had been framed.¹⁰⁸ The author eventually conceded that this did not imply that labour services should be only demanded from the Khasas and Doms. He said that he was referring to an earlier period, when the term Khasa referred to those people who lived in Kumaun before the advent of the Aryas. He said that in the present period, there are no Khasas; there are only Kshatriyas or Rajputs. This incident inspired Gauri Dutt Pande to coin a couplet. "Why should the kulin not be reduced to coolies, when the sons of the Khasas have declared themselves to be Rajputs and are ready to take on the world?"¹⁰⁹

During the First World War a large number of Rajputs were recruited by the Imperial armies. The role played by the Rajputs during this period led to the patronage of the *Kshatriyas* by the local authorities. This provided the impetus for the setting up of the Kshatriya Sabha in 1917. The first meeting was attended by 60 members. It enunciated four major objectives, commitment to the British Raj, social reforms, education and fostering of mutual affection between the various communities of Kumaun. Its

¹⁰⁶ *Almora Akhbar* 28 July 1913 and 4 August 1913.

¹⁰⁷ *Almora Akhbar* 18 August 1913.

¹⁰⁸ *Almora Akhbar* 8 September 1913.

¹⁰⁹ *Almora Akhbar* 15 December 1913.

executive committee comprised twenty members. Its functionaries were Thakur Ratan Singh Rawat, Thakur Hari Sankar Singh Mukhtiar, Thakur Lakshman Singh, Thakur Gulab Singh Bisht and Thakur Gopal Singh Rawat.¹¹⁰

The Kshatriya Sthaniya Sabha of Nainital held meetings in October 1917. By 1918, its name was changed to the Kshatriya Upakarni Sabha. It demanded boarding houses for students who had to come from the countryside for education to the urban centres. The Kshatriya Upkarini Sabha of Garhwal proved much more effective because of the leadership provided to it by Thakur Jodh Singh who also established a newspaper entitled *Kshatriya Vani*. According to Yogesh Dhasmana, Wyndham organised a meeting to felicitate the brave Rajput soldiers who had returned from the war. (Yogesh Dhasmana, 1993:69–73). At this meeting Wyndham was disappointed to find few Kshatriyas, and upset that a large number of the gentry invited for the occasion were Brahmans. Eventually, the appointment of Jodh Singh Negi as a Deputy Collector was appreciated by the Rajput community, who were clamouring for recognition and patronage.

The campaign for the reform of the Nayak system which according to the intelligentsia institutionalized prostitution also had an impact on the construction of the Rajput identity. In this initiative the modern intelligentsia was supported by British administrators. Local elites joined hands with the colonial state in launching a major offensive against the practice of rearing Nayak girls as Devachelis/Brahmachelis dedicated to the god Vyagreshwara. Nayaks were an integral part of Kumaun society, but for the modern intelligentsia they were a great embarrassment who decided to reform Kumauni society and purge it of this evil.

The reform of the Nayaks, led to the emergence of a Nayak leadership which was interested in asserting itself as Kshatriya. Udaya Sing Nayak, a preacher of Nayak reform published an open letter to the Rajputs of Kumaun in an effort to secure grooms for

¹¹⁰ *Almora Akhbar* 15 October 1917.

educated Nayak girls.¹¹¹ The Nayak Kshatriya Sudharini Sabha was also established, and must have helped promote a feeling of solidarity between different Kshatriya groups.¹¹² This Sabha of the Nayaks had establishments in Haldwani, Pali Pachaun and Ramgarh.

The investigations of Panna Lall which formed a prelude to the codification of customary law catalysed a fresh initiative for the construction of a Kumauni Hindu identity which would counter the colonial emphasis on the Khasa aspect. The compilation of Kumaun customary law has to be located in the specificity of this historic context. At the particular moment when Panna Lall was codifying customary law, large sections of the people were repudiating it. Panna Lall himself noted that “time has brought about a silent revolution. Economic and social changes have swept away these old land marks. It is now often impossible to say with certainty whether a caste is Khasiya or not and therefore he made no attempt to use these time honoured terms or to classify caste into two such water tight compartments”.¹¹³ His refusal to use the term Khasa as a prefix for customary law and the use of the term Kumaun for what was perceived as Khasa custom, earned Panna Lall the ire of the upper castes.

The year 1920 marked an important turning point in the history of the Kumaun caste system. It accelerated the pace of reform activity and also led to a growing resistance to the special status of Kumaun as a Scheduled District. Public opinion in Kumaun was mobilised to bring Kumaun under the jurisdiction of the High Court at Allahabad. This was motivated by the desire to remove Kumaun from the purview of customary law. This issue was raised by Mukandi Lall and G.B. Pant at the U.P. Legislative Council in 1924. Mukandi Lal pointed out that “Kumaun is under a very dubious system of administration in civil law. In some matters the Board of Revenue is the High Court; in the majority of matters the Commissioner of Kumaun is the High Court. In criminal matters

¹¹¹ *Shakti* 13 April 1920.

¹¹² Pamphlet of the Nayak Kshatriya Sabha found in old records at Almora.

¹¹³ L.D. Joshi, n. 84 pp. 46–47.

Allahabad is the highest court of appeal".¹¹⁴ He noted that the people of Kumaun had been agitating against this system since 1894 and had submitted a petition to the government in 1898. G.B. Pant continued this line of argument and said that the issue of customary law should not prevent the government from bringing Kumaun under the same civil administration as the rest of the province. This was reiterated at public meetings, where it was felt that the customs of the people of Kumaun did not mark them out as radically different from other groups.¹¹⁵

The reform movement which began in the aftermath of the Non-Cooperation movement in early 1923 was also a response to Panna Lall's *Kumaun Local Custom*. Debi Singh Kubarbi who was involved in Kumaun Parishad activities and in the forest and begar movements was acknowledged as a leader not only by Rajputs but also by other caste groups. He therefore had the confidence and ability to articulate a critique of a large number of customary practices. He appealed to the Rajputs of Kumaun, stating that Rajputs who had earlier practiced Svayamvara (choice of groom by bride from a large gathering based upon a test of particular skills and abilities) have now been reduced to selling their women.¹¹⁶ He also did not approve of the fact that the Rajputs allowed the performance of more than one marriage. He noted that the first marriage is according to proper rites, whereas the second marriage is referred to as Dam Chukaya Vivah, the third kind of marriage is with widows and is known as Dhanti Vivah. The fourth kind of marriage is the one in which the woman gets married many times and at each marriage her price is paid to her ex-husband. Debi Singh Kubarbi remarked upon the fact that these practices which were followed by Rajputs and Brahmans had transformed marriage into a commercial transaction.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ *U.P. Legislative Council Proceedings*, Volume XX 1924, Allahabad 1925 p. 187

¹¹⁵ *Shakti* 1 February 1930 As late as 1930, D. D. Bhatt lamented the fact that Panna Lall's codification of customary law had singled out the Kumauni and differentiated them from the rest of the United Provinces.

¹¹⁶ *Shakti* 9 January 1923.

¹¹⁷ *Shakti* 16 January 1923.

Similar sentiments were echoed in another report, which exhorted Rajputs not to admonish Nayaks, Dalits, Saun Karkis and Joharis, but to introspect and reform themselves.¹¹⁸ I.D. Pande noted that there were four social evils which plagued Kumauni society: sale of women, bride price and marriage of young girls to elderly men; singing of lewd songs at festivals; Nayak institutions as centres for the production of prostitutes; harsh treatment of domesticated animals (livestock).¹¹⁹ Another contributor noted that 95 to 96% marriages in Kumaun are transacted on the basis of bride price, and the average rate of bride price is between Rs 150 to Rs 200.¹²⁰ The price of a bride had gone up from two and half seers of paddy for the upper caste Dhanuli and a mere half seer of paddy for low caste Manuli in the 1850s to Rs 200 by 1926.¹²¹

The rendering of bride price as sale was a modern phenomenon. It was linked to the growing monetization of the economy, which was now fully established. Earlier bride price had been treated as customary exchange, which linked two lineages together. The linkage of bride price with sale of women had been noted earlier in the *Rohilkhand Akhbar*,¹²² in the *Samai Vinod*¹²³ and in the *Almora Akhbar*.¹²⁴ There were also now an increasing number of reports about abduction and sale of women. This was linked to the campaign for Nayak reform, which was also directed at prostitution in general. Yet the Rajput community was not prepared for a frontal assault on its customary practices, by upper caste

¹¹⁸ *Shakti* 6 November 1923.

¹¹⁹ *Shakti* 20 November 1923.

¹²⁰ *Shakti* 19 February 1926.

¹²¹ Krishna Pande, *Indian Antiquary* March, 1910 page 78–82.

¹²² *Native Newspaper Reports North Western Provinces* 31 January 1868.

¹²³ *Native Newspaper Reports North Western Provinces* 15 September 1873.

¹²⁴ *Native Newspaper Reports North Western Provinces* 13 May 1873, 20 May 1873. The article referred to the efforts of Henry Ramsay, Commissioner of Kumaun to prevent such abductions. Reports of abductions are also to be found in the *Shakti* 11 November 1924, 18 November 1924.

groups. The agenda of social reform brought to the fore the contradictions between different castes in Kumaun. When B.D. Pande, a Thuljaat Brahman launched an offensive against bride price at a massive meeting in Kuwali he put the Rajput community on the defensive.¹²⁵ Yet the Rajputs lacked any kind of formal structure or organisation which they could use to articulate a different point of view. They had to take recourse to the only weekly published from Almora the *Shakti*, edited and published by B.D. Pande himself. The Rajput strategy was to argue that these practices were to be found even amongst the Brahmans, social reform of this variety could not be directed only against the Rajputs, it would have to include other groups as well. In 1928, a rebuttal of Mathura Dutt Trivedi's *Kumaun Ka Sankishpta Dharmik Itihas* by Sher Singh Manurwal questioned Trivedi on his reference to bride price marriages.¹²⁶ Manurwal said that though Dhanta Vivah, Taka Ka Byah and Vidwa Vivah were not approved of by any group yet they were prevalent even among the Brahmans. He said in the villages all the Khasiya Pants, Joshis, Shatris, Upadhyayas, Tiwaris followed these practices and that a large number of Brahmans accepted bride price and then also performed a Kanyadan (gift of the virgin).

The reform of customary practices of the Khasas undoubtedly put them on the defensive. It is probably for this reason that a section of the radical intelligentsia and the Khasa intelligentsia sustained a debate on widow remarriage and the need to sanction widow remarriage. They wanted to point out that the Thuljaat Brahmans should also work towards reform of the practice of Sati and the ban on widow remarriage. The debate was initiated by Devi Dutt Tripathi who announced that he wanted to marry a Brahman widow according to Shastric Hindu rites.¹²⁷ He was supported by M.Pande who noted that Parasher had also sanctioned widow remarriage.¹²⁸ Ram Dutt Jyotirvid found this unacceptable

¹²⁵ *Shakti* 15 October 1927.

¹²⁶ *Shakti* 16 October 1928.

¹²⁷ *Shakti* 25 April 1925.

¹²⁸ *Shakti* 25 April 1925.

and said that widow remarriage was not sanctioned by the Shastras.¹²⁹ The debate continued through the 1920s in the columns of *Shakti*. Even women contributed their views and participated actively in the exchange.¹³⁰

The point that was constantly reiterated during this exercise was the sad plight of Brahman widows who were doomed to a life of misery and neglect. It was also pointed out that a number of the scandals were related to young widows, who find it difficult to lead a life of celibacy. Implicit in this critique was the understanding that this required social reform amongst the Brahmans. Indra Singh Nayal in his critique of B.D. Pande about the unfavourable practices adopted by the Kshatriyas towards their women remarked that widow remarriage should not be regarded as a malpractice.¹³¹ He said that the sanction of widow remarriage was a sign of the fact that the Rajputs are highly civilised, Manurwal reiterated the point that widow remarriage should be encouraged rather than ridiculed.¹³² Though orthodox Kumauni Thuljaat could not be persuaded about widow remarriage yet they were put on the defensive about their own attitudes towards women.

The debate about social reform and change in the Rajput community therefore became a debate about marriage practices and family structures. It also became a slanging match between those in favour of widow remarriage and those against. The issue of widow remarriage and the marriage of young girls to old men put some Thuljaat reformers on the defensive, but on the whole it generated only acrimonious debate and little social activism. The only instance of the remarriage of a Brahman widow was the

¹²⁹ *Shakti* 23 June 1925.

¹³⁰ *Shakti* 15 December 1928.

¹³¹ *Shakti* 30 June 1925.

¹³² *Shakti* 16 October 1928, I.S. Nayal also noted that the writings of B. D. Pande created a stir not only amongst the Rajputs but also created a rift amongst the two Joshi groups, so much so that the students of Ramsay College Almora, demonstrated against B.D. Pande, I.S. Nayal, *Swatranta Sangram Mein Kumaun Ka Yogadan* Delhi 1973.

marriage of Paruli married to an Arya Samaj activist.¹³³ The debate on widow remarriage and social reform continued into the 1930s and was articulated at the Kurmanchal Samaj Sannelan of 1932, and in the *Kumaun Kumud*, a local newspaper which appears to have been more radical in its views than its counterpart *Shakti*.¹³⁴

The tension between the Brahmans and Rajputs of Kumaun resulted in banishing the term Khasa from the public domain. It was not used by local politicians — the Kurmanchal Samaj Sannelan of 1932 did not refer to Khasa customs, nor did the new weekly launched by the Rajputs called *Kumaun Rajput*. B.D. Pande's reference to the Khasas and the need for social reform in his articles of 1925, and in his book in the 1930s earned him the overt hostility of Rajput groups.¹³⁵ By the 1930s, therefore the terms Khasa and Khasiya were used only in private conversations and often as a term of abuse. Even the journal *Achal* which was devoted to the promotion of Kumaun language and literature discreetly avoided the publication of any popular sayings about the Khasas (though it did refer to similar sayings about the Doms). Khasa was now evoked as relevant for the ancient period of Kumaun history, but the connection of Khasa with the contemporary present could not be acknowledged or recognised. This resulted in an emphasis on the north and pan-Indian aspect of the Kumaun tradition and resulted in a neglect of local cultural specificities and the silencing of regional historicities.

The Rajput community, on the other hand, inspite of their initial resistance internalised the critique of Khasa customary practices and as A. Fanger noted “since the beginning of the twentieth century, there has been a significant trend towards the adoption of orthodox Hindu marriages based upon the ceremony of Kanyadan and the giving of a dowry.” (Brown, Fanger and Joshi Ed. Vol. 3 1993, Almora: 275–300). Bride price has not entirely died out, but it is difficult to get information about bride price, because there is a

¹³³ *Shakti* 28 July 1928.

¹³⁴ *Kumaun Kumud* 12 March 1938 and 24 March 1938.

¹³⁵ *Shakti* 1925 and *Kumaun Ka Itihas*.

stigma attached to it.¹³⁶ It is for this reason that in some marriages bride price is then used for dowry. In the more acculturated areas however, Fanger found “dowry has become more of the cultural expectation than an exception.” (Ibid: 282). The Khasa Rajputs and the Khasa Brahmans of Kumaun, dissociated themselves from their distinct customary practices, and gradually emulated Brahmanical practices. It appears that ideologically, the debate was won by the Brahmans and the construction of the Kumauni community was typified by an all India model of Brahmanical norms.

The Rajput community accepted the need for change, but in this situation its political identity still remained nebulous. On the one hand, the Rajputs had to handle the criticism of their caste superiors, and on the other they had to face the growing restiveness of their subordinate group, the Doms or the Dalits. The Rajputs were on the offensive against the insubordination of the Dalits, but were handicapped by the fact that colonial laws did not support them. The Dalits, with the help of government authorities were able to assert themselves, and the Rajputs often found themselves indicted in cases of assault on Dalits. The Rajputs therefore found themselves beleaguered during the decade of the 1920s, and unable to assert themselves. The formation of the Kumaun Parishad in 1916, failed to excite the imagination of the Khasa/Rajput peasantry, who remained outside the ambit of the Kumaun Parishad. The elite and upper caste structure of the Kumaun Parishad also prevented the mobilisation of the Khasa peasants, who would acquire a Kumaun identity two decades later as represented by the Kumaun Rajput.

The Vaishya Rajputs

The first reference to the Sahus or the moneylending groups can be dated to the period of Rudra Chand in the sixteenth century.

¹³⁶ Field work: Kumaun 1996. Only one respondent acknowledged that he had paid brideprice. It is interesting to note that this person was not from the village (where field work was being conducted) which was well connected by roads, but from a village in the eastern part of Kumaun which had as yet not been penetrated by modern communications system.

From the period of Baj Bahadur Chand the Sahus became an integral part of the Chand court.¹³⁷ (Pokharia, Almora, 1994:27). Narayan Sahu is mentioned in Baj Bahadur's copper plate of 1648; Baj Bahadur's copper plate of 1674 (Dabral, Dogadda, V.S. 2047: 213 and 216) refers to Arjun Ratan Sahu, who also finds mention in Udyot Chand's copper plates of 1679, 1682, 1683 and 1691 respectively. (Ibid. 217–219).

The growing need for finance, probably led to the replacement of the Sahus with the Bhandaris (treasurers) who were appointed during the reign of Jagat Chand. Jagat Chand's copper plate of 1716 mentions Ranjit Bhandari and the copper plate of 1709 refers to Yashodhar Bhandari. (Ibid: 219) Kalyan Chand's copper plate of 1745 mentions Bhavanand Yashodhar Bhandari. (Ibid: 220) By the reign of Deep Chand, with the control of the Tarai extremely precarious two Bhandaris were appointed: Chinta Chaudhuri incharge of the treasury and Lakshmi Nidhi Joshi incharge of cloth stores.¹³⁸ The cash strapped economy of the Chands led to the growing importance of treasurers.

During the Gorkha period, the problem of money circulation and the shortage of specie had become even more acute. Almora had emerged as an important financial centre. As early as 1795 Krishna Sahu was appointed by the Gorkha bharadars for the collection of the Jagat tax (on trade). In 1801 Kaji Dhaukal Singh also exempted the Shah Chakrait family from the payment of Jagat. The growing importance of Ramakrishna Mahajan in the economy is evident from another letter of 1805. By 1806 Ramakrishna Mahajan had been made responsible for the collection of taxes on behalf of the Subedar Kaladhar. It appears that the army was handing over their land assignments to money lenders. The revenue was collected primarily in Farrukhabad gold coins and some

¹³⁷ Copper plate of Rudra Chand dated 1597.

¹³⁸ M.D. Trivedi, Kumaun Ki Adalati Bhasha, *Achal*, March 1938 pp. 12–15, refers to the two copper plates of Deep Chand of Shaka 1693 and 1694, and V.S. Negi Perspective on the Rohila invasion of Kumaun in *Himalaya Past and Present* Volume II Almora 1992 pp. 291–301.

portion in local money. When in 1810 Dasrath Khattri was sent for a fresh organisation of the administrative system he too affirmed the grant to the family of the Shahus. In 1811 the *theka thiti* was also handed over to Krishna Das and Tula Ram Mahajan.¹³⁹

All officials were dependent on Mahajans like Ramakrishna for financial support. This assistance was, however, not unconditional and the officers concerned appointed Rama krishna's family as Jagati, which meant that they could levy and collect a tax on trade called Jagat. They were probably able to amass a considerable fortune, because they continued to be wealthy members of Kumaun society even during the colonial period. The Chakraits were another wealthy family who also advanced loans to the Gorkhas, and were granted the Kotwalship of Almora. They too, in all likelihood were able to increase their accumulation, because they are noticed by early British administrators, as an influential family of the Kumaun region, who invested in the growing timber trade, during the early nineteenth century. The combination of financier and tax collector was found in other regions also during this period, and provides evidence of the problems faced by monetising economies like that of the Gorkhas. When the crown lands were auctioned, then a Shah family bought a part of the estates.¹⁴⁰

During the nineteenth century, British rule accelerated the process of monetisation which had begun earlier. Every tax paying peasant was now involved in a money transaction, and even the system of Bhotia trade, which was earlier based upon barter, was now increasingly dependent on transactions in cash. The financiers of Almora now provided loans to the trans-Himalayan traders and acquired control over the northern trade. The southern trade which developed during this period, with the gradual colonisation of the Bhabar and the Tarai was also controlled by the Sahus, though a large number of petty traders were also involved in the exchange.

¹³⁹ Papers from the Gorkha regime Dr. M.P. Joshi, Almora.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

The Sahus had therefore become an important and integral part of the emerging economic system.

Yet their position in the caste structure remained rather anomalous, because the caste system during the Chand period did not recognise the Vaishya as a separate category. They were a sub-group in the Thakur Khasa continuum and their position was determined by their secular rank. In the 1865 Census they were placed in the Vaishya caste and were enumerated as 2,988. They therefore formed 0.7% of the total population. It appears that the Sahus were ascribed to the Vaishya category by the British authorities who were following the classic Varna model. E.T. Atkinson found, to the contrary, that “the Sahus profess to be Rajputs, but they are neither Rajputs nor Vaishyas, but one of the outside castes difficult to place correctly”. (Atkinson 1981 vol. III pt. II: 441).

The tension between the Vaishya community and the Brahmans of Almora fostered by colonial authorities began around 1894, and was further aggravated between 1898 and 1899. This was the result of the disillusionment of the administrators with the Brahmans who decided to patronize the so called ‘Vaishyas’. The Vaishyas were the wealthy groups who had provided financial support to the British of Rs 14,000 during the revolt of 1857. Moti Ram Shah who belonged to the Khajanchi family of Almora was given the title of Rai Bahadur and was later nominated an Honorary Magistrate, and a member of the Municipal Committee at Nainital.¹⁴¹ Some acquired English education and were interested in government jobs and were keen to contest Brahman dominance. The Vaishyas, with the encouragement of the authorities were therefore in the forefront of the offensive against the Brahmans in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The rumour that was rife in Almora during this period was that the Brahmans would be removed from government service and it can be attributed to the alliance between the Vaishyas and government functionaries.

¹⁴¹ *A Manual of the Titles of North Western Provinces*, Allahabad 1889, Title number 9 granted to Krishna Shah.

The Vaishyas of Almora were particularly perturbed by the memorial presented by the Brahmans of Almora to the Lieutenant Governor in which they had apparently referred to the Vaishyas as 'petty traders'. The Vaishyas also sent two deputations to represent their grievances to the government in 1899. It suited the Sahus and other groups to accept the appellation of Vaishya used by the British administrators, even though in 1888 Krishna Shah was referred to as a Rajput in *Manual of the Titles of the North Western Provinces*. During the war years the relationship between the Vaishyas and the government became even more cordial, because of the support given by the Vaishyas to the war effort. It was the patronage provided by the government that facilitated the formation of the Vaishya Sabha. At a conference organised in December 1916, the need for a separate organisation for the Vaishyas was discussed.¹⁴² The conference was attended by 67 Vaishyas who reiterated their loyalty to the government and mentioned their support of the government on earlier occasions as well. Chiranji Lal Sah noted the progress made by the Brahmans of Jhijar and Shalakhola and said that the Shahs had not made any progress. He said that during the last Darbar he was seated before the Brahmans and therefore there was no need to consider them as superior. He added that the Shahs can perform all the tasks of the Brahmans; therefore there was no need for them to accept Brahman superiority. The resolution to form the Vaishya Sabha was endorsed by all those who were present at the meeting with the exception of Badri Shah Thulgharia who was a teacher at the local school, and of a nationalist bent of mind.

In its reports on the formation of the Vaishya Sabha the *Almora Akhbar* castigated the Vaishyas for establishing an organisation based on caste.¹⁴³ It argued that the Shahs should support the attempts of the Kumaun Parishad to create a sense of unity amongst the various groups which constituted Kumauni society. The Vaishyas should support the aspirations of the Kumauni people in

¹⁴² *Almora Akhbar* 11 December 1916.

¹⁴³ Reports in the *Almora Akhbar* of 11 December, 18 December and 25 December 1916.

their nationalist project, rather than dissipate their energy on the establishment of a caste organisation. In another article, it poked fun at the Vaishya Sabha which had been formed for the promotion of economic interests and therefore it would be more appropriate to refer to it as the Mahajan Sabha rather than the Vaishya Sabha.¹⁴⁴

The response of the Vaishya Sabha to this criticism was that the progress of the nation depended on the progress of the various groups within it. It cited Dr. Sunder Lal, “in India if any sect applied it self earnestly to ameliorate its condition and to rectify evils and remove any impediments that might come in the way of its progress the entire nation made up of different sects would achieve a degree of progress which would be difficult of attainment otherwise.”¹⁴⁵ On the basis of this formulation, the objective of the Vaishya Sabha was to protect the interest of the Vaishyas; to work for the progress of the Vaishyas; to work towards progress in agriculture commerce and finance; to establish cordial relations within the Vaishyas; to sort out internal problems of the Vaishyas through a Panchayat System; to promote the physical and mental development of Vaishya children; to work for women’s education and to remove social mal practices and institute new practices. The commitment of the Vaishyas to the objectives of the Sabha does not appear to have been very serious. At one of the meetings of the Vaishya Sabha attended by 55 Vaishyas, a decision to open three night schools was able to raise a paltry amount of Rs 49. This was clearly not in consonance with the amount of capital controlled by the Vaishyas.

The establishment of the Vaishya Sabha was successful in directing public attention to the Sahs and helped to establish them as a separate unit of Kumaun society. One of the main concerns of the Vaishya Sabha was to assert the demand for a higher status in consonance with their economic position. In its early years, the Vaishya Sabha decided to collect information about the Sahs, and to produce Vanshavalis like the other upper castes. They were

¹⁴⁴ *Almora Akhbar* 25 December 1916.

¹⁴⁵ *Almora Akhbar* 25 December 1916.

also very keen to refute Burn's suggestion that the Sahs marry Doms and therefore should be relegated to the Dom caste.¹⁴⁶

The process of documentation of Sah Vanshavalis which began in 1919,¹⁴⁷ eventually culminated in the publication of the well known work the *Sah Vansha* by Captain Nand Lal Sah.¹⁴⁸ He noted the peculiar situation of the Sahs, who because they were the financiers were included in the category of Vaishyas. He refuted the theory that Sah was derived from Sadhu which referred to the traders. He argued that the honorific Sah linked the Sahs to the royal family. A mis-reading of the term had led to the Kshatriyas being designated Vaishyas. The Sahs were also immigrants who had come to Kumaun with Som Chand. He noted that Chaudharis, and the Thulgharias had come to Kumaun from Jhusi, whereas the Gangolas came to Gangoli in Kumaun during the early sixteenth century, the Kholibhitarias are the descendants of Shalivahan who also arrived in Kumaun during the early seventeenth century and the Jagatis came all the way from Udaipur.¹⁴⁹ He said that the Sahs had been considered Vaishyas because of their own ignorance. He corrected his grandfather Chiranji Lal Sah who had referred himself as a Vaish, and said that the honorific Lala used for the Sahs should be corrected and made Lal so that the Sahs could safely style themselves Thakurs.

Captain Nand Lal Sah's book claimed immigrant status for the Sahs who asserted Kshatriya status. Their claim was contested, and the book raised protests from certain quarters. The claims of Nand Lal Sah were refuted by D.D. Tiwari in his book *Kurmanchal Sah Samaj*.¹⁵⁰ D.D. Tiwari's response was prompted by Indra Lal Sah Gangola. He stated that he had problems with the equation of the term Kshatriya with Rajput. D.D. Tiwari suggests that the

¹⁴⁶ R. Burn, *Census of India 1901* Volume 16 Part I Allahabad 1902 p. 216.

¹⁴⁷ *Shakti* 4 November 1919 and *Shakti* 12 December 1922 advertised on behalf of the Shahs and asked them to collect ethnographic information about themselves.

¹⁴⁸ N. L. Shah, *Kumaun ka Shah Vansha* Lucknow 1938 p. 3.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 14–17.

¹⁵⁰ D.D. Tiwari, *Kurmanchal Sah Samaj* Almora 1939, in the Ganga Prasad Shah Collection District Archives.

Kshatriyas are distinct from the Rajputs. He noted that the confounding of Sahs with Sahus advocated by Nand Lal Sah was facile. He referred to the differences between the various groups designated Sahs, and explained that the Sahs belonged to three different varnas Sahus, who came to Kumaun, during the Chand period; Kshatriyas, who live in Nainital, and intermarry with the Sahs and other Kshatriyas; Rajput Kshatriya and Khasa who have adopted the trading profession and are therefore considered Sahs. The book highlighted the internal divisions between the Sahs which were based upon a hierarchical rating of the various lineages. D.D. Tiwari therefore placed the different Sah lineages in the Thakur–Khasa continuum, and refused to grant Kshatriya status to all the lineages.

Immigrant status was also claimed by another Chaudhuri lineage which had not been mentioned by Nand Lal Sah¹⁵¹ the Vanshali traced the family of the Dwarahat Chaudhuris to Kot Kangra and said that they were the Kanungos during the Gorkha period and had also been recognised by G.W. Traill. The Dwarahat Chaudhuris therefore considered themselves Kshatriyas. From the above account it is evident that even the Sahs were influenced by the claim to ritual superiority based upon immigrant status, and that at least one section amongst them wanted to dissociate itself from the Khasas and wanted to contract marriages only with lineages of similar status

The Dalits¹⁵²

The Dalits referred to as Doms, formed an integral part of Kumauni society in the villages and in the urban centres. In the

¹⁵¹ G. Chaudhari, *Kurmanchali Itihas Mein Dwarahat Ke Chaudhuri Almora* 1949.

¹⁵² The term Dom, because of its pejorative connotation was replaced by Depressed Classes (used by the colonial state) and Untouchables (first used in 1909), Harijans that is people of god (used by Gandhian nationalists). The term Dalit was articulated as a self-ascribed term by Jyotirao Phule and later popularized by the Dalit Panther movement of the 1970s; it refers to Dalit as oppressed /crushed by an upper caste consciousness. The term Dalit, a self ascriptive term, has therefore been preferred in this essay.

pre-colonial period, the Doms were a distinct group who were considered polluting because of the work they performed. The Tamtas, the Lohars and the Kolis probably constituted an important group in the Kumaun polity because of their control over important economic resources. The history of the Khasas and their gradual spread over the Baisi kingdoms refers inevitably to the attendant lohars (ironsmiths) who also travelled with them. Agricultural settlements could not have transformed the landscape of the Himalayas without the support of artisanal groups (C.von Furer-Haimendorf, Delhi, 1966 : 11–68).

They were certainly not a homogeneous community, and even the early copper plates refer to Pandrah Vishi (fifteen Sudra groups) probably divided in terms of professional vocations.¹⁵³ The copper plate inscriptions and the revenue records of the Chands indicate the presence of special professional groups such as the Agaris, Tamtas, Lohars (metal workers), Bhulas (oil pressers), Paharis, (guards), Bakhariyas (those who were in charge of the stables), Bajaniyas, Bajadars and Turis (the entertainers) (Dabral, Dogadda, V.S. 2047: 192–226, Joshi edited, Kanpur 1996: 16,22) The Nanda Devi Jagara devotes an entire episode to the birth of Kaliya Lohar who produced the slicing knife for Maya¹⁵⁴ (Sax, Delhi, 1991:21). Artisanal groups were entitled to collect dues in grain from each household within their village. The Doms who were attached as serfs to particular lineages were referred to as beshva and figure prominently in the folk legends of the region, for example Khimva in the legend of Bhagva Raut (Upadhyaya, Bareilly, 1979:107–113).

¹⁵³ Copper plate of Gyan Chand 1689 in Dabral, Dogadda, V.S. 2047, pp. 207–208.

¹⁵⁴ “Then Maya came to the Mountain of Time. She gave the deerskin to Kaliya Lohar. “Here you are, son, now you make the slicing knife”. “How shall I forge the knife, my mother?” “Make the knife with a hammer, my son”. Then the Lohar made the seven slicing knives. He gave them to Maya; “May you live lakhs of years. You have erased all my troubles, my son”.

M.P. Joshi notes that the revenue records of the Chandras refers to the Bamana, Khasiya and Duma and argues that these groups represent the Brahmana, Kshatriyas and Sudra. His contention is that the Sudra Doms were the Kainis of the Chandra revenue records. On the basis of this hypothesis he argues that they were not a depressed group during the pre-modern period and that they were reduced to untouchable status by the Gorkhas and the British. The only significant point that M.P. Joshi is able to substantiate is that the Doms of Kumaun were not as badly off as their counterparts in other regions of north India, this was probably because of the different economic structure of hill society. (Joshi, Almora, 1994: 301–333).

The 1865 Census divided the Sudras into Khussia and Dom. The early Census of Kumaun therefore reveals confusion about Sudra groups and Captain Fisher's report divided the artisans into two groups, the first were considered Hindus and the others traditional Doms.¹⁵⁵ E.T. Atkinson in 1884 enlisted 23 categories of Doms and divided the Dalits into four groups. (Atkinson, 1882 reprint 1981 Vol III pt II: 445–448). To the first class belonged the Kolis, Tamtas Lohars and Ors. To the second class belonged the Ruriyas, Chimiyyaras, Agaris, Pahris, and Bhuls. The third class comprised the Chamars, Mochis, Bakharyas, and the fourth class consisted of the musicians, dancers, jugglers and acrobats that is the Badi, Hurkiya, Darzi Dholi Dumjogi and Bhand. In the urban areas these groups were not necessarily tied to upper castes in long term relationships, and functioned as occupational groups who lived in separate settlements because they were considered polluting.

The Dalits of Kumaun were divided into a large number of groups, though the upper castes designated them as one category, Doms. E.H.H. Edye, during the enumeration for the 1920 Census, noted that he had been asked to disallow the use of the term Dom in the Census schedule because the whole community was broken

¹⁵⁵ Captain Fisher, Notes and Statement Regarding the Prevailing Castes-Kumaun in *Census of North Western Provinces* Allahabad 1867.

up into so called sub-castes, and that the Dom was only a general name for the aggregate of these.¹⁵⁶ He found about 204 sub-castes names, and was eventually able to reduce them to 30 authenticated sub-castes. Below is given a list of the authenticated castes with the traditional occupation of each in the group arrangement most generally recognised, based upon E.H.H. Edey:

	Caste	Traditional occupation
Group I	(Agari	Ironsmiths
	(Lohar	Ironsmiths
	(Tamta	Coppersmiths
	(Tirwa	Sword and knife sharpners
	(Barhai	Carpenters
	(Bhul	Oil pressers
	(Bairi	Basket makers
	(Baura	Sack makers
	(Chanal	Shoe makers
	(Hankiya	Potters
Group II	(Koli	Weavers
	(Orh	Masons
	(Ruriya	Basket makers
	(Raj	Masons
	(Dhanik	Basket makers
	(Dhunia	Catechu makers
Group III	(Jamoria	Cultivators
	(Barai	Stone masons
	(Bakharia	Ploughmen and menials
	(Chuners	Turners
	(Mochi	Shoe makers
	(Pahari	Watchmen
Group IV	(Dhobi	Washer men
	(Pauri	Potters
	(Auji	Tailors and Drummers
	(Darzi	Tailors

¹⁵⁶ E. H. H. Eyde, The Depressed Classes of the Kumaun Hills, in *Census of India*, 1921 Volume 16, part I, Appendix C Allahabad 1923 pp. 21–22.

	(Doli	Tailors and Drummers
	(Turi	Trumpeters
Group V	(Hurkiya	Drummers
	(Badi	Dancers

Though E.H.H. Edye was able to workout a division of the Dalits into four groups, yet he found that “the caste system among the depressed classes of the hills is still in a very fluid state. I have said that the occupational sub-divisions are true castes rather than sub-castes. They are certainly not sub-castes of a true Dom caste, for the Doms as a whole have no sort of caste cohesion. A good case could be made out for holding that the true caste is rather what I have called the ‘groups’. But groups do not even have names, and it is most reasonable, to find the caste of the depressed classes of the hills in what has hitherto been called the sub-caste.” (Ibid p. 21).

The colonial period witnessed the proliferation of Dalit groups; in the 1921 Census, E.H.H. Edye noted 31 established sub-castes whereas in the 1931 Census, A.C. Turner recorded 51 sub-castes.¹⁵⁷ The increase in the number of divisions was the result of an emergent caste consciousness and increasing stratification, within the Dalits. The differentiation within the Dalits was premised upon a gradation of their services and schematically is best represented by R.D. Sanwal as follows: (R.D. Sanwal, Delhi 1976:109).

I. Suddha

II. Bhal

III. Neech

A. Khalait

1. Hempen bag manufacturing;	Cloth-weaving; Oil-pressing;
Copper and iron-smithery;	Mining and Stone-masonry

¹⁵⁷ A.C. Turner, ‘Caste in the Kumaun Division and the Tehri-Garhwal State’ in *Census of India*, 1931 Volume I. Appendix C pp. 553–558



- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Carpentry | Smelting |
| 2. Basket and mat making; | Wood turning; Pot making; |
| Bellows-driving; | Sieve and Village |
| Agricultural menial | yoke-strap menial |
| service | making |
| 3. Religious music and drum | |
| playing | |
| B. Mangkhani | |
| public entertaining | Begging (from clean castes only) |
| IV. Asuddha | |
| Leather-working and | |
| Tanning; | |
| Scavenging | |

We thus find that “though all the Dom occupations involved direct or indirect handling of cattle-hide and the performance of menial services and hence were considered equally polluting and low in the view of the Bith. The Dom themselves made a distinction within their ranks on the basis of their occupational relationship with Bith cultivators and formed clusters of occupational groups which functioned like castes and were hierarchically graded. Occupations such as those of the Khalait included in the cluster assigned the highest position were those which were crucial for agricultural production and which, on this account, necessitated greater interaction between the persons who followed menial and artisan occupations and those who followed more prestigious agricultural pursuits. Clusters of occupations like those of the Mangkhani which were not directly related to the process of agricultural production and hence did not necessitate interaction between those who followed them and others who followed more honoured occupations were relegated to an inferior position.” (Ibid: 110).

During the colonial period, the decline of local industries rendered some artisanal groups redundant, though some were able to carve out new locations for themselves in the burgeoning urban

centres; others had to join agricultural operations as tenants and labourers. In the mining villages, often the Dalits formed a large section of the village community, and in some areas, they had almost complete control over the mining process. In such areas, they were able to exercise a reasonable amount of autonomy. Even in mining villages where the upper castes also resided, the miners were not necessarily tied to the upper castes. The closure of the mines by the mid-nineteenth century affected the mining groups, who found themselves displaced from their traditional occupation. In 1872, the Agaris numbered 806. E.T. Atkinson noted that, “they marry with Ors and do not wear the Janeo nor have they Gotras, but of late years as they have increased in material prosperity, they have begun to assume respectability by professing many of the purificatory observances of the better classes and are fast becoming Hindused... for centuries they were serfs of the mines, but of late years have found more remunerative occupation in road making and some are now wealthy men and good cultivators”. (Atkinson first published 1882 reprint Cosmo 1981 Vol III pt II: 444).

The work of mining, smelting and production of iron and copper suffered a serious decline in the nineteenth century, and indigenous metals were replaced by iron and copper sheets from England. The transformation of these sheets into agricultural implements and copper and bronze vessels however continued. The Tamatas or the Tamrakars (the copper workers) were therefore not displaced and continued with their occupation. They were able to diversify into trade and other related activities and the Tamtas of Almora were not only wealthy but also influential by the early years of the twentieth century.

The Kolis, the weavers were found almost every where and were an important group in the economic sphere. They wove cotton cloth from a dwarf variety of cotton which was grown in the hills. Over the nineteenth century, the influx of cotton piece goods from England displaced indigenous cotton, a process which was accelerated in the early years of the twentieth century. Even in

the 1880s and 1890s “the majority of the villagers made their own clothes from Kapas grown along the Ramganga river valley”.¹⁵⁸ The importance of cotton weaving by the Kolis probably led to a differentiation between them and the Kolis were divided into two groups the Gaikria Kolis and the Dom Kolis. The Gaikria Kolis claimed a superior status, because of their respect for the cow and their consequent ritual purity. Over the nineteenth century, the Kolis found a reduction in the demand for their cloth and gradually the Kolis found themselves without an occupation. A large number of them turned towards cultivation, and in Mauna village, they were performing agricultural functions from the 1860s onwards.¹⁵⁹ The Chanals were also weavers who suffered the same fate, and in 1920 E.H.H. Edye noted that “fifty years ago the Chanals were weavers. Cotton growing has now been abandoned in the hills, and the Chanals are now mainly ploughmen. (Ibid p. 21).

It was in the agrarian sector, that the Dalits found themselves completely subservient to the upper castes. R.D. Sanwal, in the 1950s found that the Dalits were divided into two main groups, the Khalait and the Mangkhani. (R.D. Sanwal Delhi 1976:71). He noted that the Khalait Doms were maintained by Bith and were attached to specific households. He found that the Pauri and the Hali were also given small plots of cultivable land. The Pauri or the village watchman was given a plot from the Gaon Sanjait or common land whereas the Hali received a plot of land from the Gosain he was attached to. Mountaineer said the Pauri was required to execute community decisions about allocation of labour and other related matters. Over the nineteenth century as the importance of the village community declined the position of the Pauri also lost its prestige and importance. (Mountaineer, London 1869:168–169).

¹⁵⁸ M.V. Grundy, *Berinag Old and New, 1868 to 1960*, manuscript Courtesy: Margaret Bhatti.

¹⁵⁹ Almora Record Room Mauna Village Records, Patti Athagulli, Pargana Baramandal District Almora. The figures are compiled from the various settlement records.

In the predominantly Brahman villages, the Dalits were absolutely vital, because it was they who were attached to the Brahmans as their Haliyas, and were virtually agrestic serfs who could be sold along with the land and even without it. M. Smith described the Haliyas as “Doms or out castes, belonging with the children and effects to the lord of the soil like the beasts or other stock on it. Field slaves are boarded and lodged by their owners and receive moreover a *than* or bale of cloth for a dress every third year. On the occasion also of their marriages the master defrays the wedding expenses”.¹⁶⁰ The system of the Haliya was not acknowledged as legitimate by British authorities, and in any case affected a very small percentage of the total Dalit population. There was a tendency towards a decline of the system during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries because of the resumption of revenue free grants by the British authorities, the growing mobility of labour and the monetisation of labour services.

The Dalit relationship with the cultivating peasant was structured differently. R.D. Sanwal found that the “Khalait Dom were maintained by the Bith in whose village they resided. Though they were collectively owned by the Bith of that village, they were attached to specific households and were in addition to the Khal (a portion of the harvest) given a piece of land by the Gusain to build a hut upon, polluted and cast off clothes, a length of cloth every two or three years, and food when they worked for the Gusain.” (R.D. Sanwal, Delhi 1976:71). A. Fanger refers to this system as the Khaukiya Gusain relationship.¹⁶¹ (A.C. Fanger Almora 1993:271–290). He notes that it is similar to the Jajmani system except that it does not denote only the relationship between priest and client. Rather the Khaukiya is one who comes to the Khal (where the grain is threshed) to receive grain payments from the sponsor, the Gusain. He found that the Khaukia Gusain

¹⁶⁰ M. Smith, ‘Himalayas in Kumaun and Garhwal’, *Calcutta Review* Volume XVIII 1852 pp. 72–115.

¹⁶¹ Gosain is found in the copper plate inscriptions of the Chands from the period of Kirati Chand and it is possible that it was related to the growing power of the landed groups.

relationship had traditionally constituted an exchange of goods and services (both economic and ritual) between individuals of different castes. Exchanges were also affected during important rites of passage in the Gusain household.

The link of a section of the Dalits with the land, and their acquisition of small plots of land, granted to them by the Biths of the village shows that there was no clear *cur* injunction against Dalits cultivating land. This appears to be different from the situation in other regions. It may reflect the specificity of the Kumaun economic system, which found it convenient to grant the Dalit a piece of land for his own subsistence, rather than provide goods which required monetary exchange. For the petty peasant, it was difficult to provide the kind of patronage required to sustain the Khaukiya Gosain relationship. Thus, small allotments of land were given to the Dalits as *sirtans* or as *kainis*. *Sirtans* were required to cultivate the Sir land of the upper castes and were similar to a tenant at will. Though the Dalits probably constituted large sections of the *sirtan* population nevertheless they formed a very small percentage of the agriculturists and controlled an even smaller portion of the total percentage of cultivated land. Over the nineteenth century the *sirtans* were able to improve their position because of the decline in the position of the Thuljaats, but this did not result in substantial changes.

The *kainis* were tenants at will who also paid a higher rent; by the 1830s this class of tenants was merging with that of the *khaikars* (occupancy tenants) and by the early twentieth century this form of tenancy was obsolete.¹⁶² Thus Dalit rights over land were recognised and legally sanctioned by British authority. A large number of Dalits therefore became occupancy tenants, and some of them even became proprietors. In 1867, the number of total *khaikars* or occupancy tenants was 36,622 of which Doms were 9,119 that is they constituted 25% of the occupancy tenants. In the same year of the 94,924 proprietors 4,115 were Doms, which

¹⁶² *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued.

is they constituted 4.3% of the total proprietors.¹⁶³ The extension of land under cultivation during the nineteenth century, also provided an opportunity to the Dalits to become landowners, and they were responsible for an increasing number of Nayabad grants. Statement showing number of Dalit cultivators in 1867.

Names of Pergunnah.	Proprietors	Permanent Tenants
1. Burahmundul,	758	1,368
2. Chhukhata,	49	124
3. Chougarkha,	321	654
4. Danpoor,	316	353
5. Darma,	50
6. Dhuniakot,	68	537
7. Dhyaneerow,	1.7	724
8. Gungolee,	665	129
9. Johar,	222	80
10. Kalee Kumaun,	708	794
11. Kota,	30	88
12. Palee,	160	2,422
13. Phuldakot,	144	696
14. Ramgarh,	231	100
15. Seera,	54	77
16. Shor,	100	245
17. Ushkot,	27
18. Sudabart,	92	70
Total	4,115	9,119

The growing monetisation of the economy and an increase in the demand for labour services strengthened the position of artisanal sections and of agricultural labour. The requirement of a

¹⁶³ J.O' B. Beckett *Report on the Revision of Settlement of Kumaon District 1863-1873*, Allahabad 1874, p. 8.

skilled working class for the construction of public works, roads and government buildings provided particularly lucrative positions to the artisanal sections like the *Barhai* (carpenter) the *Orh* (mason) and the *Rajmistri*. The development of urban centres like Hawalbagh, Ranikhet, Nainital, Bhowali, Haldwani and Kathgodam led to the concentration of these castes at these centres. The shortage of artisans in the villages was probably a consequence of this change. G. Berremen found that even high castes performed the work of artisans on occasion. (G. Berremen, California 1963:70–71). The absence of a carpenter in Sirkanda meant that the Biths performed their own routine carpentry and brought a specialist from outside for major building jobs.

The spectacle of the artisanal Dalit as the skilled worker commanding the services of the non-skilled Bith groups was reasonably familiar by the early years of the twentieth century. Prior to the First World War, the average wage of an unskilled labourer did not exceed three annas (Rs 0.19) was four annas (Rs 0.25) a day in or near Almora and Ranikhet. Most of these services were performed by Khasa Rajputs and Khasa Brahmans. However an average skilled labourer like a mason, carpenter and blacksmith earned Rs 10 to 12 per month (unskilled wages varied from Rs 5 to Rs 6), whereas a really good worker could earn double that wage. It appears that “sometimes it also happened that an unearning member of a family of good standing accepted work for a wage which was less than remunerative, drawing upon supplies from his home for board”.¹⁶⁴ It therefore appears that during this period, the Dalits clearly had an economic advantage which was not commensurate with their social position.

The improvement of the position of the Khalait Dom, however, was not translated into any institutionalized system of status enhancement. The Dalits were still referred to as the Doms, and ritual barriers sharpened during the colonial period. The biggest obstacle to status improvement was the absence of any kind of social organisation even amongst distinct occupational groups.

¹⁶⁴ S. A. A. Rizvi *Almora Gazetteer* Lucknow 1981 pp. 158–160.

The problem with the Dalits was that “the Dom of any occupational category were not organised. This attribute of theirs were shared by them with the Khasa. Organisation, however rudimentary was a characteristic of only the Bhalbaman and the Thakurs, who between them shared control of all political and economic power.” (R.D. Sanwal Delhi 1976: 69). The agricultural Dalit suffered restrictions on his physical movement. Traditionally, he was not permitted to go out of his village or group of villages. This restriction on physical movement tended to keep the range of marriages very narrow and this militated against even occupational group endogamy. This probably prevented the development of any sub-caste like category within the Doms. Yet the emergence of proto sub-castes or groups by the 1920s indicates that a system of marriage endogamy between the various groups had become normative, and was probably bringing together occupational groups of a particular region. This would have important consequence for the development of status differentiation and stratification among the Dalits.

It was in the urban areas and in regions where communications were well established that the Dalits were able to organise themselves. One such significant group was that of the Agaris who had probably acquired a lot of importance during the eighteenth century when a large amount of metal was required by the Gorkha war machine. Kharahi Patti had become part of Bam Shah’s jagir and the Saun Agaris of the Agar Patti in Ramgarh had been successful in organising themselves into a class like jati which then petitioned the Dharmadhikari of Chhakhata Pandit Maha Deva Pant to grant them Vyavastha and the right to wear the sacred thread and the use of sandal wood paste.¹⁶⁵ (B.D. Pande, Almora, 1938 reprint 1990:616). Though the importance of mining declined over the nineteenth century, yet the Agaris continued to assert their ritually superior position.

¹⁶⁵ Private Papers of Dharmadhikari and Mantrik, M.R. Pant, Bhimtal courtesy Kailash Pant.

The Agaris of Ramgarh and Kharahi were the first to respond to the call of the Arya Samajists for Shudhi. Like the Tamatas who were a small endogamous group the Agaris formed a proto-caste and were therefore with the Tamatas in the forefront of the movement to welcome the Arya Samaj. The widening ambit of the Arya Samaj gradually reached out to Dalits in well connected towns and villages. In 1913, the Arya Samaj was successful in preventing the Dalits of Sunakia village from converting to Christianity. From this period Shuddhi became popular with the the new organization of the dalits, the Shilpakar Sudharini Sabha. By 1920, the Sabha decided that Dalits (who had performed shuddhi) would refer to themselves as Aryas and in the next census would declare themselves Shilpakars and not Doms. The large number of Aryas in Nainital District indicates that Shudhi was possible in semiurban areas like Haldwani, Kashipur, Jaspur, Nainital, Bhowali, Kathgodam and Bhimtal.¹⁶⁶ It also had a greater appeal in the regions of recent settlement, like Chhakhata, Kota, Chaubainsi, and Phaldakot.

The improvement in the position of the Tamatas (copper workers) has been discussed earlier. They were established in Almora in a locality which came to be known as Tamtyura. They had various lineages in Kharai, Chaugaon, Uderkhani and Gadatir Berinag.¹⁶⁷ The Tamata Sudharak Sabha was established in 1905 by Krishna Tamata. Krishna Tamata, because of his location in Almora realised the importance of education and started mobilising his community for school education. The Krishna library was started in Tamatyura in 1911. His nephew Hari Prasad Tamata lived with his maternal uncle and was educated by his uncle. He acquired particular proficiency in Urdu and earned for himself the title of Munshi.

Almora celebrated the Coronation of George V in 1911 with great fervour. A large section of the local elite turned up for the

¹⁶⁶ A.C. Turner Caste in the Kumaun Division and the Tehri-Garhwal State, *Census of India, 1931Report*, United Provinces Allahabad 1933 p.544

¹⁶⁷ Private Papers of the Tamata family Almora, The Tamata Collection.

event which was organised at the Badrishwar temple grounds. Krishna Tamata and Hari Prasad Tamata were also invited to the function. Their entry was obstructed by a large number of orthodox Hindus who objected to the entry of the 'Doms'. The humiliation suffered by H.P. Tamata on this occasion inspired him to organise the Tamatas so that they would be able to resist caste discrimination. He also decided that the derogatory appellation Dom would have to be replaced with the term Shilpakar by the united efforts of the community.

In 1913 at the Sunakia Shudhi H.P. Tamata was one of the organisers who accompanied Lala Lajpat Rai from Almora. He and his nephew R.P. Tamata were associated with the Arya Samaj movement in the first decade from approximately 1913 to 1925. During this period the Arya Samaj movement was the only organised movement of the Dalits. Yet the Shudhi movement itself was not very successful in Almora. Unlike Nainital, where Aryas were 74.8% of the total Dalit population by 1931, in Almora only 2.6% of the Dalit population was converted to the Arya Samaj.¹⁶⁸

In 1914 Krishna Tamata was nominated to the Municipal Board of Almora. This created a furore.¹⁶⁹ At a meeting of the Municipal Board a number of the members expressed their reservations about sitting at the same table as Krishna Tamata. The discrimination practised by the Almora upper castes probably strengthened the resolve of the Tamata Sudharak Sabha to step up its demands for government intervention to counter upper caste offensives. The formation of the Shilpakar Sudharak Sabha now extended the scope of organisation beyond the Tamatas, and included a large number of the new Aryas. During the First World War the Tamatas supported the war effort and H.P. Tamata distributed grain in Pithoragarh during the famine.¹⁷⁰ The authorities recognised his philanthropy and the Lieutenant Governor and Mr. Wyndham the

¹⁶⁸ A.C. Turner, Caste in Kumaun and Tehri Garhwal, *Census of India*, 1931, p. 554.

¹⁶⁹ *Almora Akhbar* 23 March 1914.

¹⁷⁰ *Almora Akhbar* 18 September 1916.

Commissioner visited Krishna Tamata's night school.¹⁷¹ H.P. Tamata's services were also required for the recruitment of a Labour Corps of Dalits from Kumaun and Garhwal for the war effort.¹⁷²

By 1919, the growing politicisation of the Dalit community was expressed in its letter to the Kumaun Parishad, an organisation of regional elites.¹⁷³ The charter of demands stated that 1. Please issue instructions to those who discriminate against Dalits and who do not behave properly with them. 2. We do not have enough land for agriculture and upper castes prevent us from extending our holdings, please provide us with land. 3. Please organise schools for us and provide us education. The Kumaun Parishad rejected the demands and stated that the Parishad addressed itself only to political issues and not to matters of social reform. This distinction was not appreciated by the Shilpakar Sabha which noted that the Kumaun Parishad was quibbling about trifles when the issue was a matter of life and death for the Shilpakars. Yet it is significant that the Dalits were able to make demands of the Kumaun Parishad which was an upper caste primarily Brahman organisation. In contrast, the Rajputs who constituted the bulk of the Kumaun population had still not been included in large numbers in the Kumaun Parishad.

The war years had exacerbated the demand for labour, and consequently facilitated its mobility. The increasing demand for skilled labour services promoted a considerable increase in wages. By 1918 to 1920 an unskilled labourer was not available for a wage of less than eight annas (Rs 0.50).¹⁷⁴ The demand for wage labour did not decline even after the war because discharged soldiers returned from war time services comparatively well off. Even in 1925 wages were high and a skilled labourer was hardly available at a wage of less than 12 annas (Rs 0.75) per day or Rs

¹⁷¹ *Almora Akhbar* 30 October 1916.

¹⁷² *Samata* 21 February 1962 and *Garhwali* 2 March 1918.

¹⁷³ *Shakti* 11 February 1919.

¹⁷⁴ S.A.A. Rizvi *Almora Gazetteer* Lucknow 1981 pp. 158–160.

20 a month.¹⁷⁵ The post war years were years of ferment, with the mobilisation of the peasantry against the forest and labour policy of the government; this probably provided the Dalits with a space for articulation of their demands.

The events of the First World War and the drastic changes that occurred in north India as a consequence were noticed by the Dalit leadership. H.P. Tamata noted that the First World War had led to major realignments in politics all over the world. He felt that the Montford reforms were designed to help only those who were organised and articulate. The upper castes and the Liberal parties of India were able to acquire important ministerial positions but the Dalits had been left out because they had not been able to ventilate their grievances as a group. It was around this time that a section of the Shlipkars opted for a strategy for requesting government support for their emancipation. At the same time, the government was also developing a policy of active support and intervention on behalf of the Depressed Classes.

H.P. Tamata's emphasis on providing education to his community appears to have been well received. The Krishna Night School provided education to growing numbers and gradually night schools mushroomed in other localities as well. The Kumaun Shilpakar Sabha was able to get subsidies from the government. Day schools were also opened in different parts of Almora District. By 1923–24, 1,400 children were enrolled in various schools and by 1927; the number of students had gone up to 3,000.¹⁷⁶

Dalit Students enrolled at various schools in Almora.

1923–24	1,400 students
1924–25	1,600 students
1925–26	2,400 + students
1926–27	2,400+ students
1927–28	3,000 students

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Private Papers of the Tamata family Almora, The Tamata Collection

By 1931, 2.5% of the total Dalit population had acquired education.¹⁷⁷ By 1937, the numbers of day schools had increased to 23 and they were located in various places like Chilason, Ayarpani, Lakhani, Chahargaon, Lodhiya, Baluvakot, Pavadhar, Damda, Chami, Sirmoli, Lamadhunga, Antarori, Bhumekia, Bhanya Agar, Barhuna, Ladhauli, Timata, Bhanulekh, Jarti and Rajapur, along with adult night schools at Pithoragarh and Lohaghat.¹⁷⁸ By 1934, 3,500 boys and 100 girls were attending school in Almora, 20 boys and 6 girls were in receipt of scholarship and 20 Dalits teachers have been appointed. It is significant that 40 girls had cleared the Entrance Examination and that one boy had been appointed supervisor.¹⁷⁹ By 1942, the number of Municipal, District Board and Government supported schools for the Depressed classes had increased to 31, and Asharfi Lal, a government official questioned the policy of segregated depressed classes schools and suggested that the twenty-two Depressed Classes schools should be taken over.¹⁸⁰ The Dalit leadership was hostile to this suggestion and did not want disbandment of the schools for Depressed Classes. They favoured segregated schools which were provided with grants whose disbursement was controlled by the Shilpakar leadership, which could exercise its influence in terms of appointments of teachers etc.¹⁸¹

Education provided the basis for the emergence of a Dalit community. Educated Dalits now changed their names and acquired more Brahmanical first and second names, the pejorative and local suffix to names 'uva' was no longer acceptable and this

¹⁷⁷ *Census of the United Provinces 1931* Volume XVIII Imperial Table XIV page 560.

¹⁷⁸ Private Papers of the Tamata family Almora, The Tamata Collection.

¹⁷⁹ H. P. Tamata *Dalit Sumananjali* p. 28 and according to the District Board Education Committee of 20 June 1934 the figures were as follows: District Board Depressed Schools, number of students 484, Middle and primary School 2,500. (District Board Records, Almora).

¹⁸⁰ Private Papers of the Tamata family of Almora.

¹⁸¹ The Tamata Collection contained a large number of letters from Dalits in remote areas of Kumaun asking for help of H. P. Tamata and many of them were applications for teaching jobs in schools for depressed children.

helped in the articulation of a Dalit identity.¹⁸² H.P. Tamata recognised this and in 1921 he travelled extensively all over Kumaun in an attempt to mobilise the elite sections of the Dalit community.¹⁸³ This group was extremely unhappy with the term Dom and noted that the term Dom was only a generic name for a large number of sub-castes. It suggested that the Doms return themselves as Shilpakars in the 1920 Census.¹⁸⁴ This was not accepted by the Census authorities who nevertheless accepted the legitimacy of the Dalit suggestion that the whole community was broken up into many sub-castes and that the term Dom was only a general name for the aggregate of these. By 1924, the Tamata Sudharak Sabha was working towards a larger organisation of the Shilpakars.¹⁸⁵

The articulation of a Shilpakar identity by the Dalits in the first two decades of the twentieth century marked an important change in Kumaun civil society. In 1921, Edye did not adopt the term Shilpakar, but it was first used officially in 1926 and was adopted by the Census of 1931. The replacement of the pejorative Dom with the artisanal Shilpakar, however, provided a positive identity only to some sections of the Dalits. As efforts to organise the Dalit community intensified, the differences also came to the fore. The Tamata Collection recognised only 51 groups as Shilpakars and is silent about many others. In the 1931 Census, 51 categories were enumerated but even in 1961 all the Scheduled Castes were not returned as Shilpakars.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² *Samata* 21 February 1962 carried an article by Ram Charan Das Mahant of Pithoragarh who detailed the changes that had occurred in the proper names of Dalits over the twentieth century. This clearly indicated a shift from local Kumauni names to pan-Indian names.

¹⁸³ H.P. Tamata *Dalit Sumananjali* p. 61.

¹⁸⁴ *Shakti* 7 September 1920.

¹⁸⁵ File at the Almora Collectorate 1995–96, enlisting achievements of Hari Tamata so that the Lower Mall Road could be renamed the Hari Prasad Tamata Marg.

¹⁸⁶ *District Census Handbook Almora* 1961.

In August 1925, the Arya section of the Dalits organised a meeting of more than 900 people at Almora in Narsingh Bari. The resolutions passed at the conference reflect a well worked out strategy of special concessions from the government. It categorically stated that the British had been sent by God to demolish the pride of the upper castes, but noted with satisfaction that a section of the Hindus supported the Shilpakars in their effort to assert their equality.¹⁸⁷ It noted that in Kumaun the Shilpakars numbered almost 200,000 and therefore they should not hesitate in asserting themselves. The meeting was chaired by Khushi Ram and addressed by Bachi Ram Shri Ram, Prem Ram, Gosain Ram and Gulabi Ram. Local leaders were also invited to the conference for example Mohan Joshi, Ahmad Hussain, Uttam Singh Rawat, Devi Singh Kubarbi, and Badri Dutt Pande. The Shilpakars and other local leaders ate together, and publicly denounced the discrimination practised by upper castes against the Dalits.

The organisation of the Deoli Danda Conference in early 1925 provides an index of the mobilisation of the Dalits by the Shilpakar Sabha.¹⁸⁸ The Deoli Danda conference was attended by all the leaders of the Dalits — Hari Tamata, Khushi Ram Tamta and Bachi Ram Arya. Some of the major resolutions of the conference were the demand for making primary education free and compulsory, reservation for Dalits in the Municipal Board and District Board, recruitment of Dalits to the army, grant of land to the Dalits, a ban on social mal-practices and the establishment of a Shilpakar bank.¹⁸⁹ In 1925, the Shilpakar Sabha acquired a visibility and a presence in local politics by its offensive against the upper castes in the Badrishwara and Tarikhet episodes. In both these situations, the Shilpakar Sabha with its Arya constituents, asserted their equality with the upper castes.

¹⁸⁷ *Shakti* 1 September 1925.

¹⁸⁸ *Shakti* 24 September 1925.

¹⁸⁹ *Samata* Rajat Jayanti Special Issue.

By this period the rift between the Arya Samaji section and the non-Arya Samaji section was becoming manifest. A meeting of Shilpakars was held on 23 and 24 September 1925 at the Narayan Tiwari Deval, this was known as the Kumaun Shilpakar Sammelan.¹⁹⁰ This conference was attended only by Dalits who accepted the leadership of Hari Tamata, and the Sammelan was attended by Hari Tamata, Ratan Singh Tamata, Narsingh Tamta, Hari Ram, Hira Lal, Haria Mistri, Nar Ram, Gangi Ram, Lakshmi Prasad Tamata and Hari Ram Tamata. The conference discussed a number of issues; strategy for resisting oppression by upper castes, the problems of the Shilpakars regarding shortage of land, request to government to appoint Shilpakars in government services in proportion to their numerical strength, discussion on the religious, social and political progress of the Shilpakars, the development of a fraternity of Shilpakars and lastly the establishment of the Kumaun Shilpakar Sammelan. The Kumaun Shilpakar Sammelan announced the formation of Kumaun Shilpakar Sabha which differentiated itself from the Arya Samaji Shilpakar Sudharani Sabha and indicated the different strategies adopted by the two sections of the Dalit leadership. The Arya Samaj group decided to mobilise the support of the local intelligentsia, whereas the Kumaun Shilpakars would seek the cooperation of the colonial authorities. Dalit politics enmeshed in local and imperial power structures searched for different strategies for change.

Conclusion

Stratification in pre-modern Kumaun did not fit in neatly with the Varna hierarchy. The Khasas were responsible for the emergence of a peasant society in the middle Himalayas from western Nepal to Kangra during the early medieval period. The Khasa cultural system, was based upon a lineage system, and recognised only the difference between artisanal and peasant groups. Regional sub-cultures that emerged from within this Khasa

¹⁹⁰ *Samata* Rajat Jayanti Special Issue June 1984.

system, spoke a variation of Central Pahari, Kumaun was one such sub region. The late medieval state, introduced Brahmanical domination, but with limited success. Brahmanical norms could be imposed only upon peasants who became the tenants of upper caste groups who controlled revenue free land. The triadic hierarchy that emerged as a consequence recognised the pivotal role of the Khasa within the societal framework. The specific historicity of Kumaun was premised upon the Khasa identity.

The modern period, under the colonial system, restructured these coordinates. This necessitated the undermining and marginalisation of the Khasa, the erasure of Khasa history, and the construction of a historical past which could legitimise the dominance of upper caste Brahmans and also explain British dominance. The modern caste system was tailored to fit into an all India pattern of Varna caste hierarchy. The 'fuzzy' caste identities of the pre-modern period were recast in cognisance with an all India pattern. The specificity of Kumaun caste structure suffered erosion and was formulated afresh before Kumaun could be linked to a pan-Indian framework. The emergence of well articulated caste identities was an important and integral aspect of the construction of Kumaun society in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. These caste identities were not premised upon Shastric injunctions and did not necessarily carry vestiges of caste within the earlier social formation. The organisational structure of caste was recognisably and undoubtedly modern in its manifestation, and was a response to the integration of Kumaun into the Imperial framework. Disaggregated but similar segments which emerged as the various castes of Kumaun, would now constitute and construct a regional identity based on language and culture, self professedly Kumauni. The task of bringing the various castes into a larger ambit of a Hindu Kurmanchali Samaj by the upper caste elites will be studied in another essay.

Bibliography

- Adhikary S.M., *Paschim Nepal Ko Atihasik Anveshan* Tribhuvan Vishwavidyalaya, Kathmandu V.S. 2043.
- Adhikary S.M., *The Khasa Kingdom*, Nirala, Jaipur 1988.
- Almora Akhbar* 1913.
- Atkinson E.T., *The Himalayan Gazetteer* first published Government Press, 1882 reprint Cosmo, Delhi 1981 Volume II part I and II, Volume III, part I and II.
- Batten, J.H. ed., *Official Reports on the Province of Kumaon*, Secundra Orphan Press, Agra 1851.
- Beckett J.O' B., *Report on the Revision of Settlement in the Kumaon District carried out by J.O' B. Beckett* 1863–1873, Government Press, Allahabad 1874.
- Berremen G. D., *Hindus of the Himalayas* University of California, California 1963.
- Berremen G. D., “The U. P. Himalaya; Culture, Cultures and Regionalism”, in Modie and Lall eds., *The Himalaya, Aspects of Change* Oxford University Press, Delhi 1981.
- Briggs G.W., *Gorakhanath and the Kanaphata Yogis* Motilal Benarasi Dass, reprint Delhi 1973.
- Burn R., *Census of India 1901* Volume XVI Part I Government Press, Allahabad 1911.
- Census of Almora Distirct*, Collectorate Library, Almora.
- Chaudhari G., *Kurmanchali Itihas Mein Dwarahat Ke Chaudhuri* Almora 1949.
- Dabral S.P. *Uttarakhand Ke Abhilekh*, Veergatha Prakashan, Dogadda, V.S. 2047.
- Dabral S.P., *Uttaranchal-Himanchal Ka Prachin Itihas*, Veergatha Prakashan Dogadda, V.S 2052 .
- Deva Rudra Chand, *Traivarnik Dharma Nirnayanam*, manuscript attributed to the sixteenth century, in the Government Collection of the Asiatic Society, Calcutta.

District Census Handbook, Almora, 1961.

Dutt Bhavani, "Svargiya Bhagirath Pande", in D. Pande, ed. *B.D. Pande Smarika* Shakti Press, Almora 1984 pp. 279–281.

Eyde E. H. H., "The Depressed Classes of the Kumaun Hills", in *Census of India*, 1921 Volume 16, part I Appendix C Government Press, Allahabad 1923.

Fanger A.C., *Diachronic and Synchronic Perspectives on Kumaun Society and Culture*, Ph. D dissertation, Syracuse University 1980.

— —, "Marriage Exchange among the Jimadars of the Central Himalayas", in Brown Fanger and Joshi eds *Himalaya Past and Present* Volume 3 Almora Book Depot, Almora 1993 pp. 275–300.

Fisher Captain, "Notes and Statement Regarding the Prevailing Castes in Kumaun", in *Census of North Western Provinces* Government Press, Allahabad 1867.

Fraser J.B., *Journal of a Tour through the Himalaya Mountains* Rodwell and Martin, London first printed 1820; reprint 1982.

Furer-Haimendorf C.von., "Unity and Diversity in the Chetri caste of Nepal", in C.von Furer-Haimendorf, ed. *Caste and Kin in Nepal India and Ceylon*, Asia Publishing House, Delhi, 1966, p.11–68.

Galey J.C., "Hindu Kingship in its Ritual Realm" in *Himalaya, Past and Present*, Volume 2, Almora Book Depot, Almora 1992 pp. 173–237.

Garhwali, 1918, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.

Ghildyal U.C., *Garhwal Ke Sanskrit Abhilekh*, Garhwal Vishwavidyalaya, Srinagar 1981.

Goudge J. E., *Final Report of the Assessment of the Almora District*, Government Press, Allahabad 1903.

Grundy M.V., *Berinag, Old and New, 1868 to 1960* (manuscript).

Heber R., *Narrative of a Journey through the Upper Provinces of India*, Carey, Philadelphia 1828.

Hodgson B.H., "Origin and Classification of the Military Tribes of Nepal", in *Essays on the Languages, Literature and Religion of Nepal and Tibet*, first published Trubner and Company,

- London 1874, reprint Bharat-Bharati 1971, Varanasi, pp. 37–44.
- Joshi L.D., *Diaries 1867–1912*, Archives of the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library.
- —, *Khasa Family Law*, Government Press, Allahabad 1929.
- Joshi M.P., “Economic Resource Management in the Kumaun of the Chandras”, in Joshi, Fanger and Brown eds, *Himalaya Past and Present*, Vol. II, Almora Book Depot, Almora 1992.
- —, “Kumaun Vanshavalis, Myth and Reality”, *Himalaya Past and Present* Volume I Almora Book Depot, Almora 1990 pp. 201–244.
- —, “The Silpakars of Central Himalaya: A Diachronic Study”, *Himalaya Past and Present* Volume III, Almora Book Depot, Almora 1994 pp. 301–333.
- Joshi P. ed. *Sira Desh Ko Davthar* Ajit Offset, Kanpur 1996.
- —, *Kumaun Garhwal Ki Lok Gathayen* Prakash Book Depot, Bareilly 1990.
- Kala G.R. *Memoirs of the Raj*, Mukul Prakashan, Delhi 1974.
- Kumaun Kumud* 12 March 1938 and 24 March 1938.
- Lall Panna, *Kumaun Local Custom*, Government Press, Allahabad 1920.
- A Manual of the Titles of North Western Provinces*, Government Press, Allahabad 1889.
- Mishra Nityanand, Kalyan, *Chandrodaya Kavya Evam Uske Praneta Shivanand Pande*, Almora not dated.
- Mishra, Nityanand ed., *Kalyanchandrodaya Kavya*, Almora 1992 (composed by Shivanand Pande).
- Mountaineer, *A Summer Ramble in the Himalayas*, Hurst and Blackett, London 1860, reprint Vintage Delhi 1993.
- Native Newspaper Reports North Western Provinces 1869–1901*.
- Native Newspaper Reports United Provinces 1901–1906*.
- Nautiyal K. P., B. Khanduri and R. Bhatt, Uttarakhand Ka Puratattva, *Pahad 3 and 4* pp. 1–14.
- Nautiyal K.P., *Archaeology of Kumaun*, Chowkhamba, Varanasi 1969.

- Nayal I. S., *Swatranta Sangram Mein Kumaun Ka Yogadan* Delhi 1973.
- Negi V. S., "Perspective on the Rohila invasion of Kumaun", in *Himalaya Past and Present* Volume II Almora Book Depot, Almora 1992 pp. 291–301.
- Oakley E.S., *Holy Himalaya*, first published 1905 reprint Gyanodaya Prakashan, Nainital 1990.
- Pande B.D., *Kumaun Ka Itihas* first published 1938, *Shakti*, reprint Almora Book Depot, Almora, 1990.
- Pande Krishna, *Indian Antiquary* 1910, pp. 78–82.
- Pande M., *Sankshipta Kurmanchal Rajya Varnan Aur Simaltiya Pande Vanshavali* Almora 1925.
- Pande Shivanand, *Kalyan Chandrodaya Kavya*, manuscript courtesy Dr. G.D. Pande.
- Pandey R.N., *The Making Of Modern Nepal*, Nirala, Delhi 1997.
- Pandey T., *Kumauni Bhasha aur uska Sahitya*, Lucknow 1977.
- Plowden W. C., *Census of the North Western Provinces, Volume I*, 1872, Government Press, Allahabad 1873.
- Pokharia D., *Kumauni Bhasha, Sahitya evam Sanskriti*, Almora Book Depot, Almora 1994.
- Ram Rai Bahadur Pati, *Garhwal Ancient and Modern*, first printed Army Press 1916; reprint Vintage, Delhi 1992.
- Raturi H.A., *Garhwal Ka Itihas*, first printed, Bombay, 1928; reprint Bhagirathi Prakashan, Tehri, 1988
- Regmi M.C., *Thatched Huts & Stucco Palaces*, Vikas, Delhi 1978.
- Regmi Research Collection*, Nepal Research Centre, Kathmandu, Volume I to Volume XXXVIII.
- Rizvi S. A. A., *Almora Gazetteer*, Government Press, Lucknow 1981, *Samata*, 21 February 1962.
- Samata*, Rajat Jayanti Special Issue June 1984.
- Sankrityayan R., *Kumaun*, Gyanamandal, Varanasi, V. S. 2015.
- Sankrityayan R., Kinnar Desh Par Atihasik Drishti, *Pahad* 7, 1994 pp. 92–93.

- Sanwal R.D., *Social Stratification in Rural Kumaun*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1976.
- Sax W. S., *Mountain Goddess*, Oxford University Press 1991.
- Shah N. L., *Kumaun ka Shah Vansha* Lucknow 1938.
Shakti, Almora.
- Sharma P. R., Caste, Social Mobility and Sanskritisation; a Study of Nepal's Old Legal Code, *Kailash*, Volume V 1977.
- Smith M. Himalayas in Kumaun and Garhwal, *Calcutta Review*, Volume XVIII 1852 pp. 72–115.
- Stowell V.A., *A Manual of the Land Tenure of the Kumaun Division*, Government Press Allahabad 1966.
- Tamata H. P., *Dalit Sumananjali*, File at the Almora Collectorate 1995–96, enlisting achievements of Hari Tamata so that the Lower Mall Road could be renamed the Hari Prasad Tamata Marg.
- Tiwari D.D., *Historical and Political Notes on Kumaon*, Lucknow 1923.
- —, *Kurmanchal Sah Samaj* Almora 1939, in the Ganga Prasad Shah Collection District Archives, Nainital.
- Tolia R. S. *British Kumaun Garhwal*, Almora Book Depot 1994 and 1996.
- Trivedi M.D., “Kumaun Ki Adalati Bhasha”, *Achal*, March 1938 pp. 12 to 15.
- Traill G.W, Statistical Sketch of Kumaun, in Batten J. edited *Official Report of the province of Kumaun*, Agra 1851.
- Tucci G., *Preliminary Report on two Scientific Expeditions in Nepal*, Is. M.E.O. Rome, 1956.
- Turner A.C., “Caste in the Kumaun Division and the Tehri-Garhwal State”, in *Census of India, 1931 Report*, United Provinces, Government Press, Allahabad 1933.
- —, *Census of United Provinces 1931*, Volume XVIII Imperial Table XIV, Government Press, Allahabad 1933.
- U.P. Legislative Council Proceedings*, Volume XX 1924, Government Press, Allahabad 1925.

Upadhyaya U.D., *Kumaun Ki Lok Gathayen* Prakash Book Depot, Bareilly 1979.

Vernacular Newspaper Reports, National Archives Delhi, 1870–1905.

Whalley P., *British Kumaon the Law of the Extra Regulation Tracts: Subordinate to the Government N.W.P* first published Government Press, Allahabad 1870; reprint Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan, Varanasi 1991.