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OCCASIONAL PAPER**

HISTORY AND SOCIETY

New Series

66

**Making Kumaun Modern: Family and
Custom c. 1815–1930**

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**Nehru Memorial Museum and Library
2015**

NMML Occasional Paper



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Published by

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

e-mail : ddnehrumemorial@gmail.com

ISBN : 978-93-83650-65-1

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

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The Pre-Modern Elites

The early medieval state system of Kumaun, with its capital at Champawat was dependent upon Khasa elite lineages (Adhikary, Jaipur, 1988: 34). The situation changed during the second phase of the Chand kingdom (capital at Almora) with the growing importance of trade that led to the dominance of the Vedic Gosains and the assertion of Brahmanical pre-eminence. This state system patronised temples and Brahmans and gave them revenue-free land grants. These grantees were the colonisers of the Tarai, and provided the Chand state with rich dividends, but gradually the system of revenue-free grants became parasitical and prevented further growth and expansion of the economy. The Chand state was unable to prevent the proliferation of revenue-free grants and succumbed to the growing rapacity of its elite.¹

The Gorkha state of the late eighteenth century realised that revenue-free grants would have to be resumed and was successful in appropriating a large number of land grants.² However, its

* 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 Kumaon district of Kumaon Division from 1815–1930.)

** Paper presented at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi, 25 March 2014.

¹ S.P. Dabral, *Uttarakhand ke Abhilekh evam Mudra*, Dogadda, 1990, p. 198–199.

² *Pre-Mutiny Records Revenue Letters Issued*, Volume 2, 19 May 1816.

military machine became dependent upon a similar pattern of land grants, which prevented the regime from reaping the benefits of its own reforms (Stiller, 1973: 277–294). The Gorkhas were able to marginalise the Chand elite, but nevertheless remained dependent on Brahmans for administrative work and for the maintenance of law and justice. The indispensability of the literate Brahman resulted in the imposition of a Hindu code, which not only introduced uniformity into the social system but also provided income to the state (from fines levied for transgression of caste norms).

Elites and the East India Company's State (1815 to 1858)

The British took over Kumaun in 1815 and affected many changes. During the first few years, the customary presents given by the earlier kings including the Gorkhas to the priests of Badri Nath etc., were maintained, but in the 1820s this policy was abandoned. A large number of courtiers and retainers lost their patrons, and all the grants of *Manachamal*, *Naukar* and *Tankha* were resumed, and Gorkha functionaries were removed after their emoluments were converted into pensions.³ A large number of the *jagir* holders lost not only their lands but also lost control and authority over their slaves and tenants. The upper castes whose ritual superiority was premised upon refusal to use the plough, now found themselves handicapped in terms of labour services. Over the nineteenth century, therefore, we find a tendency of landlords to try and extend their Sir (land under personal cultivation) holdings and to remove tenants and take over the land themselves. This was a clear reversal of the earlier aspiration to acquiring more land under jagir (Goudge Allahabad, 1903: 11).

British policy appears to have been successful in controlling the ambitions of the traditional elites and was therefore castigated by them for reversing the old normative order. The demise of traditional authority was lamented by courtiers of Garhwal, like

³ *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued, Volume 6, 9 March 1819.

Maula Ram in his famous poems *Maula Ram Granthavali*.⁴ The poet Gumani (wrote in Sanskrit, Kumauni and Nepali) articulated the theme of British rule as a manifestation of Kali-Yuga. He was well versed in Sanskrit, educated at Kashi (Varanasi), and resided in Kashipur in the Tarai and Gangoli in the mountains. He is considered the first writer in Kumauni language. Gumani lamented the fact that English rule had meant the loss of an aristocracy that valued learning and other Brahmanical virtues. In his *Ath Angrez Rajyavarnam*⁵ he said that nowadays Brahmans are ashamed to say that they are well versed in the Vedas, because there are no connoisseurs of worth and it is no longer important to be “worthy” during British rule. Gumani found it strange that though the British had absorbed the wealth of the entire world, yet under their dispensation iron had become more expensive than gold. The foreigner who first reached Calcutta conquered the rest of India without a battle. He noted that even the forests are populated and the platoons of the government are everywhere. He found a total reversal of old-world values; the artisanal castes are increasing their wealth, but the Baniyas (the traditional merchants) and Brahmans are all becoming paupers. British justice is oppressive because anyone who can spend Rs. 50 to Rs.100 can buy witnesses, and Almora is full of waste paper churned out by the courts. The sacred geography of the town is transformed because of the removal of the temple. People read Persian, wear Mughal caps, and one cannot make out the difference between a Hindu and a Muslim.

Yet to establish a new and well functioning administrative system, the British ultimately required the support of literate members of the local populace. It continued with the earlier system of Padhan, Kamin, Sayana (*thokdars*) and Kanungos for the collection of land revenue. According to B.D. Pande (1990: 439) the Kanungos were the appointees of the Chands as well. In the previous dispensation, the Kanungos held Naukar lands and

⁴ S.P. Dabral ed. *Maula Ram ke Atihasik Kavya* Dogadda V.S. 2034 pp. 21–162.

⁵ Gumani, *Gumani Collection*, date not available, pp. 37–47.

received one anna on the rupee of government revenue. In 1819, the Naukar lands were resumed and a monthly allowance of Rs. 25 was granted to the holders, the percentage on revenue collection was no longer permitted. Government officials were quite satisfied with the performance of the local functionaries, except for Narain Chaudhuri, a Kanungo who was dismissed on charges of corruption. The government observed that the Kanungos had provided most valuable services at each settlement and their local influence had without exception been invariably exercised for the interest of the government. The position of the Kanungo was hereditary and officials noted “a sort of hereditary or perhaps family claim seems to have been established in this province to the situation of Kanungo which claim does not appear to have been hitherto departed from in providing for the vacancies in the department ... This, however, is looked upon as a very bad custom.”⁶ Mr. Batten removed a Kanungo on grounds of incapacity, yet the office was still held by elite families. In 1837, there were six Kanungos for Kumaun, (nine for the Kumaun division, three for Garhwal) who were as follows: the Dwarahat Chaudharis provided two Kanungoes one for Kali Kumaun and one for Baramandal, the Dania Joshis provided two Kanungos for Shor and one for Chowgarkha, the Jhijhar Joshis furnished one Kanungo.

The government was interested in modifying the early administrative system; in 1821 G.W. Traill wanted to emancipate the petty landholders from the thralldom of Kamins and the Sayanas.⁷ Till 1825, the Sayanas and the Kamins, had the power to realise any dues they could; but these were now curtailed and they were granted a proportion of all the revenue engagements, with a caveat that for police duties they would be entitled to a money payment. Gradually, the government wanted to consolidate its own position and found that local functionaries were not always cooperative and effective. By 1856, the government decided that Sayanas and Kamins would retain proprietary rights,

⁶ *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued, Volume 12, 20 February 1837.

⁷ *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued, Volume 7, 14 March 1821.

but be divested of their privileges. British officials considered “the Sayanas and Kamins the curse of the province, the influence they exercise is pernicious—they occupy the position of middlemen between the government and the padhans.”⁸

The Company’s administration preferred to employ “natives” on monthly salaries, and now instituted Patwaris for collection of revenue. Though the appointment of Patwaris at the village level was in recognition of their local rank and influence, they were the Company’s employees and were considered more effective in looking after the Company’s interests. By the late 1820s, the government realised the utility of pargana Patwaris and decided to extend their jurisdiction over the entire division. The position of the Patwari was easily filled in spite of the petty remuneration of Rs. 5 and an official noted “the office of the Patwari is readily undertaken by educated and respectable natives”.⁹ In 1830, there were 63 Patwaris which roughly translates as one Patwari for 120 villages collecting approximately Rs. 3,300 land revenue. The number of “natives” employed, however, was extremely limited amounting to 37 in May 1847, all of whom were upper caste.¹⁰

We thus find that in the first half century of British rule a small number of the local elites were inducted into the administrative system of which almost all were Brahmans.¹¹ The Chand kings of Kumaun had been marginalised and given two separate jagirs in Almora and in Kashipur. The Almora family received some land in Almora and two villages in Moradabad and a pension of Rs. 250 per month. The Kashipur family was also granted a few villages in Rudrapur and Gadarpur. In keeping with the policy of appointing local elites to important administrative

⁸ *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued, Volume 24, 1 December 1856.

⁹ *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued, Volume 10, 10 February 1830.

¹⁰ *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued, Volume 16, 1 May 1847.

¹¹ *Pre Mutiny Records* Judicial Letters Issued, Volume 12, 13 June 1840 noted “the total monopoly of all offices by Brahmans which could only be broken by providing education”.

positions, Raja Mahadev Chand was appointed Deputy Collector in 1837.¹²

Yet by the 1850s, English administrators were gradually moving away from the policy of encouraging traditional elites to play an important role. British interests had also changed; the industrialisation of Britain was in its second phase and state policy now looked for expansion of markets. From 1850 onwards, British administrators were overtly critical of the efficacy of the administrative system. They noticed that the Patwari was using his local influence in a partisan manner and suggested “as vacancies occur, the successor to Patwariship should henceforth be selected with reference to educational capabilities”.¹³ This change was further articulated by Captain Ramsay and Mr. Strachey, who were inclined to emphasise the injurious influence of the local aristocracy and questioned the officers who said that people prefer customary superiors. By 1856 the government declared, Sayanas and Kamins as well as other classes who have been ordinarily included under the name of Thokdars all be relieved of their purely official duties and all will cease to be entitled to receive the payments which they have hitherto received.

Traditional Elites to Modern Intelligentsia

From the 1850s, the British were looking for the support of groups who were not members of the landed aristocracy, but who were willing to accept service. These could be recruited from the literate sections of Kumauni society. The intelligentsia in Kumaun consisted primarily of Brahmans and their scribes, the Kayasthas. Access to education was extremely limited and even as late as

¹² *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued, Volume 13, 27 April 1839, “he can read and write Hindi in the Nagari character. He thoroughly understands the hill colloquial language. His general qualifications are the good character given to him by Mr. Traill, his popularity amongst the zamindars, his freedom from all partisanship (unlike the Joshis)”.

¹³ *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued, Volume 22, 13 May 1854.

1850, the number of schools in Kumaun was 118 with 121 teachers. The number of students in the Hindi and Sanskrit schools was 522 of which 465 were Brahmans, 18 Rajputs, 27 Baniyas and 12 belonged to the other castes. The number of students in Arabic and Persian schools was 10, of which nine were Muslims and one was Brahman. We therefore find that out of a total population of 1,16,155 only 532 were enrolled for studies, only 0.46 per cent of the population could read and write, of which 87.5 per cent were Brahmans.¹⁴ A small elite section of the population was not enrolled in the school system but benefitted from private instruction. It is evident that education was neither widespread nor granted to the lower castes. In the early years of British rule the vernacular system of education was maintained and in 1842 the Vernacular school at Almora received a grant of Rs. 34 from the government.¹⁵ Even in 1848, “the greatest part of the work of instruction is carried on by private individuals”.¹⁶ By 1849, the grant to the Vernacular School at Almora had been increased to Rs. 200 per month.¹⁷

The express purpose of developing a new class of “native” intelligentsia made the government encourage the development of a modern school system in Kumaun (Oakley, 1905: 55). In 1850, with the support of Ramsay, the London Missionary Society under Reverend J.H. Budden founded the first English school at Almora. The government felt that it could now discontinue support to the Vernacular School, but did not do so because

a good many boys primarily Brahmans do still attend the school and although the mission school undoubtedly gives its pupils a much superior education, still it would be obviously improper to turn around on the Hindu parents of the government school boys and say we can no longer assist you in the education of your children, it is your own fault

¹⁴ R. Thornton, *Memoir of the Statistics of Indigenous Education within the North West Provinces of the Bengal Presidency*, Calcutta, 1850.

¹⁵ *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued, Volume 14, 28 May 1842.

¹⁶ *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued, Volume 16, 15 February 1848.

¹⁷ *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued, Volume 17, 16 May 1849.

if from fear of their conversion you deprive them of the advantages afforded by the mission.¹⁸

The significance of the Mission School lay in the fact that it was the only school in the district of Kumaun and Garhwal teaching up to the entrance standard of the Calcutta University. Its success was quick and apparent—it started off by being held in various places for want of a suitable building but by 1870 it had acquired a new building in the heart of the town and by 1874 there were not less than 500 students in its 19 classes, and by 1887 the average attendance had gone up to 621 out of 750 names enrolled.¹⁹ This was probably linked to the shift from a system of minimalist administration to an increase in the number of departments in the post-1858 era, which opened up more positions at the lower levels for the local intelligentsia.

The importance of an education in English registered with the people of Kumaun and over the years the number of schools increased. *The N.W.P. Administration Report of 1869–70* noted that the Kumaun division ranked highest in the percentage of educated to population that was 0.85. Clearly, Kumaun was exceptional in terms of its response to education. In 1868–69 the number of schools in Kumaun and Garhwal were 35, with the total attendance of 2,266. The Halkabandi schools numbered 41 in which 928 students were registered in 1868–69 and by 1869–70 the number of students had gone up to 1923.²⁰ In October 1874, the *Almora Akhbar* (a local newspaper) complained that the *North Western Provinces Gazette* of 1873–74 mentioned the large number of schools constructed by private individuals in the other districts of the North Western Provinces but failed to mention the number of Halkabandi schools constructed by local zamindars of Kumaun.²¹

¹⁸ *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued, Volume 17, 16 May 1849.

¹⁹ *Indian Council of World Missionary Archives*, henceforth I.C.W.M.A., Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.

²⁰ *The Administration Report of the North Western Provinces, 1869–70* Allahabad.

²¹ *Almora Akhbar* cited in *Native Newspaper Reports*, October 1874.

The *Annual Report of Public Instruction* of 1884–85 noted that in Kumaun the average daily attendance of scholars had increased from 3,796 to 5,035. The Director of Public Instruction said,

I inspected all the schools within a reasonable distance of my camp, and conviction is that as regards the primary schools the report is fairly correct. I have no doubt that an appreciation of our education is surely steadily increasing ... I hope to see the classes of a more practical nature started in our Almora High School as it is quite impossible that the number of lads who pass the Anglo Vernacular Middle class can obtain employment and it would be better if they were given education that would fit in for other options.²²

The same report refers to 15 middle schools and the Almora High School in the district of Kumaun. The Anglo-vernacular schools were doing well but the exceptional results of the Almora Mission School helped it to qualify for a grant from the government. The number of primary schools was considered woefully inadequate—only 170—and the local intelligentsia was unhappy with government for the unsatisfactory state and hoped that the appointment of Pandit Buddhi Ballabh Pant as Inspector of schools would help in the effort to extend education in the district.

By the 1870s two generations of school-going children had passed out of the London Mission School. The intelligentsia was unhappy with the state of the government schools, which were not providing good quality education. The *Almora Akhbar* reviewing the Education Report for 1884–85, while thanking government for increased expenditure, felt that the sum devoted to elementary education should be raised further. In its account of the state of education in Kumaun, it said primary education was still very backward. It noted that the poor state of education in the district of Kumaun was reflected in the fact that only five candidates had cleared the Vernacular Middle class in 1886.²³

²² *Annual Report of Public Instruction* 1884–1885, pp. 13–14.

²³ *Almora Akhbar* of 29 June 1886 cited in *Native Newspaper Reports* 5 July 1886.

The enthusiastic response to English education was not without its problems. The English schools were different from the traditional schools, which only enrolled upper-caste students. The local newspaper of Nainital, *Samai Vinod* complained that earlier only Hindus and Muslims of the higher castes acquired education, but now boys of inferior castes, even the children of sweepers are admitted to school. Equal access to education, may not have been acceptable to the traditional elites, but they had no option.²⁴ The popularity of English education however, did not necessarily lead to the neglect of traditional education. As a matter of fact, the evidence from Almora indicates that members of the local elite who were employed in important official positions (after receiving English education) supported the establishment of a local Sanskrit Pathshala, under the patronage of the royal Chand family, Shiv Raj Singh.

Activism: The Construction of ‘High’ Premised upon ‘Low’²⁵

As the new intelligentsia emerged its response to British rule was emulatory in some aspects and critical in others. Most significant is how it articulated its understanding of local cultural traditions and chose to represent its heritage. The making of the “Modern” was dependent upon, “a new form of social organization, based on deeply internalized, education dependent high cultures, it uses some of the pre-existent cultures, generally transforming them in the process, but it cannot possibly use them all”.²⁶ The process of constructing viable modern “High” cultures necessitates taking pre-existing cultures and transforming them, sometimes inventing new cultural traditions and often obliterating pre-existing cultures. This is precisely what the new/modern

²⁴ *Samai Vinod*, cited in *Native Newspaper Reports* 22 August 1874.

²⁵ P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, (first ed. 1978, second ed. 1994, third ed. 2009 Ashgate, Surrey. Introduction to third edition, pp. 1–20, “the interaction can scarcely be discussed without recourse to the concepts of high and low, viewed as models or ideal types to which actual cultural practices only approximate or as opposite ends of a system rather than 2 sides of a firm frontier”, p. 15.

²⁶ E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford 1983, p. 48.

intelligentsia of Kumaun worked towards; we can cite Gellner who says, "Those who are its historic agents know not what they do, but that is another matter".²⁷ This "High" culture, premised upon education, literacy, print and mobilisation invoked a Sanskrit Shastra based pan-Indian upper caste sensibility; it tailored local traditions to fit this pattern and also chose to adapt these practices to moral strictures of the imperial regime. Those practices that fell outside this domain were ignored and relegated to a pre-historic regime as insignificant remnants of a forgotten past.

In consonance with a Brahmanical cum Puritanical sensibility, the intelligentsia were involved in changing public attitudes to certain aspects of social life. They sought to reform practices which were an integral part of community life such as the ribald festivities associated with Holi festival, the singing of coarse (vulgar) songs during certain other celebrations,²⁸ or the practice of hurling abuses at neighbouring villages on particular days, the practice of inviting *patars* (prostitutes) and *hurkyanis* (dancing girls) for weddings and other festive occasions.²⁹ A report in *Shakti* lamented the fact that even the sacred ritual of Satyanarayan Vrata Katha was followed up by dance of a Hurkyani.³⁰ It applauded Mukund Ram Joshi, who on the occasion of his daughter's wedding, did not invite a patar, but chose to invite Swami Akhilanand to deliver a lecture on Sanatan Dharma.³¹

The annual Holi festival which was well known for its obscene shouting, abusing, drinking, singing, wrestling matches and bonfires is associated with fertility orgies which can be traced back to the Late Stone Age.³² It was associated with radical

²⁷ Ibid., p. 49.

²⁸ Article by I.D. Pande, *Shakti*, 20 November 1923.

²⁹ *Almora Akhbar*, 12 January 1913.

³⁰ *Shakti*, 25 August 1923.

³¹ *Shakti*, 30 May 1922.

³² D.D. Kosambi, *An Introduction to the Study of Indian History*, 2nd ed. Bombay 1975, p. 199 and D.D. Kosambi, *The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India*, p. 47.

subversion, and with a reversal of the usual normative order.³³ E.T. Atkinson's article published in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* was probably read and noticed by the intelligentsia.³⁴ His description of the festival in Kumaun noted the consumption of *bhang* and the license it afforded to those who sing obscene songs and tell ribald stories. He noted, "The Holi is clearly another of those non-Brahmanical ceremonies connected with the montane Pashupata cult which have survived to the present day."³⁵

The modern intelligentsia now launched an attack on this form of celebration of Holi. It emphasised the need for prayer, which would be performed without vulgar songs and the consumption of liquor. Holi was now infused with an ethic, which favored a strong sense of community responsibility without individual aberration. In 1887, the *Almora Akhbar* condemned those Hindus who sang obscene songs and indulged in the use of intoxicating drugs during the festival. It censured "educated natives" for taking part in such objectionable practices.³⁶ William Crooke's book and subsequently piece on Holi, published in *Folklore* cited Atkinson and referred to ritual practices of Kumaun.³⁷ This reference is also found in J.G. Frazer's chapter entitled "Fire-Walk".³⁸

By the early years of the twentieth century, as the number of educated increased, Holi celebrations changed and in 1914, the *Almora Akhbar* referred to the official celebration by all those

³³ Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, OUP, Delhi, 1983.

³⁴ E.T. Atkinson, "Notes on the History of Religion in the Himalayas of N.W. Provinces", *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. liii, Part I, pp. 39–87.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

³⁶ *Almora Akhbar* of 14 March 1887 cited in *Native Newspaper Reports* of 22 March 1887.

³⁷ William Crooke, *Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India*, Westminster 1896, p. 313 and William Crooke "The Holi: A Vernal Festival of the Hindus Folklore", Vol. 25, No. 1 (Mar. 31, 1914), pp. 55–83.

³⁸ J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Cambridge 1st ed. 1913, digital version 2012, chapter vi, pp. 2–3.

who received titles from the government along with celebrations organised by the Inder Club of Almora; Indra Lal Shah reported on Holi festivities at Haridwar.³⁹ The 1918 Holi edition of the *Almora Akhbar* lampooned the Rai Bahadurs and also ridiculed the District Commissioner who shot and killed a coolie in a bout of anger.⁴⁰ The newspaper was shut down and replaced by *Shakti*, a Hindi weekly. By 1919, the intelligentsia of Almora noted with pride that the festival of Holi had been celebrated in a customary manner⁴¹ (with new practices). In 1920, Holi was celebrated in Kashipur with a procession taken out by the Prem Sabha.⁴² By 1924, Tanakpur emulated this, and only national and patriotic songs were sung during Holi.⁴³ By 1929, this movement had spread beyond the small urban congregations to regions like Kamsyar,⁴⁴ and by 1930 Holi was transformed to a festival for national unity, with preparations for Satyagraha.⁴⁵ In 1939, Gaur da, a poet from Almora wrote Holi *kaifi* on the problems caused by British rule and paid tribute to the satyagrahis.⁴⁶ A Commemoration Volume on Kumaun published on the occasion of the Kumaun Mahotsava, Pithoragarh in 1995 translated excerpts from Atkinson's Religion of the Himalaya, but did not choose the section on Holi; a deliberate omission, maybe.⁴⁷

A similar onslaught was launched against the festive mood often expressed during the Ramlila festival. The first Ramlila was held in Badrishwar, Almora in 1860. It was organised by Badri Dutt Joshi Sadar Amin. The first Ramlila in Nainital was held in

³⁹ *Almora Akhbar*, 9 March 1914, Holi Special.

⁴⁰ Sudha Joshi, *Kurmanchal Kesri Badridutt Pande: Jeevan Rekha*, Dharmanand Pande ed. *B.D. Pande Smarika*, Shakti Prakashan, Almora, 1984, p. 6.

⁴¹ *Shakti*, 19 February 1919.

⁴² *Shakti*, 16 March 1920.

⁴³ *Shakti*, 22 April 1924.

⁴⁴ *Shakti*, 6 April 1929 .

⁴⁵ *Shakti*, 22 March and 29 March 1930.

⁴⁶ Charu Chandra Pande ed., *Gaurda ka Kavya Darshan*, Almora, 1965, p. 227.

⁴⁷ R.S. Tolia and L.S. Bisht eds, *Kumaun*, Kumaun Mahotsava, Pithoragarh, 1995, *Kumaun ke Teej Tyauhar* by Atkinson, pp. 81–88.

1880. Gradually, it was performed in three places in Almora—Pandekhola, Badrishwar and Narayan Tewari Dewal. The villages of Patia, Satrali and Chakhata also organised Ramlila Committees. In 1907, Ram Dutt Joshi Jyotirvid published the first edition of the *Kumauni Ramlila*; prior to that the Ramlila was enacted using a handwritten manuscript. In 1927, Gangi Shah of Nainital wrote and published *Shri Ramlila Natak*.⁴⁸

The Ramlila Samitis in Almora, Nainital, Haldwani, Bhimtal and Kashipur attempted to regulate and control the manner in which Ramlila was celebrated.⁴⁹ By 1920, *Shakti* a local newspaper celebrated the fact that in Kashipur the Ramlila Committee was successful in preventing the singing of obscene songs.⁵⁰ In Almora, by 1920, when the Lakshmi Bhandar Traders Association initiated its involvement with the Ramlila, individuals like Lakshmi Dutt Joshi Rai Saheb imposed stringent conditions upon the performance and attempts were made to control boisterous elements.⁵¹ Swami Satyadeva castigated the Almora elite for allowing actors and audience who had consumed alcohol to enter the Ramlila precincts.⁵² He said that they should not be allowed entry and the women's enclosure should be protected from such elements. By 1929, the Ramlila in Pandegaon near Bhimtal was celebrated with the boycott of foreign goods and by spinning and other such Gandhian activities.⁵³ Linked to the reform of the Ramlila, was the attack on the practice of gambling during the Diwali festival. A Dyut Nivarak Udyog Samaj was established and the *Shakti* reported that the 7th Annual Festival of this organisation was held on 31 October 1929. The movement against gambling was supported by a large number of nationalists, who were also members of the Indian National Congress.

⁴⁸ Lalit Mohan Joshi, "Almora Shahar: Kumauni Ramlila—Ateet se Samprati Tak", *Purvasi* 15, 1994, pp. 130–132.

⁴⁹ *Shakti*, 4 November 1919.

⁵⁰ *Shakti*, 27 April 1920.

⁵¹ *Shakti*, 7 September 1920.

⁵² *Shakti*, 4 November 1919 and 14 September 1920.

⁵³ *Shakti*, 26 October 1920.

Specific local practices fell victim to the over-zealous intelligentsia. For example, a festival called *Bhaila* was celebrated in Kumaun and Garhwal on the fourteenth day of the *krishna paksha* of Kartik (during the period of Diwali). In the night, the villagers would go to the boundary of their village with torches and drums and would then abuse the neighbouring villagers. According to one report the villagers of Naikana indulged in the use of extremely obscene language.⁵⁴ The members of the new intelligentsia did not like this, and the following year, the same festival was celebrated without the abusive language.⁵⁵ Similarly, the practice of sacrificing buffaloes to the goddess Nanda at the annual festival of Nandashtami was frowned upon and considered unbecoming of a civilised society.⁵⁶

The modern intelligentsia also launched an attack on the consumption of alcohol, which it considered extremely pernicious. The nineteenth century had witnessed an increase in the local consumption of liquor, which was a consequence of the East India Company and its successor state's attempt to increase excise revenue. This system of Abkari and Drug Mahals led to the introduction of Indian made foreign liquor, which was distinct from the local spirits brewed by the people from barley and rice. These liquors were distilled and required the payment of excise tax. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Abkari and Drug Mahals yielded a revenue of Rs. 477,⁵⁷ Rs. 756 in 1825,⁵⁸ Rs. 819 in 1826,⁵⁹ by 1834 it had gone up to Rs. 1,065,⁶⁰ though in 1836 it was again down to Rs. 950.⁶¹

The farming out of the Abkari and Drug Mahals could not change customary practices, and the greater portion of alcohol

⁵⁴ *Shakti*, 24 November 1927.

⁵⁵ *Shakti*, 24 November 1928.

⁵⁶ *Almora Akhbar*, 8 September 1913.

⁵⁷ *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued, Volume 8, 1 September 1824.

⁵⁸ *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued, Volume 8, 1 October 1825.

⁵⁹ *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued, Volume 9, 1 September 1826.

⁶⁰ *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued, Volume 11, 14 November 1834.

⁶¹ *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued, Volume 12, 17 November 1836.

consumption was initially in the cantonment areas where the army was quartered. The consumption of opium and opium-related products was part of the cultural life of the people, also because the opium plant grew in great abundance in the region. It was also consumed by the ascetic groups, which had dominated local society for centuries. Brahmanical injunctions against wine drinking were probably responsible for the temperance exercised by the local people. In neighbouring Nepal, the Khasa castes were distinguished on the basis of wine consumption. This was enshrined in the *Muluki-Ain* where the Khasa were divided into the Chettris, the sacred thread-wearing castes and the Matwalis who were denied the sacred thread because of their practice of consuming alcohol (Sharma, 1977).⁶² The Dharmadhikari records from Kumaun indicate that the Tagadhari caste were required to undergo a purification ceremony after the consumption of alcohol.⁶³ In cases where the alcohol was consumed with lower castes and also involved the sharing of rice, the offence was compounded. The new intelligentsia regarded alcohol consumption as a modern vice, which had become a social evil, thanks to its promotion by the colonial state.

Yet the British refusal to implement caste injunctions gradually led to the erosion of the ban against alcohol. Local brands of liquor, which were cheaper and more affordable, were made available and probably promoted an increase in

⁶² P.R. Sharma, "Caste, Social Mobility and Sanskritisation; A Study of Nepal's Old Legal Code", *Kailash*, Volume V 1977, page 282. All recognised castes can be grouped in four or five main categories, which, if arranged in boxes, would be as follows:

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 aspergation of water.
Pani na chalne chhoi chhito halnu parne	= Untouchable castes.

⁶³ Dharmadhikari Records of Chhakhata, Pandit Mahadeva Pant, Private Collection.

consumption. In 1854, the death of some villagers was attributed to the consumption of spurious liquors. The Senior Assistant Commissioner attributed the “increase of consumption of spirits, consequently the vice of drunkenness to the Abkari system introduced by the British government, and noted that until recently no Hindus but those of the lowest caste would have thought of buying spurious liquors”.⁶⁴

By 1855, the excise revenues had gone up to Rs. 2,312.⁶⁵ By 1891, the excise revenue from local liquor was Rs. 42,032, from foreign liquor Rs. 1,904, charas Rs. 7,690 and opium Rs. 7,070. By 1929, the total income from Nainital and Almora had gone up to Rs. 2,37,647 (Pande, Almora, 1938: 474–475). A portion of this increase can also be attributed to the growth of tourist traffic that visited Almora, Nainital and Ranikhet during the summer months. Primarily, the intelligentsia expressed its concern about the increase in alcohol consumption by the people of Kumaun. The *Shakti* newspaper consistently reported the opening of wine shops in Almora.⁶⁶ The growing presence of the Indian National Congress in the region after 1919, facilitated protest against government policy of encouragement of alcohol consumption for excise revenue.

The movement for temperance gained momentum during the decade of the 1920s, and became an integral part of local politics.⁶⁷ By the late 1920s, pickets were organised outside liquor shops, and Congress activists tried to influence liquor contractors, to prevent them from bidding at Government auctions.⁶⁸ In one instance, they were successful in preventing anyone from bidding for the liquor contract. In March 1921, public meetings were held in Haldwani (1,000 people) and Kashipur where everyone present took a vow to abstain from the consumption of alcohol.⁶⁹ The

⁶⁴ *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued, Volume 22, 17 May 1854.

⁶⁵ *Pre-Mutiny Records* Revenue Letters Issued, Volume 23, 1 October 1855.

⁶⁶ *Shakti*, 9 September 1919.

⁶⁷ Began as early as 1913, *Almora Akhbar*, 8 September 1913, further references *Shakti*, 15 February and 1 March 1921.

⁶⁸ *Shakti*, 15 February 1921.

⁶⁹ *Shakti*, 1 March 1921.

Congress policy of picketing liquor shops created problems for the liquor contractor Hari Prasad Tamata during the Civil Disobedience Movement; eventually the administration intervened to protect him (Kala, Delhi, 1974: 107–109). Yet it is ironical that an increase in the movement for temperance was accompanied by greater use of alcohol.⁷⁰

Reasonable Custom: Imperative of Homogeneity

Customary practices of the Bhotias, the trading communities of the north also came under the scrutiny of the intelligentsia. The Bhotias formed a separate stratum of Kumaun society during the medieval period. Their close and intimate contact with the Tibetans⁷¹ as well as their interaction with the residents of the middle Himalayas made them a very adaptable group, whose culture incorporated elements of both traditions. They paid their taxes in kind and in gold dust, and were extremely important in the economic structure. The growing importance of the Gosains in the trans-Himalayan trade could not dislodge the Bhotia groups. The Bhotias however, were not an undifferentiated community. They were divided on the basis of the different regions to which they belonged. The trading arrangements with western Tibet meant that traders from different regions had access to different

⁷⁰ S. Pathak, "Uttarakhand Anti Alcohol Movement", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XIX, No. 30, 28 July 1984 and S. Pathak, "Intoxication as a Social Evil Anti Alcohol Movement in Uttarakhand", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. XX, No. 32, 10 August 1985; Shekhar Pathak, "Nasha ek Shadyantra hai", *Pahar Pustika*, Nainital 1985.

⁷¹ S.D. Pant, *Social Economy of the Himalayans*, London 1935 pp. 217–218, "In Tibet, every Bhotia has his Mitra or middleman.... the appointment of a privileged correspondent or Mitra calls for a small initiation ceremony known as Suljimulji. A cup of tea or wine is brought, from which the first sip is taken by the Tibetan Mitra, the second sip by the Bhotia. A few presents, which must be standard goods, are then exchanged, and the Bhotia presents his correspondent with a white scarf or a special turban. An ordinary stone is broken into two parts, one portion remaining with the correspondent and the other with the Bhotia. The representatives to the two men are to be recognized by these tokens. If the two parts fit together the representatives' bona fides are established."

parts of western Tibet and were also restricted to the exchange of particular commodities.

The records of the Chands do not refer to the Bhotias as a separate category,⁷² but the Gorkha records clearly use the term 'Bhotiya'.⁷³ The earliest use of the term Bhotia is found in the writings of G.W. Traill. He outlined their proximity to Tibet and differentiated them from their southern neighbours, the Khasa peasants. Traill's Statistical Report on the Bhotia Mahals of Kumaon refers to Tibet as the mother country of the Bhotias and notes their accession to Kumaun as only 300 years old⁷⁴. E.T. Atkinson summarised the understanding of a large number of explorers and administrators in his section on Bhotia Mahals in *The Himalayan Gazetteer*.⁷⁵ His explanation of the term Bhotia was that it derived from, "The Khasiya population call the tract inhabited by the Bhotias of our hills Bhot, and Tibet itself Hundes, and their own country is known as Khasades".⁷⁶ For these reasons, as remarked by Sir J. Strachey, the limits of Bhot cannot be strictly defined, for the term is an ethnographical rather than a geographical expression. Logically, residents of Bhot were Bhotias. He noted that till the Gorkha conquest Byans was under the control of Jumla in Nepal. He too emphasised the Tibetan connection "The traditions both of the Bhotias and of the inhabitants of the country further south uniformly declare that the Bhotia districts were once subject to the adjoining province of Tibet."⁷⁷

⁷² Baburam Acharya, "The Sauko community inhabits the Byas-Himal area of Doti and the Thakali community in the Thak-Himalayan area of Parbat. Both these communities are affluent, because they trade in wool and salt". "A Short History of Nepal", *Regmi Research Series*, Volume 13-14, 1981-82, p. 157. This counters the claims of the Joharis that they were Shaukas and not so the others from Byans, Darma and Chaudans.

⁷³ Yogi Narharinath ed., *Itihas Prakash Ma, Part I Sandhi Patra Sangraha*, p. 23, p. 30 and p. 647 with specific reference to Johar Bhotiyas (the Devanagari script rendering from the records).

⁷⁴ G.W. Traill, "Statistical Report on the Bhotia Mehals of Kumaon", *Asiatic Researches*, Vol. 17, 1832, pp. 1-50.

⁷⁵ E.T. Atkinson, Vol. III, Part I, 1882, pp. 83-151.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 84.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

Yet even Atkinson accepted that the Bhotias do not admit their Tibetan origin. They claim Rajput origins and migration to this region from the south. All ethnographers of this community from Atkinson onwards note the resistance to the nomenclature of Bhotia. As early as 1906, Sherring commented, “We name these traders ‘Bhotias’, following the example of the ordinary hillman of Kumaon, but they themselves are not in all cases willing to be known by this appellation”.⁷⁸ Panna Lall also referred to Bhotia customs in his account of Kumaun and in the code as well.⁷⁹ In his 1911 essay Panna Lall traced some of the marriage customs of the Bhotias to polyandry and also noted traces of matriarchal forms in practices like *mamajholi* (maternal uncle’s share in the bride price). He argued that, “In the eastern Bhot of the Almora District (Parganas Darma, Chaudas and Bians) a modified form of marriage by capture prevails to this day” and also referred to cousin marriages prevalent among the Bhotias. He traced it through kinship terms of the khasa and different groups of the Bhotias.⁸⁰ The unkindest cut for a wealthy community with high aspirations was Panna Lall’s, “The Doms and Bhotias have somewhat similar customs”.⁸¹ Panna Lall’s study of Bhotias based upon kinship terminology led to a refusal by Bhotia groups of Johar to provide any further information about their language to colonial authorities.

Christian missionaries hoped the Bhotias would be easier to persuade than the dogmatic Brahmans. They were also keen to get a foothold in the region and hoped to eventually reach Tibet. The first school was opened in Dharchula in 1862 and the famous

⁷⁸ C.A. Sherring, 1906, London, pp. 61–62.

⁷⁹ Panna Lall, “An Enquiry into Birth and Marriage Customs of the Khasiyas and the Bhotiyas of Almora District U.P.”, *The Indian Antiquary*, Vol. 40, July 1911, pp. 190–198 and *Kumaun Local Custom*, 1920, pp. 17–32.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 195, “Thus we see in the Biansi dialect the names for cousins is based upon the idea of marriage. There is one term for the forbidden ones, another for marriageable males, a third for marriageable females and a fourth for males and females who would have been marriageable but for the fact that they are of the same sex as the speaker.”

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

explorer Nain Singh Rawat was appointed a teacher in the school.⁸² In 1873, Dr. Grey was sent to Pithoragarh to initiate work in the region. In the same year he married the daughter of Reverend Budden (Margaret) and both of them settled in Pithoragarh. Margaret focused on work with girls and women. Her sister Annie Budden started work in 1877 and was successful as a missionary in Bhatkot and surrounding areas. The main driver for change, however, was Padri Uttam Singh Rawat, a Johari, converted to Christianity in 1878. His initiative to propagate the Christian religion received the support of Padri Yunis Singh, Jai Dutt Joshi and Tara Dutt Pant. In 1890, Dr. H. Wilson and Bishop Thoburn were instrumental in setting up hospitals in Dharchula and Chaudans. Ethel Turner worked judiciously in the Johar region from 1899–1907.⁸³ In 1893, Dr. Sheldon came to Dharchula and in 1895 she was nominated by the North India Conference to work here. Dr. Sheldon's death in 1912 meant that missionary work came to a standstill. In 1928, E. Steiner and I. Steiner revived the mission; the couple travelled to Tibet twice between 1930 and 1942, but Elizabeth's death meant that missionary activity lost its transformative ability.⁸⁴ As R.S. Tolia notes, in spite of their earnest efforts the Christian missionaries were unable to have a serious impact on Bhotia society. Missionary attention on Bhot brought Bhotia cultural practices under the scrutiny of the new intelligentsia.

The Bhotias were not an undifferentiated group and the Joharis were quick to seize the opportunity to dissociate themselves from the other groups in Kumaun and Garhwal. The Joharis of Kumaun had emerged as the most powerful and prosperous of these trading groups, also because they were the only group who had unlimited access and could trade in commodities other than grain. In the eighteenth century these trading groups were referred to as the

⁸² Uma Bhatt and Shekhar Pathak, *Asia ki Peeth Par; Pandit Nain Singh Rawat Jeevan Anveshan tatha Lekhan*, Pahar Pothi 2008.

⁸³ R.S. Tolia, "Kumaun mein Isai Dharma", *Pahar Volume 16–17*, pp. 325–334.

⁸⁴ G. Pande and C. Bergmann, "Dharchula: Ateet ke Aine mein", *Pahar Volume 16–17*, pp. 317–324.

Shaukas, some of the elite lineages amongst them were able to establish genealogies claiming Rajput descent⁸⁵ (Pangti, 1980, 1992; Prasad, 1989; Joshi, 1983). Those who were not incorporated in this manner were probably relegated to a lower status and considered akin to the residents of the trans-Himalaya. The new intelligentsia also adopted an incorporative strategy and sought to emphasise common cultural attributes of the Bhotias and the residents of the middle Himalayas, ignored and even attempted to change cultural practices that derived from the trans-Himalayan connection. They propagated social reforms, which would contribute to this process.⁸⁶

Members of the Bhotia communities who acquired English education, also favoured reform and wanted their community to conform to upper caste models of behaviour and practice. The first initiatives towards reform were taken by the Johar Bhotias, who were considerably Hinduised by the late nineteenth century. C.A. Sherring (1906),⁸⁷ in his “Notes on the Bhotias of Almora and British Garhwal”, noted that the Jethoras of Goriphat, Malla Danpur and Johar, the Tolchas and Marchas of Mana and Niti, the Rawats or Shaukas of Johar comprised the Bhotias who could be considered partially Hinduised Rajputs. Their integration into the southern economic system was indicated by the fact that the Tolchas, Marchas and Shaukas had forgotten their original language, and only used the hill dialect. G.D. Upreti also noted Johari as one of the hill dialects, but said, “The dialect of the Marchas of the Garhwal district, and that of the Shawkas, as they are called, living in the Byans and Chaudans passes, in the Almora district, are unintelligible to an ordinary hill man. As the people constantly trade with the Tibetans their dialects mostly assimilate

⁸⁵ R.R. Prasad, *Bhotia Tribals of India, Dynamics of Economic Transformation*, Delhi 1989, pp. 91–103; Ram Singh Pangti, *Johar Ka Itihas Va Vanshawali*, 1980; S.S. Pangti, *Madhya Himalaya Ki Bhotia Janjati, Johar Ke Shauka*, Delhi, 1992, p. 134; A.K. Joshi, *Bhotantik Jan Jati*, Bareilly 1983.

⁸⁶ *Shakti*, 2 September 1919.

⁸⁷ C.A. Sherring, “Notes on the Bhotias of Almora and British Garhwal”, *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 1906, pp. 93–118 and C.A. Sherring *Western Tibet and the British Borderland*, London, 1906.



to that of Tibet”.⁸⁸ In the early decades of the twentieth century, George A. Grierson (1920) found that the Bhotias of Kumaun asserted that they did not speak any Tibeto-Burman languages. C.A. Sherring remarked,

the Rawats of Johar are earnestly striving to follow all the ordinances of the Hindu religion, and invariably speak of themselves as Hindus.... There can be no doubt that originally the Johar Bhotias followed all the customs and ceremonies at present to be found in Darma, but since the Butaula Rawats migrated to Johar from Garhwal via Tibet some three hundred years ago, a gradual change has been taking place, and the old customs have given place to the ordinary ceremonies of the Hindu faith such for instance as Bratbandha (Sherring 1906: 96–97).

British administrators encouraged the Johar Bhotias and they were recruited into government service for Tibetan survey and cartography. Kishan Singh was made Rai Bahadur for services rendered to Survey of India and his brother Narayan Singh was decorated with C.I.E. In the early years of the twentieth century the Johari Bhotias were prosperous, had received honours and recognition from the government. Education had also received considerable impetus through the influence of new leaders. As R.P. Srivastava notes:

despite all these advantages, they were not satisfied with their ‘Bhotia’ status and wanted to be accepted as Rajputs. Officially they were the members of a ‘Mongoloid border tribe’ and to those around them in the urban, administrative centers, they were ‘dirty, beef-eating Bhotias’. The Bhotias of Johar in particular did not like this appellation at all. There are stories current in Almora that the Bhotia boys in Almora schools would fight any one who called them a ‘Bhotia’.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ G.D. Upreti, *Hill Dialects of the Kumaun Division*, Almora, 1900, p. III.

⁸⁹ R.P. Srivastava, “Tribe-Caste Mobility in India and the Case of the Kumaon Bohtias”, C von Furer-Haimendorf ed. *Caste and Kin Nepal, India and Ceylon*, 1966. p. 204.

The Bhotias of Johar therefore wanted the government to reclassify inhabitants of Milam and other villages as Rajput Rawat and the others as Shauka Rajput. The Johari Hitkarani Sabha was established in July 1913, its patron was Rai Bahadur Kishan Singh, its chairman Sobhan Singh Jangpangi, Vijay Singh Pangti and Khushal Singh Rawat were Vice-Chairmen, Ram Singh was the Secretary, Daulat Singh the Deputy Secretary, Kishan Singh Jangpangi the Treasurer and Khadag Rai, the Auditor. Besides this there were nine Panchayati members and 33 ordinary members.⁹⁰

This committee was responsible for the publication of two issues of the journal *Jauhariya Upkarak*. According to the editor of the journal, Ram Singh, the chief objective of the society was economic and social development.⁹¹ The need for social reform was emphasised, and in his autobiography Ram Singh notes that he was unpopular with various groups—promotion of the Arya Samaj upset the purohits; efforts to prevent consumption of liquor meant that the Doms and Hurkiyas became enemies; attempts to prevent child marriage made those who took and gave bride price unhappy; preventing *ghatelis* from coming into the village angered their supporters.⁹² Ram Singh was interested in promoting the Johari Bhotia case for Rajput status. He compiled the genealogies of several clans in Johar in an attempt to prove their immigrant Rajput status. In November 1913, Ram Singh also advocated the cause of the Shilpakars (Dalits) of Sunakiya who had given up the practice of consuming meat, alcohol and opium and had been inducted into the Hindu community as Aryas.⁹³ He felt that emulation of upper caste practices entitled social groups a concomitant rise in ritual status. He supported and was in turn supported by leaders like B.D. Pande and Har Govind Pant. Most importantly, B.D. Pande's *Kumaun ka Itihasa*, published in 1937, is scrupulous in its refusal to use the word Bhotia for the Joharis

⁹⁰ *Almora Akhbar*, 14 July 1913.

⁹¹ S.S. Pangti, "Yugadrishta Johari : Babu Ram Singh Pangti", *Pahar Volume 16-17*, pp. 496-498.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 498.

⁹³ *Almora Akhbar*, 17 November 1913.

and refers to them as Saka, Shauk and Kirati, but refers to the residents of Darma, Byans and Chaudans as Bhotias.⁹⁴

The organisation of the Eastern Bhotias, that is the Bhotias of Darma, Chaudans and Byans began in 1914, when the four *raths* (lineages) of Budha, Khosa, Nyiben and Chudu got together for social reform.⁹⁵ They organised the Budha Rath Shauka Samaj. Gradually, the momentum for social reform was accelerated and a meeting was organised on 11 December 1918, which was attended by 5,000 to 6,000 people.⁹⁶ It was chaired by Father Joseph Hyanki and addressed by Dilip Singh Garbyal. They demanded that schools be opened in eastern Bhot for the 1,437 families of the region. They also requested the government to keep its promise regarding the construction of a road to Nirpani. In July 1919, another meeting was organised by Dilip Singh Hyanki, which advocated social reform. It expressed its dissatisfaction with the practice of the *rambang* and *dhurung*, and the consumption of liquor and other intoxicating substances. At the meeting a large section of the congregation vowed that they would never follow any of these practices.⁹⁷ In 1920, Panna Lall noted the change, “As said before marriages are arranged by the parties themselves. In recent years, owing to greater contact with the outer world, a desire seems to have sprung up among some of the people to have marriages arranged by the parents as in the rest of the province. Only one marriage has been celebrated in this manner so far.” (Lall, 1920: 28).

What were *rambang* and *dhurung* that they were looked upon with such disfavour? C.A. Sherring described the *rambang* as the universal custom of the three *pattis* Darma Byas and Chaudans. Its purpose is to arrange marriages—in every village a house or a spot is set apart, which is called *rambang kuri* or place of the *rambang*, at which men and women meet and spend the night

⁹⁴ B.D. Pande, *Kumaun ka Itihasa*, Almora 1937, pp. 63–236.

⁹⁵ *Almora Akhbar*, 25 July 1914.

⁹⁶ *Shakti*, December 1918.

⁹⁷ *Shakti*, 2 September 1919.

singing and drinking and smoking. According to him, married and unmarried men go there, also single woman and married women up to the time that their first child is born. Large villages had more than one rambang, which could be used only by persons known to the villagers. Sherring disapproved of this practice and sections of the modern intelligentsia found it difficult to explain it to their non-Kumauni educated friends. The Johar and Niti Bhotias looked down upon the rambang and had given up the custom though they were willing to avail the rambang when they visited Darma.

The dhurung was a death ceremony in which an animal was always chosen to represent the deceased. In Chaudans and Byans, a yak was chosen, though in certain instances, because the yak was considered a member of the cow family, sheep and goats were selected. It took four days to complete the ceremony. From the very first day there was continual dancing on the part of the villagers in front of the house and this was usually accompanied with the consumption of barley liquor. The animal representing the deceased was also feasted. On the last day, after the ceremony was over the animal would be driven away from the house and not allowed to return. This ceremony was clearly not in consonance with new ideas about death and the manner in which the deceased should be mourned. The movement for the prohibition of rambang and dhurung, started around 1920, and was carried on subsequently by Shri Narayan Swami and Rai Pandit Gobaria (Srivastava, 1966: 205–206). R.P. Srivastava (1966), J.C. Dass and M.K. Raha (1981: 250–265), emphasise the fact that during British rule, roads to Byans were improved and the flow of pilgrim traffic to Kailash was redirected through Byans. District Board schools were opened throughout Bhot in the late 1920s and were staffed with Brahman teachers.

Narayan Swami, a Hindu ascetic also arrived in Chaudans in 1936 and was joined by Kushal Singh Hyanki a village revenue accountant, and later by Ishwari Dutt Pande, initially a primary school teacher at Jaikot village (who resigned from his job and devoted himself to the Ashram). Narayan Swami established a



high school, a middle school, a primary school, a *dharamshala*, a boarding house, an orphanage, a hospital, a dispensary, and water works. With the support of the new intelligentsia, he waged a war against drinking, smoking, rambang and free mixing between men and women. The response appears to have been positive, and on a particular day several villages in Darma and Chaudans witnessed a bonfire of all the spirit-distilling apparatuses. Efforts were also made to modify the customary rites de passage by introducing the Hindu death rite, the *shraddha*. Das and Raha say,

the Bhotias of Chaudans and Talla Darma took the lead in this but the Bhotias living in the northern most villages faced a problem. The local Khasiya Brahmans of lower Bhot were reluctant to under take a long arduous trek to distant villager unless they were well paid. Some times it happened in a family *dhurung* was performed for one of the deceased parents and *shraddha* for the other.⁹⁸

The assimilation of Johari Bhotias was facilitated by the acquisition of genealogies and by the suppression of the Johari language, which identified them with other Tibeto-Burman groups. The Johari language known as Rankas or Shaukiya Khun was spoken in Johar, Goriphat and Malla Danpur. In 1905, the number of Shaukas who could speak Shaukia Khun numbered 615 (Sherring, 1906)⁹⁹ a small proportion of the total number of Shaukas. In 1911, H.G. Walton (1911) noted that, “some Bhotias had so far become Hinduised that they have forgotten their original dialect and now speak the ordinary hill dialect common to the Khassiya population”. In the 1920s, Grierson classified Johari as an Indo-Aryan language and a dialect of Kumauni. Grierson noted that, “in the north, the language is the Tibeto-Burman Rangkas, and in the centre of the pargana we find a mixed

⁹⁸ J.C. Das and M.K. Raha, “Divergent Trends of Transformation Among the Kumaon Bhotia”, C von Furer-Haimendorf ed., *Asian Highland Societies*, Sterling 1981, p. 259.

⁹⁹ C.A. Sherring, “Notes on the Bhotias of Almora and British Garhwal”, *Memoirs of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 1906, p. 93.

jargon, half Kumauni and half Tibeto-Burman called Johari.”¹⁰⁰ In the 1930s, Rahul Sankrityayana also noted that Joharis have forgotten their language and their religion (Buddhism). He added that few words from the earlier Johari language reveal a Tibetan connection but that is categorically denied.¹⁰¹ This links up with the findings of R.P. Srivastava (in the 1950s), who noted that family trees of established lineages of Johar claimed Rajput origins and used the surname Singh.

In 1950, a local paper categorically stated that the residents of Johar and Darma are all Hindus and should not be regarded as different from the people of Kumaun.¹⁰² By 1953, even the memory of the Johari language had disappeared and Srivastava could not identify a single individual who claimed to know Johari (Srivastava, 1966: 177). The desire for cultural approximation was bringing different and diverse communities of the region, under the overarching hegemony of an upper caste dominated Hindu Brahmanical worldview. The Bhotias of Byans, Chaudans and Darma were slow to adapt but Bhotias, disassociated from Tibet, were accepted as a part of the Kumaun cultural system.

Modern Certitudes: Assault on Nayaks and the reconstitution of the family

Evidence of the changing value system and the regeneration of society according to new values of the modern elites is documented in the activities of a large number of social reformers in this region. These values were derived from the school curricula prescribed by the British Government. These texts were imbued with a Puritan work ethic, and with family values, which cherished women’s honor, enshrined the authority of the patriarch and preached temperance, chastity and monogamy. On the other hand, this period also witnessed the development of a pan-Indian religious sensibility, based upon a broad-based though variegated

¹⁰⁰ G.A. Grierson, *Linguistic Survey of India Volume IX, Indo-Aryan Family Central Group*, Part IV, Calcutta 1916, p. 110.

¹⁰¹ R. Sankrityayan, *Kumaun*, Varanasi V.S. 2015, p. 137.

¹⁰² *Kumaun Rajput*, 24 March 1950.

Vedic belief system, which had emerged during the late medieval period.

In the context of north India it can be typified in the value system encoded in Tulsidas's *Ramcharitmanas*. It narrates the story of Maryada Purushottam Ram, who defends the honour of his wife and family against heavy odds. Rama as the king of Ayodhya restores the caste hierarchy that had been challenged by earlier heterodoxies. He places the Brahman at the top of the ritual hierarchy and brings in tribal elements like the Bhils and the Nishads into a jati system, and seeks to establish a well-ordered social organisation. The diversity of family types of the Indian subcontinent were also replaced by the model of the family provided by the *Ramcharitmanas*, which clearly established patriarchy and formulated a belief that woman's salvation could only be achieved in service of the husband.

The archetypal family and social system portrayed in the *Ramcharitmanas*, synchronised with the normative family order and social system of Victorian Britain, and was able to provide an overall model, a cultural approximate for the different constituents of the Indian section of the British Empire. This perspective was not only insensitive to the multiplicity of family types that existed in the subcontinent but also regarded them as inferior and lower on the evolutionary scale.

The Kumaun family structure of the pre-colonial period retained not only traces of a matrilineal order,¹⁰³ but also revealed

¹⁰³ The Kuninda Coins discovered in this region provide the names of the mother and appear to indicate matriliney, S.P. Dabral, *Kulinda Janapad Dogadda* VS 2047, p. 310, the pre-Buddhist genealogies also refer to the mother's name, A. Chattopadhyaya, *Atisa in Tibet*, the reference to Stri-Rajya to the north of Kumaun in the writings of Hieun Tsang provide evidence of an Amazonian Kingdom which had been located in western Tibet by G. Tucci *Preliminary Report on Two Scientific Expeditions in Nepal*. First Edition. Rome Is. M.E.O. 1956, pp. 90–109, L.D. Joshi also refers to matriarchal survivals in Kumaun custom, *The Khasa Family Law*, Allahabad 1929, pp. 59–77.

the impact of a pastoral economy, which followed polyandry¹⁰⁴ and bride price. The practice of levirate that was followed by the peasantry of Kumaun can also be considered as further evidence for the prevalence of polyandry (Joshi, 1929: 89–110). This kind of family system did not regard marriage as a sacrament and therefore permitted not only divorce and remarriage, but also granted the widow the right to remarry. These practices not only influenced notions of paternity and son ship (Ibid., pp. 168–186) but also reflected different attitudes towards women, which did not necessarily place a premium on chastity and fidelity.

Colonial authorities were also critical of this system and considered it uncivilised. Traill expressed shock when he said that chastity was not an issue, and adultery acquired significance only when it became public.¹⁰⁵ Mountaineer's description of the Paharies is also not flattering, "The songs were often very unmeaning, but almost invariably turned on love, and, I am sorry to say, generally love unlawful; the delight of sweet hearting with other people's wives or husbands, or something of the kind. No wonder the Puharies are so very immoral."¹⁰⁶ Fraser found polyandry a "revolting custom" and said, "women are here articles of property, and it is against all experience in the mutual effects of demand and supply, that when the latter is more than sufficient, the price should be kept so disproportionately high"¹⁰⁷ (Ibid., p. 207).

Rates of suicide for women were consistently high from 1825–1838; except in 1836 when number of males committing suicide

¹⁰⁴References to polyandry are found in legends, U.D. Upadhyaya (n 78) which indicate that it was prevalent not only in Jaunsar Bawar and Rawain, but also in other parts of the central Himalaya. Refer L.D. Joshi, pp. 77–89.

¹⁰⁵ *Pre-Mutiny Records*, Judicial Letter Issued Volume No. 37, 11 July 1843 cites Traill's account of Kumaun "Conjugal affection has scarcely any existence in the hills, women are universally considered or looked upon as part of the livestock and little or no importance is attached to the breach of female chastity excepting when the prejudice of caste may thereby be compromised."

¹⁰⁶ Mountaineer, 1860, pp. 11–114.

¹⁰⁷ Fraser, 1820, p. 206.

was higher. Reflecting on this, concern for the plight of women was expressed by various bureaucrats, for example, G.J. Lushington was very eloquent when he said, “Women are systematically degraded, ill used and held of no account, except as menials and labourers, their peace and happiness being considered of about the same value as that of a bullock; ... the effect of this treatment upon the women are either suicide or flight, the latter being the course usually adopted by them”.¹⁰⁸ His words are reminiscent of the couplets of Krishna Pande, his contemporary (8 couplets out of 27 refer to the unhappy wife who runs away to the mountain top). However, the concern was eventually translated not into any major interventions but into the need for a code for women’s fidelity.

The colonial system endorsed the Brahmanical family system, which appeared to be quite similar to the Victorian model. The British revenue system recognised the head of the family or *patria potestas* as responsible for the payment of land revenue. In this manner it undermined the village community, which had always played an extremely important role in Kumaun’s local life. By encouraging the nuclear family unit in contrast to the lineage system, British policy not only supported fragmentation of landholdings but also eroded the significant and cohesive role played by the lineage system. The pre-colonial custom of Kumaun which was similar to Punjab customary law was as C.L. Tupper (1881, Vol. II: 77) noted, motivated by the desire to “secure the common interests of a body of clansmen agnatically related to each other in village lands, which provide the subsistence of the group and must not leave its possession”. The British system struck at the basis of this system by granting power of alienation to the individual landholder. The *hissedar* in Kumaun was recognised as full owner, against his agnates who did not have the right to challenge alienation of ancestral land.¹⁰⁹ As a

¹⁰⁸ *Pre-Mutiny Records*, Judicial Letter Issued, Volume No. 36, 28 June 1839.

¹⁰⁹ L.D. Joshi noted that this situation was very different from that in the Punjab which came under British rule in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and where the rights of the village community were respected.

consequence, the Khasa lineage system was eroded in the early half of the nineteenth century and the bard Krishna Pande of Patiya village near Almora mourned its demise.¹¹⁰

Krishna Pande's depiction of British rule as Kali-Yuga is quite different from that of the Brahman Pandit Gumani. He wrote during the first half of the nineteenth century and because he travelled around the countryside singing, his verses reflect directly the anxieties of the peasantry. He is concerned about the changes brought about by British rule. He is greatly saddened by the growing rift between families and the breakup of the lineage system because of British policy. In his verses he says, brothers and kinsmen assault each other in every house, ashes and dust are cast upon the land of Kumaun. The erosion of the village community as a consequence of the new revenue policy is apparent in the fact that a large number of headmen have emerged in every village. In one of his couplets, he says there were nine headmen for a single village, the village is now barren. Krishna Pande also remarked upon the new system of registration with the use of stamp paper. In an ironic tone, he exhorts his countrymen to sell their wives and children by means of a stamped document. A constant refrain in Krishna Pande's writings is the unhappiness of the woman who does not get enough to eat and clothes to wear, who in despair goes to the mountain top (probably to jump off).

A century of British law changed the nature of the village community and the lineage system of Kumaun. L.D. Joshi who studied the Khasa family in the 1920s noted that,

the hissadar has been recognized as full owner for over a century now in Kumaun as against his agnates. They have no power left to challenge alienations of ancestral land such as the agriculturists in the Punjab possess. The change,

¹¹⁰ Krishna Pande, "A Specimen of the Old Kumauni Language", Verses by K.P. with English translation and notes by G.D. Upreti, *Indian Antiquary*, 1900, pp. 78–82.

however, has been progressive in the evolution of property rights. Male descendants alone can object to alienation of ancestral land made without necessity. Communal bonds regarding alienations have largely vanished, but the family bonds remain. (Allahabad, 1929: 325).

For a century British rule considered Customary Law as unfair to women and also castigated the women for adultery and lack of chastity. In the early phase the administrators had a paternalistic and benevolent style; its normative aspect was not so overt. Later on, over the nineteenth century many of the officers who were trained in other parts, came to the hill tracts and insisted on, “proof for everything that differs from the Mitakshara. This is especially so in questions of marriage, legitimacy and inheritance”.¹¹¹ This created a great deal of confusion. The Commissioner’s court was the final court of appeal because Kumaun was under Special Regulation. In rare cases appeals were made to the High Court and in one such case in 1915 was that of Fateh Singh versus Gabar Singh in which Fateh Singh lost his patrimony because of the demand by the court for a valid marriage under Mitakshara Law.¹¹² This case generated a lot of debate in the local media and Mr. Wyndham, Commissioner noted, “I regret that I have to concur with the learned lower court and dismiss the appeal, and feel that in doing so we are acting contrary to public opinion in the valleys from which the case comes. We are, however, accomplishing a task which could not be performed even by the most zealous of Hindu missionaries.”¹¹³

In 1915, the government explored the possibility of placing Kumaun under civil courts and appointed an informal committee

¹¹¹ Panna Lall cited in L.D. Joshi, *Khasa Family Law*, Allahabad, 1929, pp. 38–39 and Panna Lall, “An Enquiry into the Birth and Marriage Customs of the Khasiyas and the Bhotiyas of Almora District, U.P.”, *The Indian Antiquary*, Volume 40, July 1911, pp. 190–198.

¹¹² *Nainital Samachar* (fortnightly) 15–30 June 1994 report by Tajwar Singh Rawat on Fateh Singh’s search for patrimony. Shiva Prasad Dabral responded to it in the *Nainital Samachar* of 15 July 1994, saying that it is ironic that in 1915, 80 years ago, another Fateh Singh’s case had initiated a massive debate about customary law.

¹¹³ L.D. Joshi, *Khasa Family Law*, Allahabad, 1929, pp. 41–42.

to codify local custom. A draft bill was prepared, which provided the courts with an outline of customs they could choose to presume. This was not considered adequate and V.A. Stowell was asked to compile a list of old rulings, the book was published but failed to provide answers to a large number of issues.¹¹⁴ By the early years of the twentieth century colonial attitudes changed; they learnt to appreciate the specificity of Kumaun custom and to respect peasant traditions. The need to recognise and regularise the practice of custom was now accepted and in 1919, Panna Lall, an I.C.S. officer who had already published a paper in the *Indian Antiquary* on customs of the Khasiyas and Bhotias, was asked to make enquiries to ascertain exact customs and then provide a code. The other hill groups included, besides the Khasas, were Bhotias, Tharus and Boksas. This process of finding out custom and inquiries about various communities and their customs caused great discomfiture for all those members of the intelligentsia who claimed to invoke Brahmanical norms. Codification raised a storm and brought to centre stage the issue of “high” Brahmanical/ Shastric traditions and “low” Customary practices. Panna Lall was aware of this, so instead of presenting customary law as Khasa, like Mr. Stowell before him, he presented it as Kumaun Local Custom and excluded only a few lineages from its purview.¹¹⁵ This further incensed the intelligentsia and L.D. Joshi subsequently wrote a book entitled *Khasa Family Law* clearly stating it was not Kumauni but Khasa.

The Nayaks: Reform

The Khasa family system which was already under siege suffered further from the onslaught of the modern upper caste intelligentsia, who now sought to reform a large number of customary practices—bride-price, levirate and the Nayak system. Nayaks were an integral part of local society, but for the modern

¹¹⁴ V.A. Stowell, *Kumaon Rulings for Civil Courts with a Commentary*, Allahabad, 1916, “The real test in such disputes regarding custom should thus be whether the parties are of genuine Rajput or Brahman caste or are Khasiyas or Khasa Brahmins”, pp. 4–5.

¹¹⁵ Panna Lall, *Kumaon Local Custom*, Allahabad 1920. p. 10.

intelligentsia they were a cause of great embarrassment. They therefore decided to reform Kumauni society and purge it of this evil, the Nayak system. In this initiative British administrators supported the modern intelligentsia. Local elites joined hands with the colonial authorities in launching a major offensive against the practice of rearing Nayak girls for prostitution.

What was the Nayak system and why did it raise such a storm? According to E.T. Atkinson the Nayak system, “began with the wars of Bharti Chand with Doti, when the first standing armies in Kumaon took the field, and the soldiers contracted marriage alliances with the women of the place, whose descendants became Khatakwals and eventually Nayaks from the Sanskrit *nayaka*, a mistress”.¹¹⁶ Panna Lall noted, “the distinctive feature of the Nayaks is that their girls (generally speaking) do not marry but are brought up as dancing girls and courtesans”.¹¹⁷ L.D. Joshi pointed to a significant aspect of the Nayak family when he noted, “Their family organization is half way between a patriarchal and a matriarchal society, a curious mixture of mother-right and father-right.”¹¹⁸ A Nayak woman was entitled to family property if she did not marry, subsequent to her marriage she came under the ambit of Khasa family law. B.D. Pande, a major critic of the Nayak system, argued that this institution was linked to the left-handed Shakta rituals prevalent during the rule of the Chands.¹¹⁹

Guddi Pant refers to six folk tales about the emergence of Devachelis/Devakis (Deukis in Nepali) in Doti and western Nepal. The first reference to this is found in western Nepal in the story of Raja Bini who requested the Nayaks to dedicate Devachelis to the goddess Mailali Bhagawati. In the Chanchari of Ripumalla, Nagamalla (approximately late fourteenth century) lost his

¹¹⁶ E.T. Atkinson, *The Himalyan Gazetteer*, first published 1882, reprint Delhi 1981, Volume III, Part II, p. 448.

¹¹⁷ Panna Lall, *Kumaon Local Custom*, Allahabad 1920, p. 13.

¹¹⁸ L.D. Joshi, *Khasa Family Law*, Allahabad, 1929, p. 70.

¹¹⁹ “Kumaun ki Nayak Jati ka Sudhar”, *Kurmanchal Kesari Badridatt Pande Janmashatabdi Smarika*, ed., Dharmanand Pande, Shakti Press, Almora 1984, pp. 75–110.

dominion due to the *shrapa* (curse) of Bageshwar/Vyagreshwara, a local deity. Nagamalla tried to pacify the god by offering large number of presents including a *devaki* (temple girl). (Another version of the story is that the king was struck with leprosy and as apart of its atonement he decided to dedicate a Devacheli to the god Byagreshawar.)¹²⁰ In Dandeldhura, Dhani Shahi also lost his territory and recovered it with the help of Mailali Bhagwati and then dedicated Devachelis to her temple. A different story about a Katyuri pastoralist tell us that a cowherd found his favourite animal depositing her milk regularly on a stone and realised that it was sacred, established a temple and dedicated a Devacheli for its upkeep. Another tale refers to the father of seven daughters who told Mailali Bhagwati that he would dedicate a daughter to her if the next child were a son (Satjana chorika Babu ko kimvadanti). This example led to many others promising a Devacheli to Bhagwati if their wish was fulfilled; the number of devakis had gone up considerably. During the period of Deep Chand, some robbers abducted a Devacheli; a séance was held and the *shaman* (medium) was able to provide all the details and the devaki was traced and rescued.¹²¹ The connection to left-handed practices or Vamachara, appears to provide a partial explanation for the Nayak system which continues in western Nepal even today.

The Nayaks were part of the emerging caste system during the late medieval period. They were granted the sacred thread of three strands, and Nayak men married women from the Khasa community. These women were not required to join the profession, but their daughters were brought up for a life of prostitution. They performed all the regular pujas and the

¹²⁰ Devakant Pant narrates this story in *Doteli Loka Sanskriti*, Kathmandu V.S 2032, also cited in R.N. Pandey, *Making of Modern Nepal*, Delhi 1997, p. 173.

¹²¹ Guddi Pant, Unpublished Paper, *Deuki Pratha Thalni ra Vikas Sambandhi Doteli Kehi Kimvadanti* presented at Conference on “Before Emergence of Nation States: Indo-Nepal Relations through Uttarakhand”, Dehradun, 13–15 June 2011.

mandatory fasts.¹²² Atkinson noted, “Notwithstanding their origin, the Nayaks contrive to belong to that well abused gotra, the Bharadwaj, and to the great mid Hind Shakha. Nayaks live by cultivation and trade, and their villages in the Bhabhar are amongst the best.”¹²³

The system first came under review during the administration of Henry Ramsay in 1857 when the government passed an order against the practice of exporting female children for the purpose of training them to become prostitutes in the plains.¹²⁴ Reference to this practice is to be found in the *Native Newspaper Reports* (1868) and it caused great embarrassment to the modern intelligentsia to be identified with the region. In 1879, Mr. Garstin wrote to the Government and requested them to legislate against the system of the Nayaks. By 1885, rules were framed according to which the parents of Nayak girls had to register themselves, and report the absence of girls from home before they attained the age of 16. When the daughter turned 16, the parents had to apply to the government to strike her name off the register.¹²⁵ In 1911, these orders were cancelled and the practice of registering young girls was also abandoned. It appeared to the government that by striking off the name from the register, the government in a sense was condoning the practice of prostitution after the age of 16.¹²⁶

¹²² B.D. Pande, *Kumaun ka Itihasa*, Almora, 1990, pp. 640–643, Section on “Nayak Varga”.

¹²³ E.T. Atkinson, *The Himalayan Gazetteer*, first published 1882, reprint Delhi 1981, Volume III, Part II, p. 448.

¹²⁴ *U.P. Legislative Council Proceedings*, Volume xxxv, p. 193. Sir Henry Ramsay maintained a register of girls under 16; only girls, who attained maturity, could enter the market. This was abolished in 1896, also cited in *Kumaun ki Nayak Jati ka Sudhar*, p. 105, letter from Provincial Government to Commissioner Kumaun, no. 39901857 dated 18 June 1857, “Many young girls are frequently sent to the plains to lead a life of prostitution the Magistrate is authorized to punish such persons who send or abet in kidnapping children for this purpose. The punishment may extend to a fine of Rs. 200/- and imprisonment of 1 year.”

¹²⁵ Box Number 192, Collectorate Records Almora District Archives Nainital.

¹²⁶ G.O. Issued in 1911 directing registration to be abandoned, G.O. No. 1237/III–398 dated 16 September 1911. “They are not subjected to inspection and

The government realised that legislation prohibiting the practice was required, but was also aware of its inability to provide a social alternative. It understood that a woman prevented from becoming a prostitute would require a husband, which did not appear possible in the given social situation. The *Almora Akhbar* of 9 February 1914, asked the question: who will marry these girls? Officials noted that the Nayaks claimed to be an exogamous group and therefore required to marry outside. It was by now obvious that the first steps towards reform would be in the direction of changing the Nayak idea of marriage. It was with this intention that the government wrote to the Arya Samaj, Meerut regarding the Ramgarh Nayaks who had already evinced some interest in the Arya Samaj.

In response to the request of the government,¹²⁷ the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha sent Mahashaya Ram Prasad to the Kumaun division with the brief that he was to popularise amongst the Nayaks the need to end this practice and take recourse to the Dharmashastras. The Arya Samaj also proposed the idea of establishing a school and providing education to Nayak girls. By 1914, two Nayak girls were receiving education at Sharda Sadan and at Gurukul respectively. Ram Prasad, who was located in Haldwani visited Ramgarh in 1913, and began by organising a series of talks about the need for Nayak reform. He received a good response and a large number of young men initiated the reform movement in 1913, these were Chatur Singh, Uday Singh, Diwan Singh, Devi Dass and Lal Singh. The reform group was further enthused by the visit of Lala Lajpat Rai.

are not given permission to become prostitutes. The object of the register is praiseworthy, but the results are not encouraging. Nothing will be done till the pressure of educated Hindu opinion compels the Naiks to alter their hereditary occupations.”

¹²⁷Letter No. 3303/VI-51729 August 1913 to President, Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, Meerut. “The great difficulty to be first overcome is that there is at present no legal marriage possible for the woman. The tribe claim they are Kshatriyas and therefore observe the ordinary Rajput rules of exogamy and so do not marry into their own tribe. The men marry women of outside tribes, usually Khasiya Rajputs, but as will be understood the women as long as the present conditions exist would find it impossible to find husbands.”

By 1913, the Nayak issue had achieved a great amount of publicity and Rai Ganga Prasad Verma raised a question in the U.P. Legislative Council on 15 September about the maintenance of a register for Nayak girls.¹²⁸ By 1914, the Arya Samaj had worked out a plan for the education of the young Nayak girls. They suggested to the government that these girls be sent to Mary Sharda Sadan Vidyalaya, Saharanpur, and that the institution would be prepared to look after five girls, provided the guardians handed over the girls to them (Vide letter no. 213, 17 January 1914 at approximately Rs. 5/ per month). They also agreed to accept 15 more girls provided the government financed 50 per cent of the cost.

The Nayak Sudhar Sabha was established in 1914, with branches in Ramgarh, Naikana, Katarmal, Champawat, Lohaghat, Nainital and Ranibagh.¹²⁹ In 1916, the Nayaks of Ramgarh, felicitated B.D. Pande and thanked him for his involvement in Nayak reform. Efforts to organise Nayaks for reform gathered momentum in 1919 when the pace of change was greatly accelerated. On 18th July 1919 a meeting was organised in Ramgarh where Pande spoke to about 100 families.¹³⁰ Forty families joined the reform movement. This was followed by visits from the representatives of the Arya Samaj who visited Ramgarh in October. They were welcomed by the Kumaun Ramgarh Sewa Samiti and by the Kshatriya Nayak Jati Sudhar Sabha.¹³¹ By November 1919, discussion was initiated in the United Provinces Legislative Council regarding legal ways to change the customary practices of the Nayaks.¹³² In September 1920, the Kshatriya Nayak Reform Association organised a meeting at which scholars from Gurukul Kangri gave lectures.¹³³ By 1923, there was a growing consciousness about reform and the *Shakti* reported that

¹²⁸ The question was about the register and answered by Commissioner Kumaon order no. 240/XVIII-185, dated 23 Septmeber 1913.

¹²⁹ *Almora Akhbar*, 9 February 1914.

¹³⁰ *Shakti*, 22 July 1919.

¹³¹ *Shakti*, 21 October 1919.

¹³² *Shakti*, 18 November 1919.

¹³³ *Shakti*, 28 September 1920.

there is a general increase in awareness about the problem of Nayaks and said that this stigma of Kumaun has to be obliterated.¹³⁴ The periodical *Aaj* also received a large number of letters about Nayaks and many of them advocated reform.

The Nayak reform movement in Pali Pachaun received a fillip with the entry into the movement of Shrimati Hira Devi. Hira Devi was from the Nayak community who had married a lawyer from Meerut. She decided to open a school in her village, and donated Rs. 2,000 for the construction of a building, and also agreed to pay the salaries of the teachers along with other sundry expenses. Pali Pachaun also witnessed another innovation with the marriage of Jang Bahadur Singh's daughter to a Rajput according to Hindu rites.

By 1925, the Servants of India Society at Allahabad was also involved in the movement. The Chairman of the Prayag Sewa Samiti, H.N. Kunjru visited Nainital and met G.B. Pant, along with members of the Ramgarh Sewa Samiti. They then visited Almora where Kunjru delivered an eloquent lecture at the Indian club. Though a large number of people supported Nayak reform, there were some dissenting voices as well. From Almora the group visited Katarmal, where B.D. Pande joined them. The villagers of Katarmal were opposed to reform and articulated their resentment against the visitors. They then visited Dwarhat, Ganai, Chinauni, Masi and Naikana. The meeting at Naikana had been organised by Jang Bahadur Singh and was well attended. A large number of people supported reform and joined a signature campaign in which they vowed that they would get their daughters married. The resistance at Ranikhet and Ramgarh offset the success at Naikana.

In July 1925, the Prayag Sewa Samiti gave B.D. Pande the task of propagating reform. He visited Katarmal, Bageshwar, Pithoragarh, Sinchaur, Chaupakhi, Lilu, Naikana, Naini, Lohaghat, Khilpatti and Raul. The Khilpatti Nayaks were not in

¹³⁴ *Shakti*, 28 August and 6 November 1923.

favour of reform and only Bachi Singh Nayak half-heartedly joined Pande. However in Raul, Pande received the support of Shrimati Hajari Devi who also gave a lecture in favour of social reform. In November 1925 the reform movement was further systematised. Krishna Nand Upreti was put incharge of the Lohaghat and Pithoragarh circle, Debi Singh Kunvar was asked to handle Pali Pachaun, and Uday Singh Nayak was delegated the responsibility of the Ramgarh circle. They were directed to tour their constituencies and propagate reform. On 30th November 1925, a large meeting was organised in Katarmal addressed by B.D. Pande, Devi Singh Pande, Uday Singh, Umed Singh, Jeet Singh, Shar Singh and Bachi Singh. A Nayak Sudhar Sabha was established and office bearers were elected. Madhu Singh was elected the Chairman, Umed Singh the Vice-Chairman and Sher Singh the Secretary. This was followed by another round of meetings in Kaligadh, Dwarahat, Bairti, Chinauni Kaudhar, Kurmuvan, Pattalgaon and Nayak Majyur. Pande then went and met H.N. Kunjru, Lajpat Rai and Swami Shradhanand. Meetings were organised with the support of the Hindu Sabha and the Garhwal Upkarani Sabha in Kotdwara and Dugadda in Garhwal.

In May 1926, Kunjru came to Kumaun, he visited Ranikhet, Dwarahat and Masi. In Masi, he was very effective, and some betrothals were solemnised as a consequence. He then went to Katarmal and inspected the school established there, and then went on to Almora, Pithoragarh Chaupakhi, Sinchaur, Lohaghat, Mayawati and Khilpatti. During his visit to Nainital and Almora, M.K. Gandhi also supported the movement for Nayak reform.

It appears that there was great support for reform in Ramgarh, an important mining region. Pali Pachaun was another area that responded well to social activism. Devi Sing Kunvar played an important role in mobilising public opinion, but it is also likely that the agricultural productivity of Pali Pachaun gave it an economic stability, which made it more responsive to innovation and change. Pali Pachaun was probably receptive to change because of its proximity to the Bhabar and the fact that migration from the region had begun by the end of the nineteenth century.

Devi Singh Kunvar was able to visit the 48–49 villages in which the Nayaks resided and draw up a list of those who were in favour of reform. He was able to establish schools as well as night schools for adults. Many Nayak marriages were organised in Pali Pachaun.

Pithoragarh and Lohaghat, however, presented a different perspective. In spite of the effort put in by Krishna Nand Upreti, the opposition to reform was determined and articulate. He found it very difficult to compile any statistics about the Nayaks of the eastern region. The resistance to reform in the eastern region can be attributed to the absence of a well-developed communication system in the region, and to the small number of educated Nayaks. It is also possible that resistance to reform in the eastern region was linked to the high incidence of leprosy in the region, if we accept the folk story that Nayak practice was instituted to protect against leprosy. John Jackson noted that eastern Kumaun contained the largest percentage of leprosy patients in comparison to any other district in India.¹³⁵

An important aspect of the reform was the organisation of women by Hira Devi, Hajari Devi, Janki Bai, Hansa Devi and Prem Kumari Devi. Hira Devi was the first Nayak woman to give up her profession and she joined the reformers in 1923. She established the Khushal Adarsh Pathshala in 1923 and acquired a building for the school by 1928¹³⁶ (Pande, 1982). Her conversion

¹³⁵ John Jackson, *In Leper Land*, London 1902.

¹³⁶ B.D. Pande, "Kumaun Ki Nayak Jati Ka Sudhar", in Dharmanand Pande edited *B.D. Pande Smarika*, Almora 1984, p. 102, The Records of the Khushal Adarsh Pathshala, Bel, from 1925–1931 are as follows:

Name	Month	Year	Class						Total
			IV	III	II	I	B	A	
Month	June	1925	3	9	11	11	16	50
„	June	1926	1	7	3	15	11	16	53
„	July	1927	5	5	5	10	12	10	47
„	July	1928	3	6	8	11	7	32	67
„	July	1929	4	5	10	8	11	19	57
„	July	1930	4	5	10	8	11	19	57
„	July	1931	6	6	7	8	10	12	49

to the Arya Samaj and her marriage to a lawyer in Meerut enabled her to propagate reform not only in Kumaun but also in Meerut. As a result of her efforts Meerut became an important centre of Nayak reform. On 20 February 1930, Hira Devi organised a large conference of Nayak women in Meerut which was addressed by B.D. Pande, Thakur Debi Singh, Hira Devi and Janaki Bai. These women also established the Nayak Balika Sahayak Samiti which was important because its objective was to find husbands for Nayak girls who had given up their profession.¹³⁷

There were four important aspects to the progress of Nayak reform: 1) the education of Nayaks and the establishment of schools for them, 2) the marriage of Nayak girls to prevent them from taking to prostitution, 3) the passing of an act which would declare Nayak practices illegal and 4) the organisation of Nayak women. Ramgarh and Haldwani were two important centres of the Nayaks. Both of them were already provided with schools and no new schools were required in the region. Pali Pachaun also had a small number of educated Nayaks, but in the Kali Kumaun and Pithoragarh region, that is in the eastern section, there were almost no educated Nayaks.

The first school with the specific purpose of educating Nayaks was established with the help of Prayag Sewa Samiti and Nayak Sudhar Sabha at Katarmal. Initially the school was of a temporary nature. The local people expressed great resistance against the establishment of the school. However, Durga Dutt Tripathi was a teacher who organised and ran the school with great dedication and commitment. By 1931, the school at Katarmal was attended by 25 boys; there is no record of the number of Nayak girls educated at this school, though according to B.D. Pande there were some enrolments.

Schools were also opened at Naini in Pithoragarh and at Khilpatti and Raul. The District Board supported these schools

¹³⁷ *Shakti*, 16 February 1929 reported that at a meeting held in Meerut, Hira Devi had donated Rs. 100, Durgia Bai Rs. 4, Jamna Bai Rs. 2, Devaki Bai Rs. 10. Reports also available in *Shakti* of 8 February and 1 March 1930.

but there is little information about their success. The Nayak community did not support the idea of sending girls to school and even in Pali Pachaun where the Khushal School was a success; the number of girls who acquired primary education was extremely limited. A report of the school's activities from 1925 to 1935, notes that only 7.6 per cent of the school pupils were girls. Pali Pachaun was more active in terms of Nayak reform, and a night school was also started. This appears to have been quite successful with an average attendance of 27 students at a time.

The other aspect of Nayak reform was the mobilisation of public opinion for the marriage of Nayak girls. This was probably the most difficult part of the exercise. We had already noted the difficulty in finding grooms from the non-Nayak community. It was for this reason that the Nayaks were now divided into two groups for purposes of inter-marriage. Exceptional women like Hira Devi and Chandra Kunvar were able to marry outside the community,¹³⁸ but most of the other marriages were within the Nayak community. The first marriage according to Hindu rites was performed in Pali Pachaun in May 1930. Pande reports that by 1931, 28 marriages had been solemnised in Ramgarh, four in Pithoragarh, three in Katarmal and 21 in Pali Pachaun. These figures however have to be contextualised. According to the government there were 2,070 Nayaks in 1901¹³⁹ and 3,191 in 1911.¹⁴⁰ According to the Prayag Sewa Samiti in 1930, the Nayaks were 2,205, of which 1,285 were women and 233 were young girls, under 12. The total number of women working as prostitutes were 430, of which 366 were in the market, whilst 64 were living in homes (Pande, 84). Given these figures, the number of marriages negotiated appears to be quite large, and denote

¹³⁸ Chandra Kunvar, the second daughter of Thakur Jang Bahadur Singh, was married to Lala Firangi Lal of Bareilly, *Shakti*, 17 May 1930.

¹³⁹ Box Number 25, Nayak Prosecution 1893–1900, Almora Records at District Archives, Nainital.

¹⁴⁰ Box Number 192. D.O. Letter Number 101, Nainital 10 May 1913; from B.H. Boulderson I.C.S. Under Secretary to Commissioner of Almora, Almora Records at District Archives, Nainital.

success. It is also interesting to find, that the number of Nayaks had decreased between 1911 and 1930. Whereas, the Nayaks increased by 54 per cent between 1901 and 1911; their numbers decreased by 30 per cent between 1911 and 1930. This was surely the result of reform, with a large number of Nayaks not reporting themselves as Nayaks. According to the *Census of India 1931*, the Arya Samaj reported that two Nayak boys had graduated from Gurukul, and that 23 boys were receiving education in various Arya Samaj institutions, 23 Nayak girls had been married and rescue homes for Nayak girls had been established in Takula in Nainital.

The Nayaks: Legislation

The movement for Nayak reform culminated in the passage of a law against Nayak practices. The process of state intervention had begun as early as 1857 and, 1879. This was followed by the system of maintaining a register of young Nayak girls to prevent them from becoming prostitutes before 16 years of age. Subsequently this was also abolished. It is from the early twentieth century that the local intelligentsia took the initiative against this practice and eventually brought up the issue at the United Provinces Legislative Council. On 11 September 1924, Rai Bahadur Mashal Singh initiated a resolution that demanded, “an immediate and effective step to put a stop to the prevailing practices of selling, buying and bringing up of minor girls for immoral purposes in the provinces generally, and in the Districts of Nainital, Almora and Garhwal in particular”.¹⁴¹

As a follow-up to this resolution, a committee was appointed under the chairmanship of the Commissioner of Kumaun Mr. Stiffe. This was known as the Stiffe Committee, and comprised Rai Bahadur Mashal Singh, B.N. Mishra, G.B. Pant, M.A. Shafi, Mukandi Lal, C.S. Budathoki, and the Deputy Commissioner of Nainital. It co-opted some of the members of the Nayak community along with some representatives of those

¹⁴¹ *U.P. Legislative Council Proceedings*, Volume XXXV, 1927, p. 198.

bodies who were carrying on reform work in their midst. S. Swarup was appointed to the committee as a representative of the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, and C. Singh and J.B. Singh were nominated as Nayak representatives to the Committee. The committee submitted a Draft Bill. The Draft Bill was based upon similar legislation in Bombay, Burma and Calcutta for the purpose of preventing prostitution of young girls.

B.D. Pande and Mukandi Lal raised the issue of state legislation for Nayak reform in the U.P. Legislative Council in 1927. The Draft Bill had been published in the *Gazette* in August 1927, and a Select Committee of the Legislative Council was established on 31 October 1927 to look into the details, of the Draft Bill.¹⁴² The members of this Select Committee were G.B. Pant, B.D. Pande, R.B. Tiwari, Sardar N. Singh, S. Habibullah, Babu B.S. Bedar, Kunvar S.P. Sah, Legal Remembrancer to the Government and the Secretary of the Judicial Department to the Government. Later on Mukandi Lal, V.N. Tiwari and M.S. Rathor were also nominated to the committee. The debate on the Bill provides interesting reading. A large section of the house supported the Bill, and was keen to make it more comprehensive and to bring within its purview all forms of prostitution. Mukandi Lal, for example wanted to extend the scope of the Bill, and base it upon the Burma and Bombay acts. He argued that the Naik Reform Committee Draft Bill contained a section “any person who procures or attempts to procure any woman or girl, to become a prostitute, shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to two years or with fine of Rs. 1,000 or with both”, which was not in the final bill.¹⁴³ B.D. Pande also felt that the Nayak Reform Bill was a very modest measure, and that the punitive clauses should be clearly spelt out. The Government however wanted to restrict the Bill and define it as applicable only to the Nayak community.

The opposition to the Bill was voiced by H.C. Desanges, who presented to the House a petition signed by 27 Nayak women

¹⁴² *U.P. Legislative Council Proceedings*, Volume XXXV, 1927, pp. 183–205.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

against the Bill. He said that he was speaking on behalf of these ladies, who say that they are carrying on a profession (not a trade) which has been hallowed by religion, and which has the sanction of an old custom and has come down over the generations. He quoted from the memorial, which said, "We have sacrificed ourselves to promote the honour of higher caste, what and which orders have we disobeyed that the government legislates against us." The memorials suggested that the Government should also arrange marriages of Nayak women with better class Hindus, and also provide music schools and other institutions for their betterment. Desanges said, "Instead of having man-made laws for woman, woman should also have her say. I propose that a couple of these ladies be co-opted in the Select Committee".¹⁴⁴

B.D. Pande, G.B. Pant, A.P. Dube, Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, Khan Bahadur Maulvi Fasih-ud-den, Jagannath Prasad, Babu Mohan Lal and M.S. Rathor, all spoke in favour of the Bill and clearly opposed Desanges idea of co-opting Nayaks on to the Select Committee. B.D. Pande said that "he was surprised to hear that Mr. Desanges said that some of these ladies should be co-opted in the Select Committee. We should drop our head in shame. If some honourable ladies of the House were to be co-opted I would welcome that." A.P. Dube intervened,

the members of the House, should not be carried away by the pseudo ideas of religion and custom which have been in a half jocular manner aired by the member of the Anglo-Indian Association The question of religion must be looked at from a different point of view and I will tell those women who have issued the circular that the pleas put forward by them are merely specious pleas having no substance. Religion is a very old thing and it partakes of the limitation of those among whom it obtains... . With regard to the custom, it cannot justify conduct of this sort.¹⁴⁵

M.S. Rathor and Chaudhri Dharamvir Singh were very concerned about a clause that said if the father or guardian was

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 188.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 195.

not taking proper care of a girl, she may be removed and put in charge of a person fit to do so. Chaudhuri was keen that Nayak girls be put under the supervision of Hindus, not Christians, and that committees of respectable persons be appointed by the district magistrate to help him discharge this function.¹⁴⁶ They were concerned that if the girls were placed under the supervision of Christians, they would cease to be part of the Hindu community. E. Ahmad Shah insinuated that Desanges was speaking as a Christian who wanted to defend people not defended by their own community.¹⁴⁷ He added,

reference has been made to a petition circulated by women of the Nayak community ... they have particularly raised this point, that if this Bill is to be enforced, let the members of the community to which they belong, broaden their customs and caste regulations so that whenever anyone of them comes forward with a proposal for marriage, the member of that community may welcome such a proposal and accept her without any caste bar or restriction. It is one thing to introduce a Bill and not provide any definite suggestion for enabling them to come out of their degraded life.¹⁴⁸

The trajectory of the debate in the House provides evidence that almost all members of the house regarded Nayak practices as immoral and as a stigma on the local community. Desanges's plea was read as a criticism of the Hindu religion, and there was no doubt in the minds of the members of the House that Nayaks had to be reformed. B.D. Pande suggested that the memorial was written not by Nayak women, but by their patrons. B.D. Pande argued that in England if the mother leads an immoral life the daughters are weaned from her. He added that they had conducted a census and noted that about 5,000 Nayaks have about 800 girls in the market. He added, "Do you see what they are doing? They decoy any beautiful girl they can lay their hands on."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 189

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 194.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 195.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 193.



Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi spoke in Hindi and suggested that given the law of supply and demand and the resources available to Nayak men they would spread their tentacles to other communities.¹⁵⁰ Therefore, the law should be such that no minor (girl under 18, not only girls) may practice prostitution. G.B. Pant, represented all his colleagues like Mukandi Lal, B.D. Pande, Khan Bahadur Maulvi Fasih-ud-din, A.P. Dube and Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi who wanted a law that would address the issue not only Nayak practice, but the entire network of prostitution. He said that the original bill as it emanated from the Stiffe Committee was not confined to the Nayaks, it was of a general nature. The government bill has modified it in substantial measure by revoking important Sections 18 and 19 that provided punishment for kidnapping of girls and living off income from prostitution, that is, victims of nefarious practices. He referred to a bill he had introduced but which had not even been circulated by the government. Most importantly he noted, “I may add here that we do not rely only on legislative law in these matters. We know that moral suasion must go hand in hand with law in these matters. It is a question affecting the reform of society, affecting social progress.”¹⁵¹

A common refrain was that Nayak custom cannot be countenanced in any form, it has to be abolished. B.D. Pande, G.B. Pant, Dharamvir Singh and others from the region also confessed to being ashamed of these practices. B.D. Pande, on the authority of someone who is working among Nayaks for the last 18 years, said,

Three hundred kidnapped every year by these rascals, I should say. They are not Rajputs: if they are Rajputs they have debased themselves and we must hang our heads in shame ... But considering how we are taunted for the fact that we hail from the identical place where there do exist such shameful practices, we drop our heads in shame.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 196.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p. 201.

He appears to have spoken of behalf of the House,

it is for us who are the intelligentsia of the people to decide whether we should allow such corruption to go in the name of religion. No religion would sanction this thing, neither Christian nor Muhammadan nor Hindu. It is only the lustful people who make religion a shield to protect this vice. I think every member of the House would look with sympathy to this ill. We cannot uproot evil; it is implanted either by the Devil or God. It is only a signboard that we can put up that this way lies the danger. So we are doing the same thing here. This Bill as far as I understand is a sort of air-gun.

The deliberations of the Select Committee eventually led to the presentation of the Naik Girls Protection Bill to the House in early 1929.¹⁵² Nawab Sir Muhammad Ahmad Sa'id Khan moved the bill. He noted that technically it is a government bill, but it is the handiwork of the opposition. It is apparent that B.D. Pande and G.B. Pant worked together to move amendments in the bill. The first amendment mooted by them was to delete the words "of the Naik caste", thereby extending the scope of the bill to include all minor girls. The amendment was not accepted. G.B. Pant moved another amendment to clause 4.¹⁵³ He asked for the word "trained" to be inserted between hire and or in clause 4, line 5. The amendment was opposed by Babu Bhagwati Sahai Bedar, but eventually accepted.

G.B. Pant introduced another amendment, a new clause. The new clause he wanted to be inserted was as follows, "A girl

¹⁵² *U.P. Legislative Council Proceedings*, Volume XLI, January 28 to February 1929, pp. 387–431.

¹⁵³ If the District Magistrate is of opinion that there is danger that a minor girl of the Naik caste within the local limits of his jurisdiction may be sold, let for hire or otherwise disposed of with the intent that she shall be employed for the purpose of prostitution or for any unlawful and immoral purpose, he may order that she shall be sent for a settlement and there detained for a period as may be prescribed or that she shall be placed under the guardianship of any person of the same faith who is willing and in the opinion of the district magistrate fit to have charge of her and may take such steps as may in his opinion be necessary for the enforcement of such order.

committed to a settlement under section 4 may be detained in a settlement upto the age of 21, unless she is married earlier in which case she should be released except when the district magistrate is not satisfied about the genuineness of the marriage.”¹⁵⁴ The government refused to accept the amendment on the grounds that a girl of 18 is a major. Babu Bhagwati Sahai Bedar opposed the amendment, whereas Badri Dutt Pande and Pandit Iqbal Narayan Gurtu supported the amendment. Nawab Sir Muhammad Ahmad Sa'id Khan defended the government, “The underlying principle of the Bill is that there is a bad habit of prostitution in a certain community and as the minor girls of that community, under the influence of their elders, are trained in that immoral atmosphere, therefore they should be protected from that atmosphere till they attain the age of majority.” The amendment was put to vote, the Swarajists lost because, ‘ayes’ were 20 and ‘noes’ 47.

Subsequently, other members of the house joined in the debate and what followed was a general discussion on prostitution. Babu Bhagwati Sahai Bedar argued that the attempt to abolish the institution itself and said that,

it will be a national disaster if anything of such sort will be done ... I am afraid that by their zeal for reform that practice that has hitherto been prevalent among one class of people will be prevalent among all classes and will be a danger to household chastity ... I honestly and sincerely feel that this institution be maintained as a safety valve.¹⁵⁵

He added,

They (Naik) become prostitutes because of the custom prevalent among them and we have no right to force anybody to change his faith even if it is *Bam Marg*... . I warn this house the reasons which make a prostitute will be used as a means by unscrupulous and immoral people to dissuade household females from chastity and *Pativrata Dharma*.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 396.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 398.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 399.

Thakur Sadho Singh said that the bill does not aim at the abolition of prostitution but attempts to rather keep it at its minimum.

The amendments to clause 5 by the Swarajist lobby were accepted. The main thrust of the amendments was to protect, from oppression Nayaks who are reformed and do not follow customary practices. The debate on the Naik Girls Protection Bill was primarily about the role of the government and how that should be modulated. The Government was wary and did not want to increase state intervention on the Nayak issue. The local activists of Kumaun and Garhwal, B.D. Pande and Mukandi Lal were keen to ensure state involvement in the prevention of Nayak custom. B.D. Pande, G.B. Pant and M. Lal wanted to add an amendment to the act, which stated: "the local government shall appoint an honorary officer to carry out the provisions of this act and the rules framed under it". The need for an honorary officer was in accordance with the Stiffe Committee recommendations that a special officer belonging to the Nayak caste implement the provision of the act. The government was not prepared to accept this and decided that this would come under the purview of a magistrate and the Bill as it was passed eventually was quite different from what the local intelligentsia had envisaged. *Shakti* of 9 February 1929 reported the proceedings of the Council and was disheartened at the government's refusal to play a more significant role in the battle against prostitution.

Persistence by local reformers yielded results. Even before the ratification of the Bill, the Nayak Sudhar Sabha gave a list of 5–6 minor girls, who were being trained for prostitution, to the District Magistrate of Nainital. The men were apprehended and prosecuted.¹⁵⁷ In February 1930, a Sessions court indicted Man Singh Nayak and his sister Khimuli for initiating two minor girls into prostitution.¹⁵⁸ A pamphlet issued by Jangbahadur Singh Nayak and Kishan Singh Nayak are testimony to the fact that the

¹⁵⁷ *Shakti*, 1 December 1928.

¹⁵⁸ *Shakti*, 15 February 1930.



government established a Nayak Advisory Committee to follow up the legislative enactment. These two were members of the government committee and office bearers of the Kendriya Nayak Kshatriya Sudhar Sabha, Kumaun.¹⁵⁹ Thakur Debi Singh and Pandit Krishanand Upreti's efforts on behalf of reform in the Pali Pachaun, Kali Kumaun and Pithoragarh regions, and Durga Dutt Tripathi's work in Katarmal, was applauded by the local people.¹⁶⁰

The Nayaks: Contestation and Transformation

What were the repercussions of this reform on the Nayaks and how did they respond to a public debate and censure of their custom? Opposition to reform was intense and hotly debated by the Nayaks. The Nayaks were a community who were well placed; a large number of them were wealthy and therefore had a reasonably high status within the local community. Many of them were moneylenders, and some of them had also taken to trade. The Ramgarh Nayaks were particularly fortunate, because a large number of them had been able to develop and colonise land in the Bhabar region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. They were able to pay bride-price, and command women from the Khasa groups without any difficulty.¹⁶¹ The fact that they were entitled to the sacred thread of three strands, also gave them a ritual position within the Hindu caste system. They were able to mobilise and therefore articulate their response to reform. In 1919, 40 families advocated reform and 60 opposed it.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Appeal for contributions to establish a fund for education of Nayak girls, for building ashrams for Nayak girls, for scholarships for poor Nayak boys and other sundry activities related to Naik Girls Protection Act 1929. All contributions were to be sent to Smt. Premlata Devi, Haldwani. The pamphlet was published by Vigyan Press, Bareilly.

¹⁶⁰ *Shakti*, 20 June 1931.

¹⁶¹ Panna Lall, *Kumaon Local Custom*, Allahabad 1920, p. 13, "Nayaks of Ramgarh who are rather well to do have been for some years trying to marry their girls to other Hindus also and have given instances of marriages having been performed with men of the plains as well as in the hills by Vedic rites."

¹⁶² *Shakti*, 22 July 1919.

They put forward their perspective at the various public meetings organised by the Prayag Sewa Samiti. A large number of the uneducated were unable to comprehend the strong moral basis of the critique. To them the system appeared in consonance with their worldview, which was part of a larger culture, where bride-price, divorce, second marriage and widow remarriage were the norm. The monogamous, patriarchal family, where woman's virginity and chastity were held at a premium, had not yet permeated their cultural belief system. The surest way to accomplish reform was therefore to educate Nayaks, and it was probably the most significant factor in promoting change. This is evident in the fact the first marriage of a Nayak girl was performed by Jang Bahadur Singh who was educated at the D.A.V. College at Lahore.

In June 1925, a group of Nayaks presented G.B. Pant with a petition on behalf of Nayak women, which questioned the need for reform,

we do not believe in abortion, nor do we abduct girls, and neither do we force others to become prostitutes. We are considered auspicious and are invited to all joyous occasions. There are many others who follow the same profession, then why have you chosen to target us?

It added that Nayak women were willing to negotiate marriages for their daughters provided they were not expected to marry their daughters to the new Aryas, members of the lower castes who had recently become Arya Samajis. The petition ended with "for those who value us we are toys, but for others we are low and reprehensible".¹⁶³

Uttam Singh Nayak of Ramgarh wrote to the local newspaper of Almora, *Shakti*, and said that there are many other serious problems facing Kumauni society, such as the problem of widows, of migration, of unemployment, then why are people so exercised about Nayak reform?¹⁶⁴ Gradually a small section of the modern

¹⁶³ *Shakti*, 9 June 1925.

¹⁶⁴ *Shakti*, 11 August 1925.

intelligentsia also took up cudgels on behalf of the Nayaks. Professor D.D. Pant, for example, defended Nayak practices and said that the system was scientific, and was designed for the protection of society and should be recognised as such.¹⁶⁵ A Rai Bahadur (cited by B.D. Pande) argued that reform is fine, but Nayak custom cannot be regarded as a stigma, on the contrary it is the outcome of the perspicacity of earlier generations who institutionalised the practice, thereby protecting society and providing it with stability. Other supporters of the Nayaks, referred to it as a safety valve for Hindu society and therefore did not support its abolition. In 1928, when the reform movement had become more organised, some Nayak women of Nainital published pamphlets and distributed them in the town. They opposed the Nayak Reform Bill and were unhappy at the efforts made by the local intelligentsia towards its promulgation.¹⁶⁶

Yet, it is interesting to note that not a single advocate of the Nayaks referred to the fact that Nayak women had an entitlement to inherit property and wealth and their daughters would inherit from the mother. L.D. Joshi suggested that Nayak family organisation is halfway between patriarchal and matriarchal. “The Nayaks marry and bring their wives to their houses, so that the family is part patriarchal, and as the daughters of the house do not leave the family and have children, the family is also matriarchal. The result is as follows for the purpose of inheritance:

- A son = a daughter
- A brother = a sister
- A brother’s son = a sister’s son or daughter
- A son’s son = a daughter’s son or daughter”¹⁶⁷

Joshi also repeated what Panna Lall noted earlier that a Nayak girl when married loses this special right of inheritance.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ *Shakti*, 25 August 1925.

¹⁶⁶ *Shakti*, 7 January 1928.

¹⁶⁷ L.D. Joshi, *Khasa Family Law*, Allahabad, 1929, pp. 67–75.

¹⁶⁸ Panna Lall, *Kumaun Local Custom*, Allahabad, p. 14.

Though Nayak reform was contested, the institution died out, leaving thin memories. L.D. Joshi's words were prophetic,

The Nayaks...are in the process of being transformed into a fully patriarchal people. We can see and verify this slow transformation at the present day. As to moral ideas, they grow like other institutions, and if the present wholesome movement does take root we may find the Nayaks, fifty years hence, rightly resenting any aspersions on the chastity of their daughters and sisters.¹⁶⁹

Whilst doing fieldwork in Kumaun, in the early 1990s, I found some respondents who spoke about the Nayaks and referred to Kusumkhera in Haldwani as the settlement of the Nayaks, the building was there but no records were available. The important point was that no one claimed to be a Nayak anymore.

Contexts: Marriage and Family

Nayak reform, however, has to be contextualised differently. It has to be linked to major social changes consequent upon the advent of Imperial rule and the growing monetisation of the economy. One of the earliest Resolutions passed by the East India Company affecting local custom was in 1819. This regulation proscribed the customary right of the husband of an adulteress to take the life of the adulterer. It stated that, "Be it known, however that according to the laws of the British Government a husband is entitled to redress against the adulterer on application to the Commissioner" (Atkinson, 1882, Vol. III, Part II, p. 512). Subsequently in 1822, G.W. Traill, Commissioner Kumaun, reported the strange matter that the inhabitants of this province are in no way scrupulous in regard to the virtue of their wives and unless the latter are actually inveigled away by their seducer, the husband very rarely applies to the court for punishment of the adulterer. Traill noted that six complaints of this nature had been received.¹⁷⁰ Even in 1837, it was noted that,

¹⁶⁹ L.D. Joshi, *Khasa Family Law*, Allahabad, 1929, pp. 71.

¹⁷⁰ *Pre-Mutiny Records*, Judicial Letters Issued, Volume 25, 21 July 1822.

“Adultery is common among the lower classes but it seldom forms a subject of complaint unless accompanied by abduction of adulteress.”¹⁷¹

Administrative response to reported cases of adultery was in consonance with British law; the restoration of the wife to husband.¹⁷² They believed that adultery be considered a criminal offense and the punishment meted out to the adulterer had to be adequately harsh. Keertooa was punished with hard labour for eight months and Gangooa for hard labour for two months and Jeudal for six months. Restoration of wives to husbands, however, did not resolve the problem. It was noted that this was leading to an increase in criminal cases—poisoning of husbands by the wives so restored.¹⁷³ Despite the magistrate’s use of “moral force” it was not easy to persuade women to return to their husbands, and many women pleaded that they be punished along with their paramour.¹⁷⁴

This testimony of “adulterous wives” led the authorities to rethink not only their understanding of adultery but also, a practice, of registering such cases as those of abduction. By 1842, cases of abduction were frequent, whereas charges of adultery were comparatively rare inspite of the fact that, the offense of abduction was not specifically provided for in the Regulations. What was more intriguing was the fact that even abduction was rarely an act of coercion—charges of abduction could not be

¹⁷¹ *Pre-Mutiny Records*, Judicial Letters Issued, Volume 32, 1 January 1837.

¹⁷² Vasudha Pande, “Law Women and Family in Kumaun”, *India International Centre Quarterly*, Volume 23, No. 3/4, Second Nature: Women and the Family (Winter 1996), pp. 106–120.

¹⁷³ *Pre-Mutiny Records*, Judicial Letters Issued, Volume 44, 7 January 1856. Henry Ramsay was keen that in matters concerning women the law should be more demanding and harsh.

¹⁷⁴ *Pre-Mutiny Records*, Judicial Letters Issued, Volume 37, 11 January 1843. Charges of abduction, which are most frequent, and adultery that are comparatively rare. A greater number of persons charged with abduction are acquitted for the party accused has only to produce the woman as evidence of her voluntary elopement.

sustained when the woman asserted that she left her husband of her own free will.¹⁷⁵

Similarly, the promulgation of a Regulation forbidding **sale** of wives and widows, in 1824, also created unnecessary difficulties. Officials soon realised that the cases that came before the courts, of sale of wife, originated from her seduction and the seducer paid the price to the husband. In cases of widow remarriage the second husband had to pay a certain amount of money to the relatives of the deceased husband. According to British law these cases amounted to sale and had to be punished in criminal courts. The authorities eventually understood that it was impossible to abolish such a long established custom and Traill found many ingenious attempts to avoid the Regulation.¹⁷⁶ It must be noted that only some cases came up before colonial courts, most were adjudicated by Panchayats or by landholders (Joshi, Allahabad, 1929: 34–36).

Over the years, officials in Kumaun built up a case for understanding adultery, abduction and sale of wife differently from customary law. This is best represented by the case of a *sipahee* who in 1839 enticed away the wife of a local. The sipahee was indicted, punished and fined.¹⁷⁷ The lowest court, that of a Kumauni Magistrate, decreed only marriage expenses and no fine—the colonial authorities wanted the adulterer to be fined and also pay marriage expenses to the aggrieved husband. A case for allowing husbands to institute two kinds of complaints, criminal for adultery and civil for marriage expenses, was orchestrated by local judicial authorities. The Nizamat Adalat at Agra reluctantly sanctioned this, though it was contrary to customary law that perceived marriage expenses as adequate. Colonial practice was therefore a blend of custom with patriarchal English law!

¹⁷⁵ *Pre-Mutiny Records*, Judicial Letters Issued, Volume 36, 20 November 1839 and *Pre-Mutiny Records*, Judicial Letters Issued, Volume 37, 16 August 1843. It appears to be likely that the majority of these cases may have been demands urged by husbands for the restoration of wives who have eloped of their own free will ... which do not form a sufficient ground for prosecution.

¹⁷⁶ *Pre-Mutiny Records*, Judicial Letters Issued, Volume 26, 1 March 1831.

¹⁷⁷ *Pre-Mutiny Records*, Judicial Letters Issued, Volume 36, 28 June 1839.

Eventually, sale of women had to be contextualised differently before it could be comprehended by enlightened officialdom. The sum of money paid by the adulterer was now explained as “compensation for loss received, not the price of value given”.¹⁷⁸ This logic, however, could not be extended to include payment for the remarriage of a widow. Under British law, a widow was a free agent who had fulfilled her marriage vow, whereas according to Kumauni custom the widow belonged to the family of the deceased husband, and under the system of levirate, her husband’s brother could take her as his wife. She therefore belonged to her husband’s kinsmen (who had paid for her) until she was released by payment. Traill argued,

Throughout the province it is the universal practice for the husband to pay a certain sum to the father ... by the above transaction the husband was considered as obtaining a property in the person of his wife and might dispose of her at his pleasure and on his death in his heir. This practice has been prohibited.¹⁷⁹

The refusal of the imperial bureaucracy to understand this dimension struck at the notion of the village brotherhood, *biradari*.¹⁸⁰

Recognition of the custom of bride-price/*taca ka byah* by the civil courts led to a large amount of litigation demanding return of bride-price from parents who had taken bride-price from one and married their daughter to another. Women, who were unhappy in a marriage often returned to their natal homes and the parents would negotiate another marriage for their daughter. A large number of cases at the Zillah Courts during the 1840s then appear to be of husbands accusing their in-laws of conspiring against

¹⁷⁸ *Pre-Mutiny Records*, Judicial Letters Issued Volume 36, 19 May 1839.

¹⁷⁹ *Pre-Mutiny Records*, Judicial Letters Issued, Volume 25, 21 July 1822.

¹⁸⁰ L.D. Joshi, *Khasa Family Law*, Government Press Allahabad 1929, p. 138. “The courts in British India cannot treat her (widow) as an article of traffic and could not concede any right to the agnates of the deceased husband to claim bride-price from her second husband.”

them. Conspiracy of this kind was difficult to prove. For example in the case of Baisakhoo who accused his brother-in-law of supporting his wife's flight from her husband's home. Baisakhoo wanted a return of his marriage expenses. The court did not find the evidence adequate, and refused to hold the brother responsible for his sister's conduct¹⁸¹ In a Panchayat decision, based on custom the husband would have been simply refunded his marriage expenses.

By introducing words like chastity and adultery into the understanding of family law, Traill expressed his inability to comprehend the worldview of the Kumauni custom. Regulations and Promulgations of this period violated and changed the understanding of marriage and family within Kumaun customary law. Eventually, though belatedly, administrative experience of Kumaun custom led to colonial prescription, in recognition of its specificity and difference from the Dharmashastra law. Panna Lall codified Kumaun Local Custom in 1920, though by this period Kumaun custom had been sufficiently modified by a century of colonial adjudication. In the process, it had lost a large component of its pre-modern character, particularly its incredibly complex intermeshing with lineage system and caste. Yet even a century later, *Khasa Family Law*, a tract devoted to Kumaun custom did not feature adultery (an important feature in British law). It must be noted here that pre-colonial customary law recognised adultery, because it granted the aggrieved husband the right to kill his wife's paramour. This was proscribed by the East India Company's state and ceased to be important in Kumaun, though it was prevalent in Nepal.¹⁸² The law referred to chastity for both wife and widow inasmuch as its observance was necessary for the claim to maintenance, but not for inheritance¹⁸³ (Joshi,

¹⁸¹ *Zillah Court Records*, Kumaun & Garhwal, Volume 1, 1850.

¹⁸² T.R. Vaidya and T.R. Manandhar, *Crime and Punishment in Nepal*, Kathmandu 1985, pp. 153–155.

¹⁸³ L.D. Joshi, *Khasa Family Law*, Government Press, Allahabad, 1929, p. 300. "Thus an unchaste widow living in the house may succeed to property but she will not if she leaves it."

Allahabad, 1929, pp. 300, 306–7). However we find this perspective about chastity (*satitva*) and *pativrata* dharma resonating in the activities and writings of the intelligentsia who seek to refashion custom and practice in consonance with a pan-Indian upper caste, non-Khasa worldview.

The eighteenth century witnessed acceleration in the process of change from a barter system to a money economy. This led to an increase in the sale of men, women and children during the Gorkha period. During the early years of British rule, the Judicial Letters constantly refer to cases of kidnapping and sale of women. In the early years a number of men, women and children were sold as slaves, but in spite of the ban on slave trade, traffic in women continued surreptitiously. It appears that gradually within the colonial system the most valuable resource of the mountain economy was labour, and by the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the number of migrants had greatly increased. Along with the export of a male able-bodied force, a parallel, though subterranean, export of the female work force was also occurring. The local intelligentsia was well aware of this phenomenon that young girls from Kumaun, Garhwal and western Nepal were working as prostitutes in towns all over north India—Meerut, Delhi, Moradabad, Saharanpur, Hapur, Hathras, Mathura, Agra, Bareilly, Aligarh, Lucknow and in the far off centres of Rajasthan, Bombay, Karachi and Lahore.

In 1867, the *Rohilkhand Ukhbar* from Bareilly reported that the sale of women by the men of Almora had led to the distribution of Kumauni women in brothels in all major north Indian urban centres.¹⁸⁴ In 1910, H.G. Walton noted that,

formerly the transaction was hold (sic) to create a transferable right in the person of the woman acquired and she could be freely sold. Usually the marriage by sale is between castes who are able according to Hindu law to intermarry: but certain *pattis* have earned a very evil reputation for want of care in ascertaining the status and

¹⁸⁴ Cited in *Native Newspaper Reports*, 24 and 31 January 1868.

caste of the bridegroom, who is usually a plains man. The result is that for all practical purposes the girls are sold into prostitution or concubinage.¹⁸⁵

The *Garhwali* started a campaign against the sale of women in 1908, which continued through 1913 to 1917.¹⁸⁶ In 1917, the *Garhwali* published a report about the sale of women in Lahore. It printed the tragic story of a Garhwali girl who had been sold into prostitution in Lahore.¹⁸⁷ The Arya Samaj was activated, and supported the rescue of a number of women in transit from the hills to the plains via Kathgodam and Haldwani. A report published in *Shakti* in 1924, noted that a large number of the lower castes who were extremely poor worked as daily wagers in Kathgodam and Haldwani, performed their daughter's marriage with a sword or a pot and then made her work as a prostitute. It noted that these two centres (Kathgodam and Haldwani) had become a refuge for women from the hills who were then sent to work in the brothels.¹⁸⁸ Again in 1925, the *Shakti* reported the story of Parvati, who was a resident of Borarau in Someshwar. She had been sold to a *halwai* (sweet vendor) in Lahore for Rs. 200.¹⁸⁹ The *Shakti* lamented the fact that other Hindi newspapers reported the sale of girls and women of the hill region.¹⁹⁰ Another report from Amritsar narrated the story of a widow who had been sold by her father to a family in Lahore who then ended up in a women's centre at Amritsar.¹⁹¹ A similar report was published in 1927, and such reports featured regularly.¹⁹² B.D. Pande remarked on the floor of the U.P. Legislative Council on 31 October 1927.

Now there is a good deal of lorry traffic also, and what is happening is that these lorry-wallahs go and take away girls

¹⁸⁵ H.G. Walton, *Garhwal Gazetteer*, Allahabad 1910, p. 67.

¹⁸⁶ S. Pathak, "Uttarakhand Me Samajik Andolanalo Ki Rooprekha", *Pahar* 2, pp. 97–111.

¹⁸⁷ *Garhwali*, 8 December 1917 and 2 February 1918.

¹⁸⁸ *Shakti*, 11 November and 18 November 1924.

¹⁸⁹ *Shakti*, 14 July 1925.

¹⁹⁰ *Shakti*, 25 August and 15 December 1925.

¹⁹¹ *Shakti*, 14 July 1925.

¹⁹² *Shakti*, 27 August 1927.

and sell them in the Punjab or in Bombay. So we should put a stop to this and show that there is a danger zone, that if you do such and such things there is a penalty for it.¹⁹³

The reformers were deeply ashamed by this kind of reportage and the attack on Nayak practices coincided with an offensive against bride-price. Over the nineteenth century, the notion of bride-price had also undergone a major transformation. It is possible that in the early medieval economy, bride-price was paid in labour, a practice which continues amongst the Tharus even today. Krishna Pande, writing in the first half of the nineteenth century says two-and-a half seers of paddy procure a high caste Dhanuli and a single half seer of millet gets a low caste Manuli. By the late medieval period, in some parts of Kumaun, it was probably computed in *Kaccha Paisa* or in copper pieces. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, bride-price was paid in these copper pieces.¹⁹⁴ The colonial state introduced the system of coinage, which facilitated the shift of bride-price from copper pieces to money.¹⁹⁵

The growth of money economy imbued the system of bride-price with a fresh meaning. In the earlier social system, bride-price was regarded as an exchange between two lineage systems, and entailed certain ritual obligations.¹⁹⁶ A century of British law

¹⁹³ *U.P. Legislative Council Proceedings*, Volume XXXV, p. 193.

¹⁹⁴ *Pre-Mutiny Records*, Judicial Letter Issued, 28 November 1839.

¹⁹⁵ *Pre-Mutiny Records*, Judicial Letters Issued, Volume 36, 20 November 1839. Payment is generally made in money but occasionally in a certain quantity of copper or grain form part of the bargain. *Zillah Court Kumaun and Garhwal, Volume 1*, citing marriage expenses, 15 May 1848—15 tuccas of copper; 29 January 1848—10 tuccas of copper; 21 April 1849—10 tuccas of copper; 5 August 1848—Rs. 40/-; 31 July 1848—Rs. 60/-; May 1849—Rs. 80/-; 8 February 1849—Rs. 150/-; etc.

¹⁹⁶ “Buying Women But Not Selling Them: Gift and Commodity Exchange in Huauili Alliance Valeri Valerio”, *Man*, New Series, Volume 29, No. 1 (Mar. 1994), pp. 1–26. The Juauili people of Seram (eastern Indonesia) say that they “buy” their wives and that these have a “price” and are “costly”. Yet they do not say that they “sell” their sisters or daughters to other men. On the contrary, they imply that they give them away as gifts. References to the idiom

before Kumaun Local Custom was recognised as distinct, this profoundly altered attitudes towards it. To the modern intelligentsia, the dominant aspect of bride-price was the money transaction, and they regarded it as a sale (as did colonial law). The movement against bride-price euphemistically referred to as marriage expenses in the courts refused to make any fine distinctions between sale of women and acceptance of bride-price. Bride-price was a binding transaction, unlike sale, yet it was the sale aspect of it that was emphasised by administrators and reformers. Harimal Saraswati, better known as Harimala Dhamsaktu, wrote poems denouncing the system of bride price.¹⁹⁷ B.D. Pande who toured Kumaun for reform against Nayaks also launched a major attack on bride-price. He exhorted his countrymen not to sell their women, and in 1927 took a Bhishma vow to eradicate bride-price.¹⁹⁸

At the end of the century when British rule learnt to accept the specificity of Kumaun history and culture the damage had been done and the new intelligentsia, which articulated a stronger and more intimate critique, now resisted Panna Lall's customary law. The concern for women's morality is echoed by the intelligentsia who are keen to make Kumaun more in keeping with colonial mind sets and upper-caste practices, that is to conform to notions of "high" or "modern".

The year 1908 witnessed the composition of a poem entitled *Gopi Geet*, first published in 1912.¹⁹⁹ This poem rendered in Kumauni verse (in the poetic verse form of the famous ballad "Rajula Malushahi"), describes the virtues of a Kurmachali

of commodity exchange, however incomplete, cannot be explained away as "metaphoric", since an equivalent of the "price" given for the woman must be returned to the wife-takers by the wife-givers in order to sustain their claim that she is given as a gift rather than sold.

¹⁹⁷ *Sangeet Sarovar* cited in S.S. Pangti, *Madhya Himalaya ki Bhotia Janajati*, Delhi, 1992, pp. 86–87.

¹⁹⁸ *Shakti*, 15 October 1927.

¹⁹⁹ Gopidevi's Father, *Gopi Geet*, published by Seth Khemaraja Shrikrishnadas for free distribution, Shrivenkateswara Press, Bombay, 1969 V.S.

Pradesh widow Gopi. She was the daughter of Shiva Dutta Sati Vajapeyi of Phaldakot, who became a widow at the age of 17 and died a year later. She appeared to her father in a dream 15 days after her death, in which she spoke about Pativrata dharma and the travails of a widow and inspired the poem “Ekadashi Vrata Katha”. She counseled her parents and said death is preferable to widowhood. She then asks her parents to publish a poem about her and distribute it freely and that this act will be akin to performing her shraddha (death rituals) at Kashi.

This propagation of pativrata dharma, which addressed Kumauni, Garhwali and Nepali women, was composed in a woman’s voice. Its pathos is heart-rending²⁰⁰ yet it does not fail to castigate those who do not follow the norm and warns that the widow who lives with another man will die of sorrow and go to hell, and be born again as the daughter of a prostitute for numerous births to come, in contrast to the celibate widow who will enjoy heaven ever after.²⁰¹ This poem was ostensibly written for young women who were literate and were looking for new role models.

This was clearly linked to a change in attitudes towards women, which was also depicted in the ambivalence to *sati*. Sati attracted a great deal of attention and even those who were critical of it could not refrain from valorising it. Separate instances of sati in 1918, 1921 and even in 1950 were invariably reported in local journals as the pious act of pativratas (women devoted to their husband).²⁰² The performance of sati on 10 December 1918 and the response that a memorial be established for the sati became a major public issue with Badri Dutt Pant who even contributed Rs. 25 for the purpose. Eventually the government, the District Commissioner reminded the citizens of Almora that the statutes did not permit the celebration of sati.

²⁰⁰ Mathuradutta Mathapal, “Shivadatta Sati: Kumaun Kavita ka Madhya Stambha”, *Pahar* 9, 1998, p. 132.

²⁰¹ Shiv Dutt Sati Vajpeyi, “Gopi Geet”, *Mitra Vinod*, Lakshmi Venkateswara Press, Bombay 1953, pp. 37–48.

²⁰² *Shakti*, 10 December 1918, 24 December 1918, 28 January 1919, 1 March 1921.

At a large public meeting in Bageshwar on 24 January 1931, 500 women who attended decided to set up an organisation for Kurmanchal Women.²⁰³ In the 1930s, a local newspaper *Kumaun Kumud* also wrote about the need for reform. Rajani Devi argued that there is great concern about the unemployment of young men but nobody is even thinking about women who also face a similar problem. The only avenue of employment for educated women is school teaching (in a school for girls). Such positions are very few, and women have therefore to give up their self-respect and request men to bail them out of poverty (due to unemployment).²⁰⁴ Another report carried catchy headlines, “Sadhva Vivah, Vidhwa Vivah and Kumari Vivah” with a subtitle “Mela and Anamela Vivah” (marriage of a wife, marriage of a widow and marriage of a virgin, with subtitle of well matched and badly matched marriage).²⁰⁵ Sarcastic in tone, it said that all kinds of marriages are permitted—that of *Kanyadan* (gift of the virgin); *Anchalik* marriage (without sacred rites, only feasting the community); marriage with a wife/widow by letter; marriage with a man bought as *tekwa*; marriage based on love; permitted to maintain a mistress; Nayak woman is permitted five husbands. It goes on to say, given this state of affairs, can we blame women, after all it is as a male-dominated system; we can say that it is the men of this community who are morally degraded and the 80,000 men of this region need to be more “masculine”. This presents an interesting perspective but the moral is evident—men should prevent the multiplicity of marriage practices by being more assertive and manly.

Chastity and fidelity of women are constantly foregrounded and though sati is no longer permitted some of the folk stories that are compiled in the 1930s refer to the performance of sati (Oakley and Gairola, 1934: 42, 156, 165). Even a scholar administrator like T.D. Gairola who supported E.S. Oakley (Christian missionary) in collecting Kumauni folklore failed to recognise the particularities of Kumaun legends that evoked a

²⁰³ *Shakti*, 24 January 1931.

²⁰⁴ *Kumaun Kumud*, 11 November 1937.

²⁰⁵ *Kumaun Kumud*, 12 March 1938.



non-Vedic tradition.²⁰⁶ He made major mutations in his rendering of folk tales. Particularly surprising are the interpellations about the practice of sati, which are not found in any subsequent collections.²⁰⁷ He also glossed over references to polyandry, and folk stories collected by him and translated into English have a completely different flavour from the subsequent collections of Prayag Joshi²⁰⁸ and Urva Dutt Upadhyaya.²⁰⁹

By the 1940s and 1950s we find the formation of organisations of women and a reiteration of the unfortunate predicament of poor peasant women. Tara Dani, President of the Mahila Mandal, Chandranagar reported that educated women were required to work for illiterate village women who could not possibly think in terms of society, nation and region. Their condition was like that of domestic animals. Whereas the government had provided medical facilities for animals there were no such provision for women. Unless women's position is raised the nation will not have mothers capable of producing good and committed citizens.²¹⁰ The Rajput Mahila Samaj not only established branches in Kumaun it also established a chapter in Delhi.²¹¹

The intelligentsia's valorising of virtuous women is evident in the reportage of local newspapers. Even the *Kumaun Rajput* filed a report by R.S. Bhandari about the self-immolation of a pativrata woman in Jhulaghat who upon learning about her husband's death in Lucknow decided to become a sati on 26 May

²⁰⁶ E.S. Oakley and T.D. Gairola, *Himalayan Folklore*, Allahabad 1935, reprinted with a new introduction by Marc Gaborieau, Kathmandu 1977.

²⁰⁷ For example the story of Asa Rawat ends with, "he then reclined on the lap of Saru and expired. Saru wept bitterly and prepared a funeral pyre. She put on a white sari, and applying vermilion to her forehead, mounted the funeral pyre and became Sati", pp. 155–156. Oakley and Gairola, *Himalayan Folklore*, Allahabad 1934, reprinted with a new introduction by Marc Gaborieau, Kathmandu 1977.

²⁰⁸ Prayag Joshi, *Kumauni Lok Gathayen*, Bareilly 3, Volumes 1991, 1993 and 1994.

²⁰⁹ U.D. Upadhyaya, *Kumaun Ki Lok Gathayen*, Bareilly.

²¹⁰ *Kumaun Rajput*, 15 September 1950.

²¹¹ *Kumaun Rajput*, 16 June 1950.

1950.²¹² The 1953 reprint of *Gopi Geet* got a favourable review from Shekhar Joshi (a radical writer) in *Parvatiya Jan* (a monthly paper) of September 1954.²¹³ Though the poem addresses a society where widow remarriage is still prevalent, yet according to Shekhar Joshi it had tremendous impact on the young women (men as well, we may presume) of his generation, which is evident from the fact that the collection was reprinted eight times.

It is paradoxical and tragic that the abolition of Nayak practices was accompanied by an increasing tendency for the hills to provide women for prostitution in major urban centres of north India. This process continued apace over the twentieth century and the *Shakti* continued to report cases of abduction and sale of women. Kathgodam and Haldwani became important places for the recovery of women who were in the process of being taken to the plains to be sold into prostitution. Through the 1930s and 1940s the local newspapers—*Shakti*, *Kumaun Kumud*, *Karma Bhumi* and *Kumaun Rajput*—highlighted the issue.²¹⁴ The World War further aggravated the situation, particularly because the large number of casualties dislocated a large number of families and made the women depend on other sources of income. The government noted increase of trafficking in women and established Kumaun Abla Raksha Vibhag.²¹⁵ Sri Hayat Singh Karki, the Deputy Superintendent of the Police was in charge of this department. He established a Rescue Home at Haldwani. Lakhan Singh, who was initially in charge of rehabilitating Nayak women was appointed officer in charge of rescue operations. Twenty women were recovered and police cases were filed in various courts at Almora, Ranikhet, Nainital and Kashipur.²¹⁶ The *Kumaun Rajput* regularly reported stories of women abducted and

²¹² *Kumaun Rajput*, 9 June 1950.

²¹³ Private Communication with Shekhar Joshi; Short story writer, Allahabad. *Parvatiya Jan*, September 1954; another report on the unfortunate state of women in *Parvatiya Jan*, November 1954.

²¹⁴ S. Pathak, "Uttarakhand Me Samajik Andolanalo Ki Rooprekha", *Pahad* 2 footnote 16, pp. 108–109.

²¹⁵ Report by Sri Jaya Dutt, Lawyer Ranikhet in *Kumaun Rajput*, Number 40.

²¹⁶ *Kumaun Rajput*, Report by Debi Singh Kubarbi, Chairman of Kumaun Rajput Shiksha Parishad, 10 October 1948.

brought to Haldwani. A report stated that three women had run away from the rescue home.²¹⁷ Another gentleman filed a report about his wife missing from home.²¹⁸ We thus find that the movement for reform of Nayak practices was part of a larger agenda of change in the context of sexuality, women and family.

Conclusion

Kumaun society was stratified in the pre-colonial period, but it was fluid and changing, adapting to emerging power configurations by administrative regulation, sanctioned by those in power.²¹⁹ In another essay,²²⁰ we have shown how the Kumaun elites and peasantry adapted to and re-articulated caste identities in consonance with the “varna” hierarchy from 1815 to 1930. Caste and non-caste identities were now negotiated in the public sphere through community mobilisation and activism. The ethnography of Traill and subsequent administrators constructed the Bhotias as a separate group outside the pale of caste society. This was part of the British understanding about non-agricultural groups. The primary activity of Bhotias, according to the imperial government, was trade with Tibet. The activism of the Joharis and Kumaun elites, in the early years of the twentieth century, led to induction of Johari Bhotia groups into the Hindu fold. However, writings of colonial administrators like Panna Lall, C.A. Sherring and the customary practices of Darma, Byans and Chaudans Bhotias made it difficult to accept all Bhotia groups into the Hindu fold.

Eventually, towards the end of British rule a new ethnographic category emerged—tribal groups.²²¹ Just before independence,

²¹⁷ *Kumaun Rajput*, 22 October 1948.

²¹⁸ *Kumaun Rajput*, 25 August 1950.

²¹⁹ Deva Rudra Chand, *Trivarnik Dharma Nirmayanam*, manuscript attributed to the sixteenth century, in the Government Collection of the Asiatic Society, Hari Prasad Sastri, Calcutta and Dharmadhikari Records of Pant cited earlier.

²²⁰ Vasudha Pande, “Stratification in Kumaun 1815–1930”, *Occasional Paper History and Society Series*, NMML 2013.

²²¹ B.B. Kumar, “The Tribe Caste Continuum July–September, 1999”, *Dialogue (A quarterly Journal of Astha-Bharti)* Volume 1, No. 1.

Kumaon Bhotia Peoples Federation was formed in Almora. This sent a memorandum to the minority sub-committee of the Indian Constituent Assembly in 1947 demanding special safeguards for the Bhotias. By 1953, the Chinese presence in Tibet became more marked and Bhotia trade was clearly affected. The Federation drafted another memorandum demanding inclusion in list of Scheduled Tribes.²²² The Bhotias (including the Joharis) were eventually acknowledged as members of the Scheduled Tribes. Located at the margins of Empire, the Bhotias were relegated to tribal status though they were not a marginal group, but a wealthy resourceful community who, in spite of the closure of trade with Tibet (after the Indo-China war of 1962), continue to play an important role in Kumaun society.

The account given above depicts the modern intelligentsia's attempt to tailor Kumaun culture in a manner that Kumaun could become an integral part of the wider Brahmanical culture of the subcontinent and the emerging Indian nation. They were keen to ignore the specificities of Kumaun, which were an integral aspect of her history. Obvious and blatant cultural differences between various groups of Kumaun were obliterated, submerged or transformed. The assault on Nayak practices and pressure on the people to give up bride-price were all linked to the "civilising project" of the colonial intelligentsia. The high moral tone adopted by this section vis-à-vis the Nayaks, and the unreflective certitude with which Nayak practices were wiped out by the intelligentsia indicates its attitude towards the people whom it claimed to represent. The "symbolic violence"²²³ of this "civilising process"²²⁴ engendered a division between "high" and "low"

²²² The Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) (Uttar Pradesh) Order, 1967 and as inserted by Act 29 of 2000.

²²³ P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, C.U.P. 1972, pp. 190–197, "the imposition of the culture of the ruling class on dominated group and especially to the process by which these dominated groups are forced to recognise the ruling culture as legitimate and their own culture as illegitimate".

²²⁴ Norbert Elias, *The History of Manners: The Civilising Process*, Volume I, translated by Edmund Jephcott, Pantheon, New York, 1978.



elements of Kumaun culture²²⁵ and generated different perspectives on Kumaun society, its past and its future. Its activism helped in articulating a regional identity (the subject of another paper) contested and appropriated differently by the various segments that emerged in this region during the last decades of the nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century.

²²⁵ P. Burke, “We, the People: Popular Culture and Popular Identity in Modern Europe”, in Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman, eds, *Modernity and Identity*, Blackwell, 1992.

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