

GEOPOLITICAL RELATIONS AND REGIONAL RESTRUCTURING: THE CASE OF THE KUMAON HIMALAYA, INDIA

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With 4 figures, 1 table and 1 photo

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Summary: While the formation and regulation of international borders have long been on the agenda of geographical and social science research, the actions of populations residing in state-peripheries have received inadequate attention so far. Our case study focuses on the so-called ‘Bhotiyas’ in North India’s Kumaon Himalaya. The Bhotiyas consist of several valley communities who were formerly involved in trans-Himalayan trade. Their ethnic identities and livelihoods remain closely linked to the area of the Sino-Indian border, which was sealed as a result of the war between the two countries in 1962. We contend that these borderlanders are not passive victims of geopolitically induced interventions, but rather active participants in the restructuring of their contested live worlds. Based on the assumption that geopolitical realities are forged across a variety of scale-levels, we analyze shifting livelihoods in terms of both a specific socio-cultural context and broader webs of relations to which people have access or from which they are excluded. This offers new insight into highland-lowland interactions of mountain systems and brings the utilization of natural resources more strongly to the fore of borderland studies.

Zusammenfassung: Obwohl die Entstehung und die Aufrechterhaltung internationaler Grenzen schon einiges an Aufmerksamkeit in der Geographie und den Sozialwissenschaften erhalten haben, findet das Leben der in diesen staatlichen Randgebieten wohnenden Menschen bisher erst wenig Beachtung. Im Zentrum unserer Fallstudie stehen die sogenannten ‘Bhotiyas’ des Nord-Indischen Kumaon Himalaya. Die Bhotiyas umfassen mehrere Talgemeinschaften die einst im Trans-himalaya-Handel involviert waren. Bis heute verbindet sie ihre Lebensweise und ethnische Identität eng mit dem Gebiet der indisch-chinesischen Grenze, die aufgrund eines Krieges zwischen diesen beiden Ländern im Jahre 1962 geschlossen wurde. Wir zeigen auf, dass die Bhotiyas nicht hilflos den geopolitischen Dynamiken ausgeliefert waren, sondern aktiv an der Gestaltung ihrer umstrittenen Lebensumwelt teilhaben. Basierend auf der Annahme, dass geopolitische Realitäten auf unterschiedlichen skalaren Ebenen ausgehandelt werden, analysieren wir Strategien der Lebenssicherung sowohl unter Berücksichtigung des lokalen sozio-kulturellen Kontextes als auch hinsichtlich weiter gefasster Beziehungsgeflechte und den damit verbundenen Dynamiken. Der Beitrag bietet neue Erkenntnisse im Hinblick auf Hochland-Tiefland Interaktionen und zeigt die Wichtigkeit natürlicher Ressourcen für das wachsende Feld der Grenzraumforschung auf.

Keywords: Kumaon Himalaya, Bhotiyas, borderland studies, geopolitics, mountain pastoralists

1 Introduction

In many border regions around the globe, states rely heavily on bureaucratic and infrastructural interventions to exert a lasting influence at their peripheries. These efforts, however, intermingle with and are contested by the practices of the borderland populations themselves.¹⁾ Yet there are very few studies that consider environmental potentials and local liveli-

hoods to understand ongoing processes of border-making and geopolitical interrelations.²⁾ This is even more surprising in view of a vast body of literature that emphasizes the interrelation between the territorial control over natural resources and states’ aspiration to consolidate power and national integrity (PELUSO and VANDERGEEST 2011).

While both natural resources and borders are of special significance in Asia’s mountain regions, such as the Himalaya, most authors concerned with the geopolitical dimension do not inquire into its local

¹⁾ For reviews on borderland studies see ALVAREZ (1995), BAUD and VAN SCHENDEL (1997), PAASI (2009) and JOHNSON et al. (2011). Particular case studies on South Asian borders are given in WARIKOO (2009), VAN SCHENDEL (2005), ZUTSHI (2010) and JONES (2012).

²⁾ For rare exceptions see WALKER (1999) and STURGEON (2004).

effects (MOHAN 2007; SCOTT 2008).³⁾ All along the Himalaya many groups were previously involved in a complex cross-border network of social, cultural, and economic relations with residents of the Tibetan Plateau that resulted in a mutually dependent agro-trader-pastoralist economy (VAN SPENGEN 2000; BAUER 2004). While Nepal settled its border dispute with China already in 1961 (SHRESTA 2005), India and China are still at odds over large areas. These are mainly located in the Aksai Chin region of Ladakh and the Northeastern parts of Indian sovereign territory (see Fig. 1). However, the persistence of the Sino-Indian conflict shows up in manifold forms of government intervention all along the Himalayan mountain rim and raises critical issues in the daily lives of local populations.

In the present work we focus on the so-called 'Bhotiyas' in North India's Kumaon Himalaya. The Bhotiyas consist of several valley communities who were formerly involved in trans-Himalayan trade. Mainly with sheep and goats various commodities were transported between the Gangetic Plains and the Tibetan Plateau until the Sino-Indian border became sealed in 1962 due to war. As will be shown, these borderlanders are no passive victims of geopolitically induced interventions but rather active participants in the regional restructuring of their live world, in which mountain forests and grasslands play a significant role.⁴⁾ Based on the assumption that geopolitical realities are forged across a variety of scale-levels, we analyze the Bhotiyas' strategies of natural resource use in terms of both discrete socio-cultural contexts and broader webs of relations to which people have access or from which they are excluded. Historically evolving systems of land tenure and community-based institutions are of particular relevance in this regard. The interaction of local norms, formal and informal regulations, as well as external interventions all contribute to the constant adjustment of implemented working procedures and realized utilization strategies (NÜSSER and GERWIN 2008). This offers a new perspective on highland-lowland interactions and allows us to assess local responses to ongoing processes of border-making in one particular mountain region.

³⁾ KREUTZMANN (1996, 2003), however, has analyzed this interrelation in the Pamir.

⁴⁾ Regions are treated here as areas that cohere along some sort of organizing principles, such as typical subsistence strategies or social identities (GREGORY 2000, 687-690). Just like the local, these spatial forms describe no static and closed ensembles, but are rather "ceaselessly being transformed in reflexive and practical action" (PAASI 2010, 2300).

The paper proceeds with an outline of our analytic framework that combines recent advances in borderland studies with approaches of mountain geography. The empirical section is divided into three parts, namely colonial history, the period of decolonization that culminates in the Sino-Indian border conflict and finally recent dynamics that occurred after India liberalized its market in the early 1990s. In each section we consider wider geopolitical constellations and border affairs in the Himalaya in relation to the livelihood choices and coping strategies of the Bhotiyas. Moreover, we illustrate that this interplay is not uniform, but takes locally modified forms even in two neighboring transversal valleys that cut through the High Himalaya.

2 Analyzing border dynamics in a high mountain region

Fuelled by a broader epistemological critique of cold-war area studies, the interrelation between geopolitically motivated interventions and indigenous forms of agency in peripheral mountain regions has received some new scholarly impetus (FORSYTH and MICHAUD 2011). The discussion is anchored in VAN SCHENDEL'S (2002) proposal to conceive highland Asia under a single rubric, for which he suggests the neologism 'Zomia'.⁵⁾ Although this 'world area' covers large parts of Central (Inner), South, East and Southeast Asia, it remained within the blind spot of academic and political histories. In order to overcome the resulting geographies of ignorance, VAN SCHENDEL pleads for a process-oriented perspective that does not reify national borders along specific socio-cultural traits but instead focuses more strongly on interaction and exchange. Based on this agenda, SCOTT (2009) analyzed how the realization of mountain livelihoods is both tied to dynamic processes of state-formation in the lowland centers and geared towards the creation and maintenance of ungoverned non-state spaces in the uplands.

SCOTT'S version of Zomia dismantles the dominant paradigm of Southeast Asian scholarship as a state-centric vision that overlooked the manifold

⁵⁾ VAN SCHENDEL derived the concept from *zomi*, a term signifying 'highlander' in a number of Chin-Mizo-Kuki languages that are spoken in the borderlands of India, Burma and Bangladesh. As an academic device it became often associated with upland Southeast Asia, though its territorial boundaries remain deliberately vague. MICHAUD (2010) provides a detailed discussion of Zomia's territorial dimension.

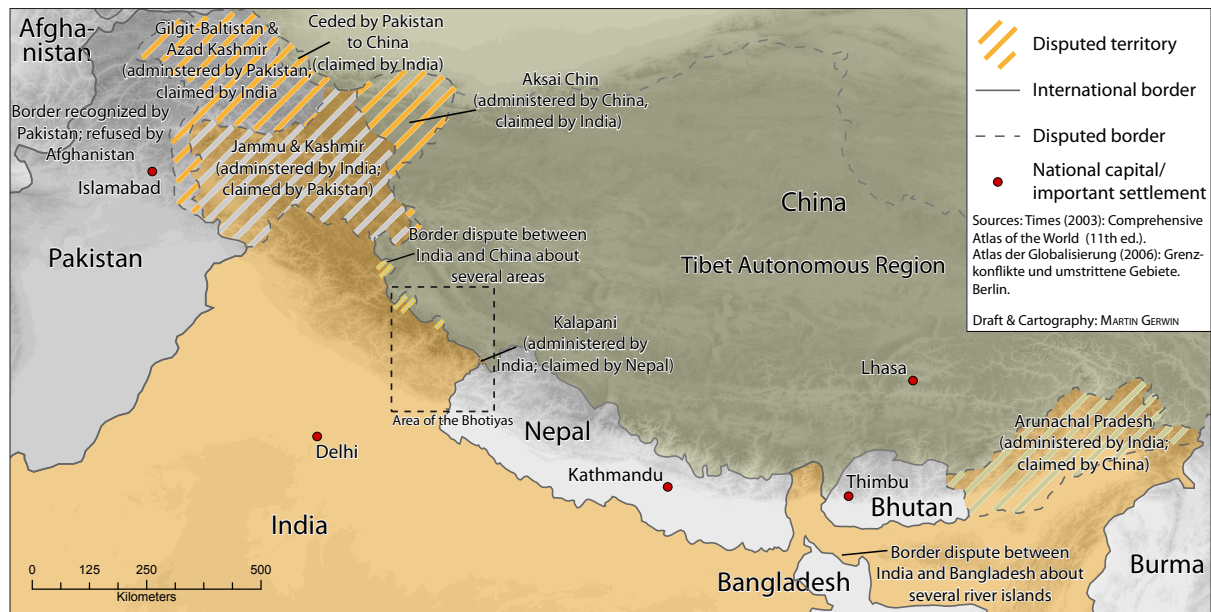


Fig. 1: Border conflicts of South Asia

histories of those residing in the unruly margins. SHNEIDERMAN (2010, 295) has convincingly shown that Himalayan studies are “suffering from the near opposite, an almost complete absence of the state” within a body of rich ethnographic literature. She therefore adopts ‘Zomia-thinking’ as a suitable framework for analyzing how big stories and national trajectories interact with the daily routines and realities of life in the Himalayan borderlands. This marks an important milestone to acknowledge both the role of multiple states in shaping highland communities and the reversal impact of local strategies on processes of state- and border-making. In this paper we contribute to these comparative conversations with a detailed case study on what we call a ‘high mountain border region’ (BERGMANN et al. 2008). Such regions are characterized by harsh environmental conditions as well as ramified networks of an agro-trader-pastoralist economy, which set an enduring scene for conflicting state-projects.

In Kumaon the mutually transformative interplay between extra-regional influences and locally situated practices is particularly visible. The regulations of forest and grassland use, for instance, were and are still shaped by the ideas of a modern-scientific forestry that became first introduced by the British colonial administration (GUHA 1989; AGRAWAL 2005). While this fact already indicates the wider economic and political dimensions of natural resource use, resulting arrangements have so far neither been analyzed with an explicit reference to resident borderland communities nor against the backdrop of

Sino-Indian border affairs and the intense regional restructuring they have triggered. In what follows we turn towards these unnoticed aspects and shed light on the complex, contingent and often also contradictory ways in which both external stakeholders and local residents imagine and perform a mountain periphery across multiple scales (DEBARBIEUX and PRICE 2008).⁶

3 Methods

Research was conducted in Uttarakhand since 2004, including initial field trips to almost all the Bhotiya-inhabited valleys of Uttarakhand. Since 2007 we concentrated our work on the Gori and Darma Valley in the Kumaon Himalaya, located to the east of Nanda Devi. For the analysis of regional and international politics, archival data from the Asia and Africa Department of the British Library in London, the Uttar Pradesh State Archive in Lucknow as well as the Regional Archive in Nainital, Uttarakhand were consulted. Additional material was surveyed

⁶ Scales are familiar methodological tools to represent an array of different analytic levels. However, they are also seen as the discrete outcomes of social practices and processes through which spatial reality is framed. Examples include national or federal state borders or village boundaries (SMITH 2000). In our analysis we follow HOWITT (2003), who conceptualizes scales as interacting webs of socio-spatial relations that are constantly shaped by the interactions and practices of diverse actors in a specific context.

in the private collection of the former Consul General to India, Wilhelm von Pochhammer, which was handed over to the South Asia Institute (SAI) Heidelberg in 1974, as well as the newspaper archive maintained by History Department of that institute. Regional dynamics were explored through open and semi-structured interviews with local villagers and shepherds as well as through discussions with government officials, including senior ones.

4 The Bhotiyas in the Kumaon Himalaya

The Kumaon Himalaya span over several ecological zones, each with specific environmental potentials and limitations for crop farming, forest and pasture use (NÜSSER 2006). The narrow belt of the Outer Himalaya (*Bhabar*) arises out of the northern parts of the Gangetic Plains (*Terai*). Up to an altitude of approximately 1,000 m this area is covered with sub-humid tropical Sal-forests (*Shorea robusta*). The Lesser Himalaya follows in northern direction. This 70 to 100 km broad belt with an elevation between 1,500 and 3,000 m is dominated by *Pinus roxburghii*-forests. The zone of the High Himalaya is about 30–50 km wide, where glaciated mountain peaks with heights above 7,000 m are found. The narrow transversal valleys give rise to montane forests, where evergreen oak forests, with *Quercus semecarpifolia*, *Qu. floribunda* and *Qu. leucotrichophora*, alternate with conifers (e.g. *Abies spectabilis*, *Cupressus torulosa*) or deciduous trees, such as *Alnus nepalensis*, *Aesculus indica* or *Acer* spp. The Tibetan Himalaya with relatively wide and shallow valley bottoms forms the northernmost part of Kumaon. These localities are covered with alpine meadows and dwarf shrubs and are widely used as summer pastures (*bug yals*).

The so-called ‘Bhotiyas’ inhabit several high mountain valleys, all of which are close to international borders in Garhwal and Kumaon, two former kingdoms and administrative units of the Indian federal state of Uttarakhand (see Fig. 2). The languages spoken in these valleys are classified by GRIERSON (1909) as belonging to the eastern subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman language family. However, most people are multilingual and speak Hindi, Pahari⁷⁾ and Nepali in addition to their

⁷⁾ Pahari literally means ‘from the mountains’ and commonly refers to the Hindu hill populations in Nepal and India, who speak Indo-European languages, which are also identified by this term.

mother tongue. Our focus rests on the residents of the Gori (named Johari) and neighboring Darma Valley (named Darmani). While the British favored the former out of politico-economic interests, the latter were often described and treated as a more backward group (BROWN 1984). In each valley the population splits up further into several exogamous patrilineal clans and lineages. Their winter settlements are located around the urbanized centers and former trade depots of Munsiri and Dharchula, which are nowadays Pahari-dominated. According to the Census of 2001, the total Bhotiya-population of Kumaon amounts to approximately 16,000 people (GoI 2003).

The indigenous category ‘Bhotiya’ was popularized as an administrative category in Kumaon under British rule (TRAILL 1832; ATKINSON 1882; SHERRING 1906).⁸⁾ When campaigns for recognition as a scheduled tribe (ST) were launched after India’s independence, local elites increasingly identified themselves as ‘Bhotiya’. Even after this status was officially awarded in 1967, ethnic identities remained highly complex and contextually negotiated (NAWA 2000; BERGMANN et al. 2011). While people publicly confess to Hindu religious practices, the term carries disliked connotations of Buddhism and beef-eating (BROWN 1992).⁹⁾ However, we still use it for making general statements because it forms part of the common, administrative and academic language.

In their former trans-Himalayan trade sugar, grain and woolen products from India were exchanged for salt, raw wool, animals and borax¹⁰⁾ in Tibet (PANT 1935, 50–60). Sheep and goats were widely reared and suited for crossing the high passes to Tibetan trade marts during the summer months. At present a reduced number of households continue to seasonally migrate towards the upper val-

⁸⁾ In Tibetan, the word *bod* stands for ‘Tibet’. In Sanskrit, writers increasingly used the word *bhotb* as a country name, viz. for Tibet, from medieval times onwards.

⁹⁾ This is a major difference to the situation in Nepal, where ‘Bhotiya’ is externally ascribed to Tibetan-speaking Buddhist groups who do themselves not claim a common ethnic identity (RAMBLE 1997). While the Nepali Bhotiyas are not an ethnic group, the Bhotiyas in Kumaon are, although they remain ambivalent towards the term ‘Bhotiya’ itself and strategize different facets according to context (BERGMANN et al. 2011).

¹⁰⁾ Raw borax or tincal is a mineral obtained from the saline lakes of Central Tibet. It was primarily utilized by the colonial and European porcelain industries as a mordant in dyeing.

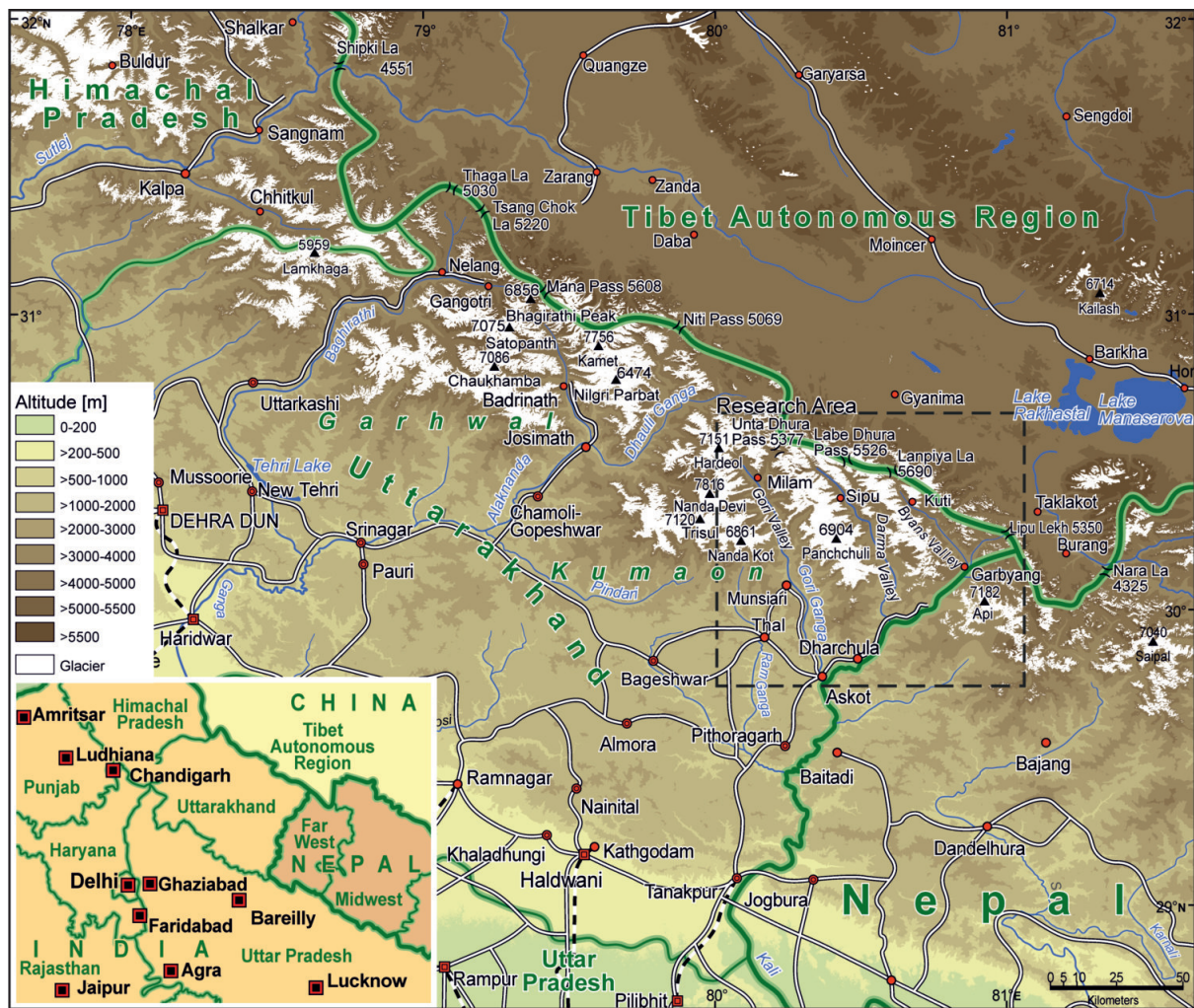


Fig. 2: The high mountain border region of Uttarakhand (Sources: Times 2003; Georeferenced SRTM-Data; Landsat-Data. Draft and Cartography: M. GERWIN, M. NÜSSER, N. HARM)

leys. They practice combined mountain agriculture (EHLERS and KREUTZMANN 2000), i.e. a mix of animal husbandry, crop cultivation and forest and pasture use in different altitudinal belts of the Kumaon Himalaya. This is now increasingly supplemented by non-agricultural income sources. In the upper settlements different species of buckwheat, barley and some vegetables such as cabbage are cultivated. In the winter settlements rice, millets and grains, as well as in higher parts (above 1,800 m), potatoes are grown. Exchange relations and dependencies in crop-farming are highly complex and have changed over time, as will be described later. Generally it can be claimed that low-caste groups (today officially recognized as scheduled caste) were, and to some extent are still closely associated with Bhotiya households, for whom they conduct many agricultural tasks.

5 Colonial legacies (1815–1947)

5.1 The rise of British control in Kumaon

Before the onset of British colonial rule interactions between the local kings and rulers of Kumaon, Tibet and Nepal formed part of a regionally arranged power constellation (BROWN 1984). The rulers focused their attention primarily on the control of the trans-Himalayan trade, both to regulate the movements of people and goods as well as to generate surplus through taxation. At least since the invasion of Kumaon by the Gorkhas, a ruling power from Nepal, in 1790, the area was brought to the fore of British strategic calculations. The defeat of the Gorkhas in 1815 allowed colonial administrators their first direct access to the Indo-Tibetan border and created a buffer between the Sikh rulers in the West and the

Gorkhas in the East (see Fig. 3). While the British intended to advance the expansion of their authority, this regularly interfered with the aspirations of Tibetan chieftains based in the trade centers beyond the high mountain border passes (POLITICAL DEPARTMENT 1899; LAMB 1989, 378).

The British were quite aware that an involvement in the trans-Himalayan trade was crucial for consolidating colonial development and forwarding their influence towards Central Asia (MOORCROFT and TREBECK 1837, xvii). The Bhotiyas, as “somewhat savage yet well-disposed subjects” (KUMAON DIVISION 1842), were seen as a crucial key by early colonial administrators to handle a border that was primarily perceived as flexible and porous. The taxation of these trading groups was successively reduced to support them (ATKINSON 1882, 147–149).

At the beginning of British colonial rule in Kumaon, the Bhotiya trade was delimited to the barter of locally needed products, such as grain, salt and

cloth, while the more lucrative long distance trade of pashmina wool, a raw material for Kashmir shawls, was exclusively conducted through middle men in Ladakh (RAPER 1812, 497–498, 530; MOORCROFT 1818, 399–400). During the winter months the animals of the Bhotiyas were predominantly grazed in forests and grasslands as well as on harvested fields in relative vicinity of the settlements at the southern slopes of the High Himalaya, such as Munsiri (WALTON 1911, 69). Especially oak forests were intensively lopped and constituted an important fodder source for the Bhotiyas’ flocks (TRAILL 1832, 11–12). Extended movements to the *Bhabar* at the margin of the Himalaya were only rarely conducted. Yet, traders regularly visited important market places (Bageshwar and Almora) and trade festivals (Thal and Jauljibi) of the Lesser Himalaya that facilitated the intermediate trade with the Pahari population (TRAILL 1828, 193–195). When the Dogras of Jammu, rivals of the British and allied to the Sikh kingdom, took over



Fig. 3: Power relations around Kumaon in 1819

Ladakh in 1834, an eastward shift of trade began. In the course of these alterations the trade volume across the routes monopolized by the Bhotiyas gradually increased (VAN SPENGEN 2000, 111–113).

5.2 From a fluid border to colonial territorial control

In the second half of the 19th century, during the time of rising imperialism and an intensifying rivalry between the British and the Russian Empire for supremacy in Central Asia ('Great Game'), the colonial administration aimed to further expand its influence into Tibet (KREUTZMANN 1996; MCKAY 2003). A number of explorers, often in close cooperation with British government agencies, enhanced the sparse information base on the high mountain valleys of Kumaon as well as the adjoining sections in Tibet. These people – including Richard Strachey, the Schlagintweit brothers and Thomas Webber – served as an advance guard for colonial expansion. However, after the East India Company had relinquished its direct control to the crown in 1858, British perceptions also aimed at defining and securing scientifically mapped national borders as well as environmental boundaries in the interior. Fiscal considerations as well as scientific and commercial interests backed these procedures (BARROW 2003).¹¹⁾

Such endeavors were only feasible with the help of local people, who carried out administrative tasks, such as revenue collections and regular reporting of affairs to executive headquarters. Especially the Rawats, a Johari-lineage from Milam¹²⁾ in the Gori Valley, were chosen to assist. These people already held some privileges in pre-British times, such as special trade rights in Tibet and a ritual superiority in their valley (POLITICAL DEPARTMENT 1898). A selected few were also trained in cartographic methods and delegated on several secret missions into Tibet from the 1860s onwards, where they travelled more inconspicuously than Europeans, whose access was often restricted due to diplomatic reasons (BISHOP 1989; WALLER 1990). Through this preferential treatment many Johari were granted better

access to education than other groups in Kumaon, which was also reflected in the building of schools in the upper Gori Valley (WEBBER 1902, 92). This augmented social disparities among the Bhotiyas and with other groups of the region throughout the 19th century (WALTON 1911, 64). During the second half of this century a rapid increase in trans-Himalayan trade, especially in wool, took place (GOUDGE 1903; SHERRING 1906, 140; see Tab. 1).¹³⁾ Reasons included the improvement of mule tracks in Kumaon, which aimed at securing access to the border districts as well as at extending the commercial relation with Tibet (WALTON 1911, 72–80). The increase, however, was also linked to dynamics of the colonial economy in the Gangetic plains, where wool mills had started an industrialized production during the 1860s (ROY 2003, 271). While at the start of this boom the Bhotiyas had exchanged their goods in Almora and Bageshwar, they increasingly began to bargain directly with middlemen of wool mills in Haldwani and Tanakpur (WALTON 1911, 69). The drainage of the *Bhabar* as well as the extension of the railway network in the 1880s had transformed these railheads into the most important market centers of Kumaon (GOUDGE 1903).

The large flocks of sheep and goats taken along the extended road for the transportation of trade goods were grazed in the forests and pastures in vicinity of the new market towns. In autumn, the grass cover of the *Pinus roxburghii* forests of the Lesser

Tab. 1: Imports of wool, borax and salt from Tibet to Kumaon in the 19th century (Sources: UP (1878); GOUDGE (1903))

	Gori Valley	Darma/Byans	Total
1840			
Wool	15 ¹	7	22
Borax	9000	8000	17000
Salt	2000	3000	5000
1877–78			
(1 year)			
Wool	4325	479	4804
Borax	10061	10335	20396
Salt	5177	8266	13443
1898–1901²			
Wool	2388	6479	8867
Borax	6808	14687	21595
Salt	5510	13855	19365

¹ Unit: maund; One *maund* equaled 100 English troy pounds (37,32 kg);

² one year average for three years

¹¹⁾ All this was closely related to the consolidation of nation-states in Europe as well as the emerging political rivalries around High Asia. Moreover, colonial ambitions were backed by a rapidly developing cartography (ARNOLD 2000).

¹²⁾ Milam, the uppermost village in the Gori Valley, was one of the most important trading centers of Kumaon (PANT 1935).

¹³⁾ The wool mills preferred Tibetan wool due to its high quality. The Bhotiyas also processed locally produced wool, mainly for weaving carpets (ROY 2003).

Himalaya provided sufficient grazing grounds. Moreover, the migratory groups negotiated customary agreements with sedentary farmers along the route in order to graze their animals on harvested fields (FOREST DEPARTMENT 1889). Especially the Johari were able to acquire more agricultural land in almost every major stage of their migration, especially around Munsiri, Bageshwar and Thal. Most often they entrusted high caste Pahari (Thakur/Rajput) with the cultivation of their land.¹⁴ This system, which was in place until the 1960s, is still remembered. As an elderly man and former tenant from a village around Munsiri reported: “The landlord [a Johari] rode his pony, followed by several of his servants on foot. Without saying many words and without coming down from his pony, he roughly inspected the grain and ordered his servants to carry it away. After that he left immediately”. This trope contributes to a narrative history, which substantiates the Bhotiyas’ economic success and the resulting hegemony towards other resident groups.

For the Eastern group of the Darmani the situation was different. The Rajwars¹⁵ of Askot placed various restrictions on them. Most notably these local aristocrats held proprietary rights on village territory and thus harshly controlled and restricted access to already scarce cultivable land around Dharchula and along the Kali River. Instead of giving land to local Bhotiya-groups, the Rajwars preferred to bring in outsiders (mainly Pahari) for conducting agricultural work (WALTON 1911, 212). The British for strategic reasons supported this practice. As HENRY RAMSEY, the former commissioner of Kumaon, wrote in 1873: “If political difficulties arise on the eastern frontier of Kumaon, the Rajwar’s services will be as much required and as valuable as ever, and to maintain his important position, it is most desirable that his formal status be maintained” (quoted in: NEHRU 1942, 144). This also explains the occurrence of different migratory patterns of Johari and Darmani. The former already kept year-round habitations in Munsiri, as only some household members were involved in the whole migratory cycle (ATKINSON 1882, 597). The migratory cycle of the Darmani, by

¹⁴ Grain, such as barley and rice, was taken by the Bhotiyas as tenure or traded for salt. The export of these crops to Tibet formed an important part of the cross-border trade (UP 1878).

¹⁵ Rajwar was the official title of the ruling powers in the Askot principality near Dharchula. They are considered as descendants from the medieval Katyuri kings of Kumaon, though their feudality became tributary to the Chand kingdom.

contrast, concerned the whole family who left behind rather provisional houses along the Kali River (LANDOR 1899, 33; WALTON 1911, 108).¹⁶

In the meantime, British perceptions of pastoral migration became increasingly influenced by the implementation of a restrictive policy in the interior, which resulted in a gradual enclosure of the Bhotiyas’ movements by complex institutional and administrative arrangements. This development was further fueled by a huge demand in natural resources, especially timber, for intensified railway constructions. After the Indian Forest Act was established in 1878, large tracts of the *Terai* and *Bhabar* forests around Haldwani and Tanakpur were demarcated as Reserved Forests (GUHA 1989; DANGWAL 2009). During the 1890s the British introduced further regulations to directly act on migratory patterns, such as the installation of officially sanctioned halting places (*paraos*) in the Lesser Himalaya. While at these intermediate spots stays were temporally restricted to a maximum of three days, the allotted grazing tracts in the *Bhabar* and *Terai* remained accessible from December to February with a grazing fee of six *annas*¹⁷ per animal (FOREST DEPARTMENT 1898; GOUDGE 1903). The high degree of mobility in general was now considered the cause for the surging disregard of operative regulations, since “[t]he absence of any control over them has in a way spoilt them and they seem to have very little respect for authority. The wandering life they lead [...] encourages lawless habits” (POLITICAL DEPARTMENT 1895).

In 1903 a British military force, led by Francis Younghusband, invaded Tibet to drive back the still assumed Russian influence in Tibet. The information gathered by the *Rawat*-explorers, particularly their maps, proved very useful to navigate the troops (YOUNGHUSBAND et al. 1905). After the Tibetans had been defeated, a trade agreement was imposed, which sanctioned the establishment of British trade posts on the Plateau (McKAY 1992).¹⁸ Despite these inter-

¹⁶ The population of Kumaon almost doubled between 1870 and 1900 (WALTON 1911, 6). This also led to an expansion of field cropping all over the region (DANGWAL 2009).

¹⁷ Sixteen *annas* equaled one Rupee.

¹⁸ In the following Anglo-Chinese and Anglo-Russian Conventions of 1906 and 1907, China’s claim (‘suzerainty’) on Tibet was acknowledged by these great powers (GOLDSTEIN 1989, 830; KREUTZMANN 2007, 7). However, after a momentary collapse of Chinese power in 1912, the British re-negotiated their position with the Tibetans. As a result, the so-called McMahon-Line emerged as the agreed border in the North-East Frontier Agency from Bhutan to Burma in 1914, which

ventions a gradual restructuring of the Bhotiya trade took place from the 1920s onwards. Commercial activities with the Tibetans gradually began to dry up, since Tibetan wool was successively replaced by imports from Europe and Australia. Furthermore, Tibetan salt was gradually superseded by cheaper substitutes from the coastal areas of India (VON FÜRER-HAIMENDORF 1975, 62; ROY 2003, 258). In the course of these alterations the main commercial routes shifted eastwards, linking Sikkim with the ports of Bengal (FOREIGN DEPARTMENT 1947). Elderly people report that during this time more Bhotiyas became involved in working on agricultural fields themselves in order to compensate for losses under changing trading constellations.

6 The Indo-China war and its consequences (1947–1991)

After India's independence in 1947 and after the Communist Party had taken power in China in 1949, a period of cautious cooperation between the two countries began. This cooperation stemmed from the notion of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism with the idea of a self-managed Asia at the centre (GUHA 2007). After the Indian Government had recognized China's control in Tibet in 1951, both countries negotiated a trade agreement in 1954 (Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence – *Panch Shila*), in which the disagreements on the common border were played down (GOI 1960). Indian state official conceived the High Himalaya as an effective natural barrier that would prevent any serious threat (NEHRU 1952, 74). This position also justified the minimal expenditures spent on development interventions.

The Chinese Government, however, implemented a large infrastructural program directly after their invasion of Tibet in 1950 (GINSBERG and MATHOS 1960). Politically the most critical intervention of this kind was the construction of a road through the Aksai Chin area of Ladakh, which was discovered at the end of the 1950s by the Indian administration (KREUTZMANN 2007). This fueled an increasingly adversarial situation on the border. Both governments frequently tried to substantiate their claims through older cartographic visualizations, a procedure which Nehru labeled as a “war of maps” (GOI 1961). Finally, the situation escalated with the outbreak of war in October 1962. Once the Chinese army had broken down almost all defens-

es of the Indian army as early as November of that year, they unilaterally declared a cease-fire and moved back behind the MacMahon-Line in the Northeast, but kept the Aksai Chin occupied. The resulting frontier later became officially known as the Line of Actual Control (LAC) (MAXWELL 1972). Soon after the war Indian officials began intensive discussions about military strategies and failures, which were picked up by the media and regional politicians. Subsequently the military budget was drastically enhanced, making it possible to secure the borders in the Himalaya that had then become overshadowed not only by the conflict with China but also with Pakistan. It was during that time that the Border Road Organization (BRO), the Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and secret agencies surveying these areas were founded.

One of the most consequential interventions by the Indian state was an extensive military road-building program, which opened up many of the Himalayan border valleys on the Indian side including those in Kumaon (NAUTIYAL et al. 2003). While most roads were built directly in the years following the war, their total length in Kumaon increased from 360 km in 1947 to 6,421 km in 1991 (RAWAT 1999, 118). The stronger government efforts to control the region also became noticeable in an increase of rural development programs. School building activities, as well as the implementation of an enlarged administrative structure in the mountain area of Kumaon indicate this trend. In the Bhotiya valleys most of the existing government and public facilities, such as Block Development Offices, hospitals or secondary schools were established in the years of drastically enhanced state presence following the border war.

A further source of turbulence for the Bhotiyas arose from the ‘Kumaon and Uttarakhand Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act of 1960’, which was finally completed in the area in 1966. This act was drafted with the intention of transferring the ownership for agricultural land to the actual cultivator (GoUP 1967). The Bhotiyas, especially the ones from the Gori Valley, almost completely lost their access to pastures and land in the foothills and the Lesser Himalaya. Around Munsiriari however, they were able to keep a considerable amount of land through extensive negotiations. Johari elders allude to the fact that the implementation took place over several years. Being well informed they were – at least partially – able to bypass these ongoing procedures through the (temporary) cultivation of fields by themselves or relatives. The Darmani were less affected, since traditionally they had developed far less landlord-tenant relations.

still lies at the heart of contestations between India and China (LAMB 1989).

All these negotiation processes were backed by various interest groups, which were founded on the valley level to efficiently represent the community in internal and external affairs (SRIVASTAVA 1966). Right after India's independence the 'Kumaon Bhotiya Peoples' Federation' (KBPF) was established as an organ vis-à-vis emerging state structures. In their first memorandum the federation defined 'Bhotiya' as a backward community that demanded special statutory safeguards to "promote economic welfare, and social and cultural uplift" (KBPF 1947, 18). Soon after, when the Indian Government started to list possible scheduled tribe (ST) candidates, the Bhotiya-leaders claimed for recognition and laid emphasis on their 'primitiveness' and 'disadvantage' as former trans-Himalayan and cross-border traders. When they finally succeeded in 1967, this guaranteed them quota-access to universities, government services and the legislature, besides other privileges. The Central Government strongly supported the Bhotiyas' endeavor in opposition to the then Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and the majority of the Pahari population (HUSAIN 1995, 11). The justifications given for the recognition by the Central Government was the potential drift of the Bhotiyas towards China if not supported on the Indian side.

In the situation of a 'new periphery', seasonal migration drastically decreased in the Gori, but only slightly retreated in the Darma Valley.¹⁹⁾ The former winter settlements of Munsiri and Dharchula developed into new economic and administrative centers, where non-agricultural employment became increasingly important. Bhotiyas managed to hold key positions in local politics and were able not only to retain, but also to expand their property in the expanding *bazaars*.²⁰⁾ This development was accompanied by a decrease in sheep and goats herding in favor of cattle (KBPF 1947, GoU 2003), which is the preferred species for all-year agriculture in the middle sections of the valley. In Munsiri the montane oak forests around the settlement often exhibit a herbaceous understorey that was progressively used for pasturing cattle, supplemented by stall-feeding during the winter months.

¹⁹⁾ Milam in the Gori Valley, for instance, recorded a reduction of migrating households from 600 in the 1930s (Pant 1935, 240) to only 23 households in 1981 (GoI 1984). In the Darma Valley seasonal migration reduced less drastically, namely from a total of 2,674 people in 1961 to still 2,222 in 1981 (GoI 1966; 1984).

²⁰⁾ In 2010 the Johari owned around 70 % of the houses in the Munsiri market. Ethnic affiliations of actual tenants, however, vary more strongly.

The *van panchayats*, village-based councils for regulating the use of forests and grasslands, played a key role in this regard.²¹⁾ These quite heterogeneous bodies also include other tribal as well as non-tribal Pahari members. However, especially some influential Bhotiyas made their voice heard better than others. Reasons for this include the reliance on scheduled tribe quota for accessing the *van panchayat* ruling committees as well as their general visibility as a powerful group, which is propagated through self-founded development associations and cultural clubs. Moreover, the public performance of a tribal identity as being intimately linked to the bygone and prosperous days of cross-border trade supports their dominance in local and scientific historiography as well as in regional politics (BERGMANN et al. 2011).

Until the early 1990s most parts of the Bhotiya valleys remained enclosed in so-called 'Inner Line' areas, which imposed strict regulations on the access of external people due to concerns of border security (*Statesman* 1981). Local people often complained that this restriction had inhibited economic development as well as an earlier setup of a tourism industry. In other words, the area formed part of a geopolitical horizon for nation building, while its people were kept at the peripheries of economic growth. The end of this situation and the gradual rise of a market oriented-borderland once again altered people's scope for action significantly.

7 Fresh rounds of globalization and new ambitions at the border (1991–today)

Initiated through early debates during the 1980s, India started to liberalize its market in 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and a subsequent orientation towards the United States of America and international trade organizations such as the International Monetary Fund (CORBRIDGE 2009). While most authors interpret this transformation in terms of intensifying frictions within a nationalized and protective economy (BERGER and GOSH 2010), KOHLI (2006) assumes that an equally important impulse was given by leading militaries who feared the vanishing of defensive capabilities on the state's bor-

²¹⁾ The first councils of this sort were legally recognized in Kumaon in 1931, which makes them one of the oldest surviving examples of formally approved agreements between state authorities and local user groups in the world (AGRAWAL 2005). Around Munsiri, however, most councils became implemented during the 1960s and early 1970s.

ders due to debts and missing arms supplies via the Soviet Union. A tentative rapprochement between India and China had already taken place after the then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had visited China in 1988. Though first joint working groups for the border issue were set up, a satisfactory solution could not be found (MOHAN 2007). Despite various setbacks and obstacles, the first two border-passes, namely the Shipki La in Himachal Pradesh and the Lipu Lekh in Kumaon, were re-opened for trade in 1992 (VASAN 2006). Since 2008 China is India's largest trading partner with an annual volume of USD 51.8 billion (CII 2010)²².

These developments on the national scale are relevant factors when considering regional processes. Here the federal independence of Uttarakhand, which was achieved in 2000, is most important. After decades of agitation the new state was finally carved out from Uttar Pradesh, the most populated Indian state, whose government had regularly ignored demands coming from these peripheries (RANGAN 2000). In a situation of federal competition for the allocation of funds, the Uttarakhand Government set up a mountain specific agenda, which aimed at tuning market-based approaches of development to local requirements. Medicinal plants, hydro-energy and tourism are the most important building blocks in this endeavor and promoted through special programs (*Garhwal Post* 2009). Moreover, Uttarakhand profits from the 'Border Area Development Program' that covers all the high valleys of Uttarakhand and promotes investments in infrastructure, education and agriculture (*Tribune* 2011).

The mentioned processes are fueled by a more confident policy of the Indian Government towards its Himalayan border areas (MOHAN 2007). Ambitious plans of integrating the uppermost settlements of the Gori and Darma Valley with the state's road network are a good indicator of this. The claim of a high government official in Uttarakhand reflects a strongly held point: "Our neighbors China and Nepal are building roads, we can not afford to stay behind". Private and state-owned companies also financially support these infrastructural endeavors, on which they depend for the construction of numerous hydro-plants with an aspired total capacity of over

1000 MW along the upper Gori River and the lower sections of the Kali River (*Tribune* 2010a).

Among the Bhotiyas these projects are highly disputed, due to diverging ideas about how the region should be developed. On the one hand people argue that dams would generate an important impetus for investments and new jobs (*Tribune* 2010b/Photo 1). Due to the long-time military recruitment of Bhotiyas, which even intensified after the border war in 1962, geostrategic arguments of national security also found their way into the discussion. On the other hand environmental activists, among them also some Bhotiyas, demand for ecologically more balanced procedures.

In the midst of these negotiations an increase in seasonal migration towards the upper settlements is noticeable in both valleys. During the summer months of 2004, for instance, 18 households stayed in Milam (NÜSSER 2006, 20); in 2010 this number rose to 22. Also in the other villages of the upper Gori Valley the number of households migrating to the summer settlements has approximately increased by 30% in that time period. Alongside the above-mentioned projects, the cultivation and (illegal) collection of aromatic and medicinal plants marks an important incentive behind this trend. Besides *Aconitum heterophyllum* (*atis*) and *Picrorhiza kurroa* (*kutki*), which are collected between August and November, especially *Cordyceps sinensis* (*kida*), a fungus that grows on a caterpillar larva, has become of particular interest for local gatherers in the last decade. The fungus is highly appreciated as a tonic, aphrodisiac agent and status symbol among large sections of the Chinese upper class, where great quantities are sold (WINKLER 2008). It is gathered primarily on high altitude grasslands above 3,200 m from May to July and then sold at local rates of around 200,000–700,000 Indian Rupees (INR)²³ per kilo to middlemen at the markets of Munsiri and Dharchula. While these activities so far are only sparsely controlled by administrative procedures, the Uttarakhand Government heavily supports the cultivation of medicinal plants, especially *Allium stracheyi* (*jambu*) and *Carum carvi* (*thoya*), in the upper Bhotiya settlements. While in the Gori Valley first plots were established by the state-sponsored Herbal Research and Development Institute, the initiative is in its testing phase in the Darma Valley. However, for local residents the collection in the wild is still a much more attractive option (BERGMANN et al. 2012).

²² The Indian Government was keen to re-open the Lipu Lekh pass, as this allows a selected number of Indian citizens to make a pilgrimage to sacred Mount Kailash in Tibet. Trade, however, plays a rather marginal role so far. In 2006 the China-India friendship year was celebrated and set in scene with the reopening of the Nathu La pass in Sikkim.

²³ In July 2010, 58 INR equalled one Euro. The stated amounts approximately equal a sum between EUR 3,200 and 15,000.



Photo 1: Bhotiyas demonstrating for a motor road in Dharcula (Photo: MARTIN GERWIN 2010)

The control over the collection of these species is progressively transferred to the communal resource regulating bodies. In the Gori Valley the existing *van panchayats* of the upper settlements are strongly supported by various NGOs, which started operating in the area in the 1990s.²⁴ In the last years the grazing grounds belonging to these *van panchayats* are used increasingly by non-tribal shepherds stemming from the lower parts of the Gori Valley, the Pindari Valley located south of Nanda Devi or even from Himachal Pradesh (see Fig. 4). They are required to pay INR 3–5 per sheep and goat and up to INR 20 per horse as a grazing fee during the summer months to the respective council. Whereas most of the Johari who seasonally live in the summer settlements nowadays possess only a few or no animals at all, the grazing of outside groups constitutes a further source of income in the upper val-

²⁴ Already during the 1990s the Joint Forest Management Program influenced the *van panchayats*. This India-wide scheme of community-based natural resource use was co-financed by the World Bank and was influenced by the terminology of international development cooperation. Key concepts are transparency, empowerment and gender-equality (SARIN 2001). Continuing these efforts, the present government of Uttarakhand aims at ensuring a greater economic viability of the *van panchayats*.

ley.²⁵ In the Darma Valley *van panchayats* are far less important at the moment. The efforts of the Forest Department to revise and control the implementation of rules for extracting resources is rather low and also the villagers themselves prefer a reliance on informal institutions for regulating the grazing of animals as well as the collection of medicinal plants. Most of the high altitude pastures are still used by local flocks, though employed shepherds mostly take care of the flocks.

8 Discussion and conclusion

Future prospects of Sino-Indian relations are irrevocably entwined with the ability of these new centres of power “to share the same mountain” – the Himalaya – and to settle remaining disputes that are pending since the border war in 1962 (MALONE 2011, 152). Both governments fostered their military presence and made heavy investments in infrastruc-

²⁵ Approximately 35 flocks (with a maximal size of 400 animals) were brought to high pastures by Johari-shepherds in 2010. The shepherds manage the flocks either on their own account or on the behalf of owners, residing in Muniari. Their relation to village residents is often very close and access to pastures is mostly negotiated informally.

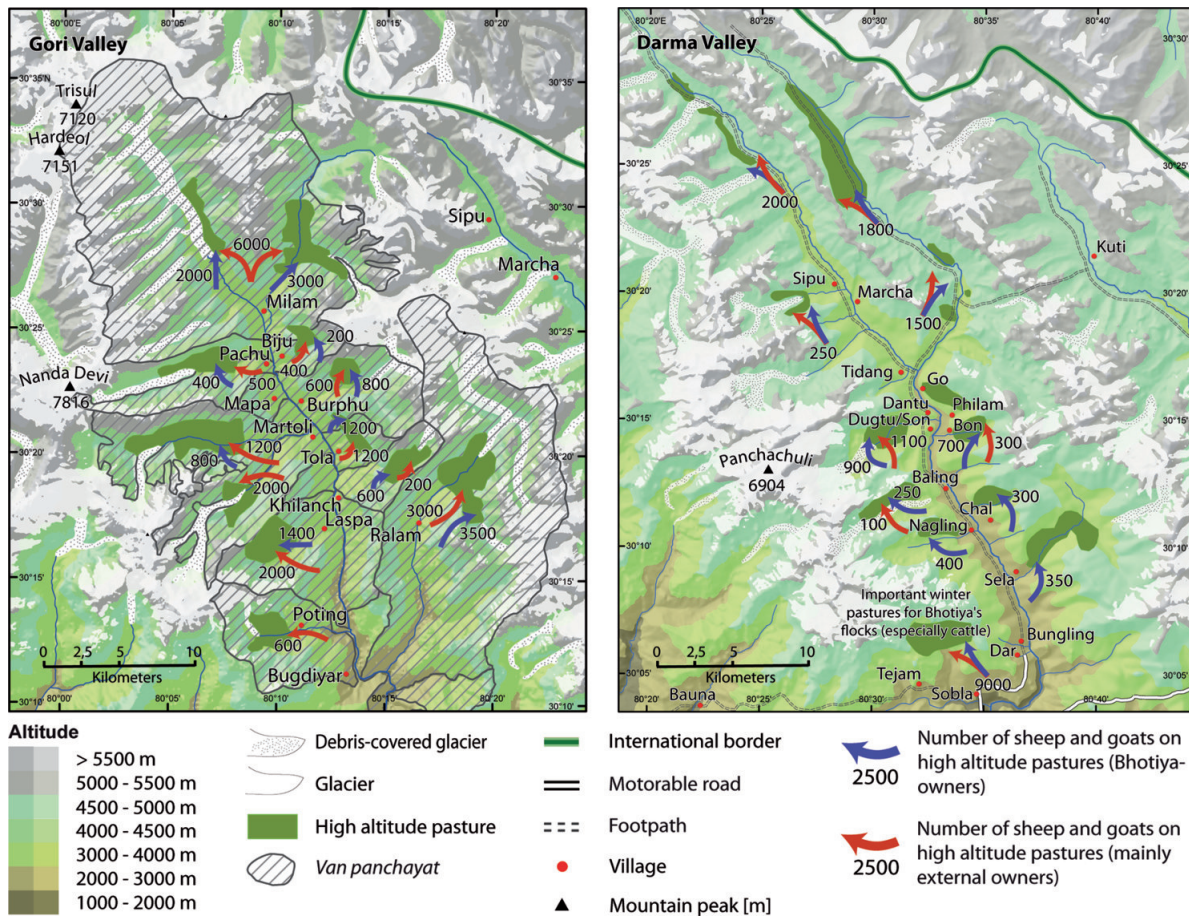


Fig. 4: Pasture use in the upper Gori and Darma Valley

Sources: Georeferenced SRTM 4-Data; SCHWEIZERISCHE STIFTUNG FÜR ALPINE FORSCHUNG (1992): Garhwal-Himalaya-Ost 1:150 000, 2. ed. ; Landsat-TM+Data (145/39), 20-10.2001;(144/39), 11-9-1999; GoUT (2009); own survey (M. GERWIN and C. BERGMANN)

tural development in their high mountain peripheries. When India started to liberalize its market in the early 1990s, commercial interests increasingly affected geopolitical imperatives and advanced new patterns of regional restructuring. While rapid economic growth as well as the rising international significance of both countries attracted much public and academic attention, related and equally compelling aspects remained largely ignored. How are such major transformations experienced and negotiated by the ethnic minorities who reside in the mountain peripheries? What implications do they have for the ways these people make a living? We tackled these issues by introducing the case of the Kumaon Himalaya and its borderland residents, the Bhotiyas. This allowed us to countervail the widespread critique that analyses in Political Geography and Critical Geopolitics are only rarely built upon first-hand knowledge of the local setting (MEGORAN 2006; Ó TUATHAIL 2010).

Our analytical approach advocated Zomia-thinking as the dual strategy of focusing on the role of national histories and government policies in shaping highland communities as well as on active local strategies and their effects on state- and border-making. The notion of ‘scale’ served as a fruitful entry point for contextualizing historical “orderings and re-orderings of the socio-spatial landscape, including new geographies of accumulation, state power, and hegemony” (JESSOP et al. 2008, 395). Scales are generally seen as the hierarchical spatial divisions that fall between the local and the global. However, in order not to lose touch with the concrete practices of everyday life that form the bedrock of such divisions and their restructuring, we followed authors who conceptualize them as contested webs of relations to which some people have access “at different levels, or with a wider geographical span, [while] others do not” (VAN SCHENDEL 2005, 10).

The resulting 'politics of scale' (COX 1998) is of particular relevance to Himalayan pastoralists, because their far-reaching (cross-border) seasonal movements are enclosed within shifting institutional and administrative arrangements. Relevant examples include the replacement of informal institutions by stately sanctioned formal ones at the village level; the implementation of a comprehensive system of affirmative action that fuelled new strategies among the ethnic minorities who reside in the transversal Himalayan valleys; the building of dams and road infrastructure that integrate these peripheries with state- and nation-wide development; and at the scale of international relations, a sealed and militarized border. We emphasized the Bhotiyas' proactive negotiations within these rather complex relational webs. In conclusion, the example of their high mountain border region confirms the practical relevance of a Zomian-perspective, since it draws in more comprehensively people's ability to craft tailored responses to broader transformations without falling victim to them.

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