

Kumaun Histories and Kumauni Identities c.1815–1990's

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The emergence of 'History' as a practice and as a discipline, which transformed inherited oral traditions into textual products, has to be located in the modern period.¹I. Chambers says that history transcribed all human practice- 'it registered, transmitted and translated the past, and it reordered and rewrote the world.'²The discipline, as it emerged in Europe, was predicated upon an understanding of the past as a period when men were not free, whereas the 'modern' present was considered emancipatory because in modernity, 'identity becomes more mobile, multiple, personal, self-reflexive and subject to change and innovation.'³ The modern was therefore understood as rupture, which made the writing of history possible.⁴ The extension of this project to the colonies also generated a history of the colonial peoples. The emergence of Kumauni history and identity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is located in this context.

The East India Company acquired control over Kumaun after the defeat of the Gorkhas in 1815. The Kumaun Division was made into a separate administrative unit, which included the present day districts of Pauri, Tehri, Chamoli, Uttarkashi, Rudraprayag, Dehradun, Haridwar (Garhwal) and Almora, Nainital, Bageshwar, Champawat, Uddham Singh Nagar and Pithoragarh (Kumaun). Though administrative boundaries were subject to change during the period, colonial administrators recognised that the Kumaun Division included two distinct cultural units- Garhwal and Kumaun. By the 1930s, this was also recognised and endorsed by the people of the region who identified themselves as Kumauni.⁵

Colonial rule provided Kumaun with its first textual account which appears in the great tradition of Imperial Gazetteer writing, in the six volume work of E.T Atkinson entitled, *The Himalayan Districts Gazetteer*.⁶ These six volumes provided information about geology, flora,

fauna, geography, religious beliefs and caste practices. Atkinson's understanding of the history of the region was foundational and continues to resonate in histories of Kumaun even today. It may be summarised as follows:- the original residents of the hills were the *Dasyus*, also referred to as *Doms*, (aboriginal) 'the Doms in the hills are not a local race peculiar to Kumaun, but the remains of an aboriginal tribe conquered and enslaved by the immigrant Khasas.'⁷The Khasas were of, 'an Aryan descent in the widest sense of that term much modified by local influences, but whether they are to be attributed to the Vedic immigration itself or to an earlier or later movement of tribes having a similar origin, there is little to show. It is probable, however, that they belong to a nation which has left its name in various parts of the Himalaya.'⁸The Khasas though Aryans, 'did not follow caste injunctions and were eventually defeated and relegated to inferior status by more evolved upper caste Brahmans and Kshatriyas who came to Kumaun from the southern reaches of the Indo-Gangetic plains.'⁹Eventually, Atkinsonian history asserts that Europeans, superior in culture and technology acquired ascendancy over the upper castes of Kumaun. The evolutionary telos of Atkinson's history narrative began in a primitive past that unfolded towards a present, which brought Kumaun into the ambit of the British empire.

In its attempt to explicate the present domination of local upper caste elites and imperial authorities, this narrative promoted a selection between what, 'must be understood and what must be *forgotten* in order to obtain the representation of a present intelligibility, ' to make contemporary stratification credible and intelligible.¹⁰In the particular context of Kumaun, the Brahmans had to be understood and Khasa history forgotten for the credibility of the imperial power structure. Upper caste genealogies in manuscript form were accepted but local legends figured in the narrative only for corroboration of events. The term Khasa was consigned to hoary antiquity and the period of Khasa rule, outlined in the

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oral tradition, was submerged. The Khasas were fixed in Kumaun history as an immutable category, as part of the ethnographic archive. Similarly, the Bhotias who connected the Himalayas and the Trans-Himalayas (Tibet) through trade were also placed in an ethnographic past which explained their subordination.

Atkinson's delineation was primarily based upon published texts, manuscripts, copper plate inscriptions, genealogies and information given by local brahmins which viewed the oral bardic tradition with suspicion. Atkinson's work also relied on the writings of the early administrators of Kumaun who believed that British rule would benefit the people and sought to validate imperial domination. This domination was presented as inevitable, and did not mark discontinuity and rupture in the manner in which European history marked the modern. The trans-Himalayan connection lost its significance and the sacred geography of the region, by emphasizing pilgrimage, located the Himalayan Districts in the larger context of the North Western Provinces and the British Empire.¹¹

This particular interpretation of Kumaun history established an orthodoxy which dominated historical writings during the colonial period. The emergence of print and better rail and road communications aligned Kumaun with North India. The *Samai Vinod* newspaper dominated Kumaun during 1870s,¹² whereas the *Almora Akhbar* structured the vision of the Kumaun intelligentsia from the 1870s to the second decade of the twentieth century.¹³ Its declared object was 'in order successfully to carry out the important reforms which at present form the principal topics of discussion viz. the education of women, the remarriage of widows, the curtailment of marriage expenses, the removal of native prejudices against visiting England the abolition of the practice of early marriage, polygamy, the practice of receiving money from the girls parents in marriage cooperation is necessary.'¹⁴ The *Almora Akhbar* was later replaced by the *Shakti*, which maintained and supported the claims of the Kumaun intelligentsia to represent the Kumaun tradition.¹⁵ The brahman ascendancy was also legitimated by references to works in Sanskrit. Work of Gumani were published, and scholars referred to a large number of unpublished Sanskrit works such as the *Manaskhand*,¹⁶ *Kurmanchal kavya* or *Kalyanchandrodaya kavya*¹⁷ and *Traivarnik Nyaya*.¹⁸ The *Almora Akhbar* and *Shakti* carried a large number of articles devoted to Sanskrit texts written by Kumauni scholars. Ram Dutt Jyotirvid, Shridhar Pathak, Mathura Dutt Trivedi, Rudra Dev Joshi and others emphasised this aspect of Kumaun's intellectual tradition. The high tradition of the Kumauni language was underlined, and initially the Kumaun intelligentsia did not encourage the publication of ballads and folk

songs, it did collate a Kumauni literary tradition by publishing copper plate inscriptions along with local adages and proverbs. It also made an effort to compile a Kumauni dictionary.

Tara Dutt Gairola collaborated with the Christian missionary E.S Oakley and published *Himalayan Folklore*, a translation into English of Kumaun and Garhwal legends.¹⁹ In retrospect and in comparison with later collections, this anthology has many references to *sati* and is silent about polyandry. Gauri Dutt Pande, popularly known as Gaurda was also published and quoted in the local papers. His writings depict a modern sensibility and cover a wide range of issues about caste, celebration of festivals, about local movements against *begar* and *utar* and poems in support of the national movement. The publication of the journal *Achal* devoted entirely to Kumauni culture was published for some years between 1938 and 1939.²⁰ It was published by Dharma Nand Pant and was edited by Jivan Chandra Joshi and Tara Dutt Pande. Its contributors were primarily upper caste and its construction of Kumaun culture was therefore from a brahmanical perspective.

The Atkinsonian formulation which supported brahmanical superiority was further embellished and elaborated by sections of the intelligentsia. This construction led to a growing corpus of genealogical literature known as the *vanshavalis*. Rudra Dutt Pant's *vanshavalis* had been cited by Atkinson and genealogies documenting migration of the brahmins were now published and historical writings depicted the upper caste traditions as the Kumaun culture. This was also favoured by the Census operations, which were unable to recognise and categorise the specificity of Kumaun's stratification. The importance of Census modalities can be understood by the manner in which Kumaun society articulated a caste hierarchy during the nineteenth century which was in consonance with the *varna* system.²¹ This understanding of Kumaun society therefore repressed the Khasa element, and did not grant it visibility either in contemporary or historical representation.

Yet, the exigencies of imperialist administration also engendered an entirely different perspective of Kumaun history, which interrogated Atkinson's account and emphasised other aspects of its contemporary life. Administrative strategies produced a perspective on Kumaun which was at odds with the evolutionary teleology of Atkinson's account. The compilation of colonial records like the *Settlement Reports*,²² V. A. Stowell's *A Manual Of The Land Tenures Of The Kumaun Division*²³ and Tara Dutt Gairola's *Selected Revenue Decisions Of Kumaun*, recognised Kumaun as a distinct administrative unit.²⁴ Over the nineteenth century, British administrators recognised the particularity of Kumaun's

mountain topography, the difficulty of communication within the region and decided to put it under a special dispensation. Kumaun was administered initially as an extra-regulation tract, and later as a Scheduled District till the 1920s.²⁵ An essential feature of this was a rough and ready administration, not bound by rules and regulations. This comes through in the much celebrated accounts of administrators such as G.W. Traill and H. Ramsay.²⁶ The official recognition of the distinctness of the Kumaun Division, fostered an understanding of its specificity in the context of the British empire. The boundaries of Kumaun on the northern and the eastern frontier demarcated it from Tibet and Nepal. The integration of the Kumaun into the empire therefore defined not only its geographical limits, but also its economic and social connection with the imperial dominions.

The *Almora Akhbar* noted the economic changes that had occurred in Kumaun during British rule and articles in *Shakti*, *Kumaun Kumud* and *Tarun Kumaun* also documented these changes. A well researched perspective was provided by S. D Pant in his book *The Social Economy of the Himalayans*. He provided a detailed picture of the Almora region- its agriculture, industries, trade, implements, cattle, commercial crops, manures, marketing and transport. The thrust of the book was towards indicating the initiative and energy of the hill folk in their adaptation to the rigors of life in the Himalayas. This was represented as the indomitable urge of man towards mastery over nature. S. D Pant emphasised the fact that, 'the picturesque terraces of the Himalayan slopes that greet the eyes of the traveller represent an extraordinary degree of strenuous toil and resourcefulness, such as have been surpassed in few regions of the world.'²⁷

Improvement in communications and the arrival of the railways to the foot hills of the Kumaun Himalayas led to an increasing influx of visitors. After 1858, the Kumaun was developed for its summer resorts where English families could replicate British life styles in temperate climates. Over the nineteenth century, Nainital developed as a salubrious hill station, and as a summer capital of the provincial government and Kumaun began to attract a variety of travellers. *Almoria* celebrated this aspect of life in Almora, which was made even more comfortable by the large number of domestics that could be employed.²⁸

The Tarai and the Himalayan forests also attracted a large number of hunting groups, the *shikaris*. This interest generated a number of travelogues and other colonial accounts about Kumaun which also provided ethnographic profiles.²⁹ Mountaineer in his memoirs reports on the large number of *shikaris* who were considered poor marksmen.³⁰ By the early years of the

twentieth century, the Tarai had become an ideal spot for hunting expeditions and G. R Kala describes one such trip which he had to organise in his official capacity during the difficult years of non-cooperation.³¹ These accounts celebrated the simplicity, honesty, unspoilt and child-like quality of the Kumauni 'native'. Colonial authorities and visitors remarked upon the harsh conditions of peasant life. This also reinforced the British patrimonialism.

It is interesting to note that during the last decades of the nineteenth century, when the Kumaun intelligentsia enthused by nationalist aspirations began to express dissent, this perspective discouraged such assertions in the name of a special relationship between the British officials and the common peasant folk. The growing menace of man eating tigers in the colonial period because of agricultural extension and hunting expeditions made the Kumaun peasantry dependent on individuals like Jim Corbett. His writings about Kumaun provide a vivid, detailed and yet nuanced picture of Kumaun society which documents his intimate knowledge not only of Kumaun's flora and fauna, but also its language and culture. He started his career in the early decades of the twentieth century and by the time *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* was published, he was a household name in Kumaun.³² British officials were also naturalists and in their accounts we find a passing reference to the region's forest tribes but a silence about the intelligentsia.³³

British administration sought to legitimise itself by emphasising difference and insisting on the colonised's need for governance and guidance. The universal humanism of European history was undercut by the sub-text of imperialism which represented the colonised as the 'other', the binary opposite of the reflexive self. Edward Said has referred to this discursive regime as Orientalism. The people of Kumaun were considered different (from the British and from other Indians), because of 'backward customs'. Emergent anthropology carried forward the binary typology of evolved and primitive races, cultures and societies. It noted that 'the distinctive differences between races, civilisations and languages was radical and ineradicable. It went to the bottom of things, it asserted that there was no escape from origins and the types these origins enabled.'³⁴ The history of origins, chose to essentialise characteristics of nations and explain domination by imperial powers in the colonies. According to this reckoning the backward races of Kumaun, because of their origins, required the British for the articulation of their self-interest. This perspective also resisted the nationalist aspirations of the Kumaun intelligentsia, who claimed to speak on behalf of the people.

Over the nineteenth century, as British officials familiarised themselves with marriage and family customs of the local people such as- brideprice, levirate,

polyandry and widow remarriage, they overcame their initial incomprehension and contextualised these practices as traces of primitivism and backwardness.³⁵ Colonial administrators tended to view colonial society as static, frozen and fixed and felt that codification of customary law would reduce judicial litigation and facilitate administration. This aspect is amply borne out by a story narrated by Jim Corbett in *My India*, where he depicts the benefits that accrue to the Kumaun peasant because of the rough and ready justice provided by British administrators who travel to the villages and set up court there and adjudicate according to immemorial custom.³⁶ The codification of *Kumaun Local Custom* by the government in 1920, emphasised the 'backward' Khasa traditions, as truly Kumauni and refused to grant weight to the brahmanical tradition in Kumaun.³⁷ Panna Lall's work granted upper caste immigrant status to a miniscule minority, who would not come under the purview of customary law. The numerical preponderance of those who followed Khasa custom, justified its designation not as Khasa but as Kumaun customary law. The Kumauni intelligentsia contested its relegation to customary law and 'noble savage' status by assiduously fostering a Hindu identity which was premised upon caste prescription. Its refusal to accept Kumaun customary law for the people of Kumaun was vigorously articulated. L. D Joshi wrote and published a voluminous rejoinder to colonial codification. He rejected the premise of Panna Lall, who had excluded from its purview few upper caste lineages, and argued that a *large* number did not follow *Khasa Family Law*. In his critique of Panna Lall he noted that the officer had missed, 'the fundamental difference in the religious and ethical evolution of the two classes of people (the immigrant Brahmans and Rajputs and the Khasa Brahmans and Rajputs).'³⁸

L. D Joshi, in spite of his resistance to imperialist ethnography, also followed the evolutionary trajectory of historical growth and attempted to argue that Khasa family law, 'represents legal ideas of family and property rights which are much older than the Brahmanised treatises. It is a simpler version of Hindu law, earlier in date, and free from the religious innovations of the Brahmans.... to the student of the evolution of Hindu law the Khasa customary law is an important link in the process of growth'³⁹ The process of codification brought to centre stage the issue of Khasa identity and its coordinates. The colonial state questioned the high cultural tradition emphasised by the Kumaun intelligentsia, and countered the vision of local elites by highlighting difference.

Whereas the local elites inspired by the nationalist vision focussed upon a contemporary Kumaun/pan-Indian identity, colonial ethnography continued to emphasise the village oriented, communitarian, egalitarian and non-

urbane, local aspects. This ethnography chose to ignore the literate, articulate, hierarchical and upper caste, nationalist elites of Kumaun society. It supported the articulation of a local Kumaun identity as the product of a particular geography and specific history. British officials encouraged Kumaunis who highlighted the particularity of Kumaun. In the foreward to S.D Pant's book, E. A.H Blunt noted that 'Kumaun is perhaps the most interesting tract in the United Provinces. Its people, its social system, its customs, its methods of agriculture, even its language differ as greatly as its climate from those of the plains. Advance but a mile or two from the foothills into the Himalayas, and you will quickly realise that you are not only in a different country, but in the midst of a different people and a different civilization, -an older and simpler civilization, but all the more attractive, and not necessarily the worse, for its age and simplicity.'⁴⁰

We noted that the Atkinson model of history was accepted by the Kumauni elites, because it explained their dominance, but they resisted British patrimonialism which treated all the people of Kumaun as inferior and unevolved. They endorsed British/European civilisation's support of reason, freedom and democracy, but were critical of British rule for violating its own canons of universal humanism by institutionalising racial difference. The racial superiority of the English administrators was resisted, and the intelligentsia demanded representative forms of governance. The debate between the intelligentsia and the colonial state has to be located in the articulation of an imperial ethnography which sought to represent the colonised as the other, different in origin from European nations and peoples and incapable of emulating them.

Though elite/upper caste version of Kumaun premised upon brahmanical Hindu predominance preferred to repress local, nonbrahmanical, and non-Hindu aspects, yet it had to contend with a colonial state which emphasised the 'low' tradition of Kumaun culture. How did the local elites respond to the articulation of this difference within their ranks? They adopted various strategies-initially they attempted to change local customs, but this was resisted, then they posited civilizational and cultural unity, and thirdly they chose to underplay difference. This process generated a counter explanation to the evolutionary one, which argued that the Khasas were originally kshatriyas, demoted because they did not conform to brahmanical ritual. The Kumaun elites refused to accept a different theory of racial origins for the Khasa, and attempted to incorporate them into their vision of Kumaun as Rajputs. This helped because though the colonial state could grant visibility to the Khasa it could not grant it dominance in the public sphere, and gradually the term Khasa went out of common parlance and in the 1990s, it was impossible to

find any individual who responded to the self ascription of Khasa.⁴¹

Kumauni nationalism asserted the self-governability of all communities and nations. Nationalist aspiration also contested differences institutionalised by the colonial state. The first history of Kumaun, in Hindi, was nationalist in inspiration. B. D Pande's *Kumaun Ka Itihas* understood nationalism of the colonial peoples as part of the historical project of modernity. He cited John Stuart Mill on the principle of nationality and argued that nations could be organised around five cardinal principles- racial or ethnic unity, political organisation, common language, common state and similarity of culture.⁴² He contested the notion of difference between Europeans and Indians postulated by the colonial state. He argued that Kumaun culture was not distinct from the culture of the north Indian plains. The book was successful in generating a discursive field in the language of the people and can be viewed as the acquisition of a vocabulary of power, that enabled the nationalist elites to arrogate to themselves the right to represent the people of Kumaun. It brought 'the people' as represented by the elites, into the domain of Kumaun politics and granted them a visibility and agency which it had not been possible to conceptualise earlier. After independence, the displacement of colonial authority produced a shift in the constellation of power which granted prominence to local elites but it did not produce a foundational shift in the writing of Kumaun history.

The making of the narrative of Kumaun, was now part of the larger history of Indian nationhood. Some of the nationalist histories, particularly those which were official depicted this phase of Kumaun history as 'glorious' in its resistance to colonialism. Even scholarly texts like the *Archaeology of Kumaun*, were infused with the nationalist ethic and represented the early history of Kumaun as part of the history of the Indian sub-continent. The author concluded that, 'this indicates that Kumaun blossomed various cultural flowers from time to time and in its turn enlightened the adjacent lands always keeping closer contacts with the Indian plains.'⁴³ K.P Nautiyal used E.T. Atkinson extensively, and though Nautiyal historicised the theories of origin, he was not able to, nor did he attempt to reconstitute a past which was radically different from that elaborated by Atkinson.

Shiv Prasad Dabral's monumental research on Garhwal and Kumaun history (Uttarakhand), from antiquity to the modern period was the result of a keen commitment to the spirit of historical inquiry.⁴⁴ Written in Hindi, citing an extensive array of material, it embellishing Atkinson's history with fresh evidence. The emphasis on printed texts for the reconstruction of pre-modern history meant that upper caste version of history remained dominant and

Dabral's work was unable to interrogate the Atkinsonian paradigm. His work, which runs into many volumes, continued to underline the sub-continental dimension of local Himalayan culture and overlooked the significance of the Khasa interregnum and though it invoked the oral tradition it was unable to fully historicise it.

Shekhar Pathak's account in Hindi of the *Coolie Utar* movement in Kumaun is also nationalist in inspiration.⁴⁵ It located Kumaun on the national map, expressed the spirited anti-colonial tradition of Kumaun, and represented it as part of the meta-narrative of Indian nationalism. It documented in great detail, the resistance of the Kumaun peasantry, under the leadership of the intelligentsia, to the labour levies imposed by the colonial state. He regarded the *coolie utar* and *begar* as feudal remnants, which continued even under the colonial dispensation, because of the exigencies of British administration. The movement against these pre-modern vestiges appeared to fit in with the evolutionary perspective which would regard such practices as barbaric and uncivilised. The Kumaun intelligentsia was therefore fulfilling its modern role, by resisting the colonial state on the issue of *coolie utar* and *begar*. Shekhar Pathak visualised the self-identity of the intelligentsia as progressive and forward looking. He also reiterated the understanding that the intelligentsia represented and spoke on behalf of the people of Kumaun.

In retrospect, imperialist and nationalist histories can be seen as products of a particular historical conjuncture, which generated a dichotomy between the 'local' and 'nationalist' versions of Kumaun culture. Colonial agency accented the local, disparate elements of Kumaun culture, whereas nationalist agency sought to highlight and make visible the homogeneous, nationalist and unitary aspects. The establishment of the Indian state did not radically alter the perspective of Kumaun 'backwardness'. Located on the margins of the sub-continent, the Kumaun was increasingly viewed as peripheral. Sociologists and anthropologists evinced a keen interest in the region, which was recognisably local and different.

Yet, these perspectives were subject to change, constrained by emergent configurations of knowledge and power. Ram Guha's work on peasant resistance to the forest policies of the colonial and the post-colonial state amplifies this perspective. His attempt to speak on behalf of the peasantry and provide them a voice in history, so as to prevent the appropriation of their discontent by modern, nationalist politics, has 'romantic' overtones. He thinks that the cohesion and collective spirit of the village community provided the mainspring of political action, and he looks at earlier forms of social protest for explanation. Ram Guha regards the peasant movement as, 'different from a modern social movement

in its aims and methods' and as 'not merely a defence of the little community and its values, but also an affirmation of a way of life more harmoniously adjusted with natural processes. At one level they are defensive, seeking to escape the tentacles of the commercial economy and the centralizing state; at yet another level they are assertive actively challenging the ruling-class vision of a homogenizing urban-industrial culture.'⁴⁶This narrative of Kumauni and Garhwali (Uttarakhand) men and women valiantly resisting colonial and post-colonial regimes resonated well with environmental concerns in the 1980's about the Himalayas as part of the global commons.

The increasing problems of mountain people because of decline in agricultural yields and out migration generated the idea of a separate hill state, leading to the demand for Uttarakhand. As the demand for Uttarakhand acquired prominence, ⁴⁷it underlined the hill identity, and substantiated the idea that, 'modernity is a matter of movement, of flux, of change and of unpredictability.'⁴⁸The articulation of 'Uttarakhand' opened up the possibility of a different retrieval of the past, because changing constellations of power interrogated the legitimacy of brahman/upper caste domination and contested it in the domain of state policy and politics. Colonial ethnography despite its fragmentary, local, temporally limited, contextual character provided clues for the construction of another past. The efficacy of a counter juxtapositioning was limited, but it provided the possibility of the return of repressed elements. 'But whatever this new understanding of the past holds to be irrelevant--shards created by the selection of materials, remainders left aside by an explication--comes back, despite everything, on the edges of discourse or in its rifts and crannies: 'resistance', 'survivals', or delays discreetly perturb the pretty order of a line of 'progress' or a system of interpretation. These are lapses in the syntax constructed by the law of a place. Therein they symbolize a return of the repressed, that is, a return of what, at a given moment, has become unthinkable in order for a new identity to become thinkable.'⁴⁹

Though some accounts of Uttarakhand continued to replicate Atkinson's history of Kumaun, nevertheless, certain aspects of imperial and nationalist history were interrogated. M.P Joshi deconstructed the myth that brahmins had migrated to Kumaun in the eighth and tenth centuries.⁵⁰By studying a large number of copper plate inscriptions, along with the genealogies of eminent brahman families he was able to expose the mythical character of the *vanshavalis* and was able to question the historicity of Som Chand. The importance of Som Chand in Atkinson's history was that a large number of brahman families claimed to have come to Kumaun

with Som Chand. For example, Manorath Pande's genealogy dates itself to the period of Shankarcharya, in the eighth century when Vedic brahmanism triumphed over decadent Buddhism. M. P Joshi's questioning of the Vanshavalis indicated that Brahman legitimacy based upon Shankar's visit to the region could also be questioned. Rahul Sankrityayan had already questioned the historicity of Shankar's pilgrimage.⁵¹Similarly, the relegation of the Manaskhand to an ancient pre-historic period by Atkinson and his Brahman informants was not borne out by a close textual reading. Folk ballads of the Katyuris, collected and published by Prayag Joshi and Urba Dutt Upadhyaya depicted a society in which caste was not pervasive.⁵²Shailesh Matyani's novels set in rural Kumaun represented a Kumaun which was different from the brahmanical constructions and which suggested the possibility of a different historical trajectory.⁵³It appeared then that the position of brahmins in pre-colonial Kumaun was not as dominant as it had been portrayed, and that clearly it could not be dated as far back as the eighth century.

Similarly, the relegation of Khasa history to hoary antiquity was also examined. M. C. Joshi argued that the Khasa period could not be traced to a date before the second century.⁵⁴ Khasa history was also illumined by studying Kumaun outside the imperial context, in juxtaposition with the history of its neighbours, Nepal and Tibet. Atkinson had noted the connection with Nepal and Tibet in the pre-colonial period, but had emphasised the southern connection because of its contemporary relevance. Badri Shah Thulgharia in his historical work Kurmanchal Kanti, published in the late 1930s had elaborated the relationship of Kumaun with the Mansarovar region.⁵⁵Rahul Sankrityayan and G. Tucci, who travelled in the central and western Himalayas during the 1950s also noticed submerged traces of a more significant relationship between the various sub-cultures of this section of the Himalayas.

G. Tucci noticed the connectedness of Western Nepal, Western Tibet, Kumaun and Garhwal from the tenth century.⁵⁶The publication of a history of the Khasa kingdom in Nepal, based on inscriptions, copper and gold plates, and Tibetan scrolls provided evidence that the Khasas had initiated the agricultural transformation of the middle Himalayas and that the Khasas were dominant in the power structure from the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries.⁵⁷The division of the Khasa kingdom into separate units, laid the foundation for the emergence of 'Kamadesh' under the Chand kings in the fourteenth century. The *Kalyan Chandrodaya Kavya* (Sanskrit) also questioned the notion of the Khasa interregnum as a period of chaos and anarchy.⁵⁸

These studies pointed towards a historical tradition which could counter brahman domination and which could posit a history of the Khasas which was not frozen or static, but part of a making of Kumaun. It also suggested a different approach to historical writing, which was not 'essentialist' and which did not reduce historical complexity by positing either the national or the local, the brahmanical or the Khasa but regarded culture as emergent, contested, conjunctural, constrained by material factors, and affected by power constellations and knowledge structures. Such a perspective about Kumaun history was emerging not within the discipline, which continued to perpetuate the essentialist dichotomies but in the works of sociologists and anthropologists.

R. D Sanwal noted the contested nature of stratification in rural Kumaun: 'the most important and far-reaching effect which the establishment of British rule in Kumaun had for the status structure was to convert latent inter-caste hostility into open conflict and competition for the control of such resources as wealth, education, political and administrative office and orthodox life style in order to gain status superiority in the hierarchy.'⁵⁹C. W. Brown questioned Atkinson and noted that, 'we must remain aware of the extent to which it was the result of circumstances primarily characteristic of British colonial thought.'⁶⁰A. Fanger also expressed his discomfort with Khasa ethnography, 'as an anthropologist I have noticed the Jimadaras of Kumaon as a category conforming to the image of a Khasa as described by Atkinson, L.D Joshi, Berreman, and Sanwal. However, I must admit that in the present state of my knowledge it is difficult to challenge the views of both M.C Joshi and M.P Joshi.'⁶¹W. S. Sax in his study of the Nanda Devi pilgrimage attempted to 'specify both a level of shared cultural assumptions and another level at which these assumptions are subject to variant interpretations. Cultural assumptions about the mutual determination of places and persons are exemplified in classical Sanskrit law treatises as well as the 'customary law' of the central Himalayas ; while the categories themselves are fluid and rarely questioned, interpretations and applications of them are subject to challenge, especially in situations of interest and desire.'⁶²

A study of Kumaun, post Uttarakhand has to be located in this context, and has to focus upon elements which were repressed in the earlier narratives. In opposition to imperial conventions about evolutionary continuity, it has to emphasise the transformative agency of imperialism, which marked a rupture in the history of Kumaun. To elaborate the discontinuity it has to document not only the contests over culture in the colonial period, but also has to contextualise 'modernity', by delineating the manner in which it affects any recovery of the pre-modern. It has to explore not only colonial history but also examine

understanding of the pre-colonial past. As T.S Eliot noted, 'the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.'⁶³The realignment of historical traces and residues to explain the contemporary present is therefore part of the making of modern Kumaun. It has to counter nationalist historiography which attempts to overlook hierarchy and unequal access to education, land, control over public property, print media and visibility. It endorses the understanding that 'modernity was a contextually located and enormously contested idea.'⁶⁴

The disputed nature of modernity helps articulate an ethnography which can explore, 'the uncompromising sense of paradox in the intertwining of diversity and homogeneity that will not allow an easy parsing of these two terms.'⁶⁵It has to record the situation which facilitates individuation, but also constructs communal configurations. It has to delineate not only the construction of Kumauni identities, (in its communitarian and segmented aspects) but also the fact that 'constructed and migrating through a grid of sites that constitute fragments rather than a community of any sort, an identity is a disseminating phenomenon that has a life of its own beyond the simple literal sense of inhering in particular human agents at a particular site and time.'⁶⁶It has to document the simultaneity of many identities-caste, religious, regional and national, which emerged during the colonial period, and also has to explain why *particular* identities acquired significance, because, 'modernity is a condition that at once empowers people and constrains them.'⁶⁷

NOTES

1. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, Tom Conley trans., New York: Columbia University Press 1988, pp. 5-6, "it appears to me that in the West, for the last four centuries, "the making of history" has referred to writing. Little by little it has replaced the myths of yesterday with a practice of meaning. As a practice (and not by virtue of the discourses that are its result) it symbolizes a society capable of managing the space that it provides for itself of replacing the obscurity of the lived body with the expression of a "will to know" or a "will to act or, in short, of being turned into a blank page that it should itself be able to write. This practice of history is an ambitious, progressive, also utopian practice that is linked to the endless institution of areas "proper", where a will to power can be inscribed in terms of reason."
2. Iain Chambers, 'Migrancy, Culture, Identity', K. Jenkins ed., *The Postmodern History Reader* London & New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 77-81.
3. D. Kellner, 'Popular Culture and the Construction of Postmodern Identities', Scott Lash and Jonathan Friedman ed., Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992, p. 141-177.

4. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, 1988, p. 2.
5. For the purpose of this essay, Kumaun consists of present day districts of Almora, Nainital, Champawat, Bageshwar, Pithoragarh, and Uddham Singh Nagar in Uttarakhand.
6. E. T Atkinson, *The Himalayan Gazetteer* (1882), Delhi: Cosmo, 1981(Reprint).
7. E. T Atkinson, Vol. II, part I, p.370.
8. *Ibid.*, p.440.
9. *Ibid.*, Vol. III, part II, pp. 421-427.
10. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, 1988, p.4.
11. In this context it is important to remember that Atkinson's compilation of information about the Himalayan Districts was part of the larger enterprise of compiling the Gazetteers of the North Western Provinces.
12. Cited in *Vernacular Newspaper Reports* of the 1870s, it began publication in 1868, was published by the Nainital Press and its editor and proprietor was J. D. Joshi.
13. *Almora Akhbar* cited *Vernacular Newspaper Reports* 15 June 1871.
14. The *Almora Akhbar* started publication in 1871, it was published by the Almora Debating Club Press and represented a wide cross section of local society. Its members were B. D Pant, M. Pande, R Dutt, L. N Joshi, B. D Joshi, Lall Ganga Ram and Babu D. D Sanwal.
15. The *Shakti* Newspaper was published by the Deshbhakt Press, and started publication in 1918, when the *Almora Akhbar* had to stop publication. It therefore inherited not only the editor but also the readership of the *Almora Akhbar*.
16. Not published during the colonial period, copies of the unpublished manuscript were available with local brahmans. G. D Pande, ed., *Manaskhand*, Varanasi: Shri Nityanand Smarak Samiti, 1989.
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18. Rudra Chandra Dev, *Traivarnik Dharma Nirnayan*, manuscript attributed to the sixteenth century, Calcutta: Government Collection of the Asiatic Society.
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21. Vasudha Pande, *Stratification in Kumaun, circa 1815-1930*, NMML Occasional Papers, History and Society, New Series, No. 37, New Delhi:NMML, 2013.
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27. S. D Pant, *The Social Economy of the Himalayans*, London: George Allen &Unwin 1935, p. 10.
28. *Almoria* (1901), Nainital: Gyanodaya Prakashan, 1991, p. 15.
29. *Pilgrim Wandering in the Himmala* (1844), Nainital: Gyanodaya Prakashan, 1990(Reprint); F. Parks, *Wanderings of A Pilgrim During Four-and-Twenty years in the East with Revelations of life in the Zenana*, 2 vols, London: Pelham Richardson, 1850; R. Heber, *Narrative of a Journey Through the Upper Provinces of India 1824-25*, Vol. I, Philadelphia: Lea &Carey 1829; John Hewett, *Jungle Trails in Northern India*, London: Methuen and Company Limited, 1938.
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33. Sir J. E. Hewett, *Jungle Traills in Northern India*, London: Methuen &Co., 1938, pp.30-31; F.W. Champion, *The Jungle in Sunlight and Shadow*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1934, pp.120-122.
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35. Vasudha Pande, Law, 'Women and Family in Colonial Kumaun', *I. I. C Quarterly*, Vol. 23, 1996, pp. 106-120.
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