



The transhumance route of Pithoragarh: A cultural route?

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ABSTRACT

A cultural route represents a spatial link between different cultural groups, which co-influenced their mutual development, also enriched their relationship with the natural environment, resulting in a vast body of knowledge. First recognized on a world platform in 1993 by UNESCO, the concept is on its evolutionary stage, and there are several developing viewpoints expressed on its meaning and constituents. However, the small-scale routes with predominantly intangible characters are overlooked in discussion compared to the large expanse, trans-national routes that possess a significant amount of tangible resources. As a preliminary step in this endeavor of recognizing local routes with intangible aspects, the paper attempts to analyze the transhumance route of Pithoragarh, India, and explore the possibilities of the route being identified as a Cultural Route. It adopts a qualitative, ethnographic research approach for investigating the route and the associated Johar, Darma, Chaudans, and Byans valley and collects data through semi-structured interviews with experts and community members. The results indicate that the routes connected the highlands with the lowlands and created a vertical model that facilitated constant movement, brought together many cultures, and enabled fluid socio-cultural and economic interactions. It suggests that a richer understanding of the cultural assets could emerge by exploring the route's significance as a 'cultural route' and with further in-depth investigation, it can qualify to be recognized and protected as a cultural route.

1. Introduction

The concept of heritage has evolved from being perceived as a singular historical structure standing in isolation from its context to include archaeological sites, cultural landscapes, Historic towns, Vernacular buildings and settlements, and intangible values (Durusoy, 2014). Within this expanding scale and complexity of heritage, the cultural route represents a new approach that provides a holistic vision of heritage (Ban et al., 2016). It acts as a connective web of the world's heritage that highlights the notion of shared culture and shared heritage (Severo, 2017). It demonstrates how people have contributed knowledge and cultural assets to people geographically distant, resulting in an extraordinary cultural heritage diversity throughout the world.

UNESCO's (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) efforts to recognize cultural routes have brought a qualitative change in the concept of heritage. The increased importance is evident by "cultural routes" being added as one of the four World heritage sites categories. ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) charter on cultural routes further advances the concept by providing guidance on identification, documentation, conservation, and promotion of the routes. The recognition has been primarily limited to the large-scale and long-duration historical routes with a consider-

able number of tangible components associated with them (Chen and Jones, 2020). The trade, pilgrimage routes discussed on the global platform, such as the Silk roads, Incense routes, routes of Santiago de Compostela, among others, traverse thousands of kilometers and have tangible components ranging from cities, palaces, churches to ports and forts.

The charters provide a broader framework that does not do justice to small-scale cultural routes, where the cultural assets are predominantly intangible. It does not explicitly lay down identification and assessment criteria that recognize Nomadic and transhumance routes, Indigenous routes showcasing agricultural expansion, routes based on a web of Indigenous oral knowledge, routes reflecting trading systems of the Indigenous or maritime-based societies, among others (Blair, 2013; Pearson, 2013; Blair and Hall, 2013; Taylor, 2013; James, 2013). As a result, decades after its conceptualization, the category remains one of the least represented on the world heritage platform.

The Indian subcontinent, which has evolved through cross-cultural exchanges and has a history spanning thousands of years, is yet to explore its potential of having cultural routes on the global platform. With its unique historical, geographical and anthropological dimensions, India is home to several smaller-scale routes associated with pilgrimage, trade, processions, and seasonal migration, which are traveled by foot.

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Some routes traverse landscapes that do not possess tangible markers and can be understood through their symbolic meanings. However, the concept is not well understood within the current heritage regime.

As a preliminary step in this endeavor of recognizing local routes with intangible aspects, the paper attempts to analyze the transhumance route of Pithoragarh and explore the possibilities of the route being identified as a cultural route. The paper provides an overview of the cultural route concept's key aspects and examines how they might apply to the said route. It explores the route's role in facilitating cross-cultural exchanges and producing heritage resources and offers a more holistic understanding of its history and significance.

2. Methodological approach

The research strategy adopted for this study involves three stages: (1) Literature review of the concept of cultural route, (2) Historical analysis and field survey of the case area, (3) Assimilation and appraisal of Stage-2 data with reference to the findings of Stage-1

Stage-1: The objective of this stage was to understand and interpret the concept of the cultural route and find overarching fundamental features that distinguish cultural routes from the regular routes. The identified fundamental features were used as a frame of reference for the preliminary assessment of the transhumance route of Pithoragarh. A systematic literature review included the International Charters and guidelines, World Heritage Nomination Dossiers, works of Council of Europe, and National Park Services related to cultural routes. In addition, books, journal articles, and other scholarly texts that provided a definition of any/all components of cultural routes (as heritage) were reviewed. Literary works written in languages other than English and Spanish were excluded. The texts were analyzed, compared and the identified fundamental features or essential characteristics were grouped under the following themes: Long-lasting History with Continuity in space and time, Multi-dimensional function, Wholeness, Crossing and connecting borders, Reflects cross-fertilization of cultures (shared roots and influences), Associational Value.

Stage-2: The objective of this stage was to develop a holistic understanding of the place, the people, their connection with the routes and surrounding environments, and explore the cross-cultural dynamics. A qualitative ethnographic research approach was adopted for this stage. It started with a historical analysis of the secondary data on the case area from published/unpublished reports, thesis, journal articles, books, district gazetteers, census handbook, archival maps, scholarly texts, web and blog pages, visual sources (videos and pictures).

Archival data were gathered from National archives, Regional archives, Nainital, Libraries of Kumaon University, GB Pant Institute of Himalayan Environment and Development, and Govt. P.G. College Pithoragarh, Rung Museum of Dharchula, and from various online sources.

The secondary data collection aimed at achieving the following: (a) gathering historical and contemporary data to understand various socio-cultural layers embedded in the case area, (b) finding information that explicitly deals with the routes and their importance, (c) finding experts (academicians/scholars/officials) with fair knowledge about the case area.

Through the Purposive sampling method, the first set of respondents (experts) for the interview were chosen. 13 interviews were conducted with open-ended questions that covered the historical background of the place, significant events that shaped it, Bhotias and their worldview, the process of seasonal migration, past trade activities, the influence of Mount Kailash and the religious beliefs, Traditional knowledge. As the last decades witnessed out-migration, these interviews were beneficial in finding settlements along the routes that are still inhabited. Through a Chain-Referral sampling method, a list of the next set of respondents was prepared.

Field surveys were conducted in the year 2019. The first phase of the field survey dealt with a reconnaissance survey of the main settle-

ments like Dharchula and Munsiyari. A few of the respondents (residing in Dharchula and Munsiyari) chosen earlier were interviewed. A few other locals were also interviewed through simple random sampling. The list of settlements to be visited and respondents to be interviewed was upgraded, and the next phase of the field survey started. The Chain-Referral sampling method was extensively used to avoid abandoned villages with no people to interview. The sampling method involves bias to a certain degree, but it proved beneficial considering the strenuous, time-consuming journey in the mountains with limited vehicular access. Moreover, the bias was attempted to remove through a few interviews based on simple random sampling. The first limitation encountered was difficulty in understanding some parts of the local dialect. To remove the barrier, a translator fluent in English, Hindi, and local dialect was appointed. It was also observed that people are more comfortable in group conversations than individual interviews. Therefore, the next set of interviews happened in groups of 5 to 6 people with the help of village heads.

The semi-structured questionnaire used for these interviews covered the historical background of the settlement and its pattern, personal ancestral history, connection (matrimonial or social) with Tibet, Nepal or plains, Stories of past (related to trade, transhumance, pilgrimage) told them by their elders, past and present occupation, knowledge of transhumance/trading/agriculture/other traditional craft-making, understanding of the route's character and frequency of usage, religious/spiritual notion, view towards the environment, myths and legends, fairs and festivals. The hours-long conversations were recorded through descriptive text and audio-recording (with permission) and manually transcribed after the end of each day. Wherever required (if possible), respondents were met for clarification and follow-up questions for the second time. In total, 40 interviews (group and individual) were conducted during the field survey. It is pertinent to mention here that the field survey was limited within the present political boundary of India, which is not an ideal scenario concerning cultural routes; however, the region across the border was understood through secondary literature.

Stage-3: The objective of the third stage is to assess the route's cross-cultural dynamics and significance. A narrative analysis with a deductive coding method was employed to analyze the transcribed field data. The transcriptions were analyzed and triangulated with the historical analysis of the secondary literature and expert interviews done earlier. Excerpts that fit into the already decided codes (Long-lasting history with continuity in space and time, Multi-dimensional function, Wholeness, Crossing and connecting borders, Reflects cross-fertilization of cultures, Associational Value) in stage-1 of the research are kept. Other data were removed and the final narrative on the route's importance was prepared.

3. The concept of cultural routes

3.1. Theory evolution

The concept of the cultural route can be traced back to the 1980s when the Council of Europe initiated a campaign to revive the European pilgrimage routes that play a significant role in strengthening European identity. In 1993 European pilgrimage route Santiago de Compostela was nominated to the World heritage list and laid the foundation for further research on the topic. Consequently, UNESCO initiated formal discussions on cultural route as a heritage category and held a meeting in Madrid in 1994 addressing the subject- "Routes as a part of our cultural heritage." The expert meeting resulted in the first-ever globally valid definition of cultural routes under the name of heritage routes. The document states,

"A heritage route is composed of tangible elements of which the cultural significance comes from exchanges and a multi-dimensional dialogue across countries or regions, and that illustrate the interaction of movement, along the route, in space and time" (UNESCO, 1994).

In addition, the document highlights that the dynamics of movement, exchange, and dialogue between regions continued over space and time, wholeness, multi-dimensional functional aspect are the fundamental features that shape the concept of cultural routes. It also mentions that heritage routes are social phenomenon rather than a particular incident/movement, and the cultural significance of a route can be measured by the "dynamics (commercial, philosophical, religious) which it may have generated or favored (transfer of goods, knowledge, know-how) and by the symbolic significance it represents for anyone using it."

Considering the challenges associated with this new category of heritage, in 1998, the International committee on cultural routes (CIIC) was created by few members of ICOMOS to develop an international consensus and doctrine on this topic (Durusoy, 2014). In 2003, experts and representatives of ICOMOS and UNESCO got together to discuss a draft of proposals and guidelines to ensure the inclusion and proper treatment of cultural routes in the Operational guidelines to implement the World heritage convention (He, 2009). With the tremendous interest shown by various member country delegations to the World heritage committee, the operational guidelines for the Implementation of the world heritage convention of UNESCO, approved in February of 2005, ratified cultural routes as one of the heritage categories in addition to the other three newly-defined categories, namely cultural landscapes, historic towns, and heritage canals.

The ANNEX 3 of the Operational guidelines throws light on different types and elements of the cultural routes. It sets out criteria to distinguish different categories of routes based on the following: Spatial characteristics- the length and diversity of a route reflecting the complexity of the connection it establishes (or established) and the exchange it generated; temporal characteristics- the age-beginning and end, the frequency of use (multiannual/annual/seasonal), the intensity of use, and variations; cultural characteristics- the capacity to connect and facilitate reciprocal exchanges between distant cultural groups; Role or Purpose - the function of the route that provided communities with necessities and or spiritual goods and contributed to their development (UNESCO World Heritage Centre, 2005).

- The guidelines state, it is necessary for a route to have had some repercussion for civilization, even if (or when) any exchanges produced now no longer take place or have been modified.
- To add clarity on the subject and provide methods for documenting, conserving, and promoting the cultural routes, the ICOMOS 2008 General assembly adopted the Charter on cultural routes. The concept of the cultural route, as defined by the Charter, is as follows:
- Any route of communication, be it land, water, or some other type, which is physically delimited and is also characterized by having its own specific dynamic and functionality historic to serve a specific and well-determined purpose, which must fulfill the following conditions:
 - (a) It must arise from and reflect interactive movements of people as well as multi-dimensional, continuous, and reciprocal exchanges of goods, ideas, knowledge, and values between peoples, countries, regions, or continents over significant periods;
 - (b) It must have thereby promoted a cross-fertilization of the affected cultures in space and time, as reflected both in their tangible and intangible heritage;
 - (c) It must have integrated into a dynamic system the historical relations and cultural properties associated with its existence" (CIIC, 2008).

Although the concept is on its evolutionary stage and there are several developing viewpoints expressed on its meaning and constituents by various international organizations and academicians since its inception, the concept can be summarized as below (Table 1).

3.2. Application and significance

Since its emergence, the term "cultural route" has been discussed globally by various organizations and researchers within the premises of heritage conservation and cultural tourism, aimed at developing and promoting cultural heritage. However, the meaning and uses of the term varied, and the concept has been applied in two ways: (a) Designating routes with historical importance as cultural routes and their associated tangible, intangible resources as the byproduct of the route's existence (UNESCO, 1994; Feng, 2005). Such routes are neither invented nor designed; they are discovered. (b) Applied in a more conceptual sense-without necessarily implying a physical path, linking various heritage structures and sites under a given theme. Such routes can be designed and agreed on according to customer demand, places of interest, distance and accessibility, and other factors (Carreno, 2003). In this paper, the term "cultural route" has been discussed within the framework of "historically significant routes," which implies that cultural routes are historical/cultural realities that have arisen in response to their own substantive, internal dynamics.

While UNESCO strictly adheres to the first approach and identifies routes with historical significance, other International organizations like C.O.E. (Council of Europe), UNWTO (World tourism organization), and N.P.S. (National park services) use either method, sometimes overlapping the two, primarily depending on the objectives to be achieved (Council of Europe, 2015; UNWTO, 2015; DeSantis and Johnson, 2019). Table 2 provides examples of a few notable cultural routes with high historical significance (UNESCO World Heritage Centre - World Heritage List, 1992).

Cultural route has managed to have just one percent presence within world heritage properties and least representation from the Asia Pacific region as a heritage category (Yanez, 2010; , (Jokilehto et al., 2005)). The "Sites along the Uttarapath, Badshahi Sadak, Sadak-e-Azam, Grand Trunk Road" is the only Indian route submitted to the tentative list of World Heritage properties (UNESCO World Heritage, 1992). In application, the category has not been explored much beyond the routes of Outstanding Universal Value; while the attention is more on the large-scale trans-national routes, the smaller scale routes predominantly represented by intangible attributes have been overlooked in definition, investigation, and assessment priorities.

Cultural route is an essential mechanism that provides a holistic reading of cultures and civilizations' encounters (Shishmanova, 2015). It gives a new definition to the already known assets and creates opportunities for the other neglected assets to be identified, conserved, and visited (Keke, 2019). If understood and applied correctly, it can become an efficient tool to achieve territorial cohesion and sustainable development (CIIC, 1999; Moulin and Boniface, 2001; Bogacz-Wojtanowska et al., 2019). Also, it could bring forth a new dimension of cultural heritage stewardship based on cooperation that overcomes localism by looking beyond the narrow scope of borders.

4. Understanding the transhumance route of Pithoragarh

4.1. Background and setting of Pithoragarh

Pithoragarh is the easternmost district of Uttarakhand that covers more than seven thousand square kilometers with an altitude varying between 500 and 6400 feet above sea level (Census of India, 2011). The district is a part of a larger cultural landscape known as the Kailash Sacred landscape that lies at the junction of India, China, and Nepal (Singh et al., 2019). Dotted with sacred sites, high-altitude lakes, rivers, snow peaks, this ecologically diverse and multicultural landscape has a history that goes back to thousands of years. The district Pithoragarh finds its mention in many ancient scriptures like Mahabharat, Skhand Purana, and others as the holy mountain Kailash and the divine lake Mansarovar are located close to its northern boundary. While Buddhists believe that Buddha and his five hundred Bodhisattvas resided here;

Table 1
Overview of the Concept of cultural route.

Aspect	Brief Description
Origin	A geographically defined pathway of human movement that might have been created as a planned project or taken advantage (fully or partially) of pre-existing roads and evolved over a long period to fulfill a collective purpose.
Function	Moving (a) goods (b) people, and (c) information (Ciolek, 2004) Examples: Pilgrimage, Administrative, Exchange, Military, Migration routes Transhumance routes, Passenger Routes, Pillagers' raiding Routes, Postal Routes, etc.
Medium	Land, Aquatic, Mixed or other(Taylor, 2013)
Spatial Scale	Trans-continental, Trans-national,Trans-regional or local (Campolo et al., 2016)
Context	Natural and /or cultural context upon which the route exerts an influence and enriches new dimensions through interactive processes. (CIIC, 2008)
Content	(a)Transport Infrastructure: the route itself along with other infrastructure that ensures smooth transport - milestones, fords, bridges, tunnels, mountain passes (b) Places of exchange: structures that accommodate the needs of a traveler to rest and relax and structures related to the functions fulfilled by the route (c) Influences: Traditions and oral expressions, social practices, rituals, festive events, knowledge, and expertise. (Elwazani, 2009; Weimin, 2017; Carreno, 2006; Antonio, 2005)
Extent	Do not conform to any natural, political boundaries. It is defined by historically determined limits, which may change according to various natural processes and man-induced measures(Feng, 2005). Its essence can be understood within various Administrative ranges, Natural range, Functional range, and perceptual range.
Structure	Conforms to multiple designs: linear, circular, cruciform, radial, or network (CIIC, 2008)
Fundamental Features	Long-lasting History with Continuity in space and time, Multi-dimensional function, Wholeness, Crossing and connecting borders,Reflects cross-fertilization of cultures (shared roots and influences), Associational Value (He, 2009; Alkadi, 2016; Fiore, 2013; Karatas, 2011; Wided Majdoub, 2009; Sugio, 2005; Masson, 2005; Rosa, 2005; Carreno, 2008).

Table 2
Notable cultural routes.

Name	Temporal Duration	Function	Spatial scale	Natural Context
Routes of Santiago de Compostela (Spain and France)	9 th –20 th century	Pilgrimage (Christianity)	More than 7000 km joining the Iberian peninsula with the rest of Europe	Plain, Mountain, Coast
Incense Route - Desert Cities in the Negev	3 rd century BC- 2 nd century A.D.	Trade	1800 km long joining Arabia-Red Sea Mediterranean-South Europe	Desert, oasis
Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range	From 9 th century to present	Pilgrimage (Shinto and Buddhism)	Spreads over more than 506.4 ha Kyoto	Mountain
Land of Frankincense	Origins 6000 BC	Trade	Covering an area of 849.88 ha Arabia–Mediterranean, Red Sea coast, West Asia, South Asia, China	Desert, Coast
Camino Real de Tierra Adentro	16 th –19 th century	Trade (Silver)	Extends over 2600 km (nominated area-1400 km) Spain-America	Mountains
The Routes Network of Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor (a part of ancient Silk Roads)	2 nd century BC- 16 th century AD	Trade, Religion, Politics, Military, Migration, etc	More than 8000 km long joining China with Central Asia	Mountains, Desert, Oasis, Steppe, Plain, River valley
Qhapaq Ñan, Andean Road System	The road is more than 2000 years old, but it was integrated as part of a political project during the the15th century.	Administrative, Transportation, communications system	6000 km long complex road spread across the Andes	Mountains, Coasts, Rainforests, fertile valleys, and absolute deserts

Jain tradition tells that the first Tirthankar, Bharat, conquered this region; Hindus consider this place as the permanent abode of Lord Shiva (Pathak, 1993).

It is believed that the Asuras and Nagas were the earliest inhabitants of the region, who were later replaced by the Kiratas, Khasas, and the Kunindas. According to historical accounts, during the time of Khasas, acculturation happened between the people of mountains and plains; as a result, Hindu traits were assimilated into highland tribal life (Pande, 2019; Zurick et al., 2005). The region became a part of the Kushana empire around the first century A.D. It came under various ruling powers until the accession of Katyuris in the seventh century A.D. (Pathak, 1993). In 1191 AD, Ashokchalla, Malla king of western Nepal, defeated Katyuris, and in 1261 AD, Thohar Chand, the first Chand king, ascended the throne. Chands remained in power for a more extended period consolidating and expanding their territory (Atkinson, 1980). During this period, different groups migrated into this region from different corners of the Indian sub-continent. In 1670AD, Baz Bahadur Chand occupies Tibet trade routes and briefly seizes Taklakot. Gorkhas overran Chands in 1790AD, which attracted increasing British attention. The British defeated the Gorkhas in 1815 AD, and the region remained under British power until India's independence (Jones, 2018; PaharMountains of Central Asia Digital Dataset, 2006).

The historical background shows that the region attracted various ruling powers resulting in cultural accumulation. The primary reason behind the special attention was its strategic location at the border of trans-Himalayan trade, from where the movements across the high mountain passes can be regulated, and trade surplus can be absorbed. With its rugged mountains, the highlands of Tibet have little capacity for food production; however, this area produces large quantities of salt, which was not available in the adjoining areas of India and Nepal. The food grain produced in the lower Indian valleys was exchanged with Tibet for Salt. In addition, the unavailability of pastures in the lower valleys initiated the trading of wool and woollen products from Tibet in considerable amounts (Channa, 2019). Over the years, Tibetan salt, wool, Pashmina, Borax, mountain goats, yaks, and Indian grains, sugar, manufactured wool products became the center of a flourishing trade in this region (Brown, 1984).

As per experts, the present-day Pithoragarh district can be divided into five cultural zones: Highland or Bhot, Askot, Seera, Sor, and Ganolgi (Rawal et al., 2012). The study area falls in the highlands or Bhot Pradesh of Pithoragarh, comprising four valleys: Johar, Darma, Chaudans, and Byans valley. These valleys are situated within the Kali river system (Gori, Darma, Kuti Yankti, Kali river) and inhabited by the Johari-Shauka and Rung -Shauka communities known as Bhotias. Bhotias are

an ethnically and culturally heterogeneous community that traditionally lived a nomadic life. While the Joharis reside in the Gori valley, the Rungs inhabit the other three valleys. Rungs further subdivide themselves according to the valley they live in -Darmani (Darma Valley), Chaudansi (Chaudans Valley), Byansi (Byans valley) (Bergmann et al., 2011; Bergmann, 2016). This area has several mountain passes along its border that open access to the highlands of Tibet.

4.2. The route network

Owing to its varying physiographic condition, proximity to mountain passes that provide access to Tibet and Nepal, and its location within the sacred realm of Mount Kailash, several ancient communication routes pass through Pithoragarh. The study is based on the network of routes that the Bhotias used during transhumance, trans-border trade, and pilgrimage. Fig. 1 shows the study area within the National, Regional, and Local territorial framework.

The Bhotias generally moved between two sets of residences located in low-altitude winter settlements (Gunshas) and high-altitude summer settlements (Mait) (Chatterjee, 1976). These two types of settlements are usually located 50–80 km apart from each other. While the summer settlements located near mountain passes gave access to Tibet and Nepal, the winter settlements helped the bhotias trade in the lower Himalayan area.

Along with transborder trading, traditionally, Bhotias practiced three distinct forms of transhumance: nuclear transhumance (only a part of the family moves to the summer settlements), transmigratory (entire family moves to the summer villages), and sedentary (the whole family do not move but drive their cattle to the alpine areas) (Rawal et al., 2012). A small number of people also lead a completely nomadic life. Every year between mid-April to May, they begin upward migration considering the relatively short growing season.

Sheep and goats are widely reared and suited for crossing the high passes to Tibetan trade marts during the summer months. On reaching the summer residence, the animals are unloaded and accompanied by herdsmen to the Buggyals (alpine pastures), pasturing for 15 to 30 days (Dangwal, 2009). The livestock is brought back from the fields and loaded with merchandise for Tibet. An elaborate ceremony and great festivity preceded the march to Tibet. Harvesting gets over by the end of September, followed by the preparation for a downward journey (Benz, 2014). Medicinal plants are also harvested during this time before the Bhotias return to their winter homes in the first half of October. While the Bhotia women cultivate small plots, spin wool, and weave cloth, men constantly move between the seasonal settlements (serving as trade depots) and seasonal market places.

The transhumance route forms the lifeline of the Bhotias as it makes seasonal migration possible, linking the combined mountain agriculture of animal husbandry and crop cultivation, biotic resources in different ecological zones (Gerwin and Bergmann, 2012). This mobility pattern also helps to maintain livestock by providing reliable grazing resources throughout the year. The rivers orient the basic structure of this road network, sometimes winding along the banks, other times cut into the rock surface negotiating with the terrain. Subsidiary routes branch off the main course and link it with the settlements. The width of the roads decreases with the increase in altitude and extreme terrain conditions. Ranging from narrow trails to well-defined paved roads, two environmental conditions- the slopes of terrain and material compositions of the land's surface, play significant roles in constructing these roads. In some cases, the construction technique is subtraction and addition; other times, it is delimited by contention and retention walls.

As the scholarly account on pre-colonial Kumaon is very rare, it is hard to trace the origin of these transhumance routes, but considering their role in life sustenance, it is believed that they might have a history spanning a thousand years. The expedition beyond the mountain passes into the highlands of Tibet must have been guided by the demand for

products that cannot be grown within the Bhotia's immediate physical setting. It is also believed that the complementarity of eco-zones may have marked the beginning of the barter system- food grain in exchange of salt between Bhotias and communities beyond the mountain passes. One of the famous local legends throws light in the same direction by the story of a certain princess of the Johar valley, who, guided by a Sakya Lama in her dreams, crossed mountains and ventured into the highland to kill a vulture whose death ceased the scarcity of salt forever. Another local legend concerning two boys named Rani Sai and Dasi Sai also talks about the beginning of the barter system between Bhotias and Tibetans. Over the years, the barter trade included wool, borax, mountain goats, yaks, grains, sugar, and other products.

Ancient Tibet can be divided into four core regions with five key historical routes facilitating long-distance trade and transport (Ryavec Karl E, 2015). One of those routes that joined Lhasa with Leh branched off near Gyangri, travels through the Mansarovar region to reach Purang. From Purang, the route again branches off- one enters Byas valley, and the other traverses through Nepal to finally reach the Gangetic plains (Zurick et al., 2005; Ryavec Karl E, 2015). Tibet's core region adjacent to the Bhotia valleys was called Ngari, predominantly a sacred religious region with Mount Kailash and Mansarovar. Between 600AD to 840 AD, Buddhism diffused into the Tibetan societies for the first time, and the region around Mt Kailash began to house many Buddhist temples and stupas. According to the historical accounts, many Indian scholars were invited to Tibet to translate Sanskrit Buddhist text to Tibetan (Van Spengen, 2010; Neelis, 2011). The period between 840 and 1240AD witnessed vigorous diffusion of Buddhism by the Indian masters and their Tibetan students (Ryavec Karl E, 2015; Schaik, 2011; Snellgrove and Richardson, 2003). Needless to say, the sacred region of Mount Kailash further flourished. In the absence of scholarly works that show the development of the routes of the Bhotia valleys, one cannot say if the routes were extensively used and developed through the above-stated periods. However, considering the growing importance of pilgrimage to the Kailash Mansarovar region and the local legends, one cannot dismiss the possibility.

It is pertinent to note that the natural features-mountain passes marked the boundary between the Tibetan highlands and Bhotia valley, and there was no border conflict or political disturbances on the northern front of the valleys. People involved in the barter trade used to pay taxes to the Tibetans, and trading activities were smoothly run (Brown, 1984; Sherring, 1906). The valleys faced territorial restructuring on the eastern side. The Katyuris used to rule Kumaon and Western Nepal until a part of the Katyuri dynasty was captured by the Malla kings of Western Nepal in 1191AD. After Mallas, some parts of Kumaon were occupied by Bums. However, both sides of the Kali river again came under one political power when Chand kings ascended the throne. The change in ruling powers on the eastern front not just meant the addition of tax-collecting entities but cultural accumulation and change in the socio-spatial landscape.

The trade activities, mainly related to the lucrative Pashmina wool along the Leh-Lhasa route, increased to a greater extent around the seventeenth century, due to which trade marts at Gyanema, Purang, Taklakot were constructed in the Ngari region (Ryavec Karl E, 2015; Van Spengen, 2010; Schaik, 2011). A trade control station near Barga next to Mount Kailash oversaw the trade activities happening around the region. Increased trade activities on the Tibetan side increased trade activities in the Bhotia valleys resulting in the structural development of the roads. At that time, the Ladakhi traders monopolized the Pashmina wool trade, and the Bhotias' trade was majorly limited to the barter of locally needed products. The ruling dynasties had created a regionally arranged power-geometry that regulated movements and generated surplus through taxation (Brown, 1984; Bergmann, 2016).

The British win over Gorkha forces in 1815 AD marked another crucial phase of the region with the primary aim of Britishers to divert the lucrative Pashmina wool trade from Tibet directly into British territory. The following year (1816) saw another turning point in local

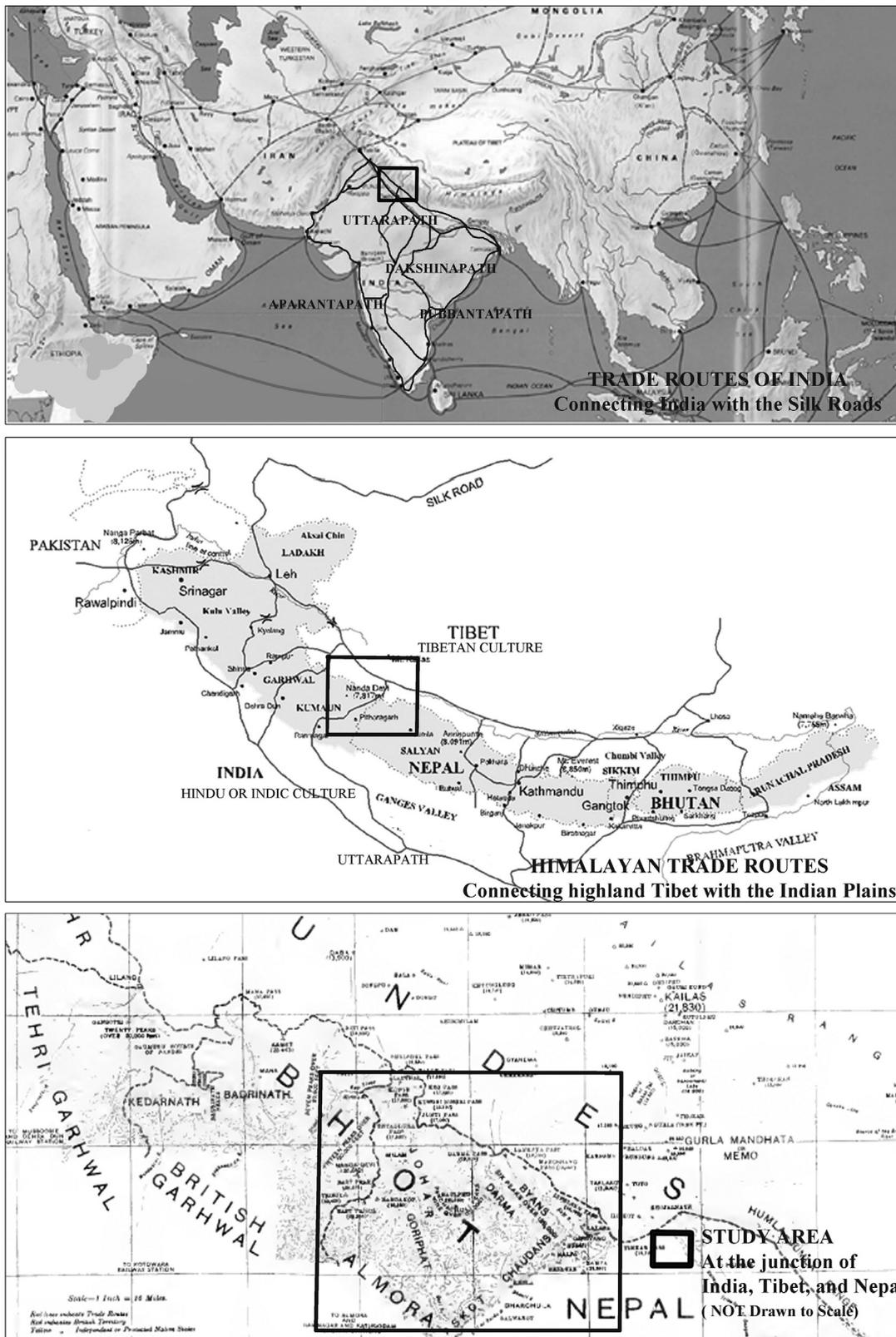


Fig. 1. Study area within the national, regional, local framework. Source: adapted and modified from Zurick et al. (2005), Sherring (1906), UNESCO (2008).

history. Through the Treaty of Sugauli, the Kali river became the international border between Nepal and British Kumaon (Kumari and Kushwaha, 2019). The Ladakh monopoly on the Pashmina trade dissolved through the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846. The later part of the nineteenth century witnessed an eastward shift of wool trade and a rapid increase

in the wool trade volume in the Bhotia valleys (Van Spengen, 2013). The increase in trade volume further strengthened the routes along the river valleys. Cultural accumulation along the routes happened faster because of the increased trade traffic into the valleys. While the roads facilitated the interaction between people from the same valley during seasonal mi-

gration, the annual trade fair at Jauljibi and the Tibetan trading marts (Sibchilim, Gyanima, Chhakara, Taklakot, and Tarchen) provided significant meeting places for Bhotias of adjacent valleys, Nepalese, Tibetans, and traders from other places. In the 1890s, the Taklakot route to Pithoragarh almost directly trapped the wool trade of the Mansarovar region and began to dominate the Tibetan trade of India (Van Spengen, 2010). The valleys were abuzz with pilgrims and traders, each adding different values to the socio-spatial landscape.

While in the beginning, the Britishers treated the Bhotias as the Cultural ambassadors to the Tibetan chiefs and granted a high level of mobility, later imposed many restrictions on the mobility pattern and natural resources use. One of the actions that majorly impacted the Bhotia livelihood and mobility is the direct control of forests by the British Government. The British interference in gaining absolute control over the trade, followed by the territorial reconfigurations, gradually decline the flexible mobility pattern of Bhotias.

Transborder trading came to a halt in 1962 due to the closing of the Indo-Tibetan border after the Sino-Indian war. Subsequently, the seasonal migration to higher alpine areas declined considerably for people choosing other lucrative occupations in the foothills (Dangwal, 2009; Negi, 2007). Presently, around 15–20% of families in Darma, Byas valley, and less than 10% in Johar and Chaudans villages migrate to alpine valleys during summer. However, the routes are still used by trekkers, nature lovers, and tourists, adding another layer of meaning to them.

Though the basic configuration of the roads along the rivers remained the same over the years, the segments in between kept shifting, sometimes due to avalanches, landslides, other times because of territorial restructuring. However, considering the historical accounts, local legends, and present context, routes that the Bhotias frequent during seasonal migration and trade (before the Indo-China war) can be outlined as (Chaterjee, 1976; Sherring, 1906; Garbyal and Pande, 2018; Kak, 2001) (Fig. 2):

- Johari: Jauljibi-Munsiyari-Lilam-Khilach-Ralam-Tola-Martola-Barphu-Mapa-Milam-Dung- Untadhura mountain pass or Kungri bingri la pass- Sibchilim and Gyanima Mandi(Trade mart) in Tibet.
- Darmani: Jauljibi- Dharchula-Tawaghat- Sobla- Dar-Nagling-Baling-Chal-Dugtu-Philam-Go-Tidang-Marchha-Sipu- Darma la muntain pass- Chhakra and Gyanima mandi in Tibet
- Chaudansi: Jauljibi-Dharchula-Tawaghat-Pangu-Sosa-Sirkha-Simkhola-Lipulekh pass- Taklakot and Tarchen Mandi
- Byasi: Jauljibi- Dharchula-Tawaghat-Malpa-Garbyang- Gunji-Kalapani-Lipu lekh pass- taklakot and purang trading. Alternatively, from Gunji-Napalchchu-Navi-Raungkong-Kuti- Lampya la pass-Gyanima mandi. This route coincides with the Kailash Mansarovar Pilgrimage route.

It must be noted here that the transhumance happens within the valleys, whereas for trade and pilgrimage, people cross the mountain passes.

4.3. Cultural accumulation on and around roads

Transhumance route represents a spatial link between India, Tibet, and Nepal with wide-ranging socio-cultural and economic implications. These roads made living, communication, and exchange possible in extreme environmental conditions, and the constant movement for trade, pilgrimage, and transhumance transformed the place into a flourishing and highly productive territory. Moreover, these roads did not just promote fluid socio-cultural interactions between local Bhotias, but on a larger scale, they facilitated the north-south flow of knowledge, ideas, and worldviews from highland Tibet to the Indian Plains.

The nature of interactions that took place along the Route comprises nature-culture and cross-cultural exchanges, expressed by the appropriation of the surroundings, settlement planning and architecture, traditional craftsmanship, agricultural practices, oral traditions and expres-

sions, social practices, rituals, and festive events. The Route, stimulating dialogue between cultures, acted as a conduit for the flow of knowledge, became a source of feedback, and constantly enriched, upgraded the interrelationship established by the communities between themselves and their natural environment.

The tangible remains of this interrelationship are not monumental, rather humble with fewer ecological footprints. Whereas the intangible heritage, representing the vision and experience of the people who use the roads, constitutes the central part of the cultural accumulation associated with the Route. The most crucial of it is the assimilation of languages that served as a vehicle for knowledge dissemination. The languages spoken in the valleys belong to the Tibeto-Burman family (Pathak, 1993). However, most people are multilingual, fluent in Indo-Aryan languages such as Hindi, Pahari, and Nepali, owing to their continuous interaction with people across the country (Banerji and Fareedi, 1983; Groff, 2010; Oko, 2018; Willis, 2007). Another link established by the Route that considerably affected people's worldviews in this sacred region was the exposure to two universal religions- Buddhism and Hinduism (Channa, 2005). The acceptance of both Buddhist and Hindu philosophy formed the basis of people's attitudes and feelings towards people, animals, and the ecosystem (Kalmar, 2017).

Inhabitants of these valleys live in harmony with nature, and the strong bonding with nature can be seen at all scales of the valleys (Bhatt et al., 2009; Garbyal et al., 2005). As densely built clusters or loosely built around open spaces, the settlement planning around the route illustrates site selection based on proximity to water sources and availability of flatter terrain. Modest houses made of locally available material, adorned with ornate doors and windows showcase the convergence of transitional, nomadic lifestyle with settled culture seeking permanence (Fig. 3). The rich artistic embellishment and excellent wood craftsmanship reflect the blend of practicality and symbolism that exist in Tibetan societies (Snellgrove and Richardson, 2003; Herrie and Wozniak, 2017). White-colored walls with blue doors and windows are common features around the valleys, which are believed to symbolize the snow-cladded Himalayas (Joshi and Rawat, 2020). The prevalent construction technique, providing safety against various destabilizing forces, indicates judicious use of resources and sophisticated technological knowledge developed over the years.

Most of the available land in the vicinity of settlements is terraced, cultivated for double cropping, and managed by community farming. The terraced fields are irrigated by diverting water from nearby streams or rivers through channels called Guls. Dug along the contours Guls are considered as one of the best examples of water resource management. Apart from irrigation, the Guls are also used for drinking purposes and running water mills called Gharats (Rawat and Sah, 2009). These watermills are powered by running water and used for grinding grains, spices, and cattle feed. Knowledge regarding cultivation practices, conservation of seeds, and food are exchanged, majorly during seasonal migration. The abundance of wild medicinal and aromatic plants around the summer and winter settlements helped the inhabitants acquire comprehensive knowledge of wild Himalayan plants and herbs for curative purposes, which was disseminated through the Route (Bhatt et al., 2009; Maiti, 2009; Farooquee and Nautiyal, 1999; Pullaiah et al., 2017; Farooquee and Kala, 2004).

As the people inhabiting these areas are agro-pastoralist-trader societies, whose livelihood depends on the forest, pastures, they attach sacred values to the natural environment for conservation and optimum resource use (Oli et al., 2013). The institution of Sacred Forests called Dev Van (Mohan et al., 2018), the institution of Shingul and Sye Roa are prominent mechanisms of biodiversity conservation at the community level (Rawal et al., 2012). Dev Van of Satgarh, Hokra Devi, and Chamunda Devi are among the notable sacred forests within the route network. Other forms of resource conservation can be seen in the rituals of Kathburiya(wayside Goddess) and Nabu samo (Negi, 2010). While Kathburiya ensures effective regeneration of flora at the hilltop,

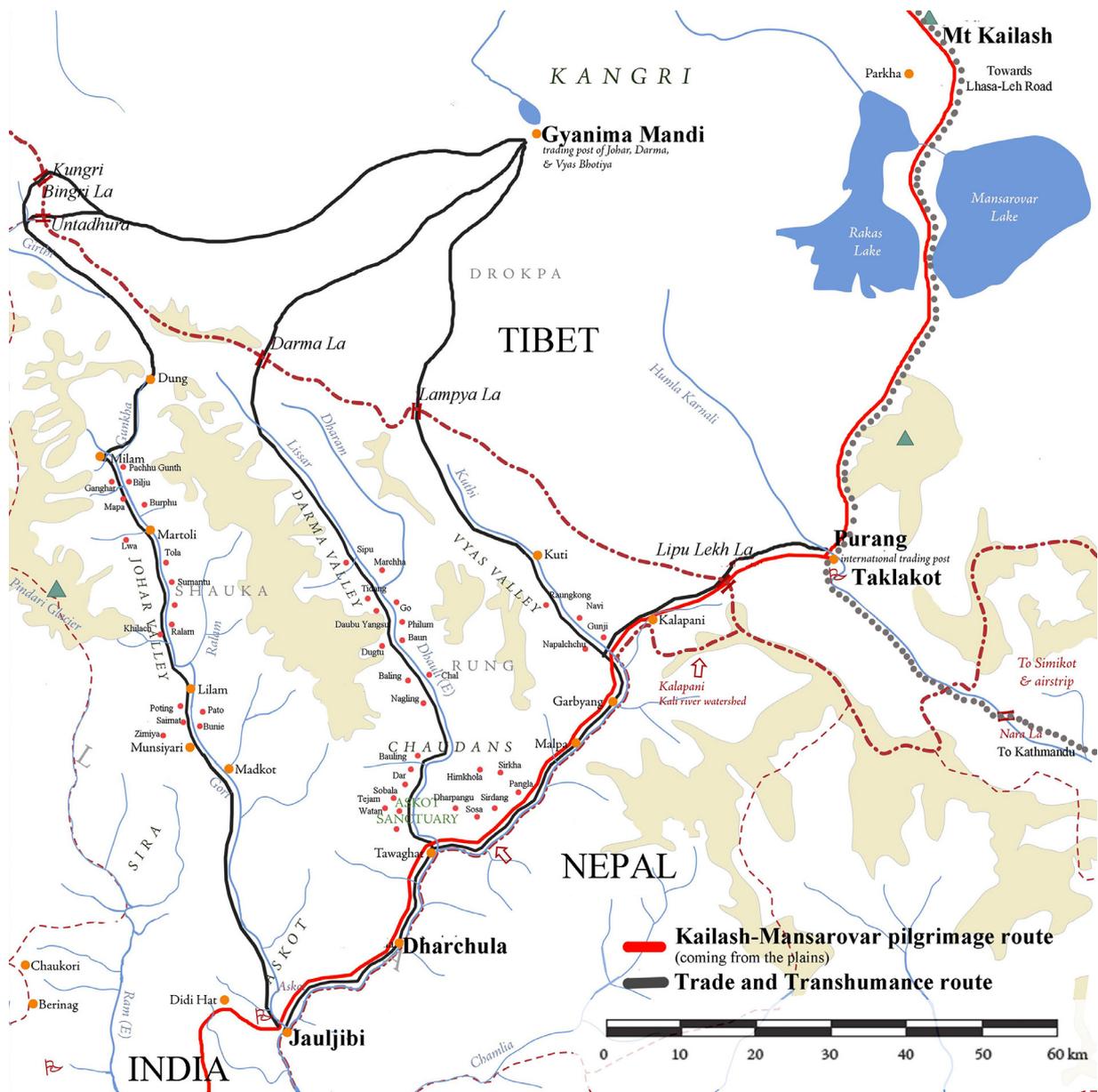


Fig. 2. The route network. Source: adapted and modified from PaharMountains of Central Asia Digital Dataset, 2006, Sherring (1906), Ryavec Karl E (2015), Web (1819).

Nabu samo represents an effective way of getting rid of harmful insects. During these festivals, the ceremonial entourage passes through special routes to reach the sacred destination.

Several other festivals/rituals are observed in the valleys directly linked to the Route, promoting a ritualized mobility pattern clustered around the biotic resources of scarce distribution. Notable of them is the Hill Jatra(hill=mud and jatra= jaat). This festival that expresses the linkages of agro-pastoralist communities with the wildlife and nature was first introduced in the valley by the people of western Nepal (Govt. of India, 2021). The Kandali festival is observed once in twelve years, and the celebration of Nanda Ashtami also involves procession through the routes. While the former deals with checking the spread of the invasive species through community action, the latter is celebrated to collect the sacred flowers of Brahma Kamal (Office Of Commissioner Kumaon and Kandali festival, 2013). The Chhipla-Jaat festival, in which people travel to the seat of Chhipla kedar every three years, gives people the opportunity to observe/inspect changing environmental conditions, regeneration of forest species, and occurrence of various medicinal

plants herbs en route. The prominence of natural objects and the association of roads in almost all the rituals reflect the value that people place on nature and the higher ceremonial significance of the transhumance route.

Traditional craftsmanship is another binding domain enriched by the Route’s cross-border interactions (Banerji and Fareedi, 1983). Wood carving, wool processing, woolen shawl making, carpet making, knowledge related to cotton and spices, musical instrument making are the prominent ones that speak of the cross-border ties (Pathak, 1993).

5. Preliminary assessment

The transhumance routes of Pithoragarh are overland routes that traverse the Johar, Darma, Chaudans, and Byas valleys. While the routes facilitate seasonal migration within the valleys, they extend themselves beyond the mountain passes into the highlands of Tibet and Nepal for trade and pilgrimage. On the spatial scale, the routes that come across as local routes of migration and transportation are actually transnational



Fig. 3. Built environment source: author.

in nature. However, in the present context, the trans-border activities are limited to the pilgrimage to Mount Kailash through the Byas valley.

Given the transnational context of the transhumance route, the concept of Cultural route offers an opportunity to identify, understand and celebrate the shared heritage. The discussion below examines some of the defining features of a cultural route and considers how they might apply to the transhumance route of Pithoragarh

Long-lasting History with Continuity in space and time: Transhumance being an age-old activity of life sustenance, the routes believed to exist since antiquity. Though the exact origin of barter trade with Tibet is unknown, it seems to have a long history, as validated by a few local legends such as Johar princess or the story of Rani Sai and Dasi Sai. The period between 600 and 1200AD witnessed diffusion of Buddhism, construction of monasteries and temples around the Mount Kailash region, and frequent travel of Indian scholars and pilgrims to Tibet. Considering the location of the valleys at the junction and the proximity to Mount Kailash, it will not be wrong to say that the routes played a vital role in disseminating religious ideologies of Hinduism and Buddhism. However, the routes were extensively used and developed between 1650 and 1962 AD as an effect of the following acts: growing commerce on the Lhasa-Leh route, the power struggle of various ruling authorities over the territory, dissolution of Ladakh's wool trade monopoly, and an eastward shift of lucrative pashmina trade, the Sugauli treaty, the British aspiration of gaining absolute control of the trade and natural resources, gradual replacement of Tibetan wool by imported wool, replacement of Tibetan salt by substitutes from coastal India, and the closure of border after 1962. The period witnessed the thriving and decline of cross-border activities with several political restructuring that resulted in a change of socio-spatial configuration of the valleys. Suffice to say, transhumance interlinked with trade and pilgrimage evolved a system of interdependence between the border region of India, Tibet, and Nepal that extends across a long time frame.

Multi-dimensional function: Different functions associated with the routes are -Transhumance, Trade, and Pilgrimage, from which transhumance structured the landscape, facilitated movement upon which other functions added values. Each function added different components which cumulatively gave meaning to the landscape. The components are

- (a) **Transport Infrastructure:** The roads, along with the fords, bridges, and mountain passes, form the first layer of components. Locally called Khancha, traditionally, they were measured as good if six sheep can walk side by side. While the basic orientation of the routes remains the same, the course has been modified over the years owing to changing environmental conditions and political actions. The local legends also suggest a few diversifications in the route's course due to mystic creatures; however, they must be investigated and scientifically validated.
- (b) **Places of exchange:** Places of exchange are the points that facilitate communication between people. The stop points, resting areas, drinking water sources, and grazing lands are the places where communication happens between the migration group/travelers while on the move. The trade marts across the border and the summer settlements (acting as storage depots) form another set of 'places of exchange.' Fairs that became a common phenomenon around the seventeenth century to accelerate the trade inflow across the region have provided meeting places for cross-cultural exchanges. The Jauljibi and Thal fairs are the prominent ones within the present Indian border. As pilgrimage and religious activities provide an essential dimension to the area, the monasteries, temples, and places ascribed with sacred values also provide a platform for exchanges. As per the records, there are around six important Buddhist monasteries in the Mount Kailash area, eight monasteries around the Chinese portion of the Manasarovar, and five in the Nepalese portion,

and many Hindu temples and shrines that acted as institutions for framing the worldviews of the people of the valleys that respect nature and form a symbiotic relationship with it. The field survey revealed several places within the landscape that are significant for their sacredness, spiritual values, and mythological importance that are a manifestation of the Bhotia worldview of nature conservation enriched by cross-cultural exchanges.

- (c) Influences: Over the years, the routes have become a crucial passage for the transport of people, and ideas from the highlands to the plains and festivals have become a significant vehicle for transmission of the acquired knowledge. As transhumance formed the backbone of the livelihood and trade was based on barter of locally grown products, the acquired knowledge majorly deals with biodiversity conservation. The notion of sacredness that has been exercised through various festivals and rituals has played an essential role in the conservation of both flora fauna diversity. The previous section of the paper has mentioned a few such festivals/rituals that, apart from assisting people to meet their spiritual needs, play a vital role in conserving natural resources. In addition, the inhabitants possess comprehensive knowledge of wild Himalayan plants and herbs for curative purposes.

The interviews revealed that there used to be customary arrangements to manage natural resources and uphold social ties, which were prevalent across the region. The institution of Dev Van, Shingul, and Sye Roa are examples of such arrangements. Many oral traditions and expressions, myths and legends, are present in the valleys that are used to pass on knowledge, values, and memory.

5.1. Wholeness

The route, as a whole, showcases the coexistence and convergence of nomadic and settled cultures, the adaptation of different mechanisms to live in harmony with nature and sustain in a place where natural resource availability is highly variable through time and space. Spanning across several ecological zones, each with specific potential and sustenance limitations (Zomer et al., 2013), the transhumance route illustrates a sustainable way of living based on environmental and cultural values developed through cross-cultural exchanges. The routes connected the highlands with the lowlands and created a vertical model that facilitated constant movement, brought together many cultures, and enabled fluid socio-cultural and economic interactions (Pandey et al., 2017). The interactions resulted in a vast body of knowledge of environmental ethics and methods of biodiversity conservation and are exhibited in the socio-spatial landscapes crossed and connected by the routes. The knowledge is disseminated across the valleys and transmitted from generation to generation through oral communication and various sacred rituals. Suffice to say, as a whole, this communication network is an outstanding example of indigenous people's abilities to explore and characterize vast areas under their control.

5.2. Crossing and connecting borders

It connects several ecological and subsistence zones between high and lowlands, Tibetan and Indic cultures, and power realms. On the local scale, the route forms an ecologically adaptive network promoting the concept of nature conservation, generated and maintained by the movement of people and livestock. The route connects with the long-distance silk roads and becomes a facilitator of religious ideologies and commerce on the regional scale. The places crossed and connected by the route network always have had a fluid character, based on religious beliefs and cultural allegiance and informed by the dynamics of trade, politics, livelihood, and ecology.

5.3. Reflects cross-fertilization of cultures

The historical accounts suggest the existence of many micro-cultures and societies within this landscape, whose ancestral origin traces back to Kol-Munds, Kirat-Mongols-Huns, Khasas, Shakas, and Dravidians. However, due to the lack of prior scholarly investigation, at this moment, it is not easy to pinpoint the products of cross-cultural fertilization of the same. The routes helped to create linguistic diversity through cross-fertilization between the Tibeto-Burman and the Indo-Aryan languages. The assimilation of languages served as a vehicle for knowledge dissemination.

Similar social and religious customs followed in the border regions because of constant communication, matrimonial alliances, and Mitra institution (trade relationship based upon clan membership). As the people across the valley had to inhabit an area that calls for ecological codependency, they developed deep ecological knowledge that includes a deeper understanding of the location and availability of natural resources and their spatial and temporal patterns, responses to natural hazards, creation of institutions and customary arrangements that regulate natural resources. The local management of natural resources through ascribing sacred meanings and conducting rituals appear very similar across the border. Shared heritage in this context is the cumulative body of ecological knowledge and practices that fulfill the demand and ensures nature conservation. In addition, the shared heritage constitutes the knowledge associated with building construction and settlement planning, use of medicinal herbs, and craft-making developed through long years of experiment and enriched by various cultural groups that ruled and traveled through the landscape. Many religious practices, ceremonies, and rules owe their origins to Tibet, Nepal, and places as far as Rajputana (Field observation). A closer, in-depth investigation could clarify the matter; however, considering the route's connection with the silk roads, it cannot be dismissed.

Associational value: The routes and the landscape have varied ranges of association: with the historical events of wars and treaties, Hindu-Buddhist religious philosophy, international trade, and commerce, association with Sacred mountains, rivers, and Mythology. The notion of sacredness created by Hindu-Buddhist philosophy plays a vital role in configuring the socio-spatial landscape. Apart from the strong association with Mount Kailash and Mansarovar, the place showcases association with several Natural features in the name of Gods and Goddesses. One of the significant Mythological associations is the journey of Lord Hanuman to Chhiyalekh to gather the magical herb- Sanjivani that could bring the dead back to life. Another one is the journey of Pandavas to Mount Kailash through the region. A small stream called Nyungtang-Ti falling in the Route to Budi from Lamari also appears in several myths since Nyungtang is the goddess of water and prosperity and is worshiped in all the valley villages. Gods that personify natural forces are: Hya Thimpa Namjyung, Chhainto Guru, Karjang Gungka, Hya Gabla, Layar Kuti, Laraung-Kakaung, among others. Some gods are directly linked to nature and its forces, while others have mythological beliefs attached to their existence. These beliefs have been passed on through generations via a highly vivid and opulent oral tradition.

The above discussion suggests that the transhumance route of Pithoragarh has a long history layered with multiple meanings, associations, and cultural interactions. This study brings to notice the environmental, socio-cultural values that are not borne just out of local interaction but interactions across time and between various cultural groups. The significance of these richly layered routes and associated landscapes can be best revealed by an in-depth investigation within the framework of cultural routes. As the routes acted as conduits for the flow of knowledge and constantly enriched, upgraded the interrelationship established by the communities between themselves and their natural environment, the cultural assets present within the landscape cannot be understood to their full extent if the routes that traverse them are not understood.

A follow-up investigation should include tracing the historical path, its evolution and preparing a comprehensive listing of its components.

The task seems daunting considering the environmental changes and lack of prior mapping. However, it can reveal how Bhotias negotiated with the external forces and created traditional customary arrangements to protect and maintain the mountainous areas with the knowledge acquired through cross-cultural exchanges. This route network cannot simply be understood in terms of its physical characteristics; a deep understanding of the environmental and spiritual dimensions is crucial in this context.

Many researchers have explored the Bhot Pradesh of Pithoragarh, ranging from Economy, Disaster management to Ethno-botany; however, there is minimal understanding of the route's role in developing the socio-spatial landscape and its significance as a whole entity. In the absence of a comprehensive inventory of tangible and intangible heritage associated with the route, it becomes even more critical and challenging to identify, document, and establish the significance before they give in to the rapid socio-economic-environmental change. Therefore, after the identification/inventorization phase, an ideal next step would be to analyze the route's condition and threats and respond to the threats. In an era of rapid globalization leading to environmental degradation, identifying such route networks and revisiting the past adaptation strategies can prove beneficial.

6. Conclusion

The transhumance route represents a network of roads that enabled fluid communication and created a humanized landscape connecting several inaccessible terrains at different altitudes. The narrow winding tracks across rugged mountain terrains not just brought in wealth from the flourishing trans-border trade and promoted seasonal migration but stimulated dialogue between different cultures. It helped in disseminating ideologies of two universal religions- Hinduism and Buddhism. The knowledge carried by the route constantly enriched the worldview of the Bhotia inhabitants and helped them create a system of respect and reciprocity with their natural environment. From creating linguistic diversity to assimilating social and religious customs and bringing in various craft skills, the route played a significant role in forming Bhotia's collective identity.

The preliminary assessment of the route's diverse cross-cultural exchange themes and contents reveals its possibilities to be protected as a cultural route; it suggests that a richer understanding of the cultural assets could emerge by exploring the route's significance as a 'Cultural Route.' However, it warrants a comprehensive listing of its components that spreads across the border. The major challenge associated with understanding the value of the route is the humanistic, non-monumental character of its tangible components. While the monumental sustains human memory, the modest often escape the eye, even though they represent a world of lived experiences based on knowledge developed over the years. Moreover, the true meaning of these components can only be understood when they are read in conjunction with intangible attributes. As the intangible components constitute the central part of the cultural accumulation associated with the transhumance route, a comprehensive research methodology is required for their identification. The route's identity as a whole and its potential as a knowledge carrier can be fully understood and appreciated through a multi-disciplinary approach that brings in expertise and perspectives from all relevant disciplines across the borders.

The study brings this underexplored but biophysically and socio-culturally important routes and associated landscape to the attention and initiates a dialogue to acknowledge the importance of routes that possess a modest built environment and have a plethora of intangible heritage resources. The study brings attention to this ecologically adaptive network, generated and maintained by people's movement, and strengthens the argument that there is a need for further exploration of the concept of the Cultural route. There is a need to redress the current emphasis on long-distance routes with strong man-made tangible markers and broaden the definition that recognizes the importance of

routes associated with intangible heritage. There have to be methodological frameworks that explicitly address the identification and assessment of such routes. In addition, this study is essential in a culturally rich country like India that is yet to tap its potential of Cultural Route heritage on the global platform. Keeping the ICOMOS approved definition in view, there can always be various ways for countries to redefine Cultural Routes according to their socio-cultural-geographical context.

This study is not an end in itself, but a means to check the ground truth to the extent that it acknowledges the route's importance and initiates a dialogue that calls for further in-depth research of routes loaded with intangible heritage. The paper acts as a preliminary step in contributing to the endeavor; it concludes with considering the possibility of the routes like the transhumance route of Pithoragarh being recognized and protected as national and/or world heritage in the future.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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