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CLAUS PETER ZOLLER

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**The hemp cultivators of Uttarakhand and social complexity
(with a special reference to the Rathis of Garhwal)¹**

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Abstract

Uttarakhand is dotted with a network of valleys that lends itself to the development of many small distinct communities, each valley being a micro-region, both in human and geographical terms, whose inhabitants form a largely self-contained economic and cultural entity. A noteworthy example of such a micro-region is the little known Rath (Rāṭh) area, drained by the Ayar in Garhwal. The inhabitants of this area are called Rathis (Rāṭhī-s, Rathi-s), predominantly traditional *bhang*-(*bhāṅga*, hemp, *Cannabis sativa*) cultivating folks in Uttarakhand. In pre-Colonial Uttarakhand, the hemp producers were a prosperous community due to their near monopoly in hempen business and enjoyed due social status, which accompanies prosperity. However, with the introduction of machine-made cloth by the British, which, contrasted to *bhangela* (*bhaṅgelā*, hempen cloth), was cheaper and fashionable, the hempen fabric lost market and its producers suffered economically and socially. Responding to the demand of the new socio-political ideology prevailing under the British, the hemp-producing

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¹ I am thankful to Dr. Vijay Bahuguna for assisting me to collect ethnographic information incorporated in this essay.

community organised themselves accordingly. Based on the principle of 'self-organization', the present study purports to unfold as to how a simple society transforms into a complex one.

Keywords: hemp, Indo-European, social stratification, caste, Othering, self-organisation, practice theory.

Introduction

Willem van Schendel's (2002) critique of area study and introduction of the concept of 'Zomia' which he applies to the mountainous region stretching from approximately Himachal Pradesh in the west to Southeast Asia in the east and its adjoining Chinese Tibetan Autonomous Region (*Ibid*: Figure 2), has opened a new window to the study of the peoples living in the borders of concerned modern nation-states. The concept has been elaborately dealt with by James Scott (2009), albeit restricting his study to what he calls 'stateless' and 'self-governed' peoples inhabiting the Southeast Asian Massif, its adjoining South China and Northeast India (*Ibid*: Map 2). Sara Shneiderman (2010) has widened the scope of 'Zomia' by including the entire Himalayan Massif, Hindu Kush-Karakorum, and adjoining Chinese Tibetan Autonomous Region. Her study makes an interesting case of the highly mobile transnational Thangmi community found in central-east Nepal, Darjeeling and Sikkim (India) and adjoining Tibet (*Ibid*: Figure 1). More recently, Martin Gerwin and Christoph Bergmann (2012) have applied the Zomia concept to the 'Bhotia' community of Uttarakhand. It is not necessary to agree with the upholders of the Zomia concept in the entirety of their formulations. However, what is central to the Zomia studies is that they focus on the inhabitants of certain mountainous geopolitical regions of their study considered as fringe elements by academics, nation-states, and states within nation-states. It is from this particular perspective that I introduce the community of hemp cultivators with a special reference to Rathis who are struggling for their identification in the socio-cultural milieu of the newly formed state of Uttarakhand.²

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² Recently, the Rathis have been included in the list of Other Backward Classes by the State Government of Uttarakhand (see *Tribune News Service*, Dehradun, December 23,

In Uttarakhand, there are several geo-ecological niches, each conditioned by its natural environment, maintaining a typical traditional lifestyle usually considered 'primitive' in ethnographic accounts. Some of these niches afford congenial environment to hemp cultivation as it is considered a natural habitat of this plant by some scholars (see, Russo 2005). Rath represents one such geo-ecological niche. It was a prosperous area and produced sufficient social surplus by means of hempen commerce, the mainstay of its economy. It is situated in the borders of two erstwhile principalities of Kumaon and Garhwal, as such its inhabitants known as Rathis were largely self-governing folks as is clear from their little known customary practices zealously governed by their traditional *panchayat* (*pañcāyata*) system. Sadly, it had to give way to the state regulated *panchayat* system under the Indian Constitution. Consequently, the traditional self-governing system is gradually dying out, and the Rathis are at the crossroads of socio-political transformation. Since there is hardly any ethnographic information about Rath, it is tempting to apply the Zomia concept to the Rath area.

It is well known that due to successive phases of folding and uplift of the Himalaya, geologically the whole region is extremely complicated. In human terms, such mountainous country with a network of valleys lends itself to the development of many small distinct communities, each valley being a micro-region, both in human and geographical terms, whose inhabitants form a largely self-contained economic and cultural entity under few dominant persons as evidenced in local inscriptions. In the past, these communities enjoyed due socio-economic status as well as freedom to pursue their traditional vocations, hempen commerce being one such vocation. However, conditions changed. Under the Gorkha (AD 1791–1815; Kumaon 1791–1815 and Garhwal 1804–1815), Uttarakhand was subjected to an autocratic rule and a strict orthodox caste system in an otherwise caste-fluid society of Uttarakhand. The British (AD 1815–1947) maintained status quo in the context of social organisation, however, they patronised those communities who claimed 'high-caste' status and who promoted British interests in Uttarakhand. Consequently, as may be noticed in contemporary official and private records, the centres of

power in Uttarakhand witnessed a phenomenal growth in social stratification; in the process, areas situated away from the seat of ruling authority were marginalised, so were their inhabitants. Ethnography and archives unfold that Rath is one such marginalised, little known area in Uttarakhand where social complexity developed during the British rule owing to the notion of ‘high caste’ category. It has been observed that during the British rule, ‘high caste’ was a passport to gaining access to power and prestige (see for details and further references, Joshi 1998; 2011).³ In the following sections of this essay, we will notice as to how under the British rule hemp related vocations (its cultivation and production of hempo commodities such as narcotic drugs and fibre for manufacturing rope and cloth) were instrumental in creating complexity in an otherwise simple society of hemp cultivators.

Antiquity of *bhāṅg* and *bhāṅgela* production in Uttarakhand

Of all the plants men have ever grown, none has been praised and denounced as often as marihuana (*Cannabis sativa*). Throughout the ages, marihuana has been extolled as one of man’s greatest benefactors and cursed as one of his greatest scourges. Marihuana is undoubtedly a herb that has been many things to many people. Armies and navies have used it to make war, men and women to make love. Hunters and fishermen have snared the most ferocious creatures, from the tiger to the shark, in its herculean weave. Fashion designers have dressed the most elegant women in its supple knit. Hangmen have snapped the necks of thieves and murderers with its fiber. Obstetricians have eased the pain of childbirth with its leaves. Farmers have crushed its seeds and used the oil within to light their lamps. Mourners have thrown its seeds into blazing fires and have had their sorrow transformed into blissful ecstasy by the fumes that filled the air (Abel 1980: ix).

Bhāṅg is one of the oldest cultivated plants in the world and the antiquity of its cultivation probably goes back to 12th millennium BP (*Ibid*; Long *et al* 2016: Table 1). Ernest Abel (1980: Pts. I-II) and Robert

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³ Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction* (1984: Part II, and *in passim*) gives an insight into identifying the ‘structure of positions’ and different ‘class fractions’ which operate as modes of domination in seats of power vis-à-vis areas away from power. Andreas Benz’s (2014) recent study gives an interesting account of this positioning in the reproduction of inequality in the context of ‘the Johari Shauka of the Kumaon Himalaya’.

Clarke and Mark Merlin (2013) have made interesting diachronic studies of the use and circulation of *bhang* products in the world. Archaeological evidence shows four areas/regions where more than 3,000 years old remains of *bhang* have been found, and its circulation has been associated with 'Bronze Age trans-continental connections' having its own route like the historic Silk Route (Long *et al* 2016: Fig. 1).

Humans have utilized *bhang* products in various forms such as foodstuff and fuel (achenes or seeds), fibre (stalks), and pharmaceutical (unfertilized flowering tops), throughout recorded history (Russo 2007). Recent studies indicate that:

Its biochemical diversity, while possibly exceeded in sheer numbers by other herbs and common food plants, is likely unrivalled with respect to its extensive complement of bioactive compounds and their potential medical applications (*Ibid*: 1614).

Barney Warf (2014) posits three conceptual tools to explain the geographics of cannabis use, namely, 'biopower and biopolitics, world-systems theory, and cultural political economy', and adds:

In short, theorizations of cannabis cultivation and use are inextricably bound up with broader understandings of power, knowledge, class, ethnicity, and the state. Such configurations inevitably play out differentially over time and space. For this reason, illuminating the historical geography of the drug offers a window into the changing networks of power that have unevenly encouraged and discouraged its use in varying historical and geographical contexts (*Ibid*: 418).

He has discussed these issues at length which improve our understanding of socio-cultural, economic, and political milieus of the traditional *bhang* cultivators of Uttarakhand. Indeed, in the present study one can find glimpses of narratives of traditional *bhang* cultivators of Uttarakhand to test Warf's theorizations, however, my primarily focus is to trace as to how the British rule was instrumental in promoting complexity in a simple society of village folks engaged in hempen business in the Central Himalaya.

Cultivation of *bhang* and its use in production of narcotic drugs and of fibre for hempen rope and cloth were widely current in India from time immemorial (Grierson 1894; Abel 1980: Ch. 1; Russo 2005; Clarke and Merlin 2013: Chs. 4-5). The British were seriously concerned about its regulation because it was an attractive source of

their revenue. It is evident from the fact that in response to a question raised in the House of Commons relating to hemp and allied issues in Bengal, the British Government appointed the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission in July 1893 to enquire into cultivation of hemp plant, its narcotic products, their trade and their effect upon society and associated administrative issues arising from the use of narcotic drugs in India with a view to regulating its production, which submitted its 7 Volume report in 1894, 'some of the more interesting conclusions' of which have been noted by Abel (1980: Ch. 6). Significantly, the commission observed:

In paragraph 552 of the Report it has been stated that "in regard to the physical effects the Commission have come to the conclusion that the moderate use of hemp drugs is practically attended by no evil results at all;" that "in respect to the alleged mental effects of the drugs, the Commission have come to the conclusion that the moderate use of the hemp drugs produces no injurious effect on the mind;" that "in regard to the moral effects of the drugs, the Commission are of the opinion that their moderate use produces no moral injury whatsoever;" and that "the moderate use of these drugs is the rule and the excessive use is comparatively exceptional ... The excessive may certainly be accepted as very injurious, but it must be admitted that in many excessive consumers the injury is not marked. The injury done by the excessive use is, however, confined almost exclusively to the consumer himself; the effect on society is rarely appreciable." ... When the injurious character of these drugs has not been established to the satisfaction of the Commission, I think they were not justified in advocating this policy of restriction; for in the light of the above remarks made by the Commission these drugs should stand on the same level with tea, tobacco, and other stimulating articles; and so long as the latter are not taxed there would hardly be any ground to tax ganja and charas, which have the further recommendation to be left free as their consumption is confined mostly to the poor classes and beggars (*Anon* 1894: 434).

However, elsewhere the Report reads that from 1872 to 1892, revenue from hemp drugs in N.W.-Provinces 'has grown from 4 to 7 lakhs' (*Ibid*: 392-93). It is implied then that hempen products earned incremental revenue to the government.

The Commission gave some interesting information about hemp cultivation and its products in Uttarakhand. Significantly, the report records that in entire India it was only in 'British Kumaon and Garhwal' that hemp was cultivated for 'fibre' (*Ibid*: 57). It is implied then that

Uttarakhand produced sufficient *bhangela* (hempen cloth). Indeed, as we will eventually notice, Uttarakhand was noted for its hempen cloth from ancient times. It is interesting to note that:

The British, however, were far less interested in the intoxicating properties of cannabis than hemp fibers, which were widely deployed in sails, paper, rope, sacks, clothing, and nets. The European demand for hemp was voracious, and the major supplier was Russia; to reduce their reliance upon Russian supplies, Britain sought out other sources. As early as 1563, Queen Elizabeth decreed that landowners throughout the empire with sixty or more acres must growth [sic] hemp or face a fine. In 1606 in Nova Scotia (then Nova Francia), experimental cultivation was started by Louis Hebert, apothecary to Samuel de Champlain. Farmers in the Jamestown colony in Virginia were required to grow hemp; George Washington and Thomas Jefferson grew hemp on their estates, and the Constitution was written on hemp (Warf 2014: 426).

Uttarakhand is well known for its biodiversity and rich natural resources, many of which are in great demand in international markets. Whereas some items are exported directly in their natural form (e.g., medicinal plants and herbs), others are processed locally and then marketed. One such item was *bhang* plant (*Cannabis sativa*). It is ‘a part of local culture’ of Uttarakhand as evidenced in its multiple uses (Shah 2004). E. K. Pauw’s (1896: 29) report reads that it yielded various by-products: its fibre was used in manufacture of fabric and rope, the latter was used in bridges and hunting devices (snare and nets), its seeds for oil as well as spices, rubbings of its flowers and buds produced *charas* (hashish), dried leaves and flowers *ganja* (*gāñjā*), and the ‘pith makes excellent torch wood’. Both *charas* and *ganja* were in great demand for their narcotic and hallucinogenic properties, thus a good source of excise duty (Anon 1894: 41, 392-93 see page 396, table showing revenue yields from 1873-74 to 1893-94; Abel 1980: *In passim*). This accounts for British interest in *bhang* (Atkinson 1882: 799-804; Bahuguna 2011; Fuloriyā and Tamtā 2011).

Bhangela fabric, owing to its great strength and resistance to moisture, was popular among Buddhist and Jain monks (Motīchandra 2007 VS: 31, 145, 163-64). Interestingly, *bhangela* is still produced, albeit in small quantity, by a particular community known as Kuthali Baur in Kumaon (Fuloriyā and Tamtā 2011) and Pabila in Garhwal (Bahuguna 2011). Before introduction of machine-made textile in

Uttarakhand by the British, *bhangela* was the principal clothing fabric of the masses (Pauw 1896: 29), and at least up to the last quarter of the 19th century AD it was 'the chief clothing fabric of the poor classes in Garhwál during the summer months' (Atkinson 1882: 801). As noted in Captain Fisser's report of 1883 (cited in Atkinson 1886: 262), hemp was peasants' great asset in Garhwal:

If by wealth is meant the possession of cash or other personal property convertible into cash, then the Garhwali cultivator is the poorest of the poor; but, on the other hand, his land provides his food and hempen clothing, his sheep the wool for his blanket. Salt he can always procure in exchange for surplus grain. Consequently money has but a limited value in a country innocent of trade on any considerable scale.

Sadly, due to socio-economic stigma, people specialised in weaving hempen fabric have distanced themselves from its production, consequently its manufacturing technology is at the verge of extinction. The paradox is that the traditional producers of *bhangela* have not gained any noticeable social prestige despite their dissociation with *bhangela*. Therefore, an in-depth study of the socio-cultural and material milieus of the traditional *bhangela*-producing folks calls for immediate attention as their traditions are rapidly disappearing. In this respect, Rath offers great scope where *bhangela* processing technology still survives (Bahugunā 2011). Interestingly, the Indian Hemp Commission noted that in Garhwal District hemp was cultivated in 580 acres of land, district-wise it was the largest such area in the North-Western Provinces (*Ibid*: 40).

Buddhist and Jain canonical literature dating back to the 4th century BC indicates that *bhangela* cloth was very popular among the monks (Motīchandra 2007 VS: Chapter 3). According to Buddhist traditions, after the 3rd Great Council of Pāṭaliputra, Aśoka sent missionaries to different quarters for propagation of Buddhism. Two of them, Kāśyapa Gotra and Madhyama, went to the Himalaya (Cunningham 1854: 289). Inscribed caskets from Sanchi, dated to the 3rd century BC, unfold that they contained '(Relics) of the emancipated son of Koti, Kasyapa Gotra, the missionary to the whole of Hemawanta', and 'of the emancipated Gotiputra, the brother of religion amongst the Dardabhisāras of the Hemawanta' (Cunningham 1854: 287, 289, 316-18). Thus, these inscriptions lend incontrovertible support to the Buddhist tradition under reference. In this context, the set

of Aśoka's 14 Rock Edicts at Kalsi (District Dehradun) in Uttarakhand is significant, for this is the only site in the entire Himalaya where he got his Fourteen Rock Edicts inscribed (Thapar 1961: 231-32). Archaeological explorations at Kalsi have brought to light traces of a settlement of the Mauryan times (*Indian Archaeology 1972-73 – A Review*: 33). On the basis of combined testimony of archaeological and literary sources coupled with local traditions it has been suggested that Kalsi was the hub of commercial activities in the Himalaya, hence attracted attention of Aśoka to get his Rock Edicts inscribed there (Joshi and Brown 1987). It is likely that Aśoka introduced Buddhism in the Himalaya through Uttarakhand whence it spread to the adjoining trans-Himalayan region of Tibet during pre-Christian times (Joshi 2014a). Therefore, on circumstantial evidences it may be suggested that the antiquity of commerce in *bhangela* in Uttarakhand goes back to at least the 3rd century BC.

My suggestion finds support from a recent study of pollen taxa and non-pollen palynomorphs obtained from BT sediment core of Lake Badanital (District Rudraprayag, Garhwal), C¹⁴ dated to between '2257 BC' and 'AD 1999' (calibrated, Demske *et al* 2016: Table 2). Among others, it includes both *Cannabis* and *Humulus/Cannabis* types, and 'an interval of high percentages of *Cannabis* type and *Humulus/Cannabis* type' such as noticed in the records of European lakes, particularly Lake Aydat (Massif Central, France), which is taken as 'an indicator of water retting of hemp' to facilitate release of fibres. Significantly, Demske *et al* (2016) notice that 'the confidential interval of intense retting at Badanital can be dated to from c. 480 BC to AD 1050' (*Ibid*: 11). Apparently, 'intense retting' of the *bhang* plant by about 480 BC presupposes its processing in order to extract fibre. Demske *et al* (2016: 12) conclude: 'Badanital possibly represents the earliest retting site for hemp in India and might provide a missing link in the Eurasian history of ancient retting techniques'. Their perspective in interpreting these activities is trans-cultural and trans-continental as may be seen in their citation of archaeological evidence from Mebrak in the Mustang Valley, Nepal, linking India with Xinjiang and Central Asia through the Kali Gandaki Valley. Nearer home, they cite two examples of human activities in Kumaon and Garhwal 'prior to c. 500 BC' respectively at 'Uleni' and 'Tehri Garhwal' (*Ibid*: 10-12).

Despite availability of adequate archaeological and linguistic source-material to support their findings, Demske *et al* (2016) have

used misleading citations, one of which, namely Uleni, does not hold (see for a critical review, Joshi 1995: 2002). However, in the context of *bhang* there are some interesting archaeological and linguistic evidences, which lend remarkable support to the study of Demske *et al* (2016: 11) who observe:

Excluding past growth of *Humulus* in the study area, the initial increase in frequencies of *Humulus/Cannabis* type after c. 1300 BC could point to a spread of wild hemp plants, early hemp cultivation and/or the beginning of retting at Badanital.

Abel (1980: 22) observes that ‘the Persian word *bhangā*’, appearing in the *Vendidad* – one of the few surviving books of the *Zend-Avesta*, is almost identical to ‘the Indian term *bhang*’ and indicates origin of these words in the language of the Aryans who moved from central Russia to Persia and India (see also, Kleijn 1984). Interestingly, Haak *et al*’s (2015) recent study of ‘genome-wide data from 69 Europeans who lived between 8,000-3,000 years ago by enriching ancient DNA libraries’ shows origin of some of the ‘Indo-European languages of Europe’ in the Steppe.

There is now a growing consensus among archaeologists and linguists that the Proto-Indo-European speaking horse-riding hordes radiated from the Eurasian steppe to different directions (see for details and further references, Anthony 2007; Parpola 2015; see also Kleijn *et al* 2017). Interestingly, occurrence of achene (*bhang* seeds), *Cannabis*-type pollen or hemp fibre in archaeological record from the Steppes and Central Asia indicates its association with the Proto-Indo-European speaking folks (Clarke and Merlin 2013: Ch. 4; Long *et al* 2016). These folks are also credited with spreading of *bhang* in South Asia through the Himalayan route ‘around 2,000 BC’ (Abel 1980: 17). Recent archaeological investigations in South Asia support Abel in that the earliest occurrences of *Cannabis* in South Asia are dated to between 4,000 and 3,100 BP: Indus Valley Civilization, samples of fibre (4,000 BP) and achene (3,600–3,300 BP), Lake Moriri (Ladakh), sample of *Cannabis*-type pollen 3,500 BP, Senuwar (Bihar) sample of achene 3,300–2,600 BP, and Lake Badanital (Uttarakhand), sample of *Cannabis*-type pollen 3,100 BP (Long *et al* 2016: Table 1).

Central Asia is considered to be one of the regions of origin of *Cannabis* where presence of its fibre, seeds, and pollen date far earlier than those found in South Asia (see Clarke and Merlin 2013: Chs. 2 and

4, tables on pp. 175, 177, 184; see for multiple regions of origin, Long *et al* 2016), and it is the nearest region to South Asia. Therefore, Lake Moriri and Badanital finds of *Cannabis* are crucial to trace entry routes of this plant in South Asia. Archaeological evidence shows that during the Neolithic the Central and Western Himalayan region was linked to the Inner Asia Complex (Fairservis 1971: 318; Stacul 1993; Aldenderfer 2013). Recent archaeological discoveries unfold that human activities and interaction in the bordering region of cis- and trans-Himalaya predate the Neolithic (see for preliminary information and references, Ota 2009; Joshi *et al* 2017). It may be noted here that during their later phase the Neolithic cultures of Western Himalaya were contemporary with the Bronze Age Indus Valley Civilization. On the basis of archaeological record it has been suggested that during the Bronze Age the horse-riders from the Steppe advanced towards the east and established a network of exchange/migration (Anthony 2007: Chs. 12 and 14; Clarke and Merlin 2013: Ch. 2; Long *et al* 2016). Various described as ‘Bronze Road’ or ‘the Bronze Age World System’, this movement facilitated ‘fundamental societal changes towards the end of the third millennium BC (ca. 5,000–4,000 cal BP)’ throughout Eurasia, and in this exchange/migration network the horse-riders from the Steppe used metallurgy as the core item and *Cannabis* as another important commodity (Clarke and Merlin 2013: Ch. 2; Long *et al* 2016). Towards the end of the third and beginning of the second millennium BC, local copper mines in Uttarakhand were also worked as evidenced in the copper anthropomorphs found at Haldwani (District Nainital), Bankot and Nainipatal (District Pithoragarh). These anthropomorphs represent the characteristic artefacts of the Copper Hoard Culture of the Ganga Valley, which flourished contemporaneously with the Indus Valley Civilization (see for details and further references, Joshi 1996). Other copper artefacts, such as celts and rings, associated with the Copper Hoards have been reported from Bahadarabad, District Haridwar in Uttarakhand (Ghosh [ed.] 1989:38–39), and recently a celt from the suburb of Dehradun.⁴ It seems, in antiquity both copper and iron technologies were shared by the people of Uttarakhand and West Nepal (Joshi 1996; 2002; references therein). Thus, circumstantial evidence suggests participation of the local

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⁴ Personal communication with Dr. P.M. Saklani, Department of Archaeology, H.N.B. Garhwal University, Srinagar, Garhwal.

population of Uttarakhand in the World Systems in the Bronze Age and, as later evidences indicate, it continued in subsequent Ages (Joshi 2014b).

Recent linguistic studies also lend support to movement of different language-speaking folks in Uttarakhand. In a recent reappraisal of the time-honoured hypotheses of Outer and Inner Languages of the Old-Indo-Aryan, Claus Peter Zoller has persuasively shown that the Outer Language groups of Pahari dialects/languages have preserved several linguistic features of Proto-Indo-Iranian, which are older than Old Indo-Aryan. Zoller subscribes to the view that the Old Indo-Aryan speakers came to South Asia in several successive waves, and posits that those who arrived earlier than the Vedic Indo-Aryan speakers continued following such linguistic traits as were present in Indo-Iranian or Proto-Indo-Iranian, but not in Vedic Indo-Aryan. Interestingly, such features have been noticed especially in the Pahari language groups of Indo-Aryan (Zoller 2016a and b; in press). One such example is that of Bangani discovered by Zoller himself (Zoller 1988; 1989; 2007; 2008) in Bangan (District Uttarkashi, Garhwal), and another one was discovered by D.D. Sharma (1983) in Lahul-Spiti (Himachal Pradesh). It is interesting to note that Lake Badanital is geographically close to Bangan and Lake Moriri is also not very far from Lahul-Spiti. Thus, both the sites have great potentials to studying movement of the *Cannibis*-using Old-Indo-Aryan speakers via Central and Inner Asian routes (cf. Kleijn 1984: 59). Recently attempts have been made to read signatures of different language-speaking groups in Central and Western Himalaya through the symbiotic study of rock drawings found in the area under reference. Though seminal, these studies seem to support movement of different language-speaking folks in the Himalayan region from the prehistoric times, and of the horse-riders from the Neolithic (Joshi: 2017a; Joshi *et al* 2017; Chauhan and Joshi 2017). This information can be extrapolated to attribute growth of *bhang* to human intervention and by extension to the horse-riding Old Indo-Aryan speakers in the Himalaya. Clarke and Merlin (2013) have discussed the origin and global circulation of *Cannabis* at length, their observation concerning South Asia is interesting:

... the Aryans entered South Asia basically from the northwest from Central Asia; however, if they carried *C. sativa* seeds with them, their genes were apparently swamped out by the dominant *C. indica* gene pool extant today. Alternatively, *C. indica* might have travelled all the

way from ancient China across the steppe to the Indo-Aryan territories and then dispersed into South India, all of this occurring before about 3500 BP when Central Asian nomads could have encountered psychoactive *C. indica* during their eastward travels. Another possibility is that *C. indica* arrived in South Asia directly from a Pleistocene refuge in southern East Asia. All these hypothetical scenarios would be in agreement with taxonomic divisions proposed by Hillig (see Chapter 11 for a detailed discussion of *Cannabis* taxonomy) (*Ibid*: 253).

Thus, archaeological and linguistic researches do indicate association of *bhang* with the Proto-Indo-Aryan speakers in Central and Western Himalaya, and Lake Badanital and Lake Moriri finds of *Cannabis* are significant.

***Bhang* and *bhangela* producers of Uttarakhand**

It seems that due to availability of other fibre plants such as ‘*kudzu* (*Puerariathunbergiana*), banana or abaca (*Musa textilis*), jute (*Corchorus spp.*), and ramie (*Boehmeria nivea*)’, *Cannabis* was sparsely used for obtaining fibre in South Asia, and therefore its use for this purpose was restricted to Nepal and adjoining Uttarakhand (*Ibid*: 105, 389). Interestingly, in this region narrow-leaf variety of *Cannabis* is grown, which contains ‘much higher levels of THC’ hence useful in the production of both psychoactive drugs and fibre (*Ibid*: Chs. 5 and 7). This may account for the popularity of Central Himalayan hemp in antiquity. As noted above, the *Report of the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission, 1893-94* (Anon 1894: 57) records that in entire India it was only in ‘British Kumaon and Garhwal’ that hemp was cultivated for ‘fibre’, it would not be an overstatement that Uttarakhand commanded near monopoly in the production of hempen fibre. Therefore, its business must have been in a flourishing state in the subsequent centuries, for G.W. Traill (1828: Appendix, page 226) includes ‘*hemp*, *hempen* cloth and *chirras* [*charas*]’ in the list of commodities exported ‘from the hills to the plains’.

E.T. Atkinson (1882: 799-804) has given a detailed account of *bhang* cultivation and its potentials in increasing revenue collection. However, its cultivation could not be expanded, possibly due to ‘much prejudice against growing the plant’:

So much is this the case that the phrase ‘*tera ghar bhang bono holo*’ – ‘may hemp be sown in thy house’ – is one of the most common abusive imprecations (Atkinson 1882: 801).

Why cultivation of such a utilitarian plant was despised can be understood in the light of the fact that before widespread use of alcoholic drinks in Uttarakhand the only modes of intoxication were *charas* (hashish) and *ganja* (dried leaves and flowers of *Cannabis sativa*), used by way of deep smoking. Although nowadays prohibited under narcotic laws, it is still a very popular mode of hallucination, and an established practice among certain sects of *Nathapanthis* (*Nāthapanthī*-s), associated with Śaivism (cf. Anon 1894: 93, 160-61; see also, Russo 2005). Thus, Abel (1980: 18) notes:

Bhang was and still is to India what alcohol is to the West. Many social and religious gatherings in ancient times, as well as present, were simply incomplete unless bhang was part of the occasion. It is said that those who speak derisively of bhang are doomed to suffer the torments of hell as long as the sun shines in the heavens.

According to Romila Thapar (1978: 95-98), renouncers used hallucinogens to maintain their celibacy for it suppressed their worldly desires. Significantly, Garhwal was a stronghold of the *Nathapanthi* sect (see for details, Kukareṭī 2060 VS), and the *Nathapanthi* literature and inscriptional evidences from Garhwal refer to King Ajayapāla as a celebrated *yogī* (*Ibid*: 32, 95; Rawat 2002: 34-35, pls.1, 9-10). The *Nathapanthis* had a wide following in Garhwal, and it goes without saying that their establishments have been instrumental in popularising *charas* and *ganja* among the masses. Thus, we have the testimony of the Hippie Movement of 1960s, when large numbers of Westerners frequented the *Nathapanthi* establishments all over Uttarakhand and, despite being illegal, freely indulged in smoking *charas* and *ganja*. Even today, such activities continue as a routine affair in those places (cf., Banerjee 1960: 157-59). What is central to this study is that these hallucinogenic agents make its users inert and unproductive, hence people look down upon those who indulge in consumption and production of these hallucinogens (cf., Anon 1894: 251-54, N.-W. Provinces, witness no. 242 - Mahant Kesho Ram Rai, Q. 33, statement: ‘The consumers of these drugs are hated and despised by society on account of the consequences of the drugs’, page 438). Despite that, being highly lucrative, ‘the Khasiyas’ cultivated *bhang* and

manufactured rope, and its 'traffic in the seed and rope, and even in *charas*' was open to all sections of society 'without prejudice to their social position' (Atkinson 1882: 801). It is implied then that *bhang* cultivation and production of its by-products were perceived as caste specific traits during the British times. Indeed, the *Report of the Indian Hemp Drugs Commission, 1893-94* records an interesting account of hempen products in relation to caste:

Duthic and Fuller write that hemp growing is restricted to the lowest classes of cultivators, being considered beneath the dignity of the higher castes. So much is this the case that the phrase "May hemp be sown in thy house" is one of the commonest of abusive imprecations. Mr. Dharma Nand and other witnesses corroborate this account. The principal cultivators appear to be Khasias or Tabhilas, a class of people above the Domes and below the Rajputs in the social scale, who do not wear the sacred thread. If a Brahman or Rajput wishes to cultivate hemp, he engages a Khasia or Dome to work for him; but, after the crop is taken off, he has no prejudice against making *charas* or separating the fibres from the stalks (*Anon* 1894: 67).

One of the major reasons of caste formations and rigidity of caste system in Uttarakhand is vocational specialisation. Any community that possessed a particular sort of specialised technology maintained social distance from other ones, which resulted in the formation of different professional groups, eventually fossilizing in a caste system (Joshi 1997; Īamṭā 2007). The hemp cultivators are examples of this social process resulting in their transformation into an exclusive caste of 'Tabhilas'. This background helps to identify factors leading to social complexity among hemp-cultivating communities of Uttarakhand and marginalisation of Rath, which was the busy hub of hempen commerce.

Study of *bhang* cultivation and production of hempen commodities also helps in studying complexity in social system through the principle of 'self-organization', the major contribution of the Brussels School founded by the Nobel laureate (1977, Chemistry) Ilya Prigogine whose interest in archaeology and social sciences led him apply his scientific formulations to social sciences (e.g., Harman and Prigogine 1979; see also, Toffler 1984). Prigogine (1997: 3-4) notes:

Over my life, I have seen many parallel developments in physics and human sciences. Classical science emphasizes equilibrium and stability. Now we emphasize instability and bifurcations. That means that we have to introduce new models in both the hard sciences and the

human sciences ... Economy and history are associated to highly non-linear and unstable situations ... Indeed we have succeeded to include instability into the fundamental laws of physics. This is precisely the extension of classical and quantum mechanics which I already mentioned. In this extension, past and future play different roles and there is an “arrow of time”. Also, laws of nature no longer express certitudes. They express possibilities.

Peter Allen’s (1997) paper illustrates as to how Prigogine’s formulations can be applied to the study of evolution of complexity in social systems. It has been used in the study of the ‘Bhotia’ community of Uttarakhand (Brown 1984) and social stratification and caste formation in Kumaon (Brown and Joshi 1990). In sum, these studies show that with the advent of the British rule in Uttarakhand a new system of governance was introduced, in which ownership of land and a money-economy-based market-system played a vital role. Furthermore, the British created a new group of subordinate political elites from those local families who claimed to have enjoyed hereditary bureaucratic status from the times of pre-Gorkha regimes and who vouched for utmost loyalty to the British. In the process, ‘Othering’ their own fraternity a new section of political elites claiming high-caste immigrant descent emerged to share power. Thus, in keeping with the demand of the time a simple society started transforming itself into a complex one.

It cannot be said precisely when this process of ‘Othering’ started, but available records clearly show that it already existed in the eighteenth century AD, before the occupation of Uttarakhand by the Gorkhas, and progressed rapidly during the British rule (AD 1815–1947). This is evident from the census reports and traditional histories of various castes recorded during the British rule (Joshi 2011).

Owing to this ‘Othering’, the vast majority of petty officials of the earlier regimes, local peasants and artisans were relegated to the ‘Khasiya’ and the ‘Dom’ ranks (Joshi 1998). Traill’s report (1828) makes it clear that at the time of British takeover of Uttarakhand, local artisans produced several items of export including hempen cloth. However, conditions changed when the British introduced machine-made cotton cloth in Uttarakhand. Besides being cheaper, it was a fashionable item and a symbol of higher social status, whereas hempen cloth symbolised poverty and primitiveness. It is clear from the

following statement of Dharma Nand Joshi, Settlement Deputy Collector, Garhwal:

The people have become more civilized, and are changing their habits as regards the use of hemp for clothing (*Anon* 1894: 41).

This accounts for degradation of hempen fabric-producing folks of Uttarakhand and, at the same time, it reveals as to how they responded to this new system through self-organisation. British accounts reveal that emulating the new ruling elite, folks engaged in *bhang*-production also resorted to ‘Othering’. Consequently, we notice the *bhang*-producing community organising itself into three distinct caste-groups according to their respective financial resources, 1) ‘manufacturers of hempen sack-cloth’ – Koli, Bora and Agari ‘sections’ of ‘the Doms’, 2) cultivators of hemp, ‘Khasiya’, and 3) traders of *bhang* seeds, rope, and even *charas* – all sections ‘without prejudice to their social position’ (Atkinson 1882: 801 [vol. I, part II]).

Interestingly, there is no mention of ‘Pavila/Pabila’ (Pavīlā/Pabīlā ‘hemp-spinning caste’ of Garhwal) in Atkinson’s *Gazetteers* (1882; 1886). However, it seems that ‘Tabhilas’ (the hemp cultivators) of the *Indian Hemp Drugs Commission Report 1893-94* (*Anon* 1894: 76), cited above, is a misspelling of ‘Pabilas’ which word occurs for the first time in Pauw’s Garhwal Settlement Report (Pauw 1896: 29). In his ‘*British Garhwal. A Gazetteer*’ Walton’s mention of ‘Pavila’ is revealing when he says: ‘Hemp is now cultivated by the *pavilas* – low caste Khasiyas of Chandpur – in rich plots of land adjoining the village’ (Walton 1910: 39).⁵ His use of ‘now’ indicates that by his time (i.e., AD 1910) *bhang* cultivation was contracted to a small area of Chandpur, as contrasted to Atkinson’s and Pauw’s times when it was widely produced as an agricultural asset of the peasants of Garhwal (see also the *Indian Hemp Drugs Commission Report 1893-94*, *Anon* 1894: 41). Apparently, by AD 1910 machine-made textile had gained wide market in Uttarakhand, and folks engaged in hempen cloth were losing their socio-economic standing as evidenced in Walton’s description of ‘the Pavilas, a somewhat depressed hemp-spinning caste living in Chandpur’ (*Ibid*: 61). It may be noted here that the word ‘depressed’ was used for the ‘Doms’ in the Census Report of 1921 (see,

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⁵ Chandpur was divided into Tailī Chāmdapura and Śīlī Chāmdapura (Ratūḍī 2004 [1928]: 155).

Edye 1923). Walton's use of 'somewhat' is suggestive of the degradation process, which, in fact, had already started during Batten's time who reports that hemp-spinning folks included '*Khussias*', 'Rajpoot', and '*soodras*' (Batten 1851: 153).

Recording the castes of 'the Kumaun division and Tehri-Garhwal State' in the Census of 1931, A.C. Turner (1933: 555) lists '*Baura* or *Bora*' among the '*Silpakars*' (official term substituted for the 'Doms' in 1931 Census) of Uttarakhand as 'Sack-makers from Almora. They cultivate hemp and make coarse cloth and rope from the fibre. The name is derived from *bora* 'a sack'. Apparently, Turner identifies a section of hempen fabric producers in Garhwal as '*Silpakar*' migrants from Kumaon like many other castes listed by him as migrants from some or the other places in Garhwal. Significantly, in keeping with the *Indian Hemp Drugs Commission Report 1893-94*, which places 'Tabhilas' above 'the Domes and below the Rajputs', the Pavilas do not figure in the category of the '*Silpakars*' in Turner's report. It shows that by Turner's time a section of traditional *bhangela* producers in Garhwal had differentiated themselves completely as 'Pabila Khasiyas' from the Baura or Bora, albeit maintaining certain exclusive customs (Turner 1933: 565-66). What is central to the present study is that in the Census of 1931 the hemp producers were divided into two discrete categories, Khasiya (included in *biṭh* = pure caste category), and '*dom*' (impure caste category) (Turner 1933). The above account clearly shows that by AD 1931 there was a sharp division among the peoples engaged in hempen business and reminds us of Prigogine's 'instability and bifurcations' in the community of the people engaged in hempen commerce.

This process of differentiation is inscribed in the customary practice of dividing paternal property according to primogeniture, termed as *jeṭhunḍā* (share of the eldest) in Rath. According to this custom, the eldest son in the family, in addition to his own share as one of the sons, is entitled to inherit 20% of the ancestral property as well as the best asset of the family as *jeṭhunḍā*. Another custom of similar nature found in Rath is *sautiyā bāmṭa*. According to this custom property of a deceased person, having more than one wife is divided equally according to the number of wives. Thus, if a man has two wives, his property was to divide into two shares, irrespective of the total number of his sons. Accordingly, if one wife bore one son and the other

wife bore two sons the former's son inherited 50% of the paternal property, and those of the latter 25% each.

Interestingly, to gain higher social status, 'Othering' was also resorted to by the Thakalis (a Buddhist community) of Western Nepal as noticed by Fürer-Haimendorf (1966). He discusses at length as to how to gain 'high caste status' among the 'Hindus'⁶ of Nepal, the Thakalis not only changed their dress, food-habits, social customs and Buddhist religious practices, but they also severed their tribal 'Bhot' identity by transforming themselves into a caste society.

Apparently, the above account of social stratification represents the etic perception of a hemp-producing community. So far, no records are available to find out as to how the traditional producers of hemp and hempen products of Uttarakhand traced their own antecedents. In this connection, a recent study by Fuloriyā and Ṭamṭā (2011) on traditional hemp-production in Kumaon is interesting. They say that the 'Kuthaliyā-Baura' themselves admit that they are ignorant of their history, however, they give two versions of their past: One, they claim (albeit unsupported) that documents relating to their origin, housed in the official record room in Kathmandu, read that originally they belonged to the 'Rājput Jāṭa' community but were degraded in Kumaon. E.A.H. Blunt (1969 [1931]: 143) also says that the Bours trace their antecedents to a 'Jat' community. According to the second version, due to atrocities under the Gorkha the elder members of Baur community committed self-immolation, leaving their children to the mercy of the people. However, nobody helped the children; rather they were treated as 'untouchables'. This accounts for the degradation of Bours who otherwise enjoyed 'Rajput' status and were immigrants from Kangra (erstwhile Punjab), but in traditional Kumaoni society they were perceived as a low caste community. Thus, as noted above, the ideology of 'immigrantness' was also adopted by the Kuthali Baur community to claim higher social status. They were partly successful in their efforts in that whereas during the colonial rule they were considered as 'untouchables' (Pāṇḍe 1937: 593), in Independent India they have managed to earn OBC (Other Backward Classes) status (*The Gazette of India, Extraordinary* 2011: 8).

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⁶ Factually, no religious system bears the name 'Hindu', hence in quote marks.

The Rathis

Garhwal is noted as a land of *gadha-s* (*gaḍha* ‘stronghold’). Traditions have it that originally there were fifty-two *gadha-s* in Garhwal, though their number exceed far more. Ajayapāla, the *gadha-pati* (‘lord of *gadha*’) of Chandpur-garh (Chāṁdapura-gaḍha), is credited with bringing these *gadha-s* into one, single polity called Garhwal (Gaḍhavāla). Rath, being adjacent to Chandpur-garh, formed an important resource-rich territorial unit under Chandpur-garh due to its flourishing commerce in hempen products. According to local traditions, Ajayapāla transferred his capital from Chandpur to Devalgarh, near modern Srinagar (District Pauri-Garhwal), in early sixteenth century AD (Ratūḍī 2004 [1928]: 176-79; Ḍabarāla 2028 VS: 193-211). Consequently, the Garhwali chiefs could not control Rath region as firmly as during the Chandpur-garh days, and Rath enjoyed a semi-autonomous status under the Chaundal (Chauṁḍāla) of Chaunda-garh (Chauṁḍā-gaḍha) (Ratūḍī 2004 [1928]: 155).

Owing to its geographical situation between the polities of Kumaon and Garhwal, Rath was a marginal area between these two principalities, and remained so even during the British time; neither has it gained any noticeable benefits after Independence. However, this strategic geo-political positioning enabled the Rathis to carve out an interesting niche in the material and socio-cultural milieus of pre-British Uttarakhand. Rath comprises approximately two Development Blocks of District Pauri, namely, Pabau and Thalısain. Rathi is the name applied to both its inhabitants and their dialect. Rathi is a distinct sub-dialect of ‘Central Pahari’ rooted in Sanskrit. The chief of Chaunda-garh organised Rathis politically by incorporating certain dominant persons in different localities who in turn incorporated lesser influential persons of diverse lineages in their respective areas of operation, eventually constituting a traditional *panchayat* system. Technically termed as *padhan* (*padhāna* ‘chief’)/*sayana* (*sayāṇā* ‘aged/elder’), these dominant persons lived in bigger, spacious houses called *kotha-s* (*koṭhā-s*) in which a chamber was set aside for imprisonment of offenders.⁷ The *padhan* discharged ‘royal functions’ as the chief of his area and the other members of *panchayat* as his counsellors (for ‘royal

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⁷ Raṇajīta Sīmha, Padhan of Village Buransi and his *koṭhā* are famous in Rath, and still held in fond memory of his able leadership.

function’ see, Dumont 1988: 160-63), in keeping with the ruling traditions of the chief of Chaunda-garh who, in turn, may have imitated his sovereign, the king of Garhwal (see, Galey 1983; 1992, for Garhwali kingship). Admittedly, for Chaunda-garh our information is meagre, however, the Sajvan (Sajvāṇa) of Bharpur-garh (Bharapūra-gaḍha) still possess their own family archives, extant *kotha* with special chambers meant for holding their ‘royal’ court and a prison. Nearby the *kotha* there are ruins of a fortification wall and a *vaṭa-vrikha* (banyan tree) from which criminals awarded capital punishment were hanged (Prasūna 2001).⁸ Louis Dumont (1988: 390, endnote 73b, Ch. VII, Power and Territory) observes:

As the royal function can hardly be observed nowadays, there is a paucity of anthropological literature on this topic, which is why the main aspects of this function are here envisaged separately. A picture of the whole would require that the extensive modern historical literature to be brought into focus from a sociological point of view ...

Significantly, inscriptions, archival records, family histories, and material remains from Uttarakhand and adjoining Far West Nepal lend remarkable support to Dumont’s formulation of ‘royal function’. Thus, Western Nepal was parcelled into twenty-two and twenty-four principalities called, respectively *Baisī* and *Chaubīsī* (Pande 1997), Kumaon, at least eight (Joshi 2005), and Garhwal more than fifty-two (Ratūḍī 2004 [1928]: 176-79 Ḍabarāla 2028 VS: 193-211). These principalities emerged sometime after the disintegration of the Katyuri (Katyūrī) dynasty in the twelfth century AD (Pande 1997; Joshi 2014b). The Katyuri inscriptions show that there was an elaborate administrative organisation under them (Kielhorn 1896; Sircar 1955-56). A long list of officers under the Katyuri-s shows that the king discharged his functions through this hierarchically formed bureaucracy.

In post-Katyuri copper plate inscriptions, dating back from the thirteenth century AD through eighteenth century, from western Nepal (Śreshṭha 2059 VS; Pāṇḍeya 2065 VS; Khanāla 2070 VS), Kumaon

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⁸ Bharpur-garh is situated some ten km away from Deoprayag towards Rishikesh on a ridge facing the Ganges. The Sajvan archives of Bharpur-garh include official letters of the Garhwali kings ruling from Srinagar (Pauri-Garhwal), the Gorkha, and the Garhwali kings ruling from Tehri (Tehri-Garhwal) in that chronological order. The author is thankful to Mr. Surendra Singh Sajvan for allowing him to examine his family archives.

(Rāma Simha 2002; 2007; Joshi 2009), and Garhwal (Pamvāra 1985; Kāthocha 2006: 206-36) this bureaucracy is totally absent. Instead, these inscriptions mention certain individuals drawn from the commoners as witnesses of the concerned land grants. They are referred to by their respective personal and caste names, indicating their influence and reputation in public as individuals, answering to the ‘dominant’ persons of Dumont mentioned above.

Folklores and local traditions of Uttarakhand are replete with information about some or the other heroic deeds of various dominant individuals (Oakley and Gairola 1977 [1935]; Chauhāna, not dated). There are many episodes preserved in local traditions showing that at times these dominant persons became more powerful, and resourceful than their suzerains (Atkinson 1884: ch VI in *passim*; Ḍabarāla 2028 VS: in *passim*). There were several factors accounting for the rise of these dominant persons, notably personal valour, sense of justice, wealth, social/religious/political leadership at the time of social/political distress, etc. Obviously, such feats helped them earn adequate ‘symbolic capital’ (see, Bourdeau 1988 [1977]: Ch. 4). The *dhanda*-s of Tehri Garhwal (Saklani 1987: 75-81; Bijalvāṇa 2003: Ch. 4) appear to be reminiscent of such occasions as gave opportunity to these dominant persons to prove their worth in troubled states of affairs. Naturally, they were held in high esteem, and, as inscriptional evidence shows, they rendered invaluable help to their suzerains in crisis (Joshi 2012).

As noted above, ecological conditions played a vital role in human settlement and emergence of dominant persons in a given region. Since the ecology of Rath was conducive to the cultivation of hemp, it became the principal crop of the area to the extent of becoming the socio-cultural milieu of the Rathis. In the concluding section of this essay, I will show that those who controlled the production of hemp and hempen items became dominant players in the *bhang*-producing community of Rath and, Othering their own less successful community members, emerged as a distinct group by styling themselves as Pavila/Pabila, and that it also accounts for the emergence of complexity in a simple society. However, before doing so, a brief discussion on the relevance of caste in social complexity needs to be addressed.

Caste, social complexity, and New Orientalism

Edward Said's 'Orientalism' (Said 1979), its critique, and its application in studying Indian society (see, Gelders and Balagangadhara 2011, and references therein) add new dimensions to the study of the Orient. This academic exercise creates a 'new image' of caste as a product of colonial knowledge of Indian society as found in early British archives (Dirks 2001). Though Dirks himself admits that his study focuses on southern India and 'is not intended to stand for the history (let alone the sociology) of all India' (*Ibid*: 79), on several occasions he unwittingly uses it in the pan-Indian context. Admittedly, Dirks' study gives a deep understanding of the historiography of caste, but it can hardly be used in studying dynamics of social complexity, as will be clear from what follows.

For example, Dirks shows British craftiness in selective interference in such aspects of traditional Indian life as they considered threats to colonial rule in the name of 'public order in public spaces', hence 'required colonial order(ing)' (*Ibid*: 153). It is evidenced in the 'custom of hook swinging' (*Ibid*: Chapter 8), which 'became a symbol of British commitment to civilizational reform as well as of the crisis of enlightened colonial rule' (*Ibid*: 153). This generalised statement is at odds with the fact that public gathered in hook swinging numbered only a few thousands (the Sholavandan example shows '5000' souls, *Ibid*: 155) compared to the Kumbha Mela, which attracted hundreds of thousands of people, sometimes exceeding a million. At least in case of Haridwar in Uttarakhand, there is hardly any evidence to show a specific 'colonial order(ing)' (Lochtefeld 2004; Skinner 1833: Ch. VI), let alone the fiery ceremony of Muharram. Witness the time-honoured scuffle among the Shiah and Sunni sects in Lucknow during the Muharram. It may be noted that in matters of public order in public spaces most of the rules and regulations introduced by the British still continue. Another problem with Dirks' study is his account of the British reliance on Brahmin informers of Indian traditions, especially in the context of caste related issues. In this case, what he calls 'colonial anthropology' (Dirks 2001: Chapter 8) by and large seems to be a product of the Brahmins and their dominant *jajmans* (ritual clients), and the British figure as gullible scribes of the Brahmin narratives. Similar accounts of caste hierarchy and social stratification originating from high-caste (particularly Brahmin) narratives are also available in the

early British records on Uttarakhand and have been accepted by scholars without critical examination. A representative example is Sanwal's (1976) monumental work, which has been thoroughly deconstructed by Brown and Joshi (1990) and Joshi (2011). It is sad that scholars still see the sociology of Uttarakhand through the British lenses.

It is worth noting that while discussing kinship relations and parallel-cousin marriages in Kabylia (an Algerian village), Bourdieu shows what empirically is viewed as appropriate practice from the male perspective, can be otherwise if viewed from the female perspective (Bourdieu 1988 [1977]: Ch. 1, figure 1, showing the diagram of relationships from the male and female angles). In the same vein, whereas Brahmins occupying the top position in 'Hindu' social order may be appropriate from a Brahmin's point of view, there are alternative ways to view this order. Thus, in Buddhist scriptures, Kṣatriyas are privileged over the Brahmins (see, Thaplyal 2004: 59-63), and in the folklore of Uttarakhand, 'Mānika Oḍa' (mason Manik – a Śūdra) is given precedence over all the deities, let alone the Brahmins and the Kṣatriyas (Joṣī 2011: 64-65; *Nandā Devī Jāgara*: 111-24). Furthermore, the Śūdra version of social/ritual hierarchy in the *Dāsa* (a section of the Śūdra-s in Uttarakhand proficient in folklore and non-Sanskritic rituals) narrative runs as follow (Joṣī 2011: 42):

Dharamiyā Dāsa kī Naubatī
Kaliyā Lvāra kī hatauḍī
Chhetrī ko khāno
Barama ke Veda

(The following persons are praised for their excellence): Dharamī Dāsa (in performing) his *Naubata* (daily periodical playing of musical instruments in sync with the Brahmanical rituals relating to worship of the deity in a temple); Kaliyā, the Lvāra (blacksmith, in fashioning) his *hatauḍī* (hammer); the Chhetrī (Kṣatriya in wielding) his *khāno* (sword); and the Barama (Brahmin reciting) the *Veda*-s.

It is interesting to note here that the first two, viz., Dharamī Dāsa and Kaliyā Lvāra belong to the Śūdra community in Uttarakhand, and in mutual social hierarchy between the two the ironsmiths have been represented as higher than the Dāsa in the early British records (see, Joshi 1994, and references therein). However, in the Dāsa tradition

Dharmī Dāsa figures on the top of social hierarchy, followed by blacksmith, Kshatri and Brahmin in that order.

Obviously, the Brahmin version of caste hierarchy as recorded by the British represents a partial view and does not represent the true character of 'Hindu' social practice. Interestingly, though rare, superiority of the lower social groups, such as scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, in some sections of Uttarakhand society has also been observed in a recent study:

These figures show that marked inequalities do exist in Kumaon, but that they exist in a rare and unusual form compared to other parts of India. The pattern of social stratification in Indian society as a whole is virtually turned upside down here, at least as far as the relationship between SC and ST groups is concerned (Benz 2014: 3).

In this connection it is worthwhile to add that 'Hindu' society is studied from two perspectives, namely, the 'book-view' based on the *Dharmaśāstra* ('Hindu' scriptures) and the 'field-view' as observed by ethnographers in their respective geographical areas of study (Béteille 2003: 8, 33-35). Dirks' study represents neither a 'book-view' nor a 'field-view'. He calls it 'colonial anthropology'. However, it looks like a product of native intellectual exercise to use caste to negotiate power. In any case, it is tempting to call it 'New Orientalism', and it needs to be subjected to a critical analysis in the light of regional source-materials such as found in Uttarakhand. The importance of regional sources is well recognised in the historiography of mediaeval India (Perlin 1985; Singh 1988; Subrahmanyam 1992; Khan 1997; Joshi: 2017b).

Like dissipated structures forced by fluctuations (Prigogine and Stengers 1984; Toffler 1984), random natural or anthropogenic events enforce recursive social relations. Such events cannot be explained in terms of a caste system or its variants, such as hierarchy or stratified society. Witness the role of Brahmins and upper caste 'Hindus' vis-à-vis *bedā/bādī*, invariably a Śūdra, in the rope-sliding ritual in Uttarakhand and adjoining Himachal Pradesh, which is '[o]ne of the most spectacular, yet little-known ceremonies in India' (Berreman 1961). Like hook swinging, it is also performed to ward off natural calamities like plague, drought, and the like. Another glaring example of similar nature is the worship of Kachiyā/Kachhiyā in Garhwal, who is a symbol of loathsomeness and a disease of women after delivery of

a child, in *Nāthapantha* tradition, the son of an *Avadhūtaṇī* (an unclean female spirit) born on *amāvasyā* (the night of new moon), which is invoked as Aghoranātha by the ‘Doma’ (Kukareṭī 2060 VS: 124, 222).⁹ It is mandatory for all (including Brahmins) to go to the temple of Kachiyā/Kachhiyā and worship there under the ministrations of a Śūdra to ward off any hazard to the new born and its mother. Sax (2008: 257-58, note 7) specifically adds that “‘Untouchable’ is offensive to many” hence the term ‘Harijan’ for the ‘lowest’ caste in Garhwal, i.e., Śūdra. On such ritual occasions, the Brahmins are subordinated to the low caste performers of these ceremonies. Or, for that matter, low caste shamans vis-à-vis Brahmins in spirit possession séances, are widely popular rituals in ‘village Hinduism’ (Dumont 1959; Berreman 1961). On such ritual occasions, the Brahmins are subordinated to the low caste performers of these ceremonies. In fact, recent studies in social systems reveal that social inequalities emerged already in the prehistoric world (*Current Anthropology*, Supplement 8, 2013). In the context of South Asia, archaeology shows the existence of several pre-Vedic communities, which represented ‘proto-castes’ and whose mutual interactions resulted in ‘caste systems’ of later ‘Hinduism’ (Omvedt 2009 [1994]; Coningham and Young 1999). Thus, in Uttarakhand these ceremonies in public spaces clearly show a reversal of ritual roles: the Brahmin is relegated to the lower plane, while the Śūdra occupies the supreme place. What I want to emphasise here is that ‘caste’ is a recursive web of directionless social relations. It cannot be described in terms of upper/higher vis-à-vis lower social order or social structure.¹⁰ It reminds us of Prigogine’s ‘instability and

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⁹ Kukareṭī’s monumental work (2060 VS) is crucial to understanding the dynamics of socio-religious behaviour of the people of Uttarakhand. Sadly, despite its originality and extensive use of unpublished *Nāthapanthī* manuscripts, it is hardly cited by pundits of ethno-religious studies.

¹⁰ Note that during the British rule six hundred Brahmin, five hundred and sixteen Kshatriya, and fifty-one Śūdra caste-names were recorded in Uttarakhand, the majority of which are derived from their respective professions. This number is not exclusive (see, Pāṇde 1937: 580-89, 601-12; Ratūḍī 2004 [1928]: 71-78, 81-88; Turner 1933: 572-77). Whereas, theoretically, it suggests a hierarchically arranged static nature of traditional three-fold divisions of Uttarakhand society, namely, Brahmin, Kshatriya and Śūdra, in practice it shows a large number of functional castes in each division forming a directionless web of recursive social relations that cannot be explained in terms of hierarchy. Because components of each social division claim and counterclaim relative superior status among themselves as well as among other divisions. Note the Dāsa

bifurcations' in the social system, and can be better understood in the framework of 'self-organization'. Thus, Allen (1997: 115-16) notes:

In order to explore the behaviour of systems with endogenously generated innovations and selection we define a "possibility space", a space representing the range of different techniques and behaviours that could potentially arise. In practice, of course, this is a multidimensional space of which we would only be able to anticipate a few of the principle dimensions. This "possibility space" will be explored by individuals and groups who explore the pay-offs of new behaviour. In biology, genetic mechanism ensures that different possibilities are explored, and off-spring, off-spring of off-spring and so on, spread out over time from any pure condition. In human systems the imperfections and subjectivity of existence mean that techniques and behaviours are never passed on exactly, and therefore that exploration and innovation are always present as a result of the individuality and contextual nature of experience. Local conditions, materials and needs differ and therefore any "pure" technique or behaviour that migrates into a locality will rapidly diverge in its nature and intent. The diversity of existence itself generates complexity, and hence complexity feeds on itself.

Human social organisation operates in two states of being. First state represented by a social structure comprising inevitably hierarchically defined roles of the ruler and the ruled – from head/chief to the lowest constituents, in 'Hindu' social system couched in the *Purusha-sūkta* of the *R̥gveda* (Wilson [tr.] 1888: 253) and later popularised as *cāturvarṇa* system (four vertically stratified divisions). Second state represented by the mundane world of functional social relations which produce recursive character of social life (the 'habitus' of Bourdieu 1988 [1977]; cf. Giddens 1986 [1984]). Function requires action and action cannot take place without agency, hence agency of active individuals who occupy different parts of a social structure in order to organise society. Said in simplified terms: social structure is static but its constituents are dynamic. This relationship between 'structure' and 'action', normally appearing "in both the sociological and philosophical literature as antinomies" has been subjected to a detailed and comprehensive study by Giddens (1979; 1986 [1984]). Therefore, to understand the dynamics of the recursive character of social life we have to situate active human agency into the study of social systems,

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narrative mentioned above. Besides, we also come across both upward and downward social mobility in these components.

which is critical for creating ‘instability and bifurcations’ in a social system. Dirks’ study is deficient in this respect as may be noticed in his own statement:

Most saliently for the argument here, British colonialism played a critical role in both the identification and the production of Indian “tradition”...

It is here that we come up against the special perversity of colonial modernity, for the traditional was produced precisely within the historical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized (Dirks 2001: 9-10).

Dirks’ simplistic and uncritical use of the term ‘tradition’ renders it as a vague manipulative product mired in colonial knowledge. He does not explain how “the identification and the production” of such an Indian “tradition” that was a product of colonial knowledge, therefore remotely associated with actual tradition, was received by the concerned people in ‘reproduction and routinization’ of social life (see, Giddens 1979: 216-22). Applied to practice theory, tradition is an essential component of recursive character of social behaviour:

Time elapses in a sequential way in all societies, but in those in which tradition is pre-eminent, processes of social reproduction are interwoven with different forms of awareness of past, present and future than in the contemporary industrialised world.

Tradition is the ‘purest’ and most innocent mode of social reproduction: tradition, in its most elemental guise, may be thought of, as one writer puts it, ‘as an indefinite series of repetitions of an action, which on each occasion is performed on the assumption that it has been performed before ... tradition has its greatest sway when it is understood simply as how things were, are (and should be) done (Giddens 1979: 200).

Thus, despite its rich contents, Dirks’ study does not help to address social dynamics. It creates the notion of a static structure of the coloniser and colonised, in which Brahmins have a predetermined role both as informers and heads of ‘Hindu’ social order, and the low castes as passive subjects to the will of the upper castes. The study does notice low-caste antecedents of South Indian royal castes such as Kallar and Maravar (*Ibid*: 70 ff.), but does not discuss social behaviour accounting for the loss of power and high caste status which several of the now low caste groups in South India enjoyed in the past (Stein 1994: 45-62;

Hanumanthan 1998). Is it not the dynamics of South Indian society that negating Kṣatriya and Vaiśya divisions of *cāturvarṇa* system it developed an exclusive system of two-fold social stratification of the Brahmins and the Śūdras (Dumont 1988: 73, 81; Dirks 2001: Ch. 4) despite presence of ruling castes and tradesmen? Therefore, to explain complexities in social systems, such as of Rathis taken up in this essay, practice theory comes to our aid. It bears on the human faculty of ‘self-organisation’ (cf. Ostrom 1990; Allen 1997) and, if translated into ‘Hindu’ social system, caste manifests itself as the functional web of instable relations. The *bearers* of different castes, not the castes themselves, determine social relations and hierarchy as active individuals. This suggestion is remarkably supported by the following statement of Dirks, albeit in parenthesis:

(... I have tried to suggest throughout this book that caste was invented *ex nihilo* by the colonizers) (Dirks 2001: 191).

‘Power relations’ are critical determinants of social hierarchy, for there is “an intrinsic relation between agency and power”, and incorporation of power is “integral to the constitution of social practices” (Giddens 1979: 6, 54, 88-94, and in *passim*). Concisely, in social theory power is:

... centrally involved with human agency; a person or party who wields power *could* ‘have acted otherwise’, and the person or party over whom power is wielded, the concept implies, *would* have acted otherwise if power had not been exercised. ‘In speaking thus, one assumes that, although the agents operate within structurally determined limits, they none the less have a certain relative autonomy and could have acted differently’ (*Ibid*: 91; see also Lukes 1977: 6, and Ch. 1 in *passim*).

Therefore, the ‘Hindu’ social system needs to be studied in the light of power relations. Indian history records rise of several Śūdra families as ruling dynasties¹¹ within an otherwise static structure of the fourfold social divisions (*cāturvarṇa*) of the ‘Hindu’ social order based on ritual purity and ritual pollution. Obviously, it was against the book-view of

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¹¹Note, for example, that the first historical ‘emperor’ of India, Ugrasena Mahāpadma Nanda, was a Śūdra (Raychaudhuri 1953: 160, 227-38): During the first half of the seventh century AD, the famous Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang records several Śūdra rulers in North India (Beal 1884: I. 190; II. 272). Likewise, several of the Rajput ruling dynasties had no higher social status than the Śūdra-s (see, Chattopadhyaya 1976), and in South India Śūdra-s ruled for a long time (Stein 1994: 45-62).

‘Hindu’ tradition, which reserved ruling authority exclusively for the Kṣatriya. Paradoxically, Dumont, despite his strong adherence to the ‘Hindu’ texts and his ‘book-view’ of ‘Hindu’ caste system and kingship thereof, unwittingly describes ‘Hindu kingship’ as ‘secular’ and by extension negates the ritual role of caste. He reconciles this discrepancy with the presence of the Western ‘individualism’ in the institution of ‘Hindu’ kingship (Dumont 1988: Appendix c). However, it can be satisfactorily explained if studied in the light of successful manipulations of power relations in the recursive character of social life in which an active individual is divorced from his/her caste antecedents in a social system.¹²

One may ask about the source of power particularly with reference to the lower castes. This draws our attention to Bourdieu’s formulation of ‘symbolic capital’ (see, Bourdieu 1988 [1977]: Ch. 4). Symbolic capital is instrumental in garnering popular social support. Symbolic capital is earned by means of good conduct, honesty, dedication to work, generosity, gifts, and a host of such activities as in public perception appear to relate to the welfare of society:

The acquisition of a clientele, even an inherited one, implies considerable labour devoted to making and maintaining relations, and also substantial material and symbolic investments, in the form of political aid against attack, theft, offence, and insult, or economic aid, which can be very costly, especially in times of scarcity. As well as material wealth, time must be invested, for the value of symbolic labour cannot be defined without reference to the time devoted to it, giving or squandering time being one of the most precious of gifts. It is clear that in such conditions symbolic capital can only be accumulated at the expense of the accumulation of economic capital (*Ibid*:180).

It is interesting to note that symbolic capital can be converted into economic as well as political capital and it is the most effective source of power:

Symbolic capital is a credit, it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition:

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¹²The present study purports to throw light on the evolution of complexity in a simple society. The highly complex issue of Indian caste dynamics cannot be discussed here, especially under the perspective when an active individual in each caste strives to become a critical agent in negotiating power. The whole issue therefore needs to be addressed afresh (see for example, in Kothari 1970; Guha 2013). In the context of Central Himalaya, I reserve this for a future study.

in this way, the power of constitution, a power of making a new group, by mobilization, or of making it exist by procuration, by speaking on its behalf, as an authorized spokesperson, can be obtained only at the end of a long process of institutionalization, at the end of which a representative is chosen, who receives from the group the power to form the group (Bourdieu 1990: 138).

In sum, power relations are not caste-dependent in simple societies such as studied in this essay. Anyone who accumulates symbolic capital can convert it into economic/material or political capital at an opportune time to negotiate power. Thus, in simple societies, social relations can be established by means of symbolic capital, and caste is not a barrier in doing so, a fact that finds indirect support from the official British reports on Uttarakhand:

According to popular estimation, they ['Doms', i.e., the Śūdra-s] are divided into four grades, all equally impure and outside ordinary caste life, but *furnishing certain distinctions from occupation and the like* which bring up the first grade very close to the lower forms of Rājput clans and these again connect with Brahmans, *so that no link in the chain of social distinction between the highest and the lowest is wanting* (Atkinson 1886: 444, emphasis added).

Burn (1902: 216) elaborates it further:

In the hills, excluding castes from the plains and immigrants from Tibet, three main castes are found, the Brahmins, Rajputs and Doms. The two first of these are divided into Brahmins and Rajputs proper and Khas Brahmins and Khas Rajputs ... In actual practice, however, a prosperous Dom finds no difficulty in marrying his daughter to a Khas Rajput, and similarly the Khas Rajput can sometimes get a real Rajput as a husband for his daughter.

Likewise, Blunt (1969 [1931]: 146) also reports 'the Brahman often takes a Rajput woman to be his concubine without incurring social obloquy; the Khas Rajput will accept to wife the daughter of a Dom if the Dom be prosperous'. Thus, these observations point to survival/continuance of a fluid state of caste system in Uttarakhand society during the colonial period. Such practices have survived in a restricted manner in the Jaunsar-Bawar area of Uttarakhand (see, Galey 1983: 93-94).

The above discussion clearly shows that colonial rule was instrumental in promoting complexity in social systems of Uttarakhand,

and the *bhang* cultivators are an example of that. We have noticed that before the advent of colonial rule, irrespective of caste all were engaged in hemp cultivation and production of hempen items. With the appearance of the British and the introduction of machine-made fashionable and cheaper cloth, hempen fabrics were driven out of the market circulation. Those professionals who were specialised in the manufacture of hempen fabrics lost their work, suffered economically because they owned just negligible land and thus could not sustain their livelihood. However, those who owned land continued to prosper on *bhang* cultivation because of the wide demand for *bhang* seeds as spices and because of the narcotic value of *caras* and *ganja*. Their material capacity afforded them to patronise costly ritual ceremonies and engage Brahmins, whereas the jobless could not do so. These fluctuations in material gains and losses in the community were instrumental in differentiating the society into two groups. In keeping with the ‘caste’ ideology prevailing during the early colonial period, the ones who lost their jobs and who owned small land were differentiated as ‘Baur’ (ritually impure), whereas the other ones with landed property were differentiated as ‘Pabila’ (ritually pure). Their response to the changed economic and political circumstances makes an interesting study of self-organisation. They accepted the changed situation as a phase of recursive character of social behaviour as noticed in the following account of Batten:

The labouring population in the villages where this useful plant [*bhang*] is cultivated, and where hempen cloth is manufactured, are chiefly *Khussias*; and though others of similar origin elsewhere assume the name and thread of the Rajpoot, here many are found who appear as *soodras*, and allow themselves to be included in that caste (Batten 1851: 153, italics in original).

What is in a caste? Components of a social system are not fossils, they are dynamic agents, and, following Prigogine, we need to study ‘instability and bifurcations’ in their social organization, which are inherent factors in human society. As noted above, the Rathis make a fitting example of a social system accounting for ‘instability and bifurcations’.

Thus, the Rathis offer an interesting scope to unfolding reproduction of complexity in social systems with the advent of the colonial rule. Significantly, Benz’s (2014: 40) recent study on the

‘Bhotias’ of Johar Valley, Uttarakhand, also shows that ‘socio-economic inequalities and social stratification in Johar are the outcome of a more than 200-year sequence of historical events, fluctuating socio-economic relations and changing geo-political and economic contexts, within which inequalities have been created, modified and reproduced over generations’.

Ergo

The socio-cultural and material milieus of the *bhang*-producing folks of Rath area, famous as ‘Rathi’, indicate that originally they were organised as a close-knit simple society of hemp cultivators with some of its members specialised in manufacturing various hempen commodities. Since, in pre-British times, hemp and hempen products had a large market, even beyond the bounds of Uttarakhand Hills, folks engaged in hempen business were prosperous. This accounts for the settlement of several Brahmin groups from both Garhwal and Kumaon in Rath where they were employed in various Brahmanical rituals. These Brahmins were instrumental in spreading the ideology of *bīṭh* (ritual purity) and *ḍum* (ritual impurity) in an otherwise egalitarian society engaged in hempen business. This ideology remained latent during pre-British times, for hempen business was the mainstay of the economy of the masses and benefitted all sections of the society irrespective of caste. However, with the advent of the British rule in Uttarakhand, folks engaged in hempen cloth production could not compete with the machine-made cloth, and the community of hemp-producers disintegrated. In keeping with the complexity of social stratification, the affluent ones who owned sizeable land, continued producing hemp and trafficking in hempen products, particularly the lucrative hallucinogenic *caras* and *ganja*, claimed ‘Khasiya’ rank and thereby ‘*bīṭh*’ (pure) status.

It may be noted here that during the British rule, *caras* and *ganja* productions were not prohibited. On the other hand, those who thrived on weaving hempen-cloth, for which reason owned paltry land, lost miserably and were relegated to the ‘Dom’ (impure) status. There is no doubt that in an ever changing socio-economic and political scenario, the Rathis adapted themselves remarkably and, as we notice today, from a fluid state of social stratification, the Rathis are gradually

transforming themselves into a complex society. Indeed, this present narrative remarkably conforms to the evolutionary model of complexity in the self-organization of communities as envisaged by the Brussels School summarily noted by one of its proponents as follows:

During the initial phase of an experiment in which we start off with a single population in an “empty” resource space, resources are plentiful, the centre of the distribution, the average type, grows better than the eccentrics at the edge. The population forms a sharp spike, with the diffusing eccentrics suppressed by their unsuccessful competition with the average type. However, any single behaviour can only grow until it reaches the limits set by its input requirements, or in the case of an economic activity, by the market limit for any particular product. After this, it is the “eccentrics”, the “error-makers” that grow more successfully than the “average type”, and the population identity becomes unstable. The single sharply spiked distribution spreads, and splits into new populations that climb the evolutionary landscape that has been created, leading away from the ancestral type. The new populations move away from each other, and grow until in their turn they reach the limits of their new normality, whereupon they also split into new behaviours, gradually filling the resource spectrum. In this way, instead of simply evolving towards the peaks of a fixed evolutionary landscape, through their interactions populations really create the landscape upon which they move, and by moving across it, change it. So the different behaviours present grow, split off, and gradually fill the possibility space with an “ecology” of activities, each identity and role being formed by the mutual interaction and identities of the others (Allen 1997: 117).

Interestingly, the Rathis still preserve some of their ethnic traditions reminiscent of a simple society, some interesting examples of which are noted below.

Resolution of allegedly dishonest inter-caste conjugal relations in traditional *pancāyat* system – the offender distributes an agreed number of *guḍ kī bhelī*-s (cakes of jaggery) from his/her own resources in the assembly, thus undermining the orthodox caste restrictions in matrimony. *Puḍgā piṭhāī* – negotiating matrimonial engagement while the babies are still in mothers’ wombs, thus avoiding Brahmanical rituals relating to matrimonial engagement including astrological bindings. *Takā kā vivāha* – marriage taking place according to the custom of payment of bride price. Almost blind adherence to magico-religious beliefs (particularly spirit possession) to address physical and

mental ailments, which are exclusively ministered by those considered lower in social hierarchy, mainly the Śūdra community (Berreman 1961; Jośī 2011). Communal festivities, particularly *Paṇḍolī* (a local narrative relating to the Pāṇḍava-s and the *Mahābhārata*, same as *Pṇḍuaṇ* performed in Western Garhwal, see for a detailed information, Zoller 2014). Turner (1933: 565-66) has reported two interesting customary practices exclusive to Pavila-Khasiya-s, namely, ‘*mamadam*’ (payment to the maternal uncle of the bride), undoubtedly reflecting a deep bride price indicative of ownership of two successive generations of women (in first generation mother and in second, her daughter). It is the polar negation of the Brahmanical ritual of *kanyādāna* (gift of daughter), in which the maternal uncle (*māmā*) mandatorily makes gifts, to the extent that he is not supposed to take even a drop of water in his sister’s household.¹³ Erection of a ‘terraced platform’ surmounted by ‘a single upright stone’ symbolising deceased ancestor. It is undoubtedly reminiscent of Megalithism, akin to the ‘living megalithic culture’ of the tribal communities of North-East India and Orissa (Tripathy 1969). Undoubtedly, these practices, though most of them are fast disappearing now, point to an egalitarian ethos of the Rathis before their adoption of orthodox Brahmanical practices. This is further supported by their worship of Niraṅkāra, a popular deity of the Śūdras of Uttarakhand (Bahugūṇa 2007). In the Rath region, Brahmins worship Niraṅkāra and erect his shrines inside their houses. Obviously, this indicates continuance of such traditional practices as were widely in vogue when rigid social stratification had not entered into religious beliefs and practices by categorizing deities along caste lines.

The Rathis still produce many interesting ethnic items, notably, hempen caps, shoes, bags, and quality fabrics, which can be profitably turned into fashionable items (Bahugūṇa 2011). It will help this backward community of hemp cultivators and manufacturers of hempen products economically, revive the dying craft of hempen

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¹³ Editorial comment by C.P. Zoller (after consultation with M.P. Joshi): This seems to have a parallel among the Dardic Kalasha: During the Chaumos festival, there is an initiation ceremony for male children during which they receive new clothes from their maternal uncle. “The maternal uncle receives in exchange the *push*, a gift of metal utensils, like tripods for the fire or kitchenware, the same type of goods, that is, as those given in payment for a bride price, the ones given to affines.” Augusto S. Cacopardo, 2016, *Pagan Christmas: Winter Feasts of the Kalasha of the Hindu Kush*, p. 124. London: Gingko Library.

fabrics, and, above all, impart a sense of honour to their profession. These need to be addressed sooner than later, for in the present age of e-media, traditional practices are fast disappearing. It is heartening that recently the government of Uttarakhand has announced that cultivation of ‘industrial hemp’ would be exempt from prohibition.¹⁴

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¹⁴ Uttarakhand Government Order no. 639/XXIII/2016/04(02)2016, dated December 5, 2016.

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