

Zeitschrift: Histoire des Alpes = Storia delle Alpi = Geschichte der Alpen
Herausgeber: Association Internationale pour l'Histoire des Alpes
Band: 16 (2011)

Artikel: Migration and trade in mountain societies : a comparative study of historical processes in Upper Dauphine (Alps) and Kulu-Kinnaur (Himalaya)
Autor: Fontaine, Laurence / Singh, Chetan
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-392043>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 21.08.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

Migration and Trade in Mountain Societies*

A Comparative Study of Historical Processes in Upper Dauphine (Alps) and Kulu-Kinnaur (Himalaya)

Laurence Fontaine, Chetan Singh

Résumé

**Migration et activités commerciales dans les sociétés de montagne.
Étude comparative de processus historiques entre le Haut-Dauphiné (Alpes)
et Kulu-Kinnaur (Himalaya occidentale)**

Historiquement ces deux régions ont produit des systèmes socio-économiques et un fonctionnement de l'entité politique extrêmement différents. Certains aspects intéressants se recoupent cependant. Les auteurs partent du principe que la recherche sur les sociétés de montagne a été dominée par certains paradigmes et que ces approches communes permettent d'explorer certains points importants du fonctionnement des sociétés de montagne dans le monde – qu'ils soient similaires ou divergents. Cette étude porte sur les types de migration, la nature du pastoralisme, la structure du commerce, les marchés et l'argent. Cette contribution, néanmoins, reste centrée sur le rôle complexe et dynamique de l'interaction entre les possibilités économiques et le processus de migration.

Migratory practices

An assumption shared by social scientists studying the Alps or the Himalaya is the existence of a kind of “law of transhumance”. At one level, this involved the seasonal movement of men and cattle over varied distances on a regular and traditionally determined basis. At another, it was an explicit act of migrating out from the mountains to pursue new and diverse economic opportunities. There appears to be a broad agreement with Braudel's famous description of

mountains as “factory of men for the use of others”.¹ In fact, Braudel assigns different speeds of capital turnover in relation to distance from urban centres; it circulates faster the closer one is to the city. At the centre, the town is the engine and pulls with much loss of energy the countryside where everything circulates at a slower pace: money, merchandises and ideas. In such a scheme, the role of the mountain is predefined: slowness if not immobility. He then describes the mountainous regions of Europe as islands located outside of civilisation and history: “The mountain is usually a world well away from civilisations, a creation of cities and lowlands. Its history is to have none, to stay on the fringe of the civilizing currents which nevertheless go by with slowness.” Most notably, descriptions of mountain migrations are usually grounded on ecological premises. These emphasize ecosystem imperatives as being primarily responsible for surplus manpower and limited food-grain availability. Ecological arguments are founded on the idea that long winters in mountains make them unsuitable for agricultural production. Many other issues, too, have been explained through an emphasis on environmental factors.

Knowledge of mountain migrations

Several preconceptions underlie the present understanding of mountain societies. These are derived from the assumption that agro-pastoralism was the one predominant way to utilize alpine resources. This system persisted in the French Alps till the 19th century, and remains a fairly common practice in the Himalaya even today. Undeniably, agro-pastoralism was a traditional, pre-industrial method of exploiting the alpine environment. But it was not the sole determinant of migratory practices. It needs to be recognized that agro-pastoralism was embedded in a larger socio-economic context. The differences in the context, therefore, bring to the fore variations in the two areas of study.

Till the 12th century, the higher alpine valleys of the Alps were economically unimportant areas. The prosperous and densely populated low countries possessed the most fertile wheat fields. From the 12th century onwards, and particularly in the 13th century, the economic growth of Europe became apparent. There was a rapid growth of towns and the sea offered more opportunities than challenges. Increasing prosperity manifested itself in new ways of dressing and nourishing oneself. These developments brought mountain regions into the mainstream. Building and ship industries required a large and constant

supply of wood. The expanding clothing industry demanded greater quantities of leather and wool, and social status was indicated by a diet that required meat. These new commodities were the product of uncultivated regions, especially the mountains.

As a result, highland society responded to socio-economic changes in the lowlands. Livestock breeding became more advanced. A system of irrigating grassland was developed in the driest mountains. Simultaneously, large-scale transhumance farming came to be increasingly practiced. The sheep descended to low-lying meadows as the higher pastures were unable to sustain large flocks in the winter.²

With this shift in the economy, the mountains became regions of high population. For instance, La Grave, situated 1400 metres above sea level, close to the Lautaret pass, was the most populated village in the Upper Dauphine – more even than Bourg d'Oisans which commanded the access to the valleys and had fertile land. Trade fairs were frequently held on the fringe of the mountains. Even as the value of their produce increased, the mountain areas became important because of their trade routes. This was true till the opening decades of the 18th century. A division in trade was established. Heavy commodities were transported by sea while luxury goods were carried overland often through Alpine routes. Mule-trains weighed down by silks, precious dyes, indigo, gold and silver thread, travelled over mountain passes. Trade irrigated the mountains in a multitude of thin trickles, in winter and summer alike, because experienced guides guaranteed safe passage the year round.

The movement of men to higher altitudes was not, therefore, a result of overpopulation. It was an integral part of man taking possession of the mountains. This is essential for understanding the origin of migrations and explaining the development of densely populated areas close to the mountain passes, along the trade routes during this period. From the Middle Ages onwards, the population here continually alternated between the high valleys and the main trade axes (North-South, joining the Netherlands and Italy by way of the Rhine Valley and East-West linking Italy to Spain through the South of France).

It is important to situate developments in the Alps within the different geographic scales in which it makes sense. Similarly, a clearer understanding of the role of peddlers in Europe emerges when one searches for their sedentary roots. This approach is contrary to the prevailing discourse in which peddlers are classed as rootless and itinerant. One needs to look beyond individual figures and concentrate on the structure of the society of which they were a product and

part.³ The first point of difference is precisely the structure of the two societies discussed in this essay. In the Himachal Himalaya, north of Delhi, though the caste system was not rigidly established, the mental categories of caste were clearly present. This influenced the way people viewed migration.

Therefore, two realities need to be identified in the Himalaya: the colonial and the autochthonous. Suspicion for the itinerant and apparently “rootless” peddler – or migrant – so common in Europe, has a parallel in South Asian history. This was the distrust that government, especially the colonial State in India, had for nomadic people. In the second half of the 18th century, British administrators had begun regulating itinerant tribal populations more rigorously than settled peasants and declared migratory tribes to be “criminal”. They were subjected to special police regulation and their movements were controlled and restricted by the State.⁴ While the British legally classified none of the migratory groups in Himachal as “criminal” tribes, the attitude of suspicion persisted. The itinerant practices of migratory communities were regulated and they were encouraged to sedentarize. This was in contrast to the approach of pre-colonial states in India that recognized tribes and itinerant people as an essential element of the socio-economic and political landscape.⁵ Interdependence of settled and migratory peoples was grounded in complex notions of caste, community or tribe. While social categorisation of this kind was fluid and varied from region to region, the overlap of certain castes and communities with specific professional skills and created easily recognizable groups within society. The demarcation of migratory from settled people was by no means the most important social division.

Present-day migratory practices of Kinnaura and Lahaula pastoralists in the western Himalaya are very similar to the system of mountain transhumance that was once common in Europe. Seasonal migration of this kind was not purely an individual or family decision. It was the time-tested practice of an entire community or society. Were the mountain environment and society both inherently suitable for the adoption of transhumance as a socio-economic system?

A study of the alpine system⁶ reveals that inhabitants owned very little land, and this may have prevented them from developing a self-sufficient economy. As earlier mentioned, the society and economy of the Alps responded to changes occurring in the lowlands. They were integrated with the larger commercial routes from the beginning. The revenues of villages had always come from the complementarity of the high and low countries, and from the numerous com-

mercial routes that crossed the Alps. One may, therefore, argue that mountain people have always worked for others – either inside or outside the village. One or two very wealthy families dominated the village. Members of these families were to be found in the big cities of Europe. This connection meant that the small number of well-placed village families had access to external markets. On the other hand, influential families from the Alps, but residing in cities, were able to attract the village population – either towards migration or towards the putting-out system in spinning or weaving – according to the needs of the market. This diasporic migration has permitted the élites to accumulate capital and to use it in the most demanded activities and products.

A certain degree of inequality was also to be found in the Himalayan villages of Kulu and Kinnaur. Unlike the alpine villages of Dauphine, however, inequality in these villages was moderated by the powerful influence of the community over crucial economic and social matters. The collective control of the Himalayan village community over water, forest and other natural resources is a case in point. In the Alps, on the other hand, the increasing demand for mules and horses for transportation and war divided village society. The wealthiest attempted to use the common pastures exclusively for maintaining more of these lucrative animals, while the others tried to retain the older communal rules for the benefit of the whole village.

The meagre income that the average western Himalayan peasant derived from his small patch of land was supplemented by a number of sheep and goats. Apart from the produce their flocks provided them, the people of Lahaul and Kinnaur also used them as pack animals for trading between India and Tibet. In the higher Himalaya, some successful families derived considerable wealth from this combination of pastoralism and trade. As traders and participants in the money economy, the pastoral-traders of the Himalaya are particularly relevant for the present study. By way of comparison, it may be mentioned here that in the Alps, few people were rich enough to possess large flocks. Community rules permitted each person to send only a limited number of animals to the common pastures. The richest members of the community entered into contracts with the poorest. The latter undertook to take the animals of the richer villagers to the pastures. In return the owners of the animals were given a share of the products (milk, cheese, etc). Behind these pasture contracts one may find concealed a certain degree of equality.

Kinnaur: high mountain economy of the peasant-pastoralist-trader

Kinnaur was part of the princely state of Bashahr bordering Tibet. It occupied the higher reaches of the Satlej river basin which is bound by immense mountains. Very little area was suitable for agriculture. All cultivated land was in the form of terraces that were permanently settled.⁷ Lt. W. Murray, Superintendent of the Simla Hill States in the 1820s wrote about Kinnaur: "The inhabited regions are confined to the dells and gorges which intersect them and drain off the streams, the cultivated parts forming so small a proportion as to appear as patches or steps of stairs up the slopes of the mountains."⁸ As early as 1818, Gerard had noted that the grain produced in the villages of Kinnaur was "insufficient for consumption".⁹ Even today, the scope for the extension of agriculture remains extremely limited and pastoralism has not been completely abandoned.

Conversely, pastoralism was not a viable alternative by itself either. Paucity of local natural resources meant that large-scale sheep or goat rearing was possible only through seasonal migration. Adequate grain and summer pastures had to be found in the adjoining lower areas. Without access to these additional, external resources, life in Kinnaur would have been impoverished and extremely tenuous. This made Kinnaur quite similar to other agro-pastoral regions of the world.¹⁰ A combination of activities was essential for survival in Kinnaur. According to Murray (1824) the people of Kinnaur were "occupied in extensive commercial intercourse and trade; rearing vast flocks which form their chief dependence and trafficking into remote countries under great hardship and privation to gain a comfortable subsistence for their families at home".¹¹ The situation remained strikingly similar even a century later.¹² The significance that Kinnaur attached to sheep and goat rearing is mentioned thus in an unsympathetic government report of 1959: "The local people have come to believe that their economy is based on the rearing of sheep and goats. [...] The terrain is so difficult that transport of foodstuffs and other necessities of life is not possible by other means of transport [...] trade with Tibet is only possible with the sheep and goats. They, therefore, want that no limitations on their number and no restriction, whatsoever, of their grazing in the forests should be imposed."¹³

The forest official who prepared this report regarded the migratory flocks as "an evil" and felt that "their number has got to be brought down with a heavy hand".¹⁴ Colonial policies, had successfully entrenched suspicion and hostility towards migratory people.

However, migratory shepherding was not the only economic activity in Kinnaur. Certainly, the primary association of Kinnauras with agriculture and with migratory flocks allows us to regard them as agro-pastoralists. But they were also agro-pastoralists actively engaged in trade. The share of each activity – agriculture, pastoralism and trade – in the total economy of the area varied according to circumstances and is difficult to quantify.

In all Himalayan areas bordering the entire length of the Tibetan plateau, sheep and goats have always been used as pack animals for transporting essential goods and trade commodities.¹⁵ Only sure-footed smaller animals could negotiate many of the treacherous mountain paths of Kinnaur. This marked the point at which trade and pastoralism overlapped. Goats and sheep are capable of carrying only small loads of merchandise, and in difficult terrain these loads have to be made even smaller. Though many traders bought additional pack animals for transporting their goods, it was probably important for a successful Kinnaura entrepreneur to build up a large flock of his own. Only a large flock could yield an adequate number of pack animals for transporting merchandise. However, skilful husbandry was a prerequisite for nurturing a large flock in semi-arid and resource-starved Kinnaur. Specialized herders probably bred and sold pack animals to agro-pastoralists who were also traders. This could be considered a purely pastoral form of income. Thus the rearing of sheep and goats was a full-time occupation of certain sections of the Kinnaur population, but it was to some extent dependent on the success of trading activities.

The economic links of the Kinnauras with the lowlands to the south and the Tibetan plateau to the north-east were extended and sometimes indirect. Migratory practices here entailed not only the simpler economic activity of animal husbandry, but also the complicated business of commercial and monetary transaction. Unlike the permanently settled peasant of the lower hill areas, the migratory agro-pastoralist trader of the higher regions was compelled to be a shrewd businessman.

Trade and entrepreneurship

Current explanations of migration assume the existence of a liberal economy in which supply and demand were the only decisive factors. The complex nature of economic institutions in mountain regions is rarely examined. Such institutions have a crucial bearing on the functioning of the labour market and the flow of

economic information. They influence the migration of different categories of manpower – especially in areas of large-scale employment such as construction work. There is a need to reconsider the dominant land-centred paradigm that is presently central to the analysis of migration in mountain societies.

While the significance of land is undeniable, the structure of power in mountain villages is equally important. The first detailed analysis of the Alps enables us to draw up a diversified picture of mountain villages and of the intricate and extensive pattern of migration that they developed. To migrations caused by poverty – and these are not specific to the mountains – can be added migrations controlled by elites acting as labour contractors. These elites were organized as merchant diasporas.¹⁶

The organized form of Alpine migration raises the important question of its specificity. Such a pattern of migration was not common in the Himachal Himalaya. Limited migration of this nature, probably, occurred in the 19th century from the mountains to the towns of Panjab. The present trend of migration is quite the opposite, and includes immigration to the mountains from the plains and from other mountain regions.¹⁷ Perhaps, the explanation for this difference can be found in the nature of urbanization and economic development occurring in the lowlands adjoining Alpine societies. Alpine migrants successfully developed functional linkages with villages, towns and cities of the lowlands. They established business interests in distant places in Europe, and sometimes specialized in fields such as book-selling and construction. Evidently, the wider socio-economic milieu of the two different mountain societies determined the options available to them. The milieu in Europe was apparently more conducive to migration from the mountains. There was a close social relationship between merchants trafficking throughout Europe and the elites of the Alpine villages. Such familial connections of migrants settled in the Indian lowlands with their Himalayan villages did not develop until the late 20th century. Nevertheless, long-distance trade of the western Himalaya did extend to the northern fringe of the Indian plains.

The structure of trans-Himalayan trade

Trade in the mountainous region of the western Himalaya was conducted in two stages. The first stage was dominated by migratory trans-Himalayan traders who came from the north, that is Ladakh, Yarkand and Tibet over the Himalayan

Fig. 1: India (Himachal Pradesh).



passes. Yarkandi and Ladakhi traders were usually engaged in transporting *charas* (*cannabis* extract) from Leh to Kulu.¹⁸ The upper reaches of the Beas (in Kulu) and the Satlej (in Rampur-Bashahr) valleys were usually the southernmost point to which traders from the trans-Himalaya came. In the category of trans-Himalayan traders may, perhaps, be included the people of the Lahual and Kinnaur areas of Himachal Pradesh.

Kinnauras, however, frequently extended their migrations to the lower hills of Himachal, though they did not enter the plains. Trade was the most important non-agricultural economic activity in the areas bordering Tibet. Buddhist monasteries in Kinnaur were usually rich institutions because Buddhist lamas were also active traders. The entire population of a village could be found engaged in trade.¹⁹ Gerard, who travelled through Nisung village of Kinnaur, bordering Tibet, in the early 19th century discovered that “there were none but women and children in the village, all the grown up men having gone to Garoo [Gartok in Tibet] for salt and wool”.²⁰ The people of the village of Pilo in *pargana* Shua were known to be “very rich, due to their trade with the Tibetans”.²¹ In some villages of this *pargana* there were very successful traders who were locally popular as “lakhpati shahukars” (millionaire moneylenders).²²

For the inhabitants of northern Kinnaur villages, trade with Tibet was crucial. Many of those who traded along the Satlej trade route became “men of consid-

erable wealth” as a result of this trade.²³ Geographically, Kinnaur occupied an intermediate space between the cultivated valleys of the Himalaya and the barren plateau of Tibet. It lay between rather diverse societies. This made Kinnauras adept at negotiating with both sides. They adopted social norms that enabled them to successfully connect with the two large ecological and social systems that flanked them.

The arid mountainous region to the north of Kulu valley was the territory of the Lahaulis. They paid a large portion of their taxes to the State in cash that was obtained through trade.²⁴ British revenue officials observed that unlike the Kulu peasants, the Lahaulis possessed “longheaded business instincts”. Quite interestingly, many cultivators in Lahaul were prosperous enough to pay their taxes in cash.²⁵ Borrowing money for investment in trade was a common practice in Lahaul. Most of the creditors were themselves agriculturists and not professional moneylenders. The wool trade, in particular, required considerable financial support.²⁶ The familiarity of the Lahaulis with money and markets is illustrated by a British administrators statement that the “Lahulas are born traders and make much money by trade every year”.²⁷

The low hills: merchants and moneylenders

Traders from the Panjab plains and the low-hills controlled the second stage of long-distance trade in Himachal. One trade route started from the plains and went up the Beas river valley all the way to Kulu. Panjabi traders purchased substantial quantities of rice from the low, well-cultivated hills of Kangra. A good profit was obtained in this enterprise, and some of the Sikh *kardars* (chief revenue official for the district) had themselves speculated in this business in pre-colonial times.²⁸ The second important route followed the Satlej river up to the town of Rampur-Bashahr and perhaps a little beyond. Here the traders from the lowlands negotiated with the Kinnauras.

For certain articles, the Kulu valley was only a conduit to the plains. *Charas* was one of these.²⁹ An exceedingly large portion of the Kulu imports from Ladakh during the second decade of the last century consisted of *charas*. In 1913/14, for example, it amounted to more than three-fourths.³⁰ As intermediaries in this lucrative trade, the hill traders naturally stood to gain even though little of this commodity was locally consumed.³¹

Though a large part of the trans-Himalayan long-distance trade was extraneous to

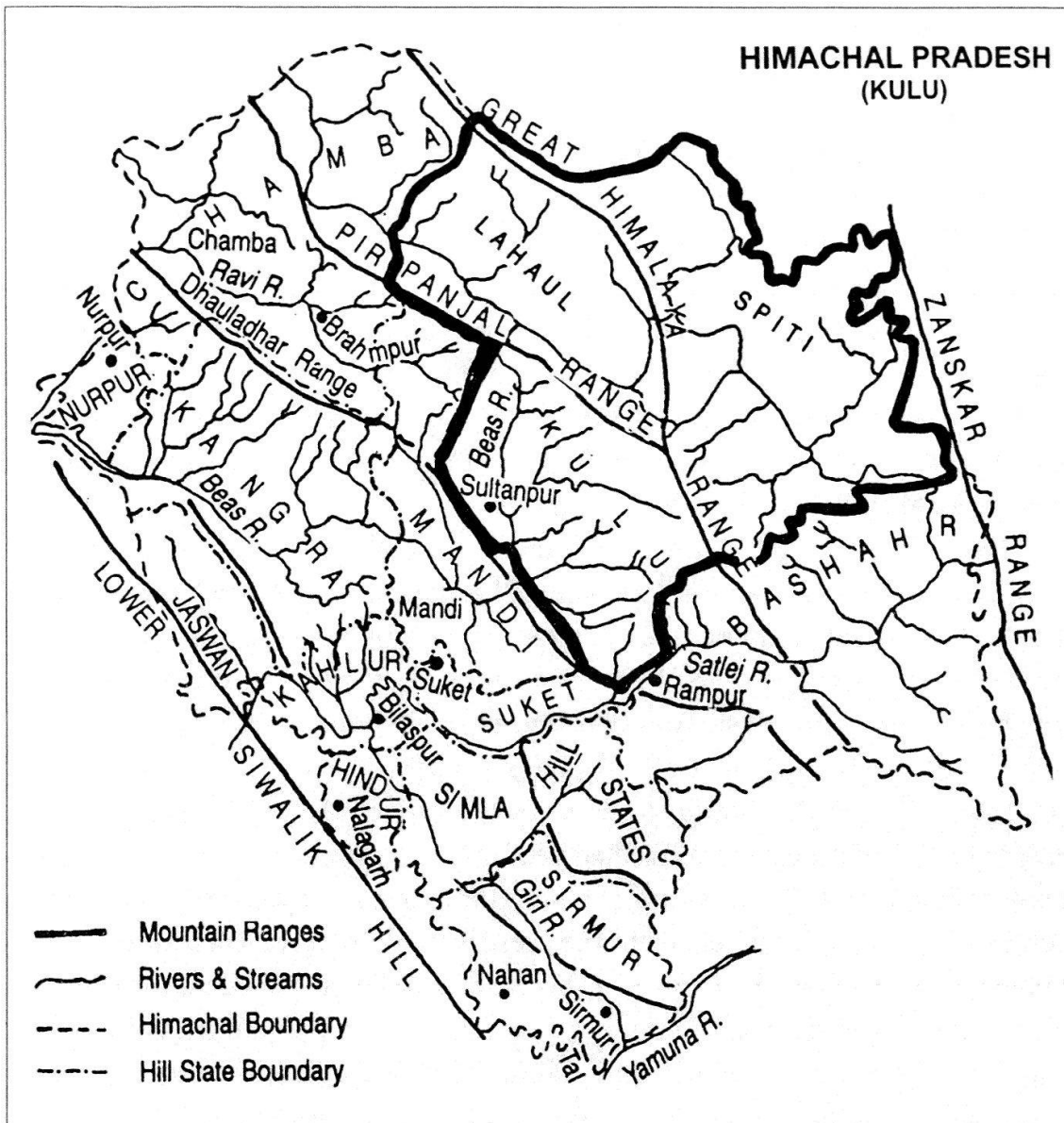


Fig. 2: *Himachal Pradesh (Kulu).*

the local economy, it did have a local impact. Local middlemen made some profit through transactions and long distance trade connected local entrepreneurs of Kulu to the outside world. Moreover, there were lowland traders like the Gosians who developed strong business links with the interior villages of the Himalaya through their agents. They specialized in opium trade. Gosain merchants from Jwalamukhi (in Kangra) advanced large loans at high interest rates to peasants of Saraj (in Kulu) that were almost impossible to repay, and made the peasantry dependent on the Gosains.³² The Gosains belonged to a religious denomination

that was entrepreneurial and actively engaged in money-lending and the purchase of opium from Saraj.³³ In the Rupi territory of Kulu, too, moneylenders were involved in the opium trade. In Shimla district Gosain traders aggressively advanced money to agriculturists producing opium.³⁴

Areas that produced opium gradually became deficient in food grain. Money for importing food grains had partly to be obtained through the sale of opium. There were, in fact, some people (Sarajis: known as *basaju*) of the Inner Saraj area of Kulu who specialized in the annual import of food grain and made a profit in the process.³⁵ Little, however, is known about them, or even about other local level traders. Written records of trading transactions are almost non-existent. Oral traditions regarding such activities, however, testify to the existence of a vibrant local trade in various commodities.

Even though Himachal society was broadly structured along the caste system, it did not possess the complex Brahmanical hierarchies of lowland societies. The lack of social complexity enabled local entrepreneurs to emerge from the dominant peasantry, as was the case in the Alps. Unlike in the north Indian lowlands, no specific caste monopolized trade and business in the higher Himalaya. The dynamics of society in the mountain areas of Kulu and Kinnaur were, therefore, quite similar to those of the French Alps.

A network of relationships connected peddlers from the alpine region of France. Family connections were emphasized and the extending of credit occupied a central position at all levels of in the mercantile structure. The limited information available on the Himalaya suggests a comparable scenario. Though many families participated in trade, a small number of rich families in Kinnaur and Lahaul were particularly successful in transacting business on a large scale. They wielded considerable influence in their home area. Availability of credit was an essential component of trade, and smaller traders were more dependent on credit than the bigger ones.

In the lower hills and adjoining plains entire communities specialized in commerce. Here that the connection between family linkages and the availability of credit was explicit. It has already been noticed above that the Gosains in Himachal used credit as an instrument of economic control. The extension of credit to peasants and small traders in remote villages enabled the Gosains to develop new connections and monopolize the opium trade. It is possible that the Gosains (a religious sect) converted the offerings and presents they received from followers of the faith into capital for investment in business.

Migration and the chronological gap

It is with respect to the second level of migration – that of migrating out of the mountains in search of new economic possibilities – that we notice an interesting divergence in the two regions of study. A chronological gap is clearly noticeable in the development of migrations when we compare the mountain societies of the Alps and the Himalaya. In Europe, migrants from mountain regions were already a vivid part of descriptions of the Alps by the Middle Ages. On the other hand, only limited information is available about the Himachal Himalaya for the corresponding period, and in this the phenomenon of migration finds little mention. But migration from the Himalaya became more visible from the early 19th century onwards. Some explanations for this difference in the time of migration needs to be provided.

The migration of peddlers from the Alps, was quite different from the migration that occurred at a later date from the Himalaya. This was because of the divergent historical experience of the two regions. Different long-term economic trends – the nature of commercial organization, the emergence of industry and most importantly the pattern of urbanization – had a significant bearing on the pattern of migration.

While examining migration in France, two assumptions need to be reconsidered:

1. The first is the inbuilt assumption in current explanations that a person is either a migrant or a sedentary person. Studies on migration perceive two geographic poles: one of *departure* and the other of *arrival*. As a result there seem to be two primary “moments” in the life of the migrant: *before* and *after* migration. Till very recently, multipolarity, as the framework within which migrations functioned, was not regarded as a viable explanation.
2. The second assumption is of explanatory models that atomize the social body. The “departure” (or the act of initial migration) is thought of as an individual choice, even though it is made possible by the family and the group of origin. “Chain migration” has been regarded as an independent, unrelated response or method for dealing with a particular situation. The larger social issue of “power” – that might link migrants to each other in multiple ways – is never seriously considered. Nor is the role of “political regimes” in mountain communities properly recognized. There is an urgent need to acknowledge that the social body is entirely, and only, a product of its constituents.³⁶

Migration of the kind found in the French Alps developed much later in the western Himalaya. This was made possible by the emergence in the early 19th century of the kingdom of Panjab with its court and capital at Lahore. The appearance of a powerful regional political economy in north-west India engendered a shift of power and patronage away from imperial Delhi and closer to the mountains. The Lahore kingdom brought about greater concentration of wealth and employment opportunities in the region. The once autonomous principalities of the western Himalaya were subjugated. Closer ties of the hill rulers and their subjects with the government at Lahore created greater possibilities for migration. Sikh rule, over the mountain states was more systematic, and a heavier land revenue demand was imposed. Its collection in cash probably encouraged local produce to be sold in the market, thereby bringing more money into the mountain economy.

The economic growth of Lahore from a provincial city to the capital of a prosperous kingdom attracted immigrants in search of livelihoods. Amritsar emerged as an important religious and production centre. In the Kangra foothills, Hoshiarpur grew as a market town that was closely linked to the mountain economy. Similar developments occurred in other urban centres of Panjab and attracted migrants from the hills for market, production and labour. Migration in the region has, therefore, to be seen in the context of the larger political economy of Panjab and the opportunities it offered for new businesses and employment.

Irrespective of the different kinds of migrations witnessed in the two regions of study, it is evident that mobility was not a transitory rite of passage. Like the more “respectable” sedentary way of life, migration too could be regarded as a way of existing and of appropriating territory. There is, moreover, a need to look beyond the argument that mobility was caused by a “push” or “pull” factor. Through these two binary points scholars have attempted to focus upon the reasons for migration and mobility. To this are applied two separate geographical and time points: the point of *departure* and the point of *arrival*, or *before* and *after*. While this approach has served a useful purpose, it does not take into account many other complex social processes that influenced long-term migratory trends.

Importantly, for both regions the act of migration or emigration did not necessarily mean an economic and cultural break with the home area. The retention of links with home territory was integral for survival and success. Therefore, migration was not a one-time act but a continuing process requiring a renewal

of connections with the mountain home. It was a “process” sustained by continuous links and return to the place of origin. In fact, the home region and the territories of migration were equal and interdependent components of the migrant’s world. In such a situation, the bipolar perspective emphasizing “push” and “pull”, “departure” and “arrival” combined with “before” and “after” loses its primacy as an explanatory scheme. Despite the apparent but attractive correspondence of these bipolar terms with the concept of “mobility”, the explicit break they create is illusory and simplistic.

Because of its exploratory nature, this study quite clearly raises more questions than it provides answers to. Its objective was to open a dialogue between scholars engaged in the study of diverse mountain societies and to deepen the understanding about such societies by adopting a comparative approach. It is hoped also that this comparison would encourage more intense reflection on the subject. At a personal level, this exercise has certainly helped enrich our work in our respective specializations by pointing out many of our own implicit assumptions and in revealing certain specificities that we tend to take for granted as being normal.

Notes

* Work on this paper was initiated at the conference of the International Association of Economic History, Buenos Aires, 2002 at a session on *Mountains in Urban Development* organised by the Istituto di Storia delle Alpi, Lugano. Its proceedings were published in *Mobilité spatiale et frontières / Räumliche Mobilität und Grenzen* (Histoire des Alpes – Storia delle Alpi – Geschichte der Alpen 3), Zurich 1998. It was further supported by the Franco-Indian programme of the Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, Paris in 2007. Both authors would like to thank Jon Mathieu for his helpful comments on an earlier version of this article.

- 1 F. Braudel, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l’époque de Philippe II*, Paris 1966, vol. I, p. 46 (“fabrique d’hommes à l’usage d’autrui”).
- 2 G. Duby, “L’état de la vallée de Barcelonnette au moyen-âge”, *Sabença de la Valeia*, Barcelonnette 1984; A. Allix, *L’Oisans au Moyen-Âge, étude de géographie historique en haute montagne d’après des documents inédits suivie de la transcription des textes*, Paris 1929, pp. 110, 145–153.
- 3 L. Fontaine, *History of Pedlars in Europe*, Cambridge 1996.
- 4 For example see M. Radhakrishna, “The Criminal Tribes Act in Madras Presidency: Implications for Itinerant Trading Communities”, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 26, 1989, 3, pp. 269–295; D. Baker, “State Policy, the Market Economy and Tribal Decline: The Central Provinces, 1861–1920”, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 28 1991, 4, pp. 341–370.
- 5 C. Singh, “Conformity and Conflict: Tribes and the ‘Agrarian System’ of Mu4, ghal India”, *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 25, 1988, 3, pp. 319–340.
- 6 For a long term study of the European Alps see, J. Mathieu, *History of the Alps 1500–1900. Environment, Development, and Society*, Morgantown WV 2009.
- 7 It has also been suggested that shifting cultivation, involving the cutting and burning of forests was once a common practice. There is, however, little evidence to support the argument. See

- A. P. F. Hamilton, *Revised Working Plan for the Kanawar Forests (Sutlej Valley) of the Upper Bashahr Division*, Lahore 1932, p. 22. Hamilton argues that “the large extent of abandoned cultivation, now naturally re-afforested, is probably due to this practice”.
- 8 *Records of the Delhi Agency*, Chapter VIII. “Report on Lapsed and Reserved Territory in the Protected Sikh and Hill States and on the Latter Generally, 1824”. From Lt. W. Murray to C. E. Elliot, July, 1824, p. 288. Later in 1932, Hamilton was to observe: “Culturable ground is so limited and the forces of nature are so hostile that the country is not self-supporting.” See Hamilton (as note 7), p. 32.
 - 9 A. Gerard, *Account of Koonawur in the Himalaya*, Reprint New Delhi 1993 (first published 1841), p. 294.
 - 10 J. Black-Michaud, *Sheep and Land: The Economies of Power in a Tribal Society*, Cambridge 1986. See also A. Molnar, “Economic Strategies and Ecological Constraints”, in: Ch. v. Furer-Haimendorf (ed.), *Asian Highland Societies. An Anthropological Perspective*, New Delhi 1981, p. 33, for Magar herders in Nepal.
 - 11 *Records of the Delhi Agency* (as note 8), pp. 278–279, 282.
 - 12 Hamilton (as note 7), p. 32.
 - 13 B. S. Parmar, *Report on The Grazing Problems and Policy of Himachal Pradesh*, Forest Department, Himachal Pradesh 1959, p. 58.
 - 14 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
 - 15 Numerous studies on this question have been made, particularly in Nepal. Among these are: Ch. v. Furer-Haimendorf, *Himalayan Traders. Life in Highland Nepal*, Reprint Times Books International 1988 (first published 1975); J. F. Fisher, *Trans-Himalayan Traders. Economy, Society and Culture in Northwest Nepal*, Delhi 1987. Gelded male sheep and goats are normally used as pack animals.
 - 16 Fontaine, *Pouvoir, identités et migrations dans les hautes vallées des Alpes occidentales (XVII^e–XVIII^e siècles)*, Grenoble 2003, chap. 10.
 - 17 It is only very recently that migratory labour under the control of contractors has become a common feature in western Himalayan areas. Even here there is a marked difference. What is being witnessed is an immigration of labour into the western Himalaya from Nepal and the poorer Indian states of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Bihar. This has been encouraged by increased construction activity in the mountains, brought about by the greater prosperity derived from horticulture, government jobs and tourism.
 - 18 G. C. Barnes, *Report of the Land Revenue Settlement of the Kangra District, Punjab*, Reprint Lahore 1889 (report completed in 1850 and first published in 1855), p. 61. Hereafter referred as Barnes, *Kangra SR*; see also *Gazetteer of the Simla Hill States, 1910*, Punjab Government, Civil and Military Press, Lahore 1911, hereafter referred as *SHSG 1910*, in this volume see *Gazetteer of Bashahr State*, p. 62.
 - 19 *SHSG 1910 (Bashahr)*, p. 61; Gerard, *Account of Koonawur* (as note 9), pp. 79, 181–185.
 - 20 Gerard (as note 9), p. 102.
 - 21 *SHSG 1910 (Bashahr)*, Appendix II, p. xx.
 - 22 *SHSG 1910 (Bashahr)*, 1910, Appendix II, pp. xvii, xxiv; see also Gerard (as note 9), pp. 76, 77, 102 for prosperous traders in Kinnaur.
 - 23 A. Mitchell, *Report on the Administration of the Bashahr State, 1914–15*, Simla 1915, p. 18.
 - 24 A. H. Diack, *Final Report of the Revised Settlement of the Kulu Sub-Division of the Kangra District*, Lahore 1898, p. 18.
 - 25 *Kangra District Gazetteer (Parts II, III, and IV, 1917) Punjab District Gazetteers*, vol. XXX A: *Punjab*, Lahore 1918, pp. 59, 248. Hereafter referred as *Kangra DG, 1917*.
 - 26 *Kangra DG, 1917*, p. 219.
 - 27 *Ibid.*, p. 229.
 - 28 Barnes, *Kangra SR*, pp. 27, 44.
 - 29 *Kangra DG, 1917*, p. 173.

- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 129.
- 31 Chamba, peculiarly, was an importer of *charas*; that, too, from Amritsar and Hoshiarpur. *Gazetteer of the Chamba State, 1904*, Lahore 1910, p. 284.
- 32 *Kangra DG, 1917*, pp. 55–56.
- 33 *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- 34 J. D. Anderson, *Final Settlement Report of the Simla District, 1915–16*, Lahore 1917, pp. 8–9; G. Powell Thomas, *Views of Simla*, London 1846, p. 22.
- 35 *Kangra DG, 1917*, p. 77.
- 36 L. Fontaine, “Données implicites dans la construction des modèles migratoires alpins à l’époque moderne”, *Mobilité spatiale et frontières / Räumliche Mobilität und Grenzen* (Histoire des Alpes – Storia delle Alpi – Geschichte der Alpen 3), Zurich 1998, pp. 25–35.

