Chapter 10
State Policy and Local Performance: Pasture Use and Pastoral Practices in the Kumaon Himalaya

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Abstract In the Kumaon Himalaya, British colonial administrators as well as agents of the independent Indian Union intervened heavily in pasture use by adopting rationally governed and scientifically sanctioned development schemes. These measures mostly originated from outside and largely ignored local cultural logics through which a pastoral life also takes its form. We use the case of the Bhotiyas of the Kumaon Himalaya to explicate this interaction of state policy and local performance. On the one hand, we analyse recent development trends that occurred after India started to liberalise its market in the early 1990s. On the other hand, we describe a ritual practice through which the Bhotiyas channel emerging power relations and conflicts towards the outside of their migratory cycle. We conclude by suggesting an interdisciplinary perspective on pastoral practices in the Himalayan region.

Keywords Bhotiya pastoralists • State policy • Ritual practice • Interdisciplinary approach • Kumaon

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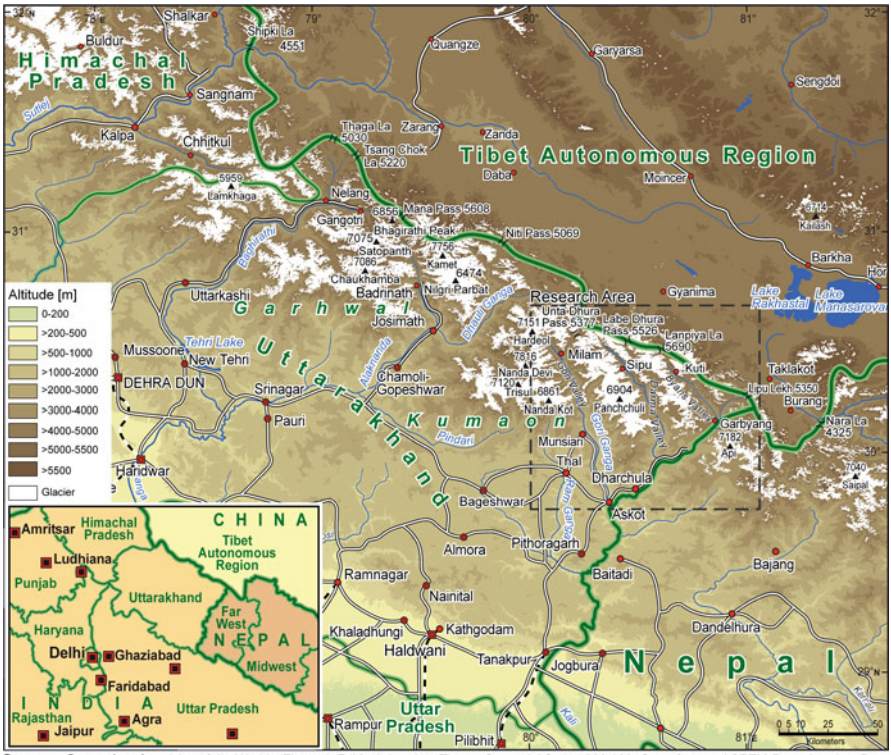
10.1 Introduction

Two broad approaches have so far shaped the discussion of how pasture use and pastoral practices in the Himalaya are affected by externally induced political and economic alterations. Some scholars hint at the importance of local cultural logics and plead for an understanding of daily routines from the inside (Gooch 2008). Others foreground the interrelations of pastoral communities with the adjoining lowland centres and show how they actively participate in the development process (Kreutzmann 2004). We intend to combine both positions by analysing how state policy and local performance interact on the ground where they are constantly shaped and reshaped in the context of pastoral life.

Our focus is on the so-called Bhotiyas of Kumaon, who practise combined mountain agriculture (Ehlers and Kreutzmann 2000) across different altitudinal belts, all of which are linked through seasonal migration (Nüsser 2006). Their mobility pattern favours the maintenance of livestock by means of reliable grazing resources including crop remnants from harvested fields. As former trans-Himalayan traders, their ethnicity and livelihood was traditionally associated with the Indo-Tibetan border, which was however sealed as a result of the India-China War in 1962. Till then, the Bhotiyas kept large flocks of sheep and goats as well as yak herds (Farooquee and Rao 2000). Trade caravans relied on these animals for transporting commodities across the high passes to Tibet. Yaks in particular were valued for their ability to cope with severe snow and difficult terrain conditions. After the cessation of trade, most of the yak herds were gradually decimated, and in the Gori Valley, as discussed below, they disappeared completely in the 1970s.

In this chapter, we expose that the development of pastoralism in the Kumaon region is highly variable, practised in various intensities over time and negotiated between local actors and external stakeholders. This is exemplified by the rather unexpected reactivation of seasonal migration and yak breeding during the 1990s when India started to liberalise its market and the Kumaon region was subsequently included into the 27th independent federal mountain state of Uttarakhand (Fig. 10.1). We further argue that pastoral production is dependent not only on shifting market relations and state policies but also on improvisational skills 'that permit continuous flow in human performance of all kinds' (Richards 1993, 63). These skills consist of embodied techniques and forms of knowledge, which are acquired and activated in settings of practical activity and engagement – when doing or making things – as well as in the interpretation of experience (Bourdieu 1977; Ingold 2000, 157–171). Rituals describe important cultural strategies for incorporating these practical interpretations as well as for invoking or acting on particular meanings, values and directives. Institutions, that is, the rules and norms that are effective for the use of biotic resources, provide an arena where daily procedures are formed and reproduced. Although ritualised and institutionalised practices have mostly been investigated separately, we suggest an interdisciplinary framework that scrutinises the mutual interplay of local performance and state policy in terms of negotiations over 'natural' and 'socio-cultural' resources and the power relations inscribed therein.



Sources: *Comprehensive Atlas of the World* (Eleventh Edition). London: Times; Generalni Stab 1:200 000; Georeferenced SRTM-Data; Landsat-Data
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Fig. 10.1 The Himalayan state of Uttarakhand

We base this suggestion upon various phases of field research that were conducted in Uttarakhand since 2004, including initial field trips to almost all the Bhotiya-inhabited valleys of Uttarakhand. Since 2007, we concentrated our work on the Gori and Darma Valleys of the Kumaon Himalayas, located to the east of Nanda Devi. The duration of field trips ranged between 1 and 15 months. The interdisciplinary data assessment for the present paper included participant observation, semi-structured interviews with local informants and government authorities, a questionnaire survey as well as translations and analyses of recorded audio and visual materials. Historical sources were surveyed in regional archives of Uttarakhand as well as in the Asia and Africa Department of the British Library.

10.2 State Policy and Local Performance

In the Indian Himalaya, pastoral practices have been regarded as maladaptive and backward since colonial times (Sharma et al. 2003; Agrawal and Saberwal 2004). State policies mostly aimed at the creation of landscapes corresponding to ‘modern,

scientific' paradigms, which increasingly restricted mobile forms of land use (Saberwal 1999). This resulted in a gradual distancing of pasture grounds and other resource deposits from local cultural practices, a typical result of Westernised development that has been critically questioned elsewhere (Braun and Wainwright 2001).

In addition, various geopolitical dynamics, of which the sealing of the Indo-Tibetan border in 1962 is only the most visible example, had profound effects on Himalayan pastoralists, particularly through the loss of additional income sources in trade as well as the massive expansion of infrastructural and administrative structures for military purposes. In this context, it becomes important to rethink the interrelation between lowland state actors and mountain communities (e.g. Kreutzmann 1996; van Schendel 2002). Upland regions and their inhabitants have often been described as passive and backward outsiders who are locked in the peripheries of a developing lowland state until they are accommodated into mainstream society. Recent studies indicate, however, that such groups actively participate in negotiations over their life world and deliver non-uniform responses to external interventions (Shneiderman 2010).

While market orientation and globalisation have created various problems for pastoralists, such as the privatisation and commercialisation of community-regulated resources, the Indian Government has also promoted certain policy tools that enable such groups to effectively represent their interests and become collaborators in the policymaking process (Agrawal 2005). Most noticeable is the expansion of forest councils (*van panchayat*) into the valleys of the High Himalaya during the 1990s, when they became shaped for a greater economic viability and environmental sustainability by the state government and various NGOs who increasingly entered the stage. The first councils of this sort in Kumaon were legally recognised in 1931, which makes them one of the oldest surviving examples of formally approved agreements between state authorities and local user groups worldwide (Agrawal 2005, 21). On the one hand, expert groups tend to look at these institutional frameworks as functionally designed and rationally governed units, whose possible outcomes can be calculated by means of quantifiable parameters, such as area size or numbers of users (Agrawal and Chhatre 2006; Jodha 2007). On the other hand, actual practices on the ground level are driven by local cultural logics in addition to an assumed transcultural rationality. This means to acknowledge that religious beliefs, social values and ritual practices also contribute to people's ability of coordinating seasonal movements and achieving a kind of resonance between the nutritional needs of animals, fluctuating weather conditions, conflicting labour tasks and the currents of social life.

10.3 The Bhotiyas in the Kumaon Himalaya

The languages spoken by the Bhotiyas belong to the Tibeto-Burman family (Grierson 1909; Willis 2007). However, most people are multilingual and also fluent in Hindi, Pahari[1] and Nepali. Though it has become the official scheduled tribe designation,

the Bhotiyas are not an ethnically or culturally homogenous group. The British colonial administration had popularised this term as a uniform administrative category for all 'Tibetan-like' pastoral groups involved in trans-Himalayan trade (Brown 1992). However, various ethnonyms are used in common parlance.[2] The two major groups in Kumaon's Pithoragarh district are the Johari and Rang. The Johari reside in the Gori Valley, whose upper parts are referred to as Johar and Ralam. The Rang live further east and split into subdivisions that are also named according to the valleys they inhabit, namely, the Darmani (Darma Valley), Chaudansi (Chaudans Valley) and Byansi (Byans Valley). Our analysis gives special emphasis to the Johari and Darmani, whose lower settlements are located around Munsiari in case of the former and around Dharchula in case of the latter. Both locations are former trade posts that have developed into densely populated and urbanised centres of the district. In general, low-caste groups (today officially recognised as scheduled castes) were, and to some extent still are, closely associated with a Bhotiya household, for whose members they conduct various agricultural tasks.

The Bhotiyas' migratory pattern spans over several ecological zones of the Kumaon Himalaya, each with specific environmental potentials and limitations for crop farming, forest and pasture use (Nüsser 2006). The narrow belt of the Outer Himalaya (*Bhabar*) arises out of the northern parts of the Gangetic Plains (*Terai*). Up to an altitude of approximately 1,000 m, sub-humid tropical Sal forests (*Shorea robusta*) are found. The Lesser Himalaya follows as a 70–100 km broad belt in a northerly direction and covers an altitude between 1,500 and 3,000 m. In lower parts, this zone is extensively covered by *Pinus roxburghii* forests, which often exhibit a herbaceous understorey sustained by intentional burnings. The zone of the High Himalaya is about 30–50 km wide. Glaciated mountain peaks, of which some exceed an altitude of 7,000 m, dominate the scenery. Its narrow transversal valleys give rise to montane forests where evergreen oaks (*Quercus semecarpifolia*, *Qu. floribunda* and *Qu. leucotrichophora*) alternate with areas dominated by conifers (*Abies spectabilis*, *Cupressus torulosa*) or deciduous trees (*Alnus nepalensis*, *Aesculus indica* and *Acer* spp.). Above 3,600 m, high altitude grasslands are found, which prevail into the Tibetan Himalaya that forms the northernmost part of Kumaon. With relatively wide and shallow valley bottoms, these localities are covered with meadows and dwarf shrubs, which are widely used as summer pastures (*bugyal*). High passes leading onto the Tibetan Plateau had facilitated a flourishing cross-border trade until the war between India and China created a new periphery in 1962.

10.4 From an Old to a New Periphery: Pastoral Life in Transition

The beginning of British colonial rule in Kumaon started 1815 with the defeat of the Gurkhas, a ruling power from Nepal that had governed the area from 1790 onwards. At this time, the Bhotiya trade was restricted to the barter of locally needed products,

such as grain, salt and cloth, whilst the more lucrative long-distance trade of *pashmina* wool took place further West through middle men in Ladakh (Raper 1812, 497–498, 530; Moorcroft 1818, 399–400). Seasonal migration during the winter months was directed towards the montane forests and grasslands at the margins of the High Himalaya (Traill 1832, 11–12; Walton 1911, 69). However, some traders also visited important market places and trade festivals in the Lesser Himalaya (Traill 1828, 193–195; Walton 1911, 209–213).

Right from the beginning, the British administration was aware that an involvement in the trans-Himalayan trade was crucial for advancing colonial ambitions and expanding their influence to market and resources of Tibet and Central Asia (Moorcroft and Trebeck 1837, xvii). In the following decades, they substantially reduced the taxes for the Bhotiyas, who in turn invested heavily in their sheep and goat livestock (Atkinson 1884, 143–151). In the course of the nineteenth century, this 'old periphery' of British sovereign territory gradually evolved into an 'integrated borderland' that was characterised by a drastically increased volume of trans-Himalayan trade (Walton 1911, 68–69) (Fig. 10.2).[3]

The ritualised trade partnerships the Bhotiyas maintained with their Tibetan partners, which we already described elsewhere (Bergmann et al. 2008), are a historical example to illustrate how local performances contribute to the flourishing of a pastoral production system. The Bhotiyas had popularised the half-truth that the Tibetans regard commensal relations as a necessary requirement for commerce and that this demands an ignorance of the important Hindu matters of touch pollution and beef eating. Besides reasons of logistical feasibility and language competence, this effectively kept away possible Pahari competitors even more effectively and thus strengthened the trader's monopoly.

The increase in trade volume, however, was also linked to major dynamics of the colonial economy in the Gangetic Plains, where wool mills had started an industrialised production during the 1860s (Roy 2003, 271–272). The Bhotiyas had started to bargain directly with middlemen of these mills in Haldwani and Tanakpur. The flocks of sheep and goats were taken along the lengthened road and grazed in forests and pasture grounds around these new market towns (Goudge 1903; Forest Department 1898). Moreover, the migratory groups negotiated customary agreements with sedentary farmers in order to graze their animals on harvested fields along the route (Forest Department 1889).

However, the Bhotiyas' seasonal migration was also influenced by more restrictive policies of the British administration that were implemented in order to meet increasing demand for timber, to be used in intensified railway construction. After the Indian Forest Act was established in 1878, large tracts of the *Terai* and *Bhabar* forests in the Himalayan foothills were demarcated as Reserved Forests (Guha 1989, 44). During the 1890s, the British introduced further regulations to directly act on migratory patterns, such as the installation of officially sanctioned grazing grounds (*parao*) in the Lesser Himalaya. While stays at these intermediate spots were temporally restricted to a maximum of 3 days, the allotted grazing grounds between the Gangetic Plains and the Outer Himalaya remained accessible from December to February with a fee of six *annas*[4] per animal (Forest Department 1898).

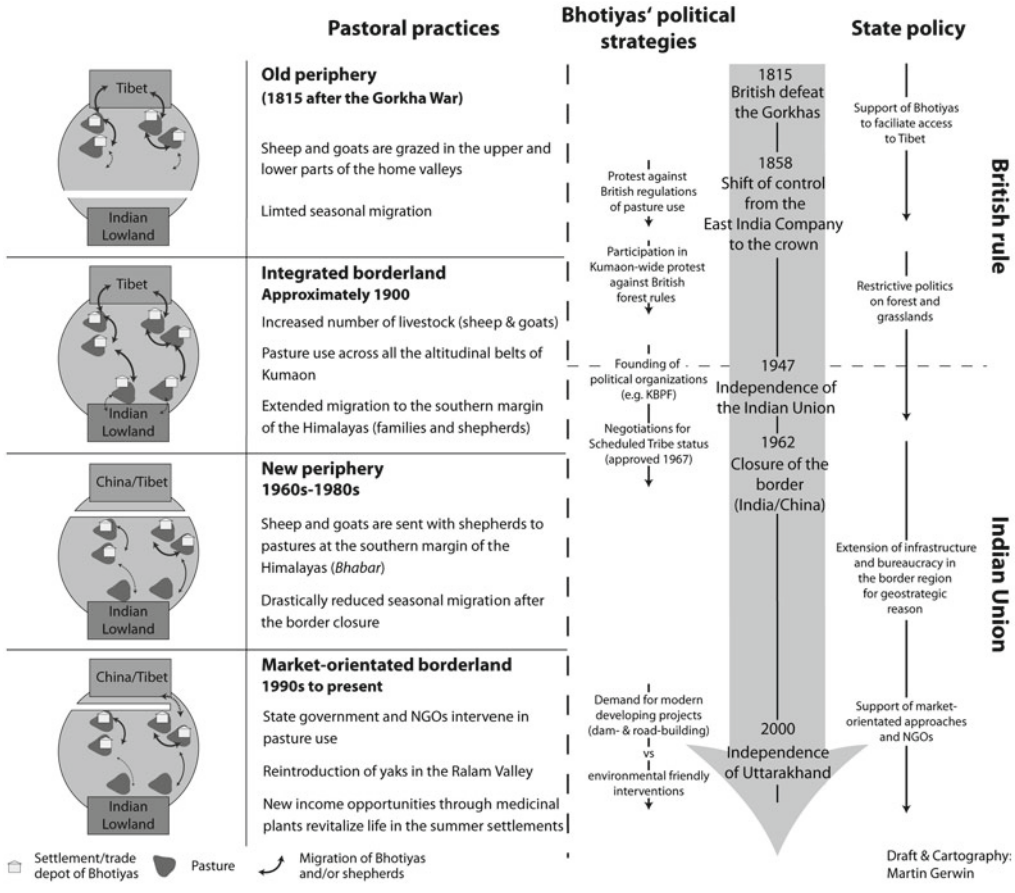

Fig. 10.2 The historical dimension of pastoral practices

The imposed rules triggered local discontent against British forestry, which ultimately led to an enduring rebellion of the entire Kumaoni population in the 1920s (Guha 1989; Agrawal 2005). Within this highly politicised conflict, commercial activities with the Tibetans began gradually to dry up. Tibetan wool was successively replaced by imports from Europe and Australia, and, furthermore, Tibetan salt was replaced by cheaper substitutes from the coastal areas of India (Roy 2003, 258–259). In the course of these changes, the main commercial routes shifted eastwards, linking Sikkim with the ports of Bengal (Foreign Department 1947). Older Johari frequently report that the most visible change was a dramatic increase in field cropping conducted by the members of a Bhotiya household themselves and not by appointed tenant farmers, as it had often been the case before.

Overshadowed by the closure of the Indo-Chinese border following the war between the two countries in 1962, seasonal migration to the summer settlements and alpine pastures drastically decreased in the Gori and slightly declined in the Darma Valley.[5] At that time, the Bhotiyas had already become politically organised and campaigned to be officially recognised as a scheduled tribe (ST). When the Indian Government approved this demand in 1967, the community benefited from quota access to universities, government services and the legislature, along with other privileges.

One of the most far-reaching forms of state intervention within this 'new periphery' was a large military road-building programme, which opened up the lower parts of all the Bhotiya valleys in Uttarakhand by providing infrastructure (Rawat and Sharma 1997). Furthermore, the Indian government promoted land reforms, the building of schools and the implementation of a decentralised administrative structure (Nautiyal et al. 2003). These policies advantaged Munsiari and Dharchula, which developed into densely populated centres of the valleys. In these new centres, non-agricultural employment became increasingly important, and Bhotiya groups were able to keep and expand their property in the growing bazaars.

All this was accompanied by a decrease of sheep and goats, and an increase in the number of cattle (KBPF 1947; GoU 2003), which are the preferred animals for all-year agriculture in the middle sections of the valleys. Around Munsiari, for instance, the herbaceous understorey of montane oak forests became progressively exploited for pasturing cattle, supplemented by stall-feeding during the winter months. These changes in livelihood also supported an increase in multifunctional trees (mainly *Alnus nepalensis* and *Aesculus indica*) as well as various fruit tree species around the villages that constitute this municipality. Grassland products, on the other hand, came to be in short supply and currently are heavily traded in local auctions that are arranged by the respective *van panchayat*.

These quite heterogeneous councils also include other tribal as well as non-tribal Pahari members. However, many Bhotiyas were in a better economic condition and even managed to enhance their standing through these institutions. Strategies include the reliance on scheduled tribe quota for accessing the ruling committees as well as their general visibility as a powerful group through self-founded development associations and cultural clubs as well as their presence in (local) scientific historiography and regional politics. These officially sanctioned institutional structures play a major role in the 'market-oriented borderland' (Fig. 10.2), which once again altered people's scope for action on Kumaon's mountain pastures significantly.

10.5 Adjusting Pasture Use and Pastoral Practice to a Market-Oriented Borderland

India planned its market liberalisation during the 1980s, and these plans were put into practice after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent orientation towards the USA, as well as international trade organisations in 1991 (Corbridge 2009). Following several rounds of negotiations on the border issue, the passes Shipki La in Himachal Pradesh and Lipu Lekh in Kumaon were reopened for trade in 1992 (Vasan 2006). Since 2008, China is India's largest trading partner with a volume of USD 51.8 billion (CII 2010).[6] All this encouraged a more confident approach of the Indian Government towards its controversial and partly disputed border with China, and this confidence increasingly has guided the actions of both policymakers and private investors (Mohan 2007). The removal of the so-called 'Inner Line' regulation in most parts of the Bhotiya valleys in the early 1990s is one sign of this process. Until then, strict controls on access due to security concerns inhibited economic development, including the nascent tourist industry (Statesman 1981; cf. Aggarwal 2004, 57–102 for Ladakh), and local residents frequently complained about this.

These interventions on the national scale interacted with various regional processes, of which the creation of Uttarakhand as an independent federal state in 2000 is the most important. Until then, the high mountain border region of Kumaon had formed the outermost part of the most densely populated Indian state, Uttar Pradesh, whose government regularly ignored demands coming from the periphery. The new government aimed at combining market-based approaches with a mountain specific policy, of which hydro-energy, tourism and medicinal plant extraction evolved as the most important building blocks (Garhwal Post 2009). Moreover, the whole state profits from the 'Border Area Development Program' that promotes investments in infrastructure, education and agriculture (Tribune 2009).

In the midst of these reconfigurations, a slight revitalisation of seasonal migration towards the upper settlements is noticeable in both valleys. In the Gori Valley, the number of families staying in the summer settlements has approximately increased by 30% since 2004. The majority of migrating people remain in their summer settlements for crop production and herb cultivation.[7] Most villagers possess only a small number of sheep and goats, or none at all. However, there are around 35 flocks with a maximum size of 400 animals that are pastured by Bhotiya shepherds in the upper valley during the summer months. While some work on their own behalf, non-migrating Bhotiyas, who are settled around Munsiari, employ the majority of them. The shepherds normally maintain strong kinship-based relations with residents of the upper villages through which access to pasture grounds is informally negotiated and granted.

During recent years, however, an increasing number of non-Bhotiya herds have also begun to enter the valley. The respective owners are from the lower parts of the Gori Valley, from the southern Pindari Valley and from Himachal Pradesh. These external user groups form a valuable income source for the *van panchayat* that now manage the alpine pastures surrounding the high altitude settlements. They levy a grazing fee of Indian Rupees (INR), 3–5 per sheep or goat and up to INR 20 per horse

Photo 10.1 A yak herder and his animals in the Ralam Valley at 3,700 m (Photograph © Marcus Nüsser September 26, 2008)

(one USD equals approx. INR 45). Most of these councils have only recently been (re-)established with the help of various non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which started to operate in the area from the 1990s onwards. The rise of these new actors in the Gori Valley forms part of an Indian-wide trend to support and facilitate the development of backward areas more efficiently and cost effectively (Townsend et al. 2004). In a similar vein, the Joint Forest Management Program of the 1990s, which was co-financed by the World Bank, heavily influenced the *van panchayat* in Kumaon. Through a focus on issues like participation, empowerment and gender equality, an internationally recognised set of communal resource regulations became gradually standardised (GoU 2001). But even though these new measures officially realised a greater integration of local users, they are still widely criticised by environmental activists and NGO workers. One reason, for instance, is an increasing bureaucratisation of organisational structures and annual implementation plans, which are seen as being far beyond the educational level of most local users (Sarin 2005).

The regional livestock sector has also been transformed by distinct NGO activities and development interventions. The example of the reintroduction of yaks in the Ralam Valley may serve to illustrate this case. After cessation of trade, most of the yak herds were decimated successively until the last herd disappeared in the 1970s in the Gori Valley. A local NGO organised the revival of yak breeding in 1996 after bringing a nucleus herd of 20 pure-bred yaks from Tibet. Till present, the Bhotiya herders support this endeavour (Photo 10.1) and promote inter-species breeding of

Photo 10.2 Ploughing of fields with yak hybrids in the summer settlement of Nagling in the Darma Valley (Photograph © Christoph Bergmann, May 12, 2008)

yaks with cows for milk production and ploughing, as well as using them as pack animals. The presence of these yak hybrids has the potential to influence earlier upward migration in spring (FES 2004, 19). In the Darma Valley, yaks and their hybrid crossbreeds are kept even without NGO support since the border closure (Photo 10.2). Villagers continue to bring these animals from the adjoining region of Nepal, where a constant supply from Tibet is still secure. Existing kinship ties often facilitate these transactions.

The reintroduction of yaks in the Ralam Valley and the maintenance of yak keeping in the Darma Valley show that various forms of pastoral practice are still alive and supported. Moreover, the increased (illegal) collection of aromatic and medicinal plants has brought new pressure on the alpine grasslands, as well as confronting local users and policymakers with new opportunities and challenges. Besides *Aconitum heterophyllum* (*atis*) and *Picrorhiza kurroa* (*kutki*), which are collected between August and November, especially *Cordyceps sinensis* (*kira*), a fungus that grows on a caterpillar larva, is of particular interest to local gatherers since approximately the last decade. This fungus is highly appreciated as a tonic, aphrodisiac agent and status symbol amongst the Chinese upper class, where large quantities of it are sold (Winkler 2008). It is extensively gathered from May to July and then sold at highly fluctuating rates ranging between INR 200,000 and 700,000 (approx. USD 3,200–15,000) per kg

to middlemen in the markets of Munsiari and Dharchula, with an estimated yearly trade volume of 150–250 kg in the former and 250–350 kg in the latter location. The collection of this lucrative item widely contributes to the household income of both Bhotiya and non-Bhotiya residents, ranging from INR 15,000 (approx. USD 340) to more than INR 75,000 (approx. USD 1,685) in one season. The Uttarakhand Government had only slowly framed these activities through administrative procedures. Only in September 2010 did it officially delegate authority to the *van panchayat* over the collection and distribution of this lucrative item (GoU 2010).

From 2000 onwards, there had been numerous discussions in the Bhotiya villages about how to regulate these new forms of use of alpine grazing grounds. Most villages, for instance, adopted strict rules to enclose their grasslands and keep out external user groups. Moreover, officials from the Forest Department interacted more regularly with these groups and aimed at the implementation of specific working procedures, such as the rotational use of pasture tracts to enhance sustainability. The official support of the *van panchayat* marks strong continuities to the endeavours that were initiated during the 1990s through various NGOs. While this indicates a stronger presence of officially sanctioned schemes to regulate pasture use, these developments are not uniform. Without strong support from NGO workers and rather low efforts on the side of the Forest Department to rework and control the extraction of forest and grassland resources, *van panchayat* are far less important in the Darma Valley than in the neighbouring Gori Valley. Most of the alpine pastures are still used by local herds, although these are normally taken care of by shepherds from elsewhere. In what follows we expose a further socio-cultural facet of pastoral practices through which the complex tasks of livestock keeping become integrated with further activities, such as crop cultivation and downward migration.

10.6 The Ritualised Coordination of Seasonal Migration

In the course of their annual migratory cycle, residents of Darma Valley intervene most clearly in a ritual for Su-Ringding, the god of the land, which happens in mid-September, when most shepherds have come down from the alpine pastures to graze their animals on harvested fields and grasslands in the valley bottom. At that time, a variety of conflicting tasks are pending such as crop processing, wool shearing and various preparations for downward migration (*kuncha*[8]). Flock owners count their animals in order to pay employed shepherds, and also the low-caste people are reimbursed in cash or kind for their agricultural labour. While the diverging demands and loyalties of the various groups often give rise to conflict, the ritual foregrounds the ongoing nature of these engagements and brings forth a kind of resonance with the seasonal rhythms of their dwelt-in surroundings.

The ceremony starts early in the morning, when male villagers offer a small quantity of grain from the new harvest at the deity's shrine. In the meantime, the women of every household prepare some food from local grains and pulses. After a joint meal with one's own family, people begin to stroll around in the village

reciprocating further food and drinks, a joyful activity that goes on for some hours. Eventually, everyone comes together at a place near the shrine, where a black goat is killed with a single stroke through its neck. Diluted with water, the animal's blood is directed along the sloped footpath towards the lower village boundary. This way of killing is exceptional, as people normally rip out the animal's heart through a little cut in the abdomen without any blood running out of the animal's body. Whenever it is beheaded during such a festive activity, this is not considered as a sacrifice for a deity but as an act that should satisfy and ward off evil spirits and demons. Having received their share, these beings are expected to stay away from the village where they are prone to spread unrest, conflict and disease.

Having cut up the meat, people start to prepare the further ceremony. Some flour, edibles as well as liquor from every household are collected in front of the shrine. Furthermore, every family holds ready a small mat made of straw (called *kayo*) on which some of these materials will be put at the end of the ceremony. For the time being, however, everyone eagerly awaits the arrival of the village elder who is supposed to conduct the further ceremony at the time of nightfall. This person then sits down in front of a wooden bowl or some other vessel that is filled with parts of the offerings, a small piece of the goatskin as well as some meat. When he starts to perform what is called *myilu tumo* ('throwing away'), low-caste drummers accompany him. The performance is constantly interrupted by loud comments of the audience's male section. All along they litter flour and distribute liquor amongst each other whilst the village elder – holding a wooden stick with a burnt tip, with which he fiercely mixes the ingredients of the vessel – recites the following story.[9]

> The gods and goddesses of my village are quite ordinary.
> The villagers, also, are somehow not different.
> Looking at their flocks, they seem rather poor.
> Also their crops do not grow very well.
> Among their sons not a single one is son-like.
> Among their daughters not a single one is daughter-like.
> None of their belongings seems to be special.
> But in the village in front, everything is better.
> Good houses, fertile fields, handsome sons, easily graspable daughters, huge flocks, and many fine goods are abundant.
> If you must get jealous, have envy or malice, then save it for those people! And if you have to go, then leave in that direction.
> But hey, those from the lower villages do the same, and they also send their people to the next village.
> And as this continues, the last of our villages will finally recite these lines for the whole of our beloved Darma region.
> Bad spirits and demons keep looking upon the gods and goddesses, and we who dwell in peace, prosperity, happiness, love, and with all virtues in the fourteen villages nestled in this Himalayan valley, this quiet heaven, this golden land, with jealousy, they always try to disturb and spread unrest.
> This envy, jealousy and malice, all bad words and conspiracies, all dangerous diseases, bad ideas and thoughts, tiredness, the origins of all kinds of violent outbreaks, power fights and ill effects we now send back from here.
> Today all these evil impacts will be shed into the flowing river to reach the far-away and deep waters.

But if this evil packet indeed goes down with the rivers into the deep waters, it will clash with those huge elephant-like beings residing there.
These giant creatures, which before crashing into this evil packet would have been quite amused, will of course ask, 'What in the world is this?'
These powerful beings will be affected by those evil influences and in a sudden burst of anger they will throw this damned packet high into the air. But guess what will happen to it? It will be carried along by the wind and again reach our beloved Himalayan glaciers.
All of a sudden this evil packet will fall out of the sky and land on one of our high pastures where our yaks are grazing.
Think about how this packet will look like in such a place where one cannot find even a single blowfly.
Having seen this evil packet, also the yaks will get furious and produce loud noises with their noses and leap about on their four feet.
But finally these fearless beasts will come close and pick this packet up with their horns. With all their strength they will again throw it back into the deep rivers.

In the closing part of the performance, the evil package is verbally directed through every one of the summer settlements and several other stations lying on the path towards the winter settlements. Its final destination is a place called Bakrihath, which is located shortly below the last winter settlement of Jauljibi near the confluence of the Kali and Gori Rivers – the 'deep waters'. Jauljibi hosts an international trade mart for livestock and commodities that annually takes place in January. There the Rang territory ends and local aristocrats, presumably the 'elephant-like beings' mentioned in the ritual chant, had their seats and were supported by their most loyal subjects in former times. Worth mentioning, for example, are the Rajwars[10] from Askot, local aristocrats who held proprietary rights in the village lands and harshly restricted the Darmanis' access to cultivatable fields in these lower parts. Darma shepherds complain that their position beyond the valley is much more insecure due to more unreliable social alliances, thefts of livestock, corrupt forest guards and the like. In a heightened atmosphere, the village elder proceeds as follows:

Give voice, make abuse
Throw it away, I say!
Give it away, I say!
The wood taken from the glowing fire is not going?
Far from it, certainly the wood taken from the glowing fire is going!
It is going from Sipu – the village of Syang Sai – hey!

[After every verse, ending with the name of the village and the tutelary deity of its residents, the audience begins to dance and shout]

We have done the worship for Su today.
Throw the evil packet away, I said!
After six months, after 160 days,
you neither have to say yes to someone,
nor do you have to do something.
If someone still does, then a six-inch nail goes right into his head
The wood taken from the glowing fire is going from Tidang – the village of Chung Sai – hey!

We have done the worship for Su today
After six months, after 160 days

you neither have to say yes to someone,
nor do you have to do something.
Admittedly our houses look like corn mills,
but our fields are rather tiny!
And our girls are just like a tokar.
And our boys are just like a takuva.[11]
The wood from the glowing fire is going from Darkar – the village of Riya Sai – hey!

Through variations of these lines and by naming every village along with its tutelary deity, the route towards Bakrihath is completed. One male member of each household then takes the small straw mat (*kayo*) on which some of the collected food and drinking materials are put. These offerings are either placed besides the shrine or on a nearby footpath from where crows are expected to pick them up and transmit their substance to the ancestor spirits (*syimi*). In the meanwhile, another man – normally a low-caste (scheduled caste) person whose daily task is to look after the villagers' cattle – approaches the scene and takes over the vessel and the wooden stick from the village elder. Equipped with branches of a prickly shrub as well as cow dung, the village youth drives him 3–5 to 7–9 times around the shrine and then finally towards the Darma River or one of its tributaries. They are expected to 'kill' the former, who yet always manages to escape and to throw away his baggage into the flowing water. The shouting crowd on his heels then desists from the initial objective and also gets rid of its 'weaponry' on the riverbank. When everyone has returned back to the village, the person that was in charge of the evil packet is applauded for his bravery and receives the two front forelegs of the goat that was killed before. Afterwards, the whole village joyfully dances and sings until late at night.

In view of the Darmanis' pastoral practices, the ritual indicates two major points. On the one hand, visible distinctions between different kinds of livestock are drawn. Yaks are associated with the uppermost and purest pastures, flocks of sheep and goats with wealth, whilst cattle are linked to conflict-prone village life.[12] Only the latter have a human spokesperson, the cattle herder, who has to take away the 'evil packet', whereas yaks are agents themselves when they finally close the annual cycle by throwing the evil packet back into the river. All this is driven by various power relations, both in terms of social distinctions within the village context as well as towards external groupings. On the other hand, the ritual foregrounds that the integration of different demands in labour as well as the scheduling of divergent agro-pastoral tasks before downward migration is always characterised by quarrels and instability. Like people attend to the growth of their crop plants and the movements of their livestock, they also take care of the ongoing process of their social affairs by channelling arising conflicts from the summer settlements towards the outside of their migratory route.

Rituals, like the one described above, have so far received little attention by outside scholars. The Bhotiya elites, however, have nowadays great interest in documenting such affairs and make them accessible to a wider audience through publications, internet forums, and local museums. In this manner, they transform these socio-cultural resources of daily life into a heritage, whose increased visibility also gains attention in the policymaking arena.

10.7 Discussion and Conclusion

Environmental conditions entail certain potentials and limitations for pastoral land use, such as the duration of snow cover or the onset of the vegetation periods in different altitudinal belts. However, the utilisation of the grass areas is never homogeneous and static. A variety of socio-economic changes and political interferences have affected the Bhotiyas' land use and migratory patterns in recent times. Far from being passive victims, they were ready to deal with new stakeholders entering the market-oriented borderland. The reintroduction of yaks in the Ralam Valley shows that officially approved institutions can provide a common platform for government officials, NGO workers and pastoral communities, who become active partners in shaping everyday forms of pasture use. These institutional arrangements are becoming increasingly important for regulating medicinal plant collection and access to grazing lands in the upper Bhotiya valleys.

Forms of regulation are, however, subjected to negotiation processes in which socio-cultural resources such as ethnicity, embodied practices, techniques and forms of knowledge play a vital role. Socio-cultural resources are important because they enable people both to transform the world and to 'play their part from within in the world's transformation of itself' (Ingold 2011, 6). This is not meant to reactivate romantic ideas of peasant oneness with nature but to emphasise the significance of local cultural logics within the context of pastoral production – when dealing with animals, cultivating fields, migrating, engaging in a *van panchayat* or carrying out a ritual. In rituals, people encounter further 'recognising agents' (Shneiderman 2010, 307), particularly from the divine world, including tutelary village deities and evil spirits who reaffirm aspects of pastoral practices that interact with but are yet different from stately approved procedures. Their presence mediates past trajectories and power relations with the locally situated activities and extra-regional influences that characterise current pastoral life. The attribution of agency to the yaks and 'elephant-like beings', which most plausibly refer to former regional aristocrats, in the ritual chant are two examples for that.

Pasture use and pastoral practices in the Kumaon Himalaya thus unfold within a multidimensional continuum that includes ritualised practices, realised subsistence strategies and the vocabulary through which external stakeholders justify or reject the implementation of specific policies (Fig. 10.3). Pastoral life depends on both 'natural' and 'socio-cultural' resources, which together drive a given production system and also shape the power relations inscribed therein. An appreciation of the interplay of state policy and local performance in the formation of pastoral utilisation strategies could enhance the policymaking process and also facilitate a more attentive assistance to those who actually dwell on high grounds for making a living.

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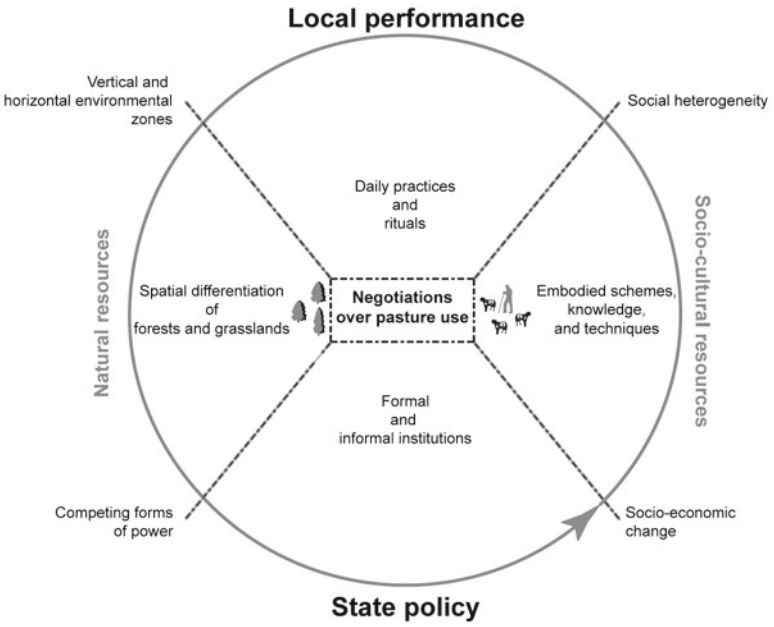

Fig. 10.3 Pasture use and pastoral practices between local performances and state policy

the final version rests completely with the authors. Finally, we are indebted to the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) for their generous grant of the ongoing project 'Changing Strategies of Resource Use: The "Bhotiyas" in the High Mountain Border Region of Uttarakhand, India'.

Notes

1. Pahari literally means 'of or belonging to the mountains' and commonly refers to the major Hindu hill populations in Nepal and India. These people speak Indo-European languages that are also classified by this term.
2. For the complexity of ethnic ascriptions amongst various Bhotiya groups compare Bergmann et al. (2008) for Uttarakhand, Nawa (2000) for Kumaon and far-western Nepal as well as Ramble (1997) for Nepal in general.
3. The quantity of imported wool to the Gori and Darma Valley rose from approximately 800 kg in 1,841 to more than 330,000 kg in the year 1901 (Goudge 1903).
4. Sixteen *annas* equalled one Indian Rupee (INR).
5. These differences are linked to varying land ownership conditions in the winter settlements of Gori and Darma Valley. Milam, the largest of all Bhotiya settlements in the Gori Valley, recorded a reduction of migrating families from 600 in the 1930s (Pant 1935, 240) to only 23 families in 1981 (GoI 1984). Even though this trend further consolidated to only 18 families in 2004 (Nüsser 2006), a slight revitalisation has taken place during the last years so that 22 families were counted in 2010. In the Darma Valley, seasonal migration reduced more slowly from a total of 2,674 people in 1961 to still 1,210 persons in 2001 (GoI 1966, 2003).
6. The Indian Government was keen to reopen the Lipu Lekh pass, as this allows a selected number of Indian citizens to make the pilgrimage to sacred Kailash in Tibet. Trade, however, plays a rather marginal role so far.

7. The main seasonal crops are buckwheat, barley, wheat, mustard, pulses, peas, potatoes and some other vegetables, such as cabbage. Cultivation takes place on traditional village fields, small vegetable gardens as well as on agricultural plots in ruins of old village houses. The latter are often irrigated and used for aromatic and medicinal plants, especially *Allium stracheyi* (*jambu*) and *Carum carvi* (*thoya*).
8. The terms of this section that are put in italics belong to the Tibeto-Burman Darma language.
9. Different versions of this ritual were recorded in September 2008 in village Bon, Son, Dugtu and Dantu in the upper Darma Valley. The description is based on the performance observed in village Bon. Parts of the story are accessible in the Darma language in Dhakriyal (2004, 253–238).
10. 'Rajwar' was the official title of the ruling powers in the Askot principality. They are considered as descendents from the medieval Katyuri kings of Kumaon, though their feudality became tributary to the Chand kingdom.
11. The *tokar* is the lower end, and the *takuva*, the upper stick of a spindle device, known as *takli*. The metaphor has clear sexual connotations, referring to male and female genitals.
12. This differs from a nomenclature reported in Stellrecht (1992), where sheep and goats are associated with high altitude pastures and ideas about purity. In the Dolpo region of western Nepal, however, yaks are the culturally most favoured livestock that also figures out prominently in rituals, even though sheep and goats are extensively reared due to their high reproductive rate and lower costs when compared to cattle (Bauer 2004, 25–38).

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