CHAPTER 2

THE REGION OF THE MOVEMENT AND THE UNIVERSE OF STUDY

This Chapter is devoted to a brief discussion of history, society, and culture of Uttarakhand region. The ethnological discussion of the region highlights the social divisions in the society. These divisions affected mobilization of people into collective action in the movement. As we see in the following Chapters that the prime movers of the movement were traditionally privileged castes. The traditionally deprived castes did not support the movement as it was elite-driven. The distinct socio-cultural features of Uttarakhand region have been discussed at the end of this Chapter.

Uttarakhand is situated between 28°44'-31°25' North latitude and 77°45'-81°1' East longitude. It constitutes a rectangle of about 300 kms (from east to west) by 150 kms (North to South), of Central Himalayas surrounded by Nepal on the east, Himachal Pradesh on the west, Tibet on the north and Uttar Pradesh on the south. It comprises 13 districts: seven in Garhwal and six in Kumaon subregion. Garhwal is made up of Dehradun, Tehri Garhwal, Pouri Garhwal, Uttarkashi, Chamoli, Rudra Prayag and
Haridwar. Kumaon consists of Nainital, Almora, Pithoragarh, Udham Singh Nagar, Bagshwar and Champawat.

The region is inhabited predominantly by Hindus. Two largest groups, the Rajputs and the Brahmins constitute 78 per cent and 8 per cent of the population of the region respectively. Many tribes such as Jaunsaris, Van-rajis, Buxas, Kolta, Tharu, Sakas, and Bhotiyas are found in Uttarakhand. The tarai belt has a substantial number of Sikhs and Bangladeshi migrants.

A majority of the population except Bhotiyas and Jaunsaris speak the 'central Pahari', a branch of Pahari language group which belongs to Indo-Aryan stock and is used throughout the lower Himalayas from Kashmir across eastern Nepal. The people of Jaunsar-Bawar area speak 'western Pahari' which also belongs to Pahari language group and is used in Himachal Pradesh.

History

The earliest settlers in the region were tribal people akin to the Kols and Gonds of Central India. At present these aborigines are represented by the Dom. The Dom were conquered and reduced to serfs and slaves by the Khasi or Khasa who occupied the hills long before the Christian era. The Khasi were without caste or class distinctions and knew nothing of Vedas or Brahminism.
They professed religion differing from the orthodox Hinduism (Atkinson 1973). When the Khasi came in contact with the Brahmins and Rajputs who emigrated to hills between 8th to 18th century AD they started adopting practices of the orthodox Hinduism. The largest emigrations occurred after the establishment of Muslim rule in the Indo-Gangetic plains (Sanwal 1976). In the 4th century A.D. the region also called Khas-des (land of Khasa) witnessed the rise of Katyuri Kingdom which was a tributary state within the Gupta empire. Atkinson (1973:449) writes that, "...Joshimath in Garhwal was the first acknowledged seat of Katyuri dynasty of Kumaon...." The Katyuris imposed a form of centralized government on the small kin-oriented tribal democracies of the Khasi. The Katyuris introduced Buddhism into this hill region and by seventh century Buddhism was fairly established here. Sankara Acharaya's visit to Kumaon Himalayas about 780 AD paved the way for the establishment of many Hindu temples and the coming of South Indian Nambudiri Brahmins to the hills to act as priests. The famous Shrines of Kedar and Badri were established by Sankara Acharaya. The introduction of Hinduism led to the disappearance of Buddhism from the region. The post–Sankara Acharaya Katyuris encourage learned Brahmins from the plains to settle in the hills by giving them grants of land. The immigrants Brahmins brought with them the
idea of ritual status as a new criteria for social differentiation, thereby added a new basis of status to the already existing ethnic and political one (Sanwal 1976). The Katyuri inscriptions mention four broad hierarchically arranged categories – the Brahmins, the Kshatriya, the Khasa and the Chandala who were placed outside the Varna system. The khasa occupied Shudra status. The Chandals who succeeded the Katyuris upgraded Khasa to Kshatriya Status. About 10th century AD Katyuri power began to decline. As a result many small Kingdoms arose in Kumaon and Garhwal (Atkinson 1973).

In the first half of 16th century Panwars one of the ruling dynasties of the post-Katyuri period, united many such small independent kingdoms and established their rule in Grahwal. Similarly Kumaon was re-united by Chand rulers of Champawat who subjugated many small Principalities and assumed political power in Kumaon in the latter half of 16th century (ibid.). The Chandals ruled Kumaon till 1790 when Gurkhas annexed it to Nepalese Kingdom. The Gurkhas moved westwards and defeated Panwar rulers of Garhwal in 1804 and ruled over the whole region up to 1815.

The British defeated the Gurkhas in 1815 and divided Garhwal into two parts. The eastern half was placed under direct British
rule and came to be known as British Garhwal as against the western half (Tehri Garhwal) which was ceded to Sudarshan Shah, the son of the last Garhwal Raja who died in Gurkha war. The British Garhwal along with the districts of Nainital and Almora formed the Kumaon Division. The Dehradun valley and adjacent hills west of Tehri Princely State and the area of Jaunsar – Bawar was annexed to Saharanpur district which was already under British control.

Society
Kumaoni society is divided and sub divided into a number of categories which are hierarchically arranged. The first division creates two very broad categories – Bith and Dom. This division corresponds to the distinction between the 'clean' and the 'unclean' castes as their exists a barrier of untouchability between Bith and Dom (Sanwal 1976: 2-19).

The category Bith is further divided into Thul-Jat (or Asal) and Khasi. This division corresponds to the distinction between 'immigrant' and 'indigenous'. The distinction between Thul-Jat and Khasi cuts across the division into Brahmin and Kashatriya. So, there are two kinds of Brahmins, Thul-Jats and Khasis. Similarly there are two
types of Kshatriya, Thul-Jat (Thakur-Rajput or Kshettri) and Khasi (or Khasi-Jimdar). Thul-Jat as a whole rank higher than Khasi as a whole. Therefore, a Thul-Jat Rajput ranks higher than a Khasi Brahmin (or Pitali Baman).

Thul-Jat Brahmins are sub-divided into Chauthani and Pachbiri. The Chauthani rank higher than the Pachbiri. In pre-British Kumaon Chauthani Brahmins hold powerful secular offices. They worked as administrators and also hold the crucial office of the Dharmadhikari (who interpreted caste law and declared and legitimized the upward movement of a group in the caste hierarchy). Pachbiri provided priests at temples (pujars), and at life-cycle ceremonies (purohits).

The Khasi were not homogenous. They were divided into two categories — Pitali Brahmins and Khasi-Jimdar. Both categories practiced subsistence agriculture-herding economy.

The Kshatriyas were ill defined and fluid unlike the Brahmins. The core of the Kshatriyas, the Kshettri caste constituted a few royal linages (Chand, Mankoti and Katyuri) which were classified as senior and junior. While the members of the former hold important positions in administration the latter had to content with less important positions. Like the Kshettri
the Khasi-Jimdar also exhibited fluidity. The latter were traditionally differentiated into naee (immigrant Hindus who were not Thul-Jat) and the purana (non-immigrant Hindus and non-Hindu tribal groups like the Raji, Bhotia, Dhotia and artisan groups of the Saun-Agari and the Raj-Koi who were in occupation of land).

The population in pre-British Kumaon was divided into three hierarchically arranged estate like categories: (1) Thul-Jat consisting of Bhal-Baman caste (divided into the Chauthani and the Pachbiri sub-castes) and the Thakur-Rajput or Kshettri caste; (2) the Khasi consisting of the Pitali Baman and the Khasi-Jimdar (divided into naee (new) and purana (old)) castes; and (3) the Dom (divided into Khailait and Mangkhani).

The stratified status system in pre-British Kumaon evolved primarily under the influence of political, legal and ethnic elements. However, the Varna framework has also been significant in its evolution for every new immigrant was accepted as a rule by a Kumaoni caste of the Varna he belonged to in the plains. But his actual acceptance into a caste or sub-caste depended on two factors: (1) the vocation
he adopted in Kumaon, and (2) the status of the group with which he formed affinal connections.

Rights and obligations of the three categories corresponded with their place in the hierarchy. Distinctions were maintained through both formal and informal sanctions. The Thul-jat alone could use gold ornaments. The Khasi were allowed to use only silver and brass ornaments, and the Dom used Khabri (a very base alloy) for personal ornamentation. The Bhal-Baman alone were entitled to wear a full length dhoti. The Khasi (both Pitali-Baman and Jimdar) and the Dom wore a typical dress called gata (loin-cloth).

Upward mobility was possible within the limits of the caste (a Pachbiri could become Chauthani) but it was not allowed across the Varna divisions. And within Varna upward mobility was extremely difficult from indigenous to immigrant status. Therefore, it was impossible for a Khasi-Baman to become a Thul-Jat Baman or for a Khasi-Jimdar to rise to Thakur-Rajput status. But there were no such restrictions on downward mobility.

Dom (also called Dum, Silapkar, Harijan, Ram, or Arya) occupied the lowest position in the status hierarchy in Kumaon. ‘Non-Aryan’ Dom were conquered by the ‘Aryan’
Khasi and assigned to the status of serfs and 'hereditary slaves'. They were distributed all over Kumaon along with agriculturist Khasi. Dom were attached to Bith Villages as servile artisans and menials. They could be freely sold by the village headman. Occupational specialization was very elementary and a Dom had to do any work assigned by the Bith masters. Dom did not enjoy freedom to leave the village or change his occupation without the permission of his masters. Dom were collectively owned by the village they were attached to and controlled through the village headman.

Dom were without any political power or civil rights except to receive sustenance from their masters. They were not allowed even to regulate relations amongst themselves. Any quarrels within the family of a Dom or between Doms of two different villages were resolved by the Bith of concerned villages. They were wholly dependent on their masters for every material and many social necessities.

Dom lived in grass huts built on the lowest periphery of the village away from the bithana (Bith residential section). The dumaura or dumtwal (Dom residential section) had its separate source of water, separate approach and rude stone structures housing their Gods and Goddesses. Dom did not
have access to Bith residential section except when called there to perform some work. Later the paths used by them were purified by sprinkling cow's urine or water. Any willful touching of food and water, utensils and hukka (smoking pipe), or entry into the temples or physical relationship with the Bith women meant certain death for the Dam.

The dress of a Dom consisted of only a G-strings on the lower part of the body or at the most a garment not reaching below the knee. They were not permitted to wear footwear of any kind, use umbrella, ride a pony or use any other conveyance. The Dom were allowed to wear ornaments made only from a base alloy known as Khabari which is a symbol of low status. They could not go for marriage or bring in a bride in a procession or use a sedan chair or sling. A bride was smuggled in under cover of darkness, riding piggy-pack on her maternal uncle so as not to offend the Bith.

Dom played a crucial role in the economic and ritual life of Kumaoni society. They not only helped their masters with agricultural work but also performed a whole range of activities considered polluting by the Bith such as burying dead cattle, handling implements constructed of animal skins, manufacturing implements of metal or wood, carrying the Bith in sedan chairs
etc. They had to be in the marriage procession as well as the funeral procession and act as scapegoats to 'catch' whatever pollution might be floating around. They wore discarded clothes used by Bith during the festival of Holi, considered saturated with ritual contamination and evil. They had to carry away impure sacrificed animals, and act as vehicles for spirits during spirit-propitiatory ceremonies.

Physical contact particularly of sexual nature between the Bith and the Dom was believed to pollute both. It brought dumtao to a Bith and bithtao to a Dom. If a Bith male had sexual relations with a Dom woman the former was declared outcaste but the letter was permitted to go unpunished. But in case of a Dom male having sexual liaison with a Bith woman, the former was killed and the latter was made an outcaste or prompted to commit suicide. The offspring were always assigned to the Dom category.

The Dom were originally a self-contained, casteless, and ritually little differentiated ethnic category. The Khasi reduced them to slavery and added politico-legal dimension to their ethnic identify. Later Hindu-immigrants added a new element of ritual purity and impurity thereby giving the Dom a caste like identity.
The Dom were not differentiated into hierarchical strata. Though there existed occupational distinctions, occupational categories were not closed groups and usually people moved from one to another. The occupational categories could not crystallize into full-fledged castes for lack of a scale to establish the precedence of the different occupations. Moreover, a Dom irrespective of the main occupation could be asked to perform any polluting work. The restrictions on physical movement and social interaction amongst the Dom also hindered the transformation of occupational categories into castes.

The Dom in pre-British Kumaon were divided into two broad categories on the basis of their roles and relationships with the Bith. The categories were: (1) the Khalait and (2) the Mangkhani or Hurki-Badi. The Khalait consisted of labourers or artisans, such as the Koi (weaver), Tamat (coppersmith), Lwar (blacksmith), Agari (smelter), Orh (mason), Bare (caretaker of sacrificial animal), Bhul (oil seed pressor), Bairi, Baruri or Ruri (basket-maker), Sani (bellows-man), Pauri (watchman), Chimari or Chunyar (turner), Hanki (potter), Chanyal (Yokestrap maker), Hali (ploughman), Bakhari, and the Das (musician). The Khalait owed their name to Khal (a portion of the harvest) they received from the gusain for whom they worked.
The mangkhani category of the Dom ranked below the Khailait, and made a living by begging preceded by singing, dancing or acting in front of the Bith houses. Mangkhani category included the Hurki-Badi, the Mirasi and the Nat. Hurki-Badi used a musical instrument called huruk as an accompaniment while dancing and singing. The Mirasi provided instrumental accompaniment to their singing and dancing woman folk. The Nat enacted farces and narrated jokes and stories. They provided entertainment and moved from village to village in the post-harvest season as they were not attached to the village as Khalait were.

The Chand rule came to an end in 1790 A.D. when the Gurkhas of Nepal conquered Kumaon. The assumption of political power by the Gurkhas affected the structure of caste in Kumaon. The British East India company defeated the Gurkhas in A.D. 1815 and provided continuity to the changes heralded by the Gurkhas in the structure of caste in Kumaon. The new political and economic condition obtaining under the British diminished the importance of politico-legal and economic factors as bases of castes. As a consequence the religious criteria, once of secondary importance, came to the fore and became crucial for justifying the continuity of the status structure and for defining the position of different castes and sub-castes in the hierarchy. This 'ritualization' of the system led to a situation in which the status
structure 'froze' at its immediate pre-British level. The dissipation of secular bases of status strengthened its religious basis and made it more caste like. This ritualization had three important consequences for Kumaoni caste structure. First, as a result of abolition of the office of the Dharmadhikari (canonist) it became difficult to integrate immigrants into the indigenous status structure. Thus, Kumaoni society closed its doors to outsiders. The new immigrants retained their native castes identity—and coexisted without being relevant to the indigenous caste structure.

Second, the British by assuming political power destroyed legal machinery, which regulated relations among three estate like categories. The dissolution of politico-legal stratificational distinction particularly between Thul-jat and Khasi on the one hand gave rise to some new groups such as the Khattri (individuals born of inter Varna casual sexual unions) and the recent immigrant groups which could not be accommodated in the three-fold hierarchy. On the other hand, it emphasized the Varna unity of the three categories of Brahmins (Chauthani, Pachbiri and Pitali) and of the Rajputs (Kshettri and Khasi-Jimdar). Earlier Varna status distinctions were subordinated to legal status distinctions.
Third, the destruction of old administrative machinery accompanied by a secular basis of status ascription gave salience to ritual elements which were responsible on the one hand for making closed units of hitherto open castes and on the other for emergence of new castes especially within the undifferentiated Dom category. It also gave birth to satellite caste like entities (Kathu-Chauthani and Kathu-Pachbiri) attached to the Thui-Jat castes. These satellite groups are made up of individuals who on account of the circumstances of their birth are considered ritually unclean. Such individuals are rejected not only by their paternal castes but also by the caste groups to which they were traditionally allocated because of the breakdown of legal sanctions for the regulation of status matters.

These individuals belong to two classes of people: (1) Those born in casual sexual unions between a Bhal-Baman male and a Thakur-Rajput woman, the offspring, rejected by both categories, form a separate caste, the Khattri. (2) Persons born of illegal sexual unions between Bhal-Baman males and females of the same varna as the males. Such individuals are allowed to assume their paternal caste name but use the adjective Kathu to differentiate from the paternal caste. Kathu-Chauthani and Kathu-Pachbiri are two such satellite caste groups.
The Khasi and Kshettri do not have Kathu satellite groups because in the former marriage does not have to be ritually sanctified to provide legitimacy to the offspring and the latter enjoyed greater latitude in regard to marriage forms and rituals; thus narrowing the range of illegitimacy. Both Kathu castes (Kathu-Chauthani and Kathu-Pachbiri) are ranked below the Chauthani and the Pachbiri castes. But opinions differ in regard to their position vis-à-vis the Pitali. The Khattri caste is assigned the lowest position within the Kshatriya Varna.

Distinctive features of Uttarakhand Region

Berreman (1963: 339-357) identifies a number of cultural features which distinguish this area from the rest of North India in general and from Gangetic plains in particular. Some of the special features of Pahari culture are:

(1) A distinctive caste structure with two broad groups – Khasa and Dom. The former consists of the Brahmin and the Kshatriya and the latter comprise of untouchables. The Vaisya and the Sudra are conspicuous by their absence. Sanwal(1976)in his study of rural Kumaon points out that unlike in the plains it is not the ritual status but the political and economic factors have been crucial in determining caste rank in Kumaon. Another distinctive feature of Kumaoni Caste
is the importance of actual occupation in determining rank. The three fold hierarchical division (the Thul-Jat, the Khasi and the Dom) consists of politico-economic status groups more akin to estates than to varna or castes.

(2) A distinctive Pahari marriage and rules pertaining to marriage such as bride-price marriage, polyandry among some people, levirate, divorce by mutual consent, remarriage of widows, inter-caste marriage within the high or low-caste group.

(3) Owing to non-observance of 'Pardah' women are relatively free to participate in most day-to-day activities, and sing and dance at special occasions. Relatively free interaction between the sexes and good deal of post marital sexual freedom is usual.

(4) The Paharis are unorthodox Hindus, not very particular about observance of Brahminical religion and rituals. Instead they have distinctive Pahari religious beliefs, forms of worship, marriage and death ceremonies in which the role of Brahmin priest is relatively less important. Animal sacrifice is usual in most Pahari ceremonies. The Pandavas of Mahabharta fame and Shiva are important deities.

(5) Distinctive folklore, songs, dances and festivals.
(6) Consumption of meat and liquor by all castes.

(7) Relatively freer and informal inter-caste relations and little observance of ritual purification and other religiously motivated acts.

(8) A characteristic village settlement type where in addition to a nucleated settlement adjacent to a concentration of village lands there are dwellings (called 'Chhans') on widely scattered and often distant agricultural and grazing lands. The 'Chhans' are considered as part of the village even when other villages intervene.

(9) Terrace agriculture dependent on rainwater for irrigation.

(10) Double storied houses of stone and timber, usually with slate roofs. The ground floor is used as barn and the upper part as living area.

(11) Pottery is conspicuous by its absence. Instead wooden utensils are used.

**Universe of Study**

The region of Uttarakhand comprises three main sub-regions: Garhwal, Kumaon, and Jaunsar-Bawar. The choice of the
universe of the study was made keeping in mind the division at sub-regional level. We did not include the area of Jaunsar-Bawar in the universe of study because people in this area did not participate in the movement for separate state of Uttarakhand. Jaunsar-Bawar is a predominantly tribal area. People in the region are entitled to the benefits available to Scheduled Tribes in India. Thus, these people have already been taken care of by the Government and do not feel the kind of deprivation felt by people in other sub-regions in Uttarakhand. Moreover, a different dialect is used in this area. This dialect belongs to ‘western Pahari, language group which is spoken in Himachal Pradesh. Garhwali and Kumaoni dialects belong to ‘central Pahari’. Thus, linguistically and culturally Jaunsar-Bawar is relatively more close to Himachal Pradesh. When the fieldwork was undertaken in several spells between December 1994 and July 1995, Garhwal and Kumaon sub-regions constituted five and three districts respectively. Two districts, one each from two sub-regions, were selected for the fieldwork – Dehradun in Garhwal and Nainital in Kumaon.

The choice of Dehradun and Nainital districts was motivated by several considerations. One, both districts are heterogeneous in regard to topography. The district of Nainital consists of mountain region as well as the plain area
of Tarai. Similarly, Dehradun district has hilly terrain and a large Valley, which is an extension of plains on the south. As the majority of the population of these districts is concentrated in the plain areas, the idea was to see how they view Uttarakhand movement with the issue of plains versus hills as an important aspect of its ideology. Two, these districts are very diverse in terms of social composition and provide a good opportunity to interact with different categories of people to get a cross-sectional view of the movement. Three, Dehradun and Nainital have a substantial educated middle class which has been major force behind the movement. Therefore, these places have always been centres of movement related activities. It is easier to find informants at these places.

The fieldwork was conducted at three different places at different levels in each district of Dehradun and Nainital. In Dehradun district three sites selected for fieldwork were (1) Dehradun city (District Headquarters); (2) Doiwala (a town south of Dehradun); and (3) Sarauna (a village in the hill region of the district). Similarly, three places in Nainital district were (1) Nainital city (District Headquarters); (2) Kala Dhungi (a town in the Tarai); and (3) Meora (a village in the interiors). The selection of the towns and the villages was guided by their being typical of the region in
regard to the size and the caste composition of the population. The reasons for carrying out fieldwork at three different levels are; one, to focus on rural-urban differences in responses of the respondents towards the movement; two, to focus on the micro-aspects of the movement. The district headquarters or the cities are suitable for the study of macro-dimensions of the regional movements. At the level of district headquarters one can study, ideology, organization, and the strategy and tactics of the movements as formulated by the ideologues or leaders settled here. But to understand how the ideology is modified or transformed to suit the conditions at grass-root level one has to analyze the movement at smaller places.

Both primary and secondary sources of data have been tapped. The informants and the respondents have been important primary sources of data. About fifty informants from different walks of life, such as, academics, journalists, editors, political leaders, social activists, lawyers, businessman, entrepreneurs, writers, administrators and artists were interviewed by using an interview guide. The schedule, another instrument used for generating primary data, was administered to approximately 250 respondents both men and women in different age groups from various strata of the society.
The respondents were selected through sampling. Efforts have been made to give representation to all religious, caste and ethnic groups of the Uttarakhand society. The respondents were drawn from among government servants, students, shopkeepers, hawkers, tea-stall and restaurant owners, housewives, labourers, political and social workers, etc., to have a cross-sectional view of the movement.

Books, academic journals, unpublished papers, newspaper clippings, news magazines, hand-bills, pamphlets, census data, reports of various commissions and committees, manifestos of different political parties on the separate state of Uttarakhand and their other publications have been the main secondary sources of data.

Note