In the preceding chapters we have seen how the ecological context and the pastoral and agrarian economy changed during the colonial period. The change in the administrative set up and land relations with the coming of the British in the hills affected class and caste relations in the society. In this chapter I briefly discuss the changes in social relations.

Social Relations in the Pre-Colonial Period:

Lack of information on the hill society in the pre-colonial period makes it difficult to re-construct the changes in social relations for this period. The early accounts of colonial administrators, writings of travellers, and the efforts of local historians help us to draw a rough picture of the society in the pre-colonial period.¹

The society was constituted of three major groups: the Thuljats, the

¹ For instance see accounts of Traill (Traill, "SSK"); E.T. Atkinson compiled HDNWP; Pandey, op. cit.; Dabral, op. cit.
Khasas and the Doms. Thuljat and Khasas together constituted the Bith and considered Doms untouchable. Doms were the service castes: ironsmith, coppersmith, carpenter, drummer, tailor etc. They also worked as *hali* and agriculture labourers. The Khasas or Khasiyas, who constituted the largest number, were agriculturists and cultivated land both as proprietors and as tenants. They were originally not part of the caste order, but centuries of contact with the Thuljat had its impact. Brahmins and Rajputs emerged amongst Khasiyas, although they managed to retain the distinctiveness of their customs and traditions.2 The Thuljats, later immigrants from the plains, were composed of Brahmins and Rajputs. Apart from claiming ritual superiority they monopolised political and economic power in the pre-colonial period.3

The three tiered social structure evolved through a historical process. Many scholars have suggested that the Doms were the earliest settlers in the region. Later the Doms were subdued by the Khasas, a powerful tribe, who set up their rule. Finally the Khasas were conquered by the Rajput immigrants from


the plains⁴ who set up the Chand dynasty in Kumaun and the Panwar dynasty in Garhwal some time between 10th and 14th centuries.⁵ These dynasties continued to rule till the Gurkhas defeated them. The region finally came under the British in 1814. However, the Tehri Kingdom, created after the division of Garhwal by the British, was ruled by the Panwar dynasty till 1949. During the rule of these dynasties a large number of Brahmins and Rajputs immigrated to these regions.⁶ Thus conquests and immigration flows played an important role in the evolution of the social structure of the region.

The Thuljats considered themselves ritually superior to the Khasas and the Doms. This was expressed in their strict observation of religious practices and

⁴. Atkinson argues that Doms are descendants of the Kol tribe and were the earliest settlers in the region. (HDNWP, vol.2, p.964, vol. 3, p.72). William Crooke argues that they are descendent of the Dasyus of the Veda and were conquered by the Khasas and the Nagas. (vol.II op. cit., pp. 330-32). Other writers also agree that the doms were the earliest settlers and later subdued by the Khasas. See Joshi, op.cit., pp. 24-7; Pandey, op.cit., p. 184; Oakley, The Holy Himalaya (Allahabad, 1905), p. 42; A.C. Turner, Castes in the Kumaun Division and Tehri Garhwal State', Census of India, 1931, vol.18, part I, p.17. Pathak sums up the entire literature on the successive conquest of the region by various tribes. See Shekhar Pathak, 'Kumaun society through the Ages', in K.S. Valdiya (ed.) Kumaun: Land and People, (Nainital, 1988), pp. 97-110.

⁵. Scholars differ on the exact date of the foundation of these dynasties but most accept that it was between the 10th and 14th centuries.

⁶. Thuljats have maintained their genealogies and know the name of their first immigrant ancestor. They have retained their gotra although have adopted new sub-castes taken from the village they first settled or from the office they held under the Raja. Pandey, op.cit., pp. 559-73 Raturi op.cit..
Caste rules. The Thuljats sought to conform to the practice of orthodox Hinduism while the practices of Khasas and the Doms could not be accommodated within the structure of orthodox Hinduism. The Thuljats put on Janeo (sacred thread) which distinguished them from Khasas. Marriage was sacrosanct to the Thuljats while not to the Khasas. The Thuljats took dowry while brideprice was the norm amongst the Khasas. Levirate was prevalent among the Khasas. The social superiority of Thuljats, and the ritual practices that sustained it, was maintained through politico-legal sanctions. Marriage of high caste women with the lower caste men was an offence. The Khasas and the Doms could be punished for wearing Janeo. Violation of caste rules was punished by dharmadhikari, an important official in the court of the Raja. Traill writes that there was capital punishment for infringing caste rules by the Doms. Caste superiority was thus maintained through political dominance.

The Thuljats monopolised administration under the Raja. All important offices like that of the Diwan, the Vazir, the Dharmadhikari, the Daftari, the Bhandari etc. were held by either Brahmins or Rajputs. The Kingdom was divided into circles which were under Faujdars. Faujdars were commanders and


thus both civil and military administrators. There were *Thokdars* and *Sayanäs* under them who worked as their agents. There were other subordinate officials as well. At the village level there was a *padhan* who represented the *Sayanäs*. All these offices were held by the Thuljats. All officials, high and low, got *Jagirs*. All of them were landlords with superior rights in land.¹⁰

*Faujdars* were also incharge of civil and petty criminal justice. Traill writes:

> In the interior, justice was administered in civil and petty criminal cases by Faujdars or governors. while the cases of magnitude, and those originating in the capital or neighbourhood were determined in the Raja’s court under the superintendence of the Diwan.¹¹

At the village level there were *panchayats* which were dominated by the Thuljat proprietors. Judicial administration was controlled by the Thuljats and was geared to maintain their status superiority.¹²

The Thuljats extended their control over land by getting grants. All officials of the Raja got grants, in lieu of their salary; non-officials could get grants for bravery or for erudition. The religious establishments were also given grants.¹³

Before immigration of Thuljats, Khasas controlled the land and cultivated it

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¹¹ Traill *'SSK'*, pp.26-7.
¹³ Traill, *'SSK'*, p.32.
with the help of Doms. The land grants to Thuljats changed agrarian relations. The grantee was known as thatwan. The cultivators were his tenants. The grantee had a right to haq-dastur, the right to customary dues and revenue from tenants. The grantee also had a right to bring one third of the land he was granted under his own cultivation, to be cultivated by himself or tenants. The grantee could not have ejected tenants but if they fled he could assume total ownership of the land and its produce. He could settle new tenants on this land for cultivation but such tenants were called non permanent tenants or kaini or khurni. Thus the system of land grants strengthened the dominance of the Thuljat. 14

In the above discussion we have seen that the Thuljats monopolized political and economic power and claimed ritual superiority. However, it should not lead one to believe that the Thuljats were a homogeneous group. They were not only divided into Brahmins and Rajputs, but were further divided into various groups or parties who competed among themselves for power. The power of a particular group depended on its influence at the court of the Raja. The most influential group in the court secured high offices and large grants. The grants of the opposition groups were resumed and redistributed. The struggle for power among Thuljats led to a shift in dominance from time to time from one group of sub-caste to another. 15 However, all of them together guarded 'their

interest against the Khasas and the Doms.

Colonial Period

Change in Administration and Land Relations

The monopoly of the Thuljats first came under attack when Gurkhas annexed this region to Nepal. They imprisoned many influential people in the courts of Kumaun and Garhwal Rajas. Many influential Thuljats fled the region. Gurkhas changed the administrative system, appointed their own military commanders in place of Faujdars for local administration, and imposed a tax on Brahmins.\(^\text{16}\) They undermined the position of Thuljats although they could not entirely eliminate their influence.

It was under British rule that systematic changes were introduced in the administration and land relations which in the long run affected social relations. The system of land grants to officials and Thuljats was discontinued thus eroding the basis of the existing multi-layered superior rights in the land. All the grantees and the original owner cultivators who were not tenants of any grantee became hissedar or co-sharers or proprietors. They had now to pay only land revenue to the state. All the permanent tenants of the grantees were now known as occupancy tenants (khaikar). Apart from paying the land revenue khaikars were

also to pay *haq-dastur*, which was now called *malikana*, to *hissedars*. Later when collecting *malikana* became difficult it was fixed at 20 percent of the land revenue. In the village where the *hissedar* was not *Khud-Kast*, *Khaikars* had a strong position and such a village was known as *pakka-Khaikari* village. In the village where the *hissedasr* was Khud-Kast, the common land belonged to the *hissedar* and only they were entitled to become the *padhan*. Such villages were *Kachcha KhaiKari* villages. As a whole the position of the *Khaikar* vis-a-vis the *hissedar* was stronger than it was vis-a-vis the *thatwan* in the pre-colonial period. The *hissedar* did not have the type of state support which the *thatwan* could marshal in the pre-colonial period. The *khaikar* could now use the legal system for redressing his grievances. As grants were discontinued the position of various intermediaries with superior right in land were either eliminated or became weaker. With the new right to own land many Doms became proprietors. The arable expansion in the 19th century helped the lower castes to own and cultivate new land.

The pre-colonial administrative system was dismantled by the British. All the important offices under the Raja monopolized by the Thuljats disappeared. In the new system the high offices were held by the Europeans. The local people only held subordinate offices. Education rather than heredity became important for offices in administration. This undermined the position of the Thuljats.17

Begar

The position of the Thuljats was further undermined by the begar system. The Thuljats were exempted from begar under the Raja. The British made begar compulsory for all. Begar became widespread as the system was made to serve European travellers, shikaris, soldiers, apart from the bureaucracy on their frequent tours. The land revenue settlements made it necessary for all shareholders and occupancy tenants, irrespective of caste, to provide begar. Forced labour was mainly of three types, coolie begar, coolie utar and coolie bardaish. Coolie begar was unpaid labour for public works like bridge, road, school construction and the private work of bureaucrats. Coolie utar was for carrying luggage of touring officials, European travellers, mountaineers, shikaris. There was either nominal payments or no payment at all. Coolie bardaish was to provide provisions like milk, food, vegetables, grass, wood etc. to touring officials either on nominal charges or no charges at all. Begar gradually became a means to exploit local people. They were requisitioned for all types of labour, and this affected their own agriculture work. They were also to provide provisions to touring officials without payment. The system appeared unjust even

18. Shekhar Pathak, Uttarakhand Mein Coolie Begar Pratha (Delhi, 1987), pp.49-59. Shekhar Pathak in a fine study has shown the operation of begar system and how the movement developed against this oppressive system. The following discussion on begar in this section is based on his book. See also Guha, Unquiet Woods, pp.25-7;100-04, 110-14.
to Thuljats since they were for the first time equated with doms and Khasas. Resistance to begar began in the 19th century and slowly a movement developed against the system, culminating in the 1921 agitation after which begar was abolished.

The colonial bureaucracy congratulated itself for weakening the power of upper castes. G.W. Traill, the Commissioner Kumaun, 1815-35, wrote:

To some of the principle Kamins and the Brahmins, the introduction of the British government, by destroying their former influence, has proved a cause of regret, but to the great bulk of the population this event has been a source of unceasing benefit and congratulation.\textsuperscript{19}

However it will be wrong to assume that the Thuljats entirely lost their ground. They still held socially influential offices of sayanas, kamins, thokdars and padhans. They held considerable land. The colonial bureaucracy sought their cooperation in revenue matters. Some families continuously held hereditary revenue offices under the British. The Raturi family of Srinagar (Garhwal), for instance, claimed hereditary kanungoship (an official who supervised patwaris).\textsuperscript{20} Moreover, the Thuljats retained their hold because they were the first to avail the opportunity of new education and thereby they came to control the various offices and professions.

\textsuperscript{19} Traill \textit{`SSK'}.  
\textsuperscript{20} BGG, 1910, pp.85-6.
Mobility, Conflict and Change

With the changes under British rule, caste and status were separated to some extent. Education became the new symbol of status. English education became essential to secure government service. Initially there were few jobs under the British but by the end of the 19th century when the bureaucracy expanded the British required large numbers of English educated natives to man the subordinate offices. For many people these subordinate services symbolized prestige. Securing English education became important. Schools were opened in various parts of the hills. Almora, the centre of Kumaun elite, emerged as important centre of education. Later schools were opened in other parts like Nainital, Pauri, Srinagar (Garhwal) etc. By December 1908, there were two high schools, five vernacular middle schools and many upper and primary schools in Garhwal. According to the 1901 census, the literacy rate was 6.39 per cent in Garhwal district which was the second highest (after Dehradun) in the Province. In the male literacy (12.84 per cent) it topped the province. The Thuljats in general


22. *Garhwali*, December, 1908. According to *BGG* there were 204 schools in Garhwal in 1908-09. *BGG* 1910, Appendix xvii.

and the Brahmins in particular were the first to take to education. By 1900 there were just 6 graduates from Garhwal and all of them were Brahmins. 24 The number of people who took to higher education and joined higher services were more in Almora and Nainital districts. 25 The Thuljats claimed a major share in the government services and various professions and also dominated the political leadership. They played a crucial role in local administration and perpetuated their caste supremacy by helping their caste brethren. 26 Thus although the pre-colonial monopoly of the Thuljats on politics and administration was broken, they still maintained power by availing new opportunities.

Thuljats were not alone to avail of the new opportunities. The Khasas and the Doms also took advantage of the new situation. The Khasas also took to education in large numbers. They took various new jobs. Like the Thuljats they emigrated to cities in search of jobs. The Khasas joined the army in large numbers particularly during the first World War. 27 This augmented the economic resources of their families and improved their economic condition. For strategic reasons special care was taken of soldiers and the area from which they were

26. Breman argues that police functionaries and other local government servants were recruited from among Anavils and when their Dubla hali ran away these functionaries helped their caste fellows by returning the Dubla. See J. Breman, *Patronage and Exploitation : Changing Agrarian Relation South Gujarat* (Delhi, 1979) p. 64-5.
27. Randhawa, *op. cit.*, p.53; 126; Sanwal, *op. cit.*
recruited. The army officers frequently wrote to the district officers to ensure that soldiers were treated well in their native villages and that their families did not face any serious problem. This increased the social status of Khasa soldiers. Mobility and contact with the wider world had social implications. The Khasa soldiers were now unwilling to accept the inferior status which traditional society accorded them. Many claimed Rajput descent. Thus the caste relations and power equations in villages underwent change.

The Doms also availed of the new opportunities. They moved out of the village, taking up work as labourers, and domestic servants. Forest operation created a new demand for labourers in the forests, and public works required construction labourers. Income outside the village augmented family income and reduced the Doms dependence on higher castes. The new right to own land was significant in the context of the late nineteenth century arable expansion.

This process of social re-ordering continued through census operations in the hills. Census was started as an exercise to collect information about the people to facilitate their proper governance. Cohn writes:

It was felt by many British officials in the middle of the nineteenth century that caste and religion were sociological keys to understanding the Indian people. If they were to be governed well,

then it was natural that information should be systematically collected about caste and religion.  

While the colonial state used this information to serve its own purpose, in the society it generated tensions. People were asked to identify themselves within the given categories. The categories were changed over time as diversity defied simple classification. People had a wide range of overlapping identities. Since they were asked about their caste and religion it led to self-questioning. The classification was not just of the individual respondent but of the group to which he belonged. This led to claims and counter claims for change in caste status and the formation of the caste associations.

In the UP hills it was difficult to classify the Khasas into the simple varna hierarchy. Due to this it was always difficult to know their exact number. In the 1840s Batten thought that the Khasas constituted 26.15 per cent of the total population of Garhwal. In the 1865 census their percentage in the total population of Garhwal was stated as 43.28 per cent. In the 1872 census their

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33. Cohn, op. cit., 248.
percentage in the total population of Garhwal was came down to 21.20. This fluctuation was because many Khasas now claimed that they were Rajputs; and this made counting difficult. Walton wrote that two-third of those who were recorded as Thakur (Rajput) were Khasas. Since more and more Khasas recorded themselves as Rajput, from the 1881 census they were included under the category of Rajputs.

Census was one way of securing status. Various other practices were adopted to ensure mobility. Adopting the customs and the way of life of a higher caste was a common practice. Sanwal argues that the Kumaun Rajput Parishad which was dominated by the Khasas exhorted members to emulate higher castes. They were asked to follow the orthodox rituals to justify claims to higher status. Turner found that Khasas were putting on janeo and were raising themselves to the rank of Rajputs. Walton wrote:

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34. Batten's figures quoted in HDNWP, vol. III, part I, p.266. Batten gives just number of Khasiyas. 1865 figures are from the Census of the North Western Provinces, 1865. The figure is for khasa Rajputs only. 1872 figures are from the Census of the North Western Provinces, 1872. Figure for Khasiyas include Khasa Brahmins and Khasa Rajputs.

35. BGG, 1910, p.62.

36. M.N.Srinivas, Caste in Modern India and Other Essays (Bombay, 1962, rept. 1989) p.44.

37. Sanwal, op. cit., 188; 194-5.

The Khasiyas ought to be distinguished from the pure Rajputs by his not wearing Janeo: but now that there is no danger of punishment for its unjustified assumption most Khasiyas have adopted the thread. 39

Through education, changed social practices, many Khasas intermarried among themselves and developed a closed social group. In the course of time they merged with Rajputs. 40 The number of Khasas joining Rajput rank increased over the decades.

Doms also struggled to improve their status. Artisan Doms who could improve their economic condition claimed a higher status among Doms. They joined the Arya Samaj and became Arya, adopted janeo and got purified. Lala Lajpat Rai in 1913 visited Almora and in Sunkiyan village gave Janeo and dvij status to 600 untouchables. 41 A temple was opened for untouchables in Almora. 42 There was a Dola-palki movement by the Doms. During the marriage of Doms the bridegrooms and brides were not allowed by the higher castes to use dola and palki (palki was used to carry the bridegroom and dola the bride. Both dola and palki were carried by 2 to 4 persons on their shoulders) and were instead to walk on foot. When Doms asserted their right to use dola-palki there was often

39. BGG, 1910, p.61.
40. Sanwal, op. cit., p.188-95.
42. Joshi, Uttarakhand ke Samajik Ewam Saskritic, p.134.
violence. The Arya Samaj played an important role in the movement.43 Doms also asserted that they should be called Shilpkar.44 Tamtas (copper smiths) who became rich took to priestly function amongst shilpkars.45 The Kumaun Shilpkar Sabha and the Garhwal Shilpkar Sabha spearheaded the movement for status mobility.

While Khasas could merge with Rajputs, Doms could not do so. They were considered impure, and there were no middle caste groups in the hills with whom they could identity. Thus their struggle did not result in mobility in caste hierarchy. An internal structure of hierarchy emerged within the Doms. When Tamtas emerged as leaders of the Kumaun Shilpkar Sabha, Sanwal argues, many did not accept their leadership.46 Only a few Doms could benefit in terms of their improved position. For many the situation remained the same.47

The dispute over status was not confined to Khasas and Doms. Within Thuljats too there were disputes over rank. When some Brahmins made public their intention of not sharing hookah (pipe) with Rajputs, it created

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43. Ibid., p. 195.
46. Ibid.
misunderstanding between the two castes. However, the newspaper *Garhwal Samachar* wrote that this was not an issue between Brahmin and Rajputs: within Brahmins some *jatis* did not share *hookah* with others to assert their superiority, and amongst Rajputs were some who did not share *hookah* with other Rajputs who were poor. The newspaper criticised such absurd ways of asserting superiority.\(^{48}\) The Colonial bureaucracy also divided the Thuljats. Wyndham, the Commissioner of Kumaun in the 1910s was, in fact, accused of encouraging rivalry between Brahmins and Rajputs.\(^{49}\)

Brahmins were also divided into superior and inferior ranks. In Kumaun they were divided into chauthani, Pachbiri, Khas-Brahmins. Chauthani claimed superiority. In Garhwal Brahmins were divided broadly into two categories - Sarola Brahmins and Gangari Brahmins. There was no marked difference between the Sarolas and Gangaris.\(^ {50}\) However there were some marriage and food taboos.\(^ {51}\) Sarolas claimed superiority over Gangaris which the latter rejected.\(^ {52}\) In one of the articles in *Garhwal Samachar* it was claimed that Sarolas were

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But this claim was refuted in another article in the next issue of the newspaper because it did not show high status in the then prevailing circumstances. The article claimed that Sarola means srestha (superior). This continuous discussion around caste status was the peculiar feature of the early twentieth century.

Thus we have seen that there was a strong conflict over caste ranking. The disappearance of the King, who presided over the caste hierarchy and who was the ultimate arbitrator of one's status, led to this situation. In the new set up caste groups vied with each other for status superiority. Among Thuljats various sub-castes struggled with each other for superiority. Khasas slowly merged into the Rajput rank. Some could not move up in the caste hierarchy but many of them improved their position and an internal hierarchy emerged within them. Mobility was mainly achieved by education, new jobs and changing economic condition. Secular gains were sought within the traditional framework of caste structure.

Conclusion

In the pre-Colonial period the Thuljats controlled political and economic

53. Garhwal Samachar, May-June, 1913. See January-February issue as well. This debate was continued in the newspapers. Rasoyas were those who cook food for public consumption in the public functions; food particularly rice, was only accepted by the public when it was cooked by certain high ranking castes.
power which was used to assert ritual superiority. Thuljats monopolized administration and had the privilege of superior rights on land. Khasas had a low status and many of them were tenants of Thulajats. Doms lived in servility and worked as *hali*, as agriculture labourers. The supremacy of the Thuljats was first jeopardized under Gurkha rule. The British then systematically undermined their position by dissociating socio-religious status from political and economic status. Thuljats no longer enjoyed land grants, their monopoly over the administration ended. Thulajat status was most seriously undermined when they were forced to render begar along with doms and *Khasa*.

Thuljats did not lose all their power. They quickly took to education, and joined government services and other professions. However in the new set up they had to compete with others. Khasas also took advantage of the new system, claimed higher caste status and slowly joined the rank of Rajputs. Their numerical strength, which became an asset in the new political system, also helped them. Thus, the relationship of Thuljats and Khasas definitely underwent change as the latter were better placed to challenge the supremacy of the former.

The relationship of Thuljats and Khasas with Doms did not change much. Some of them improved their economic and educational status, reduced their dependence on the higher castes, became Arya Samajist, converted to other religions. But most of them continued to suffer the norms of purity and pollution.