Along with the undeniable role played by physical factors in the life of mountain dwellers, our interest in understanding the cultural setting is doubly heightened because it has made the operation of regular community life feasible and is of prime relevance in exposing the socio-cultural aspects of population study.

In this context, our purpose would be realised by analysing the caste-tribe and religious composition of the people in the following pages.

A. THE TRIBE AND CASTE COMPOSITION

Although cultural landscape in this region is strongly influenced by physical factors, it is equally the product of interaction among various social groups inhabiting different areas. A greater variability of physical setting and numerous barriers of hill ranges have created small and distinctive culture areas. These are easily identified by marking the uniqueness and divergent forms of different caste-combinations along with their social traits. The discussion is important for knowing the influence of caste on various characteristics of population to be taken up in the following sequence of this study.

With scheduled castes and scheduled tribes forming more than 29% of population at the regional level, reaching the
maximum of 50 and over 90% in local areas, need for references to their socio-cultural and economic problems has to be constantly kept in mind.

The region has more than the national average of scheduled classes and among Himalayan areas, while the eastern section excels in scheduled tribes, the western Himalayas inclusive of this area has more of scheduled castes. At the same time, while the tribal population is very low in Jammu-Kashmir and in mountainous districts of Uttar Pradesh, this region plus a part of adjacent Himachal Pradesh has got its biggest concentration in this whole belt.

The ratio of scheduled castes generally varies between 10 to 30% in Himalayan areas keeping to an average of 21% in this region. Intra-regionally it decreases towards the inner parts unlike that of scheduled tribes increasing in the same direction.

As for the higher castes, they have not been enumerated separately since 1941 and the estimate of their proportions is based on old census figures modified by the averages drawn from Settlement Reports as well as the field enquiries in individual villages. Although these are approximations, they stand to give us a fair idea of the distribution of important regional castes. The discussion is based on relevant standard works, recent investigations, personal observations and enquiries.
In the remote past, certain bodies of superior castemen usually counted as Rajputs are said to have conquered the country, often supplemented by similar refugees from Indian plains under the sweeping wave of Islam, and settled down in abundant waste and forest, filling the valleys and clothing the hill sides. Each such settler having originally established himself on as much of a hill slope as he could clear or terrace, there gradually grew up the groups of numerous hamlets, each with their fields and dependent peasants. In course of time, besides such early conquering landlords, a great tail of subservient clans or others fallen out of caste by diffusion with hill aborigines, started owing allegiance to the former, becoming menial castes of the hill society. The general caste structure has neither been much tightened nor loosened since the first Muslim invader entered Punjab, the little influence of Islam in this area helping a longer preservation of its time-old characteristics. But in the absence of any theory of common descent of various ethnic groups, the inferior castes have at times succeeded in their struggle of shifting their loyalties from their old masters and have been drifting to the group above them, helped by changes in social conditions.

The degree of permissiveness in rules of interaction between the settlers and the aboriginals, the master of land and their dependents, numerous groups of hill menials and other
social functionaries evolved the caste system. The caste divisions supplied both the divisive and cohesive forces and their interplay within a predominantly rural and long-time traditional hill society produced a 'pahari culture' characterising the cultural landscape of the region.

The study of the development, composition, flux and drift of village caste carries a great significance. It is aptly remarked by G.D. Beremen in his book 'Hindus of the Himalayas' that 'like all Indian villages, pahari villages are also not static, isolated or autonomous groups of cultivation and settlement. To be understood they must be viewed in historical perspective and in their relationship to other social, political, economic and religious systems of which they or some of their members are a part.'

**GEOGRAPHIC ISOLATION AND CASTE STRUCTURE**

The caste structure is equally influenced by physical and socio-cultural isolation of the hill people, the highland region of Himalayas becoming a residual cultural island preserving the social customs that once had a far more extensive distribution.¹

Being a mountainous region, the physical barriers separating one village (consisting already of scattered hamlets) from another produce a feeling of localism, a decrease in social interaction and cultural transmission.

For this reason a smaller marriage network and a much greater cultural diversity within relatively small range of hill castes, even within the members of same caste, is marked over short distances in typical pahari villages. The physical isolation of local areas has led to linguistic isolation, has tended to keep only the closer kins together and has socially insulated the hill tracts from outside contacts. The best case of such an extreme degree of social integration within a single village is marked in an endogamous 'kanet' settlement of Malana in upper Kulu. ‘Areas of rural cosmopolitanism is restricted in the hills. There is a very real isolationist and inward-looking tendency among hill village residents.  

A relatively greater cultural homogeneity and intensive contacts found among caste-fellows of a small locality than among their counterparts scattered over a wider hill area could rarely make any individual caste-group a self-contained primary division. Likewise it has generated a greater need for freedom of association among different local castes, a genuinely more of interdependence and toleration of occasional inter-caste marriages.

A singular example of such inter-caste tolerance has been reported from villages in Brahmour tehsil of Chamba, by W.H. Newell in his investigation on scheduled tribes of the area.

It is pointed out that where a marriage between two different castes is not permitted, the defaulter is excommunicated from the caste but not from the gotra (i.e., a family of persons living together having same ritual practices) of his ancestors. Naturally when the persons of same gotra are found in two caste-groups, the inter-caste rivalries in a local area are likely to decrease.

It is stated in a local saying in Kulu that no man who takes up abode there retains purity of caste. As the settlers were scattered and few in numbers at a place, there was little fear of the 'Biradari' and they could succumb to temptation without any serious loss of reputation. To cite an instance of intra-caste spatial variation in social ranking, the Kanets and Brahmins of outer Seraj living in relatively open valleys consider themselves superior to those of the high hills a few miles to the north. About 10,000 Kolis living in better-accessible valleys of Kangra-Palampur claim themselves to be purer and superior to Koli low-castes of Kulu, the latter having a different identity altogether by living apart in greater isolation.

The tendency on the part of people living in towns or main villages in calling their counterparts of hill interiors as 'Paharias' (i.e., hill dwellers) inferior for all social relations highlights the same point. The least but not the least, as we go deep into the interior, more towards the borders
of Indo-Tibetan cultural zone, castes bearing lower social status have been changing to the next ladder, commanding higher position because of easier scope for change of occupational functions. In higher hills the population of scheduled castes being lower, hamlets more apart and demand for their duties proportionately higher, the social taboos in performance of 'low' jobs are erased and social position of low castes is raised vis-a-vis their counterparts residing in outer zone or Indian plains. Thus their social position among themselves and in relation to higher castes depends upon the customs of local families, practical needs of the people, the relative location of the areas and a change in their traditional way of living.

REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF CASTES AND TRIBES

Although the people living in remote parts of the region have been included in the list of scheduled tribes by a presidential order of 1966 on grounds of extreme degree of physical and cultural isolation and they behave with others on a supra-caste basis, they have all major Hindu castes amongst them. Thus throughout the region, social classes are synonymous with the institution of caste and hill society consists of Brahmins, Rajputs, Khatri-Mahajans at the top and a conglomery of low-castes at the bottom. At the regional level, 79% of the population consists of the high-caste people and 21% of low-caste groups. A broad distributional pattern is revealed on the basis of enquiries made from eighty villages scattered all over the
Eleven villages were found to have an overall majority of scheduled castes with their greatest concentration in densely-populated southern areas where they form 25-35% of total population. As many as thirty-three villages showed a dominance of Rajputs most widely distributed in all parts of the region. There were nineteen villages of mixed castes and eight to nine each with Brahmin and Ghorath majority, the former commonly met with and the latter ones found occasionally sprinkled or concentrated in a well-defined zone. The following discussion spells out the details of spatial distribution and characteristics of different castes and tribes on the basis of maps pertaining to their regional composition (Figs. 11 and 13).

1. The Scheduled Castes and the Tribes:

Although in order of their proportional strength, scheduled castes are only next to Rajputs and scheduled tribes far lower, it is relevant to start with the discussion of these two classes for two reasons. Firstly, among the scheduled castes are found the original inhabitants of this region and periodic rise in their numbers highlight the history of growth of caste system and the rise of individuals from its lower to higher ladder. Secondly, at the other end, scheduled tribes are spread over 40% of region's area and with little caste homogeneity; they illustrate the process of change from tribe into caste and vice versa depending upon the needs and exigencies of times.
### Table 3
Comparative Strength of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (As per cent of total population)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tahsils</th>
<th>Scheduled Castes</th>
<th>Scheduled Tribes</th>
<th>Tribal Stock Not in Scheduled List</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(As per cent of total population)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Lahaul</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>77</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pangi</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>96</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmour</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Karsog</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chichict</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>Insignificant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandi</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joginder Nagar</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kangra</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<td>3. Chamba</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bhattiyat</td>
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<td>29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Churah</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region as a Whole</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The data reproduced above shows that southern part of the region extending from Karsog-Kulu in southeast to Palampur westwards has more than the regional average proportion of scheduled castes while scheduled tribes are below this level in it.

If we study this data side by side with the spatial distribution of scheduled classes brought out on the map (Fig. 13)
three types of areas are clearly marked out: (1) The first group includes areas having predominance of tribal population and very low proportions of scheduled castes. (ii) The second group pertains to areas with predominance of scheduled castes and insignificant proportion of scheduled tribes. It forms the southeastern block containing the largest proportion of scheduled castes in the region, nearing the maximum of 50% in localised tracts. In Kangra and Palampur in the mid south, upto 25% of local population generally consists of scheduled castes. (iii) It corresponds to areas in the west where the proportions both of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes tend to be equal. It is caused by more than 50% of population consisting of scheduled tribes in individual villages on both sides of Dhauladhar and their main concentrations in Brahmour. Minus these tracts, there is a predominance of scheduled castes, upto 25% of total population in central valleys of Chamba-Churah and Bhattiyat, rising to more than 50% towards their margins.

**Origin and Main Groups of Scheduled Castes**

It is reported that the dominant scheduled caste groups of Kolis, Halis, sipis plus a few others (Fig. 14) with agriculture as their main occupation are known to be the earliest settlers, having no tradition as to their original homes. Together they form nearly two-thirds of the low castes. Ninety per cent of Kolis are found in south-east decreasing westward while Halis are mostly confined to north-western part
of Chamba. The present Kolis are representatives of Kol stock of central India and were so numerous in Kulu that it was named as land of the Kols. They were cultivators right from early days and were not scheduled castes on any ground. The early Aryans in these hills had to engage in a bitter struggle, killing their warriors and snatching their lands in order to subjugate them. They were punished for giving Aryans a hard time and were reduced to the low position of social exclusiveness because the incoming Aryan minority in those days was afraid of its likely submergence by their overwhelming population. Another sub-caste of scheduled-castes known as 'Chandals or chanals' also became scheduled castes by the course of history refusing to accept assimilation into Aryan system. In villages of upper Kulu, word 'chanalti' literally means 'grass huts' and 'chandal derived from chand' means a self-conceited person. It is implied that these once proud fighters were made to live in grass-hut colonies visible as outlying Harijan settlements in the villages of Kulu.

About 150 years ago, there were no such sub-castes among them. In course of time, associated with events and practices in different areas, the sub-groups went on developing their own stratification.

Another 22% of scheduled castes are village artisans and menials like carpenters, blacksmiths, oilmillers,  

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utensil makers, cotton scutchers, dyers and washermen, barbers, stone workers, basket makers, ferry workers, miscellaneous labourers and rural bards. Some of them combine a little of agricultural work as cultivators or landless labour with their main activity. They serve the needs of farming community and get customary payments in cash or in kind at the time of harvests.

The lowest forming about 20% of their strength are the Chamars and the like who are mostly shoe-makers and leather workers and only a few known as ‘Chuhra or Balmiki’ are sweepers mostly in towns. The chamars are concentrated in agricultural valleys of the south, Mandi-Kangra belt having 3% of their population. These areas have greater number of cattle upon which their occupation is largely based and also contain the larger number of towns in which they find jobs. In Kali and Mali areas of concentration, the sub-castes of ‘Dagis’ and ‘Ad-Dharmis’ undertake the job of chamars of the outermost zone.

In the region’s population, scheduled castes were 21% in 1961 and rose to 32% in 1971. There was a big increase of 53% in their strength in 1951-61 decade, much more than that of general population but in the next inter-censal period, they increased only by 17.6%, lower than the rate of

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4 In 1971, Himachal Pradesh had 2%, Jammu & Kashmir 2% and mountain districts of Uttar Pradesh 1% of scheduled castes in their population, making this a foremost region in respect in western Himalayan states.
increase in general population. It seems that after the initial phase of getting them enumerated as scheduled castes, for seeking concessions, some of them have started associating with different castes prevailing among the high-caste Hindus. One finds that many groups among them do not follow a caste occupation exclusively hereditary to them. On taking to agriculture, they could partly disassociate them from their parent tribe for the purpose of census enumeration.

A positive decline in their numbers in 1971 was noticed only in the tribal area of Lahaul and Jogindernagar tahsil. Generally speaking the rise and fall in tribal areas is the result of their-to-and-from-movements with other parts of the region. In these areas, excepting those who are engaged in agriculture, others are not natives and do not form such an essential part in the working of social system.

Scheduled Tribes

The tribal population of the region consisting only of those put in Government's scheduled list was 8.2% in 1961 decreasing to 7.1% by 1971. The increase in their numbers in the same period has been 5% as compared to 24% in those of non-tribal population. A decrease of 16% in their population even in their stronghold in Brahmour is full of significance. It is reported that it is more the result of increasing

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5 In Himalayas west of Nepal, this region stands as a major tribal area according to 1971 estimates of population. The proportion of Scheduled tribes in rest of Himachal Pradesh is 10.5%, in Jammu and Kashmir and mountain districts of Uttar Pradesh only about 4% of total population of these areas.
caste-consciousness among them, the affluent ones, disinclined to proclaim them socially as tribes, have got themselves enumerated as belonging to different Hindu castes. To some extent the decrease has also followed their inter-sonal migration to outer areas of the region. A trend towards rapid increase in their strength outside the main tribal areas speaks for it. To cite an instance, a rise in Churah adjoining the tribal areas of Chamba has taken place in 1961-71 period. An average fall in their numbers recorded only in Karsog and Jogindernagar tahsils of outer zone is the result of temporary population of tribals having left the areas after the census enumeration of 1961.

Although three-fourths of their population is Hindu by faith merging easily with the preponderant majority of people of this region, they are marked off as distinguished communities by retaining their tribal customs, beliefs and late responsiveness to change.

Among scheduled tribes of the region, 'Gujjars', 'Gaddis', 'Pangwals' and the 'Lahaulis' are important communities inhabiting respectively the Beas, upper Ravi, lower and upper Chenab basins close to the main ranges (Fig. 14). At regional level, 30% of the tribal people live in innermost area (making 82% of local population), 50% are found in the Mid-Mountain zone (comprising 20% of local population) and 20% are distributed along outer zone hills (making less than 3% of local population).
(1) Pangwals and Lahaulis

Both the communities are confined to the trans-Pirpanjal tract of this region constituting about 2.4% of its total population. The former retired to this seclusion as they could not stand in the face of growing strength of society of the outer hill zone. Very few of them have come down to the south of Mid-Himalayan range in adjoining high parts of Chamba even under acute pressure of population in Pangi. They are largely Hindus and originally came to these parts from various parts of the hills and plains of India.

The 'Lahaulis' integrated into a distinct group by becoming aloof as a result of the intermixture of Pre-Buddhist Hindu aborigines and hill-Aryans with Buddhist mongoloids in a culture-contact zone along Indo-Tibet borders.

While the Lahauli tribals for long got oriented more to the culture, religion and trade with Tibet, the Pangwals remained strictly local-centered Hindus. This has made the former one of the most mobile people and the latter the sedentary cultivators and graziers of high Himalayas. The population-resource problem of Pangwals is acute and poverty among them greater, specially during frequently recurring scarcity conditions.

The Lahaulis, on the other hand, have attempted to reduce its magnitude by taking to non-agricultural pursuits like mule-transport and business across their borders, earlier with Tibet and now only with other parts of India. A rigid custom of
polyandry long practised among a section of Lahauli tribes has also provided an economic solution producing at the same time a social method of population control. It has saved cultivated holdings from fragmentation and has spared workers from each jointly managed household for jobs outside. The system has also been responsible for the poor lot of a large number of unmarried girls left uncared to lead a life of hardships.

In a polyandrous household the status of a married woman is higher by often playing one brother against another. But unmarried sisters are often seen working as maidservants in each other's original houses or have been joining the monasteries. It has been in long usage but as it is being challenged by younger people now the area is on the verge of a socio-economic change in forthcoming years.

A study team of the Planning Commission on Programmes on tribal development for India's Fourth Five-Year Plan period was struck by the disparity in standards, social and economic between different scheduled tribes, and recommends that a socio-economic survey of different tribal communities should be made not only to correct the imbalance but also to de-schedule the economically advanced tribes. Some other people living in adjoining tracts like those of Banghal of Palampur deserve to be included among them, if, extreme degree of isolation and backwardness has been the criterion for this classification.
The Gaddis, Gujjars of Chamba and Thakars of Lahaul are generally fairly well-off but the Pangwals and Lahaulis of Chamba are still backward. The impact of tribal development schemes upon their social structure and economic advancement is still not known. It is, however, observed that growing economic prosperity has increased the caste-consciousness lending a set back to the feelings of isogamous union developed in many cases over years of living together.

(ii) The Gujjars:

Out of all, the hill Gujjars are predominantly Muslims, are yet largely migratory keeping to the forest edge of low mountain pastures, their villages marked generally between 6000-7000 ft. altitudes. In the region as a whole they form about 2% of total and 21% of tribal population and are confined to Chamba, Kangra and Mandi as a pastoral tribe of cattle rearers. The Muslim gujjars form 80% of them and are chiefly pastoral but the the Hindu Gujjars are agriculturists mostly found in Mandi area towards the southeast. A part of them no longer fully nomadic is called 'Svanadars' unlike the completely mobile 'Ban-Gujjars'.

Some of the hill Gujjars, both Hindus and Muslims, have similar 'Gotras' suggesting their common origin and subsequent conversion to Islam during the days of Aurangzeb. The Muslim gujjars of a village near Chamba confirm that their tribe was of Rajputs belonging to Jaipur entered Jammu while practising pastoralism and from there to Chamba spreading near the populated
areas having pastures. Originally invited by a Raja of Chamba, their slow process of penetration in that area extends over the last three generations. The village of Naingal, 24 kilometers northeastwards of Chamba is a typical settlement having 80% population of Muslim Gujjars which one rarely comes across. Its residents are conservative, simple and yet quarrelsome. They are most static of the hill tribes, do not like to change their ways of living and are reportedly indifferent towards school education of their children. They are governed by their priest in all matters of keeping up their separate identity. Because of multiple marriages (many of them practising polygamy) and their extravagance, they have landed into debts and suffer from the problems of increasing numbers with proverbial resistance to change. They do not reconcile to be hundred per cent cultivators and a Muslim gujjar is so careless about it that gets only half of what an ordinary hill peasant gets from land.

(iii) The Gaddis:

The Gaddis of Brahmore in Chamba were a society without definite boundaries and once included larger groups in the valleys of Kangra and Palampur. According to W.H.Newell, this society gradually became smaller and smaller within the last hundred years (confined to upper Ravi basin and slopes of Dhauladhar) driven back or absorbed by the more powerful Indian semi-secular culture. Their essentially Hindu-centered
religious group could not stand, the larger Indian society recognised more in terms of money and the Government jobs. This phenomenon has kept them in a self-imposed cultural autonomy. Still their stock of people in all forms about 50% of the tribal and 4% of the total population of this region.

In 1901, only 8% were listed as Gaddis in Brahmour but in 1961, the proportion reached 98.5% in the wake of declaration of tribal concessions allowed by the Government. In their marginal habitations along Dhula-Dhar, 50 to 75% of the population in a number of individual villages consists of Gaddi stock whether shown as scheduled tribes or not (Fig. 14).

The word 'Gaddi' is a generic term standing for amalgamation of middle groups of Hindu castes for all practical purposes generally leaving out a small section of Brahmins at the top and scheduled castes at the bottom. Mostly because of this arrangement and distribution of one caste in one village in their homeland in Brahmour they have been able to avoid the clash of caste interests.

W.H. Newell in his study of Gaddis of Brahmour in Chamba (known as Gadheren or original home of Gaddis for that reason) describes them as originally a group of warlike Rajputs employed in the army of Chamba Raja. Their position
in ranges immediately above Lahore favours the tradition that they were fugitives from plains before Muslim inroads into these almost uninhabited valleys. 6

They gradually conquered and Hinduised the low-caste 'Sipi' aborigines, built temples, and added to their small number by bringing Brahmins from elsewhere, giving them parts of their wasteland on higher slopes of the valleys. The social structure of Brahmour remained very much the same except another influx mostly of Khatri immigrants at the time of Muslim persecution in Aurangzeb's time. In this manner they now include Rajput, Brahmin and Khatri castes, together behaving as one big caste of 'Gaddi' in their relation with general population of this region.

Baden Powell in his 'Land systems of British India' mentioned significantly that the continuous existence of the caste system depended in great part on there being adequate supplies of arable land available to cover any increase in population. As the Gaddis are basically caste-minded and their numbers grew much more in proportion to the supply of arable land in Brahmour, they have tried to solve the problem of resource-scarcity by practising shepherding or by settling outside their original habitat. They could settle permanently on small strips of relatively poorer

land close to the limits of cultivation mostly along the southern slopes of Dhaula-Dhar from Bhattyat in the west to Palampur in the east. As this out-movement has been slower since the close of last century they could not become sufficiently diffused. They are now found as real mountain-dwellers of Dhaula-Dhar from about an elevation of 4500 ft. to 7500 ft. above which there is little or no cultivation.

According to Mr. Barnes' description they are the most remarkable race in the hills differing essentially in features, manners, dress and dialect known more for strict observance of Hindu customs and ideas of chastity than most of the inhabitants of high ranges.

2. **Major High-Caste Groups:**

(1) **Rajputs:** Forming 60% of total population, the Rajputs of various grades are better represented in this region lying to the north of Indian plains witnessing periods of Muslim persecution in the past. A line of demarcation between different caste-groups of the large body of Rajputs has become futile to draw. There is a tradition that irrespective of caste, anyone (as Brahmins in Bara Banghal) who could exercise his sovereignty over a hill area in the past came to be known as a Rajput. Most typical of top grades among them are descendants of ancient hill chiefs known by various titles. While the high class Rajput families are few, more important by their social prestige than by their numbers,
the mass of Rajput peasantry consists of their low grades mixed up by marriages over the generations, or risen in the west and 'Kanets' in the east of this region. Through a long trickle of originally irregular marriage connections between Khasiya Rajputs (the earliest hill Aryans) and the aborigines and later between their offsprings and the former class brought about their various nomenclatures, such class pretending to belong to Rajput caste in some way or the other. In this region, the proportion of top-grade Rajputs goes on decreasing in all directions from outer some of Kangra. Rathis and Kanets connected with them are 16% and 26% each, as much as 87% of the former concentrated in western part in Kangra and Chamba, and 96% of Kanets in eastern part in Mandi and Kulu (Figs. 11 and 14).

Table 4
Distribution of Major High-Caste Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tahsils</th>
<th>RAJPUTS</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Brahmins</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LOW Grades</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rathis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kangra</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palampur</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(As per cent of total population)

SOURCE: Estimated approximately from old census data, Settlement Reports and Village Enquiries.
Rathis constitute the major proportion of peasantry in valleys of Chamba district. In Kangra-Palampur, they are distributed on poorer uplands where they have to work hard with the hill soils. They are fair-looking, simple, quiet and industrious cultivators, not allowing the womenfolk like Rajputs to work in fields. Among their different subgroups, many are considered nearer to high grade Rajputs as a result of long struggle to rise in their society and the others still treated as low grade.

The rural habitations of Rajputs and Rathis, particularly in Kangra, are placed in isolated positions, either on hill crests or on the verge of a forest. In the absence of natural covers, an artificial growth of vegetation screens or a fully walled house with only one entrance is conspicuously marked. At this caste has clung to its deep-rooted prejudices of keeping 'Purdah', such measures were adopted to afford them the necessary privacy.

General Cunningham identifies the 'Kanets' with the great 'Khas' race which once occupied the whole sub-Himalayan tract as an early group of immigrant hill Aryans 100-115 years before the birth of Christ. These Aryan settlers came in contact with 'Kirets' or the mongoloids in high mountains of Lahaul and the Koli aborigines of low Himalayas. It is considered probable that Kanets appeared once as a vast section of Himalayan community as a result of irregular
6. The Rajputs in outer hills (Kangra) have been much privacy-conscious, seeking it either in their habitations built on sheltered hill tops, those screened by high walls with one entrance (as here) or with tree-shrubs.

7. The highlanders taking out the procession of their local deities, the cult being the product of their isolated 'universe' of a hill village.

(Courtesy Himachal Pradesh Tourist Dept.)

8. Amidst wilderness all around stands the Buddhist chorten (a small stone tower) along Chandrabhaga river (elevation 10,000 ft.) in Lahaul, the land of lamasarais.

(Courtesy Himachal Pradesh Tourist Dept.)
marriages of 'Khasiyas' with the aborigines. They once contained Brahmin and Rajput kanets amongst them, and their distribution all over Kulu, Mandi and Lahaul separated the later Aryans of India from the Turanians of Tibet. The meaning of word 'Kanet' is derived from 'Kanishtha' (the inferior being), 'Kunet' (one who has transgressed the rule), 'Khanan' (digging the earth), 'Kunet' (poor dancers) or 'Kanahat' (the quality of patience). Thus those Aryans who got loose in their prescribed traditions by mixing with the natives were called the inferior beings. They were undoubtedly the great diggers of earth, clearing, digging and terracing the land for cultivation, and according to some, because of their great patience and industriousness, were given this Urdu term by the Muslims. The corruption of the original word carrying such meanings came to designate, the majority of rural population inhabiting these parts.

This brief background tells how the rough terms of 'Kanets' and 'Rathi' came to be applied to anyone but the lowest class of people extracted from the identical stock and are becoming indistinct from the real Rajput class.

Even the tribal people of Lahaul are Kanets without exception, over 60% of them are the 'Bhot Kanets' with predominance of Mongoloid element, and about 20% resembling the other Indo-aryan Kanets of Kulu.

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The numerical, educational, occupational and prestigious advantages have always been important in acceptance of claims to a higher position. The adaptive mechanisms have effortlessly emerged from within the local cultures. Both these claims and mechanisms left the large body of kshatriyas anyone but the lowest and a minority of them formed the higher castes; social stratification remained alive despite mixing and assimilation between the Aryans and hill aborigines.

(ii) Brahmins: The Brahmins have no definite territorial organisation. In the region they were 13% of population with 70% of them found in Kangra-Palampur, 19% in Mandi and 11% in Chamba (Fig.11).

Even when few in numbers, they could settle among their clients wherever they went because of the immunity they enjoyed and the respect they received in society. Sometimes they received land grants in wasteland. Wherever the impact of religion could be preserved longer and the society looked to their bare needs, their distribution is well-spotted. Their number is also proportionate to the number of religious places an area has got. Besides priestly duties, they are engaged in cultivation, petty trade and services. Among high caste Hindus, they are generally the poorest. Since they started losing the top-class prestige, they suffered from educationally and materially.
In the outer zone, they have a fair concentration in Kangra-Palampur, their proportion is above the regional average in Chamba-Churah in the middle zone and are similarly distributed among Hindu population of tribal areas in and around the inner zone. In all other areas their proportion in population falls below the regional average. Although regionally they are widely scattered, they have come to form only small concentrations in localised tracts.

3. Minor Caste-Groups:

The following castes are small, forming 7% of the total population of the region; but in their local areas they are important by their size and socio-economic functions:

(i) Ghirath: They make the largest community of cultivators in area of their concentration in central portions of open valleys of Kangra and Palampur. With 93% of their population, this zone can easily be called the 'Ghirath habitat' of this region. From here they decrease both west and eastwards to insignificance (Fig. 11 and 14).

Socially considered as sudras, they have risen through a social struggle. The term 'Ghirath' is associated with 'Trigarth' (the ancient name of Kangra kingdom) after which they were significantly called as 'Trigarthiya' or simply the 'Gharith' (i.e. dwellers of Trigarth),

Based on discussion of these derivatives in L.C. Prarthi's book 'Kulwt Desh Ki Kahani' (1971).
sub-castes, unlike Rajputs, are invariably found in the levelled valleys, the most open spots containing the finest lands, most accessible portions of hills at the same time considered to be most vulnerable to foreign invasions in early days of settlement. The coarse-featured ghiraths, functionally the jats of these hills, are wedded to the soil and are the most hard-working rice cultivators preferring this life to the advantages of privacy and old-time security.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tahsils</th>
<th>As per cent of total population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ghirath-Jats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seraj</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kulu</td>
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<td>Lahaul</td>
<td>0.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pangi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brahmour</td>
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<td>Karsog</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kangra</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palampur</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Estimated from varied sources, both from records and village enquiries.
As they are most laborious peasants themselves, including their womenfolk, there are very few members of other cultivating castes in their main villages unlike the pattern observed in Rajput villages of the area. As compared to Rajput, a Ghirath has remained more conservative not leaving his home to show a fascination to join army or take up other jobs outside their habitat.

(ii) Khatri-Mahajans and Sudras: These groups belong to business castes and are important not by their numbers but by the enterprise, wealth and the social prestige they have gathered. Together hardly forming 2.5% of region’s population 56% of them are in Kangra zone, 30% in Mandi and 12% in Chamba and other parts.

Khatri are diffused all over the region. In its outer zone, their greatest concentration is marked in rural area of Kangra and Bhattiyat tahsils. An equally higher-proportion observed in Mandi eastwards forms a community apart as they are mostly confined to the town of Mandi with a little spread over its rural area. In the tribal area of Brahmuor, a number of its gaddi inhabitants are of Khatri origin but both in matters of occupation and habitat, nothing is shared between them and the non-tribal ones, except that history traces them all to the common stock of Punjab Khatri community. All non-tribal Khatri are by and large endogamous communities with a greater degree of social cohesion among them in local areas.
Mahajans are relatively more-in Hattiyat and Kangra in the lower hill zone and are sprinkled in very small proportions in other parts of the region. They, along with the Khatris and Suds, are found in sizeable numbers in the towns and market villages.

Suds make another compact community confined to the low hills of Palampur and Kangra. Tradition has it that they have migrated in the recent times from Hoshiarpur area of Punjab to run small shops in the region.

All the three business castes have greater interests in urban areas by living or having relations in the city or non-city urban tracts. They can be easily pointed out as communities whose social and business connections both run across the boundaries of rural and urban areas. In the past they enjoyed the patronage of princely rulers and because of the initial lead and by acting as a sort-of-intermediaries between rural and urban interests.

**COMMON CHARACTERISTICS AND DEMOGRAPHIC IMPLICATIONS OF CASTE STRUCTURE:**

As the region is located along the mountain ranges, bounded by Punjab plains in its south and Tibet-Ladakh plateau to the north, it has become a contact zone between Bhotias from the north, plain dwellers from the south and the aboriginal stock within it. At the same time, in the course of History, it has come to be a well-defined cultural zone by itself, integrating what is borrowed from outside within
an overall frame of a high degree of caste-culture differences from one locality to another. The fluctuating nature of caste structure becomes clear when even priest of hill temples may not necessarily be Brahmins, and Brahmin shopkeepers may often be popularly called 'Mahajans' i.e. the trading caste.

The geographical isolation of the region and increasing stratification of peasant society have so influenced the caste habitats that these are well-marked 'with each class holding possession of its peculiar domain and the different habits and associations created by different localities have impressed upon each a peculiar physiognomy and character'.

The social struggle of maintaining caste distinctions in the rural countryside is being quietly carried on, the members of a particular caste continue to be named after their original calling or social status even when they have left them long ago and have drifted into agriculture.

Thus the geographic and economic compulsions have proved too over-riding to allow the evolution of caste system proceeding on commonly recognised lines. It has primarily served the traditional socio-economic needs of hill society, the permissiveness of inter-caste relations, pollution barriers and ritual distances have remained of secondary value. This institution has decided the mutually acceptable rights and

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9 Barnes G.W., Kangra Settlement Report, 1889.
obligations between different occupational groups, more vital than their statistical proportions in agrarian hierarchy.

There are numerous instances of co-variance of caste characteristics and habits, attitudes, choices of its members, a relatively higher material or educational standards achieved through the associated style of life of a particular group. 'Distinct habits and customs of people are most marked where mass of that people dwells, when a detachment splits off from the parent tribe and settles elsewhere, it does suffer a certain change through the greater influence of superior members around.'

Thus typical caste characteristics gain conspicuousness under the force of numerical strength of the members, the change in the latter contributing to different degrees of conservatism and responsiveness to changes. One usually observes rigid adherence (far lesser than in plains) to ritual practices combined with some choice to change traditional occupations or to migrate on the part of Brahmins, Khatri-Mahajans and high caste Rajputs. The Ghoraths-Kants-Rathis show a greater laxity in ritual practices and devotion to their age-old occupations. The low-castes can take easily to any pattern of living and in the absence of land tie, their landless members can migrate anywhere in a bid to reduce their socio-economic disabilities.

10 Kitts, E.J., 'A Compendium of Castes and Tribes in India,' (1885).
Inter-zonal movement has not only taken place but has been frequently facilitated by feelings of common caste tie between migrants and the natives of the place where they could choose to go. In its absence, a piece of cultivable land is owned elsewhere by a villager but he keeps on residing in his original village on grounds of caste fellowship. Thus dispersal of population has naturally lagged behind although the fresh occupation of cultivable land has been reported from parts of the region.

Those owning more land as, for example, the top class Rajput farmers, get lower crop yields as they have caste taboos inhibiting them to look well to the land, their women not working in fields, depending more on agricultural labourers. As they belonged to the family of early rulers or warriors, they had habit of depending upon their patronage and have no tradition of being industrious tillers of hill soils. This is one of the reasons, under changed circumstances, for their sons finding it more congenial to leave village lands for getting into army jobs. Maximum migration from outer parts of the region has taken place from this caste, leaving lower working force of male Rajputs and greater proportion of females in their villages.

A Ghirath-Jat and next to him a Kanet is hardworking, getting higher yields per acre from the same quality of land although total production is insufficient for their own needs
because of their tiny holdings. Their villages have plenty of family labour with readiness to work in fields as they are generally not attracted towards out-migration or moving away from their rural habitats.

A Muslim Gujjar in the region has failed to get much from cultivation because of his longer association with pastoral activity and complete nomadism.

With these castes either wedded to the soil, more easy-going and wasteful possessing lesser keenness for higher education, the field of professional and higher administrative services is left largely to business castes and recently to Brahmans.

Greater the isolation of caste-groups, higher becomes the tedium of daily chores of life in self-sufficient homesteads whereby marriages are valued more for supplying more hands to work.

Among low-castes, scheduled-castes and tribal population, marriages are easily broken and arranged, and due to lack of stability in matrimonial relations meant solely for producing children, family planning carries little value. In many such rural pockets, natural growth rate is observed to be higher although the rate of survival of children is reported to be lower. Under the prevalence of extra joint family structure, the ranks of children is swelled by the parentless

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11 The writer counted upto 17 children per household in such villages of Kangra and Kulu.
youngsters of near relatives. With such marriages, and social customs, caste and economic compulsions, women go on producing children in more than one family; they have changed during their reproductive period. Once the isolation is broken, economic and educational development takes place reducing the degree of labour involved in performance of routine duties, survival rate of children rises because of greater availability of medical facilities, the urge for smaller families gets strengthened.

The caste structure by reflecting environmental conditions and pressures has produced distinctive habits and customs which have influenced the dispersal, characteristics and growth of population.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:

The tribal and caste structure of hill society, distribution and habitats of its major groups have played a prominent part in the making of cultural landscape of the region. The study provides important material to understand its individuality, characteristics and demographic implications of socio-cultural patterns.

Having a considerable strength of scheduled castes and being a major tribal area in west Himalayas (forming 29% of region's total population), the region has its backwardness or inherent problems of such a society. The distinction between castes and tribes becomes vague as the region's tribal communities have the institution of caste or atleast an increasing caste consciousness like any other people.
Only an extreme isolation, their greater concentration in inner far-flung parts of the region, a consequent retention of distinct customs, beliefs and cultural exclusiveness have been responsible for inclusion of these tribal people in the scheduled list. The Gaddi and Lahauli tribes have largely solved their acute population-resource problems by resorting to migratory grazing, transportation and business or to polyandrous households. Others, like Pangwals of Chamba being far less enterprising and more sedentary suffer from acute poverty by getting virtually confined to the seclusion of high Himalayas.

Although a fuller impact of economic programmes on tribal communities is not known, many of them are reported recently to be economically well-off as compared to their counterparts in non-tribal communities.

About two-thirds of the scheduled castes are the most ancient hill aborigines of this region, have been classed as outcastes as a result of their subjugation and non-assimilation into early Aryan system in remote past and not by any occupational exclusiveness. The fact that over 70% of them are either cultivators, artisans or high class village menials, with only a minority dealing with abominable tasks of disposing dead animals or scavenging, bears testimony to it.

A century back, there were very few sub-castes among them, a process of social stratification has grown depending upon
their local circumstances. Except in tribal areas where their proportion is very low, they are distributed sizeably throughout the region with the minimum of 10% of local population everywhere and the maximum of 50% in highly localised tracts.

Among high-castes, Rajputs of various grades and Brahmins are two major social groups, minor caste-groups of Khatri-Mahajans etc. being just hardly 7% of total population of the region. While Rajputs bearing different nomenclatures are widely scattered, Brahmins sprinkled everywhere with a few local concentrations; the minor castes are distributed in their clusters marked mostly in outer parts of the study area.

With lesser geographical contacts between people causing greater inward-looking tendency and inter-caste cooperation within a locality, there has been a decline in social interaction, cultural transmission and caste-fellowship across wider areas.

Within small localities, acculturation among different stock of people stuck-up and drifting in various valleys, caste-interdependence and the reciprocal evaluation depended more on environmental and economic adaptations. A particular caste or caste-combination group is marked by distinctive habits, customs, choices, attitudes and responsiveness to change on the part of its members.
A Ghirath and next to him a Kanet (literally meaning occupiers and diggers of land) are most hard-working, thrifty and sedentary peasants wedded to the soil irrespective of sex distinction thereby obtaining higher yields even from their small holdings. High caste Rajputs own larger holdings but get low crop yields as they depend more on agricultural labour and, true to their heritage, leave fields for joining the armed forces. The small but prestigious Khatri-Mahajan castes have rightly been the builders of urban civilization with the help of their long-standing business acumen. Hill gujjars have failed to get suitable returns even after settling on cultivable land. Such a relation between caste traits and demographic characteristics points out a greater sticking of high-caste people to their ancestral villages having majority of their caste brethren even though they may come to own land elsewhere. Laxity of practices among low-castes helps them to adjust and migrate anywhere in the absence of land tie in a number of cases.

Caste ties, its stratification and taboos have influenced the dispersal of population, its characteristics and spread of education in many parts of the region.

Marriage customs, smaller marriage network, social traditions and need of family labour in relatively isolated areas with scattering of population, encourage the growth of large families, far greater among the low-castes and the tribals.

The caste structure reflects environmental needs and pressures and tends to create distinctive culture areas in the region of this type.
B. RELIGIOUS COMPOSITION AND ITS CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

The study of distribution of religious groups cannot be underestimated in any study of the human geography of a tradition-bound region. Together with castes, the study of religious groups is suggestive of people's responses to their environment.

Both geographical and historical factors have played their part in making a different set of religious beliefs and practices prevailing among Pahari Hindus yet little untouched by the mores of Hinduism of the plains. A sort of contact zones of acculturation are marked between Hinduism of plains, the Tibetan lamaism and the mountain-gods-cult still prevailing in deep interior of this region. It is like the grafting of pattern on pattern, producing hybrid patterns of religious beliefs. Being at various levels of assimilation, it presents a picture of transition rather than accomplished change. All the three classes of acceptance of a mode, the resistance to a mode and a compromise adjustment between the three types of faith are met.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the evolution of religious practices and the geography of religious groups in its minutiae. The above lines and the facts to be analysed below are meant to bring in that much detail which is helpful in studying the relevance of religion and culture to population characteristics.

It is clear from the table and the map showing religious composition (Fig.12) that in majority of areas, Hindus constitute

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more than 97-98% of their population. There are two big reasons responsible for such a swelling in their numbers: (i) the continuous influence of the ancient Hindu sages and saints who turned to these mountains from plains of India for meditation and where many places are still known after them; (ii) the area offered a natural protection from periodical political turmoil and religious persecutions (of the Muslim rule in adjoining regions) to their Hindu and Buddhist population.

Table 6
Distribution and Composition of Religious Groups
1961

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tahsils</th>
<th>As per cent of total population</th>
<th>Jains</th>
<th>Buddhists</th>
<th>Muslims</th>
<th>Sikhs</th>
<th>Christians</th>
<th>Hindus</th>
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<td>0.98</td>
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Out of numerous instances, it suffices to refer to the descent of modern 'Pangwals' inhabiting Pangi area of Chamba from servants, soldiers and ladies of certain Rajput nobles whose husbands left them in the safety of this area, themselves dying fighting the Muslim army, never returning to join their families. Similarly the Gaddis of Brahmour are reported to have arrived in the shelter of these mountains from Lahore and Delhi in 7-800 A.D. and later in 17th century. A number of Kashmiri Brahmins and Indian Buddhists have been found residing in parts of the region, leaving their original homes in the past such grounds.

Next to the Hindu majority, Buddhists and the Muslims introduce an element of diversity in religious composition of people, reducing the proportional strength of Hindus to below their regional average in areas of their sizeable distribution. The Buddhist population is the greatest in inner areas, reducing Hindus to form only two-thirds of Lahaul's population. As Muslims fairly well-distributed all over the region before 1947, left in large numbers on the eve of partition of the sub-continent, besides Lahaul, they are now confined in countable proportions to Churah and partly to Chamba towards north-western interior of this study area. Originally the Muslim settlers came from the plains in the wake of sporadic military campaigns carried into the hills by the Mohammedan monarchs at Delhi. Broadly the inner parts of the region can be termed as the realm of Buddhism, the north-western areas bordering it is the local stronghold of Muslims.

12 According to the estimates of 1971 Census, the proportion of Muslims remains 66% in Chamba District, and Lahaul-Spiti and Ladakh areas of India top the list of Buddhist population, its share being 62 and 52 per cent respectively.
and small pockets in outer zone, mostly its urban tracts, have a fair sprinkling of Sikhs. The Sikhs, the third largest religious minority, have either migrated from the plains and settled in business towns of the region or a few of the low-caste hill natives have joined this fold within the last fifty years.

Besides there is a small number of Christian converts (Jains hardly significant) found in Chamba, Kulu and Kangra towns as a result of long-standing missionary activity. They could not get many members, as Hindu cults have been a strong force in these parts and Buddhism has a tradition more of tolerating than accepting alien faiths.

While both the northern and southern fringes are noted by a combination of faiths, the vast interior contains more than 98% votaries of Hinduism, different from many of its commonly observed practices.

Culturally the region is an overall amalgam of indigenous Shaiv-Shakti and local hill cults, current Vaishnava Hindu beliefs and the tantric vajrayana Buddhism. Hindu religion is overlaid with popular pre-Aryan or tantric cults. Buddhism has absorbed many Hindu tenets and has transformed Hindu deities. The synthesis

It is marked that the numbers of Hindus declined by 2-4% over 1961-71 decade with an average of up to 1% increase in minority groups. In 1961-71, little change is noticed in the proportion of Muslims but that of Sikhs has gone down in Kangra, Kulu and Lahaul in the wake of reorganisation of states in 1966 when many of them in services in these erstwhile Punjab areas left them. On the other hand in Mandi, the proportion of Sikhs, mostly confined to towns, increased from 0.5% to 1.1% of population of the district.
of various observances is also visible, from the Shikara (flat roofed and domed), and Mandap types (domed after the Sikh and Mughal style) in lower hills, Pagoda or pyramidal temples with tiered roofs in middle zone and Gompas (flat roofed complexes of rooms and corridors) serving as Buddhist monasteries (Lamasarais) in the inner zone.

With Dhauladhar and Pir-Panjal acting as physico-cultural divides, the following regionalization for studying areal variations of religious cults and the accompanying cultural imprints (Fig. 12-Inst. map) is suggested: (1) The trans-Pirpanjal zone of Buddhist Lama cult. (2) The southeastern zone of mountain-god cult. (3) The western and southern part of outer region belonging preponderantly to the realm of current Hindu faiths.

1. The Buddhist Realm:

Along the upper valleys of Chenab in Lahaul, the vajrayan branch of Mahayan Buddhism holds considerable sway among Buddhist population of the area and has also interpenetrated the northernmost Hindu areas in its neighbourhood by creating a sort of half-Hindu-half-Buddhist homes. Outside this Buddhist world of the region there are outliers of this cult, one at Rivalsar near Mandi and others at Dharamsala and Dalhousie. The former is reported to be an ancient seat of the faith from where an Indian Buddhist preacher, now revered as Padam Sambhav by Tibetans, went to Tibet on an invitation in the first decade of Christian era. The latter have grown into prominence since Dalai Lama established his residence at Dharamsala in late fifties of this century.
Right from 6th to 10th century A.D., Lahaul, literally meaning the 'south province' remained under the political hold of Tibet and Ladakh from time to time, extending sometimes up to the higher valleys of adjoining Kulu and Chamba. The Buddhism as modified in Tibet, so favourably suited the environments of this area and the cultural wedge against Hindu influence was so created by the growth of Islamic power in India that Lahaul went on experiencing a peaceful reclamation by waves of Buddhist missionaries, nomads and traders thereafter. This faith alone was left to inbreed in its geographic isolation changing the cultural landscape into that of 'little Tibet.' The Buddhist monks started fleeing from India because of the desecration of their holy places by Muslims, migrating from Tibet as well because of religious clashes between their yellow Mahayan and red puritan sects. They supplied the nucleus of Buddhist cultural penetration in Lahaul and Spiti. The human settlements and landuse grew up around the centres of Lamaism dotting the landscape. Buddhism easily reconciled the material benefits of commerce with the spiritual benefits of religion. The location of Lahaul as a passageway between Tibet and Hindustan soon made it important for the historic trade route. A number of stupas, rock inscriptions on lonely and fearsome places, painted flags and shortens (stone walls) in villages and a chain of mother and daughter gompas (Monasteries) grew up along the river valleys at vantage points.

14 The discussion is based on key notes given by D.D. Kosambi, in his book 'The Culture and Civilisation of Ancient India in Historical Perspective.'
Around these half-secular and half-religious gompas, a settled community life fostered trade relations within and across Tibet, border providing safe shelter and facilitating the existence of the area on economic resources of the bordering regions. The people were kept tied to legends and religious symbols of gompas for spiritual security in face of untamed natural environment and for material wealth through trade and transport. The tougher journey involving three-month-long-trail from Keylong to Tibet via Rupshu suited the hefty Lahaulis. They alone monopolised the overland trade by way of Buddhist alliance and because of their better knowledge of the high mountains.

They started professing Buddhism in public and were Hindus in private in order to maintain favourable trade contacts both with the Indians and Tibetans in those times. Their growing economic prosperity failed to tempt even the low-caste Hindus of Himalayas, unlike their counterparts living near the Bhot valleys of Kumaon Himalayas who did embrace Buddhism to become traders.

There has never been any religious conflict and the fusion between Hinduism and Buddhism was facilitated by early triumphs of Tantrism, a tradition common to both the religions. The mixture of Hindu-Buddhist practices and the adoption of Tibetan style of polyandry and lamaism (resorting to monasteries), now on decline, has been full of cultural and demographic implications.
2. The Cult of Mountain Gods

Although the people living in the hill interiors of Mandi, Kulu and adjoining areas are Hindus, their faith is not just a variant of Hinduism of the plains. The hold of ancient cult of mountain gods (locally called Deos or Devtas) upon them is a departure in respect of its evolution and observances. Its preservation in south-eastern part of the region has been the product of long-standing inaccessibility of these valleys and of the patronage of local hill chiefs in the past.

As the god's image carried symbolic masks presented by different Rajas, they could be conveniently placed in small hamlet-villages without affording any big temple and could be customarily moved to other places owing allegiance to it. Their peaceful assimilation into Hindu fold helped not only the fusion of religious cults but also strengthened the rule of hill chiefs over their far-flung kingdoms. The presence of each visiting deity was rewarded and its absence noticed as a sign of revolt on the part of a particular village at the time of their annual assemblage for paying tributes to the central deity established at the royal seat of Government. For instance, the legendry Harimba, the chief goddess of Kulu valley is said to have married the Bhim of the Pandvas. It suggests a compromise formula between the tribal and Aryan Hindu cults as a result of some sort of confrontation between the two. The important socio-economic and demographic implications of the cult will be found useful for our study. Many stages of socio-economic evolution.
co-existed in the hill society for long, its members being food-gatherers, pastoralists and the cultivators. A large number of legends (a field apart for research study) talk of the marriages of each other's gods and goddesses (representing aforementioned socio-economic groups), their encroachments and marching campaigns into each other's jealously-guarded territory. These allude to the alliances between the tribes of different deities and overpowering of one by another. Both are easily recognised as variants of the process of assimilation. Thus the social fusions of classes and combinations of the cults of pastoralists, food-gatherers and cultivators took place.

'The primary factors in dynamics of cultural advance from one to another category is an improvement in subsistence production.'

As the man was completely at the mercy of natural forces, the increase in the power of a god-king and its control, spreading out further into dissimilar areas, helped in releasing the forces of social fusion and production. 'This procedure enabled the Indian society to be formed out of many diverse and discordant elements with minimum use of violence. But this manner inhibited the growth of commercial production for long and hence of culture.'

There has been a necessity for ruling class to subject itself to formal restrictions in order to make religion in an effective control of such a society.'

The simple cult of simple people consists of superstitions, belief in supernatural powers of 'Devtas' and their symbolic value

15, 16, 17 D.D.Kosambi, ibid.
in all human affairs. It has come to withhold cultural advance when the fears and verdicts of gods prove more decisive in selecting a house site, a way for laying an irrigation channel or incurring a disease.

3. Current Hindu Faiths:

A reference to the Inset map (Fig.12) shows that Chamba-Kangra areas have no such cult of local areal deities. In its place the universal Hindu gods are worshipped and a mixture of indigenous Shaiy-Shakti and the Vaishnavite beliefs (the latter permeating the area from adjoining plains) have produced a pattern of their own.

Overlaid with non-Aryan practices, the worship of god Shiva as a symbol of Himalayan folds is most prominent in Brahaur, known as Shiva-Bhumi in the parlance of religious literature. The Shiva temples adorn the cultural landscape of riversides here and elsewhere. In rest of these areas the worship of Devi (or goddesses) as a symbol of 'Shakti' or powers of various types, is most common, its temples usually occupying the sites on hill tops fairly away from human habitations.

By way of comparison, the people with faith in household and village deities in the interior of eastern region have clung to their localities with a low degree of mobility affecting the demographic growth. It has been the result as much of natural isolation as of cultural barriers partly associated with their beliefs in local areal deity. The other religious groups associated with Buddhism of inner zones and Hinduism of the outer zones are more mobile and their movement has been a far more powerful
component of demographic growth during different periods. It is interesting to remark, incidentally, that a mountain god is more mobile than its devotees as it can go to visit their homes while the Buddhist and other Hindu deities are fixed in their temples.

Despite such variations of religious practices, there are places along the contact zones pointed out at the outset, as for example, at Triloknath, along the banks of Chandrabhaga river in Chamba-Lahaul, where both the Hindu and Buddhist deities are worshipped within the precincts of the same temple. Similarly both the Hindu and primitive mountain gods are honoured equally by the people in the towns of Mandi and Kulu, with no clashes between the set of beliefs in their rural areas.

Although the growing secular needs and economic setup are undercutting the hold of all religious practices, yet the three empires of human mind meet in this region, the composition and the faiths of various religious groups have shaped different landscapes and have influenced the characteristics of its population.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:

The geographical isolation and historical course of successive waves of people getting stucked in the region have made religious beliefs of Pahari Hindus different from the mores of Hindus of the plains. These are overlaid with tenets of Buddhist lamaism as practised in Tibet and of pre-Aryan cults of aborigines of the region.
The prevailing variations of faiths can be divided into three regions each having a distinct cultural landscape of its own. To the north of Pir Panjal is the realm of Buddhism but its ideas and practices are getting fused with those of Hindus. It was created under the influence of Tibetan settlements once extending to Kulu and the adjoining areas, trade and transport through Lahaul to Tibet, the decline of Buddhism and strengthening of Islamic power in India and Kashmir. The location of this part along ancient Indo-Tibet route and overland trade encouraged the growth of half-secular, half-religious monasteries. Contact with India made Lahaulis, Buddhists in public and Hindus in private and that with Tibet made them even to import the twin socio-economic institutions, like lamaism and Polyandry as a social method of population control.

Hindus living in the middle zone forming the eastern part of region, have the institution of local mountain god cult, separate gods lording over specified territories and standing as symbols of their control over local affairs, old feudal Rajas once ruling on their behalf. Instead of confrontation, a compromise formula for assimilation of pre-Aryan faiths was adopted by making the pantheon of these gods to pay tribute to universal Hindu deities imported to state capitals from the plains.

In the outer region, the worship of tantric Shiva and Shakti and religious practices akin to those in plains of India, became popular. Contact zones between the varying cults of Hinduism and between a mixture of Hindu Buddhist faiths are not
sharper; there is a greater tolerance of each others tenets, the beliefs supplying more of security than moral uplift against harsh environments and basis of fixation to a local habitat.

The Hindus form an average of 94% in the region, their distribution ranging from 61% in Buddhist Lahaul to 99% in Hindu zone. Their dominance in population is the result of continuous influence of Hindu sages in the past, the region offering refuge to persecuted Hindus of the plains against Muslim advance, and more than three fourths of Muslims having left since 1947. Next to Hindus are Buddhists in the north, Muslims in interior pockets, Sikhs and Christians confined mostly to towns, diversifying the religious composition.