De-populating Villages in the Kailash Sacred Landscape, India: Rethinking Policy Interventions

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FOR MOUNTAINS AND PEOPLE

The Kailash Sacred Landscape in India (KSL India) encompasses large parts of the Pithoragarh district and portions of the Bageshwor district. As KSL India is situated at the tri-junction of India, Nepal, and the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China, its northern and eastern boundaries have international significance, which makes this area politically sensitive as well. The government of India formed the Pithoragarh district in the state of Uttar Pradesh in 1960 to accelerate the pace of development in this border area. Like many of its neighbouring mountain districts, Pithoragarh has a long history of migration.

Human mobility is an integral part of mountain livelihoods. Initially, mobility and migration took the form of community explorations to hunt, gather, and create settlements. Later, trade and pilgrimage routes developed along primitive trails using Himalayan passes. In today's modern industrial context, villages developed as a major source of human labour for industries and urban centres. Although migration has changed in form over the years, it has remained a constant livelihood strategy for mountain families over centuries.

Today, however, the picture is a little different. As worldwide human mobility rates continue to rise to unprecedented levels, migration from mountain areas like Pithoragarh has raised concerns about de-population, "permanently locked houses," and the formation of "ghost villages."

In this study, we use mixed methods to derive a clearer picture of migration trends, patterns, and drivers and the resultant socio-demographic changes. To do this we review historical documents on human mobility and migration in the study area from pre-colonial to recent times, and complement this data with the findings of five decadal survey tours (1974, 1984, 1994, 2004, and 2014). We analyse present migration based on a participatory field work we conducted in November-December 2016, which included several focus group discussions and interviews with key informants from selected villages in all eight blocks of Pithoragarh district. We draw additional information from our notes taken at a "Diversity Fair" (December 2016) that

Empty Ghanghar village near Nanda Devi base camp

included sessions on identifying and discussing key social challenges and potential solutions for KSL India. Excerpts from relevant secondary data round out our study.

Historical patterns and drivers of migration

We start with a short profile of major drivers and their impact on migration patterns over time (including key events) as presented below:

The migration history of Uttarakhand shows that until the independence of India, the government focused on the exploitation of resources, including human labour. Even after India's independence, national security priorities have overruled the development needs of the mountainous areas of Uttarakhand, including Pithoragarh. Following the India-China War of 1962, the traditional integrated livelihoods of people in Pithoragarh, that included cross border trade, were severely disrupted, and, over time, slowly disappeared. Subsequent wars have provided significant income and employment opportunities in the district. As a result, youth began leaving subsistence integrated agro-based livelihoods to take defence sector jobs and salaried jobs in the private sector. Most migration in Uttarakhand, including Pithoragarh, is intrastate. But with increased education and

Period/Key events	Drivers	Impact	Resultant migration pattern
Pre-colonial period (before 1815/16)			
	• Open Himalayan passes	• Opportunity for trans-Himalayan trade • Seasonal mobility of livestock for grazing	• Trans-Himalayan trade • Transhumance mobility
Colonial period (1815/16 – 1947)			
	• Establishment of new towns/hills stations (Mussoorrie & Nainital) • Establishment of tea gardens • Construction of new cantonments and administrative units (Hawalbagh, Lohaghat, Almora, Ranikhet, Lansdowne and Chakrata) • Establishment of Kumaon Iron Company • Development of pilgrimage routes • Construction of railways (Haldwani, Kathgodam, Tanakpur, Ramnagar, Kotdwar, Hardwar and Dehradun)	• Increased demand for labour in survey, forestry, and public works departments.	• Initiation of labour migration or "money order economy" (individual, mostly male, who work outside their communities and send money home)
1914-1918 (First World War) & 1939-1945 (Second World War)	• Poverty and famine • Extraction of forest resources • Increased demand for soldiers	• Increased demand for labour in defence and road constructions.	• Start of international migration (to Burma and Nepal) • Labour migration (defence sector work)
Post-colonial period (1947-2000)			
1947/48	• Indian independence together with partition of the country	• In-migration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Tarai-Bhabar areas	• Partition induced displacement
1960 & 1962	• Closure of high Himalayan passes • India-China War (1962) • Founding of Indo-Tibetan Border Police, Border Roads Organization, Sashastra Seema Bal • Establishment of new cantonments (Dharchula, Joshimath) • Special provision to border areas with new roads, schools, and hospitals	• Disruption of trade and transhumance mobility affecting centuries old livelihoods in high Himalayas affecting livelihoods of entire district. • Increased uncertainty in the region. • Increased demand for labour in defense sector • Education opportunities for local population • Loss of agriculture land to build infrastructure for newly established defence institutions.	• Family permanent migration, mostly from border areas to lower areas • Labour migration (in defence jobs)
1967	• Constitutional status of scheduled tribes (STs) given to Bhotiya community together with Banraji.	• Reservations in Government jobs, making it easy for the Bhotiyas to enter the job.	• Family migration of Bhotiya community
1965 & 1971	• Establishment of Coast Guards • India-Pakistan war (1965) • Bangladesh Liberation war (1971)	• Increased demand for labour in defence sector	• Labour migration • Permanent family migration (resettlement of retired defence personnel in Tarai/Bhawar areas)
1970-2000	• A number of army personnel reaching retirement age • Families of defence personnel who lost their lives in battle provided land in plains/cities and scholarships for their children to study in Army schools	• Post retirement - increasing tendency to continue work (as salaried or self-employed) in Tarai/Bhabhar areas and in nearby towns. • Families of defence personnel who lost their lives in battle taking up opportunities provided by the state and central government.	• Permanent family migration of ex-defence personnel and families of defence personnel who lost their lives in battle
21st Century (2000-2016)			
	• Growth in industrial sector • Disaster related displacement • Stagnating agriculture sector • Increased human-wild life conflict • Improvements in education, particularly of women • Mushrooming of private education institutions (English medium schools)	• Increased demand for labour (both skilled and low skilled) in private sector • Displacement of families to plain areas due to disasters like floods and landslides • Increased movement of youth (particularly educated youth) out of the agriculture sector • Greater attraction toward private schools educating children; believed to have higher quality education	• Permanent family migration (to nearby towns, cities, plains and beyond state boundaries)

widening migration networks, migration patterns are slowly shifting to become interstate.

Present migration situation

After the formation of Uttarakhand in 2000, the state has witnessed impressive economic growth, consistently above the national average. However, the government's work to ensure a steep and steady economic growth did not include a focus on equitable growth across the districts. As a consequence, most of the growth in industries and employment has been limited to the plain districts of Haridwar, Udham Singh Nagar, and parts of Dehradun and Nainital. Other hill districts have lagged far behind these standards. This income and growth gap, in the modern context has become a driver for massive outmigration from the mountains to the plains.

We summarize the major findings about present migration trends in Uttarakhand:

- Shift underway from individual temporary labour migration to permanent family migration. This has resulted in the development of "ghost villages" and "ghost houses".
- For poor families still living in the villages, one or more male members are still involved in labour migration and send home remittances (between Rs 3,000–6,000 per month), which are an important source of household income.
- Large scale permanent fallowing of agricultural land due to outmigration of entire families.
- Increase in human-wildlife conflicts that hinder subsistence farming and make poor farmers more vulnerable (triggering additional out-migration).
- In areas of high migration, social collectivism breaking down and stewardship of productive ecosystems inhibited.
- Migrants from outside the region bridge the labour shortfall in KSL, but introduce potential for social conflict.

New settelement of Banrajis in Kulekh

It used to be agricultural field

- Low access to education and development weakens youth retention in the villages.
- Education and development of local youth can reduce outmigration, but only if improved employment and economic opportunity becomes available in villages.

De-population challenges facing policy makers and ways forward

Outmigration from local areas is a major driver of the socio-demographic change observed in KSL India, one that has challenged social collectivism and stewardship of local ecosystems and indirectly contributed to the degradation of society as well as ecosystems on which society depends. Reducing this trend is a major challenge facing the policy makers today. As our study reveals, lack of development in the mountains is a major driver for such massive outmigration from these areas. While the developmental needs of local people once focused on food and shelter, the scope has widened to include access to quality education and health care. In order to reduce the present migration trends, the governments of India and Uttarakhand need to draw a broad and abiding focus on sustainable mountain development. Without this, there is little reason to think that outmigration from KSL India will not continue unabated.

In this light, we offer some policy recommendations for addressing these challenges:

Short run policy focus: In the short term, policy should focus on meeting basic needs (food, health, education, and employment) and attracting individual migrants back home with improved employment opportunities through leveraging key public schemes (e.g., Skill India). As one example, mountain niche products can provide potential for local economic growth. High value non-timber forest products such as Yarshagumba (or yartsa gunbu or keeda jadi) have huge market potential for local development in the high Himalaya. In the lower ranges, small scale commercial agriculture and its potential to add value through processing provide enhanced economic and

Kanchoti settlement before 2013 floods

Kanchoti settlement after 2013 floods

employment opportunities, even to educated youth. However, the problems of small land holdings and human-wildlife conflicts, and water scarcity need to be addressed before such programs could succeed. Similarly, heritage tourism with equitable benefits is another potential area that could boost local development.

Long run policy focus: The aspirations of youth for a permanent and salaried jobs in defence, government, and the private sector has resulted from a lack of policy focus on the landscape context of KSL India. In other words, mountain perspectives are not properly considered in state and national policy making. It will take time to reverse these aspirations in young men as these notions are imbued with ideas of success and masculinity. Therefore, enhanced awareness campaigns such as "Nurturing Himalayas" should be supported with key development investments that are youth-centric.

In order to achieve these short- and long-term goals, we suggest the following:

- Increased planning dialogue with stakeholders, including private sector and civil society representatives;

- Adoption of a landscape approach in planning that combines stakeholder priorities and applied scientific knowledge to design long-term plans that account for the necessary balance between conservation and socio-economic development;
- Introduce sustainable mountain development early in the academic curricula and vocational education in order to build the confidence, pride and creativity of youth;
- Promote collective production systems for a larger outreach through value chain approaches; and
- Incentivize absentee landlords and willing stakeholders to put "ghost villages" and "ghost houses" to use in local development efforts and the preservation of ecosystem services.

Note: This summary has been abstracted from a detailed study of migration in Kailash Sacred Landscape, India by Prof. Shekhar Pathak and Dr. Lalit Pant. The study was performed as part of ICIMOD's Kailash Sacred Landscape Conservation and Development Initiative (KSLCDI). KSLCDI receives funding support from DFID-UKaid and BMZ through GIZ.

Mount Kailash