

## Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis or dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

Signature:

---

Luke Whitmore

Date

In Pursuit of Maheshvara: Understanding Kedarnath as Place and as *Tirtha*

By  
Luke Whitmore

Doctor of Philosophy  
Graduate Division of Religion  
West and South Asian Religions

---

Laurie L. Patton, Ph.D.  
Advisor

---

Paul B. Courtright  
Committee Member

---

Joyce Flueckiger  
Committee Member

---

Don Seeman  
Committee Member

Accepted:

---

Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D. Dean of the Graduate School

---

Date

In Pursuit of Maheshvara: Understanding Kedarnath as Place and as *Tirtha*

By

Luke Whitmore

B.A., Haverford College, 1995

M.T.S., Harvard Divinity School, 1999

Advisor: Laurie L. Patton, Ph.D.

An abstract of

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the James T. Laney School of Graduate  
Studies of Emory University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in the Graduate Division of Religion  
West and South Asian Studies

2010

## Abstract

### **In Pursuit of Maheshvara: Understanding Kedarnath as Place and as *Tirtha***

Luke Whitmore

This dissertation offers a model for understanding how it might feel to be present in Kedarnath, an abode of Shiva located in the north Indian Himalayas. Kedarnath is closed to human habitation for half the year and is on the way to no other destination. I argue for a theoretical approach to the site that places the diverse facets of its anthropological, historical, and religious characters inside a single analytic frame. This frame is the idea that Kedarnath, both as “place” in a critical phenomenological sense and as a *tirtha* (Hindu place of pilgrimage) of Shiva, acts as a complex agent in the experience of those present in the site. Building on the ideas of Ronald Inden and William Sax (among others) regarding the complex agency of Hindu deities, I suggest that this idea may be usefully applied to a place of “religious power” (Sax’s term). Kedarnath is understood and experienced by many to be the abode of Shiva, yet the site demonstrates power and significance in ways that are not only about Shiva’s presence there. The power of the place for those present is created by the complex overlapping of understandings and experiences of Shiva’s presence, the power and significance of the natural Himalayan environment, and the economic, social, and cultural importance of the site at local, state, and regional levels.

This notion of the complex agency of Kedarnath as both place and *tirtha* reflects my methodological argument for a holistic approach to the site. Thus, I examine diverse aspects of the site: historical, geographic, narrative, social, economic, visual, and practice-based. Looking across these different contexts and forms of discourse, representation, practice, and material culture, I show how they both produce and reflect complementary and contrastive understandings and experiences of the character and power of the site. I further show that the case of Kedarnath is generative for the consideration of the emplaced nature of Hindu deities in the world as well as the investigation of sites of religious significance more generally.



In Pursuit of Maheshvara: Understanding Kedarnath as Place and as *Tirtha*

By  
Luke Whitmore  
B.A., Haverford College, 1995  
M.T.S., Harvard Divinity School, 1999

Advisor: Laurie L. Patton, Ph.D.

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the James T. Laney School of Graduate  
Studies of Emory University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in the Graduate Division of Religion  
West and South Asian Studies

2010

## Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful for the guidance of the many great teachers I have had the good fortune to learn from over the course of my career as a student. Without their instruction and encouragement I would not be writing these remarks. In particular I would like to thank my advisor Laurie Patton for her unflagging support and inspiration. She possesses the brilliant and special ability to respond to and elevate the work of others by showing them the original ideas already latent in their own work. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee: Paul Courtright, Joyce Flueckiger, and Don Seeman. I have learned a great deal from each of them; collectively I have been truly fortunate to work with a committee who, in addition to possessing an extraordinary depth and breadth of knowledge in the study of South Asia, religion, and anthropology, were insightful and intellectually generous in the guidance they gave through the dissertation writing process.

It must also be acknowledged that, without the cooperation and guidance of many people in the Kedarnath valley, this work would be non-existent. The merits of this dissertation reflect in large part what I have learned from people in the Kedarnath valley and Garhwal more generally who know far more about the topic of this dissertation than I. I am also grateful to the Landour Language School in Mussoorie and the American Institute of Indian studies Hindi and Sanskrit programs for their invaluable instruction in Hindi and Sanskrit.

I would also like to thank specifically the following individuals who have both personally and professionally contributed in substantial and invaluable ways to the completion of this work: B.R. Semwal, Bhagavati Prasad Tiwari, Bhupendra Maithani,

Bhupendra Singh Pushpavan, Brahamacari Jai, D. R. Purohit, Darshan Lal, Harshvardhan Kapravan, J. P. Shukla, Judith Sone, Karin Polit, Lokesh Karnataki, Madhav Karnataki, Molly Kaushal, Neelkanth Vajpayee, Nirmila Kulkarni, Pankaj Shastri, Pashupatinath Lalmohariya, Paul Dafydd Jones, Peter Valdina, Pradeep Lalmohariya, Rajesh Kumar Kotiyal, Rakesh Bhatt, Ram Prakash Purohit, Shankar Ling, Shivaprasad Naithani, Sridhar Prasad Semwal, Umadutt Semwal, and Vijay Negi. My gratitude to all those who have helped in the researching and writing of this dissertation notwithstanding, any faults or errors found in this work are wholly my own responsibility.

I am also deeply grateful to those whose generous funding contributed to the work of this dissertation. The Fulbright Student Program and the Sinclair Kennedy Traveling Fellowship funded my first research trip to India in 1999-2000. The American Institute of Indian Studies provided me with pre-dissertation research funding in 2005 and funded my dissertation fieldwork from 2006-2007. The Laney Graduate School of Emory University provided funds at several key moments. I would also like to thank the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts for hosting me during my dissertation fieldwork, and H.N.B. Garhwal University (Srinagar) for providing an extraordinarily collegial research environment.

### Note on Diacritics and Transliteration

There are three touchstones for the method of transliteration in this work: readability, vernacular usage, and philological utility. Thus, for instances of a Sanskrit or Hindi word that has become part of a general India-based scholarly vocabulary (such as *darshan*, *yatra*, *Shiva*, *puja*, *arati*, *ashram*, *guru*, *Uttarakhand*), I employ this standard form and do not use employ full diacritics in the text. For more specialized terms, the first usage in the text will offer full transliteration. Thereafter, the simplified form is employed, thus *ghī malīś* is written *ghi malish* after the first usage. Such words, in addition to general non-English terms of utility for the reader, receive an entry and definition with full transliteration in the glossary. Some words that occur frequently in this work are written one way as Sanskrit words and another way as Hindi words, for example the Sanskrit “*liṅga*” compared the Hindi “*liṅg*”, or the name *Bhīma* instead of *Bhīm*. Unless I have a specific reason for employing a Hindi usage, such as when the context under discussion refers to a conversation or text in Hindi, or when the Hindi word in question is not known widely through its Sanskrit form, I use the Sanskrit term as the default. Actual quotations from primary sources either in the text itself or in footnotes are fully transliterated. For Hindi and Sanskrit the method of transliteration follows that used by standard reference dictionaries. For Garhwali, I follow the guidance of those scholars who assisted me the transcription of Garhwali terms.

## Table of Contents

### **Chapter One: Introduction**

<b>Arriving into Kedarnath</b> .....	1
A Narrated Arrival.....	2
The Attractive Power ( <i>Ākarśan</i> ) of Kedarnath.....	3
The Multiple Views from Devdarshini.....	6
<b>Approaching Kedarnath</b> .....	11
The Genealogy of this Project.....	12
Research Aims.....	15
Topics of Inquiry.....	16
Conversation, Rapport, and Recording in Kedarnath.....	18
Positionality, Relationships, and Money.....	19
Scholarly Work and Ethnographic Circumspection.....	23
The Shape of This Work.....	26

### **Chapter Two: Understanding Kedarnath as Place and as *Tirtha*: An Overview**

<b>Situating Kedarnath</b> .....	29
An Etymological Introduction: <i>Kedāra</i> and <i>Kidāra</i> .....	31
Bhṛigutīrtha: an Earlier Name for the Kedarnath locale?.....	37
Pashupatas in the Himalayas, Shaivism and <i>Linga</i> Worship.....	40
The Resting Place ( <i>Samādhi</i> ) of Shankara in Kedarnath.....	41
Kedarnath in the Middle and Late Puranic Period.....	43
<i>Ke Dārayāmi</i> : Pārthiva Worship and the Manifestation of Shiva at Kedarnath....	44
Shaivite Institutions and Practice in the Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries.....	45
Nauling Kedar, “Garhwal” and the Naths. ....	48
Garhwal and the Coming of the British. ....	50
Kedarnath during the Colonial Period. ....	53
Seven Centuries in Kedarnath.....	63
After Independence and into the Present.....	65
<b>Present-day Kedarnath: People</b> .....	68
Locals.....	70
Renunciants: a Special Variety of Kedarnath Local.....	73
Laborers.....	75
<i>Yatri</i> groups.....	76
<b>Spatial Organization</b> .....	77
<b>Temporal Rhythms: The High Season</b> .....	83
Shravan and Bhadon in Kedarnath.....	86
End of the Season.....	88
The Historical Character of Kedarnath in the Present.....	89

### **Chapter Three: As Place and As *Tirtha***

<b>Place, Space, and Religion</b> .....	91
Place.....	96

Phenomenology of Place.....	99
Place as a Unit of Analysis.....	102
Social Construction of Place and Critical Geography.....	103
Landscape.....	109
Hybrid Emplacement and Visual Culture at Kedarnath.....	111
The Sacredness of Place, Space, and Landscape in Religious Studies.....	115
<b>Place, Experience, and Critical Phenomenology.....</b>	<b>120</b>
Critical Phenomenology, Place, and Religious Studies.....	125
<b>The Complex Agency of Kedarnath Inside and Outside the Temple .....</b>	<b>127</b>
The Production of the Experience of Place as Complex Agent.....	137

#### **Chapter Four: In Pursuit of Maheshvara: Narrative Expositions of Kedarnath**

<b>Narratives and Narrative Exposition in the Contexts of Kedarnath.....</b>	<b>139</b>
The Taxonomical Messiness of Place and Narrative Exposition at Kedarnath...144	
The Utility of Genre and Repertoire Analysis for the Case of Kedarnath.....151	
Narrative Expositions of Kedarnath as a System of Related Genres.....152	
<b>Oral Narrative Expositions of Kedarnath .....</b>	<b>156</b>
1.1 Interview: with <i>Tirth Purohit</i> Vishvanath Tiwari.....156	
1.2 A Local Dharamshala Manager Accustomed to Orienting <i>Yatris</i> .....163	
1.3 A Bengali Dharamshala Manager Unaccustomed to Narrating Kedarnath...167	
1.4 Fragments and Conversations.....171	
1.5 Garhwali Performance Traditions in and around Kedarnath.....174	
1.6 Renunciants and Narrative Exposition in Kedarnath.....177	
<b>Pamphlet Literature found in Kedarnath. ....</b>	<b>179</b>
2.1 Shri Char Dham Yatra and its Greatness (Hindi) .....180	
2.2 The Greatness of Badri-Kedar (Hindi) .....184	
2.3 The Twelve <i>Lingas</i> of Light: Stories of Lord Shankar's Twelve <i>Lingas</i> of Light (Hindi) .....191	
2.4 Uttaranchal Tourism (Hindi).....197	
<b>Sanskrit Treatments of Kedarnath. ....</b>	<b>201</b>
3.1 Kedarnath and the <i>Śiva Purāṇa</i> .....202	
3.2 The Upapurānic <i>Kedārahanda</i> and Kedarnath.....204	
3.3 Kedarnath in the World of the <i>Kedārakalpa</i> .....221	

<b>Narrative Exposition and the Complex Agency of Kedarnath.</b> .....	224
The Prevalence of Narrative Expositions.....	224
The Character(s) of Kedarnath found in Narrative Expositions of the Place.....	224
Context and Genre in Narrative Expositions of Kedarnath.....	227
The Kedarnath Framed by Narrative Expositions of Place.....	229

#### **Chapter Five: As Place and as *Tirtha*: A Mosaic Portrait from the Kedarnath Bazaar**

<b>The Work of Visual Print Culture in Kedarnath.</b> .....	231
The Anthropology of Art and the Study of Visual Culture in South Asia.....	235
Print Images in the Kedarnath Bazaar for <i>Yatris</i> .....	239
Print Images in and around the Kedarnath Bazaar for Locals.....	241
<b>Kedarnath <i>Darshan</i>: Temple, Deity, and Mountain Landscape.</b> .....	242
A Walk through the Bazaar: Print Images in Aggregate.....	264
Local Images and Their Concerns.....	267
Kedarnath Valley Images in Kedarnath.....	271
A Temporary Shrine of the Badri-Kedar Temple Committee.....	276
Video Disc Presentations of Kedarnath.....	282
<b>Montage, Landscape, and the Portraiture of Complex Agency</b> .....	284
Towards an Understanding of Place: Print Images in Kedarnath.....	289

#### **Chapter Six: The Sensing of *Akarshan*: Practices in Place at Kedarnath**

<b>From Narratives and Images to Practices in Place.</b> .....	291
Clarifying Terms: Ritual, Ritualization, Practice, and Practices in Place.....	295
<b>The <i>Ghi Malish</i> in the Temple at Kedarnath.</b> .....	300
<b><i>Deora</i> in Kedarnath</b> .....	309
Nala Devi and Rampur Devi (August 29-30, 2007).....	312
The Theatre of the Devta's Arrival.....	316
Nala Devi Arrives at the Temple.....	318
Nala Devi <i>Deora</i> , the 29 <sup>th</sup> of August, Bhairavnath.....	320
Nala Devi visits Mahant Chandragiri.....	324
Nala Devi Performs <i>Puja</i> in the Temple.....	327
Nala Devi Heads Towards Bhairavnath.....	329
<b>Renunciant Practice in Kedarnath</b> .....	337
<b>Walking and Movement</b> .....	339
Walking from Garud Chatti to Kedarnath.....	340
Gathering Flowers and Gathering Brahma Lotuses.....	342
Gandhi Sarovar and Beyond.....	344
<b>Playing Cricket in Kedarnath</b> .....	347
<b>Practices in Kedarnath: the Engagement of Both Place and <i>Tirtha</i></b> .....	350

## **Chapter Seven: Conclusions**

<b>Grasping the <i>Akarshan</i> of Kedarnath</b> .....	353
The Stable Fluidity of Kedarnath's Complex Agency.....	354
Contrast and Complement: Narrative, Image, Practice.....	358
<b>Beyond the Case of Kedarnath</b> .....	363
<b>Departing Kedarnath at the End of the Season</b> .....	368
<b>Appendix I: The Upapuranic <i>Kedārahāṇḍa</i></b> .....	373
<b>Appendix II: A Visual Introduction to Kedarnath</b> .....	383
<b>Glossary</b> .....	407
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	415



## Illustrations

### Figures

1.1. Devdarshini.....	1
1.2. Kedarnath Photomontage .....	14
2.1. Kedarnath Valley System .....	32
2.2. Uttarakhand Char Dham Yatra Guide Map .....	34
2.3. Visitors to Badrinath and Kedarnath by year .....	66
2.4. Arrival into the horse area .....	78
2.5. View of horse area and helipad .....	78
2.6. View of Kedarnath from the east .....	79
2.7. View of Kedarnath from the west.....	79
2.8. The main street of Kedarnath .....	80
2.9. Shankara public memorial.....	81
2.10. Shankara <i>murti</i> .....	81
2.11. The path in high season .....	84
5.1. Char Dham view 1. ....	244
5.2. Char Dham view 2. ....	245
5.3. <i>Sarvam Shivamaya jagat.</i> ....	247
5.4. Kedarnath <i>nirvan darshan - shringar arati darshan.</i> ....	250
5.5. Photomontage of <i>nirvan darshan - shringar arati darshan.</i> ....	252
5.6. Painted and photomontage of <i>nirvan darshan and shringar arati darshan</i> .....	255
5.7. Composite of Kedarnath view and <i>nirvan darshan-shringar arati darshan</i> photomontage. ....	257
5.8. Photomontage of Kedarnath view, <i>nirvan darshan</i> , and <i>shringar arati darshan</i> .....	258
5.9. Kedarnath view. ....	260
5.10. Painted and photomontage of Kedarnath view. ....	262
5.11. Amarnath-Shiva.....	263
5.12. Kedarnath print images in context, 1.....	265
5.13. Kedarnath print images in context, 2.....	266
5.14. Painted collage and photomontage of <i>nirvan and shringar arati darshan</i> .....	268
5.15. Triyugi Narayan with Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Bhairav, Sun, Moon, and the <i>dhūnī</i> ....	271
5.16. Painted montage of Kedarnath <i>nirvan darshan and temple view</i> .....	272
5.17. The Rawal of Kedarnath.....	275
5.18. The temporary shrine in front of the <i>vedi</i> and <i>mandap</i> .....	278
5.19. Close-up of central upper Kedarnath image.....	278
5.20. Close up of the Kedarnath <i>doli</i> image from the temporary shrine.....	279
5.21. An older, painted montage version of the metal etched and painted montage image of Kedarnath from the temporary shrine.....	279
6.1. Nala Devi heads towards the Svargdhari river.....	313
6.2. Nala Devi bows to the Mandakini river.....	314
6.3. The shrine of Bhukund Bhairavnath.....	321
6.4. Close up of several <i>murtis</i> of Bhairavnath .....	322

6.5. Bathing Nala Devi on the banks of the Svargdhari.....	326
6.6. The <i>doli</i> of Nala Devi bowing as she is worshipped in the Kedarnath bazaar.....	334
6.7. I.d. card of a member of a <i>deora</i> group.....	336
6.8. Huneshvar Mahadev enters the temple.....	336
6.9. <i>Brahmakamal</i> for sale in the Kedarnath bazaar.....	343

## Introduction

### Arriving into Kedarnath

There is a point on the path to the Himalayan Hindu shrine of Kedarnath where, in good weather, one rounds a corner and suddenly the top of the temple, amidst the roofs of the village, becomes briefly visible against the bright, wide panorama of the Himalayas. Breathing comes with difficulty and the body is tired, with the end finally in sight. This point is located about two kilometers from the temple and twelve kilometers from the beginning of the foot path in Gaurikund. It is called The Sight of the God (*devdarśinī*, *deodekhni*). There the path begins to level out after a gain in altitude of over fifteen hundred meters over the last twelve kilometers from Gaurikund. The temple of Kedarnath itself lies at approximately thirty five hundred meters above sea level.



Figure 1.1. The view from near *Devdarshini*. The top of the Kedarnath temple is barely visible in the midst of the buildings of the village.

### ***A Narrated Arrival***

Some people do not learn about Kedarnath until they arrive into the site. For them, the physical visit functions as the primary context for their knowledge and experience of Kedarnath as a distinct site. For others, narratives about Kedarnath frame their visit. Some of the most famous such narratives are found in the *Shiva Purana*. In one section of the *Shiva Purana Suta*, sage and ubiquitous narrator in the worlds of classical and medieval Sanskrit literature, tells the following story about the origins of Shiva's presence in Kedarnath:

O Brahmins, the incarnations of Viṣṇu – Nara and Nārāyaṇa performed their penance in the Bhārata Khaṇḍa in the hermitage of Badarikāśrama. Requested by them for their worship, Śiva, being subservient to the devotees comes every day to that earthen phallic image of Śiva. A long time elapsed while these two incarnations of Viṣṇu, the spiritual sons of Śiva, performed the worship of Śiva.

On one occasion the delighted Śiva told them – “I am delighted. Choose your boon from me.” When he said this, Nara and Nārāyaṇa spoke these words keeping in mind the welfare of the world.

Nara and Nārāyaṇa said: -

O Lord of gods, if you are delighted, if the boon is to be granted by you, O Śiva, stay here in your own form and accept the devotion of your devotees.

Suta continues:

Thus requested, lord Śiva himself stayed in Kedāra on the Himavat in the form of Jyotirlinga. He was worshipped by them for helping the worlds and for appearing in the presence of the devotees. He destroys their miseries and terrors. Then Śiva himself stayed there in the name of Kedāreśvara. By his sight and worship he bestows the desires of the devotees. The gods and the sages of yore worship here. They get the fruit of their desire from the delighted lord Śiva. Since the residents of Badarikāśrama derive their desires every day by worshipping him, he is called the bestower of the desires of his devotees ever. From that day onwards, if anyone worships Kedāreśvara with devotion he will not suffer distress even in dreams.

It was he who on seeing the Pāṇḍavas assumed the form of a buffalo, having recourse to his magical skill, and began to run away. When he was caught by the Pāṇḍavas he stood with his face bent down. They held his tail and implored him again and again. He remained in that form in the name of Bhaktavatsala. His head portion went and remained fixed in the city of Nayapāla [Nepal]. The lord stood in that form there. He asked them to worship him in that trunkless form. Worshipped by them, Śiva remained there and granted boons. The Pāṇḍavas went away with joy after worshipping him. After obtaining what they desired in their minds, they were rid of all their miseries.

There in the shrine of Kedāra, Śiva is directly worshipped by the Indian people. He who makes a gift of a ring or a bracelet after going there becomes a beloved of Śiva. He is endowed with the form of Śiva. On seeing that form of Śiva, a person gets rid of sins. By going to Badarī forest he becomes a living liberated soul. On seeing the forms of Nara, Nārāyaṇa and Kedāreśvara, undoubtedly he can achieve liberation. The devotees of Kedāreśa who die on the way are released from rebirth. No doubt need be entertained in this respect. Going there, with pleasure, worshipping Kedāreśa and drinking the water there a person is released from re-birth. O Brahmins, in this Bhārata country people should worship with devotion Nara-Nārāyaṇeśvara and Kedāreśa. Although he is the lord of the universe still he is particularly the lord of Bharata. There is no doubt that Śiva Kedāra is the bestower of all desires.

O excellent sages, I have narrated to you what you have asked for. On hearing this narrative the sins disappear at once. No doubt need be entertained in this regard.<sup>1</sup>

Many *yatris* (pilgrims, tourists, travelers) come into Kedarnath cognizant that they follow in the storied footsteps of the Pandavas in their quest to find Shiva, present in Kedarnath in “his own form.”

### ***The Attractive Power (Ākarśaṇ) of Kedarnath***

How are scholars of Hinduism, South Asia, religion, and anthropology to go about understanding what is being glimpsed from *devdarshini*? How should the understanding of this place proceed? What is felt here, what brings people here, in the beginnings of a new millennium? What does the example of Kedarnath tell us about

---

<sup>1</sup> J.L. Shastri, ed. The Śiva-Purāṇa Volumes I-IV (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977), *Koṭirudrasaṁhita* 19: 1-26.

understandings, experiences, and representations of Shaivite (Shiva-related) presence at the beginning of a new millennium? These are the deceptively simple questions that begin this project.

My way of beginning to answer these questions is to suggest that it makes sense to approach Kedarnath with double vision: as an important, beautiful, powerful, transformative place *and* as a place experienced as the abode of Shiva and infused with his power and agency. I regard these two aspects as distinct but co-terminous, and I use and develop the notion of the complex agency of places in order to adequately illuminate this coterminous quality.<sup>2</sup> This notion of the complex agency of Hindu places (and Kedarnath in particular) builds on pre-existing theoretical formulations regarding the complex agency of deities in South Asia, archaeological sites and built environments, and religious phenomena more generally. The complex agency of Kedarnath does not, at the end of the day, fully resolve to an equation of deity with place, nor does it offer a view of place that subsumes the experience of divine presence in the place. It is a frame committed to the analytic preservation of the co-terminous, complex ways in which these two aspects exercise agency as a single site of economic and cultural importance. This complex agency most especially shows itself as that which has the power to draw people to the site, to attract them. It is a site that produces an attracting power (*ākarsaṇ*, henceforth *akarshan*), on economic, devotional, and natural levels.

---

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Laurie Patton for pointing out the centrality of my observations about this co-terminous quality to the argument of this work as a whole.

Adequately understanding and theorizing the attractive power of Kedarnath also helps to understand what makes Kedarnath a distinctive site. Kedarnath is not on the way to any other destination of religious, commercial, or political importance. It lies at the northern end of a Himalayan river valley; passage to the north is blocked by glaciers. It has also, over time, far outstripped in importance and fame several other Shaivite shrines in the area found in geographically similar locations. Part of the answer must be the understanding and experience that Shiva, both historically and in the present, is especially present and powerful in Kedarnath, even when compared to other places in the same area in which he is also present. Analytically registering Shiva's agency and power in Kedarnath is a primary task of this work.

However, the power that Kedarnath currently exerts in the experience of those present in the place does not only arise from experiences and understandings of Shiva's presence and power there, even if we understand many of the other aspects of the site as the mundane (*laukika*) residue of Shiva's presence.<sup>3</sup> There are other structures and agencies at work that contribute to the attractive power of the site, such as the political economy of pilgrimage tourism in India and the religious, touristic, and physical-environmental power of the Himalayan region at a general level. I argue that in the experience and understanding of those present in Kedarnath, these different factors, facets, and agencies combine into a complex but unitary awareness of the attractive, charged, powerful nature of the place; the notion of partial complex agency is the most precise way to understand the fused, composite quality of this feeling. Shiva is without doubt at the center for most of those present in the site, yet at the same time there is

---

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Laurie Patton for her notion of "residue" as a way of thinking about the traces and echoes divine agency leaves in the world.

more to the story. Thinking of Kedarnath, both as place and as *tirtha*, as a complex agent holds these different facets to the importance and distinctiveness of the site together even as it acknowledges their differences. As an analytic frame it also preserves some of the mystery and fluidity of how Shiva is understood to be actually present in the site and the exact contours of the power and nature of the place. I suggest that this mystery and fluidity itself constitutes an important part of the character of the site and the experience of those who visit and reside there.

### ***The Multiple Views from Devdarshini***

One may glimpse the complex character of Kedarnath from *devdarshini*. The first sight of the Kedarnath temple from *devdarshini* is an intensely evocative moment. But it is differently evocative for different people. For a visitor to the region, especially a first time visitor, it is a shock to the system, to the entire embodied person. It is the simultaneous *darshan* (moment of seeing and being seen by a deity) of the abode of Shiva in the temple at Kedarnath and of the high Himalayas, Shiva's abode in the larger sense. The sight of the two is commingled and contemporaneous. Various accounts of the journey to Kedarnath note that at this moment *yatris* are often overcome with emotion and prostrate themselves. A few relate that what they see in this moment is the true form of Shiva. The image of the white glaciers flowing into the dark of the lower mountains, divided by the stream of the Mandakini, one of the tributaries of what will become the Ganga at Devprayag, is a natural, indexical symbol of the descent of the Ganga into the matted locks of Shiva and the quotidian act of devotion to Shiva, the pouring of water over a *linga*. *Linga* is a difficult word to translate; Diana Eck



expresses it in this way: “...the simple stone shaft that is the symbol of Shiva.”<sup>4</sup> I would go further; it is an aniconic form of Shiva as well as a symbol.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the panorama of Kedarnath on a clear day fuses iconic, aniconic, and natural modalities for experiencing the visible presence of Shiva and the Ganga (a form of the Goddess) in this world. Kedarnath is an especially storied place in the already legendary region of Garhwal, famously known as the land of the gods (*dev bhumi*).

The moment of this *devdarshini* is also when a *yatri*, harried and hurried by the goal of completing the four abode *yatra* (pilgrimage, journey, tour) of the region of Uttarakhand (Uttarakhand Char Dham Yatra) in approximately twelve days, sees that the third of the four goals of this journey, often described as a traditional imperative for Hindus, is almost within reach. The Uttarakhand Char Dham Yatra is a *yatra* to the abodes of four deities: Yamunotri (of the goddess/river Yamuna), Gangotri (of the goddess/river Ganga), Kedarnath (of Shiva), and Badrinath (of Vishnu).<sup>6</sup>

This same moment may be a moment of intense joy and satisfaction for *yatris* who have come, as many do, to behold and enjoy the unparalleled natural beauty of the Himalayas primarily as a trekker or a tourist. Most members of this group also enter

---

<sup>4</sup> Diana Eck, *Banāras, City of Light*, 1st ed. (New York: Knopf ;Distributed by Random House, 1982), 4.

<sup>5</sup>There are more involved definitions as well. The explanation of Richard Davis is useful in this regard: “The word *liṅga* has three primary meanings, and all three are important here. *Liṅga* denotes the penis, the male generative organ. It also denotes a mark, emblem, badge – a sign that allows one to identify or recognize something, as one may identify someone as a member of the male sex by his penis. Finally, it also denotes the primary cult object of Śaivism, an upraised cylindrical shaft with rounded top, rising from a rounded base. The icon resembles, in a generally abstract manner, an erect male member, and serves at the same time as a sign of Śiva. In the Pine Forest episode, the link between penis and icon is clear: the sages order Śiva to rip out his penis, and Brahmā orders the sages to make a copy of Śiva’s sundered penis as an object of worship. This, he tells them, will enable them to perceive Śiva, for it is his mark, the easily formed emblem on earth that allows all of us to recognize the god who is at the same time the transcendent Lord of the cosmos.” See Richard H. Davis, “The origin of linga worship,” in *Religions of India in practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 639.

<sup>6</sup> For a description of what it is like to perform the Uttarakhand Char Dham Yatra, see James Lochtefeld, “Haridvara, Haradwara, Gangadwara : the construction of identity and meaning in a Hindu pilgrimage place” (Phd diss., Columbia University, 1992).

the temple at Kedarnath. And for many, *devdarshini* is a moment to savor the feeling of walking in the footsteps of the Pandavas, who according to tradition came to Kedarnath in pursuit of an inexplicably aloof, buffalo-shaped Shiva. The *darshan* of Shiva was necessary for them to remove the *pāpa* generated by their actions in the war that forms the main subject of the epic of the *Mahabharata*<sup>7</sup>. As narrated by Suta in the *Shiva Purana*, it was at Kedarnath they were finally able to touch Shiva and obtain purification. For a Nath *yogi* practitioner interested in the acquisition of esoteric power and self perfection, the view from *devdarshini* is an indication that he has almost reached Retas Kund (Mercury Pool), the final node on a series of alchemically powerful pools that begins in Gaurikund with a pool associated with the menstrual bath of the Goddess.<sup>8</sup>

But there are many more possible versions of this moment. For a *yatri* who comes up from Gaurikund on a pony or in a sedan-chair carried by four men (usually either seasonally employed Nepalis or Kedarnath valley locals), it may often be an opportunity to engage the environment more fully than when the sedan chair is moving. *Yatris*, especially elderly women, will often wrap themselves in numerous warm and waterproof layers that effectively cut off their vision; they cautiously emerge from these layers at rest stops. The sedan chair bearers may want to press on, or the *yatri* may want them to press on while they need to stop for a moment and regain their

---

<sup>7</sup> McGregor's *Oxford Hindi-English* dictionary lists the following primary definitions for the word *pāpa* (*pāp* in Hindi): "sin; evil; wickedness, wrong; moral guilt." "Sin" is perhaps the most precise translation, and in fact is the term of choice employed in many English speaking Hindu contexts, but for a broader audience the Christian connotations of this term in English are cumbersome. Other options such as "evil" or "wickedness" suggest a connotation that might apply to a whole person rather than to something generated by a specific action. I have therefore elected to retain the term in its untranslated form.

<sup>8</sup>David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 245-246.

breath. The *yatri* might, in a moment of forced intimacy that bridges considerable social and economic disparity, ask questions about Kedarnath and hear answers. The *yatri* may be deeply conscious that it is only through the efforts of these men that they are able to be in this place, or they may be peremptorily conscious of their relatively high economic status that makes trips of this nature possible almost every year. And both parties might look up as a helicopter bypasses *devdarshini* from above to land at Kedarnath, having avoided the entire footpath and come directly from Fata or Agastmuni, further south in the Kedarnath valley. The sedan chair carriers may in turn be mentally preparing themselves for the end of the day's labor, negotiations about the fare, food, rest, and the prospect of doing it all again early the next morning.

The *devdarshini* of Kedarnath may also look and feel very different to Kedarnath valley locals coming to work in Kedarnath, and Garhwalis who are visitors to Kedarnath but indigenous to the region of Garhwal in which Kedarnath is located. Garhwal itself lies in the new state of Uttarakhand, created (first as Uttaranchal) from the northern part of Uttar Pradesh in 2000. For Kedarnath valley locals, Kedar (in Garhwali this usage is more common than Kedarnath) is both the abode of Shiva and the economic engine of the region. It is the place where many must work continuously for two to six months during the pilgrimage season. It takes them away from their villages and families, and forces them to live and work at an altitude that is physically challenging even for them. It is both a prestigious and a challenging place to work. It is a place that offers the possibility of a very good income, but a very uncertain one, and forces an engagement with all the difficult exigencies of pilgrimage tourism and the necessities of doing what it takes to be successful in one's occupation (the practice of one's *dhandhā*). One of

these exigencies is the perennial issue of the relationships between mountain (*pahārī*) peoples, denizens of the development periphery in India, and *yatris*, who mostly come from the flatter and warmer climes that constitute the majority of the Indian subcontinent, or in mountain parlance, who come from "below."

For Kedarnath locals, arrival in Kedarnath is therefore bittersweet. It is the big time, one of the most cosmopolitan places in the region, a world famous abode of Shiva. But it is also a place that draws its residents away from the worlds of Garhwali culture and community even though it is located in Garhwal. And, the village of Kedarnath is not a village in a typical Garhwali sense. Because it is so high up, the site is closed for half the year. It is the home and natal village of no one. Ninety-nine percent of those who live and work at Kedarnath are men. It is a place where, as one Kedarnath resident remarked to me, people are not supposed to live. It is not a place for people, although the person speaking lives there for six months out of every year.

Kedarnath is also an important Garhwali place, and the term *devdarshini* serves as a reminder in this regard. Wherever Garhwali deities go on *yatra* (*deora* is the Garhwali word for *devta-yatra*), they go with the accompaniment of drums.<sup>9</sup> On *deora* Garhwali drummers play different rhythms for different terrain, and there is a special rhythm that signifies when a new temple or shrine comes into view. The procession stops and the drummers play the *devdarshini* (also known as *deodekhñī* or *dyodyokhñī* in the Garhwali of the Kedarnath valley) rhythm. Many Garhwali deities come to Kedarnath on *deora* along with residents from their villages, sometimes in the hundreds. They come for many reasons: collective purification, expiation, custom, so

---

<sup>9</sup> D. R. Purohit of Hemavati Nandan Bahuguna University, Srinagar (Garhwal) has confirmed for me that this is the standard term across multiple Garhwali sub-dialects.

that one deity may have the *darshan* of Kedarnath-Shiva in much the same way that one might go to see an older and more important relative, for the joy of being on *yatra*, and perhaps most importantly, for "recharge", for the renewal of the power of the village deity. This was perhaps the most common reason given to me for the visits of Garhwali deities to Kedarnath: *recharge karne ke liye*, for recharging.

### **Approaching Kedarnath**

In this work I argue that the complex agency of Kedarnath as both place and *tirtha*, and the ways in which experiences of place in Kedarnath are constituted and represented, is especially visible and analytically approachable through the phenomena of narrative exposition, visual print culture, and what I term practices in place. I elucidate this notion of platial complex agency with reference to critical phenomenological perspectives on experience. This is an admittedly broad set of subjects for a single work. I am quite conscious that each of the multiple elements of place that I discuss, as well numerous other cultural phenomena in different parts of the Kedarnath valley, could easily constitute the single focus of a dissertation length study. There are numerous candidates which in this work I treat only briefly: the history of Kedarnath, the history of the Uttarakhand Char Dham Yatra (Richard Barz and Andrea Pinkney are working on this topic), Shaivism in Garhwal, the folklore and festivals of the Kedarnath valley, the lineage histories of the Kedarnath pilgrimage priests (suggested to me by William Sax), the presence of Virashaivas in Garhwal, to name but several.

However, I have taken the considered decision that it will be most useful for understanding modern day Kedarnath to offer a view of the place as a whole, drawing

together data from a range of groups, practices, narratives, histories, visual cultures, and political economies. That said, as the author of the first full length study of Kedarnath in English I am conscious of my responsibility to place as much before the reader as possible. I therefore allude to numerous trajectories for further research so that these subjects will be available for scholarly inquiry and conversation.

### *The Genealogy of this Project*

To fully understand the approach of this work it is necessary to begin with what brought me to Kedarnath in the first place. These disclosures bear on the choices I have made in this project. I first came to focus on Kedarnath through a larger interest in South Asian visual print culture depictions of Hindu pilgrimage places, the subject of a Fulbright research grant in 1999-2000. For some years prior I had been attracted to the theorizing of myth, especially in the ancient Greek world. In this context I was particularly intrigued by the relationship between the verbal and the visual.<sup>10</sup> It was this interest in theories of myth that first led me to the consideration of South Asian religious traditions, particularly to questions of the intermingling of the narrative and the discursive modes in Puranic literature. As I deepened my engagement with South Asia it became clear that one particularly fruitful and productive way to approach religious traditions in South Asia is to ask questions about the relationships between narratives and places. I started to look and think closely about Hindu pilgrimage places, building on my fascination with Puranic literature. It was then, in the course of a research proposal for the aforementioned Fulbright, that I first read H. Daniel Smith's

---

<sup>10</sup> C. Sourvinou-Inwood, "Myths in Images: Theseus and Medea as a Case Study," in *Approaches to Greek Myth*, ed. Lowell Edmunds (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 395-445.

essay on "god posters".<sup>11</sup> With my earlier interest in the relationships between the verbal and visual in the world of ancient Greek myth, it occurred to me that an inquiry into the relationships between the aesthetic parameters of such images and the realities to which they refer would be a fruitful way into the complexities of Hindu place and pilgrimage in South Asia.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, I journeyed to India for the first time in 1999 and spent nine months travelling to different *tirthas* and to the printing presses where print images of such places are produced. I visited Kedarnath, Badrinath, Haridwar, Braj, Tirupati and Tirumala, Srirangam, Madurai, Shivakashi, Rameshvaram, Prayag (Allahabad), Gangotri, and spent several months in Varanasi in an attempt to pursue the questions raised by these visits in more depth.<sup>13</sup> In the course of this work, I viewed thousands of print images, and started to see patterns. It seemed to me that, relative to print images that depicted deities without reference to particular places, depictions of *tirthas* demonstrated a higher use of painted and photo-montage techniques. In particular, I was drawn to images of the twelve *lingas* of light, the twelve *dyotirlingas* of Shiva. And, of all the images that I viewed, depictions of Kedarnath seemed the most strikingly creative in their use of such techniques. Here is an example of a 2007 print image, discussed in detail in Chapter Five:

---

<sup>11</sup> H. Daniel Smith, "Impact of "God Posters" on Hindus and Their Devotional Traditions," in *Media and the transformation of religion in South Asia*, ed. Lawrence Babb and Susan Snow Wadley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> The irreducible complementarity of the visual and the verbal continues to be a theoretical touchstone. For an argument on the necessity of approaching the visual using a non-semantic basis, see Fernande Saint-Martin, *Semiotics of Visual Language* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

<sup>13</sup> I have since also visited Triyambakeshvar, Ghushmeshvar, Bhimashankar, Shrirdi, Vignahar, Girjatmaj, and Siddhivinayak in Maharashtra, and Ramdevra, Galta, Pushkar, and Ajmer-E-Sharif in Rajasthan.

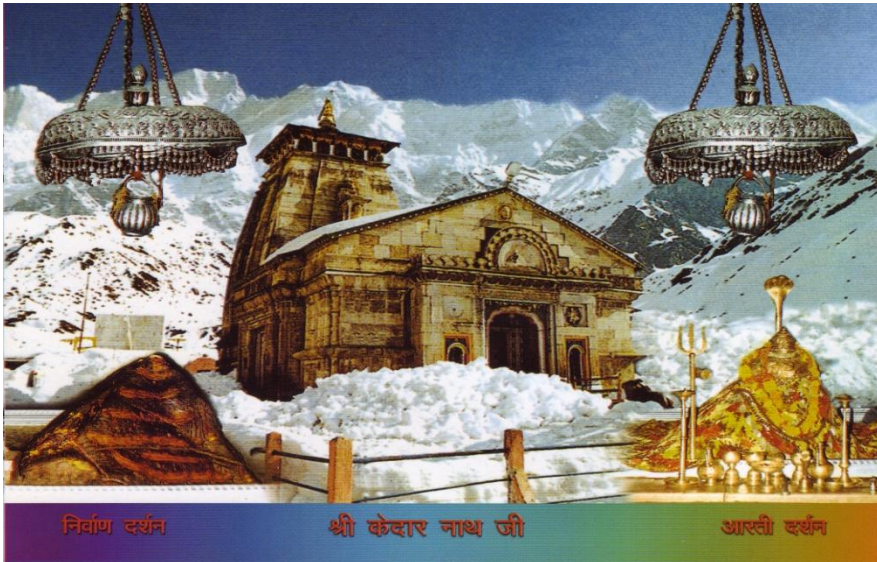


Figure 1.2 Kedarnath Photomontage.

Kedarnath also stayed with me because my first journey there was among the most physically and mentally demanding and aesthetically intense events of my life. Later, it captivated me again through the compelling character of narratives about the importance of this place and how it came to be what it is today, such as the version I offer in the beginning of this chapter. The further I progressed in my doctoral work, the richer, more rewarding, and more challenging I found the work of interpretively encountering Kedarnath. In May of 2005, with the support of a pre-dissertation grant from the American Institute of Indian Studies, I returned to the Kedarnath area for several weeks to get a sense of how I would need to plan my dissertation fieldwork and research. The result of this preliminary investigation was a strong impression that the complexity and power of the site required a theoretically and methodologically holistic system of approach. This work is therefore both an exemplification of and argument for such an approach. And, it should be noted, it was originally an attention to visual print culture that recommended this particular form of analytic attention.



### ***Research Aims***

This initial drive for holism shaped my research agenda into something extremely qualitative. In my dissertation fieldwork, also supported by the American Institute of Indian Studies, I set out to look for patterns across a range of persons, practices, times and places (even within the locale of Kedarnath) rather than targeting a more focused subject. I spent as much time as I could physically at Kedarnath during my fieldwork period, given the length the pilgrimage season. This meant about six months of 2007, and three weeks of 2008. The longest I spent on site without respite, for reasons of health and logistics, was about two months. During these periods I attempted to learn from and about as many different kinds of people as possible. I spoke with *yatris* from all over India and the world, keeping track of what regions and communities I had "covered". Similarly, with Kedarnath residents, I made sure to spend time with pilgrimage priests (*tirth purohits*), employees of the Badri Kedar Temple Committee, police, shopkeepers and pilgrim rest house (*dharamshala*) and lodge managers from different parts of the Kedarnath valley, contractors and cleaners from the plains, Nepali laborers, renunciants (*sadhus*), and Western visitors.

I spent most of the remaining months of my fieldwork in Ukhimath, the administrative center for the division of the Rudraprayag district in which Kedarnath is located. This time was itself punctuated by trips to the British Library in London for information about Kedarnath in the India Office Library and to the Scriptorium of the Sanskrit Dictionary Project in Pune for references to Kedarnath in Sanskrit literature. While based in Ukhimath, I spent most of my time introducing myself to the three valleys (see later in the introduction for the particulars) of the Kedarnath valley

system. I visited dozens of villages and important shrines in these three valleys so that I would understand how Kedarnath fit into its local contexts and so that I would have a connection to persons who work in Kedarnath who came from all these places. It is a fair generalization that my fieldwork was an introduction to Kedarnath and the Kedarnath valley system.

### ***Topics of Inquiry***

In Ukhimath and in Kedarnath, I lived as a participant-observer. I kept a rough list of important topics generated in my pre-dissertation research about which I was collecting data that in the occasional best-case scenario became formalized during actual interviews. My way of asking questions about these topics varied greatly, depending on contextual and linguistic factors, and the topics changed and evolved the more I learned. Depending on the amount of time (anywhere from two minutes in a wind-blown chai stall to an hour and a half comfortably seated indoors, at leisure), I amplified, followed up, or adapted to the course of the interchange. I would usually attempt to see what might be self-articulated until such waiting no longer seemed productive. The topics with which I entered my fieldwork were:

1. The form of Shiva present at Kedarnath.
2. General conceptions, understandings, and beliefs (all these come under the rubric of the Hindi verb *mānnā*) about Kedarnath.
3. The importance of Kedarnath, how it came to be as it is today.
4. Practices carried out in the temple, their significance and putative uniqueness.
5. Other significant practices in and around Kedarnath.

6. The social and vocational identities of those present in Kedarnath.
7. The feeling and experience of being inside the temple, and in Kedarnath.
8. Particular information about Kedarnath, and how such information came to be known.
9. Material objects that people take home with them after a visit to Kedarnath.
10. Understandings of the relationship between deity and place in Kedarnath.
11. Change and stasis in Kedarnath.
12. The possibility of *sākṣāt* (*sakshat*, i.e. the “really real: sight of God, the seeing of the true form of God with one’s own eyes) *darshan* in Kedarnath, or anywhere else.

As I gathered information on these topics, I would occasionally review the nature and source of the data I was gathering, and make adjustments. There are several adjustments that I desired to make but was unable to make to my own satisfaction. Relatively speaking, I gathered less data from South Indians (who are also present in fewer numbers), women, north Indian *yatris* from rural, agricultural settings, and Nepali and other non-local laborer communities. There are some good reasons for these gaps: I was an unmarried American man who spoke and understood fairly schoolbook Hindi, and almost all of the long term residents in Kedarnath are men. Spending time and sharing food with some of the laborer groups, given their lower caste statuses, might have meant that I would not have had access to other groups I deemed more important for my focus. In and around Ukhimath, as I became more

familiar to locals and became myself more familiar with how to communicate and navigate, I began to have substantive conversations with Garhwali women but this really only began in the last quarter or so of my fieldwork. Once or twice near the end of my fieldwork several local children called me "uncle" in Garhwali.

### ***Conversation, Rapport, and Recording in Kedarnath***

I was able to carry out and record structured and semi-structured interviews with Kedarnath and Kedarnath valley residents, and several renunciants. In both Kedarnath and during the off season in Kedarnath valley, Bhupendra Singh Pushpavan (a resident of the town of Ukhimath, located in the Kedarnath valley) and I were able to generate enough understanding of my project, trust, and goodwill that extended conversations and their recordings were possible. However, with *yatris* in Kedarnath the situation was quite different. Most *yatris* are only physically present in Kedarnath for less than twenty four hours, and in many cases less than twelve. They are by turns tired, moved, wonderstruck, and focused on the matters at hand. Time in Kedarnath is precious. Thus, my conversations with *yatris*, whether carried out in their room or the reception area of a *dharamshala*, the temple courtyard, a restaurant, the queue, while walking along the path, or in a chai stall, depended on both how much time they had to spare and how much rapport I was able to create in the first several minutes of the meeting. These meetings lasted anywhere from five minutes to two hours. Sometimes they looked like interviews; I would have my notebook out and ask particular questions. And sometimes these meetings looked like the kind of conversations that people have when they find themselves meeting strangers while on *yatra*; a free-form discussion of the site, the journey, the lives and backgrounds of the different members

of the conversation. In such instances I would not even take out my notebook (let alone my minidisc recorder), fearing that any form of overt research practice would change what was happening in the conversation. I would summarize such conversations later in my field notes. Depending on the day, the time, and what else was happening, this meant anything from five minutes to several days. Thus, in many cases the notes on which I base my discussions, for example in Chapter Four, are summaries in my own words that incorporate particular sentences or phrases from those with whom I spoke.

### ***Positionality, Relationships, and Money***

Working in the Kedarnath valley often meant sorting out where to place myself on the already existent continuum of ways that Westerners are present in the area. Anthropologists have worked in the Kedarnath valley before (notably Karin Polit and Eric Schwabach), and Kedarnath valley residents had often heard of William Sax. Westerners come through the Kedarnath valley area as tourists and trekkers all the time and stay anywhere from several days to several months, and display highly variable levels of cultural sensitivity and cultural literacy. A German woman, formerly a student of anthropology, was drawn to the Kedarnath valley through her dreams. She became the disciple of a renunciant guru in the Kalimath area, learned Hindi, Nepali, Sanskrit, and Garhwali, and has achieved a high level of respect in the area and is referred to as a mother (*mām* or *māī*). She has now been in the area for well over a decade and carries out *puja*, *arati* (the worship of a deity with flame), and distributes *prasada* (substances and objects that are offered to the deity and then returned to devotees as divinized items) at her guru's ashram. There is an international NGO directed by an American man who has been involved with Garhwal for over thirty years

and speaks Garhwali. Employment with this NGO is highly prized, and it was with considerable consternation that I found myself renting two rooms in what had been his personal house before the operation shifted to a different site. I did not want to be seen as another rich American deepening the groove of American economic involvement with the Kedarnath valley region. Yet I was unable to avoid this trajectory completely. The Kedarnath valley also sees the occasional western renunciant, another topic worth investigation in its own right.

There were therefore a number of available roles for me, most of which I participated in and encouraged to greater and lesser degrees depending on the context. I routinely and strongly rejected linkages to the NGO and to a characterization of myself as a tourist. Sometimes I was the researcher, a somewhat familiar category. Introductory conversations would often follow a pattern: Are you a tourist/trekker? No. Are you with the NGO? No. Ah, then you must be doing "research and stuff" (*research vagaira kuch*, in Hindi). Yes, I would say. At other times, as a participant-observant trying to be as much a part of what was going on around me as possible (for a multitude of reasons, one of which was, of course, to understand my own fascination, attraction, and connection to where I was), I looked like an odd sort of Shiva devotee, a *Shiv-bhakt*. At one point during my time in Kedarnath itself, the chief religious officer of the Badri Kedar Temple Committee at Kedarnath asked me, in the presence of several others, when we were going to go ahead and do my *upanayana* ceremony to become Hindu. At other times, I looked more like a tourist/trekker. It is an extreme understatement to say that my time in Garhwal and in Kedarnath, a deep, prolonged exposure to a set of intense linkages between people and beautiful, powerful places,

changed me as a person in ways that make me feel deeply humble and grateful. My friends in the Kedarnath valley, and my relationship with the area itself, are part of my life now.

My relationship with Bhupendra Singh Pushpavan, my friend and my research assistant, traversed all of this terrain. I knew Bhupendra first as a friendly local, then as a schoolteacher, then as a research assistant and guide. Somewhere along the way I realized that he makes a practice of befriending foreigners, one of several Ukhimath men who do so. We would on occasion struggle with the sometimes conflicting demands of employer-employee and friend relations as well as the ongoing process of understanding each other. Bhupendra often had to patiently explain to me very basic things about Garhwali culture and the Kedarnath valley and to tolerate my numerous idiosyncrasies and physical infirmities; I often had to reiterate my research aims because they were different from what he initially understood the object of my research to be. In one of our first official research meetings together, he offered me a series of quotations from the *Bhagavad Gita* that he had personally selected; I wanted to talk to him about starting to meet Kedarnath *tirth purohits*.

After my first several months in Ukhimath, I spent most of a year working closely with Bhupendra. We lived, cooked, and ate in the same room in Kedarnath during the 2007 season. He took me, reprising his sometime role as mountain guide, to the many villages and shrines of the Kedarnath valley that we agreed were important for my work. I went over with him, more than anyone else, how to phrase my questions, and sometimes he would add his own. He advised me on when to participate, when to lay low, when to push. He has a gift for inter-cultural communication and

clarity of expression; his background as a teacher served him well in his work with me. Many of my relationships with residents of the Kedarnath valley began through Bhupendra rather than through my own efforts or merits. His willingness to vouch for my worth paved the way for much of my work. After working with me, he went on to secure a job with the international NGO mentioned earlier.

Questions of money informed both my own presence in the Kedarnath valley and my research aims to significant extent. Even though the regions of Garhwal associated with Badrinath and Kedarnath are by Garhwali standards prosperous, much of life there continues to be premised on anxieties about income and subsistence. In recent decades many Kedarnath valley residents have also become more concerned with better education for their children and goods such as clothing and electronics that come from outside the region. This concern has to some extent offset the higher levels of cash income generated by the increasing popularity of Kedarnath as a site. These matters, combined with the deeply unpredictable nature of Kedarnath derived income, the local weather, and the area's predilection for earthquakes and landslides, means that even families who are by local standards very well off still experience their lives as being to great extent defined by the unpredictable nature of the economic and environmental climates. The instability of the economic (and physical) environments impacted me in several ways that were glaringly obvious throughout my time in the area. First, my presence in the area was understood to be economically beneficial to the region in direct and indirect ways. Second, my presence in Kedarnath was understood to have the potential to change what people think of Kedarnath (which might impact its economic potential as a site). It was often assumed, hoped for, and



strongly suggested that I make my work into *pracār*, that is to say, into a promulgation of the glories of Kedarnath that would bring even more people to the site. I always explicitly rejected this frame for my work. I would often say in rejoinder that my work was about understanding, explaining, and teaching (*samajhna*, *samjhāna*, *sikhāna*).

I also bent over backward to remove the concern that my presence in Kedarnath would negatively impact anyone's livelihood. I never asked about the amounts of *dan* (donation) and *dakshina* (meaning in this context “ritual fee”) given by *yatris* to their *tirth purohits* or to the temples in Ukhimath and Kedarnath, and put myself on public record to this effect. I respected, perhaps more than necessary, the autonomy of the *tirth purohit–yajman* (patron) interactions; when these interactions did not take place in a public place like the temple courtyard I would only be present when I had asked and received specific permission from the *tirth purohits* involved. The reasons for my behavior were simple: it is in moments of private interaction that fees are negotiated and promises made. Any independent variables, such as an odd Western researcher, might end up changing the end result. I pursued this practice even though in many instances I would have obtained more information by pushing my way into the situation, which I could have done on many occasions. I did not want any *tirth purohit*, lodge or *dharamshala* manager, shopkeeper, or temple employee to feel that they had earned less money because of my presence, and I believe I was reasonably successful in this regard.

### ***Scholarly Work and Ethnographic Circumspection***

There are times, both in research and in writing, when there is something of a narrow overlap between my aims as a scholar, my relationships and position in the

places I work, and how those with whom I work perceive these matters. I was once on the phone with my parents in front of an older friend of mine in Ukhimath; he asked for the phone and said he wanted to speak to my father. He told my father that while they liked me, I did not appear to be working very hard; I did not sit and read and write during the day very often but instead spent a lot of time walking around and talking to people. The anthropological aspects of my research did not always register as research. And I encountered, pushing in the other directions, assumptions about the sorts of things that a Western scholar, and perhaps especially a Western scholar, would come to the Kedarnath valley to research about Kedarnath. I frequently had to deflect the perception that the aims of my research were to empirically establish the historicity of things and the truth of the power and reality of deity presence in places. I was and continue to be troubled that even my ostensible conclusions about such questions could be invested with far more authority and importance than they might, in my own opinion, deserve. I would often say, instead, that I was not interested in understanding whether someone's experiences (*anubhav*) were true so much as how they felt and what caused them to feel that way. I would often invoke the term *haqiqat* (i.e. the reality of what's actually happening); I would say that I was interested in *haqiqat* as well as *dharm* ("religion", usually understood in an ideal sense).

However, my focus on *haqiqat* comes with several entailments. Description and contextualization of Kedarnath touch on many issues of a sensitive nature, issues of traditional history, the demographic histories of Garhwali people, and the economic importance of Kedarnath set amidst the backdrop of the generally challenging environment of central Garhwal. There are many details connected to these matters

that, if mentioned, would either adversely impact people's lives or, at the very least, be so perceived. With regard to the history of the administration of the Kedarnath temple and the site more generally, the potential impact is a bit more concrete. There is ongoing litigation between the Badri Kedar Temple Committee (henceforth *Samiti*), and the Kedarnath Association of Pilgrimage Priests regarding the traditional rights of Kedarnath *tirth purohits* to collect ritual fees inside the temple and in the temple courtyard. Given that I intend to give copies of this dissertation to both parties, in my opinion a fair and necessary gesture given the amount of cooperation and hospitality extended to me during my research, it is an unlikely but real possibility that what I write might someday be referenced in this litigation and be regarded as legally actionable data. Were this unlikely scenario to occur, given the two-sided nature of legal contests, the chances are high that someone would be very displeased with me. I both strenuously wish to avoid this scenario and I do not want residents of the Kedarnath valley to feel that I have betrayed their confidence. Thus, as I offer a general introduction to the site in this chapter, and throughout this work, I am intentionally circumspect. With few exceptions, I do not mention the names of specific persons. My position in writing this work is therefore quite different from that of Ishita Dube in her work on Jagannath Puri and Paul Younger in his work on Cidambaram where much of the local community welcomed historical inquiry into the main temple and attendant institutions.<sup>14</sup> Kedarnath is changing very quickly and there is a great deal of anxiety regarding exactly how it will change; I did not and do not want to become a focal point

---

<sup>14</sup> Ishita Banerjee Dube, *Divine Affairs: Religion, Pilgrimage and the State in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2001); Paul Younger, *The Home of Dancing Sivan: The Traditions of the Hindu Temple in Citamparam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

for this anxiety. My aim, rather, is to offer a model for approaching the attractive power of the site.

### **The Shape of This Work**

There is a high degree of variation in what associations, customs, and knowledge people bring to Kedarnath, how Kedarnath appears to them, their experiences of their time there, and what they may take away from that time. The common denominator of all these elements is place, the site of Kedarnath. The location of Kedarnath is what constitutes the primary ambit and unit of analysis for this work. I claim that this location should be understood as a place that demonstrates complex agency, an idea that unites the ways in which Kedarnath is a religiously, geographically, and economically distinctive site. It is my considered argument that this approach offers the best beginnings of an understanding of what it is to be in Kedarnath, *regardless of the reasons a particular person might have for being there*. I offer here a general examination of how a series of cultural and environmental patterns have the potential to combine into experiences of place for particular people. The actual specifics of how experience, meaning, and efficacy might be generated, enacted, performed, and experienced by a particular person are, with the exception of a few specific cases about which I have sufficient data to make such claims, beyond the reach of this work. What I want to offer here is a model for how such experiences of place might be produced: a frame of reference for the myriad, complex, irreducible ways that meaning, association, sense, and efficacy are created (or not created) by being present in Kedarnath.

This mode of analytic presentation knowingly emphasizes the utility of providing a general comprehensive understanding of the site. Kedarnath is at once the abode of Shiva, one of the Uttarakhand Char Dham, the economic engine of Rudraprayag district, a paradigmatic example of the famous natural Himalayan beauty of the Himalayas, and one of the emblems of the Garhwal region that possesses the power to purify even the most grievous of transgressions and to recharge lesser deities. These and many other factors are all potentially available and influential when one is present in Kedarnath. The aim of this work to understand how these factors may combine in the experience of those physically present in the site.

In Chapter Two, I offer a historical and geographical overview of the site. I suggest that the fluidity among natural environment, the efficacious form and presence of Shiva, and the power and significance of the Kedarnath locale more generally constitutes a historically enduring feature of the site. In Chapter Three, I explain the critical-phenomenological underpinnings of how I understand the terms *place* and *experience*. I then yoke these terms to the idea that deities may be productively regarded as *complex agents* to produce the composite term that is the theoretical engine of the dissertation: *place and tirtha as complex agent*. In Chapter Four I examine narrative expositions of Kedarnath found in genres ranging from Sanskrit *Puranas* to oral Hindi presentations given by *tirth purohits* to everyday conversational fragments. I look at what such narrative expositions tell about Shiva's presence in Kedarnath as well as the character of the Kedarnath locale, and how such narrative elements relate to experiences of Kedarnath as a site of attractive and efficacious power more generally. In Chapter Five I discuss how print images of Kedarnath offer a visual portrait of the

complex agency of the site and underscore the co-terminous nature of the different facets of Kedarnath's modern character. In Chapter Six I investigate how what I term salient *practices in place* interact with the complex agency of the place, and demonstrate that what is significant and powerful about the place (both as place and as abode of Shiva) spreads out over the entirety of the Kedarnath end-valley in which the village and the temple are located. Having delineated in each of these middle chapters what in Chapter Three I term especially salient constituent elements of the experience of place in Kedarnath, in the Conclusion I return to a more synoptic view of the implications of this work for the study of Hindu place, places of religious importance, and Shaivism.

## Understanding Kedarnath as Place and as *Tirtha*: An Overview

### Chapter Two

#### Situating Kedarnath

Keeping in mind my ethnographic location as a researcher of present-day Kedarnath, I offer in this chapter a brief historical and geographic overview of how Kedarnath comes to be as it is. My aim in this overview is to highlight how the historical record may aid in understanding the complexity of the relationships between place and the form of Shiva understood to be present in Kedarnath today. I suggest that this complex fluidity itself has constituted an enduring feature of the site over at least the last one thousand years. Thus, my version of ethnographically-focused history differs slightly from the historical anthropological approach taken by Ishita Dube in her work on Jagannath Puri.<sup>1</sup> She is especially concerned to shed light on the history of interactions between the colonial and post colonial states, Orissan royalty, and the complex amalgam of persons and institutions involved in the running of the pilgrimage place of Jagannath Puri. Her goal is to accomplish this aim while at the same time dismantling the supposed oppositions between such matters and idealized representations of the experience of Hindu pilgrimage. The particular ways that I use historical data are somewhat more phenomenological than Dube's methods, although as I detail in Chapter Three I understand the phenomenological endeavor in a very particular way.

---

<sup>1</sup> For Dube's discussion of this term and her thoughts on the relationships between history and anthropology, see Ishita Banerjee Dube, *Divine Affairs: Religion, Pilgrimage and the State in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2001), 1-6.

In part because of its geographical location at the edge of the high Himalayas, Kedarnath became part of what have now come to be called Shaivite (Shiva-oriented) networks very early on, near the beginning of the first millennium CE. Yet, the modern site of Kedarnath and the region of Garhwal continue to display continuities with very early indigenous conceptions of deity and Shaivite form and presence in the mountains that may predate the now naturalized notion that Shiva's primary form in the world is the *linga*. The mountainish, chthonic shape of the Kedarnath *linga* (and others in the area) suggests a strong and conceptually coherent continuity to these earliest stages of Shaivism (forms of community and practice oriented around Shiva) found in the area. There are also, of course, other elements: linkage to the deity Bhairavnath (Bhairava, Bhairav), to the Goddess, to the Pandavas, to Shiva's buffalo form, to violence and death, to alchemical power, to Shiva's column of light form. But in my view, the unique rock-form in present in the temple today is a central conceptual anchor for many of these elements. Those present in Kedarnath continue to find ways to come to terms with the shape of Shiva's presence at Kedarnath, and a part of this process is often an appreciation and awareness of its special, non-standard form.

Perhaps because of its geographical location, it is not wholly clear how the institutional frameworks associated with Kedarnath came to be as they are today, and how the history of Shaivism in Garhwal relates to the history of Shaivism more broadly. Historians of Shaivism in north India and of Himalayan folk religion not writing in Hindi for a somewhat Uttarakhand-specific audience have to large extent left Garhwal and Kumaon unexamined and proceed directly from Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh to



Nepal. Most scholars who work on Garhwal also work mostly in Garhwal, and have not joined as many more general scholarly conversation as one would hope.

***An Etymological Introduction: Kedāra and Kidāra:***

I orient this section by beginning as many on-site introductions to Kedarnath begin, with the possible histories and etymologies of the Hindi word *kedār*, in Sanskrit *kedāra*. *Kedāra* is a Sanskrit word that means marshy soil, soil mingled with water. Attestation exists for this meaning beginning in the early centuries of the Common Era.<sup>2</sup> It is usually glossed in Hindi with the term *daldalī bhūmi*, or swampy land. In the Kedarnath valley, it is the kind of ground that occurs when a combination of the melting of the winter snowpack, rain, and the overflow of rivers swollen with glacial melt turns the ground into a marshy ooze of varying consistency. Thus, the name Kedārñāth (Kedāranātha or Kedāreśvara in Sanskrit) means literally the lord of the marshy soil. Because of its location, the entire Kedarnath end-valley, starting from several kilometers south of the Kedarnath village, lies under tens of meters of snow for approximately half the year. This snow melts and the end-valley is snow-free for most of the summer pilgrimage season, with the exception of the occasional snowstorm.

Kedarnath lies at the upper edge of the lesser Himalayan mountain range. Located above the tree line at approximately thirty-five hundred meters, it sits on the valley floor about two kilometers from where the Mandakini river valley begins at the base of the white glaciers of the high Himalayas. It is therefore enclosed by mountains on three sides. It is located several thousand meters higher than where most Garhwalis live. Kedarnath occupies a relatively unique place in the networks of modern Hindu

---

<sup>2</sup>See for example *Nāradasmr̥ti*, 1st recension 165.1 (A), which the Sanskrit Dictionary Project of Deccan College in Pune dates to the second century CE.

pilgrimage in South Asia. It is remote, high, and difficult to reach; the road stops in Gaurikund, about fifteen hundred feet in altitude and fourteen kilometers in distance short of the temple. Yet at the same time it is part of a major pilgrimage grid; approximately half a million people visited Kedarnath in 2007, and just under that in 2008. It is not in the same category of inaccessibility as a journey to the famous Mt. Kailash, or even the arduous journey to Amarnath. It is a place of mass pilgrimage surprisingly located in a setting where the mere physical fact of such a phenomenon comprises an object lesson in the reach and depth of human effort.

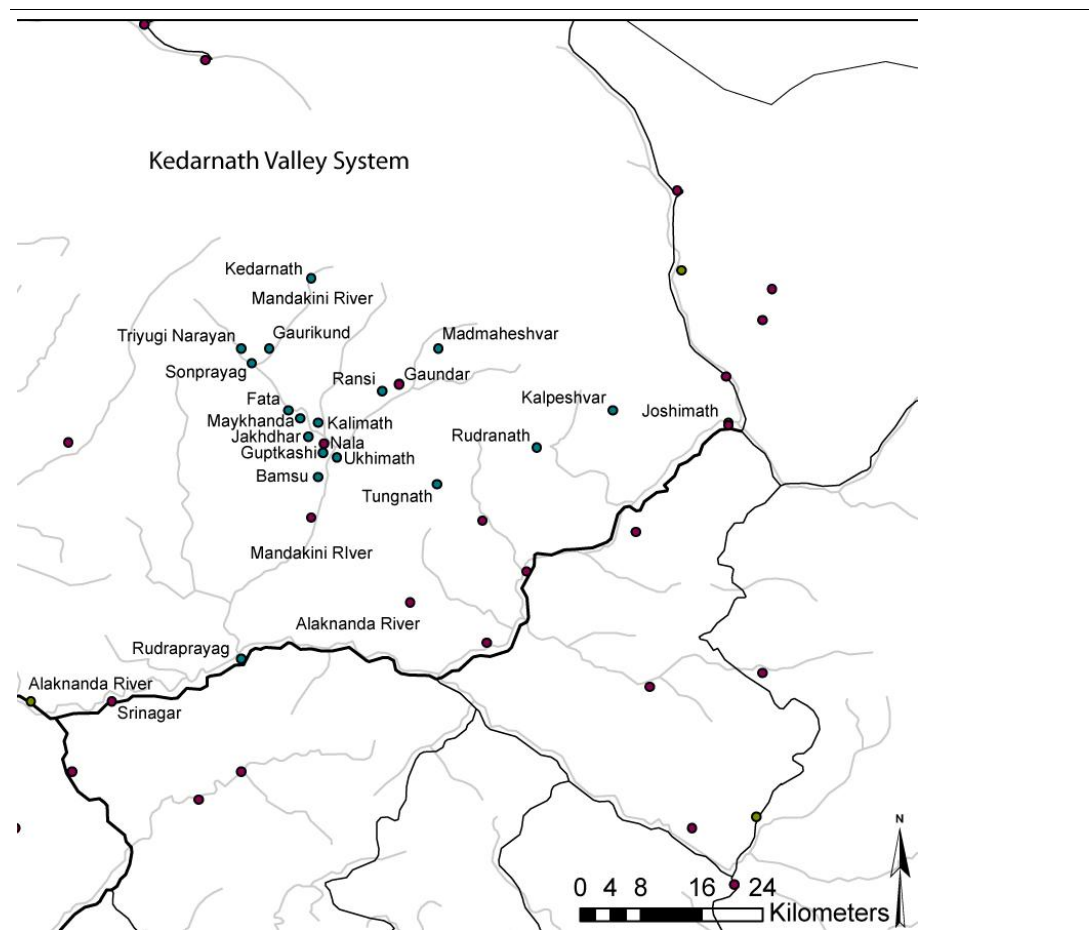


Figure 2.1. The Kedarnath Valley System, as I use the term, begins just south of Ukhimath and includes the area delineated by Ukhimath, Triyugi Narayan, Kedarnath, and Madmaheshvar.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup>I am grateful to Michael Page for his invaluable assistance in the creation of this map.

Kedarnath is today part of several different pilgrimage systems. It is, along with Yamunotri, Gangotri, and Badrinath, one of the destinations visited on the Uttarakhand Char Dham Yatra. Performance of the Uttarakhand Char Dham Yatra is one of the most popular *yatra* journeys in north India. Kedarnath is also often conflated with Badrinath and regarded as one of the All India Char Dham (*Vishva Bharat Char Dham*): Badrinath (and Kedarnath), Puri, Rameshvaram, and Dwarka. It is also one of the twelve *lingas* of light of Shiva, the *vyotirlingas*. As Benjamin Fleming has shown, understanding the different versions of the lists of these twelve is a complicated endeavor.<sup>4</sup> Here is one common version of this list that Fleming discusses: Somnath, Mallikarjun, Mahakaleshvar, Omkareshvar, Kedarnath, Bhimashankar, Vishvanath, Tryambakeshvar, Vaidyanath, Nageshvar, Rameshvaram, Ghushmeshvar (I present the names here as they would commonly be referred to in Hindi).<sup>5</sup> Kedarnath is also one of the five Kedars (*Panch Kedar*), five Shaivite sites in the Kedarnath area (see map): Kedarnath, Madmaheshvar, Tungnath, Rudranath, and Kalpanath.

---

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Fleming, “The cult of the *vyotirlingas* and the history of Śaivite worship” (Phd diss., McMaster University, 2007), 25.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

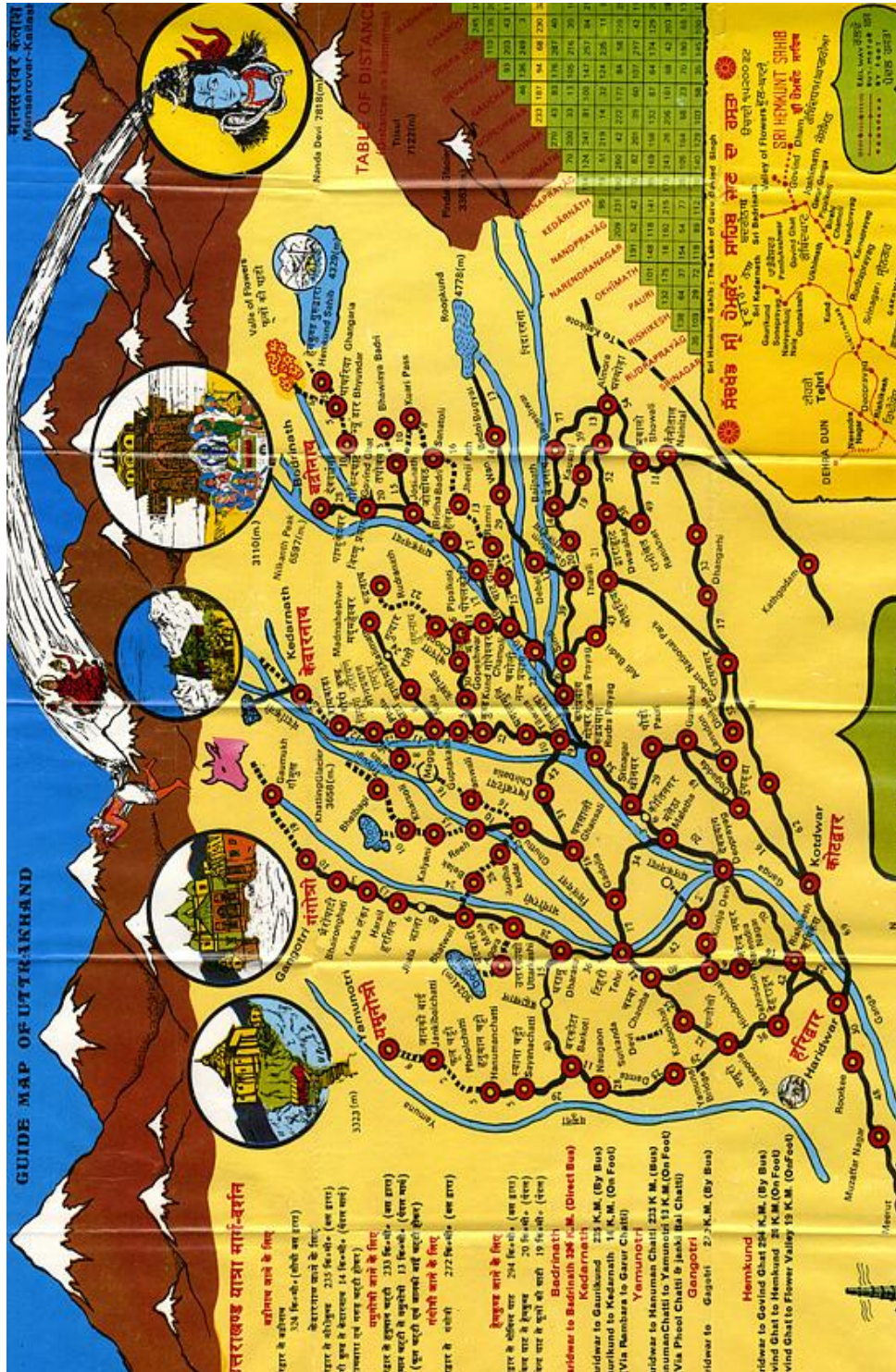


Figure 2.2. A guide map of this type accompanies most pamphlets about the Uttarakhand Char Dham. The normal course of the Uttarakhand Char Dham Yatra may be seen here. Most yatis arrive into the area at Haridwar or Rishikesh, and then from Rishikesh proceed north first to Yamunotri, then Gangotri, then Kedarnath, then Badrinath, and then back down to Rishikesh.

According to the Virashaiva community centered in Ukhimath who provide the *pujaris* (ritual specialists in the daily temple service) for Kedarnath, Kedarnath and Ukhimath (or as they refer to it, Kedar Vairagya Peetha) is one of the five institutional centers of the Virashaiva community. The other four are in Rambhapuri, Ujjain, Shrishailam, and Varanasi.<sup>6</sup> This community, while they themselves have not made this distinction, appears to belong to the strand of Virashaivism known as *pañcācārya* (five teachers), that is to say a form of Shaivism now centered in modern-day Karnataka that, in addition to its privileging of devotional poems written in Kannada, links itself to the worlds of classical and Vedic Sanskrit.<sup>7</sup> Much of this introduction constitutes my own beginning attempts to sketch the story of how Kedarnath came to be part of these different systems, yet another worthy subject for investigation in its own right.

Shivaprasad Naithani, looking at the work of previous scholars such as Harikrishna Raturi, Rahul Sankrtyayan, Shivaprasad Dabaral, colonial gazetteer E. T. Atkinson, as well as inscriptional and numismatic evidence, has suggested that the word *kedāra* originally came into Sanskrit as a transformation of the royal title *kidāra kuṣana* for rulers from the Kushana dynasty, which would have occurred during approximately the first century CE.<sup>8</sup> Naithani suggests that the Kushanas acquired this title as a result of contact with peoples already indigenous to what is now called

---

<sup>6</sup> Shobha S. Hiremath, *Kedar Vairagya Peetha: Parampara & Rawal Jagadguru Shri Bheemashankarlinga Shivacharya* (Ukhimatha (Ushamath): Himavat Kedar Vairagya Simhasana Mahasamsthana, 2006), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Prithvi Datta Chandra Shobhi, "Pre-modern Communities and Modern Histories: Narrating Vīraśaiva and Lingayat Selves" (Phd diss., University of Chicago, 2005), 257. I am grateful to Gil Ben-Herut for drawing my attention to this distinction, and to Shobhi's work, in his essay "Stories about Sectarian Conflicts in Early Vīraśaiva Material" (forthcoming).

<sup>8</sup> Śivaprasād Naithānī, *Uttarākhaṇḍ ke tīrth evaṃ mandir: Himālaya, yātrā aur paryāṭan sahit*, 3rd ed. (Srīnagar, Garhwāl: Pavetrī Prakāśan, 2006), 174; Śivaprasād Ḍabarāl, *Śrī Uttarākhaṇḍ Yātrā Darśan* (Nārayan Koṭī, Garhwāl: Viśālmaṇī Śarmā Upādhyāya, 1961); Śivrāj Siṃh Rāvat, *Kedār Himālay aur Pañc Kedār* (Dehra Dun: Vinsar Publishing Company, 2006).

Garhwal. These indigenous peoples may have been the Kirata tribe famously mentioned in Sanskrit versions of the *Mahabharata* and in Puranic literature. There are several attempts to reconstruct the meaning and referent of the postulated Kirata word *kidāra* from which *kedāra* might have come, but none of these attempts have yet merited strong scholarly consensus to the best of my knowledge. Many scholars link early worship of Shiva to the Kiratas.<sup>9</sup> There are therefore a somewhat plausible set of connections between Shiva, indigenous residents of the Garhwal region, and the word *kedara* in the beginning centuries of the Common Era. The use of *kedara* to refer to a place of Shiva seems to have been widespread by the seventh century CE.<sup>10</sup>

Additionally, indigenous to the Himalayan region both in Garhwal and more generally are fierce, meat-eating antinomian gods and goddesses who gradually come to be subsumed under the organizing frameworks of Shaivism and Shaktivism. First among these are forms of the goddess, both independently and as a consort of Shiva, and Bhairava, who comes to be known both as the personification of Shiva's anger, and his foremost lieutenant and devotee. Bhairava is most famously known both as a protector and as a resident of the cremation ground. David Gordon White dates the beginning point for Bhairava worship to the fifth century of the Common Era.<sup>11</sup> The shrine to Bhairavnath, in the form of Bhukund Bhairavnath, is a prominent feature of the Kedarnath landscape of today.

---

<sup>9</sup> For a summary of this position, see Dinesh Prasad Saklani, *Ancient communities of the Himalaya* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1998), 156.

<sup>10</sup> Alexis Sanderson has found a seventh century inscription in Cambodia to *Kedāreśvara*. See the following for a discussion of this point: Fleming, "The cult of the jyotirlingas and the history of Śaivite worship," 26-27.

<sup>11</sup> David Gordon White, "Bhairava," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 485.



The question of what aspects of modern Garhwali society, practice, and language should be understood as “indigenous” to the area is a complicated and sensitive question, one of those about which I am circumspect in this work. Many strands of Garhwali culture bear more linkages to central Asia than to the Indian subcontinent; others are clearly linked to north India. Depending on the context, such linkages may be either positive or negative. The relationship of early indigenous complexes of culture and practice involving Bhairavnath and the Kiratas to modern Garhwali society is one such area.<sup>12</sup>

***Bhṛigutīrtha: An Earlier Name for the Kedarnath Locale?***

There are no references to Kedarnath as a place that link conclusively to the Pandavas in early versions of the Sanskrit *Mahabharata*, though it is mentioned in connection with the Great Departure (*mahaprasthāna*) of the Pandavas for the Himalayas at the end of the epic in some late versions. On this point, the remarks of Peter Bisschop are illuminating:

The only attestation of the Kedāra in the Himālaya in the MBh is in an interpolation in the Mahāprasthānikāparvan. After MBh 17.2.1ab, according to which the Pāṇḍavas resided in the northern region and saw the Himavat, the following lines are interpolated in two manuscripts (K2 and K3; MBh 17.2.1ab 10\*): *tatas te brāhmaṇīm snātvā dr̥ṣṭvā devaṃ jale sthitam | madhyamiśam śivaṃ gatvā dr̥ṣṭvā rudraṃ mahābalaṃ | prayāganapañcake snātvā gatvā himagirim śubham | īśānaṃ tu namaskṛtya snātvā haṃsodake śubhe | devadevaṃ tu kedāraṃ dr̥ṣṭvā spr̥ṣṭvā prayatnataḥ | piṇḍaṃ dattvā vidhānena pitṛṇ devāṃś ca tarpya vai | udakaṃ vidhivat pītṛvā tato nandāṃ jagāma vai | mahāpanthānam āvṛtya himvanataṃ jagāma ha |*. Because this passage occurs only in two Kaśmiri manuscripts it is probably a relatively late interpolation. We can conclude that Kedāra is absent in the MBh's lists of pilgrimage places, and thus the sanctity of Kedāra was recognized only after the normative redaction of the MBh. In

<sup>12</sup> For a point of entry to this conversation, see M. C. Joshi, “The Khasas in the History of Uttarakhand,” in *Himalaya: Past and Present* (Almora: Shree Almora Book Depot, 1990), 193-200.

this respect it is worth noting that Kedāra is not yet mentioned in the *Purāṇapañcalakṣaṇa* either.<sup>13</sup>

The translation (mine) of this passage reads as follows:

Then they [the Pandavas], having bathed, saw the divine god Shiva, lord of the middle region, positioned in the water, and going there they saw the mighty Rudra [Shiva]. Having bathed in the five river meeting places they then went toward [i.e. in the direction of] the auspicious Himagiri mountain. Then they made reverence to Ishana [another form of Shiva] and bathed in the auspicious water of the swan. Having seen the god of gods, Kedara, making an effort they touched him. They gave *pindas* [an offering to ancestors] in the proper manner and also performed *tarpana* [a related rite] for their ancestors and for the gods. Then they drank water in the proper manner and went to Nandi [Shiva's animal vehicle]. Then having turned towards the great path they went to the place of snow.

In this passage one notices that *Kedara* is here used as a name of Shiva, and that in his *Kedara* form Shiva is situated in the midst of water, a position that recalls both the mundane meaning of the word and the descent of the Ganga into Shiva's hair. It is further apparent here that the Pandavas perform two distinctive actions: their touching of Shiva requires effort on their part, and they drink water in a special way. This passage appears to refer to a place that is already known, and about which there were already established customs. Thus, for reasons that will become clear later in this section, this passage is probably no older than the tenth century CE.

However, the Kedarnath locale may well have been important long before it was known by that name. Several scholars regard it as quite likely that the site now known as Kedarnath may have been once been better known as *Bhṛigutumṅga* (the high place of the sage Bhrigu), or *Bhṛigupatan* (*Bhrigupatan*, the falling place of Bhrigu), which is

---

<sup>13</sup> Peter Christiaan Bisschop, *Early Saivism and the Skandapurana: Sects and Centres*, Groningen Oriental studies (Groningen: E. Forsten, 2006), 181.



mentioned substantively in the *Mahabharata*.<sup>14</sup> Dabaral suggests that Bhrigupanth is another name for the Great Path, and notes that the *Mahabharata* records that Arjuna went there on his journey through the Himalayas.<sup>15</sup> William Sax, summarizing the work of historians and colonial-era travelogues, writes that “...The Path of Bhrigu above Kedarnath...was traditionally associated with suicide.”<sup>16</sup> This suicide would have taken the form of devotees jumping or falling from a precipice in or near Bhrigutunga/Bhrigupatan, and Dabaral connects this practice with the early identity of the site of Bhrigutunga.<sup>17</sup> The Kedarnath valley may possess a greater relationship to the Bhargava clan (the descendants of Bhrigu) than has hitherto been understood. In addition to the putative association of Kedarnath with Bhrigu, there is a temple to Bhrigu’s descendant, the sage Jamadagni, near Fata in the Kedarnath valley. The Brahmans of one of the villages closest to this temple possess special rights with regard to the performance of fire sacrifices for Shiva in Kedarnath.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Naithānī, *Uttarākhaṇḍ ke tīrth evaṃ mandir: Himālaya, yātrā aur paryātan sahit*, 175-176; Ḍabarāl, *Śrī Uttarākhaṇḍ Yātrā Darśan*, 32; Rāvāt, *Kedār Himālay aur Pañc Kedār*, 84.

<sup>15</sup> Ḍabarāl, *Śrī Uttarākhaṇḍ Yātrā Darśan*, 308.

<sup>16</sup> William S. Sax, *Mountain Goddess: Gender and Politics in a Himalayan Pilgrimage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 28.

<sup>17</sup> Ḍabarāl, *Śrī Uttarākhaṇḍ Yātrā Darśan*, 308.

<sup>18</sup> In addition to the putative association of Kedarnath with Bhrigu, there is a temple to Bhrigu’s descendant, the sage Jamadagni, near Fata in the Kedarnath valley. The Brahmans of one of the villages closest to this temple (the village of Ravi/Rabi) possess special rights with regard to the performance of fire sacrifices for Shiva in Kedarnath temple. However, given the often antinomian character of the Bhargavas in epic and Puranic texts, further exploration of this topic is warranted before concluding precisely what implications this linkage may have for understanding Kedarnath. Certainly the association of Shiva with fierce Himalayan deities and transgressive behavior is well established, and Goldman’s observation that “...the greatest of the Bhrigus is everywhere said to have served as the priest and chaplain of the *asuras*...” is provocative in light of the prominence of the *rakshasa* Banasur’s connections to the Kedarnath valley. However, such a topic possesses sufficient social implications for the modern-day Kedarnath valley that it really deserves a substantial study in its own right. On the character of the Bhargava clan, see Robert Goldman, *Gods, priests, and warriors : the Bhrigus of the Mahābhārata* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 5.

*Pashupatas in the Himalayas, Shaivism and Linga Worship*

Another set of data about the significance of Kedarnath as a place of Shiva in the first half of the first millennium CE. is what was happening with the worship of Shiva more generally around the subcontinent. The story of early Shaivism, in brief, is that the worship of the *linga*, and *linga*-like objects, gradually comes to be associated with the worship of the deity Shiva, and that communities begin to organize around this conjoined Shiva-*linga* axis. The Pashupatas are regarded as the first of these groups. Historians of Garhwal have observed that a Pashupata sect (Lakulisha) was active in the Himalayan regions of modern day Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand beginning during the period of the Kushana dynasties (third century BCE – second century CE), and were inscriptionally attested in Himachal by the seventh century.<sup>19</sup> Travis Smith has recently summarized the state of scholarship on early Shaivism, remarking that

...the very category of 'Śaivism' itself may well only begin properly with the popularization of the Pāśupata sect. The Pāśupatas were the earliest coherent and transregional sect of Shaivism for which we have clear evidence, emerging perhaps around the second century CE.<sup>20</sup>

Smith points out that there was a Pashupata institutional network centered in Varanasi by the seventh century.<sup>21</sup>

Dabaral reports that phallic shaped *lingas* (a hallmark of Lakulisha Pashupata iconography) are found in Garhwal that would have been established no later than the seventh century, and infers from this that *yatra* to Kedarnath from the southern regions of the subcontinent was already established prior to the eighth or ninth

<sup>19</sup> Dabarāl, *Śrī Uttārākhaṇḍ Yātrā Darśan*, 170.

<sup>20</sup> Travis LaMar Smith, "The Sacred Center and its Peripheries: Śaivism and the Vārāṇasī Sthala-Purāṇas" (Phd diss., Columbia University, 2007), 83.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

centuries.<sup>22</sup> Benjamin Fleming has also argued that in these early stages of Shaivism the identification of the *linga* as Shiva's primary form may not have been complete.<sup>23</sup> The locale of Kedarnath may have begun to be important before Shiva and the *linga* were regarded to be one and the same.

### ***The Resting Place (samādhi) of Shankara in Kedarnath***

Many accounts of Garhwali history, including those sometimes told at Kedarnath, correlate the Brahmanization of the region and the establishment of monastic linkages to Badrinath and Kedarnath with the figure of the famous philosopher Shankara.<sup>24</sup> In so doing, he is understood to have turned the character of the region in the direction of Shaivism and away from the influence of Vajrayana and Mahayana Buddhism.<sup>25</sup> Shankara was one of the most famous and influential thinkers in the history of the subcontinent, and in many circles was and is regarded as an avatar of Shiva. In addition to the profound influence on the development of Indian thought traditionally ascribed to him and his non-dualist (*advaita*) system, he is traditionally credited with the establishment of the Daśanāmi monastic order, one of the primary institutions that structure the lives, practices, and social worlds of Shaivite renunciants

---

<sup>22</sup> “*Garhvāl ke anek mandiroṃ meṃ prācīn lakulīś paśupatoṃ ke śivliṅg milte haiṅ jin meṃ liṅg ko pūrā śisnarūp dene kā prayatna dikhāi detā hai. Ye hī sab se adhik prācīn śivliṅg haiṅ aur sūcit karte haiṅ ki śaṃkārācārya se pahle hī śaivoṃ dvārā kedāryātrā vyāpak rūp se hone lagī thī.*” *Ḍabarāl, Śrī Uttarakhaṇḍ Yātrā Darśan*, 173.

<sup>23</sup> Fleming, “The cult of the jyotirlingas and the history of Śaivite worship,” 107, 115.

<sup>24</sup> There is considerably more to this story. Travis Smith suggests that the “...alliance between Lakulisha Pasupatism and Brahmanism runs deeper than most scholars have acknowledged.” Smith’s assertion has the potential to considerably nuance this narrative of the history of Garhwal. See Smith, “The Sacred Center and its Peripheries: Śaivism and the Vārāṇasī Sthala-Purāṇas,” 89.

<sup>25</sup> Madhu Jain, *The Abode of Mahashiva: Cults and Symbology in Jaunsar- Bawar in the Mid-Himalayas* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1995), 21, 53.

through to the present day. According to traditional sources, Kedarnath is one of the places where Shankara may have passed away.<sup>26</sup>

While I treat the importance of these traditional views of Shankara's life for Kedarnath in the present separately, what such views of his life index in a historical sense are the acknowledgement that in the second half of the first millennium Garhwal comes to be a well known and recognizable part of pilgrimage and Shaivite networks. Govind Chandra Pande places the dates for Shankara's life between 650 and 775 CE.<sup>27</sup> Many historians are comfortable concluding that Shankara spent time in the Himalayas, or at least that this is a strong possibility.<sup>28</sup> Though it is not strictly possible to absolutely correlate the figure of Shankara to the building of a temple at Kedarnath, Naithani does deem it possible that a temple at Kedarnath could have been built beginning roughly at this time, probably constructed by the ruling regional dynasty of the time in Garhwal-Kumaon, the Katyuris.<sup>29</sup>

A further linkage to the Shankarite tradition proceeds through the legendary sage Bhrigu, whose residence of *Bhrigutunga* (already mentioned) may have been linked to the Kedarnath region. Bhrigu is, according to Matthew Clark's assessment, the Vedic-lineage (*gotra*) for the *Jyotir-pīṭha* (Badarīkā) branch of the Daśanāmī monastic order, which covers the area in which Kedarnath is found.<sup>30</sup> The Daśanāmī monastic order is traditionally understood to have been founded by Shankara. Whatever the actual historical status of traditional understandings that Shankara passed away in Kedarnath,

<sup>26</sup> Matthew Clark, *The Daśanāmī-Saṃnyāsīs: The Integration of Ascetic Lineages into an Order* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 155.

<sup>27</sup> Govind Pande, *Life and thought of Śaṅkarācārya*, 1st ed. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1994), 52.

<sup>28</sup> Pande, *Life and thought of Śaṅkarācārya*, 346; Jonathan Bader, *Conquest of the four quarters: traditional accounts of the life of Śaṅkara* (New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 2000), 136-162. I am indebted to Jack Hawley for bringing Jonathan Bader's work to my attention.

<sup>29</sup> Naithānī, *Uttarākhaṇḍ ke tīrth evaṃ mandir: Himālaya, yātrā aur paryātan sahit*, 167.

<sup>30</sup> Clark, *The Daśanāmī-Saṃnyāsīs: The Integration of Ascetic Lineages into an Order*, 119.

it is clear that the most likely dates for the historical Shankara appear to precede immediately the time when Kedarnath began to possess institutional significance beyond the area now known as Garhwal. It is further clear that the figure of Shankara is traditionally linked to the historical time when the region of Garhwal began to be more strongly connected to the north Indian plains than it had been previously.

### ***Kedarnath in the Middle and Late Puranic Period***

In the context of the *Puranas* Kedarnath gains prominence as an established *tirtha*. This coincides with a turn towards the endeavor of *tirtha-yatra* more generally. As Vijay Nath writes, “That *tirtha*-centric ritualism gained prominence mainly from the time when the *Purāṇas* began to be composed, that is around the fourth century AD onwards, is generally acknowledged.”<sup>31</sup> Nath observes that many of the *tirthas* that receive prominent attention in Puranic literature are found “...not in the brahmanical heartland (the upper Gangetic plain), but in areas far removed from it.”<sup>32</sup> Further, he observes that, as geographically marginal subjects, many of these *tirthas* “betray a prominent regional and tribal affiliation...”<sup>33</sup> The practices that Puranic texts associate with these *tirthas* come to be syntheses of pre-existing Vedic and Brahmanical expectations with what Nath terms practices that reflect a “strong folk-orientation...”<sup>34</sup> These practices include performance of the following at *tirthas*: fire oblations, meditation, “satiation of gods, sages and ancestors”, funerary rites, ascetic practices, gifting, *puja*, listening to stories about *tirthas* to gain merit, *yatra* to the *tirtha*,

---

<sup>31</sup> Vijay Nath, *The Puranic World : environment, gender, ritual, and myth* (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2009), 202.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

<sup>33</sup> Vijay Nath, *Purāṇas and acculturation : a historico-anthropological perspective* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2001), 126.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

circumambulation, shaving of the head, chanting and reciting of verses many times, and on occasion “religious suicide”.<sup>35</sup> These developments serve as the backdrop for the institutionalization of Kedarnath, signaled in the Puranas by prominent enjoinders for the listener to perform a *tirtha-yatra* to the shrine.

***Ke Dārayāmi: Pārthiva Worship and the Manifestation of Shiva at Kedarnath***

Kedarnath is an established *yatra* destination for Puranic literature, but puranic accounts speak with multiple voices regarding the form of Shiva’s presence in Kedarnath and the cause of his manifestation there. One well-known puranic story about Kedarnath begins as an etymology: the word *Kedāra* is a shortening of Shiva’s question to Brahma: “*ke dārayāmi* (“Who shall I tear off?”). Brahma reminds Shiva that this is what Shiva said when Shiva appeared in the form of a buffalo in answer to Brahma's request for assistance.<sup>36</sup> The request of Nara and Narayana that Shiva inhabit Kedarnath in “his own form” is here nowhere to be seen.

The *Shiva Purana* also links the origin of Kedarnath to a ritual known as *pārthiva* worship. This practice involved the construction and worship of a clay object or image called a *pārthiva* (now understood to be a *linga* in modern observance of this *puja*). Fleming insightfully suggests that the case of the *parthiva* represents part of the transformation of Vedic fire worship to *linga* worship ultimately cemented by the notion of the *jyotirlinga*, the *linga* made of light.<sup>37</sup> He notes that this narrative version belongs to the *kotirudrasamhita* of the *Shiva Purana*, a part of that text which he dates to approximately the eleventh century.<sup>38</sup> Fleming also demonstrates that the system of the

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 131-132.

<sup>36</sup> *Śrīskandamahāpurāṇam*, vol. 6 (Delhi: Nag Publishers, 2003), VI, 122.32.

<sup>37</sup> Fleming, “The cult of the jyotirlingas and the history of Śaivite worship,” 162-163.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 19, 83-84.

twelve *jyotirlingas* may be regarded as a system of sacred geography, initially based in large part on a series of sites in Varanasi, which placed pre-existing Shaivite sites in different parts of medieval India into a single network. This system simultaneously (and successfully) equated and naturalized the idea that Shiva's forms as *linga*, light, and fire are identical and unitary.<sup>39</sup> Fleming concludes that this "cult of the Jyotirlingas" arose between the tenth and thirteenth centuries.<sup>40</sup>

### ***Shaivite Institutions and Practice in the Ninth to Thirteenth Centuries***

By the ninth and tenth centuries the earlier Shaivite institutional networks of the Pashupatas gave way to those of the Kalamukhas and the Shaiva Siddhantas all over the Indian subcontinent. As I noted before, historians of Garhwal recognize that there was already a Pashupata presence in Garhwal at this time. It would seem to be at this time, therefore, that linkages between Kedarnath and what is now known as South India begin to develop. Matthew Clark has observed that the Kalamukhas began to be associated with specific temples at Baḷḷigāve in Karnataka in 1019, among which a temple is notably dedicated to *Kedareshvara*.<sup>41</sup> Kalamukhas seem to have been the precursors to the Shaivite community that eventually comes to be called Virashaiva.<sup>42</sup> As Shobhi has demonstrated, the explicit label of Virashaiva, today synonymous with the term Lingayat (a designation referring to an originally anti-Brahmanical Shaivite devotional movement based in the area of modern Karnataka defined by, among other elements, the requirement that each devotee carry their own person *linga* with them on

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>41</sup> Clark, *The Daśanāmī-Saṃnyāsīs: The Integration of Ascetic Lineages into an Order*, 190.

<sup>42</sup> Smith, "The Sacred Center and its Peripheries: Śaivism and the Vārāṇasī Sthala-Purāṇas," 305.

their chest or arm), only solidified in the fourteenth century.<sup>43</sup> This datum is of particular relevance for understanding Kedarnath because the Kedarnath pujaris today are Virashaivas and both traditional and academic historical accounts of when they came to Garhwal and began to conduct their office cannot agree on a date for their arrival, even to within several centuries. The possibility of a Kalamukha-Lingayat presence in the area prior to the fourteenth century that would not have referred to itself as Virashaiva complicates this picture still further. David Lorenzen has observed that there was during this period already a tradition of Kalamukha pilgrimage from Karnataka to Kedarnath.<sup>44</sup> Bader notes that an “interesting parallel in the Viraśaiva and Śāṅkara orders is in the importance they place on connecting their traditions with a Himālayan centre; Kedāra for the former and the nearby Badarī for the latter.”<sup>45</sup>

Smith also observes that, beginning in the ninth century in both the north Indian plains and as far as Kashmir, Shaiva Siddhanta lineages were in control of many of the important Shaivite institutional frameworks in both North and South India. He notes that

...the spread of Śaiva Siddhānta appears to be linked to a novel focus among regional rulers on the construction of grand imperial temples, the guidelines for the building and ritual maintenance of which are set forth in the corpus of scriptures that form the basis of Siddhānta doctrine, the Śaiva Āgamas.<sup>46</sup>

The Mattamayura monastic lineage of the Shaiva Siddhanta in particular appears to have been important in shaping institutional Shaivism in the north Indian

---

<sup>43</sup> Shobhi, “Pre-modern Communities and Modern Histories: Narrating Viraśaiva and Lingayat Selves”, 269; Andre Padoux, “Śaivism: Viraśaivas,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 12, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference), 8043-8044.

<sup>44</sup> Lorenzen notes that the visit of a preceptor of the Somnath temple to “Kedāra in the Himalayas” is recorded in the Cintra *praśasti* of 1287 (trans. G. Buhler). See David Lorenzen, *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas: two lost Śaivite sects* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 109.

<sup>45</sup> Bader, *Conquest of the four quarters*, 251-252.

<sup>46</sup> Smith, “The Sacred Center and its Peripheries: Śaivism and the Vārāṇasī Sthala-Purāṇas,” 268.



plains. Smith attributes this development in part to the fact that the kings of the Kalacuri dynasty of tenth and eleventh century Madhya Pradesh were their patrons.<sup>47</sup> It is by this period, from the tenth to thirteenth centuries, that it is possible to conclude that Kedarnath became fully established as a place of pilgrimage with a temple and inscriptional evidence of royal patronage.<sup>48</sup>

There is considerable utility for understanding the history of Kedarnath's participation in the context of the larger history of Shaivite practices and institutions. As Nath points out, the very period that is characterized by a turn towards temple worship is also characterized by a privileging of *tirthas* on the periphery of the large and developed kingdoms of the north Indian plains and South Indian peninsula. The primary Shaivite group of this period, the Shaiva Siddhanta, took (at least at the elite level) a philosophical-ritual system as their compass that premised the ritual invocation of Shiva into the *linga* and the ritual transformation of the devotee into a form of Shiva in domestic and temple settings.<sup>49</sup> Kedarnath is, from the point of view of this system, non-standard; the *parthiva* worship with which Shiva is invited to manifest in Kedarnath in the *Shiva Purana* story may or may not have involved *linga* worship. Further, the place appears to be a place of natural power that does not necessarily require ritual activation. Bisschop observes that "The liberating power ascribed to drinking the water at Kedāra is a recurrent theme in the Puranic descriptions of

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 268-271.

<sup>48</sup> One likely possibility is that King Bhoja of Malwa may have sponsored the construction of the Kedarnath temple in celebration of a victory. See Ḍabarāl, *Śrī Uttarākhaṇḍ Yātrā Darśan*, 492-493; Naithānī, *Uttarākhaṇḍ ke tīrth evaṃ mandir: Himālaya, yātrā aur paryātan sahit*, 181-182.

<sup>49</sup> Richard Davis, *Ritual in an Oscillating Universe: Worshiping Śiva in Medieval India* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1991), 3-21.

Kedāra...”<sup>50</sup> And Kedarnath’s difficult location, and the complex story of what Shaivite groups may have been established in the region, may have meant that larger Shaivite frameworks of institution, community, and practice were not able to fully enfold the place into their worldviews. This theme endures to the present day.

### ***Nauling Kedar, “Garhwal” and the Naths***

Beginning in the twelfth century when the Katyuri dynasty ends, the region in which Kedarnath is located undergoes considerable political fragmentation; there was no single king able to serve as a patron for a particular Shaivite community. The next four centuries see the practice of *yatra* to Kedarnath and Badrinath as a journey through a series of numerous small, competing principalities. Each of these principalities often centered on its own fort, or *garh*, from whence comes the modern name for the region, *Garhwal* (the place of forts). This period ends with the consolidation of the Garhwal region into a single kingdom in the sixteenth century by Ajaypal and the bifurcation of Garhwal and Kumaon into separate, competing regions.<sup>51</sup> By this time Kedarnath already possesses a temple and is an established place of pilgrimage known all over the subcontinent.<sup>52</sup> It is at some point during this period at Kedarnath that the medieval north Indian Shaivite group, the Naths, or the Nath-Siddhas, come to have a strong presence in Garhwal and, arguably, important linkages to Kedarnath. There are several important attestations in this regard. One is architectural evidence in this period for important local principalities centered in the

---

<sup>50</sup> Bisschop, *Early Saivism and the Skandapurana*, 182.

<sup>51</sup> Maheshwar P. Joshi, *Uttaranchal (Kumaon-Garhwal) Himalaya : an essay in historical anthropology* (Almora: Shree Almora Book Depot, 1990), 63-64.

Note: Ajay Pal underwent initiation at the hands of a Nath, Satyanath, and gave him land. See Dabara, 106, 183, and White, *The Alchemical Body*, 112.

<sup>52</sup> I do *not* speculate here on which (if any) parts of the modern temple date from this period.

villages of Nala and Narayan Koti in the Kedarnath valley, just north of Guptkashi on the way to Gaurikund.<sup>53</sup> Of particular interest is that today the ruins of a small site associated with Narayan Koti are known as “the fort of the nine-*linga* Kedar” (*nauling kedār garh*). Naithani has suggested that this number nine refers to the traditional list of the nine primordial Nath gurus, in which case this modern name may be example of such Nath influence.<sup>54</sup> It is also of note in this regard that the text known as the *Kedarakhanda*, discussed in detail in Chapter Four and Appendix I, places an ashram of Gorakhnath near Gaurikund, one of the details used to fix the date of parts of this text in precisely this period. The influence of the Naths may be also seen in perceptions of the Himalayan deity Bhairavnath in Garhwal, both in song and iconography.<sup>55</sup> It is also during this period that historians of Garhwal grant the probability of a “Virashaiva” presence at Kedarnath.<sup>56</sup> However, it is not quite clear how and why this handover might have occurred. As David White notes, while Nath Siddhas are arguably “the direct heirs to the Pāsūpatas and Kāpālikas”, this places them on the opposite end of the Shaivite spectrum from the Virashaivas, arguably the heirs of the Karnataka-based Kalamukhas.<sup>57</sup> It is also not clear how developments in the Kedarnath region relate to contemporaneous histories of Shaiva Siddhanta and Kashmir Shaivism.<sup>58</sup> Shaivism may

---

<sup>53</sup> Dabarāl, *Śrī Uttarakhaṇḍ Yātrā Darśan*, 182 (on Naths in Garhwal), 519 (on Nala), 256-257 (on Narayan Koti).

<sup>54</sup> Naithānī, *Uttarakhaṇḍ ke tīrth evaṃ mandir: Himālaya, yātrā aur paryaṭan sahit*, 168, and personal communication.

<sup>55</sup> William S. Sax, *God of Justice: Ritual Healing and Social Justice in the Central Himalayas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 37-39.

<sup>56</sup> Dabarāl, *Śrī Uttarakhaṇḍ Yātrā Darśan*, 416 and following.

<sup>57</sup> David Gordon White, *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 97.

<sup>58</sup> David White points out that *rāwal*, which is the current title for the chief Virashaiva in charge of the Kedarnath *math*, may have begun as a Pashupata clan name in the eighth century and was absorbed into the social lexicon of the Naths, a medieval north Indian Shaivite group in the thirteenth century. He derives it from the Sanskrit term “lineage of the king” (*rāja-kula*). *Ibid.*, 121.

have become more temple-centered after the turn of the millennium, but as Fleming, Smith, and White all suggest, Shiva-oriented practice on the ground may have been much more fluid than institutional histories of Shaivism might suggest. And Shaivite practice may have been particularly unconstrained by institutional networks in Garhwal.

### ***Garhwal and the Coming of the British***

Garhwal occupied a differential position in the political, cultural, and economic networks of the subcontinent from the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries. On the one hand, sites such as Kedarnath were powerful attractors. On the basis of even a conservative historical assessment of the antiquity of the site, it is evident that from the thirteenth century onward Kedarnath was on the map of important *tirthas* visited by kings, renunciants, and those devotees with enough time and courage to make the journey. Important *dharmashastra* digests on the topic of pilgrimage mention Kedarnath.<sup>59</sup> Garhwal and Kumaon during these centuries became very involved in Indo-Tibetan commerce, and the transit fees from this trade and the pilgrimage activity of *yatris* were the major sources of income for the region.<sup>60</sup>

Yet at the same time the geography of the region generally and of the Kedarnath valley specifically meant that Garhwal remained on the periphery, and out of the way sites like Kedarnath to even greater extent. While important for the *yatra* trade, the Kedarnath valley was relatively unimportant for the commercial trade

---

<sup>59</sup> See entries on Kedarnath in Vīramitrodayaḥ, *Vīramitrodayaḥ Tīrtha Prakāśa*, ed. Viṣṇuprasāda Bhaṇḍārī and Mitra Misra (Benares: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1906); K. V. Rangaswami Aiyangar, *Kṛtyakalpataru of Bhatta Laksmidhara* (Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1942); Pāṇḍuraṅga Kāṇḍe, *List of tīrthas: being an off-print from MM Dr. P.V. Kane's History of dharmasāstra* (Poona [India]: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1953).

<sup>60</sup> Haripriya Rangan, *Of myths and movements: rewriting Chipko into Himalayan history* (London: Verso, 2000), 70.

between Tibet, central Asia, and north India because the primary northern pass proceeds through Badrinath, whereas Kedarnath is closed off to the north by glaciers. The topography of the Garhwal region in general enabled it to remain politically autonomous during the Mughal period. S.S. Negi writes

Sahajpal (1548 to 1580 AD). Sahajpal succeeded Ajaypal as the King of Garhwal in 1548 AD. The two inscriptions at Devprayag (one at the gate stone of Kshetrapal temple dated Shaka 1470 Samvat 1605, 1548 AD; and another on the Bell of Raghunath temple dated Shaka 1583 Samvat 1618, 1561 AD) bear the testimony to this effect. During his reign Mughal emperor Akbar is said to have sent an exploration team to search the source of Ganga in the region (Pranavanand, 1950; Blochman, 1977). Later during the period of Sahajpal, Hussain-Khan Tukrian, Mansabdar of Akbar made an unsuccessful attempt to win this Himalayan territory (Elliot and Dowson, 1867-69). Subsequently, though having maintained some kind of diplomatic intercourse with the Mughal court, the Garhwal Kingdom largely retained its independence (Srivastava, 1962).<sup>61</sup>

The political instability of these centuries, combined with Garhwal's challenging geography, served to preserve the region as an inhabitant of the periphery of the subcontinent. As I mentioned in the previous section, this relative isolation may have served to insulate the region from fully embracing developments such as the final consolidation of Shiva's primary form through the cult of the *jyotirlinga* that Fleming correlates with Shaivite institutions regnant in other parts of north India. It also means that traditional accounts of Kedarnath, in contradistinction to north Indian sites such as Braj or Somnath, do not include a narrative of destruction or the lapse of tradition associated with periods of Muslim rule.

The British were able to use the pretext of rescue from the occupation of Garhwal and Kumaon, beginning in Kumaon in 1790 by the Gurkha kings of Nepal, to

---

<sup>61</sup> S. S. Negi, "Back and the Beyond: Races, Dynasties, Rulers, Socio-cultural Setup," in *Garhwal Himalaya: Nature, Culture and Society*, ed. O. P. Kandari and O. P. Gusain (Srinagar, Garhwal: TransMedia, 2001), 17.

develop a foothold in a region that was of great political importance (because of the routes to central Asia and Russia) and economic potential (because of the cross-border Indo-Tibetan commerce and lucrative mineral mines). After defeating the Gurkhas, in 1815 the British annexed Kumaon and part of Garhwal, leaving what is now known as Tehri Garhwal in the hands of the Garhwali king Sudarshan Shah, who subsequently established the capitol of his kingdom in the town of Tehri.<sup>62</sup> The British struck a series of treaties with the Tehri court. Through these treaties, the British made sure that the *parganas* of Nagpur (containing Kedarnath) and Painkhanda (containing Badrinath) became part of British Garhwal rather than Tehri Garhwal.<sup>63</sup> Garhwal's geographic autonomy from Mughal rule notwithstanding, Garhwali political administration incorporated Mughal administrative patterns such as the *pargana-patti* system of land division and taxation that served as the basis for this division.<sup>64</sup>

This division of Tehri Garhwal and British Garhwal is, from a Kedarnath-centric point of view, quite notable. The Kedarnath valley marks the border between these two areas. Because of unclear language in the original treaty, for almost a century there were a series of disputes between the Tehri court and the British about the specific location of the border. In some versions of the treaty the Mandakini river had been

---

<sup>62</sup> Sudarshan Shah was a king of the Pal (Parmar) dynasty whose rule in Garhwal was consolidated by Ajay Pal. At a certain point in the history of this dynasty the kings assumed the title of Shah. See Ajay Singh Rawat, *Garhwal Himalaya: A Study in Historical Perspective* (New Delhi: Indus, 2002), 36.

<sup>63</sup> India Office, "Appointment of a Chief Priest, or Naib Rawal, at the temple of Badrinath in British Garhwal," October 1895, Judicial and Public Annual Files 1901-1999. IOR/L/PJ/6/408, India Office Library; George William Traill, "Report on the districts of Kumaon and Garhwal by the Commissioner, George William Traill (with associated correspondence)," September 1823, Records of the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India 1784-1858. IOR/F/4/828/21951, India Office Library; Crown Representative's Records: Political Department Records, "Tehri-Garhwal Darbar's claim for the Kedarnath and Badrinath shrines," 1936, IOR/R/1/1/2951, India Office Library; Saklani, *Ancient communities of the Himalaya*, 23-48.

<sup>64</sup> On the details of this fairly common development in the history of land ownership and taxation in South Asia, see S. Gordon, "Kinship and pargana in eighteenth century Khandesh," *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 22 (December 1985): 83.

taken as the border, which would have meant that everything on the western side of the Mandakini, including much of the Kedarnath valley, belonged to Tehri Garhwal. However, according to the British, all of *pargana* Nagpur, the district sub-division that contained the site of Kedarnath, was intended to be part of British Garhwal.<sup>65</sup> The general tenor of this division was to place the commercially and politically important regions of Kedarnath and Badrinath under British rule while remanding the less significant and far more difficult to control western side of Garhwal to the charge of the local ruler. The British enacted the division according to their own view, and the Kedarnath valley and the road from Rudraprayag into the Kedarnath valley became the responsibility of the British. The legacy of this division is evident today. The state government, through the organ of the Badri-Kedar Temple Committee, today regulates both Badrinath and Kedarnath, and does not do so, to the best of my knowledge, for the other half of the Uttarakhand Char Dham, the sites of Yamunotri and Gangotri. These sites are, not coincidentally, located in Tehri Garhwal.

### ***Kedarnath during the Colonial Period***

To a certain extent it is possible to understand the implications of British rule in eastern Garhwal for the Kedarnath area with reference to the larger context of such effects throughout the subcontinent. It is generally acknowledged that among the many effects of the period of British involvement and rule in India were changes in the systems of patronage and authority that surround the administration of Hindu places of pilgrimage. Dube's work on the progressive restructuring of these structures through the colonial and postcolonial periods is perhaps the most detailed account of

---

<sup>65</sup> Atul Saklani, *History of a Himalayan Princely State: Change, Conflicts, and Awakening. (An Interpretative History of Princely State of Tehri Garhwal, U.P) (A.D. 1815-1949 A.D.)*, 23-48.

these effects thus far.<sup>66</sup> There were also significant changes in the practice, customs, and understandings of pilgrimage during this time. Anand Yang has summarized the general changes in the patterns and characters of Hindu pilgrimage places that occurred during the colonial period in India. He writes (in the context of a study on Gangetic Bihar)

The dramatic increase in numbers of melas and pilgrims “on the road” and the emergence of Dashara as a major festival in the colonial era both point to changes in Hindu religious practices and in the composition and role of participants in these practices. As Bayly has observed, the numbers converging on pilgrimage sites “may have trebled” each year between 1780 and 1820...”<sup>67</sup>

Much of this change was the result of British action. As they did in many other important pilgrimage places, the British began almost immediately to involve themselves in the administration and upkeep of the roads to Kedarnath and Badrinath, and the Religious Endowments Act of 1863 paved the way for the British government to assume a more explicit role in the management and administration of religious institutions.<sup>68</sup> In 1939 this role became applicable to the Garhwal region through the legal constitution of the Badrinath Temple Committee as an amendment of the Religious Endowments Act. Kedarnath was folded in a few years later to form the Badri-Kedar Temple Committee. By 1948 the Committee had assumed most of its present form.<sup>69</sup> It was probably at about this time that the current administrative situation at Kedarnath (detailed later in this chapter and in chapter six) assumed something close

---

<sup>66</sup> Dube, *Divine Affairs*.

<sup>67</sup> Anand A. Yang, *Bazaar India: markets, society, and the colonial state in Gangetic Bihar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 134.

<sup>68</sup> Tahir Mahmood, “Religion, Law, and Judiciary in Modern India,” *Brigham Young University Law Review* 2006, no. 3 (2006): 762.

<sup>69</sup> Naithānī, *Uttarākhaṇḍ ke tīrth evaṃ mandir: Himālaya, yātrā aur paryāṭan sahit*, 173.



to its current structure. The Badri-Kedar Temple Committee today is a governmental organization belonging to the Uttarakhand state government that generates its own revenue and has a board comprised of selected and elected officials, some of whom must be from particular regions of Garhwal. Today it manages the Badrinath and Kedarnath temples, along with a host of ancillary sites. It also funds and manages several educational charitable institutions, such as Sanskrit and Ayurvedic colleges in the Kedarnath valley.

This period also saw the expansion and perhaps systematization of two related systems of land revenue connected to Kedarnath and other important temples in Garhwal: *gūmṭh* (*gunth*) and *sadāvart* (*sadavart*). *Gunth* refers to lands whose product belongs to the temple as the result of a donation, usually from a king. *Sadavart* “is the term applied to an endowment provided by the land revenue of assigned villages, originally for the purposes of providing with food indigent pilgrims visiting the shrines of Kedarnath and Badrinath.”<sup>70</sup> In the nineteenth century the British broadened the usages of these funds to include general public works (roads, dispensaries) along the pilgrimage routes.<sup>71</sup>

Yang also observes that “Official declarations regarding noninterference in religious matters notwithstanding, as recent scholarship shows the colonial state ‘penetrated Hindu religious institutions, both temples and *maths* (monasteries), deeply and systematically.”<sup>72</sup> Corollary to broader changes in the nature and mechanisms of the public sphere in colonial India, Yang observes that pilgrimage centers embarked on new forms of advertisement. Developments in printing saw the marketing of

---

<sup>70</sup> H. G. Walton, *British Garhwal. A Gazetteer* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1994), 104.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Yang, *Bazaar India: markets, society, and the colonial state in Gangetic Bihar*, 134.

a revised form of the ancient Sanskrit genre of writings known as *mahatmya*, “a laud, a hymn of praise, a glorification...By the early twentieth century, this kind of “praise-literature” extolling the virtues of sacred centers was widely available in pamphlet form. Moreover, much of this literature was rendered partly or completely into vernacular languages....”<sup>73</sup>

Increased number of pilgrims also meant that the endeavor of *tirtha-yatra* began to change from an elite and renunciant practice to include farmers and people at lower social and economic levels more generally.<sup>74</sup> Thus, this period saw the beginnings of the transformation of the Uttarakhand Himalayas into series of destinations for mass pilgrimage. James Lochtefeld has observed that it was the creation of the Upper Ganges canal in the 1850s, followed by the inclusion of Haridwar on the Oudh and Rohilkhand Railway that would transform Haridwar in a pilgrimage place of year-round importance.<sup>75</sup> Rishikesh, just northeast of Haridwar, is the current point of departure for most groups undertaking the Uttarakhand Char Dham Yatra. It is at this point in time that pilgrimage to the Uttarakhand Himalayas begins to occupy the double space of mass pilgrimage and perilous undertaking from which it now continues to emerge. Significantly, building on an observation by Ashish Nandy on nineteenth centuries views of the contested practice of *sati*, Yang observes that the act of pilgrimage, “May have gained in status and currency over the course of the colonial era...” and “may well have represented a way of expressing “conformity to older norms at a time when these norms had become shaky within.””<sup>76</sup>

---

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>75</sup> “Lochtefeld, James, “Haridvara, Haradwara, Gangadwara: the construction of identity and meaning in a Hindu pilgrimage place” (Phd diss., Columbia University, 1992), 156-159.

<sup>76</sup> Yang, *Bazaar India: markets, society, and the colonial state in Gangetic Bihar*, 138-139; Ashis Nandy, *At the edge of psychology : essays in politics and culture* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), 7. Also on this point in the context of the history of the *Kumbha Mela*, see Kama MacLean, “Making the Colonial State Work for You:

Numbering among this increased flow of pilgrims to Kedarnath were Europeans who wrote about their visits. British civil servant and Sanskritist John Muir visited Kedarnath on a trip from Mussoorie in 1853, along with an entourage of forty porters. He records that there were already *dharamshalas* constructed at certain points on the journey (such as at Bhilangana, on the old pilgrim route between Uttarkashi and Triyugi Narayan). He was particularly struck by the degree to which *yatris* were affected by “cold, fatigue, hunger, and disease”. This observation is unsurprising given that one of the main goals of the British in their administration of British Garhwal was the creation of a user-friendly road system to provide access to Kedarnath and Badrinath and the amelioration of the outbreak of diseases generated from the number of *yatris* and the conditions of the journey. He wrote this of his journey to Kedarnath:

After traversing the bare bleak plain behind the temple for a short distance, we came to the foot of an immense and very lofty moraine, several hundred feet high, the slope of which is strewn with large blocks of stone, while the summit is covered with extensive patches of snow. Masses of ice are visible here and there below the stones, from which it appears probable that underneath, the whole is a vast ice-mountain. Beyond this moraine, at the top of the valley, there are visible several beds of ice or snow, in the hollows of the mountain, which may be the top of the glacier; but though I walked for some distance along the surface of the snow-field above described, I did not reach any pure glacier-ice unencumbered by moraine. At the very head of the valley the peak to the extreme left rises in a conical shape: it is succeeded to the right by a precipitous rock, so steep as to retain very little snow on its sides, and resembling somewhat one of the aiguilles of Mont Blanc though not so pointed. Further to the right, the range exhibits a great hollow ravine filled with ice or snow, and a series of rocks and peaks more or less snow-capped. The effect of the whole as seen from a point a little below the temple, is grand and wild; and yet I must confess to some disappointment. A great deal of the face of the range consists of black rock with a mere sprinkling of snow. I should think the view is greatly inferior to that of Mont Blanc or Monte Rosa, as seen from Servoz or the Riffelberg respectively, and many prospects in

the Swiss Alps. But as it is eleven years since I have visited Switzerland, it is difficult to compare these scenes together, after so long an interval.

The cold was very severe at Kedarnath. Water froze in a tumbler inside of my tent during the night, and the whole plain around, which had been moist and plashy the evening before, from the streamlets by which it is intersected, was in the morning hard and dry from the frost. From Kedarnath we returned to Goureekoond, and thence back to the junction of the Mundakinee and Julmul streams, - from which our course turned to the S.E. down the valley traversed by those two united rivers. Our first halt in the valley was at Khurhurkotee, the second at Musta.<sup>77</sup>

Of note in this passage is the degree to which Muir focuses on the details of the natural environment and his lack of concern for the behavior of *yatris* in Kedarnath itself or what goes on inside the temple. It is quite possible that he was not allowed to enter the temple. A modern-day anecdotal account relates that once when a British collector came to Kedarnath he wished to take *darshan* but was not allowed entry. Instead, a platform was constructed outside the temple on which he could stand and see directly into the inner sanctum.

We see an account of a very different sort from Sister Nivedita, born Margaret Noble, “the young Irish disciple of the nineteenth-century Hindu reformist and protonationalist Swami Vivekananda.”<sup>78</sup> Nivedita’s account (published in 1928), comprising approximately half of an eighty-six page account of her journey to Kedarnath and Badrinath, blends her wonder at the natural environment, her orientalist wonder at the ancient richness of Indic pilgrimage traditions, her protonationalist sentiments, and a scholarly interest in the history of Indian religions.<sup>79</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> John Muir, *Notes of a Trip to Kedarnath and Other Parts of the Snowy Range of the Himalayas in the Autumn of 1853. with Some Account of a Journey from Agra to Bombay* (Edinburgh: Printed for private circulation, 1855), 16-18.

<sup>78</sup> Srirupa Roy, ““A Symbol of Freedom”: The Indian Flag and the Transformations of Nationalism, 1906-2002,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 65, no. 3 (August 2006): 498.

<sup>79</sup> Sister Nivedita, *Kedar Nath & Badri Narayan: (a Pilgrim's Diary)*, 2nd ed. (Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1928).

She consistently makes assertions regarding the pre- and post-Shankarite nature of the Saivite sites she sees on her journey, and makes numerous observations regarding the traces of Buddhist presence in Garhwal left in the archaeological record of the temples she visits.<sup>80</sup> She marvels at the number of *yatris*, and especially on how many of them are women. She writes “Who uttered a doubt that India had a place and a life for women? Certainly none who had ever seen a pilgrimage.”<sup>81</sup> In her vibrant and lengthy description of her actual time in Kedarnath, she offers a substantial description of precisely the point omitted by Muir:

Suddenly we were called to see the *arati*. Darkness had fallen but the mists were gone, and the stars and the snows were clear and bright. Lights were blazing and bells clanging within the temple and we stood without, amongst the watching people. As the lights ceased to swing and the *arati* ended, a shout of rapture went up from the waiting crowd. Then the cry went out to clear the road, and the rush of the pilgrims up the steep steps began. What a sight was this! On and on, up and up, they came, crowding, breathless, almost struggling, in their mad anxiety to enter the shrine, reach the image, and at last, by way or worship, to bend forward and touch with the heart, the sacred point of the mountain! For this half-embrace is what the worship consists of at Kedar Nath... to stand there, and watch the pilgrims streaming in. It seemed as if all India lay stretched before One, and Kedar Nath were its apex, while from all parts everywhere, by every road, one could see the people streaming onward, battling forward climbing their way up all for what? – for nothing else than to touch God!<sup>82</sup>

This embrace of the *linga*, as we shall see later in this introduction, is still mentioned in Kedarnath and occasionally performed, but the massaging of the *linga* with *ghi* (clarified butter) has to great extent replaced it. However, Sister Nivedita poignantly expresses here the moment of intimacy with the mountainous image and the effort to touch that remain for many the centerpiece of what is important about journey to Kedarnath.

---

<sup>80</sup> See her observations about Agastmuni, Nala, and Ukhimath, respectively: *Ibid.*, 29, 33, 48.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

Far and away the most well-known accounts of Garhwal written in English during the colonial period are the observations of the gazetteer Edwin T. Atkinson in his *Himalayan Gazetteer*, first published in 1881.<sup>83</sup> H.G. Walton revised and excerpted the parts of this work relevant to Garhwal in his *British Garhwal: A Gazetteer*, first published in 1910.<sup>84</sup> Both of these works are readily available in Uttarakhand today, and Atkinson's multi-volume work exists in Hindi translation. Gazetteers and travelogues were part of both colonial and indigenous discourses on the activity of *yatra* during time of British rule in India.<sup>85</sup> Walton (quoting and adding to Atkinson) wrote about Kedarnath:

...The pilgrims number 50,000 or 60,000 yearly and come from all parts of India. Formerly devotees used to immolate themselves from the Bhairab Jhap near the temple of Kedarnath, and to the present day an occasional enthusiast wanders blindly up the eternal snows seeking the heaven of the gods. "A popular belief exists that Shiva frequently makes himself visible on the crest of the great peak and that the wreaths of smoke seen there from below are not the result of whirlwinds gathering up the finer particles of snow, but the smoke of sacrifice made by some highly favoured follower..."<sup>86</sup>

For many, the "upper *pattis* of Nagpur and Painkhanda" are understood to be the assembly place of gods, and that the natural sounds of trees and avalanches are the sounds of their activities. The full sensory impact of the region is olfactory as well:

The sweet smelling flowers and other vegetation found near the limits of eternal snow frequently overpower the traveler and combined with the rarefaction of the air cause a faintness which may be attributed to superhuman powers.

---

<sup>83</sup> Edwin Atkinson, *The Himalayan gazetteer, or, The Himalayan districts of the North Western Province of India*, [Complete and unabridged]. (New Delhi: Low Price Publications, 2002); for a lesser known work from the same era see E. Oakley, *Holy Himalaya: The Religion, Traditions and Scenery of a Himalayan Province (Kumaon and Garhwál)* (Gurgaon, India: Published by Vipin Jain for Ltd. Editions Book Club, 1991).

<sup>84</sup> Walton, *British Garhwal. A Gazetteer*.

<sup>85</sup> Yang, *Bazaar India: markets, society, and the colonial state in Gangetic Bihar*, 137.

<sup>86</sup> Walton, *British Garhwal. A Gazetteer*, 57.

Walton's observations paint a fairly detailed picture of how distinctive and difficult travel to Garhwal was for visitors from the plains. These remarks both underscore the ways in which the physical environment signifies the presence of Shiva in the region beyond his temple form, and highlight the characteristic overemphasis colonial discourses often gave to forms of religious practice they found to be particularly challenging. Dube's account of missionary and governmental discourses on the famous *Rath-yatra* procession of Jagannath in Puri (famously and problematically the origin of the English word *juggernaut*) well critiques this pattern.<sup>87</sup>

In addition to the differences of weather and daily routine necessitated by such a journey, Walton notes that "To have reached the temple is itself no small sign of favour, for the god is said to turn back on the road those with whom he is displeased. A pilgrimage attended with such obvious benefits is naturally popular." A separate passage offers a version of the traditional origins of Kedarnath and its administration:

Dedicated to Sadashiu, the invisible form of Shiva, who fleeing from the Pandavas took refuge here in the form of a buffalo, and finding himself hard pressed dived into the ground, leaving his hinder parts on the surface; these are still an object of adoration. The remaining portions of the god are worshipped at four other places along the Himalayan Chain; the arms (*bahu*) at Tungnath; the face (*mukh*) at Rudranath; the belly (*nabhi*) at Madhmaheswar, and the hair (*jata*) and head at Kalpeswar. These together form the "Panch Kedar," the pilgrimage to which places in succession is a great ambition of the Hindu devotee. The priests officiating at Kedar, Guptkashi, Ukhimath, and Madmaheswar belong to the establishment of the *math* at Ukhimath, the head of which is the Rawal of Kedarnath. They are *jangam gosains* (*lingaits*) of the Birseb sect. At the other temps – Tungnath, Trijugi, and Kalimath, the priests are local hillmen under the control of the Rawal.<sup>88</sup>

A description of the practices of *yatris* in Kedarnath confirms the account of Sister Nivedita and adds a detail:

---

<sup>87</sup> Dube, *Divine Affairs*, 128-129.

<sup>88</sup> Walton, *British Garhwal. A Gazetteer*, 173.

The ceremonies to be observed by the pilgrims are very simple, consisting of a few prostrations, an embrace of the linga and the hearing of a short ritual and discourse from the officiating priest. The pilgrim carries away in copper jars from the sacred pool some water which is highly charged with iron and sulphur...<sup>89</sup>

As some of the passages discussed in Chapter Four show in detail, many of the water sources in the locale of Kedarnath are considered especially powerful, in some cases even alchemically so. I surmise that this last detail may refer to such a source. Finally, while he did not to my knowledge write about his journey, Walter Yeeling Evans Wentz, noted early scholar of Celtic religions and Tibetan Buddhism also paid a visit to Kedarnath; I found an entry recording his visit in one of the record books (*bahis, chopra*) maintained by Kedarnath pilgrimage priests on the visits of their patrons.

These three accounts of Muir, Nivedita, and Walton/Atkinson delineate in complementary ways important aspects of *yatra* to Kedarnath during the colonial period. Muir's account focuses on the scenic character of the place and well characterizes European ideas about the scenic qualities of mountain landscapes whose legacies remain apparent today in the aesthetics and practices of pilgrimage tourism in the Himalayas. Nivedita perceptively and eloquently briefs the (by the colonial period) venerable and powerful significance of Himalayan *yatra* and the intimacy and high affect to be found in a visit to Kedarnath. Walton and Atkinson highlight the ways in which the cultural and the physical fuse for the *yatri* proceeding through the Kedarnath valley. They further illustrate the British colonial scholasticism that produced both careful Indological knowledge (historians make abundance use of Atkinson's observations) and analytic misrepresentation (the highlighting of Bhairab Jhap).

---

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 176.



### *Seven Centuries in Kedarnath*

There are several important conclusions to be drawn regarding the Kedarnath of the thirteenth to early twentieth century. First, it is clear that access to the region, the demographics of the *yatri* population, and the character of *tirtha-yatra* shifted dramatically. Second, it may be observed that the importance of drinking water in and around Kedarnath is joined by the practice of embracing the *linga* (*ālīṅgan karnā*). Older Kedarnath locals told me that this was the practice earlier in the twentieth century when the current metal frame of the *linga* had not been installed and there was a concave depression with a few steps leading down to the *linga* in the inner sanctum of the temple, which would have made it physically easier to perform an embrace or the touching of one's limbs to the *linga*. The current practice most emphasized at Kedarnath is the anointing and massaging of the *linga* with *ghi*, the *ghī malīs* (*ghi malish*).<sup>90</sup> I would like to stress that I have no evidence that would suggest that these practices were *not* done in earlier times, simply that they were not recorded anywhere of which I am aware.

The nature of the administration of the site also changed. However, the details of this shift remain opaque. It is evident that the roots of the Badri Kedar Temple Committee spring from the creation and administration of British Garhwal, and that this development curtailed the authority of the Virashaivas in the Kedarnath/Ukhimath area in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is clear that the Tehri court had a traditional relationship with Kedarnath and Badrinath that

---

<sup>90</sup> There are at least four ways of referring to this specific act in Hindi that occupy to certain extent different semantic registers: *ghī malīs* (*ghi* massage), *ghī lepan* (*ghi* anointing, also spoken as *ghī lep*), *ghṛt lepan* (*ghi* anointing, a more Sanskritic usage). I employ *ghi malish* as the default term because it is the term I most often heard.

was already established by the early nineteenth century. However, as I noted before it is decidedly unclear when Kedarnath came to be associated with Virashaiva leadership, and the antiquity of the relationship between the Kedarnath *tirth purohit* lineages and the site is also unclear. There are many records regarding these matters to be found with the Virashaiva *math* in Ukhimath, the records of the Kedarnath *tirth purohits*, and the private library and records of the Tehri court that I have not examined, or even seen. Many of the reasons for this lacuna are practical: my research agenda did not permit the performance of such work, which is extraordinarily time intensive. Second, I am fairly certain that, for reasons stated in the introduction, I would not have been able to write about much of what I found. This fact is, from the point of view of a research agenda, a disincentive.

The final observation I wish to draw in this section pushes against some of the conventional wisdom on the transformation of pilgrimage during the colonial period I have just discussed. D.R Purohit, noted scholar of Garhwali folklore and Western dramaturgy at Garhwal Srinagar University, once remarked to me that the Kedarnath valley had preserved some extremely pure forms of Garhwali culture because of its geographic isolation as a valley that ended in a wall of glaciers. I find this insight useful for thinking about Kedarnath in many ways. While the approach to Kedarnath and the *yatri* demographic changed dramatically during the colonial period, I am not convinced that daily activity and practice in Kedarnath itself changed to the same extent.

Kedarnath *tirth purohits* of older generations have told me that in the time of their parents and grandparents almost no one even stayed in Kedarnath overnight. *Tirth purohits* would stage their patrons' visits to the temple as day trips from lower down in

the valley, and only the most basic foods and supplies were available. I think that the geographical isolation of the site may have meant that the basic character of the site, as an inaccessible and powerful abode of Shiva located in a physical environment charged with power and divine presence, changed less than in other cases (such as the Kumbha Mela, or Jagannath Puri) located in more central locations.

### ***After Independence and Into the Present***

The number of visitors to this difficult to reach region continued to rise steadily in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A British commissioner, George William Traill, estimated that in 1820 Badrinath received approximately seven to ten thousand visitors, and a British general estimated approximately fifty thousand in 1839.<sup>91</sup> Dabaral writes that in the present (the publication date of his history is 1961) approximately 100,000 people a year were going to Badrinath.<sup>92</sup> In recent decades the number of visitors to Badrinath has oscillated between approximately two to three times the number of visitors to Kedarnath. It is therefore a safe assumption that Kedarnath also received fewer visitors in the nineteenth century than Badrinath, thus giving us an idea of how to apply these numbers. The development of motor roads in the Kedarnath valley received special attention as a result of the Sino-Indian border conflict in the 1960s. By the beginning of the sixties, the motor road had reached Guptkashi.<sup>93</sup>

The increased ease of access yielded by the extension of motorable roads and attendant infrastructure saw the continued increase in the numbers of *yatris*

---

<sup>91</sup> Dabarāl, *Śrī Uttarākhaṇḍ Yātrā Darśan*, 573-575.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 576.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 214, 241.

journeying to Kedarnath each year. The following table is from a website maintained by the Badri-Kedar Temple Committee.<sup>94</sup>

Year	Badrinath	Kedarnath
1987	2,71,850	87,629
1988	3,72,772	1,37,095
1989	3,70,820	1,15,081
1990	3,62,757	1,17,774
1991	3,55,772	1,18,750
1992	4,12,597	1,41,704
1993	4,76,523	1,18,659
1994	3,47,415	1,04,639
1995	4,61,435	1,05,160
1996	4,65,992	1,05,693
1997	3,61,313	60,500
1998	3,40,510	82,000
1999	3,40,100	80,090
2000	7,35,200	2,15,270
2001	4,22,647	1,19,980
2002	4,48,517	1,69,217
2003	5,80,913	2,80,243
2004	4,93,914	2,74,489
2005	5,66,524	3,90,156
2006	7,41,256	4,85,464
2007	9,01,262	5,57,923
2008	9,11,262	4,70,048
2009	9,16,925	4,03,636

Figure 2.3 Visitors to Badrinath and Kedarnath by year.

The number of visitors to Kedarnath takes a fairly sharp jump in 2000, the year that Uttarakhand (first as Uttaranchal) became its own state, separate from Uttar Pradesh. I find the correlation of statehood and a jump in the *yatri* population to be notable, but without exception all those whom I asked during my fieldwork did not view this as a significant linkage. This question deserves further inquiry.

<sup>94</sup> "Shri Badrinath - Shri Kedarnath Temple Committee," <http://www.badarikedar.org/content-kedar.aspx?id=9,1/14/2010>.

During my fieldwork I was often reminded that, had I come to Kedarnath a decade or two earlier, I would have seen a much different set of circumstances, much closer to traditional views of how visits to *tirthas* and the administration of a *tirtha* are supposed to happen. Older *tirth purohits* would often begin interviews and conversations with me with their memories of earlier decades and the stories of parents and grandparents about how Kedarnath used to be. Essentially, beginning roughly a century and a half ago, Kedarnath has transformed from a physically and supernaturally dangerous place that no outsider could reach, stay the night, or obtain and cook food in without the guidance of a local *tirth purohit* to a place where the utilization of a *tirth purohit* for any of these services is optional. Further, when the village was less developed (even only decades ago), Kedarnath at night was in many respects a fearful place, with most locals unwilling to leave the far smaller enclosure of the built environment of the village during the night for fear that they would attract malevolent supernatural attention.

In earlier decades the *tirth-purohit-yajman* relationship of Kedarnath was, according to these memories (and probably to large extent historically as well), a far more intimate and personalized relationship in which the *yatri/yajman* depended on the *tirth purohit* for guidance, hospitality, education about Kedarnath, the performance of all ritual needs, and food. The *tirth purohit*, in accordance with his traditional identity and rights (*adhikār*) was happy to provide these services in unstinting fashion. The massive increase in the number of *yatris* over the last decade reveals the cracks in the system, especially during the high season. This overburdening of the system and the correspondent social, economic, and cultural changes, which I discuss in detail in

Chapter Six, are recent enough that people are still working out how they should be addressed.

As I indicated before, the arc of the history of Kedarnath demonstrates that a distinctive fluidity among the site's identities (as a place of power, an abode of Shiva and as an element of significant and efficacious Himalayan topography) has itself been a stable element in the character of Kedarnath for well over a millennium. Further, its location has meant that it has been to some extent shielded from the effects of many of the political and cultural changes that define much of the history of the Indian subcontinent. The task of this work is to understand, given this historical arc of the site, how it feels and what means to be in this site today, in the contexts of the rapid growth of pilgrimage tourism and globalization that mark the India of the last several decades of Indian life. A final preliminary step remains before this inquiry can begin in earnest: an overview of the site as it exists today.

### **Present-day Kedarnath: People**

Much of what I learned during my dissertation fieldwork had to do with the social organization of Kedarnath and how that organization related to the Kedarnath valley system more generally. In discussing this social organization I often employ a binary from the area: local and non-local. *Local* is often used as a Hindi word, usually as an adjective, e.g. a local man (*ek local ādmī*). Non-locals in Kedarnath are generally those who come on *yatra*, a polysemic term that subsumes religious travel, pilgrimage, journey, and sightseeing. If their goals are explicitly nature oriented (trekking, sightseeing) rather than devotional, an assumption much easier to make if the non-locals in question are Westerners or Bengalis fitted out with trekking gear, then non-

locals may be referred to as tourists (*paryatak-log*). It is important to note that there are also others present in Kedarnath and the Kedarnath valley whom this binary does not adequately capture: Nepalis who have become long-term residents of the area, Nepalis who come as porters for the pilgrimage season, street cleaners and building contractors who have come up from the plains and may be Harijans and Muslims.

I present, as I experienced it to be, the *local-yatri* binary as the normative frame for thinking about social organization and interactions in Kedarnath. For rhetorical clarity, I refer to all those who come to the area as visitors as *yatris* unless there is a particular example where that designation would clearly not apply. Because Kedarnath is in important ways a temporary community constituted by the difficulty and prestige of physically living in Kedarnath, it is easier to move out of the non-local category in Kedarnath than it would be in a typical Garhwali village setting. For Bhupendra becoming a Kedarnath local was straightforward; he was already a local in the Kedarnath valley and now he had employment in Kedarnath for the season as my research assistant. I think that I succeeded in moving myself out of the non-local category to some extent, but did not (nor do I think would it be possible) fully become “local”. At the end of the 2007 season I was enough of a “local” to help find and negotiate lodging for *yatris* who had asked me for assistance. When I use the term *local* in this dissertation, it means a resident of the Kedarnath valley system. Sometimes, it might mean something more specific, such a resident of the Kedarnath valley system who works in Kedarnath.

## Locals

Local is a broad grouping. There are numerous sub-groups. Kedarnath pilgrimage priests (*tirth purohits*) live in roughly three areas in the Kedarnath valley. The first is the Bamsu area just south of Guptkashi, the area that traditionally belongs to a demon (*rakshasa*) devotee of Shiva named Banasur.<sup>95</sup> The second is from just north of Guptkashi up to Fata (from Nala to Fata on the map, including villages not on the map such as Khāt and Rudrapur). Fata comprises the high water mark for how far north into the Kedarnath valley the *tirth purohit* families settled. Between Fata and Gaurikund there are no *tirth purohit* villages and there is a marked change in family names and village deities. This Fata-Gaurikund region belongs, in a broad sense, to Triyugi Narayan, a form of Vishnu who resides in Triyugi Narayan (Narayan of the Three Ages, see map).<sup>96</sup> The Kedarnath *tirth purohits* count themselves as descended from an original group of three hundred and sixty families, or the “three-sixty”.<sup>97</sup> Semwal, Bagwari, Shukla, Avasthi, Posti, Tiwari, Shastri, Lalmohariya, Jugran, Kapravan, Purohit, Kotiyal,

---

<sup>95</sup>The figure of Banasur in the Kedarnath is worthy of research in his own regard. A common story in the area is told of his daughter, Usha, who dreamed of a man she did not know and fell in love with him. She related her dream to her friend, Citralekha, who had the ability to create portraits based on verbal descriptions. It was revealed that Usha had fallen in love with Aniruddh, the grandson of Krishna. Usha kidnaps Aniruddh and marries him. Krishna goes to war with Banasur, and Shiva is forced to make peace. In Ukhimath, the far and away most ancient (judging by how much lower the floor is in that part of the complex) part of the temple complex is the marriage place (*vivāh-sthal*) of Usha and Aniruddh. In Lamgaundi, in the Bamsu area that belongs to Banasur, there is a small shrine where the image of Aniruddh is worshipped.

<sup>96</sup> As I discovered only near the end of my fieldwork, it is an area with its own separate sub-culture and performance traditions. I learned that the visit of the Pandavas to Kedarnath is mentioned in the corpus of songs sung during the Triyugi Narayan *mela*, and collected a few examples, but did not have time to investigate them thoroughly. Further, there are a several villages in this region whose connections to the Nath tradition (in the form of worshipping Gorakhnath or Matsyendranath as village deities) I plan to investigate.

<sup>97</sup> I have not explored in any depth the historical origins of the “three-hundred and sixty”; *tirth purohit* accounts of this history state that centuries ago most of the important shrines in the Kedarnath valley were originally under the control of the three hundred and sixty original families. This would be a topic worthy of investigation; indeed it would be an important part of a history of the Kedarnath valley, a project I am contemplating, and in fact William Sax once suggested to me that I pursue. However, there are several issues that require further consideration. The first is whether the available sources would be adequate to the task, and the second are the implications of publishing the results.



Vajpayi, and Trivedi are their main family names. Different families (and sub-divisions within families) maintain relationships with specific groups of *yatris* (constituted both by a combination of region, usually a north Indian region, and caste group). Particular *tirth purohit* families have historical relationships with specific Marwari families, the greater Allahabad area, a particular district in Rajasthan, groups from Himachal or Jammu-Kashmir. However, since these are historical relationships the same Marwari family might live in Mumbai or Calcutta, or those from the Alwar district in Rajasthan might reside in Patna or Pune.

Kedarnath valley lineage priests (*kul purohits*) are Brahmans who function as the family priests for residents of the Kedarnath valley. They are a different group, with family names such as Semwal (there are also Semwal *tirth purohits*), Maithani, and Jamloki. Brahmans from both this group and Kedarnath *tirth purohits* serve as *ved-pāṭhi* (reciters of the Vedas) for the Temple Committee and carry out *pujas* for *yatris* in the temple for those who choose to purchase a ticket for performance of *puja* from the Samiti rather than to employ their own traditionally designated *tirth purohit*.

Generally speaking, employees of the Badri Kedar Temple Committee are permanent government employees who are mostly locals themselves, drawn from the all the social groups found in the local population. There are Harijan drummers, Brahman Veda-reciters (*ved-pathis*, the designation of those Brahman Samiti employees who do *puja* in the Kedarnath temple), and *ṭhākur* (*kshatriya*) temple functionaries. There are also members of the three hundred and sixty who are employees of the Samiti. However, the permanent offices of the Samiti in the Kedarnath valley are located in Ukhimath, and it seems to me that the majority of the local Samiti employees

are from the Ukhimath side of the valley (though some are from the area of Tungnath, to the east), just as the majority of the *tirth purohits* are from the Guptkashi side. Many of the Brahmans who work for the Samiti are *kul purohits*.

The Samiti employs Garhwali Harijans in their traditional role as the providers of the drumming integral to most ritual environments in Garhwal. One Garhwali name for this group in the Ukhimath area is *auji*, a Harijan subcaste (*upajāti*) that maps to the vocations of drumming and tailoring.<sup>98</sup> There are six Harijan families in Ukhimath who currently hold the rights and responsibilities (in this context referred to as *dastūr*, or “customary” privilege) for drumming in the courtyard of the Omkareshvar temple in Ukhimath during all ritual functions and accompanying the processions of the Kedarnath and Madmaheshvar deity-palanquins (*dolī*, henceforth *doli*) to and from Ukhimath. There are also Harijan drummers from the Bamsu area who, along with Ukhimath families, play the drums in the courtyard of the temple in Kedarnath and request donations for their services. These are their traditional roles; everyone is allowed to enter the Kedarnath temple.<sup>99</sup>

The social organization of the Kedarnath valley to large extent replicates itself in Kedarnath. Thus, many of the shops, lodges, and transport services in and around Kedarnath are run by members of local *thakur* (*kshatriya*) families, like that of Bhupendra. Among their common family names one finds Pushpavan, Dharmavan,

---

<sup>98</sup> See “*auji*” in Aravind Purohit and Bina Banjval, *Garhvālī Hindī Śabdkoś* (Dehra Dun: Vinsar Publishing Company, 2007), 55.

<sup>99</sup> For a discussion of the difficult lives and healing rituals of Garhwali Harijans, as well as the difficulties of working with Harijans in Garhwal when one has pre-existing social connections with other groups, see Sax, *God of Justice*.

Negi, Rawat, Rana, and Panwar. Members of these families also work for the *Samiti*, and may often be found in local police and military units.

The ritual specialists in charge of the daily temple service in Kedarnath are Virashaivas. Centered in Ukhimath, or Kedarpeeth as it is called by them, there is a small Virashaiva community numbering approximately seven families and usually less than ten *celas* (students). This community exists because Virashaivas serve as *pujaris* of Kedarnath, and it is the current form of a Virashaiva presence that has existed in the area for several centuries at the very least, as I discussed earlier. As a result of a complex series of events over the last century and a half, Virashaiva *jangama jati* men are now government employees who function as *pujaris* of Kedarnath as well as in several other local temples run by the Badri Kedar Temple Committee: Guptkashi, Aumkareshvar, and Madmaheshvar. Many festival and ritual contexts in Ukhimath and environs are a carefully choreographed dance of power, tradition, and administrative authority between the Temple Committee, local Garhwali rights holders, and Virashaiva *pujaris*.<sup>100</sup>

### ***Renunciants: a Special Variety of Kedarnath Local***

The renunciant population in Kedarnath is a blend of long-term residents who come back year after year and who become in a sense Kedarnath locals, either for part or all of the pilgrimage season, and those who briefly pass through for several days or weeks. Several of the long term residents also live in the Kedarnath valley year round. In Kedarnath, renunciants will either construct or negotiate their own dwellings or stay

---

<sup>100</sup> The daily life of this Virashaiva community, located as it is in central Garhwal thousands of kilometers away from its base in Karnataka, is a topic worthy of discussion in its own right.

at the Kali Kamli *dharamshala* or the food kitchen/*ashram* (called a *langar*) maintained by a renunciant who belongs to the Juna Akhara.<sup>101</sup> Several of the long term renunciants have particular positions in and around the temple that they occupy during important moments of the day, such as the evening *arati*; they perform a semi-official, administrative devotional role at such times. James Lochtefeld has observed that, in comparison to other shrines such as Badrinath, one finds both relatively greater numbers of renunciants in Kedarnath and that their presence in the site is in spatial and social terms more central.<sup>102</sup> Sister Nivedita made a similar observation in her visit almost a century previously.<sup>103</sup> Even when they behave in ways that other Kedarnath residents and *yatris* find inappropriate (fighting, requesting donations in too aggressive a fashion), renunciants are given an extreme degree of latitude in Kedarnath because they essentially appear as forms of Shiva (garbed as anthropomorphic Shivas) in the place of Shiva. It remains to be seen whether the number of renunciants in Kedarnath will increase at a rate constant with that of the general *yatri* population.

Most renunciants found in Kedarnath are men. However, in 2007 I also noted the presence of several female renunciants, one of whom stayed in Kedarnath for months but who was quite reclusive. The only other female residents of Kedarnath were the occasional older relatives of *tirth purohits* who visit for several months after the height of the season had passed, and several Nepali women who managed

---

<sup>101</sup> For a general outline of the life and institutions associated with the Juna Akhara (a *Daśanāmī* order), see Clark, *The Daśanāmī-Saṃnyāsīs: The Integration of Ascetic Lineages into an Order*, 3-22.

<sup>102</sup> James Lochtefeld, personal communication (April, 2010).

<sup>103</sup> "Above all, Kedar Nath is the shrine of the sadhus. As in the days of Buddhism, so in those of Sankaracharya [sic], and as then so also now, the yellow robe gleams and blisters [sic] in all directions. There is no begging, for the *sadabratas* supply all the wants of monastic visitors. But there is a world of enthusiasm, and still the tradition goes among them that Kedarnath is a place of good omen for sannyasis, for here came Sankaracharya and falling into samadhi died!" Nivedita, *Kedar Nath & Badri Narayan*, 43-44.

restaurants with their families in the marketplace. For renunciants who find the bustle of Kedarnath a challenge for their goals of a quiet and inwardly focused residence, there is a Ramanandi ashram two kilometers south of Kedarnath, just below *devdarshini* at Garud Chatti.<sup>104</sup> This ashram has a core community of several renunciants who even stay in Garud Chatti through the winter, and it welcomes renunciants throughout the pilgrimage season as well.

### ***Laborers***

The socially normative local-*yatri* binary overlooks the sizable labor communities in and around Kedarnath and Gaurikund, and one of the weaknesses of this dissertation is its reification of this lack of attention. There are building contractors and their laborers, some with longstanding contacts in the region, who may be Muslims. There is also a Harijan community of street cleaners who come from Uttar Pradesh every year on contract. The majority of the porters who carry people between Gaurikund and Kedarnath are Nepalis who come from Nepal for either the high season or the entire season. This is part of the larger trend in Uttarakhand, much discussed in the Kedarnath valley, of Nepali laborers and families moving to Uttarakhand and establishing themselves by dint of extreme industriousness.

---

<sup>104</sup> For a description of the Ramanandis, a renunciant organization that includes both monastics and householders and that, as Peter van der Veer has argued, demonstrates an extremely fluid and open complex of community identity and practice, see Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth: Religious Experience and Identity in Ayodhya* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), 66-182.

### **Yatri Groups**

A rough picture of the demographics of *yatris* at Kedarnath is best achieved by looking at *yatri* rest houses (*dharamshalas*) and lodges.<sup>105</sup> A stroll through the lanes of Kedarnath village encounters *dharamshalas* for most major north Indian *yatra* groups, either by region (e.g. Punjab Sindh, Bikaner, Bharatsevashram for Bengalis, Himachal House, Jaipur House, Nepali Bhavan) or group (Marwari Bhavan, Aggarwal Bhavan). South Indians, either upon arrival in Kedarnath or through prearranged booking, tend to stay in the Maharashtra Mandal. At the southern edge of the village one finds a well-appointed state tourist hotel that belongs to the Garhwal Regional Development Authority (*Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam*, henceforth GMVN), another governmental organ separate from the Samiti. Two non-Garhwali and non-Uttarakhandi organizations, *Kali Kamli* and *Bharatsevashram Sangh*, also run *dharamshalas* in Kedarnath. I had relatively greater access to *yatris* in these places, perhaps because the managers were salaried and did not have to depend on *yatris* for their main income. There is a steady trickle of Westerners to Kedarnath, both as trekkers and as devotees. However, for what I guess are reasons of fame and accessibility, far more visitors from the West go to Gangotri.

---

<sup>105</sup> Other than the number of Garhwali and Bengali *yatris* in Kedarnath, I have no reason to surmise that the demographics of the *yatri* population differ significantly from that of the Badrinath *yatri* population documented by Surinder Bhardwaj, though these demographics may have shifted somewhat in the intervening decades. See Surinder Mohan Bhardwaj, *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India*, (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1973), 184-192.

### Spatial Organization

While the overall Kedarnath locale is quite small and, as James Lochtefeld has observed, rather constrained by its natural environment, a brief spatial orientation is nonetheless useful.<sup>106</sup> From *devdarshini* to Kedarnath, the path keeps to the west bank of the Mandakini river. Before Kedarnath proper one arrives into the horse and pony area (*ghora-parav*), an assembly of chai and snack shops, inexpensive lodging for porters, and numerous ponies milling about the mounting and dismounting areas. It is in this area that many *tirth purohits* may first connect to patrons (*yajman*) from their designated region. This area is directly parallel to the helipad that sits by the eastern bank of the Mandakini south of Kedarnath village.<sup>107</sup> One crosses a bridge over the Mandakini into Kedarnath proper. *Tirth purohits* await and welcome *yatris* at this point as well. The path forks and goes upward; to the left it leads through a series of *dharamshalas* and lodges on the western side of Kedarnath, to the right it passes by the small bathing *ghat* on the banks of the Mandakini and Ganga shrine before climbing up and around into the main street of Kedarnath and the beginning of the market. The beginning of the market road is where line of sight to the Kedarnath temple begins, and up to the temple each side of the market road is lined with *dharamshalas* and several small lanes that lead into small courtyards or side paths.

---

<sup>106</sup> “Kedarnath,” <http://personal.carthage.edu/jlochtefeld/picturepages/3dham/kedarnath.html>. Accessed 2010-05-04 at 13:46:51. See Appendix II for a more thorough visual introduction.

<sup>107</sup> Helicopter service started in Kedarnath in 2003. I am indebted to James Lochtefeld for this fact and for the following reference in this regard: *India Abroad* 8/15/03: A22.



Figure 2.4. Arriving into the horse area just after *devdarshini* on a clear day.



Figure 2.5. A view of the horse area and the heli-pad from the eastern side of the Kedarnath end-valley.





Figure 2.6. The village of Kedarnath from the east, viewed from near the shrine to Bhukund Bhairavnath (photographed by Bhupendra Singh Pushpavan). The temple can be seen in the upper right hand corner of the village. The main road of the bazaar, here not visible, runs lengthwise through the center of the village.



Figure 2.7. A view of Kedarnath from the western bank of the Mandakini. The temple is visible, along with two cell phone towers.



Figure 2.8. The main street of Kedarnath, with the temple in the background.

Midway through the market and proceeding towards the temple one sees Udak Kund (Water Pool) and a Navadurga temple immediately to the west and to the east a small temple to Shiva in his five-faced form. To the west of the temple and temple courtyard proper are several more *dharamshalas* and lodges. Continuing to the northwest of the temple one sees a recent memorial to Shankara in the form of a giant hand holding a staff emerging from a tall brick wall, and then behind that the sprawling complex of Bharatsevashram and an auditorium that contains both an old, small shrine marking the reputed location of Shankara's passing (*samadhi-sthal*) and a newer, much larger *linga* donated by a wealthy *yatri*. Then one comes to the *langar* (public food kitchen) of the Juna Akhara and the railway reservation station whose construction was begun in 2007. The line, or queue, for entry to the temple stretches in this direction.





Figure 2.9. Another public reference to Shankara in Kedarnath is this recently constructed public memorial. His journey to Kedarnath is here symbolized by a hand bearing the staff of a wandering renunciant. It lies immediately behind the temple to the northwest.



Figure 2.10. A *ved-pathi* from the Badri-Kedar Temple Committee offers *puja* and *arati* to the older *murti* of Shankaracarya.

To the immediate east of the temple are the offices of the Samiti where *yatris* may buy tickets for special *pujas* and seating inside the temple during evening *arati*, and again moving eastward the Samiti has built a large cloakroom for the storage of belongings and a public auditorium to host events such as, in 2007, a recitation of the *Shiva Purana* and a concert by the famous Garhwali singer Narendra Singh Negi. Just by this auditorium is Hams Kund (“the pool of the swan”, linked to a story in which the deity Brahma assumed the form of a swan), the location in Kedarnath for the funerary *shraddha* rituals. Behind the temple to the northeast are the residential quarters of the Samiti, the Virashaiva *pujari*, the police, and the cell phone towers.

There are two electrical grids in Kedarnath. One is for the Samiti and powered by a small hydroelectric station just to the west of Kedarnath halfway up the side of the valley, the other is for the rest of the village and comes up the valley from the south through electric lines, and often breaks. Quite a few of the more affluent shops, *dharamshalas*, and lodges in Kedarnath have invested in their own gasoline powered electric generator. About half a kilometer behind the entire village runs a retaining wall that prevents one of the several tributaries of the Mandakini from overflowing its banks and running through the village during the monsoon. The shrine of Bhukund Bhairavnath looks down on all of Kedarnath from its location on the edge of a plateau above the valley floor just east of the village. The shrine is just far enough from the village that many *yatris* never go because of the time and exertion involved but just close enough that locals go daily.

At somewhat further remove on the western and northwestern side of Kedarnath are the small glacial lakes of Gandhi Sarovar, or Corabari Tal as it is known

locally, and Vasuki Tal. Many intrepid *yatris* go to Gandhi Sarovar; one can walk there and back in half a day. A hardy few go to Vasuki Tal; it is difficult, though possible, to make the trip in the light of a single day. One older route to Kedarnath, used by *yatris* coming on foot from Gangotri, proceeds from Triyugi Narayan to Kedarnath via Vasuki Tal. "Brahma's cave" (*Brahma-gufa*) reputedly lies near Gandhi Sarovar. To the northeast lies the valley entrance to the Great Path (*Mahapath*), and near it reputedly the rock of Bhrigutirtha, from which devotees may have once jumped. Most of the pamphlets about Kedarnath and the Uttarakhand Char Dham mention these sites, including the examples discussed in Chapter Four.

### Temporal Rhythms: The High Season

Kedarnath's calendar both reflects the calendar of the Kedarnath valley and stands apart. The procession of the travelling form of Kedarnath carried in a palanquin (*doli*) from Ukhimath to Kedarnath that opens the pilgrimage season takes place in the month of Baisakh (April-May), traditionally a month for *melā* (fair) in the Kedarnath valley. During this month there are a series of *melas* in Phegu (Phegu Devi) and Taltoli (Rakeshvari Devi) in the Lamgaundi-Bamsu region, Ukhimath (Budha Madmaheshvar), Jakhdhar (Jakh), Maykhanda (Mahismardini Devi), and Tyudi (Balram/Balbhadra), among others. A *mela* in Garhwal usually (but not always) will be centered on the emergence of a deity from her or his temple in the form of a *murti* and/or in the form of a possessing presence. The deity will be "danced" and sometimes swung as well. Depending on the deity and the occasion the deity may make oracular predictions and answer questions through her or his human vehicle. *Melas* are also among the most important and enjoyable social events of the year.

An advance party of Temple Committee, public works, police, and military employees proceed to Kedarnath a week or two before the season begins. They confirm that the path is passable and enough snow has melted to allow access to the buildings. They re-install the phone and electrical wires and start to place the pipes into the ground that were removed at the end of the previous season. The departure for Kedarnath of the three-day procession varies is usually near *akshay tritiya* of the *shukla paksh* of Baisakh. In 2007, the Kedarnath *doli* left Ukhimath on April 27 and arrived on April 30, with the doors opening the next morning. Bhairavnath was worshipped in Ukhimath the evening before departure and sent ahead to prepare the way and ensure a safe procession and safe opening. I went on the procession in 2005, 2007, and 2008.

The beginning of the season at Kedarnath constitutes the high season, lasting approximately six to eight weeks. The area bursts at the seams. During the high season the Gaurikund-Kedarnath footpath becomes a continuous stream of *yatris*:



Figure 2.11. The path in high season.

The exact duration of the high season changes from year to year because of the permutation of several factors: the date the temple opens, the beginning of school holidays and vacations for salaried employees, and the onset of the monsoon. In 2007 the high season was perhaps a bit longer than most; one contributing factor was that Jyest (May-June), the month following Baisakh, was in 2007 a double month.

During the high season at Kedarnath, everything is more expensive and people are in a hurry. This is also typically when salaried employees come with their families because everyone has the time off and they have the resources to make the journey even at this expensive time. This is of course not a hard and fast generalization; *yatris* from all walks of life arrive in Kedarnath all the time. This is also when, correspondingly, the resident population of Kedarnath is at its highest ebb. There are many *tirth purohits* who will come for this period and then depart, for various reasons (e.g. a school teacher who is also on his holiday). The high season in 2007 ended around the end of June, also approximately when the monsoon began. Monsoon season in the Kedarnath valley means that the roads will inevitably be blocked by landslides at least several times; in Kedarnath these occasions were apparent because the flow of *yatris* would suddenly decrease. The Kedarnath Tirth Purohit Association performed, on June fifteenth, the first of several collective fire sacrifices (*havan/yajña*) and *pujas* for the guardian deity of Kedarnath, Bhukund Bhairav. The end of June and the beginning of July were the slowest times in Kedarnath; many locals who do stay for the entire season took the opportunity for a quick trip home then.

### ***Shravan and Bhadon in Kedarnath***

The month of Shravan, Shiva's month, began in 2007 for Garhwalis (and not for all north Indian regions) in the middle of July. The time of the monsoon is to large extent a time when Garhwalis will go on *yatra* within Garhwal, even as many *yatris* from the plains often do not travel during this time because of the dangers of travel in the mountains during the monsoon. This is also when herders began to arrive in the area around Kedarnath with sheep, goat, and buffalo herds; before then only powdered milk is usually available. Shravan is when Kedarnath valley locals who work between Gaurikund and Kedarnath will themselves come to Kedarnath; they will go in the temple and then proceed up to Bhukund Bhairavnath to offer him oil and *rot* (thick bread cooked with cane sugar/molasses water). Some come once, some come every Monday, and some every day. Bhairavnath is the focus of devotion during this time for locals.

Shravan is also the time when many Kedarnath *tirth purohits* will do *puja* on behalf of their patrons in the temple and then send the *prasada* through the mail. This *prasada* will usually include Brahma-lotuses. Brahma-lotuses (*brahmakamal*), a form of lotuses that reputedly only grows above fourteen thousand feet, bloom at this time; the offering of *brahmakamal* is one of the traditionally defining features of worship done in the Kedarnath temple. To pick these flowers (as I did once), one must walk up and out of Kedarnath barefoot, bathed, and fasting to pluck them. Locals gather *brahmakamal* both for their own patrons and for sale in the bazaar. In the last eight to ten years, during the latter half of Garhwali Shravan *kāmvariyaṁ* groups have begun coming to Kedarnath (usually from Gangotri) as an extension of the *kāmvar* festival that centers



on a barefoot *yatra*, bearing pots of water known as *kāṃvar* (*kavar*) to Haridwar and the Neelkanth Mahadev temple near Rishikesh, two hundred kilometers to the south. Several *tirth purohits* also told me that farmers will often come on *yatra* during the monsoon (or more technically, when the monsoon is happening for them), because there is little agricultural work that can be done during that time. In stark contrast to the intense crowding of the high season, during July and August (and even later) at Kedarnath it is possible to spend hours at a time in the inner sanctum of the temple.

By mid to late August the monsoon starts to depart and by early September gives way to one to two months of beautiful clear weather, the best time of the year for walking in the Himalayas. Just after the beginning of Bhadon (for Garhwalis) in mid-August of 2007, the Samiti sponsored an eleven-day recitation of the *Shiva Purana*, beginning on the seventeenth of August. Following close on the heels of the ending of the *Shiva Purana* in 2007 was the local festival of Bhatuj, as far as I know celebrated under this name only at Kedarnath and a few other temples in the Kedarnath valley area. Preparations began on August thirty-first and the final elements of the Bhatuj worship were done in the early morning on September first. I do not feel that I fully understood Bhatuj in 2007. What I did glean was that it is a local form of the common new grain festival of *annakūṭ*, and that it effectively functions as the local *mela* for Kedarnath. Kedarnath valley locals, especially teenagers, descended on Kedarnath in crowds for this festival. Several specially designated *tirth purohits* prepare a large quantity of rice, which they then shape into bricks and place on top of the *linga* in the temple to form a pyramidal shape. The temple then opens early in the morning for this special *darshan*. Unlike most offerings to deities that are received back as *prasada* and

consumed if edible, no one ever eats this rice (some link this festival to the Shiva's drinking of the poison during the churning of the ocean), and it is disposed of (buried) outside the boundaries of Kedarnath. There is also a *mela* at Triyugi Narayan in September, one of the most important in the region, when the deity leaves the temple. I was unfortunately unable to attend this *mela*; instead, Bhupendra and I went to Madmaheshvar for the first time.

### ***End of the Season***

In October one sees greater and greater numbers of Bengalis in Kedarnath, who take advantage of the long holidays afforded by Durga Puja in Bengal to come to the Himalayas.<sup>108</sup> The weather begins the turn to cold and locals start to leave, except for a core group whose custom it is to see out the entire season. The season in Kedarnath ends on Bhaiya Duj, the last day of Diwali. The Kedarnath *doli* leaves in the morning, and takes two days and three nights to return to Ukhimath. Several hundred people, included dignitaries and military troops, come to Kedarnath specifically for the final night of the season and the procession the next day. The night before departure, Kedarnath-Shiva receives *samādhi (samadhi) puja*, an elaborate procedure that involves the covering of the *linga* with numerous layers of bilva leaves, ash, and fruit. Then the Samiti prepares the travelling form of Kedarnath (*Kedarnath doli*) for departure. A day

---

<sup>108</sup> Trekking in the Himalayas is an especially Bengali tradition, and the Panch Kedar shrines are especially significant in this regard. Beyond Kedarnath, the majority of non-locals found at the Panch Kedar shrines are Bengali. While the broader reasons for the inclination of the particular segments of the Bengali populace towards trekking and adventurous travel remain a topic for a Bengali specialist to consider in depth, the particular significance of the Panch Kedar for Bengalis may be ascribed at least in part to a famous Bengali travelogue entitled *Pancha Kedar* by Umāprasād Mukhopādhyaya published in 1968. For a recent example of the worldview of Bengali trekking and *yatra* in Garhwal, see Debal Sen's photographic essay on the Panch Kedar that explicitly pays homage to Mukhopādhyaya's work: Umāprasāda Mukhopādhyāya, *Pañca Kedāra bhramaṇa kāhinī*. (Kalikātā: A. Mukherjī, 1968); Debal Sen, *Panch Kedar* (Calcutta; New Delhi: Debal Sen and Saurabh Enterprises, 2007). See also forthcoming work on the Himalayas in the Bengali imagination by Subho Basu and Sandeep Chatterjee.

or two later Kedarnath is completely empty. Decades ago there was a famous renunciant named Phalahari Baba, memorialized at several different locations in Kedarnath, who would actually spend the entire year there. He would reportedly spend the entire winter inside a single building along with the requisite supplies.

### **The Historical Character of Kedarnath in the Present**

What was the utility of year round residence in Kedarnath for the Phalahari Baba? In the winter, snow blankets Kedarnath to a depth of tens of feet. When the advance party of locals returns to Kedarnath in the spring to begin opening the site, they tell of walking up the snow-covered path and holding on to the current-less electrical lines (normally far overhead) as guide rails. There would have been no question of performing many of the practices traditionally enjoined for a visit to Kedarnath and the temple would have been locked. Part of the answer must be that there is a power in the site, an attractive power, that draws people and causes them to try and come as close as possible. The case of the Phalahari Baba is an extreme case, but also indicative of the general character of the site. Kedarnath has been drawing people to itself for arguably at least a millennium. It is evident that the development of *yatra* and *yatra* infrastructure in the last century and a half, and in Kedarnath in especially marked ways in the last ten to fifteen years, has changed the complexion of *tirthas* and the practice of *tirtha yatra* in important ways. Yet the present nature of Kedarnath markedly links itself to the longer history of the site. The aim of this chapter has been, in the course of a general overview to the site, to sketch the ways in which the historical character of the site and its current realities both may be productively

accounted for through the notion of Kedarnath as a place and *tirtha* that exerts a unitary power of attraction, of *akarshan*. This idea is the subject of the next chapter.

## As Place and As *Tirtha*

### Chapter Three

#### Place, Space, and Religion

I suggest in this work that it makes sense to approach Kedarnath with double vision: as a powerful and striking Himalayan place *and* as a place experienced as the abode of Shiva, a Shaivite *tirtha*. To be in Kedarnath is to be conscious of the *akarshan*, the attractive power, of the place. With regard to this attractive and transformative power, the aspects of Kedarnath as place and as *tirtha* function in irreducibly coterminous fashion. The idea of the complex agency of Kedarnath as both place and *tirtha* embodies this coterminous quality. This notion of complex agency does not, at the end of the day, fully resolve to an equation of deity with place, nor does it offer a view of place that wholly subsumes the experience of divine presence in the place. It is a theoretical approach that preserves the ways in which these two aspects exercise agency as a single site of economic and cultural importance and attractive power.

The phenomena of pilgrimage, pilgrimage tourism, and leisure travel in South Asia are moving and expanding targets, yet the places to which ever increasing numbers of people travel are understood to have powers and significances that are often in important ways continuous with their identities of centuries and millennia past. Adequately understanding what continues to draw people to such places stands as a fundamental desideratum in the study of religion, and in this regard the case of Kedarnath should prove a generative example. My theoretical approach to Kedarnath enters the conversation on religion, place, and space at a time when there is a

blossoming of scholarly approaches to place and space within religious studies.

However, as we will see, my aims differ from many of the regnant trends in this regard.

Thomas Tweed has recently offered a new understanding of how to approach the field of religious studies and the data sets of “religion” that orients itself around the metaphors of crossing and dwelling. The conceptual basis of Tweed’s approach is explicitly geographic – he views his own work as part of the larger movement in the social sciences and humanities towards the re-spatialization of ways of knowing pointed to by critical geographers such as Edward Soja.<sup>1</sup> The point of departure for his argument is a scene from his own ethnographic work with a Cuban-Catholic shrine of the Virgin in Miami. He describes the numerous events happening during a “collective ritual” there and then reflects on the inability of extant theoretical approaches to religion to do justice to what he has seen.<sup>2</sup> Identifying as important the themes of “movement, relation, and position”, he pushes into a new base understanding of things religious: “Religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries.”<sup>3</sup> Home-making produces the idea of dwelling, boundary crossing the notion of crossing. Thus, his theory operates as a set of spatial root metaphors from which to investigate and classify diverse phenomena.

Tweed understands the idea of “flow” to be more “dynamic” than the idea of system and more “empirical” than the idea of complexity; he builds this argument in conversation with (among other influences) actor-network theory as it is discussed in

---

<sup>1</sup> Edward W Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social* (London: Verso, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

the work of Bruno Latour and Mark C. Taylor.<sup>4</sup> A Latourian approach regards humans and non-human entities (such as objects) as entities each possessing their own agency that are interconnected through larger systems that as networks demonstrate collectively legible pattern and direction. As cultural and historical networks, flows are contingent, but they are also organic and as such material and corporeal. As religious flows, religions are materially real because they are partially organic. Yet at the same time, as networks comprised of multiple human and non-human entities they act and flow in and through the world in ways that are not localizable to specifically human actions and intentions.

Kim Knott offers a different view of spatiality and religion. She has worked to develop a “spatial methodology for locating religion, particularly in ‘secular’ places, things, communities, and objects” and has proposed a process for locating analytic subjects in space with an explicit eye towards its implications for the study of religion.<sup>5</sup> Working from a tradition that in many ways began with the work of Henri Lefebvre, she offers a view of “space” as

...dynamic, in terms of its relationship to power, history and time, its condition of simultaneity and the various ways it is experienced and represented...thoroughly enmeshed in embodiment and everyday practice, knowledge and discourse, and in processes of production and reproduction.<sup>6</sup>

Knott is particularly desirous of understanding religion in its local settings. For her, this meant developing analytic tools capable of getting at questions such as the following:

---

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>5</sup> Kim Knott, “Spatial Theory and the Study of Religion,” *Religion Compass* 2, no. 6 (2008): 1108.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 1111.

“How was religion located in secular places and how was it to be distinguished from its context? How was the nature and act of location as a state and process to be understood?”<sup>7</sup>

For Knott, religion is simply another sort of analytic subject that can be understood locally as a spatialized phenomenon. Here she differs from Tweed, as she herself points out. Tweed has developed a fundamentally spatial theory of religion that functions, as Knott herself puts it, as “...a set of related tropes with which to think about religion.”<sup>8</sup>

Both Tweed and Knott, in slightly different ways, intentionally move past a phenomenological orientation to the study of religion that takes as its compass a primarily Eliadean notion of the sacred. Depending on how one understands Eliade, the sacred may itself function as an autonomous entity rather than a linguistically epiphenomenal analytic construct. Tweed offers the notion of “sacrosapes,” a term that explicitly does not make absolutist or metaphysical claims about a “sacred” but rather describes dynamically changing landscapes which shape “religious flows” that are both biological (“organic”) and cultural in nature.<sup>9</sup> Knott, working out of a Lefebvrian trajectory, similarly eschews a strictly phenomenological orientation and suggests that “religion” is merely one sort of spatialized phenomenon that begins to be known through the body. As such, religion does not receive the sort of special analytic treatment that might result from a view that the phenomenon of religion is in any way metaphysically distinct from other kinds of spatialized phenomena.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Kim Knott, “From locality to location and back again: A spatial journey in the study of religion,” *Religion* 39, no. 2 (2009): 156.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 1112.

<sup>9</sup> Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 61.

<sup>10</sup> Knott, “Spatial Theory and the Study of Religion,” 1108.



While I follow Knott and Tweed in my commitment to the application of geographic theory to the study of religion, my goals differ slightly.<sup>11</sup> As an analytic subject, Kedarnath differs in important ways from the shrine of the Virgin in Miami discussed by Tweed and the post-secular local spaces of Leeds examined by Knott. It has been an explicitly “religious” place, an object of the practice of *tirtha-yatra*, for hundreds of years. To view Kedarnath as a religious site is not an intentional re-imagining of post-Kantian divisions of civic and religious spaces; it is instead a descriptive point of departure. The question goes the other way: how can such theoretical tools adequately register both the continuing traditional power of a site like Kedarnath as well as the ways that the power of the site is being transformed by pilgrimage and nature tourism? Where does the power of such a place register amidst Tweed’s crossings and dwellings, and Knott’s spatialities? How does one analytically frame Kedarnath as both *place* and *tirtha*?

My argument for how to answer this question, how to register the power of Kedarnath both as place and as the abode of Shiva, proposes a view of Kedarnath as a “place” that demonstrates “complex agency”. This idea also in its own way moves beyond a primarily phenomenological orientation to the “sacred” (though as we will see later in this chapter, the semantic and analytic range of this term continue to be ambiguous). I instead draw on the notion of complex agency and network as understood by Thomas Tweed, William Sax, and Ronald Inden. I take the site (or place) of Kedarnath as the unit of analysis for this work. The data inside this frame are what I take to be my task to understand and theorize, and the locale of the site constitutes the

---

<sup>11</sup> Ann Taves et al., “Assessing Theories of Religion: A Forum on Thomas A. Tweed's Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, no. 2 (June 2009): 404-445.

rough boundaries of the system under examination. I claim that Kedarnath exists, in the experience of those who are present there (whether for an hour or six months) as a place that is "an attractor of persons" (Hindi: *logon ko ākarśit karne vāla*). There is an experience of *akarshan* (attraction) that functions as a common and intersubjectively constituted experiential substratum for all who find themselves at Kedarnath. This experience of *akarshan* may be seen with special clarity in the investigation of key constituent elements in the experience of Kedarnath across social groups. As I have already indicated, these constituent elements comprise the subjects of Chapters Four, Five, and Six. The place is at the center, rather than a particular group of people. But what is a place? It is necessary to offer a genealogical presentation of what I mean by the terms place, landscape, experience, and complex agency, and to be clear about the ways in which I am adapting a largely anthropological set of tools to engage a classic topic in the history of the discipline of religious studies: the experienced presence of deities in places.

### Place

As Tweed noted, place (along with its attendant binary, space) has in recent decades returned to the foreground of scholarly focus in the social science and humanities, as evidenced by many influential, recent anthologies on the topic.<sup>12</sup> Tim Cresswell, in his recent conspectus and genealogy of the term *place*, has delineated four main approaches:

---

<sup>12</sup> Setha M. Low and Denise Lawrence-Zunigais, *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003); *Senses of Place*, 1st ed., School of American Research advanced seminar series (Santa Fe, N.M: School of American Research Press, 1996); James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997); Tom Mels, ed., *Reanimating Places: A Geography of Rhythms*, Re-materialising cultural geography (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004); Eric Hirsch and Michael. O'Hanlon, *The anthropology of landscape: perspectives on place and space*, Oxford studies in social and cultural anthropology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

- 1) A descriptive, “ideographic” approach that focuses on the unique physical details of particular locations and regions and their uniquely local meanings.<sup>13</sup>
- 2) “A social constructionist approach to place” or critical geographic approach that regards places (or “social spaces”) as the ongoing products of social processes.<sup>14</sup> Henri Lefebvre pioneered this approach in *The Production of Space*.<sup>15</sup>
- 3) “A phenomenological approach of place” that views the category and idea of Place as something that “seeks to define the essence of human existence as one that is necessarily and importantly 'in place'.”<sup>16</sup> This approach draws heavily on phenomenological approaches to perception delineated by Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau Ponty.
- 4) Following Doreen Massey, that place may be understood as “...open and hybrid- a product of interconnecting flows – of routes rather than roots....”<sup>17</sup> That is to say, that places continually come into being and disappear for polycasual, contextual reasons that have little to do with their supposed authentic character or existential essence and more to do with the movements of persons and capital understood to be part of the process of globalization. Similar to the social constructionists, Massey's approach foregrounds an irreducibly evanescent notion of place that does not premise

---

<sup>13</sup> Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), 51.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> Cresswell, *Place*, 51.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 53.

a core that persists over time. Tweed and Knott both work in this trajectory to certain extents.

An approach that foregrounds the local is not wholly adequate to deal with the site of Kedarnath because of the diversity of its geographic significance. Similarly, an approach premised on the notion of “routes rather than roots” does not promise an adequate alertness to the questions of continuity in Kedarnath that I have already noted. My use of the term *place* may best be understood as a blending of the social constructionist and phenomenological approaches. In my view the current nature of the site requires a composite lens of this sort, and the details and descriptions I offer of Kedarnath throughout this work function to, among other things, justify the appropriateness of this interpretive strategy. These approaches are to some extent understood to have an antagonistic relationship to one another in geographic circles. Conversations in other areas reproduce this putative tension; Gavin Flood recently argued that the study of religion needs to move past a phenomenological orientation to join the rest of the humanities in a post-structural orientation around the sign and its social constructionist premises.<sup>18</sup> Recent approaches to geography and religion suggest that this dichotomy is perhaps too severe. Knott’s approach, for example, looks at questions of social construction together with questions of embodiment. My own touchstone for combining and privileging the social constructionist and phenomenological approaches in geography is recent conversation in anthropology about the term *experience* that proffers what is coming to be known as a critical phenomenological approach, a conversation I discuss in greater detail later on in this

---

<sup>18</sup> Gavin D. Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 1999).

chapter. First, the reader will be well served by a slightly fuller consideration of the social constructionist and phenomenological approaches to place and why a combination of these two approaches recommends itself particularly to analysis of Kedarnath.

### ***Phenomenology of Place***

Phenomenologists of place begin by redefining the term *place*. Several decades ago, *space* was understood as an *a priori* perceptual category, a blank repository that contained *place* and inside of which location could be specified.<sup>19</sup> Once a location in space becomes specified it is able to bear specific meanings. Thus, in this model space precedes and contains place. However, following the model of body-based perception proposed in the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, philosophers such as Edward Casey reverse this order. Casey argues that

We come to the world – we come into it and keep returning to it – as already placed there. Places are not added to sensations any more than they are imposed on spaces. Both sensations and spaces are themselves emplaced from the very first moment, and at every subsequent moment as well.<sup>20</sup>

He further offers several characteristics that places, in his view, demonstrate:

- 1) Places are found and known through the body.<sup>21</sup>
- 2) “...places gather things in their midst – where 'things' connote various animate and inanimate entities. Places also gather experiences and histories, even languages and thoughts.”<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Y. F. Tuan, *Space and place: The perspective of experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 6.

<sup>20</sup> E. S. Casey, “How to get from space to place in a fairly short stretch of time: phenomenological prolegomena,” *Senses of Place* (1996): 18.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

- 3) A place is an event that happens, that is continually in process, continually happening.<sup>23</sup>

This notion of Casey that places have the ability to “gather” highlights his view that somatic emplacement is already present at the beginning of the perceptual process, rather than at a second stage.<sup>24</sup>

Philosophical speculations on the role of place in human perception such as those of Casey provide the ground for anthropologists to look at the mutually constitutive relationships among sense experience, physical environment, and culture. Keith Basso has examined how narratives about particular parts of the Western Apache landscape serve as signifiers of wisdom, of how one should act. In Basso's words, the “...sensing of place –is a form of cultural activity”.<sup>25</sup> He relates how the Apache Dudley Patterson, in response to Basso's question “What is wisdom?” responds “It's in these places...wisdom sits in places.”<sup>26</sup> To exist in the landscape and to sense it is to be reminded, at the first-order level of sense experience and perception, of how one ought to act. Steven Feld, in his discussion of the “acoustemology” of the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea, describes the primary importance of sound-experience in Kaluli lives.<sup>27</sup> The “soundscape” of the natural world fuses with Kaluli cultural forms.<sup>28</sup> Thus, for example, for the Kaluli the sound of poetic performance, itself understood to flow like water through the body, fuses with sound of rainwater as it flows through the land.

---

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 26-27.

<sup>24</sup> For an extended philosophical discussion of the relationship of place and experience which takes much the same approach to the relationship of place and spatiality, see Jeff Malpas, *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> K. Basso, “Wisdom Sits in Places: Notes on a Western Apache Landscape,” *Senses of place* (1996): 83.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>27</sup> S. Feld, “Waterfalls of Song: An Acoustemology of Place Resounding in Bosavi, Papua New Guinea,” *Senses of Place* (1996): 91-135.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 134.

Feld writes beautifully that “...the poetics of place merge with the sensuousness of place as soundscape and with the sensuality of the singing voice.”<sup>29</sup>

This emphasis on the role of particular facets of sense experience in the knowing of places and human experience more generally has been the focus of considerable attention in recent years by anthropologists who are in conversation with Merleau Pontian phenomenology.<sup>30</sup> In the more specific area of studies on Hindu place in South Asia, Anne Feldhaus has built on Casey’s ideas about the connections between body, place, and region. She writes about how, within the state of Maharashtra, a sense of the region, a “geographical awareness” of the region as “place” comes to be formed. Specifically, she describes how particular practices of pilgrimage and procession, “administrative arrangements...physical geography...images and stories” combine to create a geographical awareness of the region.<sup>31</sup> William Sax, in his most recent work on the healing cult of Bhairav in Garhwal, invokes Casey’s model of place to understand the growth of the network of small shrines to the deity Bhairavnath in the Chamoli district of Garhwal.<sup>32</sup>

Kedarnath, with its challenging weather, high Himalayan grandeur, unhealthy elevation, and self-manifest (*svayambhu*) rock presence of Shiva, is a place that imposes itself on the bodied sense experience of those who come there. And as I show in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, the narratives, images, and practices associated with Kedarnath fuse experience of the physicality of the place with its multiple, overlapping

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> See for example Paul Rodaway, *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense, and Place* (London: Routledge, 1994); Robert Desjarlais, *Sensory Biographies: Lives and Deaths among Nepal's Yolmo Buddhists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Mels, *Reanimating Places*.

<sup>31</sup> Anne Feldhaus, *Connected Places: Region, Pilgrimage, and Geographical Imagination in India, Religion/culture/critique* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 6, 157.

<sup>32</sup> William S. Sax, *God of Justice: Ritual Healing and Social Justice in the Central Himalayas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 52.

cultural and economic kinds of significance. Thus, Feld and Basso's notion of "sense of place" is crucial for understanding what it is to be present in Kedarnath. Feldhaus' notion of a sense of region is less appropriate here simply because the unit of analysis is a particular place inside a region rather than the region of Garhwal itself.

### *Place as a Unit of Analysis*

Centering this work on the site of Kedarnath effectively delineates a set of data that the theoretical approach of the work must be able to successfully engage. This is a double edged choice. It is clear that there is much at Kedarnath for which the notion of "sense of place" is an apt frame. Yet by the same token there is much that escapes this frame. By Indian standards, Kedarnath is a doubly exceptional place in that it is both a *tirtha* and home to no one. Thus, locals who work at Kedarnath during the pilgrimage season are not at home in the same way that the locals with whom Jonathan Parry worked in his explorations of funeral rituals and death in Benares or with whom Peter Van der Veer worked in his investigations on local knowledge about Ayodhya.<sup>33</sup> Most phenomenologists of place follow Martin Heidegger and Gaston Bachelard and take the experience of home-place, dwelling, as the experiential and theoretical point of departure for human perception and experience of the world.<sup>34</sup> However, Kedarnath is home to no one. It is no one's natal village, no one's *sāsural* (father-in-law's place), no one's *mait* (the birthplace of a girl that she leaves when she is married). The local population of Kedarnath is, with the exception of renunciants, almost exclusively composed of men whose families are back in their villages. *Yatris*, on the other hand,

---

<sup>33</sup> Jonathan P. Parry, *Death in Banaras* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Peter van der Veer, *Gods on Earth: Religious Experience and Identity in Ayodhya* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>34</sup> Edward Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 290-292.



usually come in families. Kedarnath has a village deity, a *gram devta*, Bhukund Bhairav, who guards the valley. But just as the water pipes must be laid and taken up every year, Bhairav's guardianship of Kedarnath village must also be activated each year – when the procession to Kedarnath departs from Ukhimath the Bhairav of the Omkareshvar temple in Ukhimath is sent in advance to clear the way, and Bhukund Bhairav must be worshiped in Kedarnath before *shringar arati* can be performed. Kedarnath is no one's first place. The fact that Kedarnath is home for no one constitutes a significant datum for the phenomenological approach that I account for through my notion of place as attractor.

### ***Social Construction of Place and Critical Geography***

Kedarnath differs in important ways from its local Garhwali surroundings. It is a place where Kedarnath valley locals rub elbows with Karnatakan and Maharashtrian Virashaivas, French trekkers, affluent Marwaris from Calcutta, Rajasthani farmers, Russian Shaivites, and Bengali nature enthusiasts, to name just a few of the types of people whom Kedarnath attracts. In socio-economic terms, Kedarnath is the engine of the local economy and one of the main engines (along with the other members of the Char Dham, Hemkunt Sahib, Haridwar, and Rishikesh) of the state economy of Uttarakhand. It is an important node on the network of the India-wide Hindu pilgrimage industry. Every several years, a Punjabi guru who lives in New Jersey comes to Kedarnath and brings with him a group of devotees from all over the world. And Garhwali villagers come along with their deities in palanquins, sometimes from twenty kilometers away and sometimes from hundreds of kilometers.

As a subject, Kedarnath does not lend itself strictly to the sort of analysis that Basso and Feld carry out because it is not simply a place of local and regional importance that is well documented and widely attested in local and regional cultural forms. Its importance and attractive power are not limited to the settings of the Kedarnath valley, the region of Garhwal, and the state of Uttarakhand. Recalling Surinder Bhardwaj's classificatory schema for Hindu pilgrimage places, Kedarnath is a site of pan-Hindu importance.<sup>35</sup> It is in many important ways in Garhwal but not of Garhwal. And then there are times, such as when Bhukund Bhairavnath is worshipped (especially during the month of Shravan), during the festival of Bhatuj, or when Garhwali deities arrive on procession with their villages, that Kedarnath becomes a Garhwali place (see my discussion of these moments in Chapter Six and Chapter Two). Kedarnath, along with Badrinath, is often invoked as one of the markers of the Garhwali region.<sup>36</sup> However, I have found relatively little content in Garhwali cultural forms *about* Kedarnath.<sup>37</sup> Thus, investigation of Kedarnath must cast a wider analytic net than the approaches of Feld and Basso that focus on the purely local and regional.

While he writes specifically about the deterritorialization of local people and their localities as they relate to the larger structures of the nation-state, the words of Arjun Appadurai relevant for an analytic move beyond the local:

---

<sup>35</sup> Surinder Mohan Bhardwaj, *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India* (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1973), 155-157.

<sup>36</sup> For example: "In our heavenly land of Uttarakhand! / Himalayan peaks are like the Brahmi Kamal / a symbol of spiritual sanctity. / The Himalayan mountains laden with dense Deodar forests / The peaks of Badri and Kedar / The rivers Ganga and Jamuna, / And Gaumukh the source of river Ganga / Adorn our beautiful land." Anjali Capila, *Images of Women in the Folk Songs of Garhwal Himalayas: A Participatory Research*, Concept's discovering Himalayas series (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 2002), 103-104.

<sup>37</sup> I spent much of the dissertation fieldwork in fruitless pursuit of local Garhwali narratives about Kedarnath that had an established performative context. Towards the end of the fieldwork period I found out that such narratives do exist as part of larger set of songs sung during worship of Triyugi Narayan, the most famous and important *local* shrine in the innermost part of the Kedar valley between Narayan Koti and Gaurikund. However, presentation of this material requires more fieldwork.

The production of locality, as a dimension of social life, as a structure of feeling, and in its material expression in lived 'copresence', faces two challenges in a postnational order. On the one hand, the production of locality challenges the order and orderliness of the nation-state. On the other hand, human motion in the context of the crisis of the nation-state encourages the emergence of *translocalities*...The isomorphism of people, territory, and legitimate sovereignty that constitutes the normative charter of the modern nation-state is under threat from the forms of circulation of people characteristic of the contemporary world.<sup>38</sup>

That is to say, analytic and investigative approaches that presume a purely local object ("the Kaluli") are less than wholly recommended. People come from all over India and abroad to Kedarnath for devotion, for touristic enjoyment, and for economic gain. Many Kedarnath *tirth purohits* spend approximately one quarter of their year traveling throughout India to collect their ritual fees. The cleaners of Kedarnath come on contract each year from Uttar Pradesh. Many palanquin bearers and porters come from Nepal. Many construction workers and contractors are Muslims, some Garhwali Muslims who have been living in the area for decades and others more recent arrivals. An analysis of the cultural meanings and associations of Kedarnath as a *jyotirlinga* in the *devbhumi* of the Himalayas as they combine with sense experience of the location would not adequately frame all that brings people to the place. By the same token, excluding such an approach would also be analytically inadequate.

The regionally composite *and* Garhwali nature of Kedarnath as a site means that that my theoretical and methodological concerns differ from much of the pre-existent scholarship on Garhwal.<sup>39</sup> The work of William Sax on the Nanda-Devi procession, the

---

<sup>38</sup> Arjun Appadurai, "Sovereignty without Territoriality: Notes for a Postnational Geography," in *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003), 338.

<sup>39</sup> Gerald Duane Berreman, *Hindus of the Himalayas: Ethnography and Change*, 2nd ed., Oxford India paperbacks (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); J. C. Galey, "L'universel dans la localité. Implications sociologiques du pèlerinage en Inde," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 211, no. 3 (1994): 259–296; William S. Sax, *Mountain Goddess: Gender and Politics in a Himalayan Pilgrimage* (New York: Oxford University Press,

*Pandav Nrtya*, and now on the healing cult of Bhairavnath, defines this young and rapidly expanding field. In each of Sax's works, however, he is for the most part very committed to a Garhwal *qua* Garhwal approach in his work on the Nanda Devi procession, the Pandav Nrtya, and the healing practices of Garhwali Harijans. Sax's work celebrates the depths and specifics of particularly Garhwali contexts and phenomena. The significance of Kedarnath for Garhwalis is only one aspect of the significance of Kedarnath as a site. It is this composite quality of Kedarnath's demographics that recommends the use of social constructionist *as well as* phenomenological approaches.

Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson engage this issue in their discussion of how anthropological theory is trying to, in different ways, move beyond the notion of monolithic local cultures. Feld's description of Kaluli soundscapes, they might suggest, misleadingly presents a unitary view of Kaluli "culture". Instead, they argue:

...all associations of place, people, and culture are social and historical creations to be explained, not given natural facts... cultural territorializations (like ethnic and national ones) must be understood as complex and contingent results of ongoing historical and political processes. It is these processes, rather than pregiven cultural entities, that require anthropological study.<sup>40</sup>

This is a somewhat different enjoiner and point of departure from the sense-experience based notion of "senses of place." Gupta and Ferguson continue by

---

1991); William S. Sax, *Dancing the Self: Personhood and Performance in the Pāṇḍav Līlā of Garhwal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Sax, *God of Justice*; Karin M. Polit, "The Effects of Inequality and Relative Marginality on the Well-being of Low Caste People in Central Uttaranchal," *Anthropology & Medicine* 12, no. 3 (2005): 225-237; Karin M. Polit, "Performing heritage through rituals, the case of Uttarakhand," in *Religion, Ritual, Theatre*, ed. Bent Fleming Nielsen, Bent Holm, and Karen Vedel (Peter Lang, 2008); William S. Sax, "Divine Kingdoms in the Central Himalayas," in *Sacred Landscape of the Himalaya: proceedings of an international conference at Heidelberg, 25-27 May 1998*, ed. Niels Gutschow et al. (Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2003).

<sup>40</sup> Ferguson and Gupta, *Culture, Power, Place*, 45.

specifically problematizing the local. They argue that relationships between the “local” and the “regional, national, international, global” are too often taken as given, and that geographic analysis ought to “focus on social and political processes of place making conceived less as a matter of ‘ideas’ than of embodied practices that shape identities and enable resistances...”<sup>41</sup>

Anthropologists who work on travel to pilgrimage places follow similar paths as they have sought to move on from the foundational work of Victor and Edith Turner on the activity of pilgrimage.<sup>42</sup> The Turners famously argued for a model of pilgrimage that upholds normal social structure and division by creating a liminal time and space in which that social structure breaks down and is subsumed in collective feelings of *communitas*. The remarks of John Eade and Michael J. Sallnow provide a good example of this trend:

Accordingly, the analytic emphasis shifts from positivist, generic accounts of the features and functions of pilgrimage, of the extrinsic characteristics of its focal shrines, towards an investigation of how the practices of pilgrimage and the sacred powers of a shrine are constructed as varied and possibly conflicting representations by the different sectors of the cultic constituency, and indeed by those outside it as well.<sup>43</sup>

While the theorizing of pilgrimage is not the primary aim of this work there is a good deal of overlap, both in the study of Hindu places of pilgrimage and more broadly, between the study of pilgrimage place and the study of the process and activity of

---

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 6-7.

<sup>42</sup> Pilgrimage and pilgrimage place are analytic categories that overlap considerably. That being said, I regard my task to be an account of place, since an ethnographic account of the activity and process of pilgrimage from one individual or group’s point of view (unless mostly from the point of view of the residents of the pilgrimage place) logistically and pragmatically precludes a comprehensive account of the destination.

<sup>43</sup> John Eade and Sallnow, Michael J, *Contesting the sacred: The anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 5.

pilgrimage.<sup>44</sup> Viewing Kedarnath through the analytic lens of pilgrimage tourism is itself significantly nuanced by the indigenous notion of *yatra*, which holds together as partially overlapping activities what the English terms *pilgrimage* and *tourism*, as well as the compound *pilgrimage tourism*, structure as distinct phenomena. The interpenetration of pilgrimage and tourism is already well established on the scholarly map.<sup>45</sup> Further, in many Indian contexts, pilgrimage often shade into public processions (to Pandarhpur in Maharashtra, the processions of deities in Garhwal).<sup>46</sup>

The status of Kedarnath as a location that attracts people from many different places and walks of life thus requires an approach that is sensitive towards the different populations, contestations, narratives of foundation, practices and activities of different groups found at the site. It is this composite nature of Kedarnath's demography and significances that make the first approach Creswell mentions, the ideographic approach and its attention to particular geographic details and their

---

<sup>44</sup> For a comprehensive review of this scholarship, see S. M. Bhardwaj and J. G. Lochtefeld, "Tirtha," in *The Hindu World*, 2004, 478-501. Some such treatments are thematic; that is to say, they investigate a place or places through a theme (Shulman and divine sacrifice and marriage, Prasad and moral conduct, Parry and the culture of funerary ritual, Levy and Rajopadhyaya and the Newar Hindu urbanism. See the following: David Shulman, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 1980); Leela Prasad, *Poetics of conduct: oral narrative and moral being in a South Indian town* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Parry, *Death in Banaras*; R. I. Levy and K. R. Rajopadhyaya, *Mesocosm: Hinduism and the organization of a traditional Newar city in Nepal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Others focus on *tirtha-yatra* as an activity. For an example see Ann Grodzins Gold, *Fruitful Journeys: The Ways of Rajasthani Pilgrims* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

<sup>45</sup> W. H. Swatos and L. Tomasi, *From Medieval Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism: The Social and Cultural Economics of Piety* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2002); David L. Gladstone, *From Pilgrimage to Package Tour: Travel and Tourism in the Third World*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005); E. Badone and S. R. Roseman, *Intersecting Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004); N. Collins-Kreiner and N. Kliot, "Pilgrimage tourism in the Holy Land: The behavioural characteristics of Christian pilgrims," *GeoJournal* 50, no. 1 (2000): 55-67; R. Raj and N. D. Morpeth, *Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Festivals Management: An International Perspective* (Wallingford, Oxfordshire: CABI, 2007); B. Pfaffenberger, "Serious pilgrimages and frivolous tourists: the chimera of tourism in the pilgrimages of Sri Lanka."

<sup>46</sup> Digambar Balkrishna Mokashi, *Palkhi, an Indian Pilgrimage*, trans. Philip C. Engblom (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987); Sax, *Mountain Goddess*; Knut A. Jacobsen, *South Asian Religions on Display: Religious Processions in South Asia and in the Diaspora*, (London: Routledge, 2009).

significance for “locals”, less well advised and recommends a blending of the phenomenological and social constructionist views of place. That is to say, this theoretical move is a response to the current reality of Kedarnath. A discussion of the idea of *landscape*, a term of art for both of these approaches, will sharpen what is entailed by such a blending and further specify this diverse theoretical terrain.

### *Landscape*

For some, landscape refers to the topology of the natural, physical environment itself that has been rendered meaningful through the sensing of it as place.<sup>47</sup> An important example of this approach is the work of Fred Myers on Pintupi aborigines. Myers, in his discussion of the significance of the physical Australian environment for Pintupi aborigines, shows that the Pintupi concept of Dreaming does not distinguish in a final sense between the physical landscape and the social Law.<sup>48</sup> In a manner similar to that which Basso describes with regard to the Western Apache, the Dreaming (i.e. the narratives of the actions of the ancestors that shaped the landscape that are both narrative and the actions themselves) are what establish the Law. They are both in the past and continually happening. The physical landscape is understood to be a record of the actions of the ancestors which set the precedents for the social Law. The physical environment also is the Law, and vice versa. Geoffrey Lienhardt presents a similar view of what he terms divinity among the Dinka: a fusing of sense impressions of the natural world and social memory that is represented and experienced as an external force that can act as an agent in the world: divinity.<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> *Senses of Place*.

<sup>48</sup> Fred R Myers, *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place, and Politics Among Western Desert Aborigines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

<sup>49</sup> G. Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka* (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1987).

The treatment of both of these examples exhibits a blending of two important theoretical approaches. The first is that of the phenomenology of place in which sense experience of the physical landscape fuses with and is epistemologically co-extensive with the frameworks used to sense and make sense of that physical landscape. The second is the mechanism famously described by Durkheim through which the social comes to be re-presented and re-experienced as something external to the individual. The Law becomes part of the external landscape sensed by the body, externalized memory blends with the natural world to become agentive divinity. However, these approaches both present the reader with a fairly monolithic indigenous local group: “the Pintupi”, “the Dinka”. This is precisely the unreconstructed view of the local that Gupta and Ferguson criticize.

Eric Hirsch and Michael O'Hanlon suggest that the term landscape has a double identity in anthropological discourses:

... 'Landscape' has been deployed, first, as a framing convention which informs the way the anthropologist brings his or her study into 'view'...Secondly, it has been used to refer to the meaning imputed by local people to their cultural and physical surroundings.<sup>50</sup>

Thus, they suggest that, both with regard to the ways that anthropologists have looked at the places of the people they study and in the way that those people themselves may represent their worlds, the sensing of the environment and representations of that sensing do not premise themselves on a static, picture-like world.<sup>51</sup> Rather, landscape, both as representation and as life-world, should be seen as a process of dynamic

---

<sup>50</sup> Hirsch and O'Hanlon, *The anthropology of landscape*, 1.

<sup>51</sup> See Christopher Pinney's application of Heidegger's notion of the “world-picture” in this same volume: Christopher Pinney, “Moral Topophilia: The Significations of Landscape in Indian Oleographs,” in *The Anthropology of Landscape: perspectives on place and space* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 78-113.



relationship between foregrounds and backgrounds that have different significances and different contents. Thus, for the Piro of the Amazon, the locations that they inhabit most of the time, their foregrounds, are contrasted with the background locations of danger and opportunity found in the “regenerated forest and new portions of the river” into which they must foray for particular purposes.<sup>52</sup> Their lives are a movement between these foregrounds and backgrounds. Hirsch and O'Hanlon argue that the ways that the Piro experience the world as divided between foreground and background are structurally similar way to the ways in which the “merging of two cultures of visualization and the forms of representation of each” may be seen in the relationships between foreground and background in European genres of landscape painting.<sup>53</sup> The ultimate base for their notion of foreground and background is the now familiar binary of space (here as background) and place (here as foreground), and the dynamic relationship between them that bears intrinsically on the act of perception. Under broad examination, the idea of *landscape* yields an example of how a single term might fuse phenomenological and social constructionist approaches. This is exemplification is apt in a second way as well; it clarifies the utility and importance of attention to visual culture in Kedarnath. It also makes transparent the connection between the impetuses, discussed at length in the introduction, provided by the salient features of visual print culture of Kedarnath for this work as a whole.

### ***Hybrid Emplacement and Visual Culture at Kedarnath***

Robust investigation of Kedarnath as a place requires that one view it as a deeply significant landscape filled with the presence of Shiva in the Himalayas in a way

---

<sup>52</sup> Hirsch and O'Hanlon, *The anthropology of landscape*, 9-10.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

that recalls the treatments of Myers and Lienhardt. It also must be regarded as the site of dynamic cultural, social, and economic processes. One way to tackle this dual requirement is through examination of visual print culture in Kedarnath, particularly through attention to the foregrounds and backgrounds of printed calendar art found in the Kedarnath bazaar. Christopher Pinney, in his work on the hybrid European-Indian genre of calendar art in South Asian visual culture, and in particular the presence of such calendar art in modern day North India, has convincingly demonstrated that use of foregrounds and background in such posters enact tensions in modern north Indian society between different ways of being in the world, such as the tension between agricultural and technological, modern lifestyles.<sup>54</sup> Specifically, for Pinney, the representation of landscape in calendar art is a “stylized aesthetic which expresses a historical and moral topophilia.”<sup>55</sup> These representations illustrate “the intersection and conflict of, on the one hand, a folk model of historical decay and, on the other, a nationalist political language of modernity.”<sup>56</sup>

Tensions between different modes of lifestyle and being are apparent at Kedarnath. It is both an abode of Shiva and a perfect picture post-card of Himalayan beauty. It is a place that is difficult to get to but also a place where Shiva is especially accessible. Going on *yatra* to the Himalayas is in some ways an eminently traditional act and in other ways eminently modern. Most, if not all, of the people who find themselves in Kedarnath end up seeing it with double vision – as modern pilgrimage tourist destination in the Himalayas and as a place of power, an abode of Shiva. Almost all of them also buy images of Kedarnath to take home; the images are also

---

<sup>54</sup> Pinney, “Moral Topophilia.”

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

commodities. Careful attention to such print images, the subject of Chapter Five, uniquely illuminates this character of the site.

My use of visual print culture as a way of thinking through the character of Kedarnath as a place builds on previous linkages between the study of place and visual culture. Martin Gaenzle and Jorg Gengnagel work through the multiple modalities in which people visually engage place in their recent edited volume on Banaras. Locating themselves with reference to Casey, Basso, Feld, Hirsch and O’Hanlon, they offer the notion of “cultural representations of space” as the analytic frame for holding together the diverse topics of the anthology.<sup>57</sup> Offering a useful general picture on the intersection of place and visuality in South Asia, they write that

South Asia has a particularly rich heritage which includes scholarly treatises and handbooks with practical advice (e.g. *vastu śāstra* knowledge) and the long tradition of *maṇḍala*- related concepts in both the political and religious sense, which is reflected in indigenous cartography. A place is generally sacralized by the presence of a divine being, local spirits, and goddesses and gods of different orders. Visual representation of space in shrines or other objects of divine presence thus implies some form of interaction with these divinities, be it visiting, “seeing” (*darśana*), offering gifts or receiving blessings. This is an important cultural practice which is embedded in other practices (bodily movement, ritual, music, speech, etc...), and as a social phenomenon it is subject to change. The colonial encounter introduced new forms of visualization, new media and markets, different ways of seeing and treating space, which were variously appropriated, assimilated or rejected...<sup>58</sup>

The utility of investigating forms of visual culture found at Kedarnath as a tool for developing a conception of the site as a whole is apparent from these succinct framings. And, to return to Pinney’s observations about the lifestyles represented in

---

<sup>57</sup> Martin. Gaenzle and Jörg. Gengnagel, *Visualizing space in Banaras : images, maps, and the practice of representation*, Ethno-Indology, v. 4 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 8.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

the foregrounds and backgrounds of calendar art, yet another part of the conception of Kedarnath as a whole that attention to its visual culture generates are the ways in which people must navigate between embodiment and representation while present there. These navigations are part of what a social constructionist lens renders visible. John Durham Peters calls this condition of being caught between culture and mass culture, between being in the landscape and seeing it as a picture, the condition of bifocality.<sup>59</sup> It is a condition of living caught between different modes of being in the world. Mary M. Crain thinks through many of the above issues in her work on the changes tourism is bringing to the Andalusian pilgrimage tradition of El Rocio. She asks

What does it mean to be a member of a “local community” in such a world of simulations and commodified differences? .....how does this change the way in which such things as locality and community themselves are lived and understood?... During the past three decades the mass media and the tourist industry, as well as new social groups, have become increasingly implicated in this event, initiating its transformation from a local *romeria* (religious pilgrimage) to a festival with regional, national, and secular dimensions.<sup>60</sup>

There are many ways that the case of Kedarnath, given that it is a Hindu pilgrimage place of pan-Hindu *and* local and regional importance, might specify and nuance this view. The point, nonetheless, is clear. By the time most people arrive in Kedarnath, whether as locals coming for the season or as outsiders for a day, their relationship to the place is bifocal – it is a destination at which they know through their bodies that they have arrived, and it is a destination that may have been represented to them thousands of times, in narrative and in image. Attention to this bifocality is but one of

---

<sup>59</sup> J. Durham Peters, “Seeing Bifocally: Media, Place, Culture,” in *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, 79.

<sup>60</sup> Mary M. Crain, “The remaking of an Andalusian pilgrimage tradition: debates regarding visual (re) presentation and the meanings of “locality” in a global era,” in *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, 292.

many aspects of the landscape and place of Kedarnath that recommends a blending of social constructionist and phenomenological approaches.

***The Sacredness of Place, Space, and Landscape in Religious Studies***

Attention to landscape and space within the field of religious studies (and further afield) is often prefixed by the term *sacred*. As Kim Knott has pointed out, investigations of the spatiality of the “sacred” became concerns of the scholarly mainstream largely through Gerardus van der Leuww’s *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, published in 1933.<sup>61</sup> Mircea Eliade famously regarded sacred space as an irruption or break in the otherwise undifferentiated spatiality of the profane.<sup>62</sup> Eliade has of course been critiqued in many quarters, most notably by Jonathan Z. Smith, for his lack of engagement with questions of the specific contexts and the reliability of his primary textual sources.<sup>63</sup> Knott observes that, in the study of religion, it was most famously J.Z. Smith who first “dislodged theory on sacred space from its previous base within a phenomenological conception of both the ‘sacred’ and ‘place’, and re-engaged it with social and cultural constructionist approaches from anthropology and sociology.”<sup>64</sup> This move reemphasizes the over-determined relationship in the study of religion between phenomenological and critical, social constructionist approaches mentioned earlier in this chapter.

William Sax makes a strong assertion regarding the analytic challenges entailed in the utilization *and* non-utilization of analytic categories such as *sacred place*:

---

<sup>61</sup> Knott, “Spatial Theory and the Study of Religion,” 1104.

<sup>62</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The sacred and the profane : the nature of religion* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1987).

<sup>63</sup> See for example Jonathan Z Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, Chicago studies in the history of Judaism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>64</sup> Knott, “Spatial Theory and the Study of Religion,” 1105.

Scholarly work in this area constantly threatens to be vitiated by the categories of analysis employed. On the one hand, many social scientists (e.g. Bhardwaj 1973, Sopher 1968) tend to ignore the specifically religious dimensions of sacred places. In failing to raise issues of religious power and experience, such studies also fail to describe their object adequately, much less analyze it. On the other hand, specialists in the study of religion persist in using transcendental and non-empirical categories – especially the category of the “the sacred” itself – to describe and analyze their object. This use of transcendental categories reflects a wider tendency to make a rigid distinction between politics and religion...<sup>65</sup>

It should be noted that Sax bases his on observations on extant work. He does not suggest that combining the approaches of the social sciences and the study of religion is intrinsically impossible.

The notions of sacred space, place, and landscape continue to have a presence, albeit a somewhat ambiguous presence, in the study of religion. For example, the notion of *sacred landscape*, though its inclusion of the term *sacred* renders it an appropriate subject for Sax’s critique, remains one of the fundamental terms in the study of ecology and religion. One striking example of the differential persistence of this term may be seen in through comparison of the title of an extraordinarily nuanced presentation of place in Rajasthan by Ann Gold (*Story, Ritual, and Environment*) with the title of the anthology in which it is located.<sup>66</sup> That title, *Sacred Landscapes and Cultural Politics*, suggests that the editors of the volume (Ann Grodzins Gold and Phillip Arnold)

---

<sup>65</sup> Sax, “Divine Kingdoms in the Central Himalayas,” 177.

<sup>66</sup> Ann Grodzins Gold, “Story, Ritual, and Environment in Rajasthan,” in *Sacred Landscapes and Cultural Politics: Planting a Tree*, ed. Philip P. Arnold and Ann Grodzins Gold (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2001). Gold’s commitment to the complexity of the representation of place and environment reveals itself even further in her work with Bhoju Ram Gujar on memory and place in Rajasthan. Their co-authored book is a deeply sensitive, subtle look at people’s memories of how the nature/landscape/physical environment of the former kingdom of Sawar in Rajasthan have changed over time, and is deeply alive to the processual ways in which experiences and representations of nature in the kingdom of Sawar occur. It is perhaps an ideal example of a work that refuses to reduce the complexity of its objects of inquiry. See Ann Grodzins Gold, *In the Time of Trees and Sorrows: Nature, Power, and Memory in Rajasthan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002).

felt that the term *sacred landscapes* by itself did not do justice to their goals for the conversation but also that it could not be done without entirely.<sup>67</sup>

Some scholars, in contradistinction to Knott's later work in this vein, have explored the putatively unique characteristics of sacred space, a formulation that extends Lefebvrian-based notions of social space (the social constructionist model) to include varieties of inner and outer spatialities that have specifically religious connotations. Allan Grapard proffers the notion of the mandalization of space to frame forms of "genotype" and "chronotype" found in indigenous descriptions of Mount Hiko in Japan.<sup>68</sup> Hedva Ben-Israel uses the term "sanctification" to discuss how Israeli nationalist discourses transform traditional Jewish conceptions of the Land of Israel.<sup>69</sup> Moshe Kalian and Eliezer Witztum use a blend of phenomenological and psychological analysis to explore the case of religiously-inflected psychotic episodes in Jerusalem.<sup>70</sup>

Much of the differential persistence of the notion of the "sacred" in current approaches to the study of religion (and places of religious significance) centers on continuing debates surrounding the figure of Mircea Eliade and his work. While as William Paden rightly points out Eliade was not the first scholar to suggest the sacred as an analytic category, Eliade's formulations of the term (particularly for thinking

---

<sup>67</sup> For an example of an edited volume somewhat less troubled by the interpretive freight of the term *sacred* as an analytic prefix see the following David L. Carmichael, ed., *Sacred Sites, Sacred Places*, *One world archaeology* 23 (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>68</sup> Allan G. Grapard, "Geotyping Sacred Space: The Case of Mount Hika in Japan," in *Sacred Space: Shrine, City, Land*, ed. Benjamin Z. Kedar and R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 234. For further examples of how scholars offer specifications for the presence of the sacred (or in this case "sanctity") in particular locales, see Phyllis Granoff and Koichi Shinohara, eds., *Pilgrims, Patrons, and Place: Localizing Sanctity in Asian Religions* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003).

<sup>69</sup> Hedva Ben-Israel, "Hallowed Land in the Theory and Practice of Modern Nationalism," in *Sacred Space: Shrine, City, Land*, ed. Benjamin Z. Kedar and R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 291.

<sup>70</sup> Moshe Kalian and Eliezer Witztum, "Facing a Holy Space: Psychiatric Hospitalization of Tourists in Jerusalem," in *Sacred Space: Shrine, City, Land*, ed. Benjamin Z. Kedar and R. J. Zwi Werblowsky (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 328.

about questions of space and place) have arguably supplanted those of figures such as Durkheim and Otto.<sup>71</sup> However, recent and ongoing scholarly conversations surrounding Eliade's life and work demonstrate that there is not scholarly consensus regarding both the nature and scholarly import of several of the main topics about which he has been traditionally critiqued: his notion that the sacred possesses separate ontological and transcendental status, his lack of regard for historical and anthropological context, and his biographical and conceptual linkages to fascist political agendas.<sup>72</sup>

Given the unresolved nature of such conversations, my choice in this work to not employ a notion of sacred place or space as the overarching frame through which to view Kedarnath reflects in the main my own view that such a frame simply does not offer the most useful angle of approach for the particular case with which I am concerned. Approaching and discussing Kedarnath primarily as a sacred place would not sufficiently alert the reader to the ways in which the power Kedarnath exercises in the lives and experience of those present in the plays is a combination of what Scott Kugle, in his work on the Sufi body, discusses as analytically distinct phenomena: sacred power, social power, and political power.<sup>73</sup> Part of the particularity of Kedarnath are the ways in which its religious power (itself a combination of the power and agency of Shiva and the power of the Himalayan environment more generally) fuses with its

---

<sup>71</sup> On these points see William Paden, "Before 'the Sacred' became Theological: Rereading the Durkheimian Legacy," in *Mircea Eliade: A Critical Reader*, ed. Bryan Rennie (London: Equinox, 2006), 68-80.

<sup>72</sup> Paden, "Before 'the Sacred' became Theological: Rereading the Durkheimian Legacy"; Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Eternal Deferral," in *Hermeneutics, Politics, and the History of Religions: The Contested Legacies of Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade*, ed. Christian K. Wedemeyer and Wendy Doniger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 215-240; Elaine Fisher, "Fascist Scholars, Fascist Scholarship: The Quest for Ur-Fascism and the Study of Religion," *Ibid.*, 261-284; Bryan Rennie, *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 1-27.

<sup>73</sup> Scott Kugle, *Sufis & saints' bodies: mysticism, corporeality, & sacred power in Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 50.



social, cultural, economic, and environmental power in the experience of those present in the place. These other sorts of power may well be understood as the residue of the primordial and indexical (and sacred) power of Shiva and the Himalayan mountains, yet in the Kedarnath of 2007 these many kinds of power and culture frame fuse in the production of experiences of place and do not remain distinct.<sup>74</sup>

In a broader taxonomical sense, Kedarnath may certainly be understood as a sacred place, and indeed there are ways to read Eliade's understanding of the ways that the sacred camouflages itself that might account for many of my concerns with its utility as an analytic frame for my particular case.<sup>75</sup> Given the intrinsically comparative nature of the academic study of religion it may well be necessary to employ such terms at a general level in order to talk coherently about different examples and phenomena that arise in different times, spaces, and in different religious traditions and sub-groups. I do not mean to imply here that that the study of religion ought to dispense with the idea of the sacred, especially given that it remains an open question what such a designation might mean.<sup>76</sup> Yet the core purpose of this work is to account for the specific textures of Kedarnath, and while an investigation of sacred place would certainly unearth Kedarnath as a site worthy of investigation, I am not convinced that it would take the discussion far enough into the important particulars of the site in its current form. A more analytically local and "down to earth" mode of approach is

---

<sup>74</sup> I am grateful to Laurie Patton (personal communication) for her formulation of the term "residue" as a way of thinking about traces of divine agency in the sensible world.

<sup>75</sup> On this point see Moshe Idel, "The Camouflaged Sacred in Mircea Eliade's Self-Perception, Literature, and Scholarship," in *Hermeneutics, Politics, and the History of Religions: The Contested Legacies of Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade*, 159-196.

<sup>76</sup> I am indebted to Corinne Dempsey and Eliza Kent for illuminating conversation on this point.

necessary for the muddy and marshy textures of place and divine presence we find in Kedarnath.

### **Place, Experience, and Critical Phenomenology**

Both in the study of religion and in the study of place and space, it is not strictly necessary to view social constructionist and phenomenological approaches as mutually antithetical. In this assertion I take my bearings from recent trends in anthropology regarding the theorization of experience. Specifically, I am in conversation with the trajectory which Sarah Willen, following Robert Desjarlais, has termed the critical phenomenological approach. As Willen writes about her own work with illegal migrant workers in Tel Aviv:

Following Desjarlais, I find it useful to characterize this project as an effort to develop a “critical phenomenology of migrant ‘illegality’”, understood as “a phenomenologically inclined account ... which attends at once to the concerns and lifeworlds of [our ethnographic subjects] and to the interrelated social, discursive, and political forces that underpinned those concerns and lifeworlds.”<sup>77</sup>

Willen argues that an account of the “sensory world” (to use Desjarlais' term) of such workers also includes an account of their social and economic worlds both as individuals and as groups.<sup>78</sup> That is to say, phenomenological attention to sense experience is broadened to include inter-subjectively constituted social and economic environments suffused with the dynamics of power. If, to recall Casey's use of Merleau Ponty, one always finds oneself already in body and already in place, then Willen and Desjarlais would perhaps say that that body and that place are also already social,

---

<sup>77</sup> Sarah S. Willen, “Toward a Critical Phenomenology of Illegality: State Power, Criminalization, and Abjectivity among Undocumented Migrant Workers in Tel Aviv, Israel,” *International Migration* 45, no. 3 (2007): 12.

<sup>78</sup> For another example of this approach see Robert R. Desjarlais, *Shelter Blues: Sanity and Selfhood Among the Homeless*, Contemporary ethnography (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1997).

already inter-subjective, and in the case of the illegal migrant workers with whom Willen works, already deeply constrained. The *experience* of being a person is phenomenologically encultured and constrained. The *experience* of being in Kedarnath is phenomenologically about the interplay of physical environment, devotion, money, nature, efficacy, and attractive power.

Critical phenomenological approaches to experience are also alert to the intersubjective qualities of being a person in the world; others are always already present. This insistence, coupled with the persistent local/*yatri* framing that I found to be one of the main ways that social identity was referenced in Kedarnath, has engendered in me a heightened sensitivity to the ways in which experiences of Kedarnath are often most saliently produced in moments of interaction between *yatri*s and locals. This sensitivity has in turn led me to replicate this binary in this work; in chapters four, five, and six I make a point of distinguishing between *yatri* points of view and local points of view.<sup>79</sup>

This critical phenomenological approach represents one among many efforts to move beyond culture in anthropological investigation, as I already mentioned with reference to Gupta and Ferguson.<sup>80</sup> Other such attempts include psycho-analytically inflected approaches to the study of possession and healing such as those by Vincent Crapanzano, Gyannath Obeyesekere, Byron Good, and Sarah Pinto.<sup>81</sup> Medical

---

<sup>79</sup> I am grateful to Joyce Flueckiger for helping me think through how to rhetorically register this emphasis on the intersubjective quality of experiences of Kedarnath as a place.

<sup>80</sup> Ferguson and Gupta, *Culture, Power, Place*.

<sup>81</sup> Vincent Crapanzano, *Tuhami, portrait of a Moroccan* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); Gananath Obeyesekere, *Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); A. Kleinman, L. Eisenberg, and B. Good, *Culture, illness, and care: clinical lessons from anthropologic and cross-cultural research*, vol. 4 (American Psychiatric Association, 2006); Sarah Pinto, *Casting Desire: Reproduction, Loss, and Subjectivity in Rural North India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

anthropologist Arthur Kleinman, along with others, has similarly attempted to theorize new ways of approaching the intractable challenge of human suffering that do not stop with cultural analysis.<sup>82</sup>

Willen describes critical phenomenological approaches as “three-dimensional”, meaning that they are approaches that recognize that focus on a single aspect of a subject’s experience (i.e. time or home or embodiment) would fall short of adequate description.<sup>83</sup> She argues that such analytic three-dimensionality is crucial for understanding the lives of people outside the law, living in constant worry, living between nations. Michael Jackson's recent piece on the life of a Sierra Leonean man in London is a good example of the fragile nature of such lives and the necessity for finding ways to allow such voices to speak.<sup>84,85</sup>

Several works on Hindu pilgrimages places have demonstrated their awareness for necessity of such methodological three-dimensionality in different ways, as well as the potential pitfalls of such an approach. Gaya Charan Tripathi has written a rigorous and comprehensive textual presentation, translation and explication of the daily *puja* ceremony in the Jagannath temple based on palm leaf manuscripts found in Orissa.<sup>86</sup> In this approach what happens inside the temple is the single defining feature the reader

---

<sup>82</sup> Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das, and Margaret M. Lock, *Social Suffering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>83</sup> Willen, “Toward a Critical Phenomenology of Illegality,” 11.

<sup>84</sup> Michael Jackson, “The Shock of the New: On Migrant Imaginaries and Critical Transitions,” *Ethnos* 73, no. 1, Routledge Journals (March 2008): 57-72.

<sup>85</sup> One might generatively contrast Michael Jackson’s description of the daily life of his Sierra Leonean friend in London with the description given by E. Valentine Daniel of his performance of the Sabarimalai pilgrimage in Kerala. Daniel uses a semiotic phenomenological approach (Peircean) to describe his own experience and that of others on the journey and how the experience of the journey to get *darshan* of Ayappa relates to the fluid contours of Tamil personhood. However, in this account he does not particularly engage questions of social and economic constraint. My surmise is that Willen and Desjarlais would not be willing to call his approach three-dimensional. See E. Valentine Daniel, *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

<sup>86</sup> Gaya Charan Tripathi, *Communication with God: The Daily Pūjā Ceremony in the Jagannātha Temple* (New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2004).

encounters of Jagannath Puri. On the other hand, the editorial team of Anncharlott Eschmann, Hermann Kulke, and Gaya Charan Tripathi assembled an anthology on Jagannath Puri which displays diverse subject matter and approach: the history of Vaishnavism in Orissa, the history of the temple, the relationship of the Jagannath deities to tribal deities of the area, temple policy and patronage in the medieval period, priestly organization and patronage, the identity of the deities, and the relationship of Jagannath to Oriya political sentiment.<sup>87</sup> The most recent scholarly work on Jagannath and one of the most sophisticated recent treatments of Hindu place, Ishita Banerjee Dube's recent historical anthropology of Jagannath Puri builds on these works. Dube takes as her explicit analytic purpose the holding of diverse aspects of Jagannath Puri within a single "analytic field", an approach that recalls my own drive for a theoretical and methodological holism:

By blending chronicles of the governance of the temple and accounts of the aspirations of the devotees, I attempt to breakdown the boundaries of pilgrimage studies, questions the dubious division between structure and process, religion and politics, pilgrimage and tourism. *Divine Affairs* underscores the inextricable links between the putative domains of the 'spiritual' and the 'temporal' in order to expose the inconsistencies inherent in a straightforward separation of religious virtue and state power. It brings together the early nineteenth and the late twentieth centuries within a single analytical field to examine the enduring bequests of the colonial regime in the understanding and 'management' of religion by the independent Indian state, further underscoring the contradictory consequences produced by a coupling of inherited ideas of order and improvement with the constructed ideal of *dharma* in the postcolonial secular state's work upon religion.<sup>88</sup>

---

<sup>87</sup> *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*, South Asian studies no. 8 (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1978); *Jagannath Revisited: Studying Society, Religion, and the State In* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2001).

<sup>88</sup> Ishita Banerjee Dube, *Divine Affairs: Religion, Pilgrimage and the State in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2001), x-xi.

The approach on display here is an historical anthropological approach that takes as its main analytic unit the complicated network of interpenetrations among the administrative history of Jagannath and its character in the experience and perception of devotees. The emphasis of the work is on the historical underpinnings of the current anthropological realities found at the site. Dube's commitment to a methodological holism that resists a dichotomizing of Jagannath Puri into what previous generations in the study of religion might call "sacred" and "secular" aspects is laudable, and in many aspects I share this aim. In comparison, the gaze of my own work, pursuant to a critical phenomenological approach, focuses to a relatively greater extent on the embodied aspects of being present in Kedarnath.

Another recent work displays a different method of framing place in South Asia that nonetheless treats a significant amount of historical material. Lawrence Babb, John Cort, and Michel Meister choose a thematic orientation for the rich fruits of their long-standing collaborative scholarship on a series of four Hindu and Jain temples in Rajasthan. They inflect their researches through four themes (history, architectural structure, pilgrims and patrons, and social identities.) rather than providing the reader with a single model for understanding and evaluating the effect of these themes on people who visit the temples in question.<sup>89</sup> Their project, as they phrase it, is an attempt to answer the question "What is a temple?", and this aim (different as well from the aim of answering questions such as "what is the experience of a temple?") structures their presentation and their content to great extent.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>89</sup> Lawrence A. Babb, John E. Cort, and Michael W. Meister, *Desert temples : sacred centers of Rajasthan in historical, art-historical, and social context* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2008).

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

It is also important to note that James Lochtefeld's recent work on the Hindu pilgrimage place of Haridwar takes an intentionally non-unitary approach to its subject as it engages a laudably broad and deep set of data about the site in its current and historical iterations. Lochtefeld emphasizes the necessity of a multiplicity of views and approaches to the site of Haridwar, and while his work as a whole is a delineation of a singular place of complex character, he intentionally resists offering a single "story" that will frame the place.<sup>91</sup> To large extent I firmly share Lochtefeld's commitment to a broad analysis of Hindu place that interpenetrates historical, social, and traditionally religious data. The ways in which our analytic paths diverge stems primarily from the different characters of the sites we engage. The site of Kedarnath is experienced primarily as a single powerful entity comprised of the complex overlapping of different facets of the place. Haridwar, on the other hand, is a site of composite significance and power that is also a small urban center. Thus, appropriate analytic attention to the multiple aspects of each site takes a different form.

### ***Critical Phenomenology, Place, and Religious Studies***

The examples I have just discussed, whether anthology or monograph, effectively illustrate a number of different three-dimensional methods for approaching Hindu place in South Asia. In this work I am similarly committed to such three-dimensionality, the specific relationships among physical environment, cultural association, practice inside and outside the temple, and economic activity push towards the critical phenomenological approach already under consideration. Throughout this work it is my contention that it is only through such an approach that it becomes

---

<sup>91</sup> James Lochtefeld, *God's Gateway: Identity and Meaning in a Hindu Pilgrimage Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010),5.

possible to view Kedarnath's overlapping identities as *tirtha*, abode of Shiva, site of natural beauty, and site of economic opportunity in a single analytic moment. The model of the complex agency of Kedarnath as both place and *tirtha* offers a single frame through which the data of sense experience, the altitude and weather of Kedarnath, the moment of *darshan*, and the inflation of up to three hundred percent of basic items such as chai in the Kedarnath bazaar may be analytically encountered.

My aims, however, are slightly different from those that drive anthropologists interested in questions of experience and critical phenomenology. My primary goal is not to create the space for oppressed voices to be heard, to render visible the exercise of human agency and resistance, or to come to terms with suffering and trauma. Rather, my goal is to talk about Kedarnath in a way that appropriately captures its character as a famous abode of Shiva but also does not presume that this aspect of Kedarnath is the primary component in the experience of all present at the site. It does not make sense to structure an approach to Kedarnath around an analytic designation of the site as a “sacred” place. Nor would it be appropriate to leave out of an analytic frame an acknowledgement of that which almost all present at the site would say is the ultimate reason that they are in that place. For a view of Kedarnath as place, it will not do to structure an analysis of Kedarnath around an approach that distinguishes in any pre-emptive or static way between the “sacred” and “profane” aspects of the site in space and time. Yet, at the same time, a responsible treatment of the site will offer a way of engaging what Sax (in the critique reference earlier in this chapter) calls “religious power”.<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> I am deeply indebted to Don Seeman for drawing my attention to the considerably utility of Sax’s phrasing for the analytic purposes of this work.



The discipline of religious studies is perhaps the primary audience for this work, even though much of how I approach Kedarnath is conditioned through anthropology, philosophy, geography, and the analysis of visual culture rather than through, for example, the history of religions. This means several disclaimers are in order. This work is an inquiry into experiences of Kedarnath as a place, not “religious” experiences of Kedarnath as a place. I do not seek to identify as special or set apart particular sorts of experiences one might have at Kedarnath from other experiences. I do not seek to engage questions of mystical language beyond experience, empirically unfalsifiable inner experiences of the sort postulated by James, Otto and problematized by Proudfoot.<sup>93</sup> I do not follow those such as Keith Yandell and empirically evaluate the truth content of particular experiences of Shiva at Kedarnath, though many Indians in fact assumed this to be my primary research purpose.<sup>94</sup> My own fieldwork indicates that attempts in this direction would obscure much of what makes Kedarnath a place with power to attract hundreds of thousands of people a year.<sup>95</sup>

### **The Complex Agency of Kedarnath Inside and Outside the Temple**

What is important, significant, and powerful about Kedarnath does not lie only inside the temple, or even only inside the confines of the built environment of the village. While what happens inside the temple is certainly a major element of what is important about Kedarnath, what happens inside the temple at Kedarnath is not

---

<sup>93</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The idea of the holy an inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational.*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1973); William James, *The varieties of religious experience* (New York: Library of America, 2010); Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>94</sup> K. E. Yandell, *The epistemology of religious experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>95</sup> A commitment to the anthropological investigation of experience does not necessarily preclude an appreciation of the analytic utility of the idea of the sacred. Drawing on Durkheim, Otto, and Eliade, Thomas Csordas finds considerable utility in the notion of the sacred as wholly other to explain the healing practice and experience of charismatics, See Thomas J. Csordas, *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 24.

distinct in stable ways from what happens outside the temple. The differential importance of the Kedarnath temple to the site of Kedarnath as a whole usefully indicates why holistic, “three-dimensional” approaches to Kedarnath are important. Thus, I do not begin the dissertation as Paul Younger does in his work on Citamparam, with a presentation of the worship inside the temple, but rather with a glimpse of the temple from *devdarshini*.<sup>96</sup> What makes Kedarnath important as a destination is not only the putative presence of Shiva inside the temple. And the site as a whole is not distinct in stable ways from the Himalayas in general. I discuss this point extensively in Chapter Six. What is needed, then, is an approach to the place that provides room for understanding the experience of the presence of Shiva at Kedarnath but does not make this presence a pre-condition for validity of the approach. It is with this need in mind that I introduce my notion of the complex agency of Kedarnath both as place and *tirtha*, building on the idea (proposed by, among others, Ronald Inden and William Sax) that it is analytically productive to regard Hindu deities as complex agents.

Kedarnath is not on the way to any other destination. It is even several days journey beyond the old trade and pilgrim routes from the Uttarkashi side that lead into Triyugi Narayan. And journey directly east to the Kalimath and Madmaheshvar valleys is arduous in the best of conditions. Kedarnath is at the end of a mostly enclosed river valley that makes a three-sided box.<sup>97</sup> Were it not for the presence of Shiva at Kedarnath the only people to come into the valley would be shepherds and goatherds bringing their flocks for pasturage. Thus, Kedarnath participates in many overlapping

---

<sup>96</sup> Paul Younger, *The Home of Dancing Sivan: The Traditions of the Hindu Temple in Citamparam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 11.

<sup>97</sup> I am grateful to D.R. Purohit for drawing my attention to the cultural and historical significance of the isolation of the north end of the Kedarnath valley.

networks of local, regional, national, and international scope but it participates as a powerful site on the periphery of the networks that constrains the web of networks to facilitate its own inclusion – through the creation of roads, tourist infrastructure, and in 2007 and 2008, a branch of the State Bank of India (though Kedarnath does not have an ATM, which Badrinath reputedly does possess), the dedication of a reservation office for Indian Railways dedicated by no less of a personage than Lalu Prasad Yadav himself.

As I signaled in Chapter Two, the attractive power of the site has passed through a series of iterations and transformations that stretch back at least a millennium. Kedarnath continues to be an attractor of persons, now at the rate of approximately half a million people per year. But it is a diverse attractor. It attracts persons who wish to be purified, to ask a boon and have it granted, to carry out an act that they understand to have considerable traditional importance, to instill the importance of traditional *saṃskāras* (virtues, values, life cycle rites) in their children, to experience the beauty of the Himalayas, and to earn a living. This is a broad set of reasons that nonetheless display commonality: an awareness that there is something about the place (as place, as locus of economic activity, as purifier) that makes itself felt as an attractor, that structures peoples' experience by requiring that they be in that place, with all its exigencies of altitude, weather, money, and culture.

The place itself gives a unique stamp to this feeling – it is the feeling of being in Kedarnath and being caused to be there, the active feeling of having made the effort to reach the place and the passive feeling of being somehow caused to come and struggling with the altitude, the terrain, and the weather. I argue that there is a unity to the fact of this attraction to and in place. Kedarnath calls to people and attracts

them. It is no one's home, no one's "dwelling". Everyone arrives and leaves, and is aware of the effort it takes to be, to exist, in that location. It does not only act on people as an abode of Shiva, but also as a fiercely beautiful and challenging environment that involves a great deal of money.

This idea of Kedarnath's attractive power is based on the indigenous notion of *akarshan*. Yet this is not the indigenous term that would be perhaps be the obvious, well known term to explain why people come to places like Kedarnath. That term would be *bulāvā* (*bulava*, call), the feeling of being called to a particular *tirtha*. *Akarshan*, however, generates different connotations. There is in *akarshan* a sense of compulsion, of magnetism that is less present in *bulava*. It is the way that a magnet calls to iron as opposed to the way, recalling Mark Rohe's work on Vaishno Devi (another Himalayan shrine wherein a deity of uncertain form resides), a mother calls a child.<sup>98</sup> While there is a good amount of connotative overlap, this term is also perhaps more appropriate to Kedarnath's identity as a *linga* of light, a *jyotirlinga* and Shiva's identity, oft-referenced in Shaivite philosophical works, as vibration (*spanda*).<sup>99</sup> Metaphors based on the language of physics (of elements, magnetism, vibration, light, oscillation) are often found in philosophical studies of Shaivism. At Kedarnath, one is perhaps more in a world framed by the idea of a transfigurative force-presence than a personality as such. Perhaps also because *akarshan* is less of a marked term it is slightly more available for me to reinterpret. The attraction is not only a devotional attraction, the sense offered by the term *bulava*. Thus, in Hindi, my argument is that Kedarnath is an attractor of

---

<sup>98</sup> M. E. Rohe, "Ambiguous and Definitive: The Greatness of Goddess Vaisno Devi," in *Seeking Mahadevi: Constructing the Identities of the Hindu Great Goddess*, 2001, 55-76.

<sup>99</sup> M. S. G. Dyczkowski, *The doctrine of vibration* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987); M. S. G. Dyczkowski, *The Stanzas on Vibration: The Spandakarika with Four Commentaries* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

persons, a *logorñ ko ākarśit karne vālā*. Forms of this phrase would occasionally come up in my conversations with both locals and *yatris* at Kedarnath: “There is something about this place that attracts people, that brings them here.” This idea of *akarshan* is further able to serve as an intellectual bridge between the communities with whom I work and the scholarly communities who are the primary audience for my writing. It is also a term that Dabaral, citing Yashpal Jain’s description of Amarnath, uses to describe the power of the Himalayas in general.<sup>100</sup>

To unpack what I mean by *logon ko akarshit karne vala*, I have chosen to invoke the idea of place and *tirtha* as complex agent. Kedarnath is an entity, made up of multiple overlapping constituent factors, that in certain patterned and coherent ways that are measurable and discernable in the world as the action, or agency, of a single entity. This notion of complex agency is to some extent an intentional substitution and broadening of the idea of the “presence of Shiva” famously offered by Stella Kramrisch, a substitution that accords with the place-based view of Kedarnath I take in this work.<sup>101</sup> I borrow and adapt the notion of complex agency from the work of William Sax, who finds considerable utility in the notion of deities as complex agents. He argues for a complex, or distributed notion of agency not defined in opposition to the notion of social structure and not limited to the “capability of power exercised by individual persons, closely connected to or even identical with free will.”<sup>102</sup> Marshalling a broad range of work on primates, machines, technologies, signs, and complex systems, he offers a different working definition for complex agency: “...the capacity to effect

---

<sup>100</sup> “The *darshan* of the Himalayas: ‘The attraction [*ākarśaṇ*] of the Himalayas is [found] nowhere else.’” The translation is mine. See Śivaprasād Ḍabarāl, *Śrī Uttarakhaṇḍ Yātrā Darśan* (Nārayaṇ Koṭi, Gaṛhvāl: Viśālmaṇī Śarmā Upādhyāya, 1961), 5.

<sup>101</sup> Stella Kramrisch, *The presence of Śiva* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

<sup>102</sup> Sax, *God of Justice*, 93.

changes in the external world...”<sup>103</sup> Sax himself builds on the work of historian Ronald Inden, who suggests that Vishnu and Shiva be taken seriously as historical complex agents. Inden in turn built on the idea of R.G. Collingwood that an agent is not a stable, eternal entity. Rather, agents, simple and complex, are better understood as scalar, processual systems of “overlapping entities” whose identity is defined processually through actions in the world.<sup>104</sup>

In such a model of complex agency, it is not necessary that the effector(s) of change in the external world demonstrate full awareness of its/their own agency in order to be regarded as an agent. This view challenges the assertions of sociologists such as Margaret Arthur, for whom agency is at its base an idea used to describe certain attributes of a personhood that contribute to self-awareness and certain mechanisms by which that personhood comes into full being.<sup>105</sup> In Archer's view, personhood emerges into full being through a gradual realization of how a self relates to others and a personal commitment to its own existence that is elaborated through interior conversation.<sup>106</sup> Thus, the use of the language of agency to describe something other than humans or collections of humans or human institutions whose overlapping concerns and investments create a pattern of agency is an assertion that must be justified. Sax asserts that such a non-human model of agency should not in this regard “cause any alarm.”<sup>107</sup>

---

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>104</sup> Ronald B. Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 24-27.

<sup>105</sup> Margaret Scotford Archer, *Being Human: The Problem of Agency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 253.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 193-305.

<sup>107</sup> Sax, *Dancing the Self*, 159.

Further, he argues that the requirement that agents possess consciousness in order to be understood as agents reflects a Western and unnecessarily limited view of consciousness that constitutes a “refusal to take seriously the ontologies of non-European cultures...”<sup>108</sup> Rather, the phenomenon of consciousness, which Sax understands as the “articulation of a vast number of ‘information-processing modules in the mind...’” can simply relocate and function “at a higher level of integration.”<sup>109</sup> At this level, different human and non-human entities may similarly comprise a set of information-processing modules that merely are not all located inside the brain of a single human subject. These modules exist as part of a network of human, material, and non-material simple agents. This understanding of consciousness, and of the utility of the notion of complex agency, premises Sax’s view that complex agency is a useful and philosophically well-attested (he references Tuomela and Searle in this regard) way of thinking about collectively constituted entities that captures the way such entities operate in the human world reasonably well.<sup>110</sup>

Following Inden, Sax’s contribution to the application of complexity theory to cases in the social sciences and humanities is to include deities as part of such complex systems. Inden wants to think about Vishnu and Shiva as agents in the history of the subcontinent. Sax suggests that Hindu deities be understood as complex agents in the context of oracular possession.<sup>111</sup> This is a different analytic solution to the question of possession than, for example, anthropological treatments that examines possession as

---

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 160-161.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. 158

something emerging out of the social and psychological contexts of the possessed individual.<sup>112</sup>

In his most recent work, Sax discusses how the complex agency of deities functions as part of larger systems of agency consisting of social, psychological, and physical webs of connection, through which healing is accomplished. He focuses on these networks of healing practice as they are found in the Harijan cult of the Garhwali deity Bhairava. Drawing on the historian of science Bruno Latour, Sax argues that Garhwali deities, or *devtas*, are part of what he calls “networks” of healing agents.<sup>113</sup> It is through the work of these networks that healing happens. It will be recalled that Thomas Tweed also drew on the thought of Latour to accomplish his goal of de-transcendentalizing the landscapes of biology and culture, what he calls “sacrosapes,” that direct the path of “religious flows.”

Sax’s application of the notion of complex agency has been questioned by John Smith, who regards it as a “rhetorical conjuring trick” whose perhaps unattainable aim is to honor the experience of Garhwalis to whom deities that possess are quite real in an intellectually respectable way.<sup>114</sup> This reply does not, however, do justice to the degree of agency and the degree of impact in the world that Sax is trying to capture. Something else, or what is experienced as something else, comes into the minds and

---

<sup>112</sup> Obeyesekere, *Medusa's Hair*.

<sup>113</sup> Sax, *God of Justice*, 236-240. Several other scholars of modern South Asia examine questions of divine agency as well. See Michael Baltutis, “Renovating Bhairav: Fierce Gods, Divine Agency, and Local Power in Kathmandu,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 13, no. 1 (April 1, 2009): 25-49; Diane P. Mines, *Fierce gods: Inequality, ritual, and the politics of dignity in a south Indian village* (Indiana University Press, 2005); Peter Sutherland, “Travelling gods and government by deity : an ethnohistory of power, representation and agency in west Himalayan polity” (Phd diss., Oxford University, 1998); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe : postcolonial thought and historical difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>114</sup> John D. Smith, “Talking about dancing: the language of anthropology,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005): 134-137.



bodies of people, frequently without or against their volition – they say things they would not say, do things they would not do, and know things they could not know. Somehow healing happens where there was no healing. Certain kinds of healing only happen in Garhwal when the *devtas* are present, whatever that presence “is”. The actions in the world of these “non-empirical beings” are empirical enough to demand serious engagement in some form.<sup>115</sup> There is more at stake here than rhetoric. The notion of deity as complex agent points down a good path; it structures thought and inquiry in directions that are heuristically valuable. It is not a perfect analytic term, but it is creative of a very useful attitude in a reader, a hermeneutic of generosity towards what Sax has termed the “ontologies of non-European cultures.”<sup>116</sup> Sax also himself admits that the concept is a bridge between the world of the western anthropologist and the world of Garhwali culture: “Such an understanding would not be identical to Hindus’ religious ideology, but neither would it contradict it.”<sup>117</sup> This idea also has the potential to function as a disciplinary bridge between the study of religion and the social sciences. It will be remembered that Sax himself, in his critique on the relationships between these disciplines and the most appropriate ways in which the phenomenon of religious power should be approached, pushes for more cross-conversation in this regard.

To say that the place of Kedarnath is a complex agent, therefore, is to say that it is an entity/location composed of the processual overlapping of numerous kinds of agents (which may themselves be complex agents on a smaller scale) whose patterned effects in the world display collective intentionality: humans, cultural forms, built and

---

<sup>115</sup> Sax, *Dancing the Self*, 160.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

physical environments, objects, and deities. A “place”, as Casey, Cresswell, Massey, Low, and Zuneigas remind us, is a sensory occasion, a landscape, a gathering of associations, a point of meeting and process of different sorts of social and economic flows. It is with these understandings of place in mind that I have made the *place* of Kedarnath my unit of analysis. I am *not* proposing a notion of place as complex agent who is a deity. It would be narrow and reductive to present the experience-structuring complex agency of Kedarnath as that of a deity full stop. It is both a site of pilgrimage and tourist activity and an abode of Shiva.

At least in the Kedarnath valley, Shiva is not a deity who possesses. He is one of the deities who undergird the systems inhabited by other deities. He is a deity who is both at the top of the divine hierarchy and best reached through intermediaries (such as Bhairavnath, who does possess) and he is a deity who is *bhola*: at once innocent, unpredictable, and forgetful. Much of Shiva’s power at Kedarnath to purify and grant boons does not appear to be dependent on his awareness or volitional relationship to a devotee but rather as a unmotivated by-product of the nature of Shiva’s presence in Kedarnath. This presence is experienced both in the place and as the place, thus recommending my invocation of the notion of complex agency. The attracting power of Kedarnath is what drives the engine of economic attraction of the region, and many locals’ worship of Kedarnath was phrased to me as the expression of thanks and the hope of economic benefit. For many locals, Kedarnath is less a place of *dharm* (in this usage, “traditional devotion”) than of *dhandha* (“occupation”, “whatever one must do to provide for one’s family”). For some *yatris* it is the natural beauty of the mountains that draws them. For others it is the putative power of the *linga* to purify and grant

wishes. For still others journey to places to Kedarnath are occasions to enjoy the ability to carry out leisure travel and at the same time to do so in an environment that will remind their children of the traditional worlds from which they themselves have begun to feel distant.

The attractive power of Kedarnath is not only theistic. For these reasons I do not merely transpose Sax's notion of deity as complex agent. Rather, I am using it and extending it as a way to view the place of Kedarnath as a whole. Ideally, it is a model of place that will work even if a reader does not wish to grant any reality to the notion of Shiva.<sup>118</sup> A famous university or company, for example, could also be viewed as a *logon ko akarshit karne vala*, as could the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls.

### ***The Production of the Experience of Place as Complex Agent***

The angle of approach of this work is now clear: a critical phenomenological view of Kedarnath as a place that demonstrates multifaceted patterns of complex agency produced by the overlapping of different facets of the site – that demonstrates a power of *akarshan*. This power of *akarshan* is effectively the synthesis of the agency of power of Shiva, the religious and touristic power of the Himalayan locale of Kedarnath, the physical impact of the environment, and the economic and cultural importance of the site. While constructed from the toolboxes of anthropology, geography, visual cultural studies, and philosophy, I mean this argument to be most resonant for those in the study of religion concerned with the ongoing powers of place and space in the modern world and with the study of Shaivism.

It now remains to examine the particulars of how what I term salient constituent elements of the experience of Kedarnath as platial complex agent reflect and produce

---

<sup>118</sup> Smith, "Talking about dancing: the language of anthropology," 136.

such experiences. Each of these elements (narrative exposition, visual print culture, practices in place) under discussion in this work registers the character and complex agency of Kedarnath in unique and complementary ways and act as agents in the production of experiences of Kedarnath in their own right. I first consider the world of narrative exposition in Kedarnath. As I began by noting in the introduction, narratives about the place often frame visit to and residence in the site. Yet precisely how these narratives frame the place and what suggestions they make about its nature is an intricate question.

## In Pursuit of Maheshvara: Narrative Expositions of Kedarnath

### Chapter Four

#### Narratives and Narrative Exposition in the Contexts of Kedarnath

Narratives are traditionally one of the primary forms of cultural event that frame the experience of being in a Hindu place of pilgrimage, for both *yatris* and locals. Even though most, if not all, present in such places carry with them a lifetime's worth of knowledge and associations that may bear on their presence at the site, there are distinct ways that encounter with narratives about *tirthas* shape and reflect the physical experiences of being present in the place. The presentation of such narratives, usually in a coherent form that begins with the beginning and ends with the end, has also comprised an important element in the discussions of scholars who write about such places.

And yet the current situation of narratives about Kedarnath, at Kedarnath, is not wholly coherent. While the majority of narrative expositions about the greatness and origin of Kedarnath share much of their content with material found in the *Shiva Purana*, the ways in which such narratives circulate and function in the context of Kedarnath are exceedingly diverse. The world of narrative exposition about Kedarnath in 2007 and 2008 recommends an interpretive strategy that places the literary, performative, and communicative contexts of these narratives onto a single continuum of texts in context as they are found in and around the location of Kedarnath. The work of this chapter is to delineate this continuum and ask how and when it frames,

represents, and reflects understandings and experiences of Kedarnath as abode of Shiva, as place, and as complex agent, as they are present in and around Kedarnath.<sup>1</sup>

An edited example from my field notes describing a conversation between myself, a group of *yatris* from Hyderabad, and a *tirth purohit* details the utility of this course. It also serves as an artifact, discussed in the introduction, of one of the major types of interactions with *yatris* I saw during my fieldwork: the impromptu and serendipitous conversation whose only record exists in field notes:

**May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2007.** We compared versions of story: in first man's version Bhairav had been chasing Shiva and somehow Shiva ended up here. In another man's version Shiva's presence here was the result of some kind of *tension* or fight [*laṛāī*]. Interesting watching \_\_\_\_\_-Ji try to very gently work the conversation around to the story he knew while at the same time be very broad minded (also this was looking to be a big ticket group so he probably wanted to keep them happy). We also talked about, basically, what things are true and proven (Indian history, the power of the *linga*, how India invented everything first, miracles) – the thread running through the whole conversation was whether something was proven [*pramāṇit*]. As it turns out, one of the things that is totally *pramanit* is *shakti*—so loosely defined - from life animating force to Parvati- that it is self evident and thus totally applicable. They were also trying to get tickets on the \_\_\_\_\_ helicopter service and were conversant with the accident [*ghaṭanā*]<sup>2</sup>, which was glossed as “nobody's fault” by locals. Also talked about alchemy. Were also savvy about local arrangements, *darshan*, etc. but the general tone was of seasoned faith—devout but not suckers if you will.

Here one sees a series of themes (pursuit, violence, “religious power”, authenticity, value for money) that are not part of a single story. The traditional *tirth purohit* narrator is not narrating, but participating in a wide ranging discussion between a group of *yatris* and a Western researcher. Narratives are mentioned, but their presence in the

<sup>1</sup> This chapter, and this work more generally, focus on what is present in Kedarnath. Thus, it is beyond the scope of this work to examine the contexts of use and reception of narrative expositions about Kedarnath pre- and post-visit for *yatris*.

<sup>2</sup> The accident in question was when a local youth died while assisting *yatris* out of a helicopter at the Kedarnath heli-pad in May of 2007.

memory of the speakers is fragmentary. These men had not yet been in the temple. Given that they were a well-off group who stayed in Kedarnath for several days, they quite probably left Kedarnath having passed through a fairly full narrative exposition of the site. Other groups with similar sorts of associations and less time and personal attention by *tirth purohits*, however, could just as easily leave with much the same set of narrative associations as those with which they came. This moment is simply a snapshot, but an important one. It offers a glimpse into how narratives circulate outside of the moments in which they are formally framed, how they often live as part of the half-remembered textures of peoples' lives that they bring with them when they come to sites like Kedarnath or how they might persist after some of the specifics of the visit become blurry through the passage of time.

This excerpt from my field notes constitutes the center on a continuum of the ways that narrative expositions about Kedarnath work and are present in the place itself. At one end of the continuum are full stories with clearly marked beginnings and endings. Such stories are found in Kedarnath in oral and written forms. At the other end of the continuum are narratives about Kedarnath that are not present in Kedarnath in moments and contexts in which they may have been present twenty years ago. My conversations with *tirth purohits* about the Kedarnath of decades past makes it clear that a narrative exposition of Kedarnath is considered a part of what a normal visit under more "traditional" conditions looked like. The examples I offer in this chapter delineate this continuum.

Simply put, verbal narratives about the greatness of Kedarnath in oral or written form play an increasingly minor role in the interaction that most *yatris* have

with the site while present in Kedarnath. Currently, narratives of the greatness and origin of Kedarnath are most often presented in Hindi by locals to *yatris*, almost always (this point was stressed to me many times) in response to an explicit question by a *yatri*. What is here, what is the importance of this *ghi*, what importance is here, how did Kedarnath-Ji originate; these are the sorts of questions that occasion a telling of such a story. Many *yatris*, especially in the high season, do not have the time and practical curiosity, however, for anything other than the most efficient of ritual engagements with a *tirth purohit* and therefore may not ask such questions. Often their engagement, with *tirth purohits* and with others, may not contain any sort of narrative exposition. Of course, visitors and locals bring with them to Kedarnath their own knowledge and experience that bear on the visit. Beyond knowledge of specific topics that I mention in this chapter and the extent to which these greater sets of knowledge and experience were visible to me in Kedarnath, my focus here is on how narrative expositions of Kedarnath work in and around the site itself.

Spoken narratives about Kedarnath, when they occur, share space and function with written versions, and to some extent video disc renditions as well. Such versions occupy a prominent but variable place in pamphlets about Kedarnath, the Char Dham, and the *jyotirlinga* available in Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali, Nepali, Marathi, Telugu, and Tamil versions in the bazaar in Kedarnath and to some extent in other parts of Uttarakhand. Of these, pamphlets written in Hindi are the majority. As with most important Hindu pilgrimage places in north India, there are also Hindi summaries and retellings of Sanskrit texts such as the *Shiva Purana*, as well as a host of literature in



Hindi on various topics from daily ritual (*nityakarma*) manuals to the *Ramcaritmanas* of Tulsidas, to compendia of narratives and rituals that have to do with Shiva.

Narratives about Kedarnath offer people the chance to frame their own presence at the site through traditional narrative models. They also convey, both directly and indirectly, information about the site (what is done, what is important and central). Yet it must be acknowledged that such narratives do not comprise an *essential* part of a visit to Kedarnath, especially during the high season. It is possible to go and come from Kedarnath without being exposed to a narrative exposition about the greatness and origin of the site; but it is not possible to go and come from the site without going inside the temple and, in the vast majority of cases, purchasing print images in the bazaar. While most present in Kedarnath have considerable general pre-existing knowledge and experience that bears on Shiva, the Himalayas, and the Pandavas, it is quite possible that this set of data and experience will not include anything specific about Kedarnath itself. It is this ethnographic fact which makes it important to consider the complementary and contrastive characters of Kedarnath seen in visual print culture (the subject of the Chapter Five) and practices in place (the subject of Chapter Six). It is possible that the current state of affairs will change again when video discs take over as the dominant form of representation found at the site, given that video discs are able to offer narrative and iconic frameworks simultaneously. I discuss this possibility and its implications in Chapter Five.

### ***The Taxonomical Messiness of Place and Narrative Exposition at Kedarnath***

There are a number of ways that narratives about *tirthas* connect to the worlds of the *tirthas* themselves, and correspondingly a number of ways that scholars have treated such relations. In the context of Hindu *tirthas*, such narratives traditionally extol the greatness (*mahimā*, *mahātmya*) and cosmic significance of the site and localize that significance to a particular geographical location. The telling of such narratives is an important part of how *yatris* are welcomed to the place. Thus, scholars such as Cynthia Humes have looked at how the content of specific *mahatmyas* found on site relate to both Sanskrit versions and to their application and use at current *tirthas*.<sup>3</sup>

Other scholars take a conceptual approach to the content of *tirtha* narratives, such as David Haberman's combination of psychoanalytically inflected approaches to human desire and medieval Sanskrit aesthetic (*rasa*) theory in his exegesis of the pilgrimage circuit of Braj, or David Shulman's survey of the foundational narratives of important Hindu temples in Tamil Nadu and their emphasis on the themes of sacrifice and marriage.<sup>4</sup>

Such approaches to literary narratives about important Hindu places begin to be indistinguishable from thematic and/or region-specific approaches to subjects in South Asian literature that do not focus on specific places. Exemplary of this approach, and particularly relevant to the subject of this work as well, are the work of Don Handelman and David Shulman on particular episodes from the corpus of South Indian

---

<sup>3</sup> Cynthia Ann Humes, "Vindhyavasini: Local goddess yet great goddess," in *Devi: Goddesses of India*, ed. John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 49–76.

<sup>4</sup> David L Haberman, *Journey Through the Twelve Forests: An Encounter with Krishna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Sanskrit and vernacular reworkings of narratives about Shiva.<sup>5</sup> Their work is notable for the profound philosophical texture they unearth about Shiva's modes of action and presence in the world. However, by their own admission, they are working with a set of texts that possess "textual integrity", that are clearly in conversation with and building on each other.<sup>6</sup> They are also working in explicit conversation with the well-established and ubiquitous (in modern South India) Shaivite philosophical system of Shaiva Siddhanta, a philosophical system indigenously that connects to the narrative episodes with which they are concerned. Even if the object of this work as a whole were to be an investigation of Kedarnath through Sanskrit and vernacular literatures in the Puranic and medieval periods and their relationship to present forms of narrative exposition, the product would differ substantially from the *opera* of Haberman, Handelman, and Shulman. A similar level of textual integrity and thematic coherence simply does not exist for narrative material that relates to Kedarnath.

Such textual integrity and thematic coherence tend to occur when a text or a related group of texts may be linked to particular groups and social formations. The case of Shaivism in Garhwal is not such a case, and any upapuranic treatment of the Garhwal region would need to have been at least partially based in Garhwal in order to treat the specifics of the networks of Shaivite and Shakta shrines in the region. As I discussed in Chapter Two, the situation of Shaivism in Garhwal seems to have been, and continues to be, an amalgam of old Himalayan, Brahmanical, Pashupata, Nath, and Virashaiva elements. It does not appear possible at this time to exclude any of these

---

<sup>5</sup> Don Handelman, *God Inside Out: Śiva's Game of Dice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Don Handelman and David Shulman, *Siva in the Forest of Pines: An Essay on Sorcery and Self-Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Handelman and Shulman, *Siva in the Forest of Pines*, vi-vii.

communities from being involved in the composition of different parts of the upapuranic *Kedarakhanda* and (with the exception of “Virashaiva” and the addition of Shaiva Siddhanta, especially Mattamayura) the *Shiva* and *Skanda Puranas*, and, correspondingly, from constituting an important part of the present-day cultural fabric of Garhwal. Further, core Kedarnath-centered practices appear to have shifted in recent centuries, thus preventing the possibility of looking at ritual practice in Kedarnath in the manner carried out by Richard Davis in his study of Shaiva Siddhanta ritual.<sup>7</sup>

Narrative exposition at Kedarnath is also taxonomically challenging from the vantage point of oral folklore and performance studies. Kedarnath does not constitute a "folklore community" inside of which narrative expositions of Kedarnath are formally identified as a *genre* at the indigenous level.<sup>8</sup> Most of those who live and work in Kedarnath are Garhwali, and while Garhwal does constitute a folklore region in much the same way that Joyce Flueckiger has demonstrated holds for Chhattisgarh, Kedarnath is not, in this sense, reliably Garhwali even though it is located in Garhwal.

Further, in Garhwal there does not exist, to my knowledge, a particular genre of Garhwali song which addresses Kedarnath specifically or the Char Dham. Rather, mentions of Kedarnath and the other abodes appear across genres as important places that frame the region.<sup>9</sup> There are particular *jagar* (an importance genre of Garhwali song in which deities are invoked and their exploits narrated) songs, which this chapter addresses briefly, that describe the visits of various legendary persons such as the

---

<sup>7</sup> Richard Davis, *Ritual in an Oscillating Universe: Worshiping Śiva in Medieval India* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Flueckiger, *Gender and Genre in the Folklore of Middle India*, 1-26.

<sup>9</sup> Anjali Capila, *Images of Women in the Folk Songs of Garhwal Himalayas: A Participatory Research* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 2002), 104.

Pandavas, or the Garhwali folk hero Jitu Bagdval, or a prince from Gujarat, to Kedarnath. There is preliminary evidence that suggests that the visit of the Pandavas to Kedarnath receives a certain level of attention in the songs that accompany the *Pandav Nrtya*, yet such episodic content does not define those genres.<sup>10</sup> And, with the exception of the visit of the Pandavas to Kedarnath, awareness of these *jagars* may be limited to more knowledgeable and possibly older Kedarnath locals from specific villages and is almost never communicated to *yatris* of non-Garhwali origin. And, even at the local level (the *yatris* of course come from all over India and the world), there are significant persons who are not Garhwali: managers of *dharamshalas* and ashrams from Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, renunciants from Karnataka who are long-term residents, and Virashaiva pujaris. Thus, recourse to particular forms of Garhwali practice and genres of folk performance provides less analytic leverage than it would for understanding other places in the Kedarnath valley system.

In the works and approaches mentioned above, the question of the relationship of narratives to their contexts (both literary and performative) is a relatively stable question. Outside of the Indian context there has been notable work by cultural anthropologists such as Basso and Myers on the relationship of narrative, place, and landscape (see my discussion of the previous chapter) that demonstrates similar configurations.<sup>11</sup> However, work such as that of Basso and Myers, which has been influential in the anthropology of place and landscape, strives to be ever more sensitive

---

<sup>10</sup>I have discussed this issue with D.R. Purohit in some depth have collected preliminary data on the topic. Exploring the specifics of these performance traditions will constitute one of the first significant steps in moving beyond the dissertation.

<sup>11</sup>K. Basso, "Wisdom Sits in Places: Notes on a Western Apache Landscape," *Senses of place* (1996): 53-90; Fred R. Myers, *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place, and Politics among Western Desert Aborigines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

towards the ways in which the relationships of persons to their environments are narratively performed, narratively enacted, narratively constructed. In all the approaches I have discussed thus far, the existence, both diachronically and synchronically, of a series of identifiable contexts and conditions for the narratives under investigation functions as a point of departure, rather than something to be examined. Given the different forms of narrative exposition of Kedarnath and the wide variation of ways in which they do occur (when they occur), this work cannot neglect such an examination.

Taking up this question in the context of a study on the place of Kedarnath synthesizes the investigation of text-based narrative exposition in its literary and historical contexts and the investigation of narrative exposition (text-based, oral, and visual) in its emergent performative contexts on site at Kedarnath. In embarking on such a synthesis, I follow the distinctive example of Leela Prasad. Scholarly assessment of Hindu *tirthas* has by and large not taken as its primary focus the differential performative contexts, variations in content and audience, and *relevance* of narratives about the greatness and origin of *tirthas* in both their oral and literary forms to the construction of understanding and experiences of place at Hindu *tirthas*.<sup>12</sup> Scholars who have blended performance and geography approaches, such as Joyce Flueckiger and Rustom Bharucha, have applied this fusion at the level of the region, rather than a

---

<sup>12</sup>Ishita Dube also treats the role of foundation narratives with a laudably nuanced touch, but she does not explicitly theorize her treatment with respect to specifically narrative material to the extent that Prasad does, who makes it one of the primary tasks of her work. See Ishita Banerjee Dube, *Divine Affairs: Religion, Pilgrimage and the State in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2001).

particular site.<sup>13</sup> While the theorizing of regionality is a topic of crucial importance in the study of South Asia, as a single site, Kedarnath requires a different mode of attention.

Prasad's work on Sringeri, on the other hand, investigates the specific ways in which different formal and everyday communicative genres enact and perform emplaced understandings of *dharmic* action at the important Hindu site of Sringeri in South India.<sup>14</sup> She combines theoretical tools drawn from the study of Western literature, such as Paul Ricoeur's adaption of Aristotle's notion of *mimesis* as an emplotment that maps intersections of the "world of text" and the "world of the reader", with ideas of dramatic propriety (*aucitya*) drawn from classical India aesthetic theories in which one finds the idea that the goal of dramatic performance is to elicit specific types of formalized emotion. She puts both of these formal claims into conversation with insights from linguistic anthropology about the role of narrative in "ordinary language" in order to illuminate the ways that narrative-based concepts of *dharma* figure into everyday conversation outside of the specifically marked genres of performance when such concepts are officially communicated.<sup>15</sup> Her investigation of the narrative construction of *dharma* is also an emplaced investigation; she binds it to the site, character, and history of Sringeri.

Prasad synthesizes this material in the way that she does because she was confronted with an ethnographic situation in which the production of narrative

---

<sup>13</sup> Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger, *Gender and Genre in the Folklore of Middle India* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); Rustom Bharucha and Komal Kothari, *Rajasthan an Oral History: Conversations with Komal Kothari* (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2003).

<sup>14</sup> Leela Prasad, *Poetics of conduct: oral narrative and moral being in a South Indian town* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 182-191.

understandings of *dharmic* conduct included both formally marked performative genres (*ashirvada*) and every day, unmarked communicative contexts of conversation and anecdote. This situation at Kedarnath differs. In contrast to the exposition and retelling of Puranic narratives that occur during Puranic recitation (which arise out of a context focusing on a text rather than a place), narrative expositions of Kedarnath are not formally marked as a genre of performance at the indigenous level.<sup>16</sup> Yet in important ways this chapter shares a goal with that of Prasad's work: to uncover some of the diffuse, unmarked, and ubiquitous ways that people learn from and about stories both during and outside of the times when they are officially told and read. Given the focus of this work on the place of Kedarnath, it is only possible to begin to answer this question. Nonetheless, it is an important task. Part of what being in a Hindu *tirtha* is about for many of those present, both as tellers and authors and as listeners and readers, is interaction with narratives of place while in the place itself.

I should further note that, with regard to the function and effects of narrative expositions in the life of pilgrimage places, I do not wish to imply that Kedarnath is a unique case. It is perhaps a distinctive case in this regard simply because, due to its geographic isolation, it is still in the very first stages of encountering many issues associated with exponential increase in *yatri* traffic and infrastructure, issues that bear

---

<sup>16</sup> Since my return from fieldwork, it has occurred to me that the notion of *gunānuvād* ("translation of virtues/qualities) could be useful here. However, I have not yet had the opportunity to confirm the utility of this designation in conversation with people in and around Kedarnath. In the Kedarnath valley this term refers to the task of the Puranic reciter during the daily sessions of public exposition of Puranic material that happen during Puranic recitation. Application of this term would therefore be potentially usefully as a mode of approach to narrative expositions about Kedarnath that took into account traditional hermeneutic approaches to the matter. Jeffrey Timm has succinctly stated the importance of such approaches. However, given that narrative exposition about Kedarnath is not classed as Puranic recitation, this matter would require a good deal of explicit investigation. The term *gunānuvad(a)* has many different meanings in different contexts. For example, in some Jain settings it refers to a eulogy. See Jeffrey Timm, *Texts in context: traditional hermeneutics in South Asia* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 1-13; John E. Cort, *Framing the Jina* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 106.



on the phenomenon of narrative exposition. Many *tirthas* of pan-Hindu importance have been dealing with these issues for several decades at the least. The particular combination of the number of *yatris*, state infrastructure, technologies of representation, and geographic environment found in Kedarnath in 2007 is arguably distinctive. But the particular ways that these elements relate to one another may look radically different a decade from now. A future version of this work with more longitudinal data might well change in its treatment of how narratives frame place in Kedarnath.<sup>17</sup>

### ***The Utility of Genre and Repertoire Analysis for the Case of Kedarnath***

Given the significant amount of analytic leverage provided by the analysis of the relationship of different communicative genres to one another in a particular place, it is important to clarify to what degree such leverage can be applied in the case of Kedarnath. The question of what constitutes a genre is an important one. Scholars of linguistic anthropology, folklore, performance theory, and literary theory typically identify “genres” based on “a broad array of features- phonological, morphological, lexical, and syntactic, as well as contextual and interactive...”<sup>18</sup> Some scholars (such as Flueckiger and Ben-Amos) utilize “locally constructed classification systems” in their identification of genres.<sup>19</sup> The shape and context of narrative expositions within Kedarnath varies from moments of marked oral narrative performance that are not indigenously marked genres, to Hindi pamphlet narratives, to versions of the

---

<sup>17</sup> Working with time-sensitive data is one example of what Joyce Flueckiger has called “the limits of ethnography”. See Saliers et al. “Ethnography and Theology: A Critical Round Table Discussion” *Practical Matters* (3) 2010, [www.practicalmattersjournal.org](http://www.practicalmattersjournal.org).

<sup>18</sup> R. Bauman and C. Briggs, “Genre, intertextuality, and social power,” *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 2, no. 2 (1992): 148, 136-138.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

upapuranic *Kedarakhandā* and *Shiva Purana* available in the bazaar with Hindi translation, to scenes found in video discs, and to conversations in which narrative material may be present in only partial fashion. The audience and readership for such expositions could be from any part of India, or even the world. Sometimes these narrative expositions are designated as *kathā*, or *utpatti kī kahānī*, and sometimes they are not. And, often such narrative exposition does not occur in places where it might have been expected. An investigation of such narrative expositions that, following Prasad, focuses specifically on the “messy underside of people’s speech” about Kedarnath and the ways that narrative of place become part of “ordinary language” finds that narrative expositions of Kedarnath do not constitute a single communicative/narrative genre.<sup>20</sup> Rather, they constitute a loose system of interrelated communicative and narrative genres defined by the intersection of content and location in Kedarnath.

### ***Narrative Expositions of Kedarnath as a System of Related Genres***

The idea of a system of communicative genres, along with the gaps between such genres and the communicative fragments that occur in the context of places such as Kedarnath, draws on the idea of a performative repertoire constituted by a series of interrelated genres.<sup>21</sup> Thus, even the moments of conversational fragment and non-performance and non-reception of narrative expository material in Kedarnath exist in relationship to other moments and contexts in Kedarnath where such expositions do occur. And, people arrive in Kedarnath carrying their own worlds with them, worlds

---

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>21</sup> I am deeply indebted to Peter Valdina for highlighting the importance of a systems approach to the task of this chapter, and in thinking through the work of the chapter more generally. I am similarly grateful to Joyce Flueckiger for pointing out that a system of such genres constitutes, in sociolinguistic terms, a repertoire.

that contain multiple sets of experience, association, and expectation that may bear on their visit to Kedarnath. Joyce Flueckiger delineates the mechanics of such a system in her discussion of how different genres of folk performances constitute Chhattisgarh as a folklore region:

...The model sets up the variables of context and text as interdependent components of a system, so that any one of the components may shift depending on the identity or content of any one of the others. The model becomes dynamic, the emergent nature of performance more readily identifiable, when applied to comparative data - the "same" genre performed in two different cultural areas or two settings...different performances of the same genre observed over a period of time, or the variation of components when two genres from a given repertoire are compared.<sup>22</sup>

As the examples discussed in this chapter will detail, narratively communicated information about Kedarnath is almost always “emergent”, whether in oral, written, or visual form. Its context and manner of reception depends on the concatenation of numerous logistical, social, and individual factors. And it is also *information*; to a certain extent if people learn about “what” to do and “why” to do it from one source, they may find that sufficient for the needs of the visit. Further, the notion of narrative expositions of Kedarnath functioning as a system of loosely associated genres and forms of communicative discourse constituted by the geographic location of Kedarnath (and perhaps more broadly the Kedarnath valley) also allows for relating full stories (i.e. stories with marked beginnings and endings) to conversational fragments, and to gaps when narrative exposition does not happen.

Thus, in this chapter I balance the contexts in which tellings occur and texts are acquired with the content and form of such telling and readings. I present important

---

<sup>22</sup>Flueckiger, *Gender and Genre in the Folklore of Middle India*, 22.

narrative items and their contexts drawn from my own recordings, notes, the notes of Bhupendra, Hindi pamphlets, and Sanskrit texts (with their Hindi translations) found in and around Kedarnath. As I do so, I also insist that the non-performance and non-reading of such narratives prior to and during the visit also be construed as part of the same system of narrative exposition of place that is under investigation.

I read the information produced by this “system” in a way that builds on and transposes a mode of interpreting myth suggested by Laurie Patton: that scholars should “take myths seriously in their own right...evaluate them as forms as narrative reasoning equal to our own.”<sup>23</sup> This system of narrative exposition at Kedarnath, a system that includes the diminishing level of formal interaction people have with oral narrative expositions about Kedarnath, offers a narrative theory about the character of Kedarnath as a place whose message spreads out across different versions and contexts. The theory embodied in this repertoire constitutes a dynamic and emergent set of narrative expositions on the form and presence of Shiva in Kedarnath, the power intrinsic in the physical landscape of the area, the different modes of relation to Shiva possible at Kedarnath, the difficulty of catching him, and the sense of (sometimes violent) intimacy involved with touching him.

In general, Shiva is a god whose “habit”, as Shulman and Handelman have put it, “is to slip away.”<sup>24</sup> The physical inaccessibility of Kedarnath enshrines this difficulty; yet upon arrival, suddenly the god and place are hyper-present and hyper-efficacious. The analytic challenges of appropriately “grasping” the situation of narrative exposition at Kedarnath are isomorphic to the challenge of the Pandavas in grasping

---

<sup>23</sup> Laurie L. Patton and Wendy Doniger, *Myth and Method* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 392.

<sup>24</sup>Handelman and Shulman, *Siva in the Forest of Pines*, 220.

Shiva. It is difficult to create interpretive traction in the *daldali bhumi* (marshy soil) of Kedar.<sup>25</sup>

The senses of the character of Kedarnath accorded by narrative expositions are both illustrative in their own right and suggest ways that other salient forms of representation and practice in Kedarnath (such as those bound up in print images of the site and practices of place) may be striking similar chords in how they reflect and constitute aspects of Kedarnath as a site. And, images and practices may fill precisely some of the gaps left by narrative presentation. By “gaps” here, I mean both gaps of communication (without a story, one learns from other sources) and gaps of tone and content (the Kedarnath-Shiva of these stories is not wholly the same as the Kedarnath-Shiva of print images, or the one who is touched in the temple). I will reflect more on this at the conclusion of this chapter.

The rest of this chapter offers a set of specific narratives and narrative expositions in their Kedarnath contexts organized by genre, as well as examples when such moments might have occurred but did not. The genres under consideration in this chapter are the following: formally marked oral narrative expositions, oral narrative expository fragments, narrative expositions found in pamphlet literature, and textual Sanskrit treatments (with or without Hindi translation). I present and discuss these examples in considerable detail so that the reader may experience both the overlappings and differences in content and form that are found across different versions and contexts. That is to say, it is important that the relationship of narrative expositions and narrative elements to other forms of linguistic communication be

---

<sup>25</sup> My extension of this concept intentionally builds on a distinctive interpretation of *daldali bhumi* offered to me by the Kedarnath *pujari* Shankar Ling in 2007: the *daldal* is our own human imperfection set in a world filled with *maya*.

somewhat visible to the reader. The different genres of narrative exposition in Kedarnath connect to one another in numerous ways, ways that create a web of possible narrative association for encountering and remembering the place. The work of this chapter is to sketch the character of this web. After the reader has met these examples in detail I return to a specification of the narrative theories of place they tell.

### Oral Narrative Expositions of Kedarnath

#### 1.1 Interview: with Tirth Purohit Vishvanath Tiwari

The following selection from an interview I carried out, edited and excerpted for inclusion here, provides a baseline for how *tirth purohits* view narrative expositions of Kedarnath. This interview (carried out on June 29, 2007) also provides information about the performative contexts in which the *tirth purohits* traditionally offer such versions. The opportunity for the interview was serendipitous: the *tirth purohit* found Bhupendra in the bazaar and told him that he would like to meet with me before proceeding home (many *tirth purohits* only stay in Kedarnath for the high season). The interview with me was an opportunity for him to make sure that I had the appropriate and correct understanding of Kedarnath's origins. Bhupendra brought him to our room and we carried out a formal interview, from which I present an excerpt here:<sup>26</sup>

...There are different published versions coming out – there is a Hindi one, there is a Marathi one, here there is a Gujarati one – it depends.....the media is producing different publications on the subject of Kedarnath-Ji. I will tell you particularly about the subject of Kedarnath-Ji, what is the importance [of Kedarnath] here, what is the importance of Bhagavan here. So many people come here – why do they come? With what sort of mindset are they coming [*Kaisā mān kī ate haiṅ*]? Some people come here and say that Bhagavan's true form [*svarūp*] is that of a buffalo. A buffalo, meaning, they say that the back portion, the *backside* of the buffalo [is Bhagavan's true form]. But, and here I give

<sup>26</sup>note: English words spoken as Hindi are italicized; relevant Hindi terms and my own editorial clarifications, as well as key original phrases in transliterated form, are placed in brackets.

something of my own presentation that I give to *yatris*, to them I say that the true form of Bhagavan is not in the form of a buffalo. Bhagavan's *linga* of light [*jyotirling*] is here from before then. That is to say, Bhagavan's *linga* of light is here from before the beginning...there is no proof from when it is here. And here and there where Bhagavan has given *darshan* of his true form...like when Ravan came into the place [*sthān*] in front of Bhagavan and he took *darshan* of Bhagavan here. And there was a king named Kedar from whom the name of Bhagavan himself [here] occurred.....Because Bhagavan himself gave him the boon that "from today people will know me by your name...[they will know] this abode by your name, by the name Kedarnath; joining "Nath" to your "Kedar" people will come here and know it by the name Kedarnath. So there is also this tradition.

Vishvanath Tiwari, himself a professional teller of narratives about Kedarnath in his role as *tirth purohit*, began his exposition by telling me that he is aware that there are many versions (written and other) of such stories, and that what he tells his patrons is a correction and harmonizing of these different versions. If the presence of Shiva in Kedarnath is linked to the Pandavas, then Kedarnath is not a site of beginning-less, primordial importance, which its identity as a *jyotirlinga* suggests. And if Shiva's presence in Kedarnath is as a *linga* of light, then his true form cannot be that of a bull, which many say is the reason for the shape of the Kedarnath rock-*linga*. The same problem exists for the question of dating the construction of the temple; according to traditional views of the site there is ample evidence for the claims that the Pandavas built the temple, that their descendants built it or added on, and that Shankara built it and it has been modified since then. The older the temple it is, the more impressive it is for *yatris*.

Thus, the famous story at the beginning of the *Shiva Purana* in which Brahma and Shiva's competition for supremacy is interrupted by an endlessly tall *linga* of light is often spoken of as the true origin of the Kedarnath *linga*; this was the implicit

reference for the story given here.<sup>27</sup> This interview, then, constitutes the considered response of a specific *tirth purohit* to this more general problem of locating when Shiva's presence in Kedarnath began. Many Kedarnath locals are aware of competing claims about the origin and historicity of the site and they feel that they cannot explicitly engage the multiplicity they know exists (either with me or more publically) because their livelihood depends on the idea that the temple in Kedarnath was built by the Pandavas five thousand years ago.

He continues

We can say that there is no single definite story that we can tell you here that says "Brother, this is Bhagavan's importance, and this is the greatness of the place", and starting a long time ago Bhagavan has given *darshan* in different forms [*rūp*] and in different modes [*dhaṅg*]. You will have already obtained some information on the history of the Pandavas; the history associated with them is from almost five thousand years ago. Bhagavan himself knew that this *linga* of light is beginning-less.

Lord Shri Krishna knew that there is a *dyotirlinga* here and that until the Pandavas took *darshan* of that *linga* their wickedness would not be cleansed....When the Pandavas finished ruling their own kingdom....[after] the Mahabharata war happens, a very awful war that lasts for eighteen days in which everyone related to the Pandavas, including he whom they held as their guru, grandfather, their blood relations, those who were special to them, brothers...sisters, paternal uncle, paternal grandfather and grandmother...everyone died who was related to the lineage of the Kauravas, there were no survivors...at the end they felt..... The Pandavas.....what did we do and who made us do this? Lord Krishna made us do this. So much grievous calamity!...

So Yudhishtira said to Bhagavan "Lord, you have caused us to be so very guilty [*hamārā itnā barā doś lagāyā*], guilty of killing fathers, guilty of killing mothers, guilty of killing those of our lineage, tell us what greater *papa* in the world is there? Where do we need to go for expiation [*nivāraṇ*]?" So, Lord Shri Krishna says that "actually you have done really awful [*aghor*] *papa*." When Lord Shri Krishna said this then Dharmaraja Yudhishtira himself said "You only inspired us, [saying] 'fight, fight,

<sup>27</sup>This is a very well known story, and its mention here does not indicate any direct contact with puranic literature. That being said, see the following for a famous Sanskrit version: *Śrī Śivamahāpurāṇa* (Mumbai: Khemarāja Śrīkrṣṇadās - Śrī Veṅkaṭeśvar Press, 2004), *Vidyēśvarasamhitā*: 7:13.



destroy *adharma*'. And now you are saying to us 'You have done *papa*.'" So then Lord Shri Krishna said "It was on account of *adharma* that I inspired you, but because it was on account of *adharma* does not mean that you weren't fighting. How would that happen? *Adharma* always grows, it never lessens, it never ends.

But you actually did the deed – you killed relatives, you killed your guru so you are guilty of murder. And for that you need to perform expiation." So Lord Shri Krishna again says to them "Go to the Himalayas, go where Bhagavan has a place called Kedar. Bhagavan has a *dyotirlinga* there and he himself is present [*virājmān*] in that place, and until that *linga* appears to you there and until you touch [*spars*] it then you will not get the actual [*sāksāt*] *darshan* of Bhagavan." So the Pandavas wander and wander until they come to Guptkashi. Lord Shankar and Mother Parvati are resting there and Mother Parvati was troubled that the Pandavas are distressed and worrying "Where has he gone, has he gone in this valley or that valley.....where is this road..."

Tiwari engages here the challenging moral complexity of the world of the Pandavas (and the *Mahabharata*). The Pandavas and the *Mahabharata* are, as William Sax has discussed in detail, central to Garhwali culture and identity.<sup>28</sup> Beyond Garhwal, the actions of the Pandavas are often the catalyst for discussions on what constitutes appropriate *dharmic* action, and the Himalayas are the last place they reside on earth before going to heaven. Most of the *yatris* with whom I spoke mentioned the journey of the Pandavas to heaven, their *svargarohan*, in general terms in connection with Kedarnath. Yet, the attempts of the Pandavas to behave according to *dharma* caused them to generate *papa* which they then had to journey all the way to Kedarnath in order to expiate.

Whenever one goes to a new place, when it happens that he goes to a new city so it is necessary to ask people where is this side street, where is this store – that's how it is in cities. So at that time what must their experience have been like? .... It must have been dark, no *population*, no habitations [*basti*], just jungle. You just take a walk around

<sup>28</sup>William S. Sax, *Dancing the Self: Personhood and Performance in the Pāṇḍav Līlā of Garhwal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

here five thousand years ago ... All these hotels and lodges you see were built since I've been living here, in the last ten-fifteen years. Before that there were.....huts here...people used to make huts/ temporary dwellings [*jhomprī*].

In Gaurikund, here in Kedarnath, *yatris* used to live in those huts, so if you took a walk around even before that what would be there? In my opinion there would have been.....jungle, forest, well there's not that much jungle in the Himalayas, so there would have been snow. So Lord Shankar says to Mother Parvati...their goal is there in the Himalayas, at Kedarnath, they have to search for the *linga* at Kedarnath [i.e. not in Guptkashi]. So Mother Parvati says "You do what you want but I will certainly give them *darshan*." So Lord Shankar disappeared there in a manner of speaking [*ek prakār se*], he became hidden [*gupt...lupt*]. And they say that this is where Guptkashi ["hidden Kashi"] gets its name, and there [in Guptkashi] Mother Parvati herself gives *darshan* to the Pandavas. And she says to them "I can't do anything for you now but I can give you a little guidance and tell you where to go, which road to take – I can do that much, I can make the road comfortable for you." So when Mother Parvati said this they somehow saw the road here and then they saw that buffalo, that illusion in the shape of a buffalo [*māyā rūpī bhāṅs*], they saw that here...

Once it happened that...Bhagavan took the form of a buffalo to kill Bhasmasur here... It is that buffalo form that Bhagavan made here. So...[Yudhishtira] said to Bhima "Make those buffaloes come out [*nikālo*], among them is the true form of Bhagavan." So when they make the buffaloes come out they are going into that *linga* and getting absorbed in it [*us hī liṅg meṃ jā rahe hai samāveś ho jā rahe hai*].<sup>29</sup> They are making them go out in the manner that they drive cows, they are driving the buffaloes the way they drive cows [*hāmknā*], they are making them go out one by one. They are doing it one by one. So the buffalo that was Bhagavan, it was coming here and right at that moment getting absorbed into the Shiva *linga*.

So one by one they were disappearing, every single one of those illusory buffaloes disappeared and the one that was Bhagavan's true form was beginning to be absorbed into that *linga*, it was going there. Like when you have seen in some documentary.....that all happened...Bhagavan's buffalo form was being absorbed into the *linga*, it was showing the way. So when the Pandavas grab [*pakarte haiṅ*] that buffalo and touch it in a way [*ek prakār se*] they touched the *linga* of

<sup>29</sup>The connotative echoes of the term *samāveśa* are provocative. Frederick Smith glosses this term as "initiatory possession" that may also denote or initiate a process of "realization". I have consulted him on this point and await his reply. See Frederick Smith, *The self possessed: deity and spirit possession in South Asian literature and civilization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 367.

Bhagavan. They achieved....the touching of Bhagavan, the true form of Bhagavan that is present in the light is what the Pandavas touched and then you may understand that the buffalo disappeared and then there...it happened that the divine form got extended/stretched [*jo divyasvarūp thā vo tan huā*] and that Bhagavan in original true form gave *darshan* to the Pandavas. And he said “look, you endured pain and you have also done *papa* but however much *papa* you did now it has all been cleansed [*dhul ho gayā hai*]. Now tell me what you wish for, I mean what do you desire?”

Tiwari specifically references the multiformity of Shiva’s presence in Kedarnath, and the fuzziness of his language exemplifies the ambiguity of the topic. When the Pandavas finally achieve their *darshan*, his description of the forms/presences of Shiva of which they receive *darshan* indexes the complexity of the presence he is narrating. The unique form of the *linga* presents narration-specific challenges as well as visual representation-specific challenges (discussed in Chapter Five) that this version deals with by describing the presence one way in one place and a slightly different way further on in the same account. Shiva's buffalo form is equally provocative. In this narrative, it is a form in which Shiva had previously vanquished a demon, that is to say, it is a form with a precedent. In Kedarnath valley and more generally, demons themselves may often assume buffalo shape. There is an area of the Kedarnath valley quite close to where Vishvanath Tiwari spends most of the year called *Maykhanda* (Mother's Region) whose main deity is Mahishmardini Devi, or the form of the Goddess who famously killed the buffalo demon Mahishasur.

Then the Pandavas said “For what purpose would we need a boon? We just need a little place to live in the Himalayas - -we just want to live here.” Then the Pandavas felt this inspiration and craziness inside that “We should build a temple and do Bhagavan’s *puja*”, and Bhagavan said “Do your *puja*. And coming generations, make a road for coming generations, since you have already made a temple. And when future generations come, among them your names will be immortal. Whenever any *yatri* comes here in Bhagavan’s name they also will come

in your name.” And their [the Pandavas'] name became immortal.

Then the Pandavas went ahead [past Kedarnath] and perhaps they disappeared somewhere in the Himalayas. They say about Dharmaraja Yudhishtira that he was journeying in the Himalayas and one time there was a dog going with him, *dog*, *śvān* [Sanskrit word for dog]. He [the dog] was going with him [Yudhishtira]. It was a big surprise to him that “There is a dog going with me. Where did this dog come from? There aren't any habitations close by, so why he is going with me?” The dog was going where he went. So one time during that time, they say that the dog got worms [*kīre*]. It would be a surprise, how do you get worms in the Himalayas anyway, but they say that Dharmaraja Yudhishtira took those worms out of the dog and threw them on the ground, and they died...This also seemed like *papa* to him. [He thought] I've already committed *papa* as I am coming.” Those worms shouldn't die and also the dog should escape. So they say that Dharmaraja tore open his thigh and taking the worms out he put them into his own thigh. So then Bhagavan himself gave him true *darshan* and [said] “I thought that they just call you Dharmaraja but actually you really are a king of Dharma.” And it is believed that he goes to heaven in his own body.

[A bit later in the same interview Luke asks about the beginning-less *linga*, why does it have that shape?] It is the formless shape of Bhagavan, the Brahma-shape, it was here from before, it is as if it comes from the ground, it is the real *linga*....[Luke prompts about *ghi malish*.] And so that people would not leave assuming that the *linga* has a particular form [*koi particular rūp se mān ke nahīṅ calenge*]...There is also an importance of *ghi* here. They are ..... laying on their hands...They say that Bhima hit with a mace at that time, [saying] “Where has he gone, all of them have gone...” He did not have intelligence, he has strength but not intelligence, it is well known...that, regarding someone who has strength, one can see that he is totally *mindless*. That's how it happens...he has very little thinking power....he hit Bhagavan and then pulled him....Therefore Mother Kunti says "Son, you made a great mistake." When Bhagavan gave *darshan* there and when he became invisible again Mother Kunti said to him "You should apply a repair...to where you hit Bhagavan with a mace" and there that repair is applied. *Pāpo'haṃ pāpakarmāhaṃ pāpātmā pāpasambhavaḥ | Trahī māṃ Pārvatīnātha sarvapāpaharo bhava.*<sup>30</sup> Doing this [*mantra*] the repair is applied... For the expiation of *papa*, *ghi* is applied to Bhagavan...

This version again splits the difference between the *dharmic* nature of the Pandava's goals and the *papa* that sometimes results from the pursuing of those goals by

<sup>30</sup>See full discussion of this *mantra* in Chapter Five.

separating the actions of Bhima from those of Yudhishtira: Yudhishtira is so righteous that he nourishes worms/maggots on the meat of his own thigh. Bhima is so impetuous that in the pursuit of the expiation of their *papa* he becomes impatient and strikes God with a mace and Mother Kunti reprimands him.

The Bhima and the mace episode here is also performatively telling. It was not part of the self-articulated narrative unit that begins the excerpt, but rather the response to a specifying question on my part. This is often the case with this episode; a specifying question about a ritual detail (usually about *ghi*) is often the pivot that elicits the account. I was once waiting in queue for *darshan* and overheard a discussion between two middle class *yatris* from Delhi who did not know why a dollop of *ghi* had been placed on their *puja thali* (puja tray); they eventually asked a nearby *tirth purohit* and were then told about how Bhima's wounding of Shiva with the mace initiated the custom of *ghi* application to the *linga*.

### **1.2 A Local Dharamshala Manager Accustomed to Orienting Yatris**

This second version presents my description of an example of narrative exposition and introduction to Kedarnath set in the reception area of a *dharamshala* at Kedarnath on May 3, 2007. The manager of the *dharamshala* is himself a Kedarnath valley local who does not personally perform *puja* for *yatris*. The *yatris* present included a husband and wife couple from Mumbai who were by their own admission doing a combination of *yatra* and tourism. The husband said that the Char Dham Yatra is a religious obligation for all Hindus. He said that he had read "spiritual" (*adhyātmik*) books in Hindi that had given him information about Kedarnath. Also present were two families from Maharashtra and a maternal aunt living in Jodhpur. The aunt said

that she had tried to come to Kedarnath many times but hadn't previously managed to proceed further than Rishikesh. She rode up in a sedan chair, but had a very clear view of the scenery.

I asked one of the husbands from this group whether he thought Bhima's behavior was appropriate (*ucit*). The question gave him pause. His wife said she thought Bhima's behavior was acceptable because he was trying to obtain liberation (*mukti*) and therefore the means were justified. The implication, made explicit in other such conversations, is that such behavior towards a deity would normally not be appropriate. These two responses exemplify what came to be a pattern in my interviews, conversations, and observations both about the story of the Pandavas and Kedarnath and about behavior in Kedarnath more generally. As the 2007 season progressed I came to view the activity of waiting in line as a re-enactment of the search of the Pandavas for Shiva that showcased similar values about the valence of the efforts involved in attaining Shiva. In conversations and observations of *yatris* and locals (both from afar and as one who was myself waiting in line), it became apparent that there were at least two general approaches to the problem of getting through the queue and into the temple for *darshan*. One approach viewed purity of thought and action to be a requirement for going before God; thus, one should behave properly in line, have patience, and not try to bribe one's way in, or argue, or attempt to jump the queue. Another approach viewed the *darshan* and touching of God, and the powerful effects of that closeness, as so important that whatever it took to get inside efficiently was justified.<sup>31</sup> After speculating to myself for some time, I began to tentatively link the

---

<sup>31</sup>There are of course numerous other sociological factors at work here; the culture of the queue in India and its relationship to social hierarchies is a subject for study in and of itself.

story of the Pandavas with people's behavior in line. I did this in conversation with both locals while drinking chai, chatting, and watching the spectacle of the queue and the temple courtyard and while myself in queue with *yatris*. In both settings this suggestion, this linkage was thoughtfully, if cautiously, accepted.

When one of the husbands from the second couple asked the manager formally for information about *puja* in the temple, the manager slipped into performance and entered an expository mode. I observed that the eight-ten people in the room turned into a circle listening to him, and he narrated a very long version of the *utpatti kahani* complete with Shankara being an avatar of Shiva and intentionally tying India together in a thread (*sutra*) by sending *pujaris* from the south to the north. He mentioned Rahul Sankrityayan's research into the history of the temple. He also, in a lower voice, quickly explained the prices of various *pujas*.

This moment highlighted an important fact about my own presence and methods. This example generally offers a good picture of one of the main traditional contexts in which such narratives are either told or not told. The question of logistical and financial arrangements for *puja* and *prasada* were an important part of the setting. In general, I was not successful at being in the room during such times precisely because it was a time when the *yatris* and the *tirth purohit* negotiate ritual fees and donations. This is a very sensitive time from the standpoint of the *tirth purohit*, and as I rule I was only present at such moments upon specific invitation, which happened rarely, or in instances such as this when they occurred spontaneously and I was not told to leave or did not voluntarily leave. Thus, I derive much of my data (with the exception of times in which I was successful in this endeavor) from after-the-fact

conversations with *yatris* in which I would discuss with them what they had experienced during their time in Kedarnath, what they had done, what their *tirth purohit* had told them.

The manager proceeded from the narrative exposition to register them for a specific *puja*. He explained to them that they would not see the actual *puja* done, that it would be performed in the month of Shravan, and that he would send them the *prasada* through the mail. He informed them that the next day they would only have time for *darshan* and touching their head to the *linga* (*māthā ṭeknā*). He suggested that they try to stay longer in Kedarnath, since they had already made so much effort to reach, and recommended a leisurely route to Badrinath that would stop at important local sites. The husband said that seven generations of his family had been to Triyugi Narayan.

The difficulty of reaching Kedarnath (and the implicit fact of its attractive power) is evident in this version, both in the words of one of the *yatris* who had tried several times to come to Kedarnath but only made it as far as Rishikesh, and in the words of the *dharamshala* manager who urged the couple to honor the amount of effort it takes to reach Kedarnath and not to let themselves be held hostage by the demands of their horse driver and taxi driver for as speedy a journey as possible.

Performatively, it was the couple's request for details about *puja* that shifted the communicative mode from discussion to an informal, but marked, performance event. The telling was also reactive to the audience; the importance of Shankara to Maharashtrian *yatris*, and more generally, South India *yatris* is Kedarnath conventional wisdom (as are similar items about Marwaris, Bengalis, Biharis, Andhra Pradeshis, etc...). The writing of Rahul Sankrityayan, a famously nomadic public intellectual from



the first half of the twentieth century who wrote (among his voluminous other works) a book on his travels through modern day Uttarakhand, called *Himalay Paricay*, was invoked with reference to the historicity of the temple, appropriate for an educated audience.<sup>32</sup>

### 1.3. A Bengali Dharamshala Manager Unaccustomed to Narrating Kedarnath

This version, observed in Kedarnath on June 1, 2007, comes from a different *dharamshala* at Kedarnath, and provides an example of a narrative introduction to Kedarnath made by Brahmachari Jai, a Bengali monk-representative of the Bharatsevashram organization. He had been stationed for several years as the manager of the Bharatsevashram *dharamshala* in Kedarnath and had gradually formed his own impressions of the site. He was both unaccustomed to narrative performance and unmotivated by the possibility of economic benefit. A woman staying in his *dharamshala*, hearing that he had been in Kedarnath for six years, asked him to explain the site. He said he would try and give the “gist”. The following are my fieldnotes of what he said.

At the end of the *Mahabharata*, which was a war between good and evil, the Pandavas even though they were on the side of good had committed the *papa* of killing teachers and members of their lineage. After 36 years of ruling they went to Krishna for advice, who sent them to Vyasa, who told them to go to the Himalayas and do *tapasya* [ascetic practice] and then to get *darshan* of Shiva and from that they would get their *papa* purified. The Pandavas were in *vanprasth* [the stage of preliminary renunciation and forest-dwelling]. So they went and did *tapas*, but no matter how long they did *tapas* they couldn't get full *darshan* even though they were great *bhaktas* and, like all people of that time, somewhat larger than life.

---

<sup>32</sup>Rahul Sankrityayan, *Himālaya-paricay*. (Ilahabad, Agra : Ilāhābād Jarnal Prēs and Sāhitya Ratna Bhaṇḍāra, 1953).

The context of the narration of this version was slightly different from the previous version. While, once the narration began, the focused attention of the listener and the cadences of the narrator indicated that it was marked narrative performance, the narrator was not someone who made a practice of providing this service. He had, in fact, consented to offer his thoughts only with resistance and disclaimer. Because of his position in the *dharamshala* where he worked, he did not stand to profit in any way from any convictions or actions that his narration might strengthen or inspire, but rather viewed it as a position of *seva* (service). What was at issue for him, rather, was the necessity to give an account of the site that would allow him to discharge the intellectual responsibility that the question had placed on him to explain the "gist" of Kedarnath, that would be useful to the questioner, and that would satisfy his own personal assessment of the authority of scientific verification.

Finally Sahadeva, wise in astrology, said that according to my information Shiva is somewhere near here but in some other form. Then they saw that there was a white bull, so Yudhishtira told Bhima to spread his legs onto the two mountains Jaya and Vijaya and they would cause those bulls [there were others as well] to pass through his legs and then Bhima drove them from behind, knowing that the one that was Shiva would never do such a thing. There is of course a difficulty or contradiction here because Bhima could not have been so big, but, bracketing this difficulty and proceeding, Bhima, being very strong and thus not bright grabbed Shiva and embraced him from behind, and from this Shiva became established there. The Pandavas at this time, were all equally one hundred and eight years in age and did not have the same amount of *yoga shakti* that they had during the war. And then it was said that *puja* would be done etc, and then the Pandavas continued on. All of them died except for Yudhishtira who went to heaven in his human body.

It is of course scientifically impossible because it would take four hundred to five hundred years for the back of a bull to fossilize, but be that as it may that is the story. The shape of the *linga* is pyramidal and, recalling research done of the pyramids of the Egyptians, that something intrinsically powerful about their shape allowed them to preserve dead

bodies for thousands of years without decay; there was something intrinsic in this pyramidal shape of that rock that may or may not have been already there that allowed Shiva to take residence in that rock, that allowed his *shakti* to inhabit that place in a special way. And also from this time, because of the idea that Shiva may have gotten some wound in the process, *ghi* was applied because at that time that was what they used to treat wounds, not having things like Vasoline etc... *Channa* [a lentil] is also the other thing that absolutely must be applied, and its reason is that is what they used to feed buffalo.

This narration presents the epistemological difficulty of fully supporting legendary narratives about the Pandavas yet at the same time preserving a commitment to reading them historically. Another detail this version adds, common in many oral and pamphlet versions, is that when the Pandavas were trying to discern which buffalo was Shiva, they forced the buffaloes to pass one by one between Bhima's legs, a technique premised on the impropriety of a deity passing between the legs of a human. Also, as did the version 1.1 told by Vishvanath Tiwari, this version explicitly references the special nature of Yudhishtira's body. In version one, Yudhishtira feeds maggots with his thigh. Here, the fairly common idea appears that, from among the Pandavas and Draupadi, Yudhishtira alone goes to heaven in his own body (I return to this point later in the chapter in my discussion of the *Kedarakalpa* text).

It is also possible to see in this version, as with the version of Vishvanath Tiwari, a special attention to the unique form of the *linga* at Kedarnath and how it relates to the form of Shiva. The narrator thinks through the power and special naturality of the shape of the *linga* with reference to the pyramids and takes a robustly pragmatist view of the figure of the buffalo as it relates to details of ritual practice (the *channa* lentils). Yet at the same time he does not comment on the accuracy of the view that Shiva took the form of a bull.

A group of people once did carbon/isotope testing on the rocks of the temple, and came to the conclusion that the front part of the temple is both north Indian in style and four hundred years younger than the inner sanctum which is south Indian. Arjuna once fed Agni an entire forest [Khandavan] to help his digestion, a forest that lay between North and South, between Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh. Above the Vindhya mountains was considered the land of the Aryas and below was considered the land of the Daityas, and because he helped Agni both Vishvakarma and Mayadaitya vowed Arjuna favors [Mayadaitya had been living in the forest and Arjuna saved him and that's why he owed him a favor], so thus Mayadaitya was the one who built the inner sanctum since the Pandavas could not, being one hundred and eight years old. But, the newer part of the temple was constructed by Shukadeva who was Parikshit's *purohit* so that the four Pandavas who died [and Yuddhistira] would be able to receive *pindadana* [a form of funerary practice and ancestor worship] since logically you cannot do *pindadana* in the same place that you would worship a *devta*. Of course it is sometimes difficult to make this story plausible from a logical point of view, but if one has to then that is the way.

Finally, Brahamcari Jai treats the fraught character of the historicity of the temple and its relationship to the Pandavas, both through the mention of experimental analysis and rational architectural analysis. He acknowledges the local Garhwali importance of the Pandavas as ancestors who receive worship. As with the *dharamshala* manager's account in version number two, the Kedarnath temple is referenced as an explicitly composite North Indian-South Indian structure. He finishes the narration with a tone closest to his own preference for a logical view of the history of the site.

#### 1.4 *Fragments and Conversations*

The first three versions sketch the beginnings of the issues involved in the narration of Kedarnath for Kedarnath residents, and they show the context and form of full narratives with beginnings and endings. What about the audience for these narratives? And what about oral situations in which narratives about Kedarnath are partially present, but in more fragmentary or unmarked form? Many interactions with *yatris* in which I attempted to discuss the somewhat constant set of research topics described in the introduction revealed that they had not, in their visit to Kedarnath, been exposed to a formal narrative exposition of the site. In some instances that meant that did not have knowledge of such material, in other cases they did. In either event, what such conversations with *yatris* revealed were the differential effects, memories, and relevance of narratives about Kedarnath to the visit, to the extent that such information was visible during our interactions. To some extent the nature of the conversations about Kedarnath in which I participated are similar to the sorts of conversations that *yatris* may have more generally either in their own internal group or with others whom they meet regarding the site and their journey to it. My conversations often functioned, as my field note artifact indicates, as *vicār-vimarś*, the discussion and exchange of views. In many ways I intentionally shaped my conversations to fit this broader communicative genre.

On May 27, 2007, while waiting in the queue I spoke with several people who were part of a large group from Gujarat. They had not heard anything about the history of the temple and simply said “We are coming for *darshan* of Bholenath, it is his place of *tapas*.” For this group, the character of the Himalayas in general as Shiva’s place of *tapas*

encompassed their experience of Kedarnath, at least up to the moment of our conversation in the queue. They were not waiting in line because of a particular event that had occurred in Kedarnath, but because Kedarnath was an abode of Shiva in the Himalayas, something true in an almost *a priori*, locatively ontological way, a formulation that recalls Casey's understanding of place.

On June 8, 2007, I spoke with a man and two veiled women from Rajasthan sitting in the temple courtyard. They said that they were coming for the first time on the Char Dham Yatra, and that their pandit hadn't explained anything to them about the *puja*, simply had told them what to do, nor had they asked. I asked him in many different ways about his experience in the inner sanctum, to which he replied "*darshan is darshan*." This group had already passed through many of the moments of their visit where they might have heard a story about Kedarnath, including the performance of the *ghi malish*. However, at least in conversation with me, everything that happened for them in the temple at Kedarnath could be framed by the general category of *darshan* and did not require reference any sort of narrative. The world of Kedarnath-centric narrative may simply not be the most useful analytic focus for understanding what Kedarnath was in this man's view.

On June 25, 2007, I had a conversation with a group of families from Shivpuri (Madhya Pradesh) that strikingly illustrated the sorts of narratives and experiential associations many people bring with them to Kedarnath. We had started out by talking about what they already had heard about Kedarnath. The men in the group said that they were already familiar with the Pandava's story from *kathā* (puranic recitation) and *satsang* (public gathering and teachings on intellectual, philosophical themes, or

devotional singing). They said that the journey of the Pandavas to Kedarnath was a common story and that they found the behavior of the Pandavas to be appropriate. They had not heard about the role of *ghi malish* in Kedarnath, but where they live both men and women are able to do *abhisheka* in the temple, and that this may involve the touching of the *linga*. Their father had come to Kedarnath in 1960 and they were coming now because they had finally seen all their children married and now had the leisure (*fursat*) for such pursuits. They were coming on the Char Dham for the first time. I asked the men if I could also hear what the women thought, so after being coached a bit by the men in the group, one of the women (who had already been participating in the conversation) slipped into a clearly familiar role as storyteller. She spoke a colloquial Hindi that I needed help to understand. Here my notes on the story she told:

One day Shiva was going somewhere and wanted Parvati to stay at home but she said no I'm going, so after a little argument she came along. As they were going through the jungle they stopped to have lunch where there were two platform stones [*cabutarā*], one of which was whole and one of which was broken. She took the broken one and made an oven out of it and cooked lunch. Then as they were sitting she asked Shiva why is it that you take poor people and make them poorer and rich people and make them richer. This can't be fair. Shiva said- well, isn't that what you did with the stones for the oven? You made the oven out of the stone that was already broken. Those who are poor can handle more suffering, those who are rich cannot.

Then one of the men told a story of his own:

One day Parvati asked Shiva to show her *samsara*, so he said come on and they went walking down the road with a bull. So first Shiva put Parvati on the bull and walked along side and as they did people made fun of them and said look at that idiot: he put his wife on the bull and now he must endure the inconvenience of walking. So then Shiva went and sat behind Parvati on the bull and then people made fun of them and said: don't they have any shame? So then they both got off the bull and were walking and people were making fun of them and said idiots: they have a bull to ride and both of them are walking. So then Shiva said to

Parvati that's *samsara*.

The two Shiva-Parvati stories told by the Shivpuri group hint at a general corpus of stories about Shiva and Parvati that were part of what the group already knew before coming to Kedarnath that they deemed relevant and/or worth sharing with me. They may have also been implicit commentaries on their own journey as relatively poor *yatris* who were able to bear a great deal of hardship on the journey, and a general appreciation for the arbitrary, ridiculous nature of *samsara* brought on by their journey through a series of vistas and situations they had never before imagined. These stories also present Shiva and Parvati in their anthropomorphic roles, and do not mention anything about devotion or practice. They are commentaries on the nature of the world. The tone of the conversation, and others in this set, serves as a reminder that much of what *yatris* experience in Kedarnath connects to general ideas about Shiva and Parvati in the Himalayas and a general, non-Kedarnath or even Char Dham specific understandings of the endeavor of *yatra* - something very close to the points of view and experiences described by Ann Grodzins Gold when she went on a general *yatra* with members of a Rajasthani village.<sup>33</sup>

### **1.5 Garhwali Performance Traditions in and around Kedarnath**

As I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, Kedarnath is not a site for Garhwali performance traditions as such. However, emblematic snippets of several important Garhwali performance traditions are performed during the procession of the traveling form of Kedarnath-Shiva from Ukhimath to Kedarnath at the beginning of the season, most significantly at the Ramanandi ashram at Garud Chatti (about two

---

<sup>33</sup> Ann Grodzins Gold, *Fruitful Journeys: The Ways of Rajasthani Pilgrims* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).



kilometers from Kedarnath itself) on the third day of the procession to Kedarnath. This procession is a Garhwali deity procession accompanied by drummers every step of the way. I have been on this procession from Ukhimath to Kedarnath three times, in 2005, 2007, and 2008. As with any Garhwali deity procession in the Kedarnath valley, there are drum rhythms for different terrain, the sight of a new village or temple in site, and the wish of the deity to rest. There are several special moments during the procession to Kedarnath when the procession stops to acknowledge that Jitu Bagdval, one of the heroes of Garhwali folklore, passed that way and stopped to rest, or to smoke his pipe.

The stop at Garud Chatti has become the moment when the Garhwali character of Kedarnath becomes present through the performance of small segments excerpted from two well-known Garhwali performance traditions.<sup>34</sup> When the Kedarnath deity-palanquin enters Garud Chatti, several things happen in rapid succession. The drummers sing a song known as *ukāli gīt* (song of ascent) that, according to them, one sings during any sort of ascent on procession in which extra energy is needed. They also sing the beginning of the Jitu Bagdval epic, as well as the invocations to the Pandavas that open the *Pandav Nrtya*.<sup>35</sup> In more traditional settings, each of these items would occur in its own specific context (a multi-day dancing of Jitu Bagdval, a month-long performance of the *Pandav Nrtya*). While it is certainly the case that particular episodes from these larger cycles (such as the *Cakravyuh* episode from the *Pandav*

---

<sup>34</sup>My suspicion is that there may have once been an extremely local form of the Jitu Bagdval epic that located an important event of his life in this place; I elicited excerpt versions of the epic that narrative Jitu's visit to Kedarnath and worship of *nau-ling Kedar* (nine-linga Kedar). However, I have not been able to find a definitive identification for this phrase. Further, according to D.R. Purohit, who has been working on the Jitu Bagadwal epic for decades, most versions of the epic do not contain reference of a visit to Kedarnath; he was surprised by my data. Further research is needed on this point.

<sup>35</sup>I am indebted to D. R. Purohit for his help in confirming what was being sung at this time, and for his translation of *ukāli*. I am also grateful to Darshan Lal of Ukhimath for his many explanations on drumming, songs, and the logistics of the Kedarnath and Madmaheshvar processions, explanations that included a performance of *ukāli gīt*.

*Nrtya*) have begun to be performed as separate, free-standing pieces, that was not what happened here.

What happens in Garud Chatti is different again from such performances.<sup>36</sup> During the singing of these emblems of Garhwali performance traditions all the men in the procession (Garhwalis and others, including myself) are invited (and most do) dance in circular Garhwali style. Possession will sometimes happen towards the end of this dancing, but it is not a given. There is no clear ending point to this event and the length of each of the two segments seems to be somewhat reactive to the energy of those involved and the logistics of whether the group needs to push onward to Kedarnath sooner rather than later. There is not a formal script for the performance in the way that there would be for a presentation of the *cakravyūh* (a particular military troop formation associated with a famous episode in the *Mahabharata*). Yet, these Garhwali cultural forms do become present in this context of the Kedarnath procession, which may include *yatris* from all over India as well as foreigners such as myself. The opening and closing processions to Kedarnath demonstrate the ways in which Kedarnath is both a Garhwali place and a *tirtha* of pan-Hindu significance.

Finally, while I have not heard or seen explicit attestation or mention of the account in Kedarnath or the Kedarnath valley, it is important to note that Kedarnath is mentioned as a place of solution and suicide for Adishakti, one of the forms of the goddess Nanda Devi.<sup>37</sup> The corpus of practice, procession, and performance surrounding Nanda Devi and her *yatra*-processions are one of the most well-known

---

<sup>36</sup>Karin M. Polit, "Performing heritage through rituals, the case of Uttarakhand," in *Religion, Ritual, Theatre*, eds. Bent Fleming Nielsen, Bent Holm, and Karen Vedel (Peter Lang, 2008); Sax, *Dancing the Self*.

<sup>37</sup> I am aware that commercial recordings of Nanda Devi *jagars* circulate in the Kedarnath valley but I do not know whether they contain this particular episode or not.

such subjects in Garhwali culture. In his work on Nanda Devi and her associated procession-*yatras* and performance traditions, William Sax relates several versions of a story about the “primordial Goddess” Adishakti. She creates the world, but each of the male partners she creates for herself proves unsatisfactory. Eventually she travels to the Kedarnath locale and on the “high Path of Bhrigu” (mentioned in Chapter Two as the location for acts of religious suicide) cuts off her own head and then leaps from the path of Bhrigu. Subsequently her head travels to Kailash and turns into a form of Shiva; her torso (“trunk”) becomes a form of Parvati (Gauradevi) in Rishasau.<sup>38</sup>

### **1.6 Renunciants and Narrative Exposition in Kedarnath**

Renunciants have a strong presence in Kedarnath. James Lochtefeld has observed that they are much more at the center of things, both spatially and socially, than their counterparts in Badrinath.<sup>39</sup> This makes sense; renunciants in Kedarnath are extraordinarily evocative of Shiva, the paradigmatic ascetic who serves as the model for those who pursue the path of renunciation. This evocation is often explicitly and performatively visual; many renunciants in Kedarnath make a point of adorning themselves with ash, leopard or tiger-patterned textiles, and holding *damaru* drums at the times when they are most visible to the public, such as the temple courtyard during *arati*. *Yatris* will often choose to give donations, an auspicious act for those on *yatra*, to the renunciants who most successfully visually and performatively embody the renunciant archetype: the image of Shiva.

Many renunciants reside in shelters that line the path of the queue. They therefore have the opportunity to interact with *yatris* as they wait in line. Others spend

---

<sup>38</sup> William S. Sax, *Mountain Goddess: Gender and Politics in a Himalayan Pilgrimage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 18-22.

<sup>39</sup> Personal communication, 2009.

their time primarily in the temple courtyard. A select few, among whom are several important long-time Kedarnath residents, make the Havan Kund their base of operations both during the day and at night. The Havan Kund is a raised stone platform that is open air but covered by a roof; it is used for important public fire sacrifices, such as those that are dedicated to Bhairavnath several times a season. It is the closest place to the temple where people can take shelter from the rain, and there is often a fire. The Havan Kund renunciants cast themselves both as hosts and at the same time supplicants. They welcome *yatris* to rest and warm themselves, and offer *chai* if they have it, and at the same time will often request donations.

On May 14, 2007 I sat at the Havan Kund in conversation with a family of four from Mahakaleshvar on the Char Dham Yatra and several of the Havan Kund renunciants. There was a fascinating and sometimes quite intense conversation in which it was very clear that the renunciants were acting as expository authorities in a manner similar to that of *tirth purohits*, and that the family regarded them as authorities in that regard. While the discussion about the appropriateness of the Pandava's behavior was quite spirited, for the renunciants it was also somehow not the heart of the matter of Kedarnath. One of them said that the entire place (*jagah*) of Kedarnath is the city of Shiva (*Shivpuri*) and that *darshan* is not necessary. He said that he only goes inside the temple when it is empty and he can take his time and be relaxed. Thus, his contribution to a conversation about the story of the Pandavas in Kedarnath was an assertion that relativized the importance of a narrative frame for interacting appropriately with the place. In my conversations with and observations of renunciant praxis in Kedarnath, it did indeed appear to me that narratives about Kedarnath are not

a primary axis through which they relate to the site. Renunciants look to Shiva as their model, rather than the Pandavas. And for *yatris*, renunciants are evocative of Shiva. This also means that renunciants in Kedarnath are given an extraordinary amount of latitude for bad behavior; to expel someone who embodies Shiva from Kedarnath for bad behavior is almost unthinkable.

### **Pamphlet Literature found in Kedarnath**

The presence of narratives about Kedarnath in pamphlet literature and guide books about Kedarnath, the Char Dham, or Uttarakhand display considerable overlap (in both form and content) with oral narrative expositions. Pamphlets also display considerable overlap of structure, language, and content with the Sanskrit texts (along with Hindi translations and abridged versions) from which they derive and which also circulate in the Kedarnath bazaar. While such texts speak to a reader preparing to embark on the journey, there is an equal chance that, along with images and other material and ritual artifacts, *yatris* will purchase them after the visit to the temple and only examine them in detail once the visit has been concluded, or in a hotel room in Guptkashi or Rudraprayag or Rishikesh during the journey home.

As I discuss in detail in Chapter Five, most purchases in the bazaar happen immediately prior to departure. Thus, there is no fixed relationship of these pamphlets to the experience of *yatris* while in Kedarnath itself, no set context in which they are engaged. They may frame the visit for some *yatris* and allow them to arrive already oriented; they may be purchased by *yatris* on site and digested during the actual visit, they may be something purchased at the end of the visit and digested later, helping to shape the memory of what transpired; or they may not be purchased at all and be

irrelevant to the thoughts and experiences of a particular group. My discussion of these pamphlets here attends specifically to the form, content and the context of their purchase in Kedarnath. Investigation of the manner and contexts of their reading and reception outside of Kedarnath remains for another time.

### 2.1 *Shri Char Dham Yatra and its greatness (Hindi)*<sup>40</sup>

The form and content of many pamphlets found in the bazaar reflect the fact that the majority of those who come to Kedarnath do so as part of the Uttarakhand Char Dham Yatra, which they are quite probably carrying out over a period of ten to fourteen days. Such pamphlets contain a section for each *dham* of varying specificity, and employ Sanskrit quotation to variable degree.

“By going to Kedarnath on tirtha a human is released of all wickedness.”<sup>41</sup>(Vyasa Smriti, 4th Chapter)

In the world there are seven Sarasvatis [rivers]: the Suprabha in Pushkar, the Kamanakshi in the Naimisha forest, the Vishala in Gaya, the Manorama in Ayodhya, the Oghavati in Kurukshetra, the Suren in Gangadvar, the Vimalodaka in the Himalaya. (*Mahabharata Shalya Parva* 68th chapter)

“The *Mahaprasthanana Yatra* means that when a person goes to Kedaranchal [Kedarakshetra] and renounces their life they attain the heaven of Shiva.”<sup>42</sup>(*Shanti Parva* 35th chapter)

“The person who, having become a renunciant, lives in Kedara becomes like/equal to Shiva.”(*Linga Purana*, 92nd chapter)

---

<sup>40</sup>Savāser Jī Mahārāj, *Śrī Cārom Dhām Yātrā va Mahātma - Śhrī Badrīnāth - Kedārñāth- Gaṅgotrī - Yamunotrī* (Haridvār: Raṅdhīr Prakāśan), 19-24.

<sup>41</sup>Sentences in quotation marks are Sanskrit verses that have been translated into Hindi. When Hindi passages offer specific, often parenthetical, references to Sanskrit works, I provide a simple transliteration of the Sanskrit reference as it exists in the Hindi text.

<sup>42</sup>*Mahaprasthanana* (great departure) in many contexts, such as the *Mahabharata*, means death or suicide. In the critical Sanskrit edition of the *Mahabharata* it is during the *Mahaprasthanika parva* that the departure of the Pandavas to the Himalayas is mentioned. See my discussion of this point in the introduction. This also may refer in more specific manner to the tradition of suicide at Kedarnath already mentioned.

“By living in the Kedara region and worshiping the Rudra named *Ḍiḍi* a person goes effortlessly to heaven.”(*Vamana Purana* 35th chapter)

“On the day of Brhaspati during the month of the Kumbha zodiac the pulling/touching of Kedar delivers *moksha* [liberation].”( *Padma Purana Pa. Khand.* 91st chapter)

“One obtains the world of Rudra by bathing in a Himalayan *tirtha* or taking *darshan* of Kedara.”(*Kurma Purana*: 35th chapter)

"The *tirtha* of Kedar destroys all wickedness."(*Garuda Purana* 81st chapter)

"Kedar is the great *tirtha* of Shankar-Ji[Shiva]. The person who, having bathed, takes *darshan* of Shiva-Ji becomes the king of [Shiva's] *ganas* [followers]."( *Saura Purana*: 39th chapter)

"A king named Kedara ruled the seven continents during the Satya Yuga, and when he became old he gave his kingdom to his son and began to do *tapas*, and where he did his *tapas* became famous as Kedarakhanda. His daughter Vrinda, the *avatara* of Kamla, did not get married but instead left home and began to do *tapas*; where she did *tapas* became famous as Vrindavan."(*Brahmavaivarta Purana: Krishnajanma Khanda*, 17th chapter)

"There are twelve *dyotirlingas* of Shiva-Ji, among which the Kedareshvar *linga* stands on the Himalaya mountain. Even an extremely wicked person is cleansed by its *darshan*. The life of someone who has not had *darshan* of the Kedareshvar *linga* is meaningless." (*Shiva Purana, Jnana Samhita*, 68th chapter)

Thus far, the reader has undergone a presentation of Kedarnath that offers a general view of the power and efficacy of the site. After an epigram that summarizes the power of Kedarnath, a list of divine rivers gives way to a series of statements from Sanskrit texts about the power and efficacy of Kedarnath and its Himalayan setting. These statements begin as habitual statements about what happens to someone who goes to Kedarnath. Such statements then give way to a summary narrative of king Kedar. A mention of the *dyotirlinga* then serves to transition to mention of the Pandavas and more specific discussions of Kedarnath.

(*Shiva Purana: Jnana Samhita* 38th chapter)

"Yudhishtira and the other Pandavas asked Vyasa-Ji how they might be cleansed of the murder of their guru and their relatives. Vyasa-Ji began to say that there is no atonement for such wickedness in the *shastras*; without [journey to] to region of Kedarakhanda this wickedness will not be cleansed. You should go there. All the wickedness will be destroyed by living there, and a person who dies there becomes a form of Shiva – it is the Mahapatha [great path]."<sup>43</sup>

(*Skanda Purana: Kedara Khanda* first section, 40th chapter)

Going on from Ganga Dvara [Haridwar] up to Baudhacala [Tibet] 50 *yojanas* long and 30 *yojanas* wide is the path of Heaven, the Kedara region. A person who lives there becomes the form of Shiva. The Kedar region has many *tirthas*, hundreds of Shiva-*lingas*, beautiful forest, many kinds of rivers and auspicious deity-seats are known there.

In the Garhwal section of the Himalayas there are five Kedars: Kedarnath, Madmaheshvar, Tungnath, Rudranath, Kalpeshvar.

The person who wishes to go to Kedarnath is fortunate in this world, and for the subsequent three hundred generations their ancestors go to the world of Shiva. The region of Kedar is the best of regions.

Here in Kedarnath in southeast direction is Retas Kund. From drinking its water a person becomes the shape of Shiva. To the north of there is a crystal *linga*, and seven strides behind that is the Vahni *tirtha* where there is warm water in the midst of the snow. In that place Bhimsen [Bhima] worshiped Shri Shankar-Ji with pearls. Beyond there is the Mahapatha; a person who goes there is exempt from reincarnation.

Near the juncture of the Madhu Ganga and the Mandakini rivers is the Kroncha *tirtha*, and at the juncture of the Mandakini and the Kshira Ganga is Brahma *tirtha*. To the south one can see bubbling water. On the left side of Shiva-Ji is Indra mountain, where Indra did *tapas*. Here there is a Shiva-*linga*. ten *dands* past Kedarnath is Hams kund, where Brahma in swan [*hams*] form drank *retas*. Shri Shankar-Ji becomes established in the heart of the person who, having had *darshan* of Kedarnath, drinks the water of Retas Kund no matter how full of *papa* they are. That person can die wherever they want and they will still live in the world of Shiva afterward. People go to the highest level when they perform *sraddha* and *tarpana* here.

From the village of Kedarnath to Bhima's rock [between Rambara and Garud-Chatti] is the hospice/resting place of Mahadev-Ji. When it rains in the Kedar region there are lotuses and other flowers and in the

---

<sup>43</sup>The *Mahapath* (great path), is the path one takes on the great departure. It is traditionally held to begin from behind Kedarnath and/or Badrinath.



month of Shravan *yatris* worship Shiva with those flowers. Bhuvakund [sic] Bhairav is half a kilometer from Kedarnath-Ji, Chandrashila is one kilometer, and Corabari Lake is two kilometers. Five kilometers from Kedarnath is the large and deep lake of Vasuki.

In this section, the text combines the narrative of the search of the Pandavas for Shiva with a detailed description of Kedarnath and environs. The Pandavas' search is set in the context of a place already bursting with power and personality, a place set inside of an entire region that belongs to Shiva. Their actions are set in the context of other activities and outcomes of a visit to Kedarnath: drinking and bathing, becoming Shiva, and worship using pearls.

When the Pandavas came to Kedar Tirth in order to cleanse the wickedness that arose from the murder of their relatives by getting darshan of Kedareshvar, Shiva took the form of a buffalo and fled from them. They prayed "Please, Lord, please have pity on us, take our wickedness away from us, and become established in this place!" Shri Shankar-Ji was pleased and his back portion became established there. This place there is an ancient, holy place.

With narrative framing accomplished, the text now turns to the specifics of the temple and environs.

On the northern side of Kedar village is the temple of Shri Kedarnath-Ji, with a twenty-doored roof that has a golden spire at the top. At the exact center of the temple is the self-arisen image of Shri Kedarnath-Ji, which also bears the shape of the back side of a buffalo. *Yatris* touch Shri Kedarnath. At the front of the temple is a stone Jagmohan [Vishnu], surrounded on four sides by Draupadi and the five Pandavas and a small bronze Nandi in the middle. Outside the temple to the south is a large Nandi and also many different sizes and shapes of bells. There are door-guardians on both sides of the door, and images of ten-fifteen other gods. The decorative *murti* of Shri Kedarnath-Ji has five faces and always appears dressed and beautifully decorated and ornamented. Behind the temple, only two or three hands breadth in length, is the Amrit Kund in which stand two Shiva *lingas*, and to the north east is Hams Kund (also known as Retas Kund), where having rinsed the legs one drinks from the hands three times, and also the temple of Ishaneshvar Mahadev is in that direction. To the west is one Subalak Kund, and opposite the Kedar temple is a small other temple in

which there is the wide Udak Kund, where one drinks water in the same manner as at Retas Kund. There is also another *kund* [pool] behind this temple whose water is drunk.

This is, to large extent, a description of the externals of the temple; the distinctive form of the *linga* is discussed, relatively briefly in comparison to some other versions, as we shall see. It makes a point of saying that "Yatris touch Shri Kedarnath" precisely because the assumption of many *yatris* would be to the contrary. The temple and the different water tanks are the endpoint of this narrativized description, a description that began with general statements about the power and importance of journey to the region of Kedarnath. The power of the region in general is interpenetrated with the specific power and importance of Kedarnath.

## 2.2 *The Greatness of Badri-Kedar (Hindi)*<sup>44</sup>

While the majority of those who come to Kedarnath do so as part of the Char Dham Yatra, a significant minority come to only Kedarnath and Badrinath (usually in that order). The reasons for this that I heard most often were either that there was not time for the entire Char Dham or that the *yatri(s)* had done the entire Char Dham in previous years, thus freeing them of the obligation to do the entire Char Dham (remembering the many *yatris* articulate the traditional mandate to the Char Dham yatra once in one's life) and concentrate on the sites more meaningful, efficacious and relevant to them. For this and other reasons, Badri-Kedar pamphlets are a sub-genre in the Char Dham pamphlet literature. Further, *this* Badri-Kedar pamphlet is published by the Badri Kedar Temple Committee, which notably does *not* control Yamunotri and

---

<sup>44</sup>Śrī Badrināth evaṃ Śrī Kedārnāth Mandir Samiti, *Śrī Badrī-Kedār Mahātmya* (Jośīmaṭh: Śrī Badrināth evaṃ Śrī Kedārnāth Mandir Samiti, 2000), 28.

Gangotri, the first two sites of the Char Dham. Aspects of its presentation reflect both the interests of the Committee and the local knowledge of its staff.

“There is poison in his throat and Ganga water on the top of his head. At his left is Bhavani, the daughter of the king of the mountains. Nandi, Skanda, and his followers are with the lord, the lord Kedarnath. May the region established as Kedar always generate auspiciousness.”<sup>45</sup>

According to the *Skanda Purana* Bhagavan Shiva-Ji tells Parvati-Ji that “This place [Kedarakhand] is as ancient as I am.”<sup>46</sup> In this very place, having attained Brahma-hood in the form of Brahma for the purpose of arranging creation, I carried out the auspicious beginning of the construction of creation and from then this Kedar region is my ancient residence and this place is equivalent to heaven on earth. Himalaya is divided into five sections. Among them the greatness of the Kedar region is held to be more than the rest.” The poet Kalidasa, with his “The self of the god lies in the northern direction” gave the northern direction the name of a god. In the *Kotirudrasamhita* of the *Shiva Mahapurana* the name of Kedarnath is famous as the eleventh of the twelve *dyotirlingas*.

There are several items here that have particular local resonance. The first the dialogical framing of the quotation from the *Skanda Purana*: the fact that much of the *Kedarakhand* (an upapuranic text commonly understood to be part of the *Skanda Purana*) is framed as a conversation between Shiva and Parvati in which Shiva describes the places of his specific presence in detail is the feature of that text that I have most often heard mentioned in conversations that invoke the world of Sanskrit text in reference to Kedarnath. As I discuss in Chapter Five, this idea is often rendered visually in print images of Kedarnath. Further, the mention of Kalidasa, the famous Sanskrit

<sup>45</sup>Given in Sanskrit (my translation):

Kaṅṭhe yasya virājate hi garalaṃ gaṅgā jalaṃ mastake  
vāmāṅge girirājarājanayā jāyā bhavānī sthitā  
nandī skandha gaṅgādi nātha sahita kedāranāthaḥ prabhūḥ  
kedārāñcala saṃsthito hi satataṃ kuryāt sadā maṅgalaṃ.

Note: this verse also appears as part of the *mangala shloka* in the Khemaraja edition of the *Kedarakalpa*, discussed later in this chapter. It appears to be a variation of a verse known as the *Vishvanath Suprabhatam*.

<sup>46</sup>The dialogic structure of the upapuranic *Kedarakhand* was mentioned in conversations about Kedarnath and texts far more than any particular narrative details.

playwright, here is particularly evocative for Kedarnath valley residents. There is a strong local tradition that Kalidasa is from near Kalimath. Kalimath is one of the most important goddess shrines in Garhwal, and lies between Kedarnath and Madmaheshvar, near Guptkashi (see the map in the introduction). I heard several times that each year Kavitla holds a special conference in which scholars from Ujjain come and dispute the question of Kalidasa's birthplace.

In the Satya Yuga in this place a king named Kedar did fierce *tapas*. For this reason they call this region the Kedar region. The meaning of “Kedar” is marshy soil and Bhagavan Shiva is the ruler of watery marshy ground therefore the name Kedarnath (lord of marshy soil) came to pass.<sup>47</sup> In the *Mahabharata* about this area one finds mentions of the Mandakini, Alaknanda, and Sarasvati rivers, rivers that flow in this area up to the present day.

In the Dvapara Yuga, after the Mahabharata war, the Pandavas were exceedingly troubled by their own *papa* in killing their relatives. On the advice of Vedavyasa-Ji the Pandavas started wandering in Uttarakhand in [search of] the *darshan* of Bhagavan Shankar. Bhagavan Shiva did not want to give the Pandavas actual, visible *darshan* so he started moving around the Kedar region in the shape of a buffalo. When the Pandavas found out that Bhagavan Shankar was in the shape of a buffalo they began to pursue him. When, in the marshy soil of Kedar, Shiva-in-buffalo-form went down began to plunge into the earth. Bhima running after him, grabbed him by the tail [*pūmch pakar lī*] and the Pandavas in tender voice [*karūṇ bbbsvar*] began to praise Shiva. Bhagavan Shiva, seeing the Pandava's devotion, was pleased and in the form of the back section [of the buffalo] became established in that place. There was a heavenly voice that said “O Pandavas, only by worshiping this true form of mine will your desires be fulfilled.” The Pandavas did the *puja* of that true form and thus were liberated from the murder of members of their lineage. In that place the Pandavas constructed an enormous temple of Bhagavan Shri Kedarnath. After that Adiguru Shankaracarya-Ji, having made all the arrangements for *puja*, increased the grandeur and prestige of all the temples in Uttarakhand.

---

<sup>47</sup>See the section on etymologies of the word *Kedar* in the introduction.

This section concisely presents a fairly common version of events given during narrative expositions of Kedarnath. It is notable that the form of Shiva in Kedarnath (in the shape of the back section of a buffalo) is not identified with the full, actual (often referred to as *sakshat*) *darshan*. Yet, the buffalo-shaped form in which Shiva only presents his back to the Pandavas then becomes a “true form” (*svarūp*). Further, this version mitigates the violence of the Pandava's quest for Shiva in a unique way. Bhima grabs Shiva's tail as one would commonly steer a cow or buffalo one was herding (*pūmch pakar lī*), yet as he does so the Pandavas praise Shiva in tender tones.<sup>48</sup> Their tone compensates for the violence of Bhima's actions. This version also very clearly dates the construction of the temple from the time of the Pandavas and situates Shankara inside that narrative.

Now the text begins to focus on the details of the site:

This temple is almost ninety feet high and on it have been placed carved stones [columns]. The form of the temple is four sided. On the columns of stone there is a fixed wooden canopy on top of which copper has been placed. The highest copper canopy has been polished with gold.

The self-manifest *jyotirlinga* [*svayambhū-jyotirling*] of Bhagavan Shiva is in the inner sanctum of the temple in the form of a large rock. There is a stone image of Parvati in the part of the temple immediately outside the inner sanctum known as the *jagmohan* [sic]. In the outer hall, what they call the public hall, [*sabhā maṇḍap*], there are the images of five Pandavas, Shri Krishna-Ji and Ma Kunti.

In the Shri Kedarnath everyone does the worship [*pūjā-arcana*] with their own hands. In the month of Shravan *puja* is done with Ganga water, Brahma lotuses, and Bilva leaves. Virashaiv *pujaris* of the *jangama jati* perform the *puja* of Bhagavan Shiva.

In the present day geographical sense the distance between Rishikesh and Kedarnath is one hundred and nineteen kilometers. The road goes up to Gaurikund, and from here the distance of fourteen

---

<sup>48</sup>I am indebted to Vidhu Shekhar Caturvedi of the American Institute of Indian Studies (Jaipur) for pointing out the familiar, irreverent quality of this phrase.

kilometers is traversed on foot, horse, or carried porters in a *dandi* [palanquin] or *kandi* [a basket strapped to the back for carrying a single person]. Special *puja* happens at seven [sic] every day. After seven it stays open for all *yatris* until one. Then from one to two again special *pujas* are performed. Then, for the purposes of daily cleaning, food offering, and ornamentation of the deity the doors are closed until five in the afternoon when they open again for *darshan* until about nine-thirty. Along with the *darshan* for general *yatris* there are two special *arcanas*. In the evening from seven-thirty to nine-thirty every day there is *arati*.<sup>49</sup>

The text tackles the complex question of Shiva's form in a single sentence: "the self-manifest *linga* of light...is in the form of a large rock." It also makes clear that in Kedarnath devotees worship "with their own hands", which in the present day refers to the *ghi malish*, a fact that is unknown to many before arrival in Kedarnath and when known, a distinctive aspect of the site.

After these general details there follows specific information that relates to the work of the Samiti in the Kedarnath valley.

In addition to regular daily *puja*, *puja* done on behalf of *yatris* is carried out [by the Temple Committee] according to their desire and their faith on a *tithi* [lunar day] or special *parv* [equinox, solstice, significant occasion] specified by them. The prices and specifications for all the above-mentioned *pujas* are fixed by the Temple Committee and any pious person who wishes may, having caused a receipt to be written, have *puja* done according to their own wish. According to the *Shiva Purana*, after the *darshan* of Bhagavan Shiva in the Kedar region even in dreams one does not suffer. According to a story found in the *Skanda Purana* once *yakshas* [demigod servants of the god Kubera], *devas* [deities], *gandharvas* [divine musicians] all came and took refuge with Brahma to find out a means of surviving the excessive cold of the Himalaya. Brahma-Ji knew that only Shiva is able to reside in the Himalayas. So they all went to Shiva on Kailash [mountain]. Bhagavan Shiva assigned places for the *yaksha*, *kinnara* [horse-headed divine musicians], *naga* [serpents], *bhuta-preta* [ghosts] etc... [The sages] Nara and Narayana worshiped Bhagavan in the form of an earthen *linga* according to the rules for earthen *linga puja*, and after doing that *puja* they received

---

<sup>49</sup>The temple timings have changed somewhat from the time of the printing of this pamphlet.

*darshan* of Bhagavan and prayed/requested “For the well being of the world, please reside in this very Kedar region!”<sup>50</sup>

Bhagavan Shiva gives *darshan* to his devotees from his five faces [sic]. Adiguru Shankaracarya, having wandered through Bharat [“India”] and promulgated *sanatan* [eternal] *dharma*, passed into *samadhi* in Kedarnath itself. On every step of the *yatra* of Kedarnath-Ji one gets the fruit of an *ashvamedha yajna* [Vedic horse sacrifice]. Vishnu Bhagavan got his discus from Bhagavan Shiva, with which Bhagavan Vishnu slaughtered evil demons on many occasions.

The information about the special *pujas* to be booked through the Samiti is then linked directly to one of the most famous mentions of Kedarnath in Sanskrit literature, found in the *Shiva Purana* and first discussed in the introduction. Shankara’s association with Kedarnath and further general statements about the power and importance of the site then follow close behind. This structure sets up close linkages between the services offered by the Samiti and the most traditionally important and famous features of the site.

There are many *tirthas* in Kedarnath that deliver liberation. Even a terribly wicked person gets liberated from wickedness when he drinks water from Udak Kund. Flowing on all four sides of the Kedarnath temple are the Dughda Ganga, the Mandakini and other divine rivers in which if one bathes one’s lifespan increases. On the circuit around the temple is the temple of Ishaneshvar Mahadev. About half a kilometer to the east is the rock of Bhairavnath-Ji on which there are images of Bhairavnath-Ji. Bhairav-Ji is the guardian of this area. In addition Amrit Kund, Retas Kund, Hams Kund, and Bhrigupanth [the path of Bhrigu], Corabari Sarovar, Vasuki Sarovar and others are holy sites worth seeing. In Hams Kund one can do *tarpana* [water offering for ancestors] and *pindadana* [a food offering for ancestors in the form of a ball or lump] for all of one’s ancestors. Drinking the water of Retas Kund, which they also call Sarasvati Kund, increases inner strength and develops mental fitness. Ailments of the skin are destroyed by drinking the water of Udak Kund.

---

<sup>50</sup>The creation of a temporary earthen *linga* is one of the primary ways in which Mahashivaratri is celebrated in and around the town of Ukhimath in the Kedar valley. I surmise that this could be termed a form of *Parthiva puja*.

Here the text has broadened out to include all of the sites of significant interest in and around Kedarnath proper. It extols the corporeal and otherworldly effects of engagement with the materials and substances of the Kedarnath area. Such passages are found in almost every pamphlet of this sort. However, what follows is distinctive:

About two kilometers north of Kedarnath lies Corabari Tal which today they also call Gandhi Sarovar. There are divine medicinal herbs, roots, and flowers in this place. "Cora" is the name of a famous medicinal plant; because it is found in abundance there they call it Corabari Tal. Nine kilometers to the northwest of Kedarnath is Vasuki Tal. Brahmalotuses are in abundance in this area, and guggul, jatamamsi, atis, mamira, hatthajari and other medicinal plants grow there naturally.

To the east of the temple is a cave. It is said that the Pandavas did their last *yajna* in this very place. The vehicle that carried Dharmaraja Yudhishtira to heaven alighted here.

One of the other significant endeavors of the Badri Kedar Samiti in the Kedarnath valley is the running of an Ayurvedic college that would be interested in precisely such herbs and roots, and that mixes its own Ayurvedic compounds for commercial use. The author(s) of the pamphlet make this an explicit focus of what they want *yatris* to know about Kedarnath.

The doors of Shri Kedarnath-Ji open in the month of Vaisakh and close on Bhaiyya Duj [Dipavali]. For six months the *puja* of the image of Bhagavan Kedarnath happens in Ukhimath. Out of the Shri Panch Kedar, the *puja* of Madmaheshvar also happens here. In Ukhimath there is a huge temple to Bhagavan Aumkareshvar-Ji.

In the *Kedarakhanda* [text], that is to say in the *Skanda Purana*, the importance of the Kedar *yatra* is described in this way, that before *yatra* to Badrinath it is necessary to do *yatra* to Shri Kedarnath-Ji. Whomever remembers the name of Bhagavan Kedarnath and makes an auspicious vow in his mind is full of merit and fortunate. Having created many generations of credit/aid for his ancestors, by the kindness of Bhagavan that person obtains the real/actual world of Shiva.



In the same way that the five Badri *tirthas* have their own history and greatness, so too the Kedar *tirthas* have their own special importance. Bhagavan Shiva himself describes the special [qualities] that are in these places from an exceedingly ancient time to Parvati-Ji. Also in the present time all desires are fulfilled merely by coming on *yatra* to these places or taking Bhagavan's *darshan*. Shri Kedarnath-Ji is first among the five Kedars. Description of the greatness of the others can be found below.

As one might expect, this is a good example of the level of information and exposition someone might receive in Kedarnath if they asked one of the Samiti officials or *ved-pathis* about the importance and history of Kedarnath. It shows the subtle ways in which local position and knowledge blend with what is more generally known about Kedarnath and the Kedarnath end-valley.

### 2.3 *The Twelve Lingas of Light: Stories of Lord Shankar's Twelve Lingas of Light (Hindi)*<sup>51</sup>

The Uttarakhand Char Dham is not the only pilgrimage system to which Kedarnath belongs. Kedarnath is part of the pilgrimage system of the twelve *lingas* of light as well as the Uttarakhand Char Dham, and there are pamphlets found in Kedarnath (and in other regions of the country that contain *jyotirlingas*, such as much of Maharashtra) specific to this audience. This presentation also contrasts with the clearly local-inflected presentation of pamphlet version 2.2.

“I have praised he who delights on the slopes of the great mountains, the lord of Kedar, the mount Meru that is Shiva, who is worshipped continuously by the most eminent of sages, Suras, Asuras, Yakshas, great serpents, and others.”<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup>*Dvādaś Jyotirling - Bhagavān Śaṅkar ke 12 Jyotirlingom kī kathā* (Delhi: Lāl Cand and Sons), 36-38. I obtained this pamphlet from the market in Kedarnath. However, twelve *jyotilinga* pamphlets are available in many places – especially places in regions where there are *jyotirlingas*. For example, I have found similar pamphlets in Pune that were also published in Pune.

<sup>52</sup>*Mahādripārśve ca taṭe ramantaṃ saṃpūjyamānaṃ satataṃ munindraiḥ  
Surāsurairyakṣamahonaḡādyaiḥ kedāramīśaṃ Śivamerūmīḍe.*

The translation is mine. It should be noted that many versions of this verse end *Śivamekamīḍe*, or “I have

Conditions: In the divine land of the Himalayas resides the eleventh *jyotirlinga* of Shri Kedarnath Bhagavan, which stands on the banks of the Mandakini river at a height of three thousand, five hundred and eighty one meters. This *jyotirlinga* is the *jyotirlinga* that resides at the highest altitude. It is only possible to reach this region full of high, snowy mountains and beautiful natural views for six months out of the year. People only get the good fortune of its [the *jyotirlinga*'s] *darshan* and *puja* from Baisakh to Kartik. During the other months of the year the Himalayas of this state stay covered with snow due to the bitter cold. And the doors of the Shri Kedarnath temple are closed to those whose purpose is *darshan*.

Because of intense cold precipitation, in the month of Kartik the lion throne of Shri Kedarnath to which food offerings are made is brought outside after lighting a *ghi* Nanda-lamp, and then the doors are closed. From Kartik to Caitra Shri Kedareshvar-Ji resides lower down in Ukhimath. In Vaisakh, when the snow melts then the Kedar Abode [*Dhām*] is opened. At the moment when the doors of the temples are opened one can see the still burning *nandadip* that had been lit in Kartik.

This pamphlet uses different vocabulary to describe what goes on in Kedarnath than the words more commonly used in Kedarnath on site. What the author refers to as the *nandadip* is usually referred to as the *akhaṇḍ jyot*, the eternal light. It is an oil lamp that rests along the western wall of the inner sanctum. And the lion throne to which this text says refers, I surmise, is the five-faced *utsav mūrti* (travelling image/form of a deity worshipped in a temple) that travels in the Kedarnath palanquin (*doli*) during the procession.

“Hari” means the door of Bhagavan; liberation-delivering Haridwar has been known as Mayapuri. After Haridwar one goes to Rishikesh, Devprayag, Rudraprayag, Sonprayag, and Triyugi Narayan. Then from Gaurikund one goes to Shri Kedarnath. In order to reach here it is necessary to complete a journey of fourteen kilometers by means of a natural foot path, or one can also find horses and palanquins. For resting on the way there are pilgrim rest houses, ashrams, and other arrangements. *Yatris* bathe in the warm springs of Gaurikund and take *darshan* of decapitated Ganesha. Gaurikund is said to be the birthplace of Ganesha. In this very place Shankar-Ji cut off the head of Parvati's son

---

praised the one who is Shiva.” This is the Kedarnath section of a well-known hymn (*stotra*) to the twelve *jyotirlingas*, often attributed to Shankara.

Ganesha with his trident and afterwards having replaced it with an elephant head brought him back to life.

Not far from Gaurikund, in between mountain peaks in the Mandakini valley lies the Shri Kedarnath temple that is known as Kailash (the original, eternal dwelling place of Bhagavan Shankar-Ji). There is no *linga* or image [*mūrti*] here, there is only a high place [*sthān*] in a three-sided shape, [*yahām to keval ek trikoṇ ākār meṁ ūm̄cāi vālā sthān hai*] that is known as the back side of Shiva-Ji's buffalo.

This text makes the assertion, also occasionally heard in conversation with *yatris*, that what is present in the temple at Kedarnath is neither *linga* nor image, but rather a theriomorphic place. Language on this point differs slightly in each pamphlet and literary version I discuss in this chapter. Part of what becomes visible when looking across different pamphlet versions are the persistently unique linguistic strategies for describing the *linga*, and how different choices about how to discuss important elements of the site (its history, the natural environment, the efficaciously powerful natural environment) frame what is present in the temple. In this pamphlet, one meets the form of the *linga* before the narrative that frames the form.

Story [*Kathā*]: The story of Shri Kedarnath *jiyotirlinga* is in this way: the Pandavas arrived in Kashi and went to Vishveshvar Shiva-Shankar in order to cleanse themselves of their wickedness in killing people in the war of the Kauravas and Pandavas. But when they went there they found out that at this time Bhagavan Shiva-Shankar is in Kailash. So the Pandavas left Kashi and by way of Haridwar arrived in the lap of the Himalayas. The Pandavas barely began to get *darshan* of Shankar-Ji from a distance when Shankar-Ji disappeared. Seeing all of this Dharmaraja said “O God, you saw us *papa*-possessing people and disappeared. Thus, we will set out to find you. It is only by your *darshan* that our *papa* will be cleansed. Where you disappeared will be called ‘Guptkashi’.” Then the Pandavas went past Guptkashi (Rudraprayag) [sic] and searching for Shankar-Ji in the Himalayas they arrived in Gaurikund. When they went on from Gaurikund a buffalo became visible to Nakula and Sahadeva. When Dharmaraja saw its unique form he said “Bhagavan Shankar himself has taken the form of this buffalo and is testing us.”

The conflation of Guptkashi with Rudraprayag (they are over thirty kilometers distant), in addition to the use of the term *nandadip* in place of the term *akhand jyot* commonly used in Kedarnath, suggests that the author(s) of the text were visitors and not permanent residents of the region. This version also interprets Shiva's behavior as a test of the Pandava's devotion. His unwillingness to give them *darshan* is meant as a test, rather than an indication of an actual unwillingness. This interpretation would come up occasionally during conversations about the "appropriateness" of the Pandava's behavior.

Then what happened! Mace-wielding Bhima started after that buffalo. The buffalo started to move and Bhima was not able to put his hand on it. Finally, Bhima became tired and wounded the buffalo by hitting it with his mace. The wounded buffalo sat down, plunging its mouth into the earth. Bhima grabbed it by the tail and pulled, and from this [action] the mouth of the buffalo fell straight to Nepal and the back portion stayed here in Kedarnath. In Nepal it is known as Pashupatinath. From that back portion of the buffalo a divine light appeared, and the Pandavas took *darshan* in this light and their wickedness was cleansed. Bhagavan Shankar-Ji said to the Pandavas "I will always reside here as a three-sided *jyotirlinga*. And devotees will become pure by *darshan* of Kedarnath."

In the area of Kedar Dham one can see several memorials of the Pandavas. Raja Pandu, with his wife Madri, was living in this very forest when he died and that place is called Pandukeshvar. There *adivasis* perform Pandav-Nrtya. The place where the Pandavas ascended to heaven there is a high mountain peak called Svargarohini. When Dharmaraja was going up to heaven one of his thumbs fell to the earth, and he established a thumb-sized Shiva-*linga* in that place.

This narrative links Kedarnath first not to the Panch Kedar, but to Pashupatinath in Nepal, again betraying an orientation from outside the region. The view that *Pandav Nrtya* is an activity of *ādivāsī* (indigenous) people here is telling in the same regard. It suggests that one of the central public forms of Garhwali culture is *adivasi*. For Garhwali

Kshatriya and Brahman groups, this is an essentially pejorative statement about the non-Aryan history of Garhwal as a peripheral region. The statement maps to some of the questions and assumptions, discussed in the introduction and chapter two, about *pahari* (mountain) identity in contrast to that of the north Indian plains that underlie interactions between Garhwalis and non-Himalayan *yatris* discussed in the introduction. This version further presents the wounding of the *linga* by Bhima as a central part of the Kedarnath story. It also displays a unique glossing of Shiva's form: a buffalo whose back portion emits a divine light that becomes a triangular *linga* of light, passing through the earth between places.

Bhima struck buffalo-shaped Shiva-Ji with a mace and deeply regretted it. So he began to apply *ghi* [*ghī kā lep lagāne lagā*] to the body of that buffalo. This practice [*rīti*] is still carried out today; in addition to the *abhisheka* of the Shiva-Ji's three-sided divine *jyotirlinga* with water and *bilva* leaves *puja* is done by the smearing of *ghi*. Once in the village of Badrika Nar and Narayan were worshiping an earthen *linga* and, pleased, Shiva-Ji appeared to them and asked told them to request a boon. Nara and Narayana made the supplication that for the well-being of the world he stays in that place for ever so that his *puja* could be done in his own true form. At their supplication, in the snowy place called Kedar Maheshvar became truly present and established there in the form of a *jyoti* and became known as Kedareshvar. After *darshan* of Kedarnath one is not troubled even in dreams. From its *darshan* and *puja* the *papa* of the Pandavas was banished. One gets liberation by reaching Badrikeshvar and the observance of *puja* and *darshan*. If in Kedareshvar one goes near Shiva-Ji and then makes a gift of money [to a *purohit*] he becomes like Shiva.

In this telling, Bhima's regret is the only counterbalance to his striking of Shiva. The other Pandavas are not involved. One also sees here the highly provocative juxtaposition of the practice of *ghi malish* and the *parthiva puja* of Nar and Narayan, two forms of Shiva worship are both linked to Kedarnath and that direct themselves to non-standard forms of the deity. While *parthiva puja* is not a normal part of what is done in

Kedarnath, this discussion suggests an equation of sorts between the *ghi malish* and *parthiva puja*, by first discussing one, then the other, and then proceeding to a general exhortation to carry out *puja* at Kedarnath.

The main temple of Shri Kedarnath was built in ancient times by the Pandavas but its present form was given by Adi Shankaracarya in the eighth century. In sight of the temple Bhagavan Shiva's vehicle Nandi is established and behind the temple the *samadhi* of Shankaracarya has been built. Past that and a bit higher up is Bhrgupatan ("flying Bhairav") [*Bhairav urān*], a sheer, terrifying cliff overhang. One must face death ("intentional liberation") in order to reach there. There are *tirthas* in eight directions surrounding the temple. There is the temple of Bhairavnath here; Gandhi Sarovar, Vasuki Tal, Gaurikund, Son Prayag, Guptkashi, the five Kedars and others are all worth seeing.

In order to achieve the goal of having the *darshan* of the *jyotirlinga* of Shri Kedarnath one must travel by way of a difficult and rough path. But if one announces one's intention loudly and proceeds with faith then when going one does not become tired in the least. The cry of "Jay Kedarnath! Jay Kedarnath" stays on everyone's tongue.

The illustrious Shankaracarya-Ji said that in the state of the Himalaya there are sages by whom *puja* is continually being performed. Like them I offer to Shri Kedareshvar Mahadev-Ji thousands and thousands of prostrations. Jay Shri Kedarnath! Jay Shri Kedarnath!

What is on display in each of these accounts are the particular choices of structure, language, detail, and emphasis that each version makes. The combination of these specific decisions creates accounts that present Kedarnath in a specific tone. For example, the final frame offered by this *jyotirlinga* pamphlet is emotional and experiential; it exhorts devotion, offers a visual sweep of the Kedarnath environs, mentions the challenges of the path and underscores them by mentioning the extreme example of Bhrgupatan.

## 2.4 Uttarakhand Tourism (Hindi)<sup>53</sup>

The tone of this version is more informational than devotional. It is possible that the lengthiness of this account suggests a more literate and leisure-oriented audience that is both willing to read more and is interested in specific, historical details. By the same token, the degree to which this version demonstrates overlap with the other pamphlet examples is a good illustration of the amount of overlap between “tourism” and *yatra* characterized by discussions about religious tourism in Uttarakhand.

Area: three square km.

Weather: in summer time comfortable during the day and cold at night.

Average: from six Celsius to at the most twenty Celsius.

In the winter: below zero/snow-covered.

The best season: from May to October.

Clothing: in summer light woolens and in the winter heavy woolens.

Language: Hindi, English, and Garhwali.

*Tirtha-yatris* come to Yamunotri and Gangotri and purify their *atmas* [souls] and bodies. For *tirtha-yatris* to Kedarnath this is highly auspicious. There is a tradition of doing Bhagavan Shiva’s *puja* with Ganga water. The *yatri* who goes to Gangotri also performs the *yatra* to Kedarnath.

Kedarnath is the seat of Bhagavan Shiva. It is one of the twelve Shiva-*lingas* of Bhagavan Shiva. The temple of Kedarnath, established on the banks of the Mandakini at a height of three thousand, five hundred and eighty four meters above sea level is among the most sacred *tirthas* for Hindus. It will come as no surprise that the great scholar Adi Guru Shankaracarya, a saint-like individual, established Bhagavan Shiva in this land, a land where an unholy person becomes holy and a holy person becomes holier still.

Here is the place where Bhagavan Shiva liberated the Pandavas from the *papa* incurred by the killing of the Kauravas that they carried out in the Kurukshetra war. There is a mention of the founding of this

---

<sup>53</sup>*Cār Dhām Yātrā* (Dehra Dun: Data and Expo India Press Limited, Uttarakhand Tourism), 64–75.

temple in the *Mahabharata*.

It is known that each of the various *kunds* in Kedarnath has its own religious importance – Shiv Kund, Ret Kund, Hams Kund, Udak Kund, Rudhir Kund, and others are of primary importance. At a slight distance from Kedarnath is the temple of Bhaironath [Bhairavnath], who according to tradition at the time of Kedarnath's opening and closing as function of proper religious behavior is also worshiped directly [*dhārmik vyavahār ke rūp meṃ apnāyā gayā hai*]. There is a belief that Bhaironath-Ji protects Kedarnath-Ji when the doors are closed with his fierce powers [*rākṣasī śaktiyom se*].

During winter the temple remains closed because of snowfall. Someone who finds themselves near Kedarnath-Ji in good weather is fortunate. The snow that has fallen like thousands of little particles lies continually on the range of mountains.

The most holy, respected Shiva temple is topped with gold and every *yatri* finds peace here. It is said that the pious person [*bhaktagaṇ*] dies here he himself becomes Shiva. In addition to the temple there is an important road to heaven that is called either the Road to Heaven [*svargārohaṇ*] or the Great Path [*mahāpath*].

This exposition appears to be two consecutive presentations joined together. The first ranges starts with what to wear, briefly mentions the Pandavas, bathing tanks of importance around Kedarnath, the snowy beauty of the Himalayas, and the shrine of the Himalayan lieutenant of Shiva, Bhairavnath, and suggests that journey to Kedarnath results in peace, the becoming of Shiva, and the attainment of heaven. Again we see how a broader description of the importance of the place frames a more detailed narrative treatment of the Pandavas.

According to traditional songs [*gathā*], it was actually this path that the five Pandavas took when, having received the blessing of Shiva, they wanted to go to heaven. [They did this] because they killed their cousins and wanted to cleanse that wickedness [*pāp dhonā cāhte the*]. Lord Shiva gave the Pandavas half-hearted [*anmane*] *darshan* and went to Kashi, and began to live there in hidden form. Afterwards, the Pandavas went to search for God and lying down on the ground did six-limbed prostration. It is no surprise that [there is] a natural boulder [*caṭṭān*]



whose *puja* is done there. A bull's [*sāṁḍ*] hump [*kūbar*] is marked/recognized [*cihinit*] there.

In this way Shiva, pleased with the determination [*daṣḍh niṣcay*] of the Pandavas, liberated them from *papa* and gave them *darshan* and gave them permission to worship his own hump. There are four other places where Shiva's *puja* is done and where he appeared [*pragaṭ*, sic] - Madmaheshvar, in Tungnath because of the arms, the face in Rudranath and his...braided topknot in Kalpeshvar. These four places along with Kedarnath are called the five Kedars...

[The intervening sections contain advertisements, room rates, destination tables.]<sup>54</sup>

In this version, again, slightly different language and associations are invoked for discussing Shiva's form in Kedarnath. It is not Shiva's back portion but rather the hump of his form (here a bull rather than a buffalo) linked to the Panch Kedar, a hump that is also a boulder. Shiva is pleased with the determination of the Pandavas. And, there is no speculation about the reasons that Shiva was originally unwilling to give the Pandavas full *darshan*.

...Kedarnath Temple:

A flat, broad, powerfully effectual place is enclosed and covered with a high spire. The current temple was built in the eighth century by Adiguru Shankaracharya, and next to the temple is statuary built by the Pandavas. It is built over a triangular ground and constructed with the help of cut stones. It is fully decorated with architectural carvings; this temple is one hundred years old...

....By the outer door of the temple stands a giant *murti* of the bull Nandi taking the position of guardian. The inner sanctum of the temple is where the *murti* is stationed. The inner sanctum is of stone and possesses a *pradakshina* [circumambulation] space that goes around all four sides, where Lord Shiva is worshiped in the form of Sadashiva. There are various deities and there is a small temple on the path for *pradakshina*. There are some inscriptions written in Pali or Brahmi script with historical information written on large gray stones. These are all indications of ancient importance and answer questions about who constructed the temple.

---

<sup>54</sup>See Appendix II for images of the actual page layout of these texts.

Here this text, in yet another meditation on Shiva's distinctive presence at the site, intriguingly describes the *linga* as being in the form of Sadashiva, notably one of the five forms of Shiva's face that Stella Kramrisch writes is "generally not shown" iconographically.<sup>55</sup> That is to say, this account suggests that the face of Shiva present in Kedarnath is the face for which there is no iconographic representation, a challenging suggestion given the datum of a form of Shiva around which a temple has been constructed. This version also distinctively emphasizes the authority of inscriptional attestations for the ancient character of the temple.

The daily time of *puja* is in the morning and evening. The morning's *puja* is called *nirvan darshan* as the *Śivpinḍ puja* is done in its natural form. *Ghi* and water are the primary offerings [*upahār*]. The evening *puja* is called *shringar darshan* as they decorate the *Shivpinḍ* with flowers and adornments. The *puja* is accomplished with the speaking of mantras, the ringing of bells, and the presence of devotees. There is a search/attempt to obtain a divine blessing. In the *Suprabhāt* [morning] *puja*, *suprabhāt*, *bālbhog*, *Śivpūja*, *Asatotār*, *Śivmahimā*, *Śivnāmāvalī*, *Śivasamhāram* [these are the names of well-known forms of *puja* and devotional Sanskrit compositions] are included. What is recited and accomplished is based on Kedarnath and spoken by Sanskrit scholars who are Brahmins from villages near Ukhimath and Guptkashi.

The date of the opening of the Kedarnath temple is fixed on the day of Mahashivratri by pious persons [*sādhuom se*] in Ukhimath, normally the last week of April or the first week of May. The Kedarnath temple is opened one day prior to that of Shri Badrinath... [The text continues to describe Shankaracarya Samadhi, Gandhi Sarovar, Vasuki Tal, Gaurikund, Sonprayag, Guptkashi, Agastmuni, Ukhimath, Kalimath, Chopta, Triyuginarayan before proceeding to a description of the remaining four of the five Kedar.]

The more standard language of offering (*upahar*) is used for the *ghi malish*, and Shiva's form receives yet another treatment, as a *pind*, or lump. This usage of *pind* to refer to ambiguously shaped organic forms of divine presence resonates with the way that one

<sup>55</sup>Stella Kramrisch, *The presence of Śiva* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 185.

often finds descriptions of forms of the Goddess. Vaishno Devi's ambiguous three *pind* form is a good example.<sup>56</sup> In contrast to the previous example, the Panch Kedar and specific Sanskrit devotional compositions are mentioned but Bhairavnath and Pashupatinath are not.

### Sanskrit Treatments of Kedarnath

There are treatments of Kedarnath found in Sanskrit texts available in the bazaar which connect to oral and pamphlet versions in a number of direct and indirect ways. Treatments of Kedarnath in Sanskrit literature more generally would be a topic worthy of its own full-length study, along the lines of the work of Handelman and Shulman already discussed. I focus here on three texts that are found in the Kedarnath bazaar itself. The *Shiva Purana* functions as a main axis for these treatments, and the *Shiva Purana* is present in Kedarnath in a number of important ways. Both in the Kedarnath valley and more generally, the *Shiva Purana* is one of the *puranas* that is commonly recited and expounded in the context of puranic *katha* recitations, and the stories and ritual instructions found in it functions as an important node on the web of cultural knowledge and representation about “Hinduism” in the medieval, colonial, and modern periods constituted by Puranic modes.<sup>57</sup> Second, recitations of the *Shiva Purana* often occur in Kedarnath: in 2007 three were scheduled and two were performed. One was a very public recitation sponsored by the Samiti, and the second was a private

---

<sup>56</sup>See Mark E. Rohe, “Ambiguous and Definitive: The Greatness of Goddess Vaisno Devi,” in *Seeking Mahadevi: Constructing the Identities of the Hindu Great Goddess*, ed. Tracy Pintchman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 55-76.

<sup>57</sup> In the Kedarnath valley puranic recitations are sponsored by individuals, families or group of families, or institutional groups such as the Badri Kedar Samiti. They may be held in honor of a particular event such as a marriage. The puranic reciter (Vyas-Ji) will usually be a knowledgeable Brahman man. I have observed something of a trend that, if financially and logistically possible, the Vyas-Ji will be invited from outside the specific locale. The larger the budget for the event, the more famous the Vyas-Ji might be. Because he is usually not a resident of the locale in which the *katha* is happening, he effectively functions as both a visiting religious leader and a “scholar in residence” during his visit.

recitation sponsored by a group of *yatris* who brought their own reciter with them and who resided in Kedarnath for the duration of the *katha*. Third, texts of the *Shiva Purana* are available for purchase in the bazaar. Two other Sanskrit texts are also available in the bazaar that complement and elaborate on themes found in the *Shiva Purana*. In this section I look at the thematic relations among the treatment of Kedarnath in these texts and suggest how these themes offer interpretive frames for thinking about narrative exposition and the experience of place more generally.

### 3.1 *Kedarnath and the Shiva Purana*

As Benjamin Fleming has discussed in detail, there are at least two versions of the *Shiva Purana* with not wholly identical content.<sup>58</sup> I base my discussion here on a treatment of Kedarnath found in the Motilal Banarsidass translation, which is based on the Sanskrit text of the later of two Venkateshwar Press editions.<sup>59</sup> The Sanskrit versions of the *Shiva Purana* most commonly available in the Kedarnath valley (they are usually ordered from Haridwar or Rishikesh) are also those published by the publisher who took over the Venkateshwar Press, Khemaraj Shrikrishnadass.<sup>60</sup>

Sūta said:

O Brahmins, the incarnations of Viṣṇu – Nara and Nārāyaṇa performed their penance in the Bhārata Khaṇḍa in the hermitage of Badarikāśrama. Requested by them for their worship, Śiva, being subservient to the devotees comes every day to that earthen phallic [*pārthive*] image of Śiva. A long time elapsed while these two incarnations of Viṣṇu, the spiritual sons of Śiva, performed the worship of Śiva. On one occasion the delighted Śiva told them – “I am delighted. Choose your boon from me.” When he said this, Nara and Nārāyaṇa spoke these words keeping in mind the welfare of the world. Nara and Nārāyaṇa said: - O lord of gods, if you are delighted, if the boon is to be

<sup>58</sup> Benjamin Fleming, “The cult of the jyotirlingas and the history of Śaivite worship” (Phd diss., McMaster University, 2007), 14.

<sup>59</sup> J.L. Shastri et al., *The Siva-Purana Volumes I-IV* (Motilal Banarsidass, 1977), *Koṭirudrasaṁhita* 19: 1-26.

<sup>60</sup> *Śrī Śivamahāpurāṇa* (Mumbai: Khemarāja Śrīkrishnadās (Śrī Venkateśvar Press), 2004).

granted by you, O Śiva, stay here in your own form [*svena rūpeṇa*] and accept the devotion of your devotees.

As I noted in the introduction, Benjamin Fleming has pointed out that the identification of Shiva's primary form with the *linga* was not complete during the redaction of the different parts and versions of the *Shiva Purana*; as he discusses with regard to this particular example, it is not wholly clear that Shiva's Parthiva form is that of a *linga*.<sup>61</sup> This is particularly significant in the context of the consistent ambiguity of Shiva's form in Kedarnath that I have highlighted throughout this chapter.

Sūta said:

Thus requested, lord Śiva himself stayed in Kedāra on the Himavat in the form of Jyotirlinga. He was worshipped by them for helping the worlds and for appearing in the presence of the devotees. He destroys their miseries and terrors. Then Śiva himself stayed there in the name of Kedāreśvara. By his sight and worship he bestows the desires of the devotees. The gods and the sages of yore worship here. They get the fruit of their desire from the delighted lord Śiva. Since the residents of Badarikāśrama derive their desires every day by worshipping him, he is called the bestower of the desires of his devotees ever. From that day onwards, if anyone worships Kedāreśvara with devotion he will not suffer distress even in dreams.

It was he who on seeing the Pāṇḍavas assumed the form of a buffalo [*mahiṣam rūpamāsthitaḥ*], having recourse to his magical skill and began to run away. When he was caught by the Pāṇḍavas he stood with his face bent down. They held his tail and implored him again and again [*prārthitaśca punaḥ punaḥ*]. He remained in that form in the name of Bhaktavatsala. His head portion went and remained fixed in the city of Nayapāla [Nepal]. The lord stood in that form there. He asked them to worship him in that trunkless form. Worshipped by them, Śiva remained there and granted boons. The Pāṇḍavas went away with joy after worshipping him. After obtaining what they desired in their minds, they were rid of all their miseries.

---

<sup>61</sup> Fleming, "The cult of the jyotirlingas and the history of Śaivite worship," 82-83.

There in the shrine of Kedāra, Śiva is directly worshipped by the Indian people. He who makes a gift of a ring or a bracelet after going there becomes a beloved of Śiva. He is endowed with the form of Śiva. On seeing that form of Śiva, a person gets rid of sins. By going to Badarī forest he becomes a living liberated soul. On seeing the forms of Nara, Nārāyaṇa and Kedāreśvara, undoubtedly he can achieve liberation. The devotees of Kedāreśa who die on the way are released from rebirth. No doubt need be entertained in this respect. Going there, with pleasure, worshipping Kedāreśa and drinking the water there a person is released from re-birth. O Brahmins, in this Bhārata country people should worship with devotion Nara-Nārāyaṇeśvara and Kedāreśa. Although he is the lord of the universe still he is particularly the lord of Bharata. There is no doubt that Śiva Kedāra is the bestower of all desires. O excellent sages, I have narrated to you what you have asked for. On hearing this narrative the sins disappear at once. No doubt need be entertained in this regard.

The text does not attempt to reconcile its assertion that the *jyotirlinga* is Shiva's true form (*svarupa*) with its subsequent statement that Shiva's presence in Kedarnath is based on the buffalo form that he took to flee the Pandavas. It links Kedarnath to Nepal and not the five Kedars, and the manner of their supplication is reverent. There is no hint of violence whose effects and tone must be mitigated. Yet at the same time the initial unwillingness of Shiva to fully encounter the Pandavas is clear.

### 3.2 The Upapuranic Kedārakhaṇḍa and Kedarnath

While the most well-known, both inside and outside of Garhwal, account of the visit of the Pandavas to Kedarnath is found in the *Shiva Purana*, the text that is mostly commonly mentioned in the context of Kedarnath and the Kedarnath valley is known as the *Kedārakhaṇḍa* (the section/area of Kedara). The *Kedarakhanda* (henceforth *Ukkh*) is an upapuranic (minor puranic) text, and it is the text most commonly known in the Kedarnath valley, and by extension mentioned to *yatris* in this regard, to contain substantial information about Kedarnath. Upapuranic literature tends to be, in contradistinction to the eighteen great puranas (*mahāpurāṇa*), more regionally focused.

It displays an intimate knowledge of the geography of a particular region, and it has been argued that *Upapuranas* often constitute the attempts of a Brahmanical group to establish dominance in the region through textually structured interactions with the persons already present in the region.<sup>62</sup>

Speaking ethnographically, the distinction between the puranic and the upapuranic is in the case of the *Kedarakhanda* to large extent an analytic distinction. I met very few people who articulated (or were even convinced by my claims regarding) this distinction. The *Ukkh* is a different text than the *Kedarakhanda* of the *Skandapurana*, though in practice the two are almost always conflated. I do not discuss the *Skandapurana* in this chapter because it is generally not referred to in Kedarnath beyond its conflation with the *Ukkh* and, though a *mahapurana*, it is not the subject of puranic recitation in the Kedarnath valley. A full discussion of *Ukkh* (about eight hundred pages long with its Hindi translation in one version), its different published editions, and the ways in which it fits into the vast network of puranic, agamic, tantric, and epic literature would itself require the space of an entire book.<sup>63</sup> I confine myself here to a discussion based on the only version of the text I found available in the Kedarnath marketplace and the only version I ever saw in the homes of Kedarnath valley residents. It is a version that, not coincidentally, comes with a Hindi translation by the famous Garhwali scholar of Garhwali history and culture Shivanand Nautiyal.<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>62</sup>Kunal. Chakrabarti, *Religious process : the Puranas and the making of a regional tradition* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>63</sup>See Appendix I for some general observations about the *Ukkh* that are not germane to the work of this chapter.

<sup>64</sup>Shivanand Nautiyal, trans., *Kedārahāṇḍam - Skandapurāṇāntargata (Hindī anuvād sahit)* (Ilahabad: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1994).

There is not a performance tradition in the Kedarnath valley that engages the *Ukkh* as such. Public recitations of a Purana, usually lasting nine or eleven days and known as either *katha* or *puja* (e.g. *Shrimad Bhagavat Puja*, *Shri Shiva Mahapurana Katha*), tend to be of great Puranas such as the *Bhagavata Purana* or the *Shiva Purana* rather than the *Kedarakhanda*. On the other hand it is often, in its guise as part of the *Skandapurana* and along with the Sanskrit *Mahabharata*, invoked as a proof text in interactions with *yatris*. These invocations, however, do not involve the iconic presence of the text in the same way that mention of Tulsidas' *Ramcaritmanas* might. The text is referenced, but rarely displayed.

In addition to its function as a proof text for the ancient greatness of Kedarnath, one of the most important ways in which this text is invoked is through the image of Shiva explaining to Parvati the multiple ways in which he is present in the landscape of Garhwal. Like much South Asian literature, the framing of the text is dialogic. The content emerges as the result of a series of questions and answers between pairs of speakers. The *Ukkh* has multiple such pairs: Vasbbishta and Arundhati, Shiva and Parvati, Narada and Skanda, and Utpalaka and Dharmanetra. The Shiva-Parvati pairing is the one I have heard referenced in conversation, and their discussion is what frames the description of *tirthas* in the Kedarnath valley found in the text.

There are several passages with markedly different content and tone that refer specifically and substantially to Kedarnath.<sup>65</sup> The differing voices and contents of these passages, taken together, offer a useful literary rubric for looking at how narrative expositions of Kedarnath, more generally, relate to the place as a whole. As one might

---

<sup>65</sup>Shivaprasad Naithani views (personal communication) these different passages about Kedarnath as an example of the composite nature of the text as a whole. I agree.



expect in an upapuranic treatment of Kedarnath in a Garhwal-centric text, these passages constitute an extensive set of narrative approaches for encountering the site.

The first passage occurs immediately following an account of the descent of the Ganga and the *tapas* of king Bhagirathi.

Vasishta said:<sup>66</sup>

Having heard this excellent story Parvati, filled with devotion, said to her husband Shiva “God of Gods, ruler of the world, you are he whose grace is the final objective of devotees. You have now told me about the ten streams of the Ganga. Abode of all that which is, tell me the names and greatness of the country where those flows went. Tell me their greatness in detail; I want to hear this now. Where did those Brahma-arisen waters meet? Tell more about the greatness of those places. I am your devotee, Lord of Gods, you alone are dearer to me than breath. People do not conceal from those who love them. Lord, you alone are the maker of the world, the upholder of the world. By you alone, Lord of Gods, are these three worlds permeated entirely. Tell in detail in which countries are the ten flows of the Ganga.

It should be noted what question Parvati asks specifically; she asks to know more about the greatness of the region. Her questions are similar in form (if not fully in import, considering the metaphysical underpinnings of a dialogue between Shiva and Shakti), to those that *yatris* might ask their *tirth purohit*.

The Lord said:

Listen, Devi, best of women, matchless one – I will answer what you have asked, and it has never been told to anyone else before. Effort should be made to keep this marvelous and wonderful secret hidden. By the mere sight [of such places] millions of *papa*-generating actions are burnt up as if by fire, ruler of the ruler of the gods. Hear, Devi, how once the god-sired Pandavas, the famous and mighty sons of great-souled Pandu, were disgraced by their killing of their own lineage and afflicted by their murder of their own guru. Having killed Drona and all the others they were greatly troubled, and with their hearts burning and greatly agitated with grief, with all their deeds come to foul ends, they

<sup>66</sup> *Skandapurāṇantargata Kedārahāṇḍam: Hindī Anuvāda Sahita*, 1st ed. (Ilahabad: Hindī Sāhitya Sammelan, 1994), 141-143 (chapter 40: 1-29). The translation is mine, carried out with the aid of the Hindi commentary by Nautiyal.

sought refuge with Vyasa. Possessing minds into which impurity had already entered, they said to great-souled Vyasa: blessed Vyasa, all of us have come for refuge with you. How can we, Brahman, whose selves are now [full of] *papa*, attain liberation? We are disgraced by the killing of our own lineage and afflicted by the murder of our guru. You are our only refuge; give us a clear command. Brahman, by what action can we attain the highest state? Having taken pity on us because we are your descendants, tell us this.

Notable here, considering some of the other versions of this scene encountered in this chapter, is that the Pandavas do not seem to hold anyone responsible for spurring them on to actions that will later incur *papa*.

Vyasa said:

You Pandavas who are killers of your lineage, listen! What is generally valid as a cure for all cases does not hold for those who have killed members of their lineage unless they go to the abode [*bhavanam*] of Kedar. Go there! That is where Brahma and other gods who are desirous of the *darshan* of Shiva stay established in *tapas*, purified of their actions as they carry out the highest *tapas*. That is where Ganga is, the most eminent and chief of the numerous rivers. That is where the Lord Shiva [*Mahadeva*] lives, along with his numerous mighty followers and kings. That is where the gods, along with the *gandharvas* and *yakshas* and *rakshasas* and bulls, have their sport every sunset of one half of the month of the Scorpion. Many instruments sound there and the chanting of the Vedas is heard. That is the place where those who are dead become Shiva, without doubt. Who can describe the greatness of that area [*kṣetrasya*]? He who has given himself over to numerous *tirthas* and remembered that area will get liberation. Go to that divine place [*tridaśasthānam*] known as the Great Path [*mahāpatha*]. That is the best place for expiation of the *papa* of killing Brahmins.

Of distinct importance in this paragraph, and throughout many parts of the *Ukhh*, is that there is a good degree of semantic overlap between the region of Kedara, roughly conforming to modern Garhwal, and the “region” of Kedarnath proper. In this small section alone one finds a number of different place words that set up this overlap:

*bhavana, sthana, kshetra*, and later on *sthala*. This overlap of locative specific is pervasive throughout the passages from the *Ukkh* I discuss.

The Lord [Shiva] said:

Thus Vyasa spoke. Having heard, the Pandavas delightedly revered him, circumambulated him, and went to mount Kailash. They lived there and attained the highest condition. The *tirthas* by whose *seva* the mighty [Pandavas] became pure, the attainment of that place [those *tirthas*] is difficult even for the gods. It is fifty *yojanas* by thirty *yojanas*, and this place is whence one goes to heaven – that mighty place is not earthly. From the border of Gangadvar to the white mountains and from the banks of the Tamasa to the underside of Boddhacala is known as the auspicious region of Kedara, a region separate from the world...

The journey of the Pandavas into the Himalayas here is presented in general fashion, similar to the text of the *Mahabharata* variant discussed in the introduction. It is a general picture of the *svargarohana*, the ascent to heaven, of the Pandavas.

The second account is that of a wicked hunter who accidentally happens on the Kedara area.

Parvati said:<sup>67</sup>

Mahadeva, tell me of that region in detail, the region known by the name of Kedara that bestows liberation and heaven. Husband, how many *tirthas* are there? By bathing and offering gifts, Lord, what merit and what fruits occur? How is that *tirtha* the best of *tirthas*? Lord, dear one, tell all that to your dear one.

The Lord [Shiva] said...

... As a king among men, as Vasava [Indra] among the Suras, as Danada [Kubera] among the Vasus, as my [city] among cities, as Rambha among *apsaras*, as Tumburu among *gandharvas*, thus is the region known and referred to as Kedara [first] among regions.

---

<sup>67</sup> Shivanand Nautiyal, trans., *Kedārahāṇḍam - Skandapurāṇāntargata (Hindī anuvād sahit)* (Ilahabad: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1994), 144-147 (chapter 41: 1-55). The translation is mine, carried out with the aid of the Hindi commentary by Nautiyal.

Hear, Devi, in detail, the story of a hunter and a deer – listen to it. There lived at the border of a village a dreadful hunter of deer. He always ate and sold deer meat. Once, that great hunter went to the forest to kill deer. Devi, he killed many deer there. Thus, killing deer, the hunter went into the *tirtha* of Kedara. Ruler of gods, that most excellent of sages Narada appeared wandering on the mountain, and going along with him were the sages who were his followers. At that time that very same hunter became excited – “That which is moving [going] is a golden deer of divine appearance! Having killed that golden deer, I would be full of [its] gold.” Having thought thus, the hunter became very surprised. Having made the bow ready and placed on it an arrow, just as he went to shoot the sage the sun went away. Seeing that extraordinarily surprising thing, the hunter was amazed.

Just as he went closer he saw a frog in a hole being quickly swallowed by a large snake. Just as the black snake swallowed this frog the frog turned into a noble trident-bearing entity wearing a serpent as a sacred thread, with resplendent locks, bearing a half-moon, glorious like Kailasa, dancing, adorned by his followers, blue throated, wearing the skin of an elephant. Having seen that most amazing thing, the hunter [thought] “What is this? How did it happen that the frog, enveloped by the snake --How did this happen that the frog transformed into a different body? What?! I think this is a dream – how do I wake up? How has this confusion happened? After all, I am nothing if not healthy! Or otherwise this is somehow a misfortune having to do with ghosts. Now my death is near. Whence comes this misfortune? What do I do? Where do I go in this ghost-inhabited [*vane>smimbhūtasevite*] forest? In this great forest who will protect me? I alone have just seen how the frog encountered misfortune.” With worries such as these having entered his mind the hunter, Maheshi [Parvati], at that very moment began to flee from the forest. At that very moment he saw a deer, of beautiful and fat limbs, being killed by a tiger and the great hunter was distressed with fear. [He saw that] deer, as it was being killed, take the form of Shiva, five-faced, three-eyed, wearing a snake as a sacred thread. At that instant, ruler of the ruler of the gods, the killer who was the killer of the deer was killed by another hunter and became a bull. Then the formerly slain deer, now in the form of Shiva’s very own likeness, mounted that bull, beautiful one.

The hunter and the reader are seeing one of the attributes of Puranic *tirthas* in action: *sarūpatā*.<sup>68</sup> That is to say, when one enters a *tirtha*, one attains the form of the

---

<sup>68</sup> I am indebted to Nirmila Kulkarni for this insight.

deity who is present in that *tirtha*. Transformation and fluidity of form are here marked as characteristics of being in the vicinity of Kedarnath.

Having seen that most surprising thing the hunter was amazed, and started to think “What is this, what is this? The hairs all over his body stood up, and his mind was dismayed. Then, ruler of the gods, he again saw the sage Narada. Seeing him, someone with the form of a mortal in that fearsome forest, and the hunter heard the statement from the sage’s mouth, dear one, that “How is it that the hunter is good and bad [*sādhurasādhuśca*], and that this forest is pre-eminently good?” Having heard thus the hunter said to the sage Narada “How is it that I am good, Brahman, and not good? And how is the forest so very good?” Tell me about what you have said. Having heard what the hunter said, Narada said, laughing “You, excellent hunter, possess great merit, by virtue of which you have come to this *tirtha* and taken the auspicious *darshan* of such sites. That is why you are good. Now hear why you are not good. You did not know [recognize] this most auspicious of *tirthas*, by whose greatness living beings straightaway obtained Shiva-hood even at the very moment that you were watching.” Having heard that statement and [seen] that most surprising form, dear one, the extremely lucky hunter at once prostrated himself on the ground. “I am favored, I have realized all my desires, sage, by your *darshan*. I drink the nectar of your great tale that has come from your lotus mouth. Best of sages, take me out of the ocean of existence! I am wicked: I am a killer of sages, I am violent, I am dangerous. Auspicious one, cause me to cross over. How might a condition such as this come about for me? Best of sages, having taken pity, tell me!” Narada said to him “Now live here!” Having spoken thus, Devi, he [Narada] disappeared even as he [the hunter] was watching. And the hunter lived there and indeed attained the highest state. Even I am not able, well-hipped one, in hundreds of years to tell the greatness of that region. Merely by hearing [of its greatness] one goes to the highest state. Ruler of the gods, dear one, hear even more about the most excellent and secret *tirthas*.

This episode offers a view of the transformative power of Kedara, undefined here whether it is meant as region or site. This episode suggests membership in a general corpus of stories about ignorant hunters, often *adivasis*, who accidentally perform acts of devotion to Shiva and are richly rewarded. Such stores are often associated with the celebration of the festival of *Mahashivaratri*.

The next passage focuses on the power of particular sites in the area between, in, and around Kedarnath and Gaurikund. It does not tell a story, but rather lists the specific powers and benefits of particular sites. In this way it may be called tantric; the tantric text of the *Kedarakalpa* (discussed in the next section) demonstrates a similar emphasis.

[Shiva is speaking]<sup>69</sup>

Wife of Shiva, Devi, to the south is what is heard of as *Retasa* [quicksilver, sometimes understood to be Shiva's semen] *Kund*. By the drinking of its water, there is no doubt that [one becomes] Shiva. There are marks by which that place that bestows Shiva-[ness] is known. Quicksilver is seen there and the water bubbles. By the mere sight of that place a man goes to the highest state. So again, ruler of the ruler of the gods, what especially happens by means of that water, wife of Shiva? Here, Parvati, the *tirthas* are on the good shores of the Mandakini. Down from that great *tirtha* is what is known as the auspicious Shiva Kund that bestows the world of Shiva. The Shiva *linga* there is known as liberation-bestowing Kapila. The wise man who fasts there for seven nights and withdraws from breath [life] attains the condition of being joined with Shiva [known as *Śivasayujyatā*]. Where a stream flows out above that is Bhrigutunga, [the place] that bestows liberation on the wicked. Cow killers, the ungrateful, Brahman-killers, even those who have betrayed confidences. He who does *tapas* on Shrishila and then forsakes breath [life] from the high elevation of Bhrigutunga, ruler of the gods, he will go to the state of the highest Brahma. Two *yojanas* up from that *tirtha* there emerges bubbling red-colored water. This water is most secret and should not be mentioned to bad living beings. By its mere touch, dear one, all metals become gold. Iron and other metals they become [gold], Devi, this is very true and without doubt. This most difficult to reach *tirtha* is called Hiranyagarbha.

This section is directly evocative of the alchemical agendas of the Nath-Siddhas described by David White discussed in the introduction. It is also a much more prominent presentation of the practice of leaping from Bhrigutunga than that found in most modern pamphlets.

---

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 148-153 (chapter 42:1-70).

North from there, o Devi, is a most excellent crystal *linga*. By its *puja* a man would become Shiva at that very instant. Seven steps before that is the *tirtha* remembered as Vahni [fire]. I will tell its marks- Devi, listen to my telling. Dear one, the water of the Vahni is from melted snow. Its *puja* should be done by offering anointing of invocations and ghi. Vahni [fire] becomes pleased and bestows desired boons. North from there, Devi, there is a most amazing thing, wife of Shiva. Water falls from the tip of a rock/mountain onto the ground. From a drop of that water, Devi, [people] are liberated. I was worshipped with pearls there by Bhima, [pearls] from the houses full of coral and pearls that are always there. In those houses, o ruler of the gods, *gandharvas* and *apsaras* sing to the great lord, filled with delight.

O great Devi, those who are wise and with meritorious *atma* go there. There, having gone to the *yatra* of the great path they do not suffer. On that great path, Devi, there is a mud [made of] *ghi* and milk-rice [*ghṛtapāyasakardamāḥ*]. The ground is gold, full of jewels, adorned with golden animals and birds. The trees there are golden and the branches are red coral. Great vultures shine from the eating of golden snakes. In every direction for a *yojana* there are great serpents. Maheshvari, my abode has seven walls. There, Devi, Brahma and others always do my *seva*. They are ruled by great Bhairava with a staff in his hand. Ghosts and corpse-spirits, Jrimbhakas [a type of demon], Kushmandas [Durgas], Nandis, attendants of Shiva, and others play there enveloped in delight. I am always established on the great path, my dear one. There is no place, ruler of the gods, more dear to me anywhere. Any mortal who says with devotion “I will go to the great path and I will forsake my breath [life] there. He, ruler of the ruler of the gods, is the dearest of the dear to me. What is left [what benefit is there] in the world for a person who, having separated himself from the social world, having established me in his own heart, goes to a temple? My greatest place is the top of the mountain of the ascent to heaven. This rock/mountain has the character of a *tirtha* where I am always established. By its *darshan*, by its *puja*, by its touch, the *papa* of deeds such as the killing of Brahmans is destroyed, ruler of the gods. Where Madhvi Ganga river meets the Mandakini, there is a great, Shiva-bestowing *tirtha* known as the “death of Krauncha” [belonging to Kartikeya]. Having bathed there, best of women, one dwells in the abode of Kailasa. And where the Kshiraganga river meets with the Mandakini. There is the most eminent Brahmya *tirtha* where, having bathed, one becomes a divine follower of Shiva. South from there, Devi, is the water that bubbles. That water is known as ocean-water and by its touch it bestows [the attainment of] Shiva.

The part of the Kedarnath end-valley that lies above the valley floor and to the north of the “main” site appears here as a wondrous realm where normal environmental matter is transmuted (mud into auspicious substances, trees and dirt into gold) and where the impossible is juxtaposed (fire and water). The *kedara*, the marshy soil, is itself transformed.

Having framed the region as generally wondrous, powerful, and transformative, the text proceeds to what a modern-day view of the text would call the area of the temple.

To the south of me is a most beautiful rock known as Porandara where, Devi, Indra for his own establishment once worshipped me. There is my eminent *linga*; by its *darshan* it bestows liberation. Ten *dandas* from my place is what is remembered as Hamsa [swan] Kund. Where Brahma, great Devi, came having become a swan and after having drunk *retasa* contended with Shiva’s followers. That [place] known as Hamsa Kund bestows liberation on ancestors, and one who does the *shraddha* for ancestors goes to the highest level. Those ancestors who are in hell or who are born into lives and lives become trident-bearing Shivas with topknots made of the half moon, [sitting] on the shoulders of a bull, wearing snakes as sacred threads, limbs covered in ash who sport with me. That is the greatness of Hamsa Kund, best of women. This water-infused ground trembles with a foot is placed [on it]. What is called the region of Kedara is the best *tirtha* of *tirthas*. Having seen me, the lord of Kedara and having drunk my *retas*-water, he attains union with Shiva in his heart, Maheshvari. Wherever, whenever, however, wife of Shiva, whether wicked or good, when he dies he goes to the city of Shiva. This place of Shiva is said to be [as] auspicious as that of Vishnu.

The center of the Kedarnath end-valley, today marked by the Kedarnath temple and the built environment of Kedarnath village, is in this account merely part of a broad series of powerfully efficacious sites that all should be visited. This egalitarian view of the power of the Kedarnath region, both specifically as the Kedarnath valley and more generally as the entire region of *kedaramandala*, then proceeds south from



Kedarnath, first to a site on the way south to Gaurikund and then to Gaurikund (here Gauritirtha) itself.

Devi, the rock of Bhimasena is known as my couch. Hear about my *tirtha* that is three *gavyutis* to the south from my place. This *tirtha* is known as Gauritirtha and bestows all *siddhis* [powers]. It is where you, Maheshani [Parvati], on the bank of the Mandakini, previously performed your post-menstrual bath – that is remembered as Gauritirtha, for the birth of Mahasena [Kartikeya]. Matchless one, has this been forgotten by you? Therefore I will tell the marks by which that auspicious [place] is known. The water there is pungent and red and muddy. I never forsake that place, ruler of the ruler of the gods. There I am called Gaurishvara and I bestow dwelling in the world of Shiva. Who bathes there and puts the dirt on his head, he becomes as dear to me, dear one, as you. Here whatever action is done its qualities are multiplied by a hundred thousand. South from there, Devi, is the protective ashram of Goraksha [Gorakhnath] where, o Mahadevi, Siddha-Goraksha always resides.

Listen- I will tell [about] that *linga* and that most auspicious place. There is very warm water there that is wholly divine. Having stayed there for seven nights and doing *japa*, one attains the highest Shiva. Ruler of the gods, one becomes *siddha* [powerful] in the same manner as most eminent Goraksha. On that great rock four rivers are remembered: Devika, Bhadrada, Shubhra, Matangi – thus are they [listed] together in a collection. In the [place] belonging to Devi, the person who for seven nights abstains from falsehood and does the *japa* of “Aum namah Shivaya”, Devi, attains the capability to create pearls by touch, [to make] metals become gold by touching them -- there is no doubt about this. Thus, Devi, having bathed in the other (rivers) one obtains power.

The text returns to the alchemical significance of the area around Gaurikund for those interested in the attainment of *siddhis*. Then, the discussion heads slightly north (and then slightly south) again to the area just above Gaurikund on the way to Kedarnath.

Up from Gauritirtha in the direction of where Saumya mountain lies Cirvasa [clothes-wearing] Bhairava guards my area. Thus, the person who has given clothing there obtains merit. If not, Shiva and Bhairava take away all the results. Therefore having made the utmost effort to worship Bhairava one should enter [my area]. There on a great rock/mountain unbearable Kali dwells. Having revered her, wife of Shiva, one should go to my couch [Bhimasena-rock]. A *krosha* in the

other direction from Gauritirtha is the difficult to reach door of Vinayaka [Ganesha], established there, wife of Shiva, when your son Ganesha stood at the door, [who was] created from application of unguents on your limbs. He was established at the door, o ruler of the gods, by you while you were bathing. I cut off his head and it fell in the [this] region of Shiva. Devi, the head returned as a boon by me when I became pleased – then the elephant head was attached onto his body. Having worshipped Ganesha with various foods and substances, one should go to my great place where, having gone [arrived], he would become Shiva.

Finally, in preparation for the next section of the text on the area of Triyugi Narayan to the southwest of Kedarnath, the text describes the area of the lake of Vasuki (located immediately to the southwest of Kedarnath on the way to Triyugi Narayan).

The river known as Kalika is born from a tributary of the Ganga, whose *seva* is always done by the *nāgas* [serpents] and their chief Vasuki. That is where as Shesheshvara [lord of the snakes] Mahadeva is in the lake. There great snakes spring up and when those great poison bearers are angry they turn that place to ash, otherwise they do not. At the root of that lake, Devi, is Kalika, for which reason [it is known] as Kalika [river]. The meeting point of the Mandakini and the Trivikrami is most bestowing of merit. That is where I stand with the name of Kalisha and I bestow [attainment] of my own place. Enough! Thus, Devi, you have been told about the region of the lord of Kedara. Having heard or spoken half a verse or a verse, one will obtain Shiva/ auspicious things.

It should be noted that in the passages of the *Ukkh* discussed thus far, no mention has yet been made of the Pandava's touching of Shiva that constitutes the centerpiece of the account from the *kotirudrasamhita* of the *Shiva Purana*. The touching of Shiva by the Pandavas appears separately in the Rudranath section of a part of the *Ukkh* dedicated to the remaining four of the five Kedars. In these chapters, the main theme is that of the purificatory, transformative journeys of individuals from the modern-day north Indian plains into the mountainous region of Kedar. Moving steadily east, the reader first meets Madmaheshvar, Tungeshvar (Tungnath), Rudralaya

(Rudranath), and Kalpeshvar (Kalpanath).<sup>70</sup> The immediate catalyst for the mention of Kedarnath is again a river, this time the Vaitarani river.

Listen, Devi, best of women, Parvati, to my *tirthas*. There the excellent Vaitarani flows, who causes the crossing over of ancestors. There by the act of *pindadana* [offering to the ancestors] one gets the fruit of a hundred thousand Gayas. There is a pleasing Shiva-face there bearing all sorts of adornments. By its *darshan* people are liberated. Formerly, I, the ruler of the gods, was fiercely and persistently sought by the Pandavas, all connected to the killing of members of their lineage, for the purposes of purification of their *papa*. Seeing them, I went to the region of Kedar. They followed behind me for a very long way. Seeing them coming close, I entered the ground. Seeing me near, they came behind me, and in the [place] known as Kedar, Goddess, they touched [my] auspicious back region. By that mere touch they were liberated from the murder of their lineage, and [that] behind portion, Parvati, is established there even today. Kedaresha [the lord of Kedara] is reported in all the three worlds as liberation bestowing. By way of the downward path, ruler of gods, my face is in the great place. In this world, whoever having arrived at this place would take *darshan*, those persons are liberated from all wickedness and are enclosed by the armor/rainment of knowledge. Those humans will be absorbed into this very body of mine. Now, another: I will tell of a *tirtha* that is the best of *tirthas*.

The text continues on to discuss the *tirtha* of Manasa. While Shiva's buffalo form is not mentioned here, it may be to some extent inferred on the basis of the well known version already found in the *Shiva Purana*. Here the Pandavas do not supplicate, they merely touch. The passage does not mention Nepal, nor the *ghi malish*, nor does it mention the identity of Kedarnath as a *jyotirlinga*. Immediately following the establishment of Shiva in Kedara, the text takes an esoteric turn that is difficult to interpret. Without the guidance of oral or written commentary alert to the tantric

---

<sup>70</sup> Nautiyal, *Kedārahāṇḍam - Skandapurāṇāntargata (Hindī anuvād sahit)*, 177-178.

allusions of this language, it is unclear what exactly is meant by being enclosed in the “rainment of knowledge” and the location of the face “by way of the downward path”.<sup>71</sup>

This passage generates several themes. Shiva was unwilling to be immediately accessible to the Pandavas, and ultimately they only succeeded in obtaining, through touch (*sparsā*), access to his backside. Yet the text makes a point of mentioning the face of Shiva. *Darshan* is normatively of the face of the deity. This is a telling reversal. Then, this already complicated presence is rendered even more complex. An understanding of the true location of his face, the normal object of *darshan*, would seem to be limited to one who is clothed in knowledge. And it is this opaque partial presence into which, according to Shiva the narrator, humans would be absorbed.

The *Ukkh* also questions the extent to which narratives about places are capable of fully describing what is there to be described. There is a passage about Kedarnath which occurs in a different section of the text when the discussion is centered on the Uttarkashi region of central Garhwal. The point of connection is the notion of Kashi. In some versions of the Kedarnath narrative Shiva had been residing in Kashi (Varanasi) prior to his being sought out by the Pandavas. At this point in the text the dialogue is between Narada and Skanda. Narada asks Skanda for the details of why the Pandavas had to do their *tapas* specifically in Kedarnath. He presses for specific reasons. Why, he asks, did Shiva leave Kashi when he saw the Pandavas? How did he not know of their obligation [to be cleansed]?<sup>72</sup> Skanda's response is provocatively unexpected.

<sup>71</sup>*Kedāreśa iti khyātastrīṣu lokeṣu muktidaḥ | adhomārgeṇa deveśi manmukhaṃ tu mahālaye || āgataṃ muktidaṃ loke ye syurdarśanakāriṇaḥ | Te muktāḥ sarvapāpebhyo jñānakañcukasārivr̥tāḥ ||* (52: 8-9). Such resources are unavailable at the time of writing.

<sup>72</sup>*Kāśīm tyaktvā mahādevo dṛṣṭvā pāṇḍavasattamān | Kathaṃ na jñātavāṃsteṣāṃ niṣkṛtiṃ śivanandana ||* (101: 18).

Having heard the words of Narada the great-souled one first for a moment fixed his thought on Shiva and remembered his [Shiva's] statement. That articulate one, eminent among speakers, having revered Shiva, great among all the gods, laughing, spoke.

Skanda said:

You, are fortunate, well-destined one, you are a sage favored among the fortunate. There is no devotee in the three worlds more devoted than you...<sup>73</sup>

He then embarks on a lengthy (101:22-49) and general description and assertion of the unparalleled greatness and unique power of the Kedara region, including a detailed articulation of its borders. This is Skanda's answer to Narada. After this, the text moves on and Narada asks Skanda to tell him more about other particular *tirthas*. That is to say, Narada asks in essence a philosophical question about Shiva's reasons for his behavior: why did Shiva force the Pandavas to go the Himalayas when he was already in Kashi (where he himself was cleansed of his murder of Brahma and where he himself resides in the form of a *linga* of light)? Skanda's response is to laugh, and recount for Narada the unique power of the region. He does not give a psychological answer (e.g. Shiva wanted to test the Pandavas, as many people would say in response to such a question about Shiva's motives). Skanda, himself Shiva's son, says that the place is the answer. He does not answer with a story or an account of Shiva's motivation; he answers with a description of the region in which the site is located. The place is the answer – it is, remembering the observations of Edward Casey on the nature of places, what gathers.

---

<sup>73</sup> Nautiyal, *Kedārahāṇḍam - Skandapurāṇāntargata (Hindī anuvād sahit)*, 380-381 (chapter 101:20-22).  
*iti śrutvā vacastasya nāradasya mahātmanaḥ | dhyātvā kṣanaṃ mahādevaṃ smṛtvā tadvacanaṃ param || uvāca  
 prahasavākyaṃ vākyaḥ | vāgvidāṃvaraḥ | namaskṛtya mahēśānaṃ sarvadeva namaskṛtam || Skanda uvāca -  
 dhanyo>si tvaṃ mahābhāga dhanyānāṃ pravaro munih || sarvasya jagato bījaṃ janmādirivarjitam ||*

There are several general themes in the *Ukkh* that are also relevant for understanding how the *Ukkh* frames journey through Garhwal to Kedarnath and residence in the region. The first is the notion that there are numerous beings and natural entities inhabiting the region of Kedar (i.e. Garhwal) who were previously wicked, from a lower *varna*, or a demon. One finds in several places in the *Ukkh* the figure of the *Brahma-rakshas*, the Brahman-demon, who has taken up residence in the Kedar region (sometimes in groups of ten million) until final liberation may be achieved.<sup>74</sup> There are Shudras who come to the Kedar region and achieve liberation; there is a river who was once a Shudra.<sup>75</sup> Taken together, these stories paint a picture of the Kedar region as a region of extraordinary purificatory power populated by both holy people and *papa*-burdened beings on their way to liberation. There is also a continuum among people, the natural environment, and deities rather than a sharp distinction among different classes of entities.

There is in many places a conflation of *tapas* in the form of physical austerity and meditation with acts of intense devotion and praise dedicated to a particular deity.<sup>76</sup> Drona's devotion to Shiva is a good example of this phenomenon, in which the ascetic practices of *tapas* are linked and to some extent synonymous with the worship (*ārādhana*) of Shiva.<sup>77</sup> As one might expect, there are numerous enjoinders for animal sacrifice, usually when the subject of the text is a form of Devi.<sup>78</sup> There are also several cases of parental devotion to elements of the natural environment. The *Ukkh* tells of a

---

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 163, 542.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 769, 699.

<sup>76</sup>Exposure to the work of Antoinette DeNapoli on the subject of devotional asceticism has allowed me to be alert to this theme.

<sup>77</sup>*Devadhārācale vipra droṇo nāma mahāmatih / tapaścakāra paramaṃ śivamārādhayanmune //* In the area of the *Devadharas* a noble, great-minded man named Drona did *tapas* and worship for that highest Shiva, o sage. Ibid., 496-497 (125: 8).

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 796, 749.

merchant couple who adopts a river and treat the river as a daughter, or a merchant who takes a mountain as his son when he is unable to become a father through normal means.<sup>79</sup> Here again one finds the slippage among human, deity, and natural environment that seems to mark the region of Kedara. The overall effect of the *Ukkh* on a reader is a dizzying sense of the significance and power of the entire Kedar region brought on by the sheer number of important sites and their matchless and transformative efficacies.

### 3.3 Kedarnath in the World of the *Kedāra*kalpa

There is a layer in the *Ukkh* that deals with animal sacrifice, alchemy, and takes an extremely specific interest in the qualities and powers of particular locations in the physical environment of the Kedar region. As I noted, this layer may in some senses be usefully understood as tantric. The *Kedāra*kalpa, also found with difficulty in the Kedarnath bazaar, is an entire text about the region of Kedara (here understood as Garhwal).<sup>80</sup> The text was explicitly mentioned to me once in conversation with a local *tirth purohit* who works in Kedarnath. It is an explicitly tantric text; the chapter colophons of the Khemaraja edition state that it is from the *Kedāra*kalpa section of the *Rudrayāmala Tantra* and it mentions the recitation of the *Aghora* mantra in many places.<sup>81</sup> There are dozens of exhortations to drink the uniquely powerful water of the

---

<sup>79</sup>*Ibid.*, 787, 779.

<sup>80</sup>Nārāyaṇasinhajūdeva Bahādur Padumā and J. Hajārībāg, trans., *Śrīkedāra*kalpa (Bombay: Khemarāja Śrīkr̥ṣṇadās (Śrī Venkateśvar Press), 1907).

<sup>81</sup>Contextualizing the two editions of the *Kedāra*kalpa in my possession would be a task worthy of a dissertation in and of itself. The attribution of the *Kedāra*kalpa to the *Rudrayāmala* is itself suspect. The *Rudrayāmala Tantra* appears to be the sort of text to which many passages are attributed. See Loriliai Biernacki, *Renowned Goddess of Desire: Women, Sex, and Speech in Tantra* (Oxford University Press, 2007), 49; Paul Eduardo Muller-Ortega, *The Triadic Heart of Śiva: Kaula Tantricism of Abhinavagupta in the Non-Dual Shaivism of Kashmir* (State University of New York Press, 1989), xxvi.

Kedara region. Much of the latter part of the text describes the successful journey of a group of renunciants to the world of Shiva and their attainment of his darshan.

In the Vishal Mani Sharma edition of the *Kedarakalpa* one finds the description of a ritual in which a person is enjoined to performatively become a bull as part of a ritualized drinking of water.<sup>82</sup> After bathing in the Mandakini river and performing a series of ritual preparations one is enjoined to face in the northwestern direction, drink water three times from the left hand, three times from the right hand, and then to get down on all fours like a bull, make sounds like a bull, and drink again like a bull (*pibeta* [sic] *vṛsabho yathā*).<sup>83</sup> While doing this one is to speak “unmanifest/unknown words” (*avyakt śabd karke* in the commentary) and then the words “I alone am Brahma, I am Vishnu, and thus also Shiva.”<sup>84</sup> That is to say, the person ritually becomes Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva and acts as a bull drinking water for purification and atonement.<sup>85</sup>

The path of the *Kedarakalpa* is the path towards eventual Shiva darshan, purification, and towards becoming Shiva, and this process involves among other things ritually becoming a bull in order to become Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. This is the path of what Jvalaprasad Mishra, in the foreword to the Khemaraja edition of the *Kedarakalpa*, calls “the path of going to Kailash in one's own body” (*sadeh kailās jāne kā mārg*), in explicit contrast to the path of yoga and meditation.<sup>86</sup> Notably, it will be remembered that in many versions of the *Mahabharata*, including several mentioned in

<sup>82</sup> Viśālmaṇi Śarmā Upādhyāya, *Kedāra Kalpa* (Nārayaṇ Koṭi, Gaṛhvāl: Viśālmaṇi Śarmā Upādhyāya, 1952), 6:9-19.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:16.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 6:18.

<sup>85</sup> This ritual is also one of the main elements of the passage on Kedarnath from a dharmashtric digest on what to do when one goes to various pilgrimage places. See Mitra Mishra and Vishnu Prasad Sharma, eds., *Vīramitrodaya Tirtha Prakasha*, vol. 7, Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series 30 (Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1987), 492.

<sup>86</sup> Padumā and Hajārībāg, *Śrīkedāra Kalpa*, 1.



this chapter, Yudhishtira performs the rare feat of going to heaven in his own body, as a living person.

David Shulman has observed, in the South Indian context, that some folk versions of puranic accounts of Devi's victory over the buffalo demon Mahishasura explicitly and implicitly identify Shiva as the buffalo demon himself.<sup>87</sup> In some of these accounts, Devi directs violence towards a buffalo-shaped Shiva as part of her aggression against forces that attempt to control her. Stephen Alter, in his account of his performance of the Uttarakhand Char Dham Yatra on foot, offers a notable comment on this point. Alter recounts an instance in Kumaon, the region directly east of Garhwal, where he witnessed buffalo sacrifice for the Goddess in which the buffalo to be sacrificed is first driven through a crack in a rock (supposedly a gambling piece shattered by Bhima in his anger):

Years later when I heard the story of Shiv at Kedarnath the connection became clear. At Devidhurra Bhim's shattered gambling piece has taken the place of the Pandav hero standing with his legs apart and just to make sure that none of the buffaloes is actually a god in disguise, the villagers put them through this test. Not only was the sacrifice a means of propitiating the goddess but also a re-enactment of the myth.<sup>88</sup>

It will be remembered that this is the action that, in many versions, causes Shiva to reveal himself; he will not pass through Bhima's legs. Further, it reminds us of another aspect of relationship to Shiva at Kedarnath, in the Himalayas. That is the aspect of violence, of wound, of the frustration of the Goddess (remembering Sax's account of Adishakti).

---

<sup>87</sup>David Shulman, "The Murderous Bride: Tamil Versions of the Myth of Devī and the Buffalo-Demon," *History of Religions* 16, no. 2 (1976): 120–146.

<sup>88</sup>Stephen Alter, *Sacred Waters: A Pilgrimage up the Ganges River to the Source of Hindu Culture* (New York: Harcourt, 2001), 265–266.

## **Narrative Exposition and the Complex Agency of Kedarnath**

### ***The Prevalence of Narrative Expositions***

I have delineated the form, contexts, and contents of narrative expositions of Kedarnath as they potentially occur, and often do in fact occur, in and around Kedarnath. These thematic echoes and conversations, as well the ways that such stories offer information about and models of relation to Kedarnath, resonate across the genres and contexts of communication and reception I have discussed in this chapter. Several ethnographic generalizations also obtain across these examples. First, narrative expositions of Kedarnath have the potential to add distinctive views of the place to the associations, experiences, and expectations people bring to the site. Second, such narrative expositions sometimes occur, sometimes occur or are referenced in partial form, sometimes do not occur, and sometimes only become relevant after the conclusion of the visit itself. Experiences of Kedarnath as a place may involve such narrative influence, or they may not.

### ***The Character(s) of Kedarnath found in Narrative Expositions of the Place***

When such narrative expositions and discussions do occur, the character of Kedarnath they delineate is consistently variable across the various contexts I discuss in this chapter. Let us summarize the content of the themes found in these different versions. First, from the downward directions of Shiva's face in the "great place" to his self-manifest, conical, pyramidal, mountain-shaped, rock-shaped place, *linga* of light, and buffalo forms, Shiva's presence in Kedarnath does not lend itself to consistent description. Descriptions and stories about Kedarnath combine these features in differing permutations. There is a persistent uniqueness, across time and language, to how different accounts of Kedarnath engage the phenomenon of Shiva's form and

presence in the place. Even on a grammatical level the syntax of sentences that take this form and presence as their subject is, when compared to the syntax of surrounding sentences, convoluted. We may conclude from the convoluted uniqueness of rhetoric surrounding the form and presence of Shiva in Kedarnath that as an abode of Shiva, Kedarnath poses a challenge to language.

Second, the significance and power of Kedarnath as a specific location spreads out in variable fashion. There are numerous places of power that have the potential to become the object of efficacious practice in and around Kedarnath proper: rivers, *kunds*, valleys, *lingas*, rocks, and the environment more generally. The *Ukkh* demonstrates a consistent refusal to distinguish in any final sense between Kedarnath and the region of Kedara (modern-day Garhwal) more generally, and suggests a continuum of human, animal, and physical environment with significant overlap. Generally speaking, both oral and written modern accounts present a more circumspect list of important sites, perhaps because they know that most *yatris* will not have the time to stay in Kedarnath for more than a day. And yet, the power of the area as a whole comes through modern accounts as well.

Third, there are severable available models for thinking through the form and valence of human interactions with what is present at Kedarnath. Humans in Kedarnath may choose to think of themselves as following in the footsteps of the Pandavas, but the tone of the interactions of the Pandavas with Shiva in Kedarnath varies. Are they *dharmic* exemplars whose assiduous search for Shiva finally yields fruit, as the woman from the *dharamshala* in version 1.2 suggested? Are they seekers of liberation whose fierce determination and purpose lead them into an inappropriately

intimate and violent encounter with Shiva that requires that they make redress, such as the twelve *jyotirlinga* account suggests in version 2.3? What does the example of the Pandavas tell us? Kedarnath is where the Pandavas departed on their ascent to heaven, and from whence Yudhishtira departed and proceed to successfully arrive in heaven in his own body (as Brahmachari Jai and the foreword to the *Kedarakalpa* mention) without passing through the gate of death; does Kedarnath enshrine human desire for heaven and the transcendence of death? The *darshan* of Shiva in Kedarnath is the *darshan* of a deity whose face has turned away; the challenge posed by this unwillingness forces the Pandavas to resort to drastic measures, such as the threat of inappropriate behavior (forcing Shiva to pass between Bhima's legs, or striking him in frustration). Yet this place of challenge enshrines a God who is hyper-efficacious, hyper-present, and able to cleanse *papa* that can nowhere else be cleansed.

And what of the relationships framed by these narratives between humans and Shiva in Kedarnath? Are humans in Kedarnath on their way to becoming Shiva? If so, are they to accomplish this by seeking his *darshan* or by somatically engaging the numerous powerfully charged sites in the Kedarnath valley? If the devotee wishes to become Shiva, and Shiva takes the form of a bull or a buffalo (as might the devotee as well, the *Kedarakalpa* reminds us), then what of the violence, the effort, and the wound contained many accounts of the Pandava's interactions with Shiva when he is in his buffalo form? Are these not accounts that premise a devotional relationality of the human and the divine, rather than the human becoming of Shiva suggested in the concept of *sarūpatā*? Is the wounding then a self-wounding? Is presence in Kedarnath progress towards greater intimacy with Shiva or is it an opportunity to move beyond

the relationality of devotion and to access liberating power inside of one's self by using the power of the *tirtha*? Narrative expositions of Kedarnath do not resolve such questions, but rather embody them. They create a weave of narrative possibilities for framing physical presence in the place that break down the boundaries between self, body, deity, place, and religious power.

Fourth, Kedarnath is also a place where people measure their relationships to the traditional past. For locals, as custodians of Kedarnath and narrators of the place, the connection of the site to its historical and legendary pasts touches on issues of prestige, *adhikar*, social authority, puranic authority, the imperatives of touristic and pilgrimage development, and the maintenance of Garhwali tradition that are deeply, recalling my discussion of the term in Chapter Two, "bifocal". For visitors to Kedarnath, the historical age of the temple is a measure of its potential power, an index of the depth of their accomplishment in having reached such a place, and an opportunity to measure their own beliefs and experiences against the historical narratives they encounter. The stones of the temple are so big, and the place so remote, that the Pandavas must have been giants. And here we are.

#### ***Context and Genre in Narrative Expositions of Kedarnath***

Particular tellings, expositions, and texts about the origin and importance of Kedarnath pick their way among these various possibilities. Narrative expositions of Kedarnath reflect the social position of those involved and what they think about the character of Kedarnath, Shiva's presence in the place, and the most appropriate and important ways to interact with both. The account of the Samiti hints at the local knowledge of those who wrote the text. The *jyotirlinga* account suggests the authors'

origin from outside the region. The tourist account and the telling of the Bengali *dharamshala* manager linger on the historical attestations of the temple and the site. Some accounts mention the wounding of Shiva by Bhima and correlate it to the *ghi malish*, while others do not. Some mention the importance of drinking water, others of applying the *ghi*. And for many the Himalayas are simply Shiva's place of *tapas*, and that says all that is necessary.

The character of the repertoire constituted by the different contexts, contents, and forms of narrative exposition reveals a great deal about what it is to be present in Kedarnath. Oral narrative expositions are the product of encounters with a Kedarnath local (broadly construed) who has the knowledge and authority to provide an orientation to the site, an orientation that may reflect his own particular concerns and competences, be those the concerns of history, institutional affiliation, and what he thinks will be most useful and influential for his audience. Pamphlets in many cases betray their position (the Samiti, a *tirth purohit* family, an observer from outside the region), but such narrative expositions are playing a longer game. They do not make their case for the nature of Kedarnath while physically in the site and at the request of a *yatri*.

Then there is the broader conceptual substratum that undergirds these relatively recent and often evanescent forms of narrative exposition. The Sanskrit/Hindi versions of the *Shiva Purana* and the *Kedarakhanda* are one such axis, itself a complex synthesis of puranic, tantric, agamic, philosophical, and devotional material. And the Garhwali culture of the Kedarnath valley and its devotion to Bhairavnath and the Pandavas are another axis. Finally there is the still broader

atmosphere of daily conversation in which fragments of all of the above float and recombine in conversation, memory, and snatches of narrative exposition overheard.

***The Kedarnath Framed by Narrative Expositions of Place***

The themes discussed in this chapter that contribute to the characterization of Kedarnath, taken together with the data that I have been able to gather on their contexts of performance, reception, purchase, and (to beginning extent) use, suggest that the character of Kedarnath and Shiva's presence in it are, as the central story of the place suggests, fundamentally difficult to *grasp*. The power of Shiva's presence spreads out into the power of the environment more generally, and the natural beauty of the site has its own attractive power as well.

What comes through these many examples is both the complexity of Kedarnath's character, and of Shiva's presence in Kedarnath, and the unitary fact of the power of the site to attract people: the Pandavas, pious and wicked beings in the millions, and in 2007 approximately half a million *yatris*. This power of *akarshan* is present both inside and outside the temple. Those who find themselves present in Kedarnath, whether for a day or six months, find themselves conscious of having been somehow drawn to a place whose character is irreducibly mysterious yet intensely present. This feeling of being attracted to the place stands as an intersubjective experiential fact for all who find themselves in the place, even if this attracting force has no theistic referent. And exactly how to relate to this presence and attracting force, this complex agency, is irreducibly polyvalent. There is the intimacy of touch, but there may or may not be the sense of violence and wound. There is the claim of history, and the power of the physical environment, a power sometimes generated by its beauty and

sometimes by its alchemical lines of force. Narrative expositions wend their way through these themes – the theory of place they suggest is both the particular configurations of content and emergent meaning they produce as well as the fact of the variability of these configurations visible in the system of their exposition. And as narratives, what they can tell us about experiences of Kedarnath is partial. They do not necessarily inform what Kedarnath is for those present there; they rather frame a set of possibilities. And as I show in Chapter Five and Chapter Six, there is not perfect overlap among the Kedarnath found in narratives, the Kedarnath pictured in visual print culture, and the Kedarnath engaged through practices in place.



## As Place and as *Tirtha*: A Mosaic Portrait from the Kedarnath Bazaar

### Chapter Five

#### The Work of Visual Print Culture in Kedarnath

The contents and contexts of narrative expositions in Kedarnath offer a way in to understanding the difficult to grasp yet hyper-present nature of Shiva in Kedarnath. They showcase the ways in which the *linga* in Kedarnath functions as one particularly important node in the larger networks of powerful, purificatory shrines and features of the natural environment that make up the Kedarnath valley system and *Dev Bhumi* more generally. And they offer a complex weave of the possible kinds of interaction, and the valence of such interactions, available to someone present in Kedarnath. The worlds of Kedarnath-centric narrative do not, however, offer a readily synoptic view of Kedarnath. Rather, they frame a set of possibilities. They offer a series of context-sensitive narrative views that may or may not find the occasion to be presented. Common forms of visual print culture found in the bazaar at Kedarnath offer a synoptic view of the various facets of Kedarnath's character as an important, powerful, attracting place, and they are a form of commentary on Kedarnath that is ubiquitously present and employed. These images justify the decision I take in this work to approach the site as a whole, as a place: they present an image of Kedarnath that illustrates how the importance and power of the site spreads out beyond the temple. And they do so in single visual moments.

Almost everyone who has spent time at Kedarnath, whether once for half a day or for six months out of every year, possesses some or other form of printed visual

memento of the place. These images often take their place in the part of the house or shop dedicated to the worship of deities and ancestors, or on the wall as a souvenir to display to guests. Some people leave Kedarnath with several large framed posters as well as their own snapshots and videos, some with hundreds of tiny images to be handed out to relatives, neighbors, and the rest of their communities, and some with one or two prints that were all they could afford. Print images are one of the main objects *yatris* and locals take home with them.

These images reflect an on-site decision making process on the part of the purchasers about what they find meaningful and worthy of representation. They also function as one of the main avenues of ritual and memory through which the site is evoked when not actually present in the physical location of Kedarnath.<sup>1</sup> While video and written materials also function in these ways, print images are far and away the most popular. After *prasada*, print images are perhaps the most common form of material culture brought back from Kedarnath to the home.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, arguably print images of Kedarnath function as a form of *prasada*, even though in most cases they are not referred to in this way.<sup>3</sup> They offer a representational baseline for thinking about the site as a whole that many other forms of material culture currently do not.<sup>4</sup>

There is an inverse correlation between the expanding role of print images as providers of information and catalysts for post-*yatra* memory and the phenomenon, discussed in the last chapter, of the decline in the performance of narratives about the

---

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Andrea Pinkney for the notion that print images function as primary carriers and constructors of memory in Garhwal and India more generally.

<sup>2</sup> On the function of *prasada* in the context of the *Uttarakhand Char Dham*, see Andrea Pinkney, "The Sacred Share: *Prasada* in South Asia" (Phd diss., Columbia University, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Joyce Flueckiger for this insight.

<sup>4</sup> In ten or twenty years video may assume this role. See my discussion of this point in the conclusion to this chapter.

origin and greatness of Kedarnath. Though the formal content of these images has not changed substantively since my first visit to Kedarnath in the fall of 1999, their relative importance and the kinds of agency they possess continues to increase as that of oral narrative exposition declines.<sup>5</sup> Attention to visual print culture exemplifies the utility of the holistic view I take in this work of Kedarnath as a platial complex agent. The images of Kedarnath I discuss in this chapter concretely illustrate the interrelated and co-terminous nature of the multiple aspects of the site as abode of Shiva with the power to purify and grant boons, as tourist site of matchless Himalayan beauty, and as economic attractor. Images do this synoptic work and inform us about Kedarnath in ways which narratives, interviews, and participant observation cannot.<sup>6</sup> They show us which facets of Kedarnath people wish to take home with them. Further, upon closer investigation, there exist forms of visual print culture in Kedarnath that have been created with considerable local input. These images and image objects begin to illustrate the distinct character of the local worlds in Kedarnath that run on both parallel and intersecting tracks to the Kedarnath most visible to *yatris*. Systems of visual print culture at Kedarnath constitute a visual argument for engaging the site as a whole and offer ethnographic points of departure for how to do so.

---

<sup>5</sup> Alfred Gell has famously proposed an entire system for understanding objects and networks of objects as agents. See Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). However, in order to apply such an approach I would need to possess better data on the practices surrounding these images once they reach the homes and shops of those who purchase them. This chapter focuses primarily on what such images reflect and construct about the experience of being in Kedarnath rather than on the important and related issue of their post visit functions. I hope to gather more data on this question in my next fieldwork period, in which I will (logistics permitting) make visits to the homes of *yatris* who have been to Kedarnath.

<sup>6</sup> Susan Chen, personal communication, 2004.

Walking in and around the bazaar in Kedarnath is in a sense a stroll through a mosaic portrait in which each piece is a specific print representation of the site.<sup>7</sup> In a manner similar to my treatment of narratives about Kedarnath in the last chapter and the model suggested by this work for how experiences of Kedarnath are produced through the combination of constituent experiential elements, I look at this mosaic portrait as a system of representations.<sup>8</sup> Each element of the system offers critical purchase for understanding Kedarnath, as does analysis of the system as a whole. What the mosaic system created by visual print culture in Kedarnath offers specifically is a *picture* of the complex agency of the site.

A focus on select formal attributes of the images I present, coupled with ethnographic data about their site and contexts of purchase, illustrates the co-terminous nature of the different facets of Kedarnath's character as a place. This focus shows in mosaic fashion how the modern face of the presence and form of Shiva that have been understood to be present in Kedarnath in continuous and distinctive form for over a millennium relate to the site and the Kedarnath end-valley as a whole. Thus, this chapter first reviews the theoretical reasons for my attunement to this particular representational system, and then introduces the reader to a select set of print images from Kedarnath. I first proceed item by item, and then discuss some of the ways that these images work in aggregate, as part of a system, to image Kedarnath.

---

<sup>7</sup> This analogy invites comparison with the approach famously taken by Walter Benjamin in his work on the city of Paris as viewed through the commercial arcades of the city. I am grateful to Don Seeman for the suggestion of this comparative note. See Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> I am indebted to Peter Valdina for pointing out the implicit systematicity of the way I approach this work as a whole as well as the potential implications of such a method.

***The Anthropology of Art and the Study of Visual Culture in South Asia***

The study of images is increasingly interdisciplinary. One mode of interdisciplinary synthesis is the combination of art-historical analysis of the formal properties of images with anthropological attention to their social and cultural functions. The work of Sarah Brett with Bamana art and textiles and Howard Morphy with Australian aboriginal painting are notable examples of the utility of such an approach for the work of understanding Kedarnath. In his “Seeing Indigenous Australian Art”, Morphy explains and contextualizes the formal qualities of Yolngu art and shows how

Through the diversity of their representational techniques...Yolngu artists are able to convey the nature of the world as they experience it. It is a world in which ancestral presence is clear and marked, yet dynamic and transforming. Their paintings allude to the fact that the landscape itself is active, animated by the presence of ancestral beings.<sup>9</sup>

Morphy’s analysis shows the ways in which Yolngu art illustrate the Yolngu understanding of the landscape as both part of the natural world and as agentive and “animated by the presence of ancestral beings”. In other words, recalling my discussion of Edward Casey’s understanding of “place” in chapter three, it is an example in which representations of the landscape furnish a view of place that is both already in some sense given and at the same time culturally mediated.

Sarah Brett-Smith illustrates, in “The Knowledge of Women”, how in the geometric designs in textiles produced by Bamana women they “deliberately parcel what they know into discreet, tiny units” that do not naturally enact a “meta-

---

<sup>9</sup> Howard Morphy, “Seeing Indigenous Australian Art,” in *Anthropologies of Art*, Clark Studies in the Visual Arts (Dalton, Massachusetts: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2005), 141.

discourse” into a “coherent whole” set of knowledge.<sup>10</sup> She links this set of material data to the social context of women’s lives in which the data occur: “...women either are unable or refuse to think of themselves as knowers...The most brutal explanation [of this phenomenon] is simply women’s fear of explicit violence.”<sup>11</sup> Here the combination of analysis of the formal properties of the textiles and their social and cultural contexts has allowed Brett-Smith to excavate a very important and very difficult to articulate view of the constrained subjectivity of Bamana women.

The approach of this chapter is similar and dissimilar to the approaches of Morphy and Brett-Smith. It does analyze the formal elements of exemplary images, examine those images in context, and make an argument about the experiences they signify. Print images of Kedarnath, however, differ from the objects of Morphy and Brett-Smith’s study in that they are not strictly locally produced artisanal images that express bounded, local worldviews, but artifacts that are the result of far more complex chains of production and aesthetic expectations. Thus, the situation of visual culture at Kedarnath reproduces the necessity of the blending of phenomenological and social constructionist, local and trans-local analytic lenses for which I argued in Chapter Three. Print images of Kedarnath do express very important local understandings about the Shiva-infused nature of the physical environment, the economic importance of Kedarnath to the region, and the subjectivity of the local actors involved, yet the audiences for these images and the ways that they are produced take the discussion beyond the local. Parties involved in the printing of these images include Kedarnath valley photographers, Uttarakhandi printers and wholesalers, and north and south

---

<sup>10</sup> Sarah Brett-Smith, “The Knowledge of Women,” in *Anthropologies of Art*, Clark Studies in the Visual Arts (Dalton, Massachusetts: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2005), 147.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

Indian printing presses and publishers. They reflect a blend of traditional pan-South Asian, regional, colonial, post-colonial, and tourist aesthetics. These images are also circulating commodities, and the range of images found in the bazaar at Kedarnath may be construed as a range that satisfies the needs of the majority of consumers. The hybrid, commodified nature of these images corresponds to the hybrid nature of the place of Kedarnath mentioned during my discussion in Chapter Three of the critical geography framework espoused by theorists such as Gupta, Ferguson, and Appadurai.<sup>12</sup>

The study of visual print culture in modern South Asia on the other hand highlights this precise aspect of print images as hybrid commodities that circulate in the bazaar.<sup>13</sup> Recent scholarship has focused on the imbrications of calendar art with Hindu nationalist projects, the depiction of the nation state as a form of the Goddess, and the way that Sikhism fits with the modernizing project of the nation-state.<sup>14</sup> Art historians have carefully documented the history of this hybridity in modern Indian fine art as it relates to classical Indian classical art, western influences in the form of Company painters and western academies of art in India, and the trajectory of Indian nationalism as it related to the development of nationalist, *svadeśī* art.<sup>15</sup> Finally, there is

---

<sup>12</sup> James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

<sup>13</sup> In the interest of brevity I do not engage the considerable amount of scholarship on South Asian cinema.

<sup>14</sup> Sumathi Ramaswamy, ed., *Beyond Appearances?: Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern*, Contributions to Indian sociology 10 (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003); Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997); Christopher Pinney, *Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004); Kajri Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar: The Economies of Indian Calendar Art*, Objects/histories (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Patricia Uberoi, "Times Past: Gender and the Nation in 'Calendar Art,'" *Indian Horizons* 46 (4), 47 (1) (1999): 24-29; W. H. McLeod, *Popular Sikh Art* (Delhi: Oxford University Press).

<sup>15</sup> Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New "Indian" Art: Artists, Aesthetics, and Nationalism in Bengal, C. 1850-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Partha Mitter, *Art and nationalism in colonial India, 1850-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

an emergent sub-category defined by the work of Kajri Jain: the study and theorization of the bazaar as a central point of many different kinds of overlapping networks of circulating image-commodities in the settings of colonial and post-colonial India and South Asia.

Somewhat separate from regnant trends in the study of visual culture in South Asia is the study of print images and other forms of material culture that function as the objects of ritual and devotional attention. This area, or perhaps attitude, of inquiry has traditionally had much more overlap with the well established study of folk and classical art in India. The work of Jyotindra Jain on Kalighat images is one example of scholarship that holds these diverse approaches together.<sup>16</sup> Further recent examples of scholarly attention that unite art-historical, archaeological, and anthropological attention include recent studies of major temples in Rajasthan, the city of Varanasi, and Hindu temples in America.<sup>17</sup> Occasionally such inquiry is explicitly linked to the analytic category of religion.<sup>18</sup> The analytic attention of this chapter, therefore, draws on all these avenues of approach as it seeks to understand the work of print images at Kedarnath. I focus on these print images here for the understandings they are able to contribute towards the goal of understanding Kedarnath as a place. My attention in this

---

<sup>16</sup> Jyotindra Jain and Los Angeles County Museum of Art, *Kalighat Painting: Images from a Changing World* (Ahmedabad, India: Mapin Publishing, 1999).

<sup>17</sup> Lawrence A. Babb, John E. Cort, and Michael W. Meister, *Desert temples: sacred centers of Rajasthan in historical, art-historical, and social context* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2008); Martin. Gaenzle and Jörg. Gengnagel, *Visualizing space in Banaras: images, maps, and the practice of representation*, *Ethno-Indology*, v. 4 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006); Joanne Punzo Waghorne, *Diaspora of the gods: modern Hindu temples in an urban middle-class world* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>18</sup> Kajri Jain has in fact recently made a plea for the re-inclusion, or rather reclamation of the “ownership” of “the sacred” in the study of visual culture in South Asia. However, the theoretical details of how this reclamation will proceed relative to pre-existent and ongoing approaches to the study of religion in South Asia remain to be clarified. For two very different approaches to this topic, see Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar*, 373; Lawrence A. Babb et al., *Media and the transformation of religion in South Asia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995).



chapter examines what is possible to learn from these images at their point of purchase; the placement and function of such images in home and business settings is a related avenue but distinct from the work of this chapter. Thus, one step remains before looking at the images themselves: examination of their contexts of display and purchase as they appear for *yatris* and for locals.

***Print Images in the Kedarnath Bazaar for Yatris***

The Kedarnath bazaar constitutes the main road of the village and leads directly up to the temple steps. From the point of view of the *yatri*, it is the end of a leg of a journey that takes between three and forty hours, depending on mode of transportation and whether the point of origin is Rishikesh, Gangotri, Rudraprayag, Guptkashi, or Gaurikund. They round the corner into the main bazaar and within the first fifteen steps or so get their first close, frontal glimpse of the temple. This is the second view of the temple overall – the first comes at *devdarshini*, as I describe in the introduction. Many stop at this moment in the bazaar and touch the ground or join their hands in reverence. When arriving into Kedarnath and before proceeding to my room, I would myself at that same point make a point of visibly doing *namaskaram* to the temple.

When *yatris* arrive they look to the bazaar for specific needs: to find their *tirth purohit* and/or lodgings if they intend to stay the night, to eat something, and to get materials for *puja* if they are arriving during the day when *nirvan darshan* and *puja* are an option. If they are arriving in the evening they will not be able to physically approach the *linga* but must take *darshan* from a distance during the *shringar arati*

ceremony.<sup>19</sup> In either case one sees many *yatris* whose sole intent upon arrival is to reach the temple and take *darshan*, or get as close as possible at that particular time, and they are uninterested in dealing with any practical matters until they have attained this goal.

The bazaar is a place to be dealt with quickly and, as with the entire approach to Kedarnath starting across the river in the *ghora parav* (horse-camp), *yatris* must fend off an array of locals who wish to sell them something or offer their services. The manner in which locals greet *yatris* varies widely. Perhaps most common is the geographically inflected "Where are you from?" called out in whatever language the local assumes to be appropriate. The tone of this approach can vary from eagerly hospitable to mercenary to professional and concierge-like. With perhaps one or two exceptions, all the locals are men, and the decision makers about what to purchase in the bazaar, images included, are usually women. Upon arrival the bazaar is a place to briefly experience satisfaction at having successfully made the journey and a place to treat with practical necessities, a sometimes efficient and sometimes long and difficult process. Almost no one buys pictures at this time.

*Yatris* usually purchase images at one of two times: directly after evening *arati* and before they retire to their rooms for the night or start back down to Gaurikund, and in the morning after they have taken *darshan*, done *puja* and are preparing to leave. That is to say, images are usually bought within an hour of being inside the temple and usually afterwards. Some *yatris* (and locals as well) will buy very small images before entry into the temple and then include those images in the set of

---

<sup>19</sup> See my discussion of the temple timings and access to the inner shrine in Chapters Two and Six.

materials that are touched to the *linga* and become *prasada*, place them in packets, and later give them to family and friends.

Purchasing images involves multiple decisions. The portability of the images must be assessed, and for this reason some choose to buy the images later in Gaurikund or even in Haridwar and Rishikesh on their way out of Uttarakhand. People must decide how many images to buy; they may be buying only for themselves or for a large set of relatives or even an entire village. Finally, they must decide which images they find most appropriate to their needs. Prints and photographs are usually purchased and then packed immediately. This made it almost impossible for me to discuss with *yatris* their purchase decisions while actually viewing the prints, because they were usually unwilling to open up a very intricate packing job and then have to do it again. Many *yatris* will also commission group photographic portraits with the temple in the background from photographers (who are almost all from *tirth purohit* families) in the temple courtyard.

### ***Print Images in and around the Kedarnath Bazaar for Locals***

For locals the Kedarnath bazaar is the public face of the economic importance of Kedarnath to the entire Kedarnath valley region. On several occasions I was bluntly told by locals that no locals would spend more than a week or two per year at Kedarnath if it were not for economic necessity. Most of the locals with whom I spoke and spent time would prefer to be someplace else where they could be closer to their families, in a place where the altitude does not make them ill, and/or in a salaried job (Hindi: *service, naukri*) that would not be so dependent on the vagaries of the day and the season. This is not to say that they do not maintain a level of reverence and

devotion for Kedarnath-Shiva.<sup>20</sup> They do, both in word and deed, but my own data suggests that economic necessity is one of the primary frames inside of which most daily activity and ritual activity at Kedarnath is viewed. The other are the senses of traditional right, responsibility, and prestige that go with either being generally associated with Kedarnath or being a member of the three hundred and sixty families that belong to the Kedarnath Tirth Purohit Association. Many Kedarnath residents only stay in residence at Kedarnath for the high season and after that return sporadically if at all. As I discussed in Chapter Two, demographically the shopkeepers in the bazaar fall into one of two main categories: members of *tirth purohit* and *thakur* (*kshatriya*, high-status non-Brahman) families. From the local point of view the Kedarnath bazaar is a microcosm of the Kedarnath valley minus a sizeable Harijan population. The identity of the shopkeepers reflects a combination of personal choice, traditional duty, and economic contingency. They also, like *yatris*, take images from the bazaar home with them, where they adorn their household shrines and guest rooms, though with different valence. Images of Kedarnath for locals are images of Shiva and images that reference intersections of prosperity, tradition, development, and authority.

### **Kedarnath Darshan: Temple, Deity, and Mountain Landscape**

What follows is a range of images and image-objects found in and around the Kedarnath bazaar in 2007 and the beginning of 2008 that I have personally selected and that offer a portrait of the complex agency of Kedarnath as a place. Unfortunately, I possess no quantitative data about the popularity of particular images. It was an explicit rule of mine not to collect numbers of any sort because I did not want to make

---

<sup>20</sup> See discussion of local practices in Kedarnath in chapter six.

locals nervous.<sup>21</sup> Conversations containing phrases like "How many \_\_\_ did you sell" felt too close to areas I had determined were off limits for this reason. Thus, my decisions about image selection incorporate and are informed by anecdotal information about their popularity that has come up in conversations with local merchants, conversations with *yatris* and observance of their behavior, and my own observations of the range of images in the bazaar.<sup>22</sup> I then put this data into conversation with my knowledge of what goes on at Kedarnath more generally, my knowledge of scholarly work about such images, and my own previous research on print images of Hindu *tirthas* in 1999-2000 discussed in the introduction. What is striking about the set of images presented here is that while the subject of almost every image is clearly Kedarnath, there is not a single feature of the site that is present in *all* the images. Each image displays a unique configuration of the following formal elements:

1. Depiction of the Kedarnath temple from the outside of the temple.
2. Depiction of the *linga* and the inner sanctum in the morning.
3. Depiction of the *linga* and the inner sanctum in the evening.
4. Depiction of the natural setting of Kedarnath.
5. Depiction of an anthropomorphic form of Shiva.
6. Depiction of a site other than Kedarnath.

Taken separately, the print images I discuss in this chapter present distinct views of Kedarnath that emphasize, with relationship to this list of features, specific aspects of the character of the site. Viewed in aggregate they demonstrate the range of ways of thinking about the relationship of Shiva to the Kedarnath environment as well

---

<sup>21</sup> See my discussion of my own presence in the field in the introduction.

<sup>22</sup> It is important to note that neither in my own observations nor in discussions with shopkeepers was it possible to link particular image selections to particular groups.

as the partially overlapping and partially distinct character of devotional and touristic experiences of the place more generally. Viewed as a system, they offer a visual framework for thinking through the idea of Kedarnath as complex agent, as a *logon ko akarshit karne vala* (an attractor of persons).



Figure 5.1. Char Dham view 1.



Figure 5.2: Char Dham view 2.

The great majority of visitors to Kedarnath are first time visitors on the third leg of the Uttarakhand Char Dham Yatra. Most of them have departed Gangotri the day before. These two images offers such a *yatri* the possibility of seeing and remembering their entire *yatra* in one visual moment. Figure 5.1 shows one version of the most popular Char Dham Yatra image found in the Kedarnath bazaar. In this image, going clockwise, a photograph of the major temple of each of the four *dham*s is shown (from upper left: Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri, Yamunotri) with the name of the site written in Devanagari script and *Char Dham Darshan* written in the center. The four images are straightforward photographic views, and the composite functions as a single expression of the most important cultural and economic feature of the new state of Uttarakhand: that as *dev bhumi* (land of the gods) it is home to the Uttarakhand Char Dham Yatra.

The Char Dham image in figure 5.2 differs. Each of the four sites has been superimposed on a single mountainous backdrop.<sup>23</sup> An inset circle hovers in the sky above each temple which shows the main deity worshiped in the temple. The Badrinath and Kedarnath insets are fairly accurate renditions of the actual identity of the deity worshipped in the temple, whereas the Ganga and Yamuna images are not. Thus, this image might be read as the Char Dham image for the more devotionally inclined *yatri* that makes explicit the presence of a deity at each of these sites in the form of Vishnu, Shiva, Ganga, and Yamuna respectively. Compared to the pilgrim guide map shown in the Chapter Two, it is more iconic and less cartographic. Taken together, figures 1 and 2

---

<sup>23</sup> This backdrop may be a photograph from the Badrinath valley.





*jyotirlingas* of Shiva.<sup>24</sup> Clustered around the central Shiva-Parvati-*linga* composite central image, the distinctive form of the Kedarnath *linga* can be seen third from the bottom on the right. In this image it is the only one of the *jyotirlinga* not represented with an accompanying *yonī* (corresponding aniconic representation of Parvati, the wife of Shiva). I have had several discussions with Kedarnath locals on this point, though not in reference to this image. Apparently the current metal frame, drain and stone floor that surround the *linga* in the Kedarnath temple are “recent”, and that in the living memory of older *tirth purohīts* the *linga* was inset into a sunken floor and one would descend several steps and then stand opposite a larger *linga* than what is visible today. This also made the practice of actually embracing the *linga*, less common today, considerably easier to perform. The accompanying *yonī* may have been visible at this time. However, it is a point of contention that such a *yonī* exists. I have heard several other explanations as well. One claim is that there is in fact not a *yonī* there and that is why one can do full circumambulation of the *linga* whereas with most *lingas* one does not do a full circumambulation but goes half way around, up to the opening of the *yonī*, and then returns. A second claim, once offered by a single local individual, asserts that the entire valley is the *yonī* for the *linga* that is inside the temple.

Also remarkable about this image is the fact that, though the *jyotirlingas* are almost always considered to constitute twelve separate sites, in this image only eleven *jyotirlingas* appear.<sup>25</sup> In addition to Fleming’s work on the cult of the *jyotirlingas*, Ann

---

<sup>24</sup> See discussion of the *jyotirlinga* in Chapter One and Chapter Two.

<sup>25</sup> I did not notice this “discrepancy” when I was in Kedarnath. When I purchased the image from the bazaar my only intention was to purchase a fairly generic *jyotirlinga* image and I did not inspect it too closely. It was a useful coincidence that I obtained an image that confirms Feldhaus’ observation.

Feldhaus has discussed the fluidity of the identity and number of the *jyotirlingas* in the Maharashtrian context. She writes that

The exact list varies....Why the number of Jyotirlinga places is 12 is not clear. The numbers more often associated with Śiva are five (e.g. his five forms or face faces) and 11 (the number of the Rudras, an old form of Śiva). Some scholars suggest that the Jyotirlingas stand for the 12 Ādityas (*BSK* 3:686), and others point to a list of 12 elements that the *Taittirīya Upaniṣad* identifies as Jyotirlingas (*ibid*).<sup>26</sup>

While not nearly as common as the Uttarakhand Char Dham Yatra, journey to the twelve (or eleven) *jyotirlingas* is in fact performed by individuals, families, and tour groups and has a powerful place in the world of Hindu pilgrimage across India. There are *jyotirlinga yatra* tours based in both North and South India, and twelve *jyotirlinga* images and video discs are abundant in the Kedarnath bazaar. I have also met *yatris* who are slowly chipping away at a lifelong goal of going to each of them once, as well as several remarkable individuals who have been to all (i.e. the list of twelve that they consider to be authoritative) numerous times.

This image reminds the viewer of the identity of Kedarnath as a Shaivite *tirtha* that is a member of a larger system stretching across north and south India. It further emphasizes the distinctive form of the Kedarnath *linga* within that system. It reminds the viewer that the distinctive form of Shiva's presence at Kedarnath is part of a larger system of presence that stretches throughout the country and, for many, extends even to Pashupatinath in Nepal.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Anne Feldhaus, *Connected Places: Region, Pilgrimage, and Geographical Imagination in India, Religion/culture/critique* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 245.

<sup>27</sup> Pashupatinath often comes up in discussions about the *jyotirlinga* in Kedarnath. I have often heard people list it as one of the *jyotirlinga* and then be chastised for being mistaken.

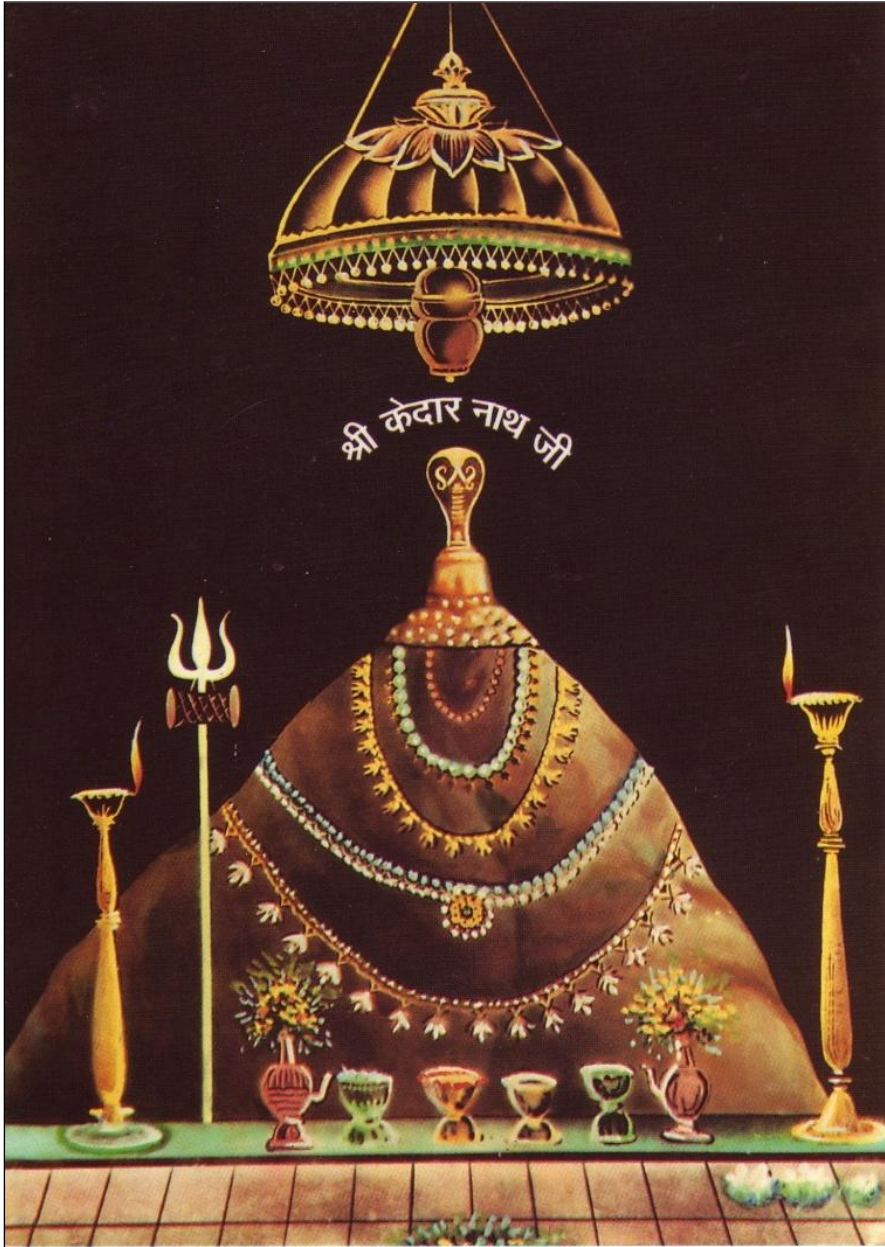


Figure 5.4. Kedarnath *nirvan darshan-shringar arati darshan*.

This painted image is at the opposite end of the spectrum of contextual specificity from the Char Dham image. It shows the unique shape of the Kedarnath *linga* against a blank, colored background with the words "Shri Kedar Nath Ji" hovering between the top of the golden serpent resting on top of the *linga* and the canopy. It is available in the Kedarnath bazaar with different blank colored backgrounds in many

sizes, both as a plain print and as a print imbedded inside plastic for ease of portability. There is no sense of scale and the flooring depicted in front of the *linga* does not correspond to the current flooring in the inner sanctum of the temple.

It is an image that represents the fusion of two ritual times and two different kinds of *darshan* of the Kedarnath *linga*, comprising a combination of *nirvan darshan* and *shringar arati darshan*. It displays the oil lamps and garlands that adorn the *linga* during *shringar arati darshan*, but lacks the patterned textile covering usually draped over the *linga* at that time. Bringing home such an image from Kedarnath reflects a perception and experience of Kedarnath that is quite starkly centered on the Kedarnath *linga* itself and nothing else. The physical and temporal context has dissolved and fused in contemplation of the *linga* as the single, centered subject. This image is suggestive of the power concentrated in the heart of the temple, the power to grant boons and purify even sins as heinous as the slaughter of kin and teachers. As one man put it who is a regular visitor to Kedarnath and a guru whose community stretches from Punjab to New Jersey, power (*shakti*) can be found anywhere but there are some places where it runs closer to the surface, like Kedarnath.





Figure 5.5. Photomontage of *nirvan darshan* and *shringar arati darshan*.

This photomontage of two photographs shows the Kedarnath *linga* at the time of *nirvan darshan* (left) and at the time of *shringar arati darshan* (right), the two ritual moments whose depictions were partially fused in the previous image. Here they lie

next to each other and only a somewhat informed viewer would know that they depict separate times of the same imaginal day. The background is an actual though double depiction of the back wall of the inner sanctum of the temple, and immediately behind the canopy a cavity can be seen where certain Garhwali deities rest when they spend the night during their *deora* to Kedarnath. In *nirvan darshan* the *linga* is mostly bare, with only the *tilak* (forehead mark) applied by the *pujari* during the early morning *bhog* (offering of food and worship to the deity) visible. This is how the *linga* greets the first devotees to enter the inner sanctum in the early morning. This is the form of the deity that the devotee can touch and anoint with their own hands.

The *linga* of the *shringar arati darshan*, on the other hand, glitters with gold and lights and flowers and patterned textiles.<sup>28</sup> Even the most distinguished visitor, unless a local with a traditional *adhikar* (traditional right, privilege) or connection that would allow him to stand in the inner sanctum, cannot be closer than the door and most devotees have this *darshan* from the other end of the hall that separates the *sabha mandap* (entry hall) from the inner sanctum, a distance of about twenty five feet. *Yatris* who have purchased tickets from the Badri Kedar Samiti may sit in the hall in front of the inner door at this time.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast to the process of *nirvan darshan* and *puja* done for *yatris* during the day in which the emphasis is on the particular needs and goals of each group and individual who enters the temple, evening *shringar arati darshan* is much more

---

<sup>28</sup> There were several occasions when, during conversations with both *yatris* and locals, the idea was voiced that *shringar* (adornment) is not really appropriate for Shiva. In those conversations the idea had both supporters and detractors.

<sup>29</sup> *Yatris* who arrive into Kedarnath for the first time in the evening sometimes do not always realize that this is not the only form and mode through which they have access to Shiva in Kedarnath and find out only on the spot. If they are not already knowledgeable about the place this does not register for them necessarily as a problem because they are coming from settings where *darshan* from a distance in a large temple may be the norm.

collective, dramatic, and non-egalitarian. Inside a select group sits for the duration of the evening *puja* and *arati*, which takes about thirty minutes to an hour. All other *yatris* pass in front of the doorway to the connecting chamber and attempt to stay there for as long as possible. When finished they usually exit the temple and then congregate in the courtyard, where every bell attached to the gate is rung and devotional songs (especially *Aum Jai Shiva Aumkara*) play over the temple speakers. Several permanent resident renunciants, dressed as Shiva in the place of Shiva, occupy their chosen posts and sing, chant, and play the *damaru* drum. At the end of the of the worship inside the temple the *pujari* strides out onto the front steps of the temple with his assistant and offers the flame of the *arati* for the Ganesh deity seated just outside the temple door and the guardian Bhairavnath half way up the side of the valley to the east. With a flourish he ends the *arati* and then his assistant carries the flame around close to the tents, sometimes hundreds of hands stretching to receive the flame-*prasad*. The fusing of these two images, then, is an acknowledgement that every day there are two very different modes of access, relation, and worship with the form of Shiva present in the temple and a way of accessing both those modes at the same time.



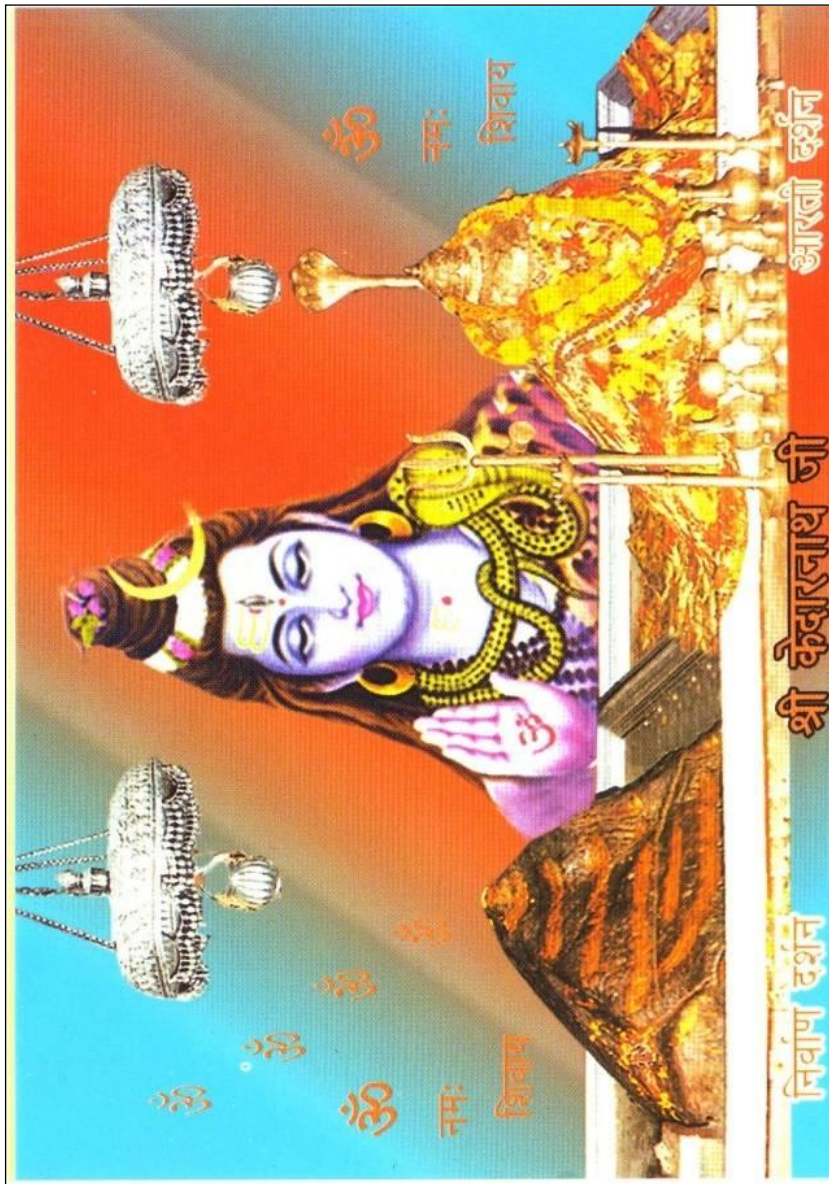


Figure 5.6. Painted and photomontage of nirvan darshan and shringar arati darshan.

Here again one sees a photomontage of *nirvan darshan* and *shringar arati darshan* side by side, with the addition of a painted image of Shiva blessing the viewer and *aum namah Shivaya* (literally: *Aum*, reverence to Shiva) written out in red letters that float against a colored, blank background. Shiva's outline is decidedly non-standard here and, to my eye, mimics the outline of the Kedarnath *linga* so that the eye sees three entities with roughly the same shape. Thus, in this image there are three different representations of the same subject, Shiva, two of which are actual photographs of the Kedarnath *linga* and all of which display the same shape in outline. It is a devotional image that registers the distinctive form of Shiva found at Kedarnath. As with the second of the *Char Dham* images (figure 5.2), the photographic image is modified in a way that makes the presence of Shiva explicit, yet this modification also does not specify geographical or external location. Later in this chapter I will return to this evidenced intention to make Shiva's presence in the image clear and without question.

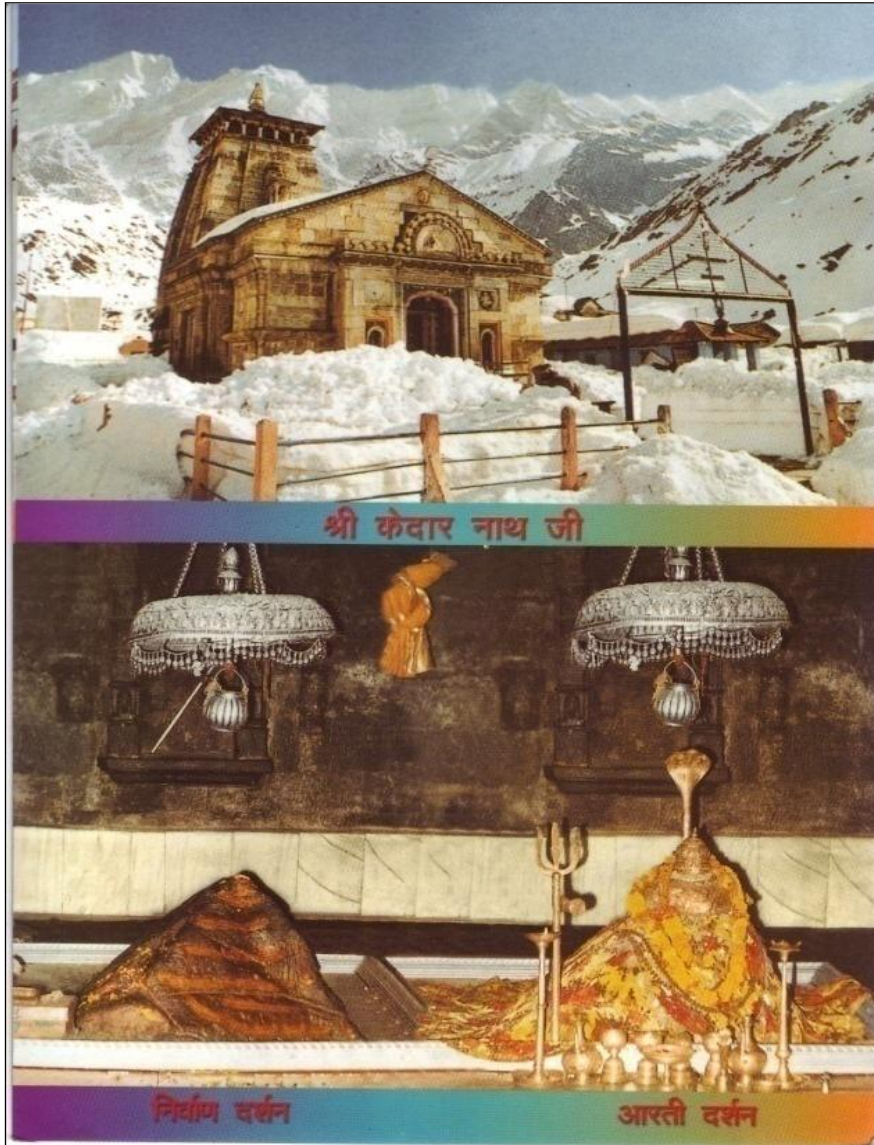


Figure 5.7. Composite of Kedarnath view and nirvan darshan-shringar arati darshan photomontage.



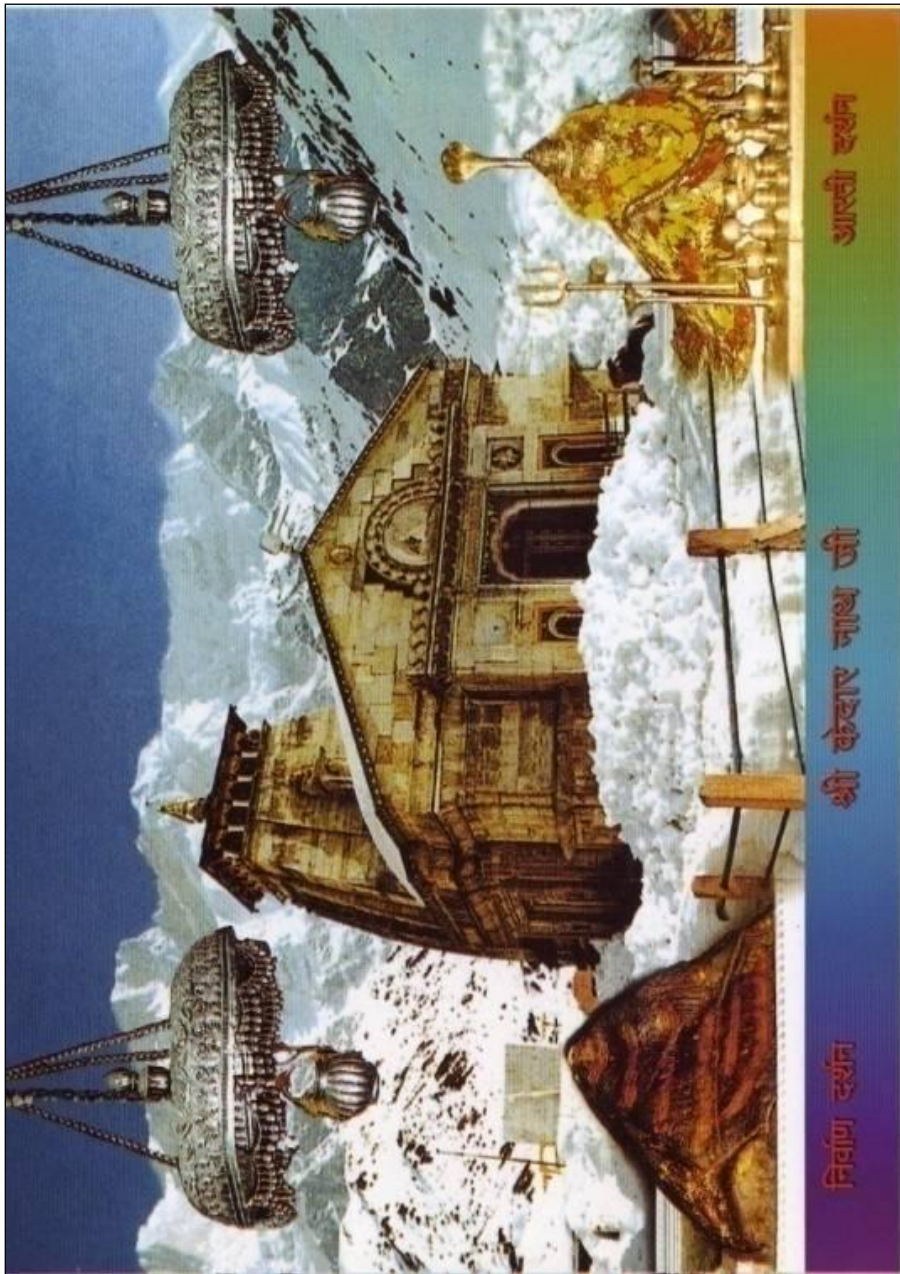


Figure 5.8. Photomontage of Kedarnath view, nirvan darshan, and shringar arati darshan.

Here one sees two different ways of combining depictions inside the *linga* inside the temple in its *nirvan* and *shringar arati darshan* forms with a photograph of the outside view of the temple just after a snowfall.<sup>30</sup> Snow falls rarely in Kedarnath in the summer but nonetheless serves to index the remote Himalayan nature of the place for many whether they are present during snowfall or not. During the 2007 season snow fell twice. Each time it fell almost continuously for days and stayed on the ground for about a week. In figure 5.7 the inner and outer depictions of Kedarnath lie beneath the simple photographic view (*view* is in fact the word often used in Hindi for such images); a bit of knowledge or intuition is required to see the image as a depiction of a single place. In figure 5.8 the two scenes have been brought together and the *linga* has become part of the landscape. Said another way, the inside and outside of the temple have started to fuse and stand as one scene.<sup>31</sup> The Kedarnath *linga* is both part of and separate from the Himalayan landscape, both inside and outside the temple. In these images Shiva begins, to differing degree, to be consubstantial with the Himalayan landscape. The fact that both of these images exist is notable; it points to the degree to which particular understandings of Kedarnath bear their own distinct aesthetic nuance.

---

<sup>30</sup> This photograph is probably several decades old: less infrastructure surrounds the courtyard than is visible now and no consecrated bells overhang the temple doorway, a prominent feature today. However, Stephen Ramey has suggested (personal communication, 2010) that this snow may have been digitally added. If so, this image could then be an *intentional* rejection of the way that infrastructure has changed the appearance of Kedarnath in recent decades.

<sup>31</sup> I am indebted to David Haberman (personal communication, 1999) for the original insight that in photographic depictions of Kedarnath inner space becomes outer space and the temple (inside and outside) and the mountains become entities in the same visual continuum.



Figure 5.9. Kedarnath View.

This is the standard “view” of the Kedarnath temple taken from the roof of one of the closest *dharamshalas*. The photograph was taken by the proprietor of a photography and video store in Rudraprayag town.<sup>32</sup> In it one sees the temple from the outside with no one visible in the courtyard, its famous mountainous backdrop, and the red-roofed office of the Badri-Kedar temple committee immediately to the right of the temple that mark this photo as one taken in recent years. However, fewer buildings surround the courtyard than are visible today and no consecrated bells overhang the doorway to the courtyard, now a prominent feature. Even during the July-November off-season, the photographer would have had to pick his time very carefully or make special arrangements to snap a photograph of a totally empty courtyard. The image most closely corresponds to what one could call the *paryatak* (tourist) Kedarnath - it shows the temple with its fabulous Himalayan backdrop and does not attempt to specify a particular ritual time or add extra information through collage or painting. Photographs such as these (and there are many) often serve as the base for more complicated composite and photomontage images. Such photographic or painted frontal or semi-frontal depictions of the temple with the mountains in the backdrop are the representations of Kedarnath most often used as emblems of Kedarnath in political posters, tourist pamphlets, and advertisements of all kinds.

---

<sup>32</sup>The creases are from shipping and handling.





Figure 5.10. Painted and photomontage of Kedarnath view.



Here, a painted Shiva and Parvati set amidst painted clouds look down onto a photograph of the Kedarnath temple identified as *Shri Kedarnath Dham* (honored Kedarnath abode). This is an example of a photographic image of Kedarnath to which visual information has been added that does not include a depiction of the Kedarnath *linga*. Looking at it also brings to mind that the feature of the *Kedarakhanda* text that came up most often in discussion with locals. They usually placed a higher value on the narratological fact that the *Kedarakhanda* and the passages about Kedarnath in it are framed as a conversation between Shiva and Parvati than on the specific geographic references and detailed descriptions the text makes about the Kedarnath area. Recalling figure 5.6, one sees here another example in which an anthropomorphic Shiva takes backstage to the more primary form of the Kedarnath *linga* but at the same time has been intentionally added to the image.

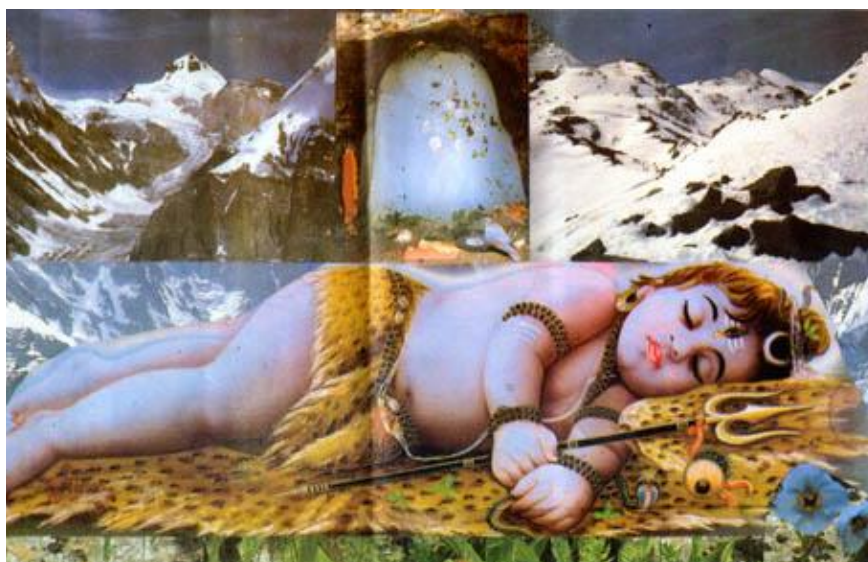


Figure 5.11. Amarnath-Shiva.

This image, not ubiquitous in the Kedarnath bazaar but nonetheless present, uses photographic and painted montage to connect the figure of a sleeping child-Shiva to

the ice *linga* of Amarnath, one of the other major Shaivite shrine in the Indian Himalayas of pan-Hindu importance, and to Himalayan mountainous scenery more generally. Again, it is a montage dedicated to the complex relationship between Shiva's different forms and Himalayas. It notably does not include anything specific to Kedarnath but its presence in Kedarnath underscores the multiple levels of physical specificity at which Shiva's connections to the Himalayan landscape are understood. It is also exemplifies what has been referred to as the sweetening of, or the Krishnaization of the figure of Shiva in Indian visual culture and invites devotion in that mode.<sup>33</sup>

***A Walk through the Bazaar: Print Images in Aggregate***

Now that they have been examined individually it becomes possible to see these images as someone would see them on a walk through the bazaar: as a mosaic portrait of the site in aggregate which the acts of purchase disaggregate or re-organize according to the decisions of the buyer. Print images of Kedarnath constitute a point of purchase defined system of representation; a visual survey of the bazaar allows for a conspectus of this system. The following two images present a slice of such a visual survey.

---

<sup>33</sup> Axel Michaels (personal communication, 1996), Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar*, 332.



Figure 5.12. Kedarnath print images in context, 1.





Figure 5.13. Kedarnath print images in context, 2.

Visually sweeping back and forth across these print image groups gives the viewer both a sense of their character as commodities in the bazaar and their ability to function as a mosaic portrait of Kedarnath which illustrates the range of understandings of the site in ways that examination of single images does not achieve. Both of these aggregate digital images offer examples of the choices available when someone purchases a print image in Kedarnath. In figure 5.12 the various depictions of Kedarnath are intermingled with images whose formal content is less site specific (an image of Krishna-Raddha, Shiva and Parvati in the mountains, a painted *AUM*).<sup>34</sup> This image is a rich illustration of how the visual world of the bazaar moves between images that are site specific and images that are generic in north Indian Hindu contexts. Figure 5.13 well exemplifies the visual range of the diversity of representation present even when Kedarnath and Badrinath are the only subjects. The diversity of representation evident in these aggregate images offers a mosaic portrait of the importance of analytically regarding the place as a whole as a single entity, a complex attracting agent.

### ***Local Images and Their Concerns***

One does not say Kedarnath in Garhwali but rather usually Kedar, and it is a place name. For locals, Kedarnath is also Kedar and the articulations of this more locally inflected relationship to the site are also specified through print images. However, they demand more than a cursory stroll through the bazaar to perceive. Such images, found inside and outside the bazaar in Kedarnath, reflect more specifically

---

<sup>34</sup> Of course, any image purchased in Kedarnath will be evocative of Kedarnath at many important levels regardless of its formal content.

local concerns and function at the asymptote of devotion, economic constraint, platial agency, and resistance.



Figure 5.14. Painted collage and photomontage of *nirvan* and *shringar arati darshan*.

This *nirvan darshan-shringar arati darshan* image, based on an older, colorized black and white photograph, is available at only a select few of the shops in Kedarnath and is a twist on the more common combination images already discussed. The formally central and unique visual elements here are the addition of a flower which is notably *not* the *brahmakamal* (Brahma-lotus), the offering of which is a specialty of worship in temples at high altitudes in the Kedarnath valley, the red and yellow *tilak* on the canopies of the *linga*, and the Shaivite *tilak* on the *nirvan darshan linga*. Thus, the image presents itself as already being the object of *puja*, having been offered a flower and having received *tilak*. It is a picture of Kedarnath and at the same time a picture of an act of devotion to Kedarnath.<sup>35</sup> Here is how the designer of the image, Yashpal Panwar, described it:

Like we saw when we went in the temple, what we saw inside is what we showed [*darśāya*]...What is inside the temple that we saw with our eyes, it is of that that we provided *darshan*. That is what there is, that's it.

The production of this photograph provides insight into the regional economic networks in which Kedarnath valley locals participate. The designer and wholesaler of this image is a native of the Rudraprayag district (in which the Kedarnath valley system is located) who moved to Delhi with his family about twenty-two years ago for work.<sup>36</sup> After starting in a company that produced bathroom drains, one day Panwar had one of

---

<sup>35</sup> Aftab Jassal sees in these tripartite images the structure of portraits of newly married couples, the lifting of the mountain by Ravan and the re-uniting of Shiva and Parvati, and the union of dualities around a primary non-dual axis (personal communication, September 2008).

<sup>36</sup> Migration to Delhi for work today, and for the last several decades, is a typical pattern for many Garhwalis, both men and families. In such scenarios the children of middle aged parents usually speak Hindi as their first language and Garhwali to relatives and passively in watching Garhwali video discs and listening to Garhwali music. According to my own anecdotal research the Garhwali audio visual market's largest demographic is Garhwalis who live outside of Garhwal. The work of Stefan Fiol investigates the commercial Garhwali audio-visual arena in detail. See Stefan Fiol, "Dual Framing: Locating Authenticities in the Music Videos of Himalayan Possession Rituals," *Ethnomusicology* 54, no. 1 (2010): 28–53.

his own photographs printed and liked the result. From this modest start he first switched occupations to the production and selling of frames for pictures and from there to the production and distribution of printed images themselves.

His decision to begin marketing photographs in Kedarnath was the result of a suggestion to that effect made by a Kedarnath *tirth purohit* who was visiting him in Delhi. He has been in the photograph and print business for over a decade and among other things claims responsibility for putting the images of the *Char Dham* together onto one print, as well as creating prints that contain both an image of the Kedarnath *linga* and an image of the temple from the outside (both "*darshan*" and "*mandir*", in his words). This particular image is based on a decades old black and white photograph that has been modified at his direction. According to him, sometimes when people see only a photograph or painting of the Kedarnath *linga* they do not know where it is from, and having it together with the much more recognizable image of the temple obviates this problem. To create such an image he goes and sits with a graphic artist from a printing press and they work together on the image, a process that usually takes about a week.

Panwar resides with his family in Delhi most of the time but maintains a dwelling in Rudraprayag, which he calls his *asli ghar* (real home). Speaking with him at his home in Rudraprayag he demonstrated pride in his own creativity at the difficult task of accurately representing what is important at Kedarnath in ways that satisfy the needs of the market. This image is at once a studied representation of the nature of Shiva at Kedarnath, an act of devotion, an act of artistic creativity, and a careful calculation of what will sell in the bazaar. It is a good example of how the pilgrimage



economy of Kedarnath creates the opportunity for business endeavors by Kedarnath valley locals who must then negotiate the relationships between their own local knowledge and Kedarnath valley based identity and larger (regional, national) commercial frameworks of production and consumption.

### *Kedarnath Valley Images in Kedarnath*

One can also find, in and around the bazaar in Kedarnath, print images of important shrines and personages found elsewhere in Kedarnath. Their presence in Kedarnath attests, in a quiet way, to the ubiquitous fact that in a devotional sense Kedarnath is far from the most important deity and place in the everyday lives of residents of the Kedarnath valley.



Figure Figure 5.15. Triyugi Narayan with Lakshmi, Sarasvati, Bhairav, Sun, Moon, and the *dhūnī* (fire).

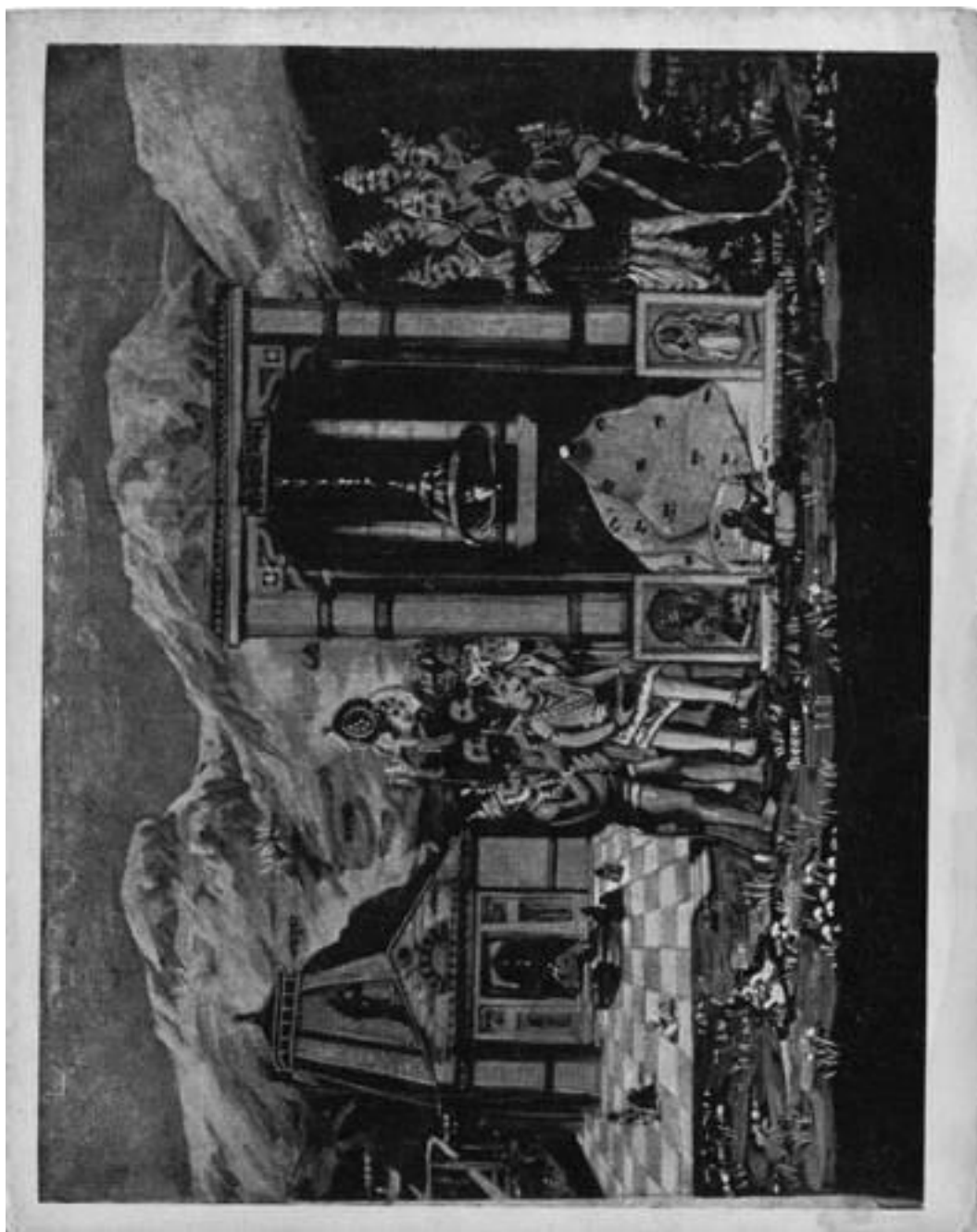


Figure 5.16. Painted montage of Kedarnath *nirvan darshan* and temple view.

These two images were present at a single shop in Kedarnath in 2007 belonging to Gangadhar Vajpayi, a *tirth purohit* in his eighties, found in a stack of older posters he keeps on display with the rest of his merchandise. He is one of the most well known,

respected, scholarly, and visible links to a generation of Kedarnath locals who are mostly no longer part of the Kedarnath scene because they are old and can no longer reside there without significant risk to their health. He has written his own ritual manual (manual of *puja paddhati*) and a short book of songs in Sanskrit verse devoted to Kedarnath.

In a shift towards *vanaprastha/sannyasa* (retirement to the forest/renunciation) Gangadhar Vajpai left his natal village of Lamgaundi almost twenty years ago and has been living during the off-season in a small village near Triyugi Narayan, the major local *tirtha* in the Kedar valley proper where Shiva and Parvati are understood to have married, where the *dhuni* (wood-fire) has been burning continuously for three ages (*Triyugi* = three ages), and where Vishnu is present in the form of Triyugi Narayan.<sup>37</sup> Figure 5.15 is a depiction of that site. There one sees Triyugi Narayan in the center flanked by Lakshmi and Sarasvati, with the Sun and Moon overhead, a moustached Bhairav appearing twice in the upper right hand corner and the *dhuni* in front of Vishnu. This is the only instance I have seen where Bhairavnath appears in a poster in the Kedarnath bazaar, even though he is of paramount importance to all locals.<sup>38</sup> I view the presence of this image in this man's shop as a visual assertion of his own identity as someone who lives near Triyugi Narayan. In the Kedarnath valley locally produced small photographic posters and small *murtis* of the local deities and/or their shrines placed in shops, jeeps, and homes tend to illustrate a local, locative identity. So, for example, a

---

<sup>37</sup> Triyugi Narayan is normatively identified as Vishnu as far as I know, and the iconography of this image matches that assessment. However, I have heard Kedar valley locals on several occasions identify this Narayan as Krishna in his Garhwali, Nag Raja form. In the Kedar valley proper there are also a series of sites whose *gram devta* has several identities, only one of which is Vaishnavite. One example is the village of Tyudi, where the *gram devta* is identified as both Balram and Balbhadra. One prominent local scholar and politician, Pratap Singh Pushpavan, holds that Triyugi Narayan is in fact Shiva (personal communication, 2008).

<sup>38</sup> See my discussion of devotion to Bhairavnath in Chapter Six.

jeep driver whose home village is in the area of Triyugi Narayan would probably have an image of Triyugi Narayan fixed to his dashboard and would finish his driving day by returning to that area of the valley. In local visual culture, images of deities map directly to locations with which one has primary locative, ancestral, or devotional allegiance.

Figure 5.16, an old black and white photograph, shows a Kedarnath of forty or fifty years ago when Gangadhar Vajpayi was a young man. I included his image here because a photograph of the proprietor as a young man was affixed to the back of this painted image. It also bears his name and address in the lower right-hand corner. It is thus intentional representation of his individual identity as a Kedarnath *tirth purohit* and a link to an era when Kedarnath was an almost unrecognizably different place.<sup>39</sup> These two images together offer a glimpse into the substratum of richly contoured local culture that rarely finds space for articulation in visual and textual form in Kedarnath.<sup>40</sup> It is the substratum of devotion to Bhairavnath and Triyugi Narayan, of a time when the road was not paved and very limited types of food were available, when people were afraid to leave the circle of the lights of Kedarnath at night for fear of animals and ghosts, and when *yatris* were much more dependent on their local hosts.

---

<sup>39</sup> Twenty to thirty years ago there seems to have been a time when production of photographs (such as this one) and books were more expressive of a local touch. There used to be a well reputed printing press called Vishal Mani Sharma in the Kedar valley that has since closed and now local authors wishing to publish usually have to convince a publisher in Haridwar or Rishikesh (such as Randhir Prakashan) to publish their manuscripts. Image making, on the other hand, is returning to local control as local photographers by their own computers and start to take control of the editing process (though they still have to send their product to Rudraprayag, or Dehra Dun, or Delhi for printing).

<sup>40</sup> See Chapter Two and Chapter Six for more about moments in which Kedarnath became a Garhwali place during my fieldwork.

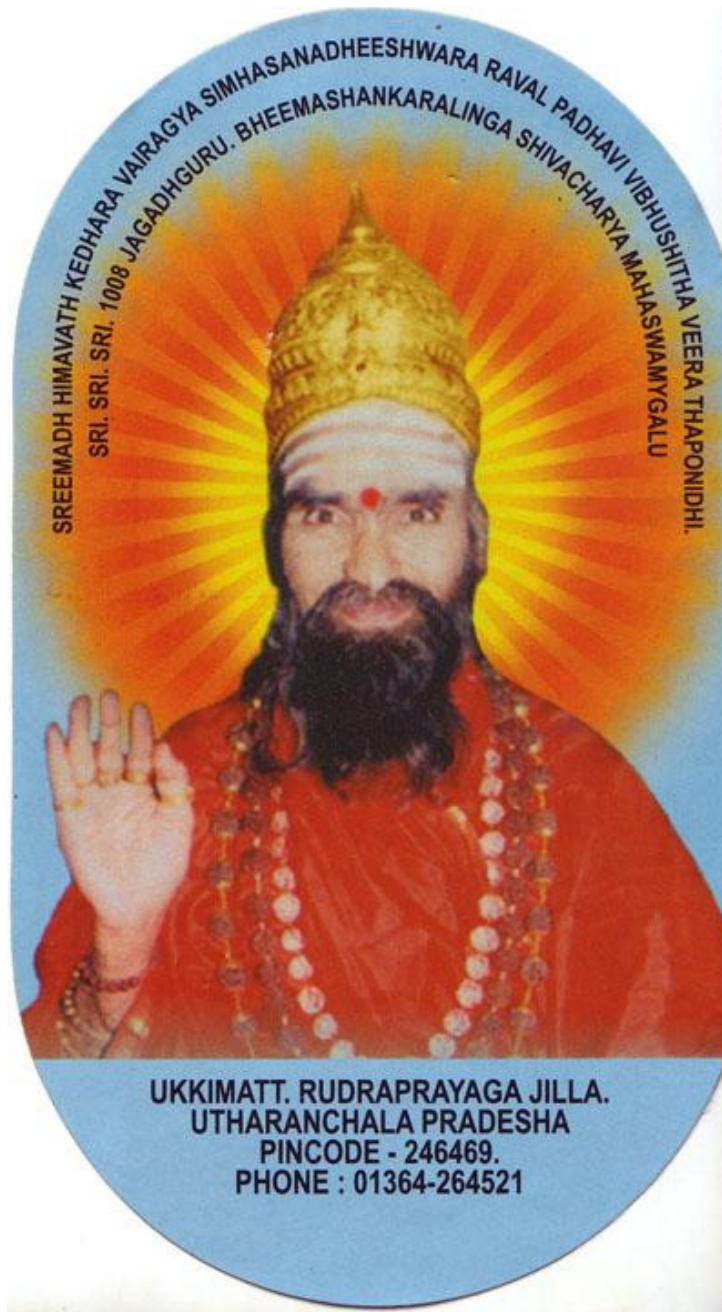


Figure 5.17. The Rawal of Kedarnath.

In this image the current Rawal of Kedarnath, Bhimashankar Ling, blesses the viewer. One of his local titles is *Bolanda Kedar*, or the speaking and walking form of Kedarnath. I have seen images similar to this image on the walls of shops in Kedarnath,

but I have not seen it for sale anywhere in Kedarnath.<sup>41</sup> Display might express kinship relation to someone from Dangvari village, the village of Ukhimath (itself a composite of five main villages) closest to the Aumkareshvar temple. It might express that one is from the Ukhimath side of the Kedarnath valley. It might also express reverence for the Rawal on the part of someone who is from a different part of the Kedarnath valley or someone who is a Kedarnath resident during the season. Virashaiva *yatris* might receive a copy directly from the Virashaiva *pujari* if they go to his room to visit him and he happened to have copies on hand. Like images of Bhairavnath, this image indicates the threshold of what is marketed and legible to outsiders and what is not. As I discuss in the introduction, Virashaivas in the Kedarnath valley live as both insiders and outsiders, hence the intelligibility of this image to Kedarnath valley locals and select *yatris* with some sort of Virashaiva background. This is another instance where local image placement can be understood to indicate local resistance to the majority visual culture of Kedarnath as well as personal devotion and social affiliation.

#### ***A Temporary Shrine of the Badri Kedar Temple Committee***

The end of August in 2007 in Kedarnath saw an eleven day recitation of the *Shiva Purana* (*Shiv Puran Katha*) carried out by a member of the Badri Kedar Samiti who was also from a *tirth purohit* family. A dais (*mandap*) was erected on which the reciter (*Vyas-Ji, kathavacak*) sat during the daily period of public exposition. The majority of this exposition was in high, Sanskritic Hindi; occasionally to make a point (or a joke) the reciter would switch to Garhwali. Immediately in front of the dais a temporary altar (*vedi*) is constructed; it contained the deity of the sacrifice/recitation (*yajna-purush*) and a vessel (*kalash*) full of water infused with the presence of numerous deities. Members

---

<sup>41</sup> One also finds such images in Ukhimath.

of the *Samiti* and important *tirth purohits* sat in carefully choreographed alternating positions on either side of the *vedi*. The human vehicle (*aur*) of Bhukund Bhairavnath sat in one of these positions; Bhairavnath actually became present several times during the eleven day period. Immediately in front and lower down from the *vedi* lay a temporary shrine to Kedarnath-Shiva; an assembly of print images of Kedarnath constituted this shrine. Upon arrival to the recitation most people, a mix of locals and *yatris*, would circumambulate the *vedi* and the *mandap* where the reciter was seated (often touching his feet), receive *tilak* from the *aur*, and perform a *pranam* (reverent prostration) to the temporary shrine before taking their seat. The images that follow present and contextualize the temporary shrine in front of the *vedi*.





Figure 5.18. The temporary shrine in front of the *vedi* and *mandap*.



Figure 5.19. Close-up of central upper Kedarnath image.





Figure 5.20. Close up of the Kedarnath *doli* image from the temporary shrine.

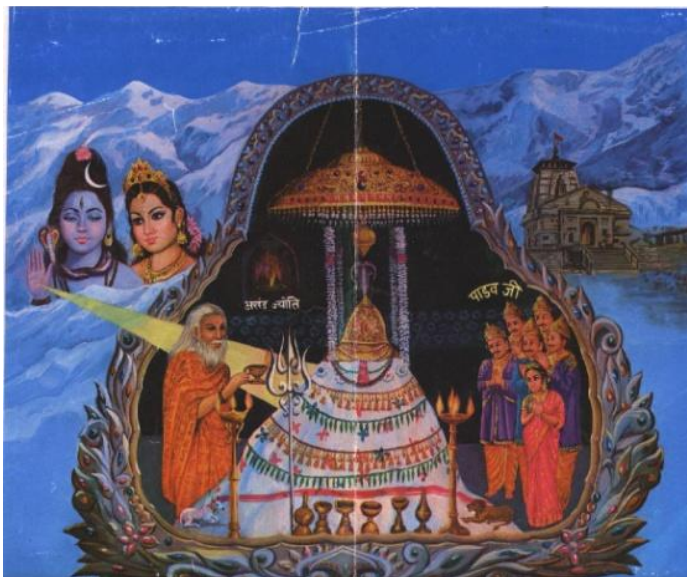


Figure 5.21. An older, painted montage version of the metal etched and painted montage image of Kedarnath from the temporary shrine.

Starting at the top and going clockwise the images in figure 5.18 are:

- 1) A metallic, painted image of the Kedarnath *linga* being worshipped by the Pandavas and an old man (sometimes identified as Vyasa and sometimes as a Kedarnath *pujari*) superimposed onto a mountainous Himalayan backdrop, flanked on one side by Shiva and Parvati and on the other by the temple.
- 2) A photograph of the Ganesha who sits outside the door of the Kedarnath temple.
- 3) A photograph of the Kedarnath *doli* about to depart from the courtyard of the Aumkareshvar temple in Ukhimath and a photograph of Shiva seated on Nandi from the Vishvanath temple located in Guptkashi, the town just across the valley from Ukhimath that lies directly on the road to Kedarnath.

Figures 5.20 and 5.21 present clearer views of the same central two images outside of their immediate ritual contexts.

This temporary shrine presents a complicated picture. In figure 5.19 the central, top image has a slight but actual presence in the bazaar and can be classed as one of the temple/*nirvan darshan* composite views already presented that demonstrate notable use of painted and photomontage techniques. The other three were not found in the Kedarnath bazaar in 2007 to the best of my knowledge. The photograph of the Kedarnath *doli* comes from a local photography studio and *yatris* would only possess such an image if they had participated in part of the procession and taken a photograph themselves. The other two photographs are of subjects recognizable to anyone who has been to Kedarnath and stopped in Guptkashi: one is of the Ganesha outside the Kedarnath temple and the other is of *Gaurishankar* from the Vishvanath temple in Guptkashi. However, the addition to all three photographs of labels in

English and Hindi places them in a different repertoire as well -- as part of the gallery of images that line the walls of the *pravacan* hall (auditorium, built by the Samiti) in which the *Shiv Puran Katha* took place. These laminated and hardbacked posters, produced and placed by the Badri Kedar Samiti, display both photographs of temples and deities and standard tourist views of Himalayan landscapes and label them all in the same way, thus creating a single visual continuum of Uttarakhand as it represents itself to outsiders: as a state of religious and spiritual importance (*Dev Bhumi*, the abode of the gods) and as a tourist destination of unmatched natural beauty. These depictions of local items have undergone a process of re-presentation by the Samiti. The garlanding of the Kedarnath *linga* image is also notable: the bright yellow plastic garland is sold in the bazaar and is an addition to the inventory in the last ten years or so as a result of demand by *yatris*. Directly overhanging the *linga* are several *brahmakamal*, and on either side the white *bogula* garlands peek out as well. *Bogula* flowers are well regarded by locals because they never spoil and are thus especially good for garlands. That is to say, the garlanding of these images is itself a blend of floral offerings of local and *yatri* significance.

This image configuration highlights the special complexity of the character of the Samiti in the Kedarnath valley. The Samiti is a state organization that acts as a ritual patron, that regulates important pilgrimage sites in the area while at the same time being staffed mostly by locals from the same area, and that is engaged in the representation of Kedarnath to the rest of the world for purposes of prestige, devotion, and revenue generation. The images in this temporary shrine are both devotional images in a ritual context and images that reflect the local yet governmental character

of the Samiti. They reflect the ways in which the Samiti leverages both the prestige and power of Kedarnath and in a more general sense traditional Brahman authority in order to increase the power and reach of the organization.<sup>42</sup>

### *Video Disc Presentations of Kedarnath*

Presentations of Kedarnath found in video discs in many ways function as a simple fusion of pamphlet literature and print images. They take as their subjects the Char Dham Yatra, the twelve *jyotirlingas*, Kedarnath, Kedarnath and Badrinath, and sometimes albeit rarely the Panch Kedar. They are shot and produced both by local and non-local photographers in concert with regional and national media companies such as Ambey and T-Series.<sup>43</sup> They take advantage of the diachronous and audio-visual nature of the filmic medium to interpenetrate oral narrative expositions of Kedarnath, Garhwal, the Char Dham, the Himalayas, and Shiva with exactly the sorts of photo and painted (in this case animated) montage found in the print images discussed in this chapter. However, in filmic versions such montages gain far more power and immediacy as they more precisely reproduce the visual sweep of a set of eyes encountering the sight and looking in different directions. They further allow for the possibility that non-literate visitors to Kedarnath who did not encounter a narrative exposition in oral form about Kedarnath will be afforded an opportunity through the viewing of a video disc, either in excerpt form in the Kedarnath bazaar or subsequent to the visit. This means that, while this has not yet happened, oral narrative

---

<sup>42</sup> Notably, the *Samiti* is also responsible for a great deal of what constitutes public ritual innovation in the Kedarnath valley. For example, for the last several years the Samiti has sponsored a *yajna* (fire sacrifice) in Ukhimath on Mahashivaratri (the festival of the great night of Shiva) in February in which it acts as both patron (*yajman*) and ritual specialist who makes the offerings and chants the Vedic verses.

<sup>43</sup> For an example of a video disc presentation of Kedarnath with significant local input, see Subhash Chandra, *Yatra Shri Kedarnath Dham Ki* (Ambey, 2007). The production of video discs and other forms of visual culture in Kedarnath and the Kedarnath valley, particularly as such production relates to the cultural life of the valley more generally, deserves to be explored more fully in a separate work.

expositions of Kedarnath may ultimately again become a constituent element in the experiences of Kedarnath as place that most visitors to the site will have encountered.

There are two relatively novel aspects to commercial video representations of Kedarnath that should be briefly noted. The first is that they include a great deal of footage of the journey and the activity of *yatra*, shot from a first person point of view as a passenger in a car or a walker on the path. The camera lingers on the activity of journey, of driving, walking, traveling by helicopter, of arrival, of waiting in line, to an extent that produces a far greater impact than the lists of distance tables and destination descriptions found in pamphlets, and about which print images of Kedarnath are wholly silent. There are no print images for sale in Kedarnath that depict *yatris* and the activity of *yatra*; such images depict only the place. Thus the activity of *yatra* becomes another, relatively new site of bifocality for the *yatri* to Kedarnath, who may see videos representations of the activity of *yatra* while still on *yatra* in the site.

The second departure is that many of the video discs devote a fair amount of time to the depiction of the processions to and from Ukhimath that open and close the season. These deity processions are a strikingly compelling form of public spectacle that build on the traditional centrality of deity procession in Garhwal. However, most *yatris* to Kedarnath do not ever see these processions unless they happen to be in the area on the three days of the beginning or ending of the season when the processions occur, or when they see thirty seconds of coverage on the news.<sup>44</sup> The fact and representation of such processions is slowly coming to be one of the features by which Kedarnath is publically known. Yet, at least on site in Kedarnath, such video

---

<sup>44</sup> I heard substantial rumors that a national television network was producing, or had already produced a program on the *dyotirlingas* that might include such footage, but I have not yet ascertained any specifics in this regard.

representations have only begun to take hold. Another five or ten years will prove instructive for understanding how they will fit themselves into the other forms of exposition and representation already popular in the site.

### **Montage, Landscape, and the Portraiture of Complex Agency**

The techniques of painted and photomontage are employed extensively across the print images discussed in this chapter. Though this is a thoroughly unquantifiable assertion, my own research over the years, detailed in the introduction, suggests that the range of ways that Shiva's presence is depicted at Kedarnath and the level of technical creativity one finds in some of the most common and popular print images in Kedarnath is, in the context of print image depictions of Hindu *tirthas*, fairly distinctive. I consider much of this compositional distinctiveness to arise from the relation between the mountainous setting of the temple and the distinctive shape of the *linga*. To my own eye, the shape of the *linga* suggests the shape of a mountain. While a minority view to be sure, conversations with locals and *yatris* (a group from Jaipur, a civil engineer from Mumbai) have affirmed my own sense of the analytic utility of this view. I encountered this view most notably from a retired Virashaiva *pujari*, Niranjan Ling, who had put in decades of service in Kedarnath and several other sites. As he put it, they wanted to worship the entire Himalayas but that does not fit inside a temple, so they built a temple around a small piece of the Himalayas and worship that instead.<sup>45</sup> I discuss this conversation in greater detail in the next chapter. Such conversations confirm my feeling that there is something about Kedarnath that requires, even demands this relatively high use of painted and photomontage in order to satisfactorily

---

<sup>45</sup> Ukhimath, personal communication, 2007. This discussion about the shape of the Kedarnath *linga* also recalls the theories about the origins of the term *kedara* discussed in Chapter Two.

represent the range of perception and experience of place these items leverage. Part of the work of this chapter is to allow the reader to feel something of this suggestion. The visual complexity of these images is one of the ways that the complex agency of the place as a whole becomes visible. It is also fascinating that this formal aesthetic complexity persists even as the possibility of hearing oral narrative expositions about the source of that complexity continue to decrease.

Kajri Jain and Christopher Pinney have discussed the significance of representations of landscape in Indian poster art and the use of multiple image and montage techniques. Pinney suggests that the creatively manipulated backgrounds of Indian photographic portraiture may be viewed “...not simply as a substitute in the absence of their referents, but as a space of exploration.”<sup>46</sup> He has also discussed the ways that the representation of figures and landscapes in calendar art in South Asia sets up a dialectical relation between the meanings and existential modalities signified by the foreground and background of the image. In modern Indian calendar art the relationships between foregrounds and backgrounds

...frequently give visible form to the intersection and conflict of, on the one hand, a folk model of historical decay and, on the other, a nationalist political language of modernity.<sup>47</sup>

He goes on to explicitly relate this phenomenon to the analytic categories of place and space:

...In formal pictorial terms, I will argue, ‘place’ is connoted by the foreground which exists in a state of mutual dependence with ‘space’

---

<sup>46</sup> Christopher Pinney, *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 175

<sup>47</sup> Christopher Pinney, “Moral Topophilia: The Significations of Landscape in Indian Oleographs,” in *The Anthropology of Landscape: perspectives on place and space*, eds. Eric Hirsch and Michael O’Hanlon (Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1995), 78-113.

connoted by the horizon.<sup>48</sup>

In other words, in popular Indian calendar and poster art the foreground often expresses the distinctive affect that a particular subject holds for viewers, affect which is often in a state of intersection and tension with more general and already existent structures represented by the background. The utility of this observation for images of Kedarnath is immediate. One can discern binaries of natural-built, internal-external, environmental-anthropomorphic, anthropomorphic-aniconic, as well as more complicated relations: Himalayan beauty/Himalayan religious power - anthropomorphic Shaivite presence/aniconic Shaivite presence, for example.

Kajri Jain offers a number of observations that highlight the significance of the representation of landscape and deities in landscape in Indian calendar art. In particular, Jain has looked at the influences of particular schools and painters on the early development of Indian calendar art in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She has observed that the depictions of landscape in paintings produced by the artist community of Nathdvara (a pilgrimage place in Rajasthan) reflect the patronage of the Pushtimarg community. She attributes the sizable influence of paintings of this school on the world of the calendar print image to the power of the Pushtimarg mercantile network. She correlates the landscape aesthetic in such images to the world of their Pushtimarg patrons. She asserts that

...the social context of the bazaar's trading communities is particularly pertinent to the embrace of landscapes...It is no coincidence that the intense elaboration of landscapes as portable figures of territory in iconic prints should emanate from the image culture of Pushtimarg,

---

<sup>48</sup> Christopher Pinney, "Moral Topophilia: The Significations of Landscape in Indian Oleographs," in *The anthropology of landscape: perspectives on place and space* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, n.d.), 79.



with its increasingly mobile, largely mercantile followers.<sup>49</sup>

These landscapes, she continues, did not depict particular places precisely because of the mobility of the possessors of the images. They were images that needed to be able to fit in wherever the merchant nomads of the Pushtimarg community settled.<sup>50</sup> About another famous early influence on Indian calendar art, the painter Raja Ravi Varma, Jain observes that Varma's visual interpretations of the *Puranic* settings of his mythological paintings had a habit of "mimicking Western naturalisms".<sup>51</sup> A European-Indian hybrid form of "naturalism" was adopted as a way to humanize the gods and set them in a human landscape.<sup>52</sup>

Further, Jain asserts that much of the aesthetic framework set during the late nineteenth century undergirding popular calendar art today was significantly colored by Vaishnavite structures. She offers several reasons for this assessment. First, she suggests that "the multiple material incarnations of Vishnu have been particularly amenable to a culture of visual imaging."<sup>53</sup> The Vaishnavite idea of *avatara*, of descent of the deity into a contained presence in the human world, lends itself to particularly well to painted representation of figures in landscapes. Second, the Pushtimarg mercantile communities, who exercised a great deal of influence in the production and circulation of calendar art in the subcontinent, were Vaishnavite. Shiva is of course often represented anthropomorphically: as a *yogi* seated in contemplation in the Himalayas, with Parvati, with Parvati and the two progeny of the family Ganesha and Skanda.

---

<sup>49</sup> Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar*, 141

<sup>50</sup> Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar*, 142.

<sup>51</sup> Kajri Jain, "New Visual Technologies in the Bazaar: Reterritorialisation of the Sacred in Popular Print Culture," in *Sarai Reader 2003: Shaping Technologies* (Delhi: Sarai Program, CSDS, 2003), 53.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>53</sup> Jain, *Gods in the Bazaar*, 249.

However, the form of Shiva normally worshipped in temple settings is aniconic: the *linga*.

Jain also documents the predictably important role of puranic literature as a source of artistic inspiration for such print images (especially commercial images), particularly through the art of Raja Ravi Varma.<sup>54</sup> It will be recalled that in the important work of Benjamin Fleming on the development of the cult of the *vyotirlinga* as evidenced particularly in different layers of the *Shiva Purana* he argues that, prior to the success of this cult, the form of Shiva was not wholly identified with the *linga*. His observations in this regard offer a further analytic fulcrum for the present discussion. Puranic literature, an important influence on the development of calendar art aesthetics, did not itself possess a wholly coherent view of the form of Shiva's presence in the world. Combining Jain's observations here with the demonstrated irreducible complexity of visual representations of Kedarnath and the ethnographic fact that there is not a single primary "type" of image purchased by *yatris* from among those discussed in this chapter, a hypothesis about this state of visual affairs arises. The use of painted and photomontage in Kedarnath print images is to some extent symptomatic of the representational challenges posed by the depiction a non-standard and non-anthropomorphic form of Shiva in Kedarnath in his Himalayan environment. And the power of the Himalayan landscape in which Shiva resides (and may be consubstantial) is itself historically and conceptually composite: the "natural beauty" of the Himalayas and the postcolonial and touristic overtones of this concept mingle with the older and still fundamental idea of the religious power of the Himalayan landscape.

---

<sup>54</sup> Jain, "New Visual Technologies in the Bazaar: Reterritorialisation of the Sacred in Popular Print Culture," 50.

*Towards an Understanding of Place: Print Images in Kedarnath*

Analysis of print images in Kedarnath makes several invaluable contributions to understanding the place of Kedarnath more generally. First, sustained analysis of such images singly and in aggregate offers a visual argument that indigenously frames the irreducibly complex nature of Kedarnath, an argument that is the methodological point of departure for this work and the genesis for the notion of the place of Kedarnath as complex agent. At a very basic level, they are pictures of Kedarnath. This work is an exploration of the experience of being in Kedarnath; these images are attempts to render the “originary event”, to use Robert Sharf’s term, of this experience.<sup>55</sup> They are pictures of the subject of this work.

Second, the different types of images available in and around the Kedarnath bazaar point towards different experiential modalities in modern day Kedarnath: the touristic, the devotional, the touristic-devotional, the local, the Samiti-local, the *tirth-purohit* local. They both reflect and constitute aspects of what it feels like to be in, and to have visited Kedarnath that are common enough to be worth reproducing commercially. Third, like many forms of material culture, print images, their subjects, modes of production, and placements are invaluable as signposts pointing towards others forms of investigation. Attention to these images engenders a sense of both what they make uniquely visible and what it is not possible to discern without other tools. Such print images correspond to a beginning extent with internal and imaginal views of Kedarnath that could not be glimpsed in any other way. Yet they may similarly only be understood in the context of the other forms of discourse, practice,

---

<sup>55</sup> Robert H. Sharf, “Experience,” in *Critical terms for religious studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), 109.

representation, and association that constitute experiences of place in Kedarnath. I have already suggested several sets of relationships among narratives, narrative exposition, and print images in the construction and reflection of experiences of place and as complex, attracting agent. It is now time to move past discourse and representation, and to turn to what people do, as embodied and intersubjectively constituted persons, when they are in Kedarnath.

## The Sensing of *Akarshan*: Practices in Place at Kedarnath

### Chapter Six

#### From Narratives and Images to Practices in Place

Kedarnath is a site that has demonstrated an enduring attractive power for over a millennium, and the exact form of Shiva understood to be present and the most recommended forms of interaction with the efficacious power of the site have been somewhat fluid for much of that time. Examination of narrative expositions of Kedarnath offer approaches to the place that evoke themes of pursuit, of ascent, of wound, of tenderness, of service (*seva*), of devotional relation with Shiva, of liberatory transcendence and becoming Shiva, and of the efficacious power of both what is present in the temple and at numerous sites in the upper Kedarnath end valley. Print images found in Kedarnath show us how the identity of the place spreads out beyond the temple to include the natural environment of the site, and underscore the fluidity of the relationship between the presence of Shiva in Kedarnath and the polyvalent aesthetic, often touristic power of the site's natural setting. They do not make any explicit mention of Shiva's buffalo form, of Bhima's striking with the mace, or of Bhrigupatan, and (unlike video discs) they do not depict any forms of modern *yatri* or local practice.

There is, however, a great deal about what it is for a person to be present in Kedarnath, and what goes into the experiencing of Kedarnath and its power of *akarshan*, that comes about through what people *do* when they are physically present in the place. Keith Basso views place-making, and place itself, as forms of "cultural

activity”, accomplished through “ideas” and “practices”, through which places come to be what they are for those present in them.<sup>1</sup> This chapter concerns itself with the doing of, depending on one’s particular ends and disciplinary agenda, what one might call practices, practices of place, embodied cultural activities of place, or place-directed ritualizations. My concern here is to discuss the particular forms of embodied human activity that both shape and reflect experiences of Kedarnath in significant ways and demonstrate how the significant human interactions with the complex agency of the place distribute themselves across various specific sites and contexts in and around Kedarnath proper.

I regard the work of J.Z. Smith on the relationship between place and ritual as the conceptual point of departure for thinking about the relationship between the two terms “practice” and “place”. Smith has famously written that

Ritual is, first and foremost, a mode of paying attention. It is a process for marking interest. It is the recognition of this fundamental characteristic of ritual that most sharply distinguishes our understanding from that of the Reformers, with their all too easy equation of ritual with blind and thoughtless habit. It is this characteristic, as well, that explains the role of place as a fundamental component of ritual: place directions attention.”<sup>2</sup>

Given the identity of Kedarnath as a *tirtha*, this is a key insight for understanding why people do what they do when present in the place. But, what exactly is the place that is doing the directing here? And how and to what does “Kedarnath” direct attention? Kim Knott has observed that, in *To Take Place*,

---

<sup>1</sup> Keith Basso, *Wisdom sits in places : landscape and language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 7, 33.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Z Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, Chicago studies in the history of Judaism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 103.

Smith dislodged theory on sacred space from its previous base within a phenomenological conception of both the 'sacred' and 'place', and re-engaged it with social and cultural constructionist approaches from anthropology and sociology.<sup>3</sup>

I have to some extent followed Smith's invitation for the study of religion to reengage with "social and cultural constructionist" approaches to place but, as I have noted, my utilization of a critical phenomenological approach suggests I do not regard phenomenological and constructionist approaches to be mutually exclusive. It follows that I strike in a middle path in locating the agents involved in the construction and reflection of experiences of place, as William Sax does in his discussion of networks of agency for healing that include divine agents, by acknowledging both the human and platial agencies involved.<sup>4</sup>

In a recent re-examination of J.Z. Smith's *To Take Place*, Christine Thomas suggests that Smith's framework "tends to skew the analysis of the book in the direction of 'world religions' that function independently of geographical location..."<sup>5</sup> As a rejoinder, she suggests, building on existing conversations in archaeology, that "sacred spaces" may also function as agents, "not as sites of the absolutely numinous, but as sites of the exchange of cultural traditions among agents, as physical locations that accumulate and organize the collected lore of a society."<sup>6</sup> Thus, as I detailed in Chapter Three, in my view the "place" that directs ritual attention is a complex agent made up of the overlap of sense experience of the physical and built environments, the

---

<sup>3</sup> Kim Knott, "Spatial Theory and the Study of Religion," *Religion Compass* 2, no. 6 (2008): 1105.

<sup>4</sup> William S Sax, *God of Justice: Ritual Healing and Social Justice in the Central Himalayas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Christine M. Thomas, "Place and Memory: Response to Jonathan Z. Smith on *To Take Place*, on the Occasion of Its Twentieth Anniversary," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 775.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 777.

encultured meanings and associations bound up with Shiva, Kedarnath, the Himalayas, and *tirtha-yatra*, the economies and contingencies of pilgrimage tourism, and the information and actions that frame the site. Significant practices in the location of Kedarnath are focused interactions with this platial complex agency.

Several brief excerpts from interviews I carried out illustrate the utility of premising a certain level of indeterminacy in the concatenation of place and practice. They are both the words of different Virashaiva *pujaris*, whose job it is to worship Shiva three times a day in the Kedarnath temple for the duration of the season. Niranjan Ling, a retired *pujari* who lives in Ukhimath and who had spent numerous seasons in Kedarnath, expressed the place/practice relationship in this way:

..Inside the temple there is a mountain. It is the Himalaya mountain inside the temple. And the Bhagavan [God] there means the mountain. Whatever *qudrat* [power] there is there, that *qudrat* takes the form of god. But if you say to someone worship a mountain, he won't do it, will he? Worship the mountain, brother no one will do it. What we old people did is we put the mountain inside the temple. We took that very mountain and built an impressive temple there, where now people come and exclaim "*vah vah*, what an enormous linga!" That's whose *puja* we do -- we are doing the *puja* of the Himalaya. We do the *puja* of that lap of Himalaya in which we live...

And Shankar Ling, the Kedarnath *pujari* in 2007, told me in an interview conducted in his quarters in Kedarnath during the 2007 season, that

Here, Bhagavan [God] and place [*sthān*] are the same.

If the mountainous place is the same as the god who is in the temple, or the mountain (whether as deity or not) is what is in the temple, then there is potentially a good deal of experiential variability to how the place directs ritual attention, and what "ritual



attention” looks like. Thus, the work of this chapter is to illustrate possible relationships among conceptions and experiences of place and the forms and objects of ritual attention through the discussion of specific examples that accurately index this complexity: the *ghi malish* in the temple, *deora* (the *yatra* of a Garhwali deity), the residence of renunciants in Kedarnath, walking and movement in and around Kedarnath, and cricket. I have selected these examples for their utility in several regards. First, they contribute in salient and distinct ways to the experience of Kedarnath as a place. Second, they illustrate that interactions with the religious power of the place spread out beyond the temple and into the entire environment of the Kedarnath end-valley. Third, they illustrate that there are important practices in Kedarnath that are not aimed primarily at interaction with the religious power of the place. Finally, they suggest that in the examples of the actions of actual groups and persons in Kedarnath such typological distinctions often do not hold.

***Clarifying Terms: Ritual, Ritualization, Practice, and Practices in Place***

Before encountering these examples in detail, it is important to take note briefly of the current state of conversations about place, practice, and ritual. Catherine Bell has offered the term *ritualization* as something of a replacement for *ritual*. Her claims in this regard provide one of the recent compass points for thinking about ritual(ization) and religious activity. In her understanding,

...ritualization is a matter of various culturally specific strategies for setting some activities off from others, for creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane’, and for

ascribing such distinction to realities thought to transcend powers of human actors.<sup>7</sup>

Bell's approach here redraws earlier understandings of the relationship between ritual and "religious beliefs" by viewing belief itself as, like ritualization, "irreducibly social in nature". That is to say, according to Bell ritualizations are not to be primarily construed as epistemic judgments about the world and the cosmos.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Bell herself observes that "...even the basic symbols of a community's ritual life, can be very unclear to participants or interpreted by them in very dissimilar ways."<sup>9</sup> Yet, even as this formulation allows for the irreducible social diversity that might lie behind the ritual life of a community, there is a level of formalization here, a suggestion that one already knows what might count as community and what might count as ritual life. This approach to practice does not adequately register the complexity of Kedarnath as place and abode of Shiva and the variable contours of what counts as the entity that is directing ritual attention. Different forms of human activity in Kedarnath are in a fundamentally complex relationship with each other in which it is possible to discern the agency of the place acting in patterned ways but within which it is *not* possible to discuss notions such as community or ritual life without selecting out certain areas and phenomena assuming that forms of activity bear stable configurations (of meaning, of power, of significance) to one another.<sup>10</sup>

The notion of "practice" is also part of the conversation about ritual, ritualization, and human activity. This term, particularly as part of a movement in the

---

<sup>7</sup> Catherine M. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 74.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 182-183.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>10</sup> For a provocative discussion of the relationship between place and complexity theory, see J. Portugali, "Complexity theory as a link between space and place," *Environment and Planning A* 38, no. 4 (2006): 647.

study of American religion to pay greater attention to the role of “lived religion”, has come to be part of a gathering attention to what are known as “religious” practices.<sup>11</sup> In a very general sense, the term *practice* may be understood to be a patterned human doing of some significance that is understood to involve the whole person. Many scholars (such as Basso in *Wisdom Sits in Places*) use it as a fairly underdetermined phrase that encompasses a wide range of embodied human activity. Others are more specific.

Catherine Bell, drawing on Bourdieu’s famous work on practice as well as others such as Clifford Geertz and Marshall Sahlins, suggests that practice be understood as an “irreducible term for human activity” that is “situational...strategic...embedded in a misrecognition of what it is in fact doing...”<sup>12</sup> As Bell notes, the advantage of this idea is that it avoids the mind-body split implied by classical notions of ritual. She also argues that avoiding this error runs the risk of substituting mind-body binary with a Marxist theory-derived binary of theory and practice. The notion of the doer of practices as a being who is both embodied and socially situated fits well with critical phenomenological view of embodied cultural activity that centers on place. However, a particularly Bellian notion of practice runs the risk, as Laurie Patton has observed, of not acknowledging that people often discuss in fully explicit manner in written, visual, and oral contexts the importance of specifics with which they involve themselves.<sup>13</sup>

Thinking with the linked notions of practice and place requires one or two further caveats. As an analytic term in the investigation of place, *practice* does many

---

<sup>11</sup> David D. Hall, *Lived religion in America: Toward a history of practice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 81.

<sup>13</sup> Laurie Patton, personal communication.

kinds of work. One finds scholars who speak of “practices of place” or practices of “place-making”.<sup>14</sup> Such language usually frames experiences of place in which sites come to have positive (sometimes “sacred”) meaning for people through patterned activity and aesthetic experience that matches particular cultural expectations or needs that people bring to such locations and moments. Practice, with or without the prefix of “religious”, is also a way of analytically describing things that people do in particular contexts that preserves the somaticity and mind-body linkages of the doers involved.

I employ this language of place and practice, but in so doing I will change it slightly so as to circumscribe several possible assumptions on the part of the reader. Therefore, the subjects of this chapter are practices *in* place, and not *of* place. There are several reasons for this distinction. First, there is a rhetorical reason. Notions of practices of place or practices of place making frequently carry with them deeply positive connotations that emerge from phenomenological approaches to geography that take up the idea, found prominently in Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space*, that a coming into place is premised on an archetypal experience of dwelling, of being at home.<sup>15</sup> Kedarnath is home to no one – the feeling of being drawn there, of being present, should perhaps not be understood with recourse to a template based on home and dwelling. And many strategies of place making that involve, for example, the creation of meaning through narrative exposition, are not universally or consistently

---

<sup>14</sup> Adrian J. Ivakhiv, *Claiming Sacred Ground: Pilgrims and Politics at Glastonbury and Sedona* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001); Basso, *Wisdom sits in places*. See also “Placing Lives, Practicing Place: Contemporary Expression of Lived Nature Religion” by Bobbi Patterson in *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* (forthcoming). I am grateful to Donna Mote as well for her useful thoughts on this subject.

<sup>15</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

relevant to the production of experiences of Kedarnath. Second, given that Kedarnath is a *tirtha* a reader might assume that practices of place are necessarily “religious” practices. I neither wish to preclude this possibility nor presume it, but rather to suggest that in many ways for the case of the complex agency of Kedarnath renders the question of such a distinction moot. I have chosen the examples in this chapter specifically to signal to the reader this suggestion.

Third, my analytic designation of “practices in place” is an intentional elision of indigenous categories for talking about significant forms of cultural activity in Kedarnath. Practices that one does in a *tirtha* include the sorts of activities mentioned in various texts and conversations in chapter three: *ghi malish*, the drinking of water, *puja*, *sraddha*. They would not necessarily include cricket, and might include some forms of walking but not others. Corollary to my formulation that the goal of this work to understand Kedarnath as place and as *tirtha* is to suggest that, in the case of Kedarnath, it is not possible to distinguish practices that center on Kedarnath as a *tirtha* from practices that construct and reflect its significance as a beautiful and economically important Himalayan place more generally in any final way. As Shankar Ling asserted, it is a place where God and place are the same thing, and where the physical environment is according to some worshipped inside the temple. Yet he himself would not equate playing cricket in a side valley, or walking to Gandhi Sarovar, with what occurs within the walls of the inner sanctum. I honor his observation and develop it through the approach I take here, nonetheless it is important to observe that while one could classify the *ghi malish*, *puja*, and the drinking of water and offering of flowers as marked forms of practice or ritualization in Kedarnath, as *rīti-rivāj*, one would not so

characterize walking to Gandhi Sarovar, taking an evening walk, wandering (*ghūmnā*), or playing cricket. One might possibly designate such activities as customs (*niyam*).

Finally, the potential valences of significant practices in Kedarnath are, as I show in this chapter, exceedingly diverse. Thus, what binds them together is not their common meaning in the form of a collectively comprehensible place but rather their location, the intersubjectively experienced fact of their location in Kedarnath around which a complexly linked set of phenomena cohere. The common referent of different types of human practices in Kedarnath is the place itself rather than a particular idea and experience of its character that is necessarily shared. What is shared is the fact of its attractive power and the complexity of that power's valence. The significant practices in place on which I focus exemplify different forms and characters of ritual attention in Kedarnath. They focus their attention in different, partially overlapping ways on what is present in the temple, the presence of activities and deities outside the main temple, and the natural environment more broadly. I begin with the most famous and distinctive practice of modern day Kedarnath: the *ghi malish*.

### **The *Ghi Malish* in the Temple at Kedarnath**

In Kedarnath anyone may touch the *linga* in the inner sanctum of the temple and massage it with *ghi* with her or his own hands. In the spring of 2005 I spoke with a middle-aged man in Jaipur who had gone to Kedarnath with his parents as a small child several decades ago. The only thing he remembered about the time in Kedarnath was that at Kedarnath they had been allowed to massage the *linga* with *ghi*. Many Kedarnath locals loudly insist that Kedarnath is the only place where this *ghi malish* (the massage

of the *linga* with clarified butter) is performed.<sup>16</sup> This is not the case, but it is nonetheless the most distinctive practice currently linked to Kedarnath and *does* stand as a unique practice for many.<sup>17</sup>

Until the beginning of the 2008 season, it was the tradition at Kedarnath that every single person or family may have a seated *puja* in the inner sanctum itself. This commitment to full accessibility is contrasted by locals with the brief, distant moment of *darshan* that most *yatris* receive in Badrinath. The *puja* itself is fairly standard and may or may not include an *abhiṣeka* of the *linga* (a series of baths with auspicious substances), depending on the level of the *puja* and the availability of materials. *Puja thalis* (metal trays that hold the materials for *puja*) typically include a sacred thread, camphor, incense, whole dried rice, oil lamps, vermilion powder, nuts (such as almonds), split chickpeas, and raisins, and more expensive *thalis* add scarves, plastic flower garlands, and coconuts.<sup>18</sup> Even the least expensive *puja* tray usually comes with *ghi* whether or not the *yatris* request it. *Puja* in the inner sanctum takes place on whichever side of the square metal frame surrounding the *linga* there is space. Regardless of whether an *abhisheka* is performed, after the *āvāhana* (*avahana*, invocation), *saṅkalpa* (*sankalpa*, vow), *puja*, *arati*, and *puṣpāñjalī* (*pushpanjali*, offering of flowers) comes the *ghi malish*. Each member of the family takes semi-solid *ghi* into their

---

<sup>16</sup> *Ghī māliś*, *ghī lep*, *ghī lepan*, *ghṛt lepan*, in order of increasingly Sanskritized Hindi, are all words that refer to the action in question. Of these, *ghī māliś* is the most common expression. I therefore use *ghi malish*.

<sup>17</sup> North Indian *yatris*, without correlation to a particular region, would occasionally tell me that touching and massaging of the *linga* were practices that occur at certain temples in their home region. Paul Muller-Ortega (personal communication, June, 2009) has witnessed a select group of devotees massaging the *linga* at Mallikarjuna, a *jyotirlinga* located in Andhra Pradesh. However, in many other north Indian settings, and in all South Indian settings of which I am aware, such an act would not be possible for the average devotee.

<sup>18</sup> Plastic flower garlands came into fashion roughly seven to ten years ago.

hands and is urged to rub, massage the *linga* vigorously with *ghi* while the *purohit* recites a mantra:

*Pāpo'ham pāpakarmāham pāpātmā pāpasambhavaḥ |*

I am [full of] *papa*, I am one whose actions [generate] *papa*, my *atma* is full of *papa*, I am one from whom *papa* arises.

*Trahī māṃ Pārvatīnātha sarvapāpaharo bhava ||*

Save me, lord of Parvati! O Shiva, you destroy all *papa*.

The meaning of the *mantra* fits the structure of the *puja*, coming as it does in the apology/supplication/ stating one's unworthiness and asking forgiveness section that often follows other *pujas* in the Kedarnath valley. This *mantra* is different from the *mantras* for the *ghi* bath used during an *abhisheka* (there are several different *mantras*), and the *ghi malish* is always done whether or not there is an *abhisheka*.

For many *yatris* such touching and massaging of the *linga* at a major Shaivite temple is a unique moment in their lives that allows them an unprecedented intimacy with a famous and powerful form of God. For others it is merely an elaboration or variation of an *abhishekha* of Shiva, something with which they are already familiar. As I discuss in Chapter Four, *yatris* may not have heard anything about the significance of the ritual or the foundation narratives of Kedarnath before doing the *ghi* massage. They may or may not correlate the massaging of the *linga* with *ghi* with the sense of wounding or asking of forgiveness. For example, a Rajasthani woman from Delhi told me that when she massaged the *linga* with *ghi* it reminded her of the act of massaging a baby's body, placing her in a maternal and decisively non-wounding, non-violent relationship to Shiva. *Yatris* may or may not have any sense of what the *mantra* says,



though most would recognize the word *pap(a)*. Other *yatris* during the high season reported that they just did as they were told, and their *purohit* offered no explanation for the *ghi malish* nor did they ask. Kedarnath *tirth purohits* almost universally assert that they do not tell explain such details unless they are asked directly. Thus, the narrative expositions of the sort discussed in Chapter Four may or may not frame the carrying out of these practices.

Older *tirth purohits* are quite insistent that the *ghi malish* is a traditionally imperative and integral part of *puja* at Kedarnath yet at the same time are nervous because they cannot offer textual proof for this imperative when they are asked for justification by, for example, *yatris* from South India, Kashmiri Brahmans, or Western researchers. Thus, it is both a marker of the importance of local tradition and at the same time a marker of the lower traditional and educational status often accorded mountain residents by visitors from other parts of India. There may also be the sense that the *ghi malish* derives from the paradigmatic actions of the Pandavas, particularly those of Bhima, actions that as I showed in Chapter Four possess diverse valence. For some, the goals of the Pandavas justify these actions. For others, there was a transgression that demands healing and apology. And, many visitors may not ever hear a narrative exposition that mentions this episode.

However, it is not clear that the *ghi malish* will continue in its current form because of the ever-increasing numbers of *yatris* present in Kedarnath during the high season. A quick perusal of the temple timings will clarify the situation. The day begins with the Kedarnath *pujari* offering food (*bhog*) to Kedarnath-Shiva at around four-fifteen in the morning. After this comes the time for “special *puja*”, for which a ticket must be

purchased from the Badri-Kedar Temple Committee. Special *pujas* will frequently be more elaborate and involve more materials and/or greater quantities, and may only be scheduled by purchasing a ticket from the Samiti. Any *puja* performed during this time must include the presence of a Brahman *ved-pathi* who is a temple committee employee, even if the patrons of the *puja* wish to use their own *tirth purohit* as well. General *darshan* and *puja* begin at six a.m. and go until three p.m. It is at this time that anyone who waits in the queue may directly touch the *linga* and sponsor a *puja* in which they will perform the *ghi malish*. Then the temple closes, the inner sanctum is cleaned up, after which come a *havan* (fire sacrifice), the offering of the second *bhog* of the day, and decoration of the *linga* for *shringar darshan* (adorned *darshan*). After the second *bhog*, only the *pujari* and his assistants may enter the inner sanctum. The doors open at five p.m. for *shringar darshan*, and then evening *puja* and *arati* commence at six p.m. and last approximately an hour. Most *yatris* pass briefly in front of the door to the hall between the *sabha maṇḍap* (public hall, antechamber) and the inner sanctum for a brief *shringar darshan* from afar. Around eight p.m. the temple closes until the next morning.

This is an ideal version of the temple timings. In the high season these timings change dramatically. Special *pujas* begin as early as eleven p.m., preceded by the (technically the next day's) morning *bhog* and go straight through until approximately six a.m. when the doors open for general *darshan* and *puja*. *Yatris* waiting for general *darshan* and *puja* can expect a two-five hour wait. Until 2008, the temple doors would not close for the afternoon until all *yatris* had been through the temple. However, this policy effectively pushed back the rest of the day's schedule two-three hours. In the third week of the 2008 season, the temple committee decided (to the best of my

knowledge for the first time) to start closing the doors at three p.m. whether or not everyone had received *darshan*. Immediately prior to my departure in 2008 the system was bursting at the seams.

There is a widespread but as yet informal consensus that changes in the system of temple *puja* and timings will have to be made that has not yet, to my knowledge, been publically articulated in a serious way. In my decidedly informal conversations over chai both in Kedarnath and with Kedarnath locals at their homes during the off-season I heard several proposals for ways in which the current system should be changed that reflect a great deal of anxiety about ways that Kedarnath may be changing more generally. I intentionally do not mention the identities or positions of those with whom I spoke about this matter. The first proposal is that the *ghi malish* and seated *puja* no longer be carried out within the inner sanctum and that each *yatri* be given the opportunity for a quick touch of the *linga* and pouring of water over the *linga*. *Pujas* would then be done in the courtyard, without the *ghi malish*. Proponents of this view claim that Shiva should be directly accessible in egalitarian fashion to all his devotees and this system will ensure that imperative. Pouring water over the *linga* is one of the most fundamental and ubiquitous acts through which Shiva is worshipped. The second proposal mentioned is that the procedure during the general *darshan* and *puja* period should remain unchanged but that the time set aside by the Temple Committee for special *puja* be abolished. Proponents of this view claim that the problem is with the system which the Temple Committee has constructed, and that the *ghi malish* must not be discarded because it is an essential part of what should be done at Kedarnath.

The third proposal charts a middle path. Stations should be created on each side of the *linga* for different sections of the *puja* that families and larger groups would pass through in the same order, with both *tirth purohits* and *ved-pathis* in charge of the elements specific to each side. Thus, something like the following:

Side 1: *avahana, sankalpa*

Side 2 sacred thread, offerings of sandalwood, rice, camphor, possibly *abhisheka*

Side 3: camphor *arati*

Side 4 *pushpanjali, ghi malish, tilak, ashirvad*

This option would also require a greater degree of coordination between the *ved-pathis* and the *tirth purohits* than currently exists both in terms of ritual performance and in terms of the collection of ritual fees and donations.

A note about purity and the important of proper performance of ritual at Kedarnath is appropriate here. There is a general sense that, because of the power of the place as an abode of Shiva and because it is Shiva's abode and not, for example, Vishnu's abode, that perfect ritual performance and maintenance of purity are not necessary. There is, for example, the oft-mentioned notion of the wind bath (*havā snān*). This phrase refers to the statement that merely being at Kedarnath and feeling the wind takes the place of bathing prior to entry into the temple. This notion also acknowledges how difficult it is for people to even be in Kedarnath at all, let alone take a bath if warm water is not available. It also underscores the degree to which the efficacious power of the deity and the natural environment interpenetrate.

When I talked with people about these possible changes to what happens inside the temple there were always undercurrents of anxiety and denial. However, it is

difficult to analytically locate this anxiety with reference to the *ghi malish* itself because of the extreme variability of the following factors. First, the level of *yatri* knowledge and engagement with this practice is widely variable. Education about the specificity of what is present at Kedarnath is absent much of the time, and much education that is given happens retroactively, after the actual visit is finished or nearing its close.

Second, the experiential valences of the massaging of the *linga* are extraordinarily diverse. These valences may include any or all of the following: the healing of an ordinary wound, an apology for one's *papa* and hope of purification, a particularly intimate engagement with an important form of Shiva, an expression of maternal affection, the quick performance of a meaningless local custom, the performance of a clearly important action about which one has not yet had the chance to ask, and the performance of an action that is a local emblem of the traditional uniqueness of the site. Third, the right to lead *yatris* through the *ghi malish*, perform their *pujas*, and collect *dakshina* is hotly contested and raises questions of local traditional authority vs. governmental authority, economic survival, and the relentless growth of infrastructure at the site.

Fourth, performance of the *ghi malish* is a local imperative that at some level implies a certain relationship with Shiva and allegiance to the paradigmatic model of the Pandavas, yet at the same time Kedarnath is a site where ritual laxity because of the extreme purificatory power of the site is a pre-existing public category through which practices done at the site are viewed. There are cross-cutting theological lenses that bear on what one should do in Kedarnath, and what the connotations of such doings might be.

Fifth, one can find locals and *yatris* on both sides of the question of whether to preserve the *ghi malish* or not. Proponents for any particular solution do not necessarily stand to gain or be harmed economically by that solution even though it might often be the case in an individual instance.

The anxiety that comes up for people in discussing these possible changes should not only be viewed as anxiety about what is done inside the temple the proper forms of interaction with Kedarnath-Shiva, but as a more generalized anxiety about what is happening with the place. There are changes on the horizon that people do not wish to face, but the reasons they may not wish to face them touch on diverse aspects of what makes Kedarnath an important and powerful place as well as their relationship to what they understand to be present in the place.

The conditions and factors implicated in massaging the *linga* with *ghi* are clearly evocative of J.Z. Smith's famous remarks on the relationship of ritual attention and place. However, as I have demonstrated, there are so many different factors and potential variations of the relationships between factors of what happens during the *ghi malish* (of actors, of understandings, of feelings, of associations, of needs, of constraints) that a singular focus on what is understood to be present inside the temple does not fully characterize the ambit, expectations, understandings, and conceptualizations of the relationships between ritual attention and place in Kedarnath. Practices in Kedarnath that contribute to experiences of place in important ways are not only directed towards the form of Shiva understood to be present in the temple. Experiences of Kedarnath, as place and as *tirtha*, are the cumulative result of what is done and sensed inside and outside the temple. The primary claim I make in

this work is that at the end of the day experiences of Kedarnath reflect an experience of the complex agency of the site that both centers on what is in the temple and spreads out over the village and the entire Kedarnath end valley. Thus, this chapter is an inquiry of *practices in place* beyond the temple as well. The *ghi malish*, while it is one of if not *the* paradigmatic moments of human activity at Kedarnath, in fundamental ways cannot be understood or theorized apart from other practices in Kedarnath that combine in experiences of the character of the site. It is with this recognition in mind that I turn the practice of *deora*, of accompanying Garhwali deities when they come to Kedarnath on *yatra*.

### ***Deora in Kedarnath***

The *yatras* of Garhwali deities, known as *deora*, and the villagers who accompany them to Kedarnath offer a counterpoint to the temple-centric *ghi malish* as a practice which engages the place in a way that ranges far beyond the temple. Examination of these processions also functions as a reminder that there are certain moments in the season where Kedarnath becomes an intensely Garhwali place. Most of the time Kedarnath feels like a supra-regional (to use Bhardwaj's classification) North Indian *tirtha* located in the Himalayas. The *lingua franca* of Kedarnath is Hindi, with many *tirth purohits* also speaking a bit of the different languages or dialects of their specific *yajman* communities (Gujarati, Punjabi, Sindhi, Bhojpuri, Marathi, Marwari, etc.). Hindi devotional songs and Sanskrit verses play over the temple loudspeakers, occasionally interspersed with the words in Hindi of famous *kathavacakas* (reciters and expounders of Puranas and the *Ramayana*). Video discs of the *Shiva Purana*, the *Char Dham Yatra*, *Panch Kedar*, and the twelve *jyotirlinga* play when there is electricity, and most of the

pamphlets and literature are written in Hindi, though one also finds Gujarati, Bengali, Tamil, Telugu, and Nepali. In the main, Kedarnath is a Hindi place as opposed to a Garhwali place, a classification that I would often try out in conversation with locals in Kedarnath that usually received cautious, thoughtful agreement.

However, occasionally Kedarnath becomes a Garhwali place, when there occur what I term “pulses of Garhwali regionality.” I mentioned many of these times and activities in the introduction: Bhatuj (Annakut), Bhairavnath *puja*, Diwali, the concert given by Narendra Singh Negi. And, Kedarnath becomes an intensely Garhwali place when Garhwali deities come to Kedarnath on *deora*. Garhwali deities go on *deora* to Kedarnath (and other places) for combinations of several interrelated reasons. One common explanation I heard many times was that Garhwali deities come to Kedarnath “recharge *karne ke liye*” (“to recharge”), that is to say that Kedarnath is a charging station for smaller local deities whose “charge” periodically runs out. Another reason, usually much less discussed for obvious reasons, is for *doś nivāran* (the expiation of a collective problem with supernatural aspects in a particular village or set of villages) that the deity has often itself recommended through its oracles. A third reason is simply that the deity wished to go on *deora*, or that particular members of a village or the entire village wanted to go on *yatra* and to take the *devta* with them on the journey. Other possible reasons include the habits of a particular deity to go on *deora* once every set number of years (once a year, once every other year, once every year on which the *ardh Kumbha Mela* falls, etc...).

During my time at Kedarnath there were *deoras* of Garhwali deities who come every year, of deities who were coming for the first time in 45 years, and deities who



had never previously made the trip. My attempts to elicit full explanations led me to conclude that the complex of reasons that go into a specific *deora* are, in my opinion, beyond the reach of any observer not working with the village where the *deora* originated. The magisterial work of William Sax on how deity processions in Garhwal, especially the famous procession of Nanda Devi, index issues of gender, marriage, social cooperation, contestation, territory, and tradition provides an excellent window in to the world of what such a procession might look like from the inside, though the Nanda Devi procession is far grander and well known than are most *deoras* of Garhwali deities.<sup>19</sup>

When deities to come to Kedarnath, they behave in many respects like human devotees. For example, when the *devta* enters the temple it does so technically as the *yajman* of the *tirth purohit* for the village.<sup>20</sup> I have discussed this point at length with several *tirth purohits* and they unanimously agree that the *devta* becomes the *yajman* during its visit to Kedarnath. A designated human representative (*pratiniddhi*), often the person whom the deity regularly possesses if a specific person exists, performs the *ghimlish* and other actions on behalf of the *devta*. With this general framing in mind I will now describe the *deora* of Nala Devi (Lalita Mai) to Kedarnath at the end of August 2007. This description is a composite of my field notes, the far more extensive and detailed field notes of Bhupendra Pushpavan, my own photos and video, and my own observations and memories. I intentionally digress at many points in the description to provide a taste of the kinds of associations and connotations that might have been

---

<sup>19</sup> I am indebted to Vijay Negi of Mussoorie for the idea that in Garhwal processions function almost as encyclopedias of Garhwali culture.

<sup>20</sup> Almost all Kedarnath *tirth purohits* are responsible for a particular area inside of Garhwal in addition to their other *yajman* groups.

evoked for local Garhwalis visiting Kedarnath on *deora* and for Kedarnath locals who became, collectively, hosts for a visiting Garhwali *devta*.

***Nala Devi and Rampur Devi (August 29-30, 2007)***

As with many *deoras*, we could see the Nala Devi procession and hear the sound of her accompanying *dhol* and *damav* drums before she actually came over the bridge.<sup>21</sup> Nala Devi came through the horse and pony area and over the bridge marking entry into Kedarnath proper a bit before five in the afternoon on the twenty ninth of August. She travels as many Garhwali deities travel: as a collection of *murtis* inside a frame or palanquin-like container (known in Garhwal as a *doli*) that is suspended between two poles resting on the shoulders of two or four barefooted men. The *murtis* and their container are swathed in numerous layers of textile wraps, adornments, garlands, and dozens of scarves. It may happen that a particular *murti*, usually in the characteristically Garhwali form of a metal mask, will be affixed on the outside of the *doli*. Thus the actual *murtis* may or not be visible during the procession; the animating presence of the deity is clearly present but often cannot be seen directly.

---

<sup>21</sup> Nala Devi is also called Lalita Mai. Sanskritists who began the Lanman reader with the story of Nala and Damayanti will be fascinated to note that the village of Nala connects itself to this story.



Figure 6. 1. Nala Devi, travelling in her *doli* (palanquin), heads towards the Svargdhari river behind Kedarnath.

This *deora* of Nala Devi followed almost on the heels of Bhatuj, the occasion in the month of Bhadon when the *linga* is covered in bricks of boiled rice by representatives of the *tirth purohit* association. Much of the resident population of Kedarnath had turned out to welcome her as she crossed the bridge. Officials of the Kedar Tirth Purohit Association and members of the Badri Kedar Temple Committee welcomed her with garlands and with the chanting of *svasthi vacana mantras*. As with many Garhwali deities on the move, her *doli* was mobile in three dimensions, bending and shaking and bowing. Bhupendra calls this mobility *jhuknā* (bowing, bending of the

head). To me it seems to oscillate between bowing proper and a kind of swaying motion that indicates the active presence of the deity in the *doli*. The movement of those who have the *doli* on the shoulders is frequently, when the deity is in such an active mode, jerky and somewhat unstable as if she is pulling them, or forcing them to go in a particular direction. Nala Devi proceeded with this kind of motion down the steps to the small *ghāt* (stepped bathing area) on the bank of the Mandakini river; here she continued to bow to the river until four or five people began to bathe her by dipping vessels in the water and pouring them over the *doli*. It seemed that her motion indicated that she wished to bathe.



Figure 6.2. Nala Devi bowing to the Mandakini river with Kedarnath *tirth purohits* and other locals in attendance after having crossed the bridge and passed through the horse area (visible on the other side of the river).

She then came up through the main bazaar, thronged on all sides with people. By the Kali Kamli Dharamshala, local Garhwali women were throwing flowers and rice,

as they do on many auspicious occasions when a *devta* is present, and some were tying on scarves/turbans (*pagrī*) on to the *doli*.<sup>22</sup> People were shouting Jai Kedarnath, Jay Ganga, Jay Lalita Mai. She turned into the lane for the Udak Kund, the enclosed water tank whose water *yatris* are often told is especially efficacious for the destroying of *papa* and made *pranam* at the small adjoining Navadurga (nine Durgas) temple. The Navadurga temple is usually only a devotional focus during specific, Devi-related times. Navaratri is the only time during the season when I saw the Navadurga temple as a site of marked collective local attention. Thus here Nala Devi was herself acting presumably as a *yatri* would who is particularly devoted to the Goddess. Permanent Kedarnath forms of Devi do not, with the exception of Navaratri and the occasional devotional attentions of someone who is a particularly ardent devotee of the Goddess, attract a significant amount of ritual attention in Kedarnath. Devi is much more prominently present in her form of Gauri-Parvati, in Gaurikund, at the trailhead for the ascent to Kedarnath. However, numerous Garhwali *devis* visit Kedarnath on *deora*.

Nala Devi then went back to the main road of the bazaar and proceeded into the courtyard of the temple. One *acharya* was going with the *doli*, saying *mantras*, and applying sandalwood *tilak*. Lalita Mai (Bhupendra uses this name for her at this point in his notes and not Nala Devi) came onto one man, whom Bhupendra found out was her *naur*, her designated vehicle. The man made motions, and was given water.

---

<sup>22</sup> Kali Kamli is one of the oldest *dharamshalas* in Kedarnath, and part of a charitable trust whose *dharamshalas* were once the standard for carrying out the Char Dham. Starting in Rishikesh, one finds Kali Kamli *dharamshalas* at almost every staging point, or *chatti*, along the Char Dham path. For example, there are Kalikamli *dharamshalas* in Kedarnath, Guptkashi, Ukhimath, and Rudraprayag.

### *The Theatre of the Devta's Arrival*

There is a theatrical aspect to the arrival of Garhwali *dolis* in Kedarnath, and specifically into the temple courtyard, that should not be underestimated. The importance of what is present in the temple is briefly decentered when a different deity is publicly present in the site. Villagers travel with their deities and enter Kedarnath in groups of anywhere from thirty to three hundred, accompanied by drumming. Several *deora-yatris* are often possessed. The potential for possession increases as the *doli* nears the temple, and reaches its height in the courtyard of the temple. The *devta* becomes more active, the drumming quickens. Often the *deora yatris* begin to dance one of the circular dances that are often claimed as hallmark of Garhwali culture, and frequently several people (women and men) become possessed at this time. The arrival of *devtas* into the courtyard with their *dolis* and insignia (*nyauj-aur-nisān*), their drummers and their villagers, is a dramatic moment of high spectacle.

Once, for example, a *deora yatri* village woman denied entry to the temple in the late afternoon by a committee official because it was not yet time for *shringar darshan* become possessed and then peremptorily forced her way past the committee official who, himself a Garhwali, found himself no longer in a position of authority. Such moments are radical juxtapositions of several sorts: the active presence of Devi in the place of Shiva's hyper-presence, and the mobile presence of a deity in a person in a place that enshrines a self-manifest, immobile form of Shiva.

In such moments the *devta* and those with the *devta* claim the courtyard and the village as their own and announce their presence and that of the deity. I was able to observe such moments in 2007 perhaps a dozen times. When a deity enters the

courtyard, hundreds of locals stop their Kedarnath-related business and gather to watch the *devta* and the *deora yatris* – the courtyard transforms from a place of interaction between locals and *yatris* from the plains to a variation of the Garhwali *mela* where the village gathers to watch the *devta* dancing/being danced (*devta nācna*, *devta nācāna*). As when such possession happens in more typical village and town settings, everyone present becomes particularly focused and serious, extremely engaged with what is happening and what is becoming present.

*Yatris* from the plains are frequently unable to interpret what is happening at such a time. Some assume that it is in fact Kedarnath-Shiva who has come into the courtyard. Others do not register immediately that it is a *devta*. Still others recognize it is as a *devta*, take *darshan* and pay respect, without necessarily understanding how exactly this particular *devta* has come to be where it is. A minority of *yatris* ask a local to explain to them what is going on. *Yatris* from Himachal Pradesh, the mountainous western neighbour of Uttarakhand, and *yatris* from Kumaon (the region comprising the eastern part of Uttarakhand) do immediately recognize what is happening, since similar rituals occur in these neighboring regions. It is a brief time, usually less than half an hour, when the attention of Kedarnath locals shifts away from the business of engaging *yatris* (with the exception of the *tirth purohit* whose *yajmans* the *deora-yatris* they are). Such scenes well exemplify the observations by anthropologists such as Gananath Obeyesekere regarding the heightened agency often afforded by possession.<sup>23</sup> The live presence of the *devta* in a person definitely works to, among other things, claim the space and create new possibilities.

---

<sup>23</sup> Gananath Obeyesekere, *Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

### ***Nala Devi Arrives at the Temple***

Thus, with devotional focus, attendant spectacle and fanfare, Nala Devi entered the courtyard, performed one *parikrama* (circumambulation) of the temple, and after bowing to the Ganesha who guards the door of the Kedarnath temple she was taken off the shoulders of her bearers and placed in front of the still-closed door of the temple, where she received a small *puja*.

When the temple opened for *shringar darshan*, Nala Devi was picked up and entered into the inner sanctum. Bhupendra and I tried to follow but were unable – we could not even manage to enter by the side door because the press of locals was so great. However, we were able to come up with a fairly accurate description of what happened by piecing together information from those who were inside and what happened a day later when one of the other local *devtas*, Rampur Devi, arrived in the temple. Thus, at the time of *shringar darshan* Nala Devi was lifted from her *doli* and placed onto a niche in the back wall of the inner sanctum immediately behind the *linga*. This niche is reserved for three local Devis when they visit Kedarnath: Nala Devi, Rampur Devi, and Phegu Devi (Phegu-Devi is the village Devi of Lamgaundi, the central village/region of the *tirth purohit* community). When other Garhwali *devtas* come on *deora* to Kedarnath they are not placed in the niche and do not spend the night in the temple. Nala Devi, as one of the three, after being placed in the niche would remain there until the next morning when it was time for *puja*.

That evening I went to the *dharamshala* where many of the Nala Devi *deora yatris* were being hosted. There were enough *yatris* to require that they be spread out between different *dharamshalas*. Such an arrangement is, incidentally, a demanding



situation for the *tirth purohit*. Traditionally speaking the role of the *tirth purohit* in Kedarnath involves, in addition to carrying out all the ritual needs of their *yajman*, finding them lodgings and arranging meals. They are hosts. However, unlike a lodge owner (there are in Kedarnath both *dharamshalas* and lodges) who may discuss the charges for services rendered up front, the *tirth purohit* cannot. He provides hospitality and performs *puja* and then cannot insist on the amount of the fee (*dakshina*) he will receive. Thus, part of being a *tirth purohit* in Kedarnath is arranging expensive services (food for an entire village, for example) without necessarily knowing what he will receive in return. The situation invokes both traditional values of hospitality and *seva* and at the same time is shot through with uncertainty and anxiety because the patrons will not necessarily reciprocate with payment in the appropriate manner when the time comes. When a *tirth purohit's* Garhwali patrons come, however, I have noticed that they are usually much less worried about payment and view their hospitality actions more through the lens of Garhwali inter-village relations. It is customary for Garhwali villages to welcome *deora* groups with food and lodging as they journey on processions and *yatras*, and to expect such hospitality when they themselves are on *deora*.

At one of *dharamshalas* where the Nala group was being lodged, Bhupendra and I spoke with an elderly man from Nala and one of the older Kedarnath *tirth purohitis* in whose *dharamshala's* canteen we were seated. According to them this was the third time that Nala Devi had come to Kedarnath. The first time had been at least four decades before, and Nala Devi had come not in a *doli* but in a basket carried on someone's back.<sup>24</sup> There were differing reports about the second time – it seems to

---

<sup>24</sup>The Kedarnath *deora* procession also did not involve a *doli* prior to the 1950s.

have been approximately twenty or thirty years ago. The man also reported that Nala Devi had come via Triyugi Narayan, a reminder of the importance of the site for Kedar valley locals. The Nala man spoke about the phenomenon of why Nala Devi comes to Kedarnath on *deora*. He explained that she comes in order to obtain *shakti* (power). He went on to link her reasons for coming to his own, saying that there was certainly *shakti* in Kedarnath and that if there was not, then how would he, such an elderly man, have had the power to come to Kedarnath as he did? He had previously gone with Nala Devi to Kedarnath, Madmaheshvar, Devprayag (an important southern Garhwali site at the juncture of the Ganga and Alakananda rivers), Barahath (in the Uttarkashi district of Garhwal), and Uttarkashi itself.

***Nala Devi Deora, the 29<sup>th</sup> of August, Bhairavnath***

Early in the morning on the twenty-ninth the *deora yatris* went to the temple and having done *parikrama* entered it; to the sound of the *dhol* and *damav* they brought Nala Devi out into the courtyard. About the time when Nala Devi came near to the Nandi who stands immediately in front of the main temple door, she came onto a local man who was not her designated *naur* – Bhupendra reports that someone applied sandalwood-*tilak* to the man who had become possessed and he calmed down (“*śānt ho gayā*”). He also put in his notes that the *doli* of Nala Devi was roaming around the courtyard, back and forth, and to him it seemed that she was torn between her desire to stay at the temple and her desire to bathe. Bhukund Bhairavnath briefly came onto his *naur* as well, a Kedarnath *tirth purohit* from the village of Rudrapur in the Kedar valley. This appearance, while brief, meant that Nala Devi was being welcomed and invited to make herself at home by the guardian of the valley. A day later when Rampur

Devi came out of the temple in the morning and was about to head out of the village, Bhairavnath also became present. At that point Bhairavnath said to Rampur Devi, through his *naur*, “You people have permission to move around, this is my command and salutation to you.”<sup>25</sup>



Figure 6.3. The shrine of Bhukund Bhairavnath as it looks down on Kedarnath.

---

<sup>25</sup> “*Āp log cal sakte haiṅ, ye hamāra ādeś hai.*” – reported by Bhupendra Singh Pushpavan.



Figure 6.4. Close up of several *murtis* of Bhairavnath at the shrine.

William Sax has observed, in the context of a study on the cult of Bhairavnath among Garhwali Harijans, that Bhairavnath is a primary focus of local devotion and a far more active presence in the daily lives of most Garhwalis than Shiva. His identity in Garhwal centers on his ability to provide protection and justice.<sup>26</sup> More generally, his character as the lord of spirits residing at the edge of demarcated times and spaces and guarding the transitions between them is much the same as his far better documented character in Nepal.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, I was once advised by a Kedarnath *tirth purohit* that I would do better to take Bhairavnath or Hanuman as my personal deity (*iṣṭa devta*) than Shiva. Surprised, I asked why. The reply came that Shiva and his reasons for helping or not

<sup>26</sup> Sax, *God of Justice*, 25-50.

<sup>27</sup> David Gordon White, "At the *Maṇḍala's* Dark Fringe: Possession and Protection in Tantric Bhairava Cults," in *Notes from a Mandala: essays in the history of indian religions in honor of Wendy Doniger*, [Rev. ed.]. (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2009), 208.

were ultimately mysterious; while all-powerful he was in many ways both unaware of the world and also fundamentally *bhola*, naive and like a child. Bhairavnath and Hanuman, on the other hand, are accessible and active deities who come when you call and will immediately get to work on your behalf. On another occasion, I was discussing Bhairavnath's relationship to Shiva with two local employees of the local hydro-power plant that powers the government facilities at Kedarnath. I had been feeling confused as to whether, in the contexts of Kedarnath and the Kedarnath valley, Bhairavnath was actually another form of Shiva, or whether it made more sense to regard him as a lieutenant of sorts. The analogy we reached in the conversation that was satisfactory to all parties was that Shiva was the actual electric generator powered by the flowing water – full of vast amounts of power. Bhairavnath was the electric heater warming us as we spoke, a heater powered by that electric generator. The heater is an obviously smaller conduit for electricity, yet there is no direct way of accessing the electricity present in the generator without plugging in a smaller, external device.

Bhukund Bhairavnath is colloquially known as the *kul-devta* (lineage deity) of the Kedarnath Tirth Purohit Association. The Kedarnath *tirth purohits* worship him with a *havan* and *puja* several times each season, and these occasions are one of the most visible moments of the season when the *tirth purohits* are in charge of the proceedings and the temple committee is relegated to an extremely secondary role. Indeed, one of the *havans* of 2007 serendipitously followed close on the heels of the day on which the Kedarnath Tirth Purohit Association received word that, in their ongoing legal battle with the Badri Kedar Temple Committee, they had won an appeal at the Uttarakhand High Court in Nainital regarding their rights to collect *dakshina* (in this context, ritual

fees) in and around the temple. The *havan* was already scheduled, but the celebratory and victorious tone of the *puja* was at least in part explicitly related to the legal victory.

At the beginning of the season, *shringar arati* of the Kedarnath *linga* cannot begin until Bhukund Bhairavnath has been worshipped on one of his appropriate days, which in 2008 delayed the beginning of *shringar arati* by several days. In the month of *Shravan*, locals from as far as Gaurikund make the trek to Kedarnath to worship Bhairav. In addition to entering the Kedarnath temple (where most of them do not carry out the *ghi malish*), they make a point of bringing *rot* (very thick flat bread cooked with jaggery sugar and water) and oil for offering at his shrine up the eastern side of the valley. Some come every day or every Monday for a month to his shrine. His shrine is open to the elements – every time the association has asked him through his *naur* whether he would like them to build him a temple he refuses. I have also noticed, reinforcing Bhairavnath's character in Kedarnath as a protector, that several of the important police officers in Kedarnath would make a point of doing *pranam* to Bhairavnath while standing in the temple courtyard during *shringar arti* at time when the *pujari* would offer the *arati* flame in Bhairavnath's direction from the temple steps.

### ***Nala Devi Visits Mahant Chandragiri***

It is at this point that Nala Devi began to engage Kedarnath beyond her approach to the temple and her residence in the inner sanctum for the night. Her itinerary for the day in many ways constituted a map of people, locations, and practices outside of the temple that are significant to Kedarnath. Having received permission from Bhairavnath to move about the area, from the courtyard Nala Devi headed out of Kedarnath to the north with the *deora yattris* to bathe in Svargdhari, one of the

tributaries that form the base of the Mandakini river (itself a tributary of the Ganga). The government has created a massive barrier wall that begins just behind the northwestern edge of Kedarnath village and runs diagonally northeast behind Kedarnath so that the Svargdhari does not overrun its banks and flood the village (something that used to happen occasionally during the monsoon season). Her bath in the Svargdhari (recalling that there is bathing *ghat* at the entry to Kedarnath village in which she had already bathed) can be read as an acknowledgment of the numerous sites of power (many of them rivers) described in the *Kedarakhanda* that lie just to the north of Kedarnath village.

On the way to bathe, however, Nala Devi stopped briefly at the free food kitchen (*langar*) of Mahant Chandra Giri, a renouncer (formerly a businessman) and member of the Juna Akhara who has been a fixture in Kedarnath for decades. He runs one of the two places in Kedarnath where renunciants can obtain free food (the other being the Kali Kamli *dharamshala*), and provides shelter for *yatris* unable to find accommodations. His primary practice, to which he is intensely devoted, is to feed everyone who visits *prasada*, something I only learned in the breach after I once refused to be fed at the *langar* and was scolded. Mahant Chandragiri is a fixture at the evening *arati* but would rarely make an appearance in the temple during the day, preferring not to stay away from the preparation of the day's *prasad* at the *langar* for too long.

Nala Devi also stopped briefly and bowed at the recently built hall of Adishankaracarya before continuing to Svargdhari. Upon arrival at the banks of Svargdhari Nala Devi dipped her umbrella/canopy (*chatr*) in the water. Her *doli* was



then seated on the banks and all of the scarves and insignia were taken off, put down, and immersed separately in the river, a procedure which took about an hour.

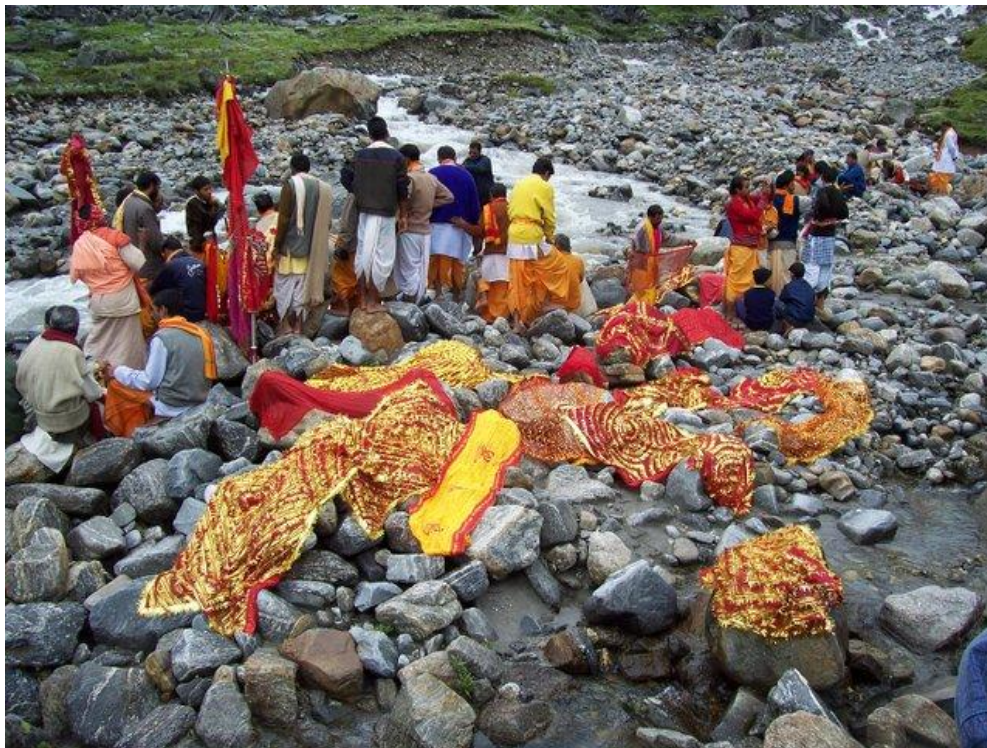


Figure 6.5. Bathing Nala Devi on the banks of the Svargdhari.

The bathing concluded with a small *puja*. Ganga (Svargdhari) water was sprinkled over Nala Devi, and the *dhol* and *dhamav* players also sprinkled Ganga water over their instruments. With cries of Jay Ganga, Jay Lalita Maya, Jai Kedarnath the *doli* was picked up again and, after some discussion of whether to go first to Bhairavnath, Nala Devi returned to Kedarnath. She returned by a different path, entering into Kedarnath from the northeast, and went to the Badri Kedar Temple committee compound and stopped by the *bhog mandir* is located (where the food offered in the temple is prepared). The *ved pathis* all came out and prostrated in front of her, and she bowed to them. People then started asked for the *bhandari*, the committee officer in



charge of the rations, supplies, and preparation of the offerings for the temple. This is one of the temple committee posts at Kedarnath that, according to the chairman of the Kedarnath Tirth Purohit Association, legally must be filled by a member of the Kedarnath Tirth Purohit association.<sup>28</sup> The *Bhandari* officer came and Nala Devi thanked him for providing supplies for her and her *deora yatris*; the group was the guest of the temple committee while in Kedarnath. *Yatris* will sometimes come to this area to have an audience with the *pujari*. Otherwise, this is primarily a local area.

### ***Nala Devi Performs Puja in the Temple***

Nala Devi then re-entered the temple for *puja*. Other *yatris* who were in the temple at that time were hastened out as quickly as possible. The *doli* was put down opposite the *linga* and important local purohits and the important members of the *deora yatri* group sat on either side. Bhupendra wrote that the *tirth purohits* were carrying out the *puja* on behalf of Nala Devi (“*ḍolī kī aur se pūjā karvā rahe the.*”) He also observed that materials for the *puja* were provided by the temple committee. It turned out that this *puja*, unlike most of the *pujas* done in the Kedarnath temple, was basically a collective *puja* that stood in for individual family *pujas* done by members of the *deora yatri* group. Thus, each family present was instructed to say its name and zodiac sign (*rāśī*) near the beginning of the *puja* so that they would be included in it. Those wearing a sacred thread took it off to make their vow of ritual obligation (*sankalpa*) and then put it back on. Nala Devi’s weapons and insignia were also placed on the *linga* during the *puja*, presumably also for recharging.<sup>29</sup> The inner sanctum was by this time empty of any

---

<sup>28</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>29</sup> Weapons and other insignia of deities are often in Garhwal regarded as powerfully charged objects. In the context of the Pandav Nrtya, each character has a specially designated weapon with which they

other *yatris*, though one *tirth purohit* was quietly reciting the *Rudri* (the *Rudrāṣṭādhyāya*, a section of the white *Yājur Veda*) in the corner.

Several verses were recited from the *Durga Saptaśatī* (*The 700 verses to Durga*) and the *puja* proceeded through a fairly normal sequence: Ganesh *puja*, praising of Ganesh, concentration (*dhyān*) on Brahma, Vishnu, Mahesh, Shankar (Shiva), and Kedareshvar (Shiva-in/as-Kedarnath) in turn, along with relevant verses. The *tirth purohit* poured water on to the *linga*, on behalf of Nala Devi, and offered whole rice, applied *tilak*, offered the sacred thread, recited verses in praise of Shiva from texts such as the *Śivamahimnastotra* (*Praise of the Greatness of Shiva*), and performed camphor *arati* for Shiva. That the *tirth purohit* did these actions was somewhat irregular – usually when *devtas* visit either their *naur* or designated representative performs the actions on behalf of the *devta*. However, the *tirth purohit* who did these actions was also from Nala village, which may explain his participation. The *deora yatris* were told collectively at various points during the *puja* to bow their head to the *linga*. After the *arati* the *tirth purohit* did the *ghi malish* on behalf of Nala Devi. A day later with Rampur Devi these actions were done by her *naur*. Everyone, *deora yatris* and Nala Devi alike, did a *parikrama* of the *linga* before leaving the inner sanctum, stopping on the way out to worship Parvati and Virbhadra. Upon emergence from the temple Nala Devi then did a *parikrama* of the temple from the outside and headed up the side of the valley for Bhairavnath *puja*.

---

dance that is regarded as full of *shakti*. Sometimes possession begins when someone grasps the weapon or object. It therefore stands to reason that such objects could also be “recharged”. See William S. Sax, *Dancing the Self: Personhood and Performance in the Pāṇḍav Līlā of Garhwal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 84, 97-100.

### ***Nala Devi Heads Towards Bhairavnath***

At this point activity bifurcated. A group of ten to twelve *purohits* remained by the Havan Kund, a covered raised platform on the eastern side of the temple that is both the standard location for large fire sacrifices (*havans*) in Kedarnath and the base of operation in the temple courtyard for renunciants. They began a *havan* sponsored by *tirth purohits* from Rudrapur (the Kedar valley village that is the natal village of Bhukund Bhairav's *naur*). Nala Devi went up to Bhairavnath, where a brief *puja* was performed that we did not have the chance to observe closely. Many *yatris* make the small trek (approximately fifteen to twenty minutes in each direction) to Bhairavnath if they have the time and energy to spare. Yet few *yatris*, except for the nature oriented trekkers who possess both inclination and have planned to include time for a longer stay, then proceed to wander about on the high plateau immediately behind the Bhairavnath shrine. Here Nala Devi began again to display a marked desire to move about the broader area of the Kedarnath end-valley.

Nala Devi's actions here illustrate the ways in which significant practices (of both deities and humans) in Kedarnath do not limit themselves to focused interactions with sites of religious power. From Bhairavnath Nala Devi began to wander (*ghūmnā*, to travel without fixed purpose). This wandering distinguishes the three local, Kedar valley Devis who come to Kedarnath from the other Garhwali *devtas*. Nala Devi, Phegu Devi, and Rampur Devi all are known to potentially wander over much of the length and breadth of the Kedarnath end-valley. This practice of wandering is one of the "practices in place" I discuss a bit further in the chapter. It is the word used by locals when they describe a jaunt by foot they have taken that was not for a specific purpose

other than to enjoy a walk; in this sense Nala Devi was acting like a Kedarnath valley local in Kedarnath, which she was. She first headed south on the Bhairavnath plateau half way down the eastern side of the valley, down to a large and visible rock known by some as “old Kedar”.<sup>30</sup>

I, shivering and sick in my blankets a day later as a result of trying to keep up with Nala Devi, learned from Bhupendra a day later that when Rampur Devi and her *deora yatris* finished with Bhairavnath *puja*, they then all proceeded to dance with each other and with Rampur Devi for almost an hour.<sup>31</sup> While much of the activity of processing a *devta* on a *doli*, or celebrating the presence of a *devta* during a *mela*, is referred to as both seeing the *devta* dance (*nācnā*) and causing the *devta* to dance (*nācāna*), this to me sounded like something else – that the villagers from Rampur were actually dancing *with* their Devi. It sounded extraordinary, and I was jealous that I was too weak to have gone myself.

From *Buḍha Kedār* Nala Devi came down the hill near the helipad, the site (which I discuss in greater detail in the part of this chapter on walking) that has come to represent the face of *vikās*, (“economic and technological development”), the face of all that is changing about Kedarnath, the region and the world.<sup>32</sup> By this point a cold rain

---

<sup>30</sup> *Buḍha Kedār*. There is also a *Buḍha Madmaheśvar* located on a hill above the valley in which the current Madmaheshvar temple is found. There, however, there is actually a very small and simple shrine with a *linga* inside. Additionally, there are other “Kedars” not part of the five Kedar series: *Basukedār* (located south of Lamgondi, arguably the beginning point of the Kedarnath valley pilgrim trail of centuries past) and another *Buḍha Kedār*, which I have not seen, reputedly on the path that departs Triyugi Narayan and crosses the mountains that divide the Kedar valley from the Uttarkashi district. I do not yet have a hypothesis for the names of these places but plan to visit *Buḍha Kedār* eventually.

<sup>31</sup> Rampur Devi, it will be remembered, is another one of the three local Devis with special privileges in Kedarnath who in 2007 arrived in Kedarnath on *deora* one day after Nala Devi and pursued an almost identical agenda while in the place.

<sup>32</sup> It is also site of the tragic helicopter accident that resulted in the death of a local youth, an event that became the focus point for an immense groundswell of resentment both about the Kedarnath helicopter

had begun to fall. As Nala Devi started to turn north, the *deora yatris* began trying to convince Nala Devi to stop wandering and head back to the bazaar. Bhupendra and I remembered their conversation as something like the following: “Speak, what should be done, if you need to keep wandering then say so, but in this rain we cannot help you wander any more. Also now it is necessary to go into the bazaar, everyone has invited you. We would like to take you to at least half the places in the bazaar today—the rest is up to you (*bākī terī marzī*).” This serves as an important reminder of the challenging conditions one finds at Kedarnath. At almost twelve thousand feet, walking wet and barefoot around the end valley in a cold rain with the temperature only a few degrees above freezing was difficult enough that the *deora-yatris* were willing to challenge their deity. Given that the satisfaction and beneficence of the deity is a large part of why villages bring their deities to Kedarnath, this is a telling indicator of the physical state of the *deora-yatris* at this point.

Nala Devi began to head back to the bazaar. On the way she stopped at Retas Kund, and like thousands of other *yatris* have done, a sound was made (in this case a conch was blown) and bubbles came up through the water in the pool as everyone watched. She continued on through the center of Kedarnath and went to the hall of Adi Shankaracarya on the eastern side of the village in response to the invitation of an important renunciant from Varanasi who bore the title Mahamandaleshvar, a title that indicates both his particular level in a monastic hierarchy (reputedly that of the Juna Akhara, though I did not manage to confirm this) and signifies that he is the head of his

---

service, the role of the Badri-Kedar Temple Committee, and the ways in which the political economy of the region is changing.

own monastery (*maṭha*) in Varanasi. That is to say, she proceeded to the site associated with the *samadhi* of Shankara, traditionally understood to be a founder of one of the most important renunciant monastic orders, the *dashanamis*.

Following the example of renunciant practice in Kedarnath symbolized by Shankara's place of *samadhi*, the Mahamandaleshvar was carrying out a two month *anusthan* (extended period of devotion and meditation) in Kedarnath as part of his program to carry out a series of *anusthans* in each of the twelve *jyotirlingas*. He was himself a Garhwali who had been living in Varanasi for almost thirty years, having originally gone as university student to study Sanskrit grammar. The Kedarnath *anusthan* was in many ways for him a return home. The hall of Shankaracarya is a recent structure that houses inside of it the "original" Shankaracarya Samadhi Sthal (the place of Shankara's passage into liberation) and *murti* as well as a new, gigantic *linga* made of crystal.

For most of August and September, the hall of Shankaracarya was the site for the public daily *puja* and *atirudra yajna* (an especially elaborate form of the Rudri/Rudrashtadhyayi fire sacrifice that lasted for the entirety of the two months of the *anushtan*) of the Mahamandaleshvar.<sup>33</sup> The Mahamandaleshvar had hundreds, if not thousands, of followers visit him during his two months in Kedarnath, especially in the last week, culminating in a celebration of the last moment of the *yajna* (*pūrṇāhuti*, "last

---

<sup>33</sup> Given Shankara's importance, both to the history of Kedarnath and more generally in the subcontinent, it is surprising that his *samadhi* place is not more of a consistent ritual attention by the majority of *yatis*. It may receive more attention from particular groups and individuals for whom Shankara is especially significant. My hunch (that is to say, a topic for further inquiry), based on events in 2007, is that the new hall surrounding the *samadhi* place functions as the primary indoor location for large non-temple based rituals and gatherings sponsored by private individuals. Such events might or might not be directed towards Shankara specifically. The other such space is, of course, the Samiti's auditorium.

offering”) in which all present make the final offering into the fire together, a celebration that involved conservatively several hundred people. Most of his activity took place in the hall of Shankaracarya and his own quarters, and he ventured only rarely to the temple. It was explicitly clear in discussion with many of his followers that his presence was the primary motivating factor for their journey—most of his followers organized trips to the temple around the timings of the Mahamandaleshvar’s *puja* and the *atirudra yajna*.

The Mahamandaleshvar and the Brahmins he employed for his *yajna* (comprised of both local *tirth purohits* and Garhwali Brahmins from other parts of Garhwal) worshipped Nala Devi with verses from the *Durgasapashati* and the *svasthi vacana* mantras. Then all the *deora yatris* were given chai and snacks. Nala Devi then left the hall of Shankaracarya and went to the bazaar. In the bazaar, Nala Devi stopped at almost each shop, where she was garlanded with flowers and scarves, sometimes worshipped with a small *puja*, and given small gifts of money and rations, and then asked for *ashirvad*. Several older local women who were visiting Kedarnath for several weeks (wives, aunts, and grandmothers of Kedarnath *tirth purohits*) garlanded her. At this point in her visit her activity was no longer that of a *yatri* in Kedarnath. In the bazaar she was a Garhwali deity on *deora* in a bazaar filled with people from her own area, people to each of whom she owed *darshan* and *ashirvad* and who were bound by the especially high level of reciprocal obligations of offering implied by her status as a local Devi of the Kedarnath valley.



Figure 6.6. The *doli* of Nala Devi bowing as she is worshipped in the Kedarnath bazaar.

At this point the *deora yatris* again requested/told Nala Devi to go straight back to her (resting) place because, “We cannot help you to wander any more in this rain.”<sup>34</sup> She then returned to the *dharamshala* where she was based and remained there at rest until eight in the evening, when she received *arati*. While she was resting, at about five thirty, Rampur Devi (the second local Devi of the season) arrived and was greeted in much the same fashion. When Rampur Devi came through the bazaar she in fact stopped at the turning that would have taken her to the *dharamshala* where Nala Devi was resting. It seemed for a moment that she wished to go visit Nala Devi (they are often understood to be sisters); for a moment the crowd did not know what she was going to do. However, after a moment Rampur Devi turned the other way and headed to Udak Kund before herself proceeding to the temple courtyard. Her arrival in the

<sup>34</sup> Bhupendra remembered their words in this way: *Ab siddhe āpne sthān par calo, ese bāris meṅ ham tujhe aur nahīṅ gumā sakte haiṅ.* “



courtyard and the temple and entrance into the temple for the night followed much the same pattern as that of Nala Devi the day before. The next morning, while Rampur Devi had gone north to bathe in the *Svargdhari* river, Nala Devi and her *deora yatris* got ready for departure. Some of the *yatris* were having their family details recorded in the *bahi* (the records *tirth purohits* keep of the visits of their patrons) by the *tirth purohit*. Nala Devi went and performed *parikrama* of the temple before visiting more shops and several lodges on her way out of Kedarnath.

The visit of Nala Devi (and Rampur Devi) to Kedarnath marked one of the moments when Kedarnath became a “Garhwali place”, a place where Garhwali attitudes surrounding the presence of *devtas* on the move superseded the business of pilgrimage and many other normally operative distinctions between locals and *yatris*. In 2007 approximately fifteen or twenty different Garhwali *devtas*, either singly or in groups, visited Kedarnath. Many of these *devtas* visit from the Uttarkashi district of Garhwal, such as the group of *devtas* (Rudreshvar Mahadev, Narsingh, Someshvar, Madri-Devi, Draupadi-Devi) who arrived into Kedarnath on July 29, 2007.<sup>35</sup> I learned that that particular Rudreshvar Mahadev is in fact the *kul-devta* of sixty-villages and is taken on *deora* by different groups from among those sixty five villages on different years, sometimes consecutively. Jitu Bagdval, whose performance tradition I mentioned in Chapter Four, came from the Uttarkashi side for the first time ever in 2008 as part of a group of *devtas* of whom the main deity was Huneshvar Mahadev.

---

<sup>35</sup> An ongoing research question for me, something that I have discussed with many Kedar valley locals, is why most Garhwali *devtas* that come to Kedarnath come from the Uttarkashi and Tehri side, rather than from the Kedar valley itself or the Badrinath side.



Figure 6.7. The i.d. card of a member of a very well-organized *deora* group taking their deity *Huṇeśvar Mahādev* on the *Char Dham Yatra* along with *Durgā Mātā*, *Brahmanāth*, *Nāgrājā* (*Krishna*), and *Jītū Bagaḍvāl*.



Figure 6.8. *Huneshvar Mahadev* enters the temple along with the other *devtas*, here visible by means of their *nyauj-aur-niśān* (Garhwali: emblems and insignia).

The visits of such *devtas* in Kedarnath are some of the moments when Kedarnath briefly becomes a place of primarily Garhwali concern, worth highlighting precisely because such moments constitute such a fascinating counterpoint to the activities of most *yatris* in Kedarnath that inflect through more north Indian, pan-Hindu, and Hindi registers.<sup>36</sup> The attracting power of the place and of Shiva reveals itself through the visits of Garhwali *devtas* a place capable of attracting (and recharging) deities as well as humans.

### Renunciant practice in Kedarnath

The primary form of renunciant practice in Kedarnath is to physically reside in Kedarnath. In addition to the very public *seva* of Mahant Chandra Giri, there exist a range of practices in which renunciants engage. Some of them are public in nature: the Ramanandi ascetic in the process of spending five years at each of the Char Dham who recites *Aum Namah Shivaya* approximately one hundred and fifty thousand times a day, several month long *anusthans* (described in the introduction) that involve a daily series of *puja* and *havan*, the *dashanami* ascetic who quietly, after the high season has ended, pours water on the *linga* every day in the early morning, the several who (garbed as Shiva himself) take up positions of performance and crowd control in the courtyard during the evening *arati*, the practices of hospitality and narrative exposition directed at *yatris*, the request for donations from the same *yatris*. There are also without doubt a number of important private practices of which I was not aware and did not sufficiently prioritize the development of a relationship that would have made such information obtainable, many of which might be quite esoteric practices aimed at the generation of

---

<sup>36</sup> The opening and closing processions between Kedarnath and Ukhimath, on the other hand, mark a much more complex and composite processional phenomenon.

specific kinds of power (several renunciants were rumored to be *aghoris*). I know that there were several long term renunciants in Kedarnath whom I almost never saw, one of whom was a woman. The long term custodian of the Bhairavnath shrine lives in a structure that emerges out of a cave near the shrine itself on the side of the valley wall up from Kedarnath, and keeps black dogs, the animal form of Bhairavnath.

Unfortunately, I never successfully had a long conversation with him and was unable to find out much about his activities and concerns.

In my conversations with the *dashanami* renunciant Hanuman Giri whose custom is to enter the temple and pour water on the *linga*, the thread that ran through his words were his emphasis, almost as a refrain, on Shiva's identity as both formless (*nirākār*) and form-possessing (*sākār*). And the thread that, to my eye, runs through all forms of renunciant practice in Kedarnath is that, whether public or esoteric, inwardly-directed or *yatri* directed, their primary goal is simply to be in Kedarnath. Whatever practice is undertaken, its effect is amplified by being in Kedarnath (and *dev bhumi* more generally). They may or may not enter the temple; many renunciants do not, or if they do so, do it rarely. The Ramanandi renunciant told me that, while he goes in the temple more than many renunciants, he does not feel that it is particularly necessary since Kedarnath is itself already located in *Shiv-bhumi* (the land of Shiva). Renunciants may do *japa*, they may have particular texts or *mantras* that they recite and sing (*Aum Namah Shivaya*, the *Rudri*, the *Shivamahimna Stotra*, the *Tandava Stotra*), but much of their aims are accomplished by simply being in Kedarnath, humans emulating Shiva living in Shiva's Himalayas in an area where he is especially manifest. They have merely to reside in the place as incipient forms of Shiva themselves.

### Walking and Movement

As I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, both *deora* and the *ghi malish* are construed as lexically distinct activities at the indigenous level in a manner very similar to how I discuss them in this chapter. Living the life of renunciant also, at a more general level, fits into an existing indigenous conceptual category of practice: the life of renunciation (*sannyasa*). That is to say, my framing of these phenomena as analytic subjects corresponds with how they are framed indigenously – as important practices in the Kedarnath that is the abode of Shiva. However, there are important forms of practice in Kedarnath that reflect its co-extensive characters of place and *tirtha*. To this end I apply the intentionally mundane, lowest common denominator analytic frame of “walking and movement” to look at a range of related practices in which this sensing occurs that spread out around the Kedarnath end-valley. This analytic frame intentionally does not match the ways in which locals and *yatris* might characterize and regard as distinct different kinds of walking and movement that happen at different times and for different purposes; I focus instead here on how they are all linked as practices that move through and about Kedarnath.

To walk and move in the end-valley of Kedarnath is to simultaneously engage the shape of the Himalayas, the difficult beauty of the environment and its weather, the level of development and infrastructure that is a testimony to human effort and economic necessity, the set-apartness of Kedarnath as a site from the rest of the world, and the postulate of Shiva’s presence and power in the place. These are all part, in some way or other, part of the place that is sensed and experienced. Specific examples illuminate the ways in which these aspects are linked: the last two kilometers of the

journey from Gaurikund to Kedarnath (walking or being carried), walking in the valley to gather flowers, walking to and from Gandhi Sarovar (Corabari Tal), Vasuki Tal, and the Mahapath as a forms of tourism and trekking, and walking out of Kedarnath to engage in a specific devotional/contemplative practice.

### ***Walking from Garud Chatti to Kedarnath***

During the last two kilometers of the path from Garud Chatti to Kedarnath, just past the Ramanandi *ashram* and the small Garuda shrine, the world changes. The altitude crosses the three thousand meter mark and hypoxia begins to be a possibility. The path turns a series of corners that brings those on the path into a different weather system from the rest of their journey. If it is a clear day the high Himalayas spread out at the end of the trail. If it is a rainy and foggy day (or night) the cold and dampness double in intensity as oxygen diminishes. Footsore, tired *yatris* get a second wind at the sight of the end of the trail. Their drive to reach their destination is renewed, their pace quickens as they begin a final push. One is reminded of the old Nala *deora yatri's* words on the attractive *shakti* of the site that if this *shakti* did not exist then how would he have been able to reach? Many in Kedarnath, both locals and *yatris*, marvel at how it is able to draw people, people who would never think they would be capable of such a feat. Visitors to Kedarnath, myself included, are frequently in shock at their own ability to have reached such a challenging place. Those who ride on horses and mules straighten in their saddles when they pass the point at which the temple becomes visible: *devdarshini*.

The path from Gaurikund, especially these last two kilometers, is often a unique experience in the lives of *yatris*, especially women. As one *tirth purohit* put it, many of

these female *yatris* have never ridden a horse before, never been outside of *pardah*, have never been touched by non-familial men such as those who help them on and off their horse. Then, as he put it, they ride into the *ghora parav* of Kedarnath like queens. Other *yatris* on horseback may arrive slumped over, their leg muscles so tired that they have no regard for who helps them off of the horse, whose arms catch them. One's experience of arriving into Kedarnath frames the place, as my first description of such an arrival frames this work.

Oddly enough, it is sometimes in this last two kilometers that many *yatris* have their first view of a helicopter – the helipad with its arriving and departing flights is on the opposite, directly parallel side of the valley from the foot approach to Kedarnath. And only in the last half kilometer, when the path crests a rise, does the full extent of built Kedarnath come into view, the full extent of what humans have done in order to gain a foothold in the environment. This movement into Kedarnath, then, is a coming into consciousness and experience of development and infrastructure, of helicopter technology and cell phone towers, of high Himalayan panorama, of thin air and difficult weather, and into the attracting power of Shiva-in-the-Himalayas. Once a Rajasthani woman told me that she experienced *sakshat darshan* from *devdarshini* – she saw Shiva's face emerging from the peaks directly ahead.

For a local returning to work after a visit home the site of Kedarnath is a reminder of the money he may be able to earn, the world famous abode of Shiva with which he has a personal, traditional relationship, his return to an almost all male local world which is both, in Kedar valley and Garhwali terms the big time, the cosmopolitan place, and the necessity that prevents him from being in his home with his family.

Many Kedarnath *tirth purohits* routinely walk a couple of kilometers down the path on a walk that is at once a leisure activity known as an “evening walk” in Hindi and a trolling for potential guests and *yajmans*. Other *tirth purohits* will also take an evening/late afternoon walk down the helipad side and past it down to the end of the plateau on the eastern side of the valley, almost down to the point opposite Garud Chatti, just as they might do if they were at home in their village, without vocational concern.

### ***Gathering Flowers and Gathering Brahma Lotuses***

Locals also walk out of Kedarnath to gather flowers. Members of the Badri Kedar Samiti walk out of Kedarnath to gather flowers to be used in the temple service, and *tirth purohits* walk out to collect flowers for use in the *puja* of their own *yajmans*. In both cases it has been clear, both in word and deed, that it is an agreeable task, an opportunity for enjoyment while performing an obligation. Local Garhwali women who are relatives of *tirth purohits* and staying for a month or two in Kedarnath (usually in August, September, and October) will walk out of Kedarnath in twos or threes and return several hours later with flowers that they will then offer in the temple. On these walks they often intentionally circumambulate the entire village of Kedarnath at a distance of several kilometers. This is walking with devotional purpose.

There is also the more arduous journey that is made to gather Brahma lotuses (*brahmakamal*), a lotus that reputedly only grows above fourteen thousand feet. One must gather these lotuses in bare feet, having fasted and bathed. Even for young, fit Kedarnath locals, to whom this task is delegated, the gathering of these Brahma-lotuses takes between two to four hours of constant movement at high altitude.





Figure 6.9. *Brahmakamal* for sale in the Kedarnath bazaar.

If not used for a *yajman's puja* the sale of Brahma lotuses are highly profitable. They are also dried and stored for less immediate use. The gathering of Brahma lotuses is also one of several areas of life in Kedarnath where nascent environmental concerns are slowly becoming public. At one point in 2007 there was a demand from a man claiming to be a state official that locals cease plucking and selling Brahma lotuses on the grounds that it injurious to the environment – this suggestion was met by a wave of outrage at the idea that the government might curtail something that related to the livelihood of locals. Now, going up into the mountains surrounding Kedarnath is also a reminder of the ways that the site may be changing. How many years are left before Brahma lotuses may not be picked? While concerns about the environmental impact of

plucking Brahma lotuses do not yet seem to have a place in public discourse about Kedarnath, and indeed in some ways cannot because of the importance and sensitivity of questions of livelihood, privately many locals are concerned about the environmental impacts of development more broadly. In the aftermath of the Brahma lotus incident, another private worry surfaced in conversations in the bazaar: that the snow and ice may melt and the source of the Mandakini river and its tributaries may dry up, at which point no one would be able to live in Kedarnath for even a day.

### ***Gandhi Sarovar and Beyond***

A sizable number of those who visit Kedarnath come explicitly for the experience of being in a unique place of high Himalayan beauty. Many of those who come in this way are either Bengalis or westerners occasionally accompanied by a local man acting as a guide, and the one thing that many such visitors do in Kedarnath is make the approximately five kilometer round trip journey northwest behind Kedarnath to the famous, small glacial lake known in Hindi as Gandhi Sarovar (reputedly a portion of Gandhi's ashes were once scattered there) and more locally as Corabari Tal. The more adventurous trekkers make the day-long trek to Vasuki Tal, a much more arduous and risky endeavor. Sometimes such trekkers actually arrive at Kedarnath from Vasuki Tal, having departed from Triyugi Narayan the day before and taken a path that circumvents the Gaurikund valley and leads directly to Vasuki Tal. Finally, there are the mountaineers who carry oxygen and who occasionally arrive and depart Kedarnath via the northeastern valley system traditionally known as Mahapath, the path by which the Pandavas departed Kedarnath on their way to heaven.

In my field notes I recorded a conversation with three Bengalis who arrived in Kedarnath during June of 2007. They had come from Rhansi (on the way to Madmaheshvar) with six porters on a trek that took them nine days and included a stretch of three to four kilometers on a glacier; they felt that they had narrowly escaped death several times. They found a high altitude Devi temple where they did *puja*, and then after resuming their crossing they saw a piece of a glacier fall right in front of them. They said that if it had fallen differently they would have all died. Then, they came to Kedarnath via, in their own words, the river Svargdhari and Mahapath.

On another occasion I spoke with a Bengali man who had travelled to Kedarnath eighteen times, visited the Panch Kedar, Amarnath, and trekked through glacial passes. Invoking the well-known phrase (and movie title) “Shiva is what is true and beautiful” (*satyam Śivaṃ sundaram*), he said that he was especially effected by both the *linga* and the natural environment. And on a third occasion, speaking with a Bengali journalist from Calcutta and his wife (who had applied the red *sindhur* to her forehead that in many places signifies one’s identity as a married woman explicitly for the visit in Kedarnath), I registered that they were very intent on distinguishing between their actions in Kedarnath (going to the temple, sponsoring a *puja* and receiving *prasada*), and the reasons for their visit to the temple (so that they could bring *prasada* back home for their parents and grandparents). They viewed their presence in Kedarnath as merely part of the general phenomenon of middle-class Bengalis who go on vacation to the Himalayas. There appears to be a marked tradition of such journeys in Garhwal among Bengalis; one finds that at lesser known shrines (such as Madmaheshvar) the majority of non-local visitors are Bengalis. In each of these instances what is in the temple of

Kedarnath shares focus with the grandeur and attractive power of the natural environment, yet at the same time the two are not wholly distinct from each other. And the valences of interaction with both are multiple. Trekking tourism, while not (yet) the majority reason that people come to Kedarnath, is one of the primary focii of the development of tourist infrastructure at the state level and occupies a large share of how planning and development in the region are discussed and conceptualized.<sup>37</sup> The natural beauty of the Himalayan environment is another part of the attraction of Kedarnath for visitors (many but not all of whom self-identify as *yatris*). However, the attractive power of the Himalayan environment, and the ways in which it is sensed and experienced through walking and movement in the Kedarnath end-valley, are ultimately polyvalent. The air, the mountains, the water, and the mountainous panoramas are, depending on the moment and the mood, signifiers of the religious power of the Himalayan landscape, Shiva's presence in the landscape, and the beauty that makes it a tourist destination often inflected after a model of nature and trekking tourism originating in the West that has particularly resonant overtones in the Himalayas that are the home of Mount Everest, the paradigmatic goal of Western trekkers. Anyone present in Kedarnath, and especially anyone who walks out of the village on a clear day, cannot help but somatically engage many of these elements at the same time.

---

<sup>37</sup> See discussions of Bengali trekkers and Garhwali tourism in Chapter Two.

### Playing Cricket in Kedarnath

With my focus on walking and movement I suggest, as a counterpoint and complement to Shiva and *devta*-oriented practices, a range of ways in which locals and *yatris* engage the natural environment of Kedarnath. This engagement may be colored in various ways – as economic practice, devotional practice, nature-oriented practice, as forms of practice that function as an explicit acknowledgment of human capacities for perseverance and endurance, as forms of practice that engage the development of the site over time. Walking and moving through the Kedarnath environment for both locals and *yatris* is a deeply somaticized and associative engagement with some combination of these themes.

I would also like to consider in this chapter an important form of activity in Kedarnath that neither involves *yatris* or trekkers nor, as do local forms of devotion to Bhairavnath, engages local Garhwali religious worlds in any explicit way. That activity is playing cricket. After the high season and subsequent monsoon rains, many (usually younger) Kedarnath locals walk up out of Kedarnath, past Bhairavnath and the small dwelling of the renunciant who maintains the Bhairavnath shrine, to a small bowl shaped side valley whose flat and level center forms what is surely one of the most picturesque cricket pitches in the world. The games are heated, a high point of the season.

On the several occasions that I watched (and was even allowed to bat when the stakes were low) cricket matches several threads of the spectacle leapt out at me. First, even the strongest and fittest locals at Kedarnath would quickly tire when running between the wickets. Playing cricket in a side valley at approximately twelve and a half

thousand feet is challenging for everyone. Second, playing cricket was an occasion for experimenting with and affirming different kinds of social relations. According to my cricket playing friends, teams were organized along different lines on different days: *tirth purohits* vs. other locals, all Ukhimath sidars (including *tirth purohits* and non-*tirth-purohits*) vs. Lamgaundi and Guptkashi sidars, Kedarnath locals vs. police and military. Friends whose community and business concerns put them on opposite sides of the fence down in Kedarnath would hold hands. Lastly, shot through the entire game was a feeling of *resistance*, what in an American idiom could well be called the feeling of “playing hooky”. Remembering my own long years of practice as a tennis player, I had commented admiringly on the batting skills of one of my Kedarnath local friends and said he must have practiced a great deal. He snorted and said that every single person in Kedarnath who was any good at cricket was good because as a child he had repeatedly snuck away to play cricket knowing that the price of playing was a beating when he returned home, and if I wanted to call that “practice” then yes, he had practiced a great deal.

Arjun Appadurai has famously suggested the power of cricket in India to engage “national attention and nationalist passion” is because of its extreme utility as a vehicle for engaging the “means of modernity”: media spectacle, merchandising, and participation in the world notion of “sport”.<sup>38</sup> It offered Indians from all walks of life the chance to both participate in Indianness and savor the feeling of having decolonized a formerly British sport. Appadurai writes elegantly that

---

<sup>38</sup> A. Appadurai, “Playing with modernity: the decolonization of Indian cricket,” *Modernity at Large* (1996): 45-46. I am grateful to Joyce Flueckiger for this reference.

The erotic pleasure of watching cricket, for Indian male subjects, is the *pleasure of agency* in an imagined community that in many other areas is violently contested...This pleasure is neither wholly cathartic nor wholly vicarious, since playing cricket is close to, or part of, the experience of many Indian males. It is however, magnified, politicized, and spectacularized without losing its links to the lived experience of bodily competence and agonistic bonding....<sup>39</sup>

Appadurai's analysis helps us to understand cricket in Kedarnath. The pleasures of being able to celebrate the imagined community of Kedarnath in a way that is both agonistic and without violent communal contest, that engages bodily competence in spectacular fashion, that pleasurably reifies the maleness of an already masculine environment – these pleasures are undeniable.

Yet at the same time Appadurai's view requires nuance in the context of Kedarnath. The nation is not the only imagined community here –the community of Kedarnath, imagined and real, is also a community. And there is a palpable presence of agency – but agency in what field of action? I read the pleasure of agency in playing cricket at Kedarnath as, among other things, the pleasure of being an agent *in Kedarnath*, that is to say of being an agent in a sub-national field of action where one's presence is significantly constrained by the complex agency of the place. To play cricket is not only to celebrate the successful decolonization of cricket from the British – it is also to “play hooky” from the structures of economic constraint that attract locals to Kedarnath for the season. It is to “play hooky” from a place whose development and current condition are sliding out of step with traditional understandings of what is supposed to be. It is an engagement with the *means of modernity* in very specific, Kedar valley ways. It is a celebration of social bonds with

---

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 45

people whom economic and traditional structures of Kedarnath itself place into opposing position as opposed to people whom narratives of communalism place into opposition. That is all to say, playing cricket in Kedarnath is in some sense a resistance, a claiming of agency over and against what I term the complex agency of the place as a whole, here valenced not as the complex agency of Shiva but as the complex agency behind the structure of pilgrimage touristic constraint that draws locals away from their families and forces them to bear a high degree of daily uncertainty about their potential earnings. The structures of agency and engagement with the “means of modernity” are much as Appadurai claims – many of the essential concerns with the means of modernity, however, are local in scope *in addition* to national and international.

#### **Practices in Kedarnath: the Engagement of Both Place and *Tirtha***

The examples I have discussed in this chapter, taken together, begin to suggest the range of ways that particular persons (*yatris* and locals) might sense and engage Kedarnath on any given day, or over longer periods of time. They further show that such practices, recalling the observations of J.Z. Smith, are each in their own way practices that demonstrate a relationship to significant aspects and locations in Kedarnath. Taken together, however, they suggest that what is important and powerful in Kedarnath is both inside and outside the temple, both something that is touched by hands, felt on the skin, felt in the feet, encountered through language, and negotiated through economic exchange and social relationships. Kedarnath, as place and as abode of Shiva – as complex agent, directs the ritual attention of those present in the place. But it does so in a variety of salient ways whose range I have sketched in this chapter.



Practices in the place of Kedarnath engage it as an abode of Shiva, an abode of God, a uniquely compelling place of natural beauty that may not last forever, a powerful site for the “recharging” of Garhwali deities where they themselves come on *deora*, and a place to earn one’s livelihood. At the center of this network is an attractive and efficacious force that both resides in the temple and spreads out through the village of Kedarnath and the entire end valley.

There is a wide range of practice, visual representation, cultural knowledge and association, and social and economic contexts that bear on the production of experiences of Kedarnath while present in the place. I have already discussed the ways in which narratives about Kedarnath offer a views of the place that do not wholly overlap with popular visual print representation. Narrative expositions of Kedarnath evoke themes of power, pursuit, violence, intimacy, relation, and self transcendence. Print images of Kedarnath present a Kedarnath whose essential character demonstrates a relationship between temple, deity, and physical environment that is irreducibly fluid and often co-terminous. The attention of this chapter to practices in the place of Kedarnath adds an embodied, critical phenomenological view of how, in particular moments and locations, all of these elements fuse together in the experience of particular persons. The wind bath (*hava snan*) is a good example of what I mean. I once spoke with a man who had come to Kedarnath many times before and always bathed. This time he had not, nor had he wanted to (or been able to afford) to pay for hot water. So he did not bathe before entering the temple, and as he walked down to Gaurikund took comfort in the long standing idea of the power of the wind bath. The notion of the wind bath is both a reflection of the efficacious power of the place to purify, the actual

physical conditions of the site, and an economic environment in which hot water is an expensive luxury item.

To begin understand what Kedarnath was for this man, we need to think about how narrative exposition, visual representation, and embodied practice might combine in his experiences of Kedarnath. What sort of print image does he think best represents Kedarnath? What narratives, if any, frame Kedarnath for him? What does he say he felt in the temple? Where else in Kedarnath did he go, and what did he do? How might montage representations of the site, narrative expositions of the place that tack back and forth between the religious power of the local in general and Shiva's specific presence temple, and his own particular somatic engagements with the place combine to produce what he felt while in Kedarnath? This is where the conclusion begins.

## In Pursuit of Maheshvara: Understanding Kedarnath as Place and as *Tirtha*:

### Conclusions

#### Grasping the *Akarshan* of Kedarnath

Throughout this work I have highlighted both the special relationship between Shiva and the physical environment of the Kedarnath end-valley and how the cultural significance, economic importance, and efficacious power of the site and its Himalayan environment fuse in the experience of those who are drawn to Kedarnath by the attractive power of the place. This power to attract lies, I suggest, at the base of what makes Kedarnath a powerful and important place for *yatris*, locals, *yatri*-tourists, trekkers, and researchers. The complex agency of the place is the common denominator for those who find themselves there. The Mahamandaleshvar from Varanasi who completed a two-month *anusthan* in Kedarnath as part of his procession through the twelve *jyotirlingas* once described this attractive power to me in the following terms:

Everyone comes here – people like you come here, people like me. Westerners also come, Christians also come, many Muslims, Hindus – all kinds of people come here and take *darshan*. Some come for research, some come for *darshan*, some come for *tapas*, but Lord Kedarnath is the center-point [*kendra-bindu*] for everyone.

“Lord Kedarnath” here refers, as it often does in Hindi, both to Shiva and to the site itself. The Mahamandaleshvar’s observation is accurate and subtle. The site is the common denominator, and many people with different backgrounds and different goals come to Kedarnath and even to large extent perform the same actions. “Lord Kedarnath,” the presence and agency of Kedarnath-Shiva, is at the center of the attractive power of the place.

### *The Stable Fluidity of Kedarnath's Complex Agency*

I also began this work by pointing out that the power of the place and the fluidity of the ways that the emplaced presence of Shiva are understood to be present in the place themselves arguably constitute enduring historical features of the site. The *Shiva Purana* suggests that Shiva is especially present in Kedarnath in “his own form”, and Fleming observes that it is not so clear what this actually may have meant. In the present, perceptions and experiences of this form are strikingly diverse. As one Hindi pamphlet puts it, “There there is no constructed (*nirmit*) *murti* in Kedarnath. There they worship a three-sided form of a piece of mountain and embrace it (*ek trikoṇ rūp kā parvatkhaṇḍ hai jiskī pūjā karte haiṇ.*)”<sup>1</sup> A Kedarnath *pujari* told me that in Kedarnath place and deity are one. Yet at the same time, a group of female *yatris* from Maharashtra whose family had been coming to Kedarnath for generations but were themselves in Kedarnath for the first time, said that the Himalayas are Shiva’s field of activity (*vicaran kṣetra*), and that while Shiva is himself formless (*nirākār*) our feelings (*bhāv*) cause him to exist in a form (*sākār*). Kedarnath is the place of Shiva, and yet his mysteriously imprecise relationship to and presence in the place is itself one of the hallmarks of the site. The constellation of verbal, visual, and somatic understandings of how Shiva is present in Kedarnath read as a local set of reflections on how Shiva is present in the world more generally.

Observations about the relationship between expectation and experience were common in my conversations with *yatris* and locals to constitute truisms: “As your feeling, so your *darshan*” (*jaisā bhāv, vaisā darśan*), or “as your faith, so your *prasada*”

---

<sup>1</sup>Bābā Śrī Auḍharnāth, *Bhagavān Śamkar ke 22 avatārom aur 12 Śivliṅgom kī kathā* (Haridvār: Raṇdhīr Prakāśan), 67, 91-92.

(*jaisā śraddhā, vaisā prasād*). Once in a conversation among myself, a family of *yatris*, and a Samiti employee, the father in the family related an account in which he had, on three separate entrances into the temple on the same visit, experienced actual sight (*sakshat darshan*) of an anthropomorphic Shiva. But when the man then took his family into the temple he saw nothing. In this conversation the temple committee employee said that he has been working in Kedarnath for decades, and that although he has never himself experienced *sakshat darshan*, he does feel that there is some sort of power in the place. Yet on the other hand, anyone can be and become God at any time. His words, clearly the result of much thought and reflection, express both the attractive power of Kedarnath as a site, the presence and power of Shiva's presence there, and the complex and contingent ways that these different facets of the site might combine in experiences of the place.

Yet, it must be underscored, for many present in Kedarnath the importance of the site spreads out beyond the form of Shiva in the temple, or even the broader traces of Shiva's presence in the locale and in the Himalayas more generally. This broader significance is evident in the range of significant practices found in and around the place of Kedarnath: massaging and embracing the *linga*, drinking the water from Udak Kund, walking out into the end valley and gathering flowers, and walking up into the sides of the valley and beyond for the purposes of trekking. The natural environment also attracts and possesses efficacious power in its own right that is produced through a combination of religious, scenic, and physical factors. An excellent example of the power of the Himalayan beauty of Kedarnath's setting is a fictional example from a

short story by Satyajit Ray, “Crime in Kedarnath”.<sup>2</sup> Ray originally wrote these stories as didactic piece on Indian culture for children. While fictional, these stories offer an eloquent and accurate picture of the worldview and *mores* of his middle class Bengali audience, who constitute one of the core visitor groups to Uttarakhand.<sup>3</sup> In this episode the crime-solving trio of Feluda Mitter, Lalmohan Babu, and Feluda’s nephew Tapesh are drawn to Kedarnath on a case, and are speaking with a fellow Bengali they meet on the road. He says to them

I have been to Kedar and Badri twenty-three times. It’s got nothing to do with religious devotion. I go back just to look at their natural beauty. If I didn’t have a family, I’d quite happily live there. I have also been to Jamunotri, Gangotri, Gomukh, Panchakedar, and Vasukital. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Makhanlal Majumdar.’ Feluda said ‘namaskar’ and introduced us. ‘Very pleased to meet you,’ said Mr. Majumdar. ‘A lot of people are going to all these places now, thanks to road transport. They are not pilgrims, they are picnickers. But, of course, buses and taxis can do nothing to spoil the glory of the Himalayas. The scenic beauty is absolutely incredible.’<sup>1</sup>

Yet at the same time, the story continues on and strikes a different tone:

Ramwara [*Rambara, the midway point between Gaurikund and Kedarnath*] was at a height of 2500 meters. The scenery around us was absolutely fantastic. Lalmohan Babu went into raptures, recalling scenes from the *Mahabharata*. He declared eventually that he would have no regret if he fell and died on the way, for no one could have a more glorious death....

In the remaining three and a half miles, only one thing happened that’s worth mentioning. The tall spire of the temple of Kedarnath came suddenly into view after leaving Ramwara. Most of the travelers stopped, shouting, ‘Jai Kedar!’ Some folded their hands and bowed, others lay prostrate on the ground. But only a few moments after we resumed walking it vanished behind a mountain. We could see it again only after reaching Kedarnath. I learn afterwards that the brief glimpse we had caught earlier was considered a special darshan. It was called a *deo-dekhni*...

---

<sup>2</sup> Satyajit Ray, *The Complete Adventures of Feluda*, trans. Gopa Majumdar, vol. 2 (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2000). I am grateful to Phillip Webb for recommending these stories.

<sup>3</sup> I look forward to forthcoming work of Subho Basu and Sandeep Banerjee on this topic.

It was half past five in the evening by the time we reached Kedarnath. It had not yet started to get dark, and the mountain tops were all shining bright.

It is impossible to describe what one feels on reaching a flat plateau after climbing uphill for several hours on a steep and narrow road. The feel uppermost in my mind was a mixture of disbelief, reassurance, and joy. With this came a sense of calm, peace, and humility. Perhaps it was those peaks which towered over everything else that made one feel so humble. Perhaps it was this feeling that evoked religious ardour, a reverence for the Creator.

A large number of people were sitting, standing, or lying on the rocky ground, overcome with emotion, unable to say or do anything except shout, 'Jai Kedar!'....

I had expected Lalmohan Babu to want to rest after our difficult journey. But he said he had never felt more invigorated in his life. 'There is new life in every vein in my body,' he said. 'Tapes, such is the magic of Kedar.'<sup>1</sup>

The relationships between the natural environment and the power that many experience inside and outside the temple are close and not easily disentangled. The "magic of Kedar" would seem to result from the experience of the visit as a whole, rather than a particular aspect of it. And in sites such as modern day Kedarnath, colonial and post-colonial discourses on the practice of *yatra*, tourism, and the scenic beauty of the Himalayan landscape must be reckoned as part of this "magic".

The power and attractive force of Kedarnath as an important site in the pilgrimage tourism industry in India also combines with these "magical" aspects of the site to constitute the complex agency of the place as a whole. The same complex agency that transforms the lives of those who make requests on their visits to Kedarnath, who see Shiva in the crest of the Himalayas, who drink the water and rub the remainder of the *ghi* from the *ghi* massage onto their faces and hair, that same complex agency creates the conditions for the building of lodges, helicopter sites, cable television, and

the laying of internet specific fiber-optic cable. Many in the Kedarnath valley explicitly revere Shiva in his Kedarnath form because Kedarnath is the main economic axis of their lives: the language of devotion and “religious power” (to use Sax’s phrase) runs in the same channel as the language of economic significance. This religious power is itself a composite of understandings and experiences of Shiva’s presence and agency in the place and the efficacious power of the Himalayan environment more generally. Yet other locals in the same position make a sharp distinction and freely acknowledge that, for them, their presence in Kedarnath has little to do with the traditional importance of the site. As one put it, “For *yatris* this is heaven, for us it is our livelihood.” Experience of the power of *akarshan* exercised by Kedarnath may or may not be subsumed and wholly framed by the analytic categories of religious power, sacred power, and the agentive presence of Shiva. Yet at the same time few would contest the significance of these influences on experiences of the place.

***Contrast and Complement: Narrative, Image, Practice***

Part of the aim of this work is to recommend the utility of viewing Kedarnath as a complex agent that draws people to itself through its power of *akarshan*. The complex agency of Kedarnath frames both its identity as place and as a Shaivite *tirtha*, as a place that is an abode of Shiva. For some the presence of Shiva fully overlaps with the entire physical environment. For others, it does not. For yet others, characteristics of the physical environment are the primary experiential axis. Yet the site is the common meeting point that draws them. One of the main goals of this work has been to create something of the feeling of the attractive power of Kedarnath in the experience of the reader. This is as much a methodological exhortation as it is the satisfaction of an



aesthetic goal on my part, but in both senses it is a specific response to the character of the place.

Forms of discourse, practice, and representation centered on Kedarnath engage this common meeting point in a number of ways and exercise their own forms of overlapping agency. That is the second aim of this work: to sketch the character of these salient forms, and note points of difference and overlap among them in what they reveal about the character(s) of the site. Narrative expositions of Kedarnath, when they occur in the many forms discussed in Chapter Four, offer links to the example of the Pandavas and the vast and complex corpus of Shaivite knowledge and practice in the subcontinent. They describe the efficacious power of particular locations in the environment of Kedarnath, and the special hyper-presence of Shiva in Kedarnath in his “own form”. They offer a number of modes of relation to Shiva, as devotee, as seeker of transformative power, as incipient Shiva. They recommend intimacy with the god through “touch”, yet also on occasion speak of grasping and wound. Narrative expositions of Kedarnath, examined as a system, resist identifying in unitary fashion precisely how Shiva is present in Kedarnath, and what the valence of human interaction is with him there. And, such narrative expositions may or may not occur in the context of a specific visit to Kedarnath.

Print images of Kedarnath, viewed in aggregate, offer a striking argument for treating the multiple aspects of the place as a single complex agent. Their uses of multiple subject composition and photomontage index in a concrete, single visual moment the irreducibly co-terminous and variously inflected relations of the physical environment of Kedarnath with the ways Shiva is understood to be present in that

environment. The history of this visual genre and the ways it deals with the relationship of deities to landscape also serves as a striking reminder of the post-colonial and globalized contexts in which the natural beauty of the Himalayas and the burgeoning practice and trade of pilgrimage and nature tourism unfold. And, given the complex agency of the site as a whole, we may understand these print images as themselves a form of *prasada*, a material that has been transformed through interaction with a power and efficacious deity and place and then taken home.<sup>4</sup> Visual representations of Kedarnath in print form, however, are synoptic rather than narrative. The information they offer about Kedarnath concerns the best way of representing the essential underlying character of the site. They do not offer narratives as such, do not refer to touching or wounding or embrace or pursuit – they offer foci for memory and devotion that may or may not evoke these themes.

Practices in the place of Kedarnath, viewed broadly, illustrate the intimate and sensuous quality of interactions with the place, and how the ritual attention contained in such significant practices focuses on the end valley as a whole as well as what is inside the temple. Some of these actions are understood as interactions with Shiva, some with Shiva and the abode of Shiva, and some with the Himalayas more generally in their overlapping persona as repository of efficacious natural power and exemplars of natural mountainous beauty. While it is certainly true that bodily interactions with deities and places are arguably one of the hallmarks of popular religious practice in South Asia, there is nonetheless something distinctive about the insistence on intimate interaction with place and deity one finds in Kedarnath both at present and

---

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Joyce Flueckiger for this insight.

historically. The story from the *Shiva Purana* underscores that the Pandavas interacted with Shiva through touch (*sparsha*) rather than through a strictly visual act of *darshan*. Drinking water from the Kedarnath area has been a continuously enjoined practice for approximately a millennium. The practice of embracing the *linga* appears to have been replaced to some extent by the *ghi malish*. And numerous forms of walking, residence, and movement centered on the Kedarnath end valley suggest that in many ways it is simply enough, and very special, to be an embodied person in that location. Then there are the ways that locals in Kedarnath mark the importance and power of the site devotionally (the worship of Bhairavnath), vocationally (as *tirth purohits*, employees of the Samiti, lodge-keepers), and in resistance to the *tirtha*-focused nature of their vocational obligations (cricket, the evening walk).

How these elements, and others, combine to produce experiences of place for specific individuals and groups is something that must, from the point of view of this study, at the end of the day be measured person by person. Many *yatris*, after they have emerged from and circumambulated the temple, sit down in the courtyard for a moment and quietly relax, assimilating all that has just happened and processing where they are. Understanding all that such a moment might be for a specific person would itself be the work of years, yet it is possible to make a start. It is an ethnographic fact that the constituent elements of narrative exposition, print image, and practice on which I have focused in this work form, in significant part, the parameters of what might be experienced when present in the site. What I offer in this work is a way of thinking about the nature of these parameters. The contexts of discourse, environment,

*yatra* economy, representation, and practice that I discuss in this work inform the lives of almost all of those present in Kedarnath, whether for a day or for six months.

Many *yatris* say that what they feel in Kedarnath is *shanti*. But what does a word like this, whose denotative meaning is “peace”, mean in such a context? A man, known to me as Chandu *bhai* (Chandu brother), who has been coming from Gujarat to Kedarnath since 1983, and who spends about forty days in Kedarnath each year once offered me a very thoughtful and personal definition. He said that there are two elements that draw people to Kedarnath: a “magnet power” that attracts people and the natural beauty of the site. When the thread or flow (*tar*) of these elements becomes one with the *tār* inside a person that union produces *shanti*. Others link the feeling of *shanti* to the feeling of satisfaction (*santuṣṭi*). They feel *shanti* because by virtue of being in a place like Kedarnath they have left all the worries of their daily lives behind, and they feel satisfaction because by being in Kedarnath they have affirmed their connection to the complexes of Hindu traditions of which *yatra* is an emblem. Still others come to Kedarnath with the hope of help; *shanti* and/or *santushti* are desiderata while still in the place. The effects of the visit have yet to be revealed while still present in the site. A group of Rajasthani women told me that, when they came before the *linga*, they felt it as a chance to ask for help on behalf of their children. The potentially efficacious power of the Kedarnath *linga* emerges as their primary motivation, beyond whatever they may or may not have thought and felt about the place more broadly.

The specifics of what Kedarnath might be for any particular person present at the site suggested by these few quick examples remain, from the point of view of this work, ultimately unknown. But what I offer here is a model, generated through visual

culture analysis, textual analysis, ethnographic engagement, and a critical phenomenological attitude towards place that delineates the overall contours inside of which experiences of place emerge for individuals and groups when present in Kedarnath. Such a model serves as a beginning for such more specific inquiries.

### **Beyond the Case of Kedarnath**

For Kedarnath, the investigation of place is the investigation of Shiva, or more specifically an investigation of the texture of Shiva's presence in a specific place. The two are not one and the same, yet they are also not in any stable way distinct from one another. But what are the implications of the example of Kedarnath for the investigation of Shaivism and places of religious power more generally? The first implication is that the examination of modern Shaivism through the lens of place sheds new light on both metaphysical questions of Shiva's nature and his relationship to the world.

Don Handelman and David Shulman end their philosophical exegesis on the deeds of Shiva in the forest of pines with broader reflections on what these stories say about the nature of Shiva. From this narrative corpus they bring a view of Shiva to articulation that engages, at a general theological level, Shiva's "tensile", "generative, processual" nature, his tendency to "always be on the edge of disappearance..."<sup>5</sup> Kedarnath is in a sense a site of such an attempted disappearance. Yet the site of such an attempt itself has become a place of hyper-presence in which Shiva is non-distinct from the marshy soil of the valley he inhabits. The rock of the Kedarnath *linga* anchors

---

<sup>5</sup> Don Handelman and David Shulman, *Siva in the Forest of Pines: An Essay on Sorcery and Self-Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 219-221.

Shiva's processual nature in the wet ground of the Himalayas and reconfigures our understandings of how this processual nature relates to the world.

The character of Kedarnath also evokes particular formulations found in the schools of Kashmiri Shaivism. The notion of Kedarnath's attractive power of *akarshan*, of the *shakti* of the place, combined with the identity of the site as a *dyotilinga*, is evocative of the doctrine of vibration found in the Spanda (Vibration) school. In this school, vibration constitutes the "dynamic, recurrent and creative activity of the absolute."<sup>6</sup> Viewed in this way, the attractive power of Kedarnath is a local, material example of this dynamic and recurrent pulse. It is a physical analog and index of the metaphysical *spanda*.

In Kedarnath there is a tactile immediacy to Shiva's fluid nature that more conceptual views of his character have difficulty registering. If a *linga* of light is enshrined at Kedarnath, it is enshrined in a setting that pulls that light into the swampy, marshy ground whose earth-water mixture indexically evokes the union of Shiva and the Goddess in her form of Ganga, and that spreads out beyond the temple. And this elemental power of the site cannot be separated from its active participation in the economic networks of pilgrimage tourism, something that such metaphysically oriented models do not directly address. The nature and presence of Shiva in Kedarnath are emplaced in all these ways. The complex nature of this emplacement is itself a significant datum for those working on Shaivite thought and ritual; it suggests that broader anthropological and geographical concerns are of signal relevance for such inquiries. And such divine emplacements must be considered on a case by case

---

<sup>6</sup> M. S. G. Dyczkowski, *The doctrine of vibration* (State University of New York Press, 1987), 21.

basis. Ann Grodzins Gold writes of the profound effect that seeing and bathing in the ocean for the first time had on Rajasthani *yatris* in Jagannath Puri, who called it “taking waves”.<sup>7</sup> This effect, however, did not link indexically to the presence of Jagannath Vishnu in Puri in a manner comparable to Shiva’s presence in the marshy soil of Kedarnath.

The case of Kedarnath further demonstrates that inquiry, whether anthropological, philosophical, or historical, into modern Shaivite thought and practice need not limit itself to Shaivite communities defined by initiation (*dīkṣā*). One of the most recent works in the field of Shaivism is a translation and commentary by Richard Davis of a famous and still popular ritual manual for the observance of Shaivite temple festivals in South India by the medieval scholar Aghorasiva.<sup>8</sup> Aghorasiva is one of the luminaries of the Shaiva Siddhanta tradition. The manual goes far beyond mere instruction; towards the end of the work it explicitly and systematically correlates the stages of the festival to the five fundamental activities of Shiva: maintenance, emission, reabsorption, veiling, and grace.<sup>9</sup> Yet there are many important sites of Shaivite importance and practice that are not framed by such coherent and well attested documents and social formations. Many of those present in Kedarnath are not from Shaivite communities, and Kedarnath is only one stop on a larger *yatra*. Locals typically do not speak in terms of Shaivite affiliation or initiation; as residents in *Shiv-bhumi* (the

---

<sup>7</sup> Ann Grodzins Gold, *Fruitful Journeys: The Ways of Rajasthani Pilgrims* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 282.

<sup>8</sup> Richard H. Davis, trans., *A priest's guide for the great festival: Aghorasiva's Mahotsavavidhi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

land of Shiva) such matters are redundant.<sup>10</sup> One could argue that journey to Kedarnath itself constitutes a form of temporary Shaiva initiation.

There is scope for the consideration of Shaivite phenomena of thought and practice beyond contexts in which they are explicitly and formally identified as such. This recommendation will certainly prove useful for places other than Kedarnath; Varanasi comes immediately to mind. Yet treatments of Varanasi have focused either on its primarily Sanskritic and symbolic registers (Eck, Singh), its linkages to death and dying (Parry), the history of its Shaivite institutions (Smith), or the visual representations of a particular sub-community or spatial unit inside the city (Gaenzle and Gengnagel).<sup>11</sup> Even in the case of Varanasi, about which a great deal has already been written, there remains room for the coherent theoretical reflection of how the set of discourses and practices by which the place is presently constituted relate to the scholarly consideration of Shaivism.

My analytic treatment of the place of Kedarnath as a complex agent further demonstrates that scholarly accounts of places of religious power and significance will remain incomplete unless they address the *specific* contours of the religious power of the place in ways that go beyond designations of *sacred* and *holy*. I do not mean to imply that all such places be viewed as complex agents; this is a theoretical formulation that

---

<sup>10</sup> A few locals in Ukhimath have, however, undergone initiation to enter the Virashaiva community based there. This is a fascinating exception to the norm, and warrants further inquiry.

<sup>11</sup> Diana Eck, *Banāras, City of Light*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1982); Jonathan P. Parry, *Death in Banaras* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Travis LaMar Smith, “The Sacred Center and its Peripheries: Śaivism and the Vārāṇasī Sthala-Purāṇas” (Columbia University, 2007); Martin. Gaenzle and Jörg. Gengnagel, *Visualizing space in Banaras : images, maps, and the practice of representation*, Ethno-Indology, v. 4 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006); Rana P. B Singh, *Towards the Pilgrimage Archetype: The Pañcakrośī Yātrā of Banāras*, Pilgrimage & cosmology series 3 (Varanasi: Indica Books, 2002).



is in important ways a response to the specifics of Kedarnath. Yet even a thoroughly secular scholarly account of a place of religious power and significance not concerned with conversations such as those I engage about Shaivism should still register the nuances of that religious power and how it relates to the character of the place or, to recall Sax's critique, it will be an incomplete account. If, depending on the specifics of the case, the notion of complex agency does not prove appropriate in the anthropological investigation of such places, then the burden lies on the scholar to formulate a different theoretical framework that is equal to the task. The catalyst of the theoretical approach of this work was the idea of *akarshan* as it emerged in several conversations in Kedarnath in 2007 during my fieldwork; the notion of Kedarnath as complex agent was an elaboration from that beginning. There is considerable utility to using indigenous concepts found in the context of fieldwork as the basis for subsequent theoretical formulations of place. However, by definition, such formulations would be responsive to their own contexts of examination and might look very different from this work.

The conceptual linkage of place, deity, and complex agency also promises to be a generative concept with which to approach Hindu thought more broadly. As I discussed in Chapter Three, complex agency as a way of thinking about the actions of Hindu deities in the world has already gained a foothold through the works of Sutherland, Sax, Mines, Baltutis, Chakrabarty, and Inden. Yet there remains a great deal to engage and theorize about the ways in which the idea of complex agency may help to understand how Hindu deities are present in the world, and how that presence connects to their "real" natures. There are numerous indigenous ideas found in South

Asia that provide resources for conceptualizing such connections between deity and world, and the analytic re-envisioning of such ideas remains an area for creative theorizing. Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak has made one such thought experiment. She writes:

It is not too fanciful to say that a possible *dvaita* “structure of feeling,” if there are such structures, would be the future anteriority of every being as potentially, unanticipatably *avatār* in the general sense. It is within this general uneven, unanticipatable possibility of *avatarana* or descent – this cathexis by the ulterior, as it were, that the “lesser” god or goddess, when fixed in devotion, is as “great” as the greatest...<sup>12</sup>

David Haberman is also breaking new ground in this regard. Both in his recent work on the goddess/river Yamuna and in his forthcoming work on tree shrines in north India, he has been developing the concept of *svarūpa* (real, essential, own form) as a way of thinking about the relationships between persons, deities, and the natural world.<sup>13</sup> Given the primacy of emplacement for the experience of being in the world and the processes of knowing and constituting the world noted by theoreticians of place and space, the conjoining of place, deity, and complex agency in the context of Hindu thought adds a generative new stream to the ways in which the nature and presence of deities in the world are already under theoretical consideration.

### **Departing Kedarnath at the End of the Season**

It is therefore appropriate on numerous levels that I end this work with a vignette from the end of the season. The end of the season in Kedarnath is one of the season’s significant events. In the days and weeks immediately prior, Kedarnath empties; the influx of Bengalis on vacation for Durga Puja has ended and many locals

<sup>12</sup> Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak, "Moving Devi". *Cultural Critique* 47, (Winter: 2001), 123.

<sup>13</sup> David L. Haberman, *River of Love in an Age of Pollution: The Yamuna River of Northern India*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 180, and *People Trees: Worship of Trees in Northern India* (forthcoming).

want to be home with their families on Diwali. This means leaving several days before the official close of the season. But on the penultimate day of the season the population rises again; many repeat *yatris* make it a point to come for the beginning and end of the season. Distinguished political and religious figures make the journey, and the ranks of the police and military swell as they secure the site for the winter. Phone lines are taken down, and pipes are taken up for the off-season. On the final morning the military actually runs its own *bhaṇḍārā* (food kitchen) for all those still remaining in the village.

The final night of the season is marked by what is known as *samadhi-puja*. *Samadhi* typically refers either to an advanced level in the procession of a conscious self towards realization or to the death of a holy person who, it is assumed, will not return into the cycle of *samsara*. Thus, for example, the traditional site of Shankara's death in Kedarnath is known as his place of *samadhi*. But what this term means in reference to a self-manifest and immobile form of Shiva is, as the following scene describes, perhaps best viewed as a semantic and ritual extension of these more established concepts.

In preparation for *samadhi puja*, the inside and the outside of the temple received the adornment of flowers in the same manner that happened on the occasion of Bhatuj (the occasion on which the Kedarnath *linga* is covered with a pyramid of bricks made from boiled rice). In 2007 a Haridwar man whose custom it is to accompany the Kedarnath opening and closing processions each year provided the flowers. We are friends; we have been on four Kedarnath processions together, starting in 2000. The temple opened to the public for the viewing of *samadhi puja* at two a.m. on the final day of the season. While there were only several hundred people in Kedarnath at this point

the press inside the temple was considerable because everyone wanted to be as close to the inner sanctum as possible. The *pujari* and Samiti *ved pathis* poured buckets and buckets of *ghi* over the *linga* and then adorned it with multiple lines of fragrant paste (*gandh*). They placed flowers and fruit liberally on and around the *linga*, and then proceeded to cover the *linga* with multiple layers of *bhasma* (ash made from cow dung), *dhotis*, and flowers. The scene was, for me, evocative of passage into sleep. It felt to me as if Kedarnath-Shiva was being tucked in for the winter, returning to a quiescent and self-contained state until the opening of the next season. Everyone received the *bhasma* from this *samadhi puja* as *prasada*.

The temple then closed to the public for several hours while people prepared for departure and the Kedarnath *doli* received its final adornments and was placed in the temple (I presume near the *linga*). It emerged from the temple around eight in the morning, and representatives of the Samiti locked the temple. The drums and bagpipes of the Garhwali military band sounded, along with the Garhwali drums that accompany the deity on *deora*. Snow had begun to fall in Kedarnath several days before the end of the season. Combined with the sunshine of the morning, this meant that the first several kilometers of the journey were over a footpath covered with melting ice. When the procession departs Kedarnath at the end of the season the area, even more so than during the season, officially becomes the province of Bhairavnath. Locals tell stories in which the temple key is forgotten and left behind, and rather than allow a human presence to reenter the village after the *doli* has left, Bhairavnath himself returns it.

At the end of the season the Kedarnath *doli* does not stop in Gaurikund; Parvati has herself left Gaurikund a day before for her winter residence. This way, I was told,

Kedarnath-Shiva will not feel tempted to visit with her on his way to Ukhimath. A detailed examination and discussion of the Kedarnath procession and how it relates to its local contexts is the subject for a separate, shorter work. I will, however, offer several observations about the tone of the procession and its arrival in Ukhimath. The opening of the pilgrimage season and the opening procession to Kedarnath are a time of excitement, fanfare, expectation, and hopes for a good season. The Kedarnath *doli* receives a military accompaniment, organized welcomes by schools and colleges, and national media coverage. On the procession back to Ukhimath, the dominant feeling and tone I observed was one of satisfaction, thankfulness and relief. The season had been sufficient, and those who welcomed and worshipped the *doli* knew that they had earned an amount sufficient for the off-season. There was a sense of satisfaction at the successful conclusion of the season.

Yet the Kedarnath *doli* does not receive the same level of personal and communal devotional attention as the *doli* of Madmaheshvar-Shiva. Madmaheshvar is the second Shiva of the Panch Kedar and is located directly north of Ukhimath; the Madmaheshvar *doli* also departs and arrives into Ukhimath. I observed that the character of the Madmaheshvar processions that similarly open and close the season and that depart and arrive into Ukhimath are in sharp contrast to the Kedarnath processions. With the Madmaheshvar *doli*, its departure from Ukhimath is rather quiet. People are sad that Madmaheshvar is leaving and do not wish to draw attention to their sadness. When Madmaheshvar returns to Ukhimath it is the single most important event in the Ukhimath calendar, more so than when the Kedarnath *doli* arrives, even though Kedarnath is far more famous and important to the economic life of the region.

The primary markers of Madmaheshvar's arrival into Ukhimath are the heights of devotional intensity reached as Madmaheshvar enters particular villages. The Madmaheshvar *doli* shakes as it travels, renders judgments on land disputes, and listens to the calls of those in need for justice. The Kedarnath *doli* does not do these things; it is rather a moving emblem of what is perennially present in Kedarnath, the importance of the pilgrimage season, and the worldwide renown of a *jyotirlinga* that is one of the sites of the Char Dham Yatra.

This is perhaps a good moment to take leave of Kedarnath. The procession, accompanied with the sounds of drums and bagpipes that sonically evoke the India's colonial period and with the *dhol* and the *damav* that sonically evoke the local Himalayan contexts of Garhwal, enters Ukhimath. Local school children and Ukhimath residents accompany the *doli* as it nears the Aumkareshvar temple, the site of a marriage between the daughter of a *rakshasa* (Usha) and the grandson of Krishna (Aniruddh). The Rawal of Kedarnath, a Virashaiva *jagadguru* and himself a walking form of Kedarnath, welcomes the *doli*, and then he is himself worshipped. The travelling form of Shiva installed in the *doli* has arrived in Ukhimath, and a different Kedarnath-Shiva *murti* will receive worship in the Aumkareshvar temple, as do forms of each of the Panch Kedar. The high Himalayas in the distance, sometimes shining with white-reflected snow, sometimes dark with their own special severe weather, remind anyone who looks northward to the horizon that the complex agency of Kedarnath-Shiva rests and waits to become again a place possible for humans to reach.

## Appendix I: The Upapuranic *Kedārakhaṇḍa*

### *Published Editions*

I am in possession of five published versions of the upapuranic *Kedārakhaṇḍa*, In order of publication, these versions are:

- 1) *Śrīskandamahāpurāṇāntargatakedārakhaṇḍaḥ*. (Bombay: Khemraj Shrikrishnadas 'Shri Venktateshwar' Steam Press, 1906/1963 Samvat/1828 Shaka). Sanskrit only. 206 chapters. Table of contents with brief subject headings. Unbound; palm leaf type rectangular printed pages.
- 2) *Kedārakhaṇḍa Purāṇam (mūl saṁskṛt, hindī anuvād evaṁ vistr̥t samīkṣā)*. Ed. Kṛṣṇākumār. (Kankhal, Haridvār: Prācyā Vidyā Akādamī, 1993). Sanskrit with Hindi introduction and translation. Four volumes. 206 chapters. Table of contents with chapter summary, map of Garhwal.
- 3) *Skandapurāṇātargata - Kedārakhaṇḍam (Hindī anuvād sahit)*. Trans. Śivānand Nauṭiyāl. (Ilāhābād: Hindī Sāhitya Sammelan – Prayāg, 1994). Sanskrit with Hindi introduction and translation. One volume. 206 chapters. Introduction, table of contents with brief subject headings.
- 4) *Kedārakhaṇḍa of Maharṣi Vyāsa with the Hindi Commentary*. Ed. and Trans. Vācaspati Dwivedī. Gaṅgānāthajhā-Granthamālā Vol. 17. (Varanasi: Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, 2001). Sanskrit with Hindi introduction and translation. Four volumes. 206 chapters. Table of contents with brief chapter summary.
- 5) *Maharṣivyāsapraṇītaḥ Skandamahāpurāṇāntargataḥ: Kedārakhaṇḍaḥ (ratnaprabhābhāṣāvyākhyāsahit)*. Trans. Vrajaratna Bhaṭṭācārya. (Delhi:

Caukhambā Saṃskṛt Pratiṣṭhān, 2007). Sanskrit with Hindi translation. One volume. 206 chapters. Table of contents with brief chapter summary. This text may be a reprint; Shivanand Nautiyal mentions Bhattacharya's edition in the introduction to his own edition, published in 1994.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Variation Among Published Editions of the Upapurānic Kedārahanda***

Some preliminary observations about the text are in order here. Each of the published editions in my possession contains 206 chapters. While more complete examination of this point is certainly warranted, using chapter fifty two (in which the Pandavas pursue and touch Shiva) as a benchmark, it appears that while the layout and pagination of the Sanskrit text differs from version to version, the text itself remains constant. However, the chapter headings and summaries found in the table of contents vary, and are not wholly indicative of the contents of the chapter. In the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan version, for example, the title the Hindi translation assigns chapter fifty-two, “Vaitaraṇīgaṅgā Jī”, gives no indication that the chapter mentions the visit of the Pandavas to Kedarnath. In the Caukhamba edition, chapters fifty-one and fifty-two are entitled “Rudranāth Māhātmya.”

### ***Content and Structure***

The upapurānic *Kedarakhanda* begins on a cosmogonic note with a discussion between a group of sages and Suta, the narrator, about the true form (*svarūpa*) of Brahma (ch. 1). It gives an account of creation and the arising of Manu, and proceeds

---

<sup>1</sup> Shivanand Nautiyal, trans., *Kedārahandaṃ - Skandapurāṇāntargata (Hindī anuvād sahit)* (Ilahabad: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1994), 9.

Note: Shivanand Nautiyal also mentions a Nandaprayag (also in Garhwal) edition of this text, also published by Venkateshwar Steam Press, carried out (presumably with translation) by Maheśānand Śarmā Nautiyāl. Shivanand Nautiyal states that there is no difference between the Sanskrit text of Maheshanand Nautiyal's version and the 1906 Venkateshwar Press Bombay version (see the first edition discussed above) on which Shivanand Nautiyal bases his own edition.



through a cosmologically narrowing progression in classic Indic form through topics such as the descendants of Manu (9), the four ages (10), and the lineages of Mandara and Kuvalashva (16-19). It then tells the story of king Harischandra in detail (21-25), which leads in turn to the story of King Ocean (Sagar) and the destruction of his many sons by the sage Kapila (27-29). The structure of the entire text is that of a sometimes nesting, sometimes switching set of dialogical frames between pairs: Suta-sages, Vasishta-Arundhati, Shiva-Parvati, Narada-Skanda, Utpalaka-Dharmanetra.

The stage is then set for the localization of the narrative to Garhwal. Sagar's descendant Bhagirathi performs *tapas* to bring the goddess Ganga to earth and thereby bring about the rescue of Sagar's sons (30-35). Ganga eventually consents, and Shiva bears the weight of her descent to earth through his matted locks. The story of the descent of the Ganga and the elucidation of her multiple watery flows frame the first mention of the Pandavas and the beginning of the text's explicitly geographic focus on Garhwal with several accounts of Kedarnath (see discussion of these passages in Chapter Four). From this point (40) on, the structure of the remaining bulk of the text focuses its attention on a site-by-site elucidation of important shrines and natural features in the area known today as Garhwal.

This presentation roughly proceeds according to the following progression of modern areas within Garhwal: the Kedarnath valley and the Panch Kedar (41-56), Badrinath (57), Nanda Prayag and Rudraprayag (58, 63), Karnaprayag (81), Nanda Devi (81), Kalimath and Kali *kshetra* (82-85), Uttarkashi area (95), the region to the west of the Ganga in the Uttarkashi district (98), Haridwar (103), Rishikesh and environs (116-117), the western Yamuna region (131), Gaumukh, near Gangotri (148),

Deoprayag/Devprayag (150-163), Shri *kshetra*, i.e. the Srinagar area (179), Rudraprayag (181), the Mandakini valley (194), Guptkashi (200), Nala (200) , and the area of Bhilla mountain (204; these last three are all locales in the upper Kedar valley). The text concludes with a mention of Mount Sumeru and Mount Kailash (205), linking the local geography of the region back to the broader and more well-known general topography of the Himalayas, and a return to the story of Vasishta and Arundhati that, after the conversation between Suta and a group of sages, began the text. That is to say, arguably the geographically localized part of the text begins and ends with the Kedar valley, loosely construed as the area between Guptkashi and Kedarnath, extending to the west past Triyugi Narayan. As the text proceeds through this geographic movement it engages in detail numerous other subjects, including examples such as: praise for Devi (85), Vishnu (53, 165), and Shiva (64, 97), retellings of sections of the *Ramayana* (121), *Devi Mahatmya* (86-88, 186-187), and the *Mahabharata* (181), the story of Daksha (104-105, 129, 162), a systematic elucidation of music and sound (67-77), the nature of *maya* (117-118), the science of archery (126), the importance and proper treatment of Brahmins (122), and the proper procedures for going on *yatra* to a particular place (110, 163). The majority of these topics connect to a specific site under discussion at that moment in the progression of the text. The discussion of each site often involves an account of a journey by a person to the site that has a transformative result.

### ***Date and Composition***

Vacaspati Dwivedi (and others as well) acknowledges that the upapuranic *Kedarakhandā* differs from the *Kedarakhandā* of the *Skanda Purana*.<sup>2</sup> He writes that it is not possible to fix the author of the text; his discussion of this point implicitly assumes single authorship.<sup>3</sup> Dwivedi further states that precisely dating the text is not possible and that he accords with Krishnakumar's view that the text must have been composed after the eleventh century because the text mentions Gorakhnath, whom he (Dwivedi) places in the eleventh century.<sup>4</sup> However, Krishnakumar suggests that, because the text mentions both Gorakhnath and Satyanath, part of the text may date from before the fifteenth century and overall the text dates from the first part of the sixteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Krishnakumar makes this assessment on the basis of the following indications in the text: the mention of Satyanath (linked to fifteenth century Garhwal) and Gorakhnath, the mention of the *Mānasakhaṇḍa* (a *Kedārakhaṇḍa*-type text about the neighboring region of Kumaon that according to some is only two-three hundred years old), the utilization of content from the *Kulārṇavatantra* (arguably composed in the sixteenth century), the boost given to *tirtha-yatra* during the reigns of Balaji Rao (Nana Saheb) and Ahilyabai in the eighteenth century in middle India, and its repeated mention of Bhrigupatan and the practice of jumping to one's death from Śrīśilā (outlawed by the British).<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Vācaspati Dwivedī, ed., *Kedārakhaṇḍa of Mahārṣi Vyāsa with the Hindi Commentary*, trans. Vācaspati Dwivedī, vol. 1, Gaṅgānāthajhā Granthamālā 17 (Varanasi: Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, 2001), 7.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 1:8.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 1:9.

<sup>5</sup> Kṛṣṇākumār, ed., *Kedārakhaṇḍa Purāṇam (mūl saṃskṛt, hindī anuvād evaṃ viśṛt samīkṣā)* (Kankhal, Haridvar: Prācyā Vidyā Akādamī, 1993), 1:21-22.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 22.

Based on the above data as well the mention the text makes of relatively new temples in the Garhwal area, and the ways in which the text returns more expansively to sites already discussed in earlier sections, Shivaprasad Dabaral suggests that the upapuranic *Kedarakhanda* was originally two texts; he breaks the text after chapter one hundred.<sup>7</sup> Shivaprasad Naithani agrees with Dabaral regarding the generally composite nature of the text.<sup>8</sup>

I follow Dabaral, Naithani, and Krishnakumar in regarding the upapuranic *Kedarakhanda* as a composite text. The treatment of Kedarnath and the Pandavas is ample indication in this regard: the different passages about the site (see my discussion of these passages in Chapter Four) differ markedly with respect to their tone, content, and the specificity of their regard for the site. It is not certain that a direct focus on the elucidation of the different characters of the *Kedarakhanda* as a composite text would produce conclusions beyond what the above scholars have already suggested regarding the correlation of specific strata of the text to specific social groups and times.

However, it is possible that by putting their conclusions into conversation with recent scholarship (especially that of Bisschop, Fleming, and Smith) on Varanasi and the *Shiva* and *Skanda Purana*, that new conclusions could be unearthed. There are, for example, two accounts of Kedarnath as a *jyotirlinga* found in the *Shiva Purana* that seem to know different things about the site, one in the *koṭirudrasaṃhita* and one in the *jñānasaṃhita*; Fleming observes that the former mentions the pursuit of the Pandavas

---

<sup>7</sup> Śivaprasād Ḍabarāl, *Śrī Uttarākhaṇḍ Yātrā Darśan* (Nārayaṇ Koṭi, Gaṛhvāl: Viśālmaṇī Śarmā Upādhyāya, 1961), 101-106.

<sup>8</sup> Personal communication.

and the touching of Shiva and the latter mentions the *avatars* of Vishnu.<sup>9</sup> Bisschop's remarks on Kedarnath, discussed in preliminary fashion in Chapter Two, are another generative point of departure in this regard.<sup>10</sup> On the basis of a late *mahatmya* text, the *Pañcakedāramāhātmya* (with translation and commentary by Jvālāprasāda Miśra), he notes that early versions of the *Skanda Purana* may have been aware of at least three of the Panch Kedar, and further suggests that a site known as Mahābhairava may refer to Bhrigupatan/Bhairav Jhamp.<sup>11</sup> Bisschop's observations serve as a point of departure for a Garhwal-specific examination of the connections between puranic and upapuranic mentions of the region, including a more substantive understanding of when, how, for whom, and in what contexts it begins to function as a unitary text.

#### ***Investigation of Shaivite Texts Relevant to Kedarnath***

There are over twenty manuscripts in the Kritisamapada online manuscript database of the National Mission for Manuscripts in Delhi that appear to be either *kedāramāhātmya* or *kedāraśalpa* texts.<sup>12</sup> However, given that the claims of the upapuranic *Kedāraśhaṇḍa* and the *Kedāraśalpa* about their relationships to other texts such as the *Skanda Purāṇā* and the *Rudrayāmalatantra* cannot be straightforwardly trusted, there really is no way to know what is in each of these (and doubtless dozens of other) manuscripts without examining a number of specific examples. There is a substantive *kedāramāhātmya* found in at least one published text whose colophon says

---

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Fleming, "The cult of the jyotirlingas and the history of Śaivite worship" (Ph. D., McMaster University, 2007), 81-83.

<sup>10</sup> See for example Peter Christiaan Bisschop, *Early Saivism and the Skandapurana: Sects and Centres*, Groningen Oriental studies (Groningen: E. Forsten, 2006), 180-181.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 9, 13, 16, 18, 66, 177, 178, 182, 192, and 223.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.namami.org/pdatabase.aspx>, accessed 5/24/2010, search term "kedar".

that it is part of the *Vāyu Purāṇa*, but at this time I possess only a digital image of the relevant pages and no bibliographic information about the text from which it comes.

It certainly appears that a careful cross-textual and archival examination of the upapuranic *Kedarakhandā*, the *Kedarakalpa*, the *Shiva Purana* and *Skanda Purana*, other Shaivite puranas, and select tantric and agamic materials would be fruitful for a full understanding of the different historical and conceptual layers found in the upapuranic *Kedārakhaṇḍa*. It is my hope that this brief summary of the lay of the land will prove useful as a point of departure in this regard.

### ***The History of Printing in the Kedarnath Valley***

Such a project could fruitfully intersect with the social and religious history of the Kedarnath valley. One sees both in the production of print and visual culture in the Kedarnath valley in the last one hundred years the ebb and flow of local agency. Most of the pamphlets produced now, including most of the examples discussed in Chapter Four, were authored (to the extent authorship can be ascribed), published, and printed outside the Kedarnath valley. The publishers are the Badri Kedar Temple Committee, Uttaranchal Tourism, and Randhir Prakashan (based in Haridwar).<sup>13</sup>

However, there was a time when a significant amount of the religious literature available in the Kedarnath valley was authored and published by local scholars. So, for example, far and away the most substantive pamphlet (and least available and purchased) pamphlet about Kedarnath available in the Kedarnath bazaar is the *Śrī Kedārnāth-Māhātmya* authored by Ramprasad Kothiyal and Pashupatinath Lalmohariya

---

<sup>13</sup>The other main publishers and wholesalers of Uttarakhand specific popular religious literature are Amar Singh and Karam Singh, also based in Haridwar. The Gita Press, one of the most significant publishing houses of religious literature in north India, has a massive presence including a riverfront *bhavan* in Rishikesh, but most of the texts it publishes are not Uttarakhand-specific.

(both of whom I interviewed several times).<sup>14</sup> The Kothiyals and the Lalmohariyas are Kedarnath *tirth purohit* families from Lamgaundi. The *Śrī Kedār Māhātmya* is published by Ganga Dhar Vajpayi (whom I discussed in Chapter Five) using a Garhwali printing press in Rishikesh and authored by Govind Ram Shastri of Guptkashi under Vajpayi's guidance.<sup>15</sup>

Arguably the most important personage in the history of printing in the Kedarntath valley is the figure of Vishalmani Sharma Upadhyaya, a Garhwali scholar of the Kedarnath valley area who reputedly established his own printing press in Narayan Koti, several kilometers north of Guptkashi on the Kedarnath road. This press published, among other works, one of the two editions I possess of the *Kedāra kalpa*, discussed in Chapter Four.<sup>16</sup> The other edition is published by Shri Khemaraja Krishnadass (alternatively Shri Khemraj Krsishnadas) of Bombay, one of the major publishing houses of puranic material in India. One long-term research project of mine will be to gradually interpenetrate such material from the history of the Kedarnath valley with larger trajectories in the study of Garhwal and Shaivism to greater extent than I have been able to carry out in Chapter Two of this work.

---

<sup>14</sup>Rāmprasād Koṭhiyāl and Paśupatināth Lālmohariyā, *Śrī Kedārñāth Mahātmya* (Lamgauṇḍī/Gwalior: Devīprasād Koṭhiyāl).

<sup>15</sup>Gangadhar Vajpayee and Gobind Ram Shastri, *Shri Kedar Mahatmya: Shri Kedarnath Dham, Its Importance and Historical Description* (Semwal Printing Press, Rishikesh: Gangadhar Vajpayee).

<sup>16</sup>Viśālmaṇi Śarmā Upādhyāya, *Kedāra Kalpa* (Nārayaṇ Koṭi, Gaṛhvāl: Viśālmaṇi Śarmā Upādhyāya, 1952).

## चीरवासा महात्म्यम्

गौरीतीर्थाद्दूर्घ्नभागे पर्वते सौम्यदिक् स्थिते ।  
चीरवासा भैरवस्तु क्षेत्रं रक्षति मामकम् । १ ।

हे देवि ! उस गौरी तीर्थ से उत्तर दिशा की तरफ डेढ़ मील ऊपर पर्वत में  
चीरवासा नाम का भैरव मेरे केकार क्षेत्र की रक्षा के निमित्त वास करता है ।

तस्मै चीरादिकं दत्वा सर्वपुण्यं लभेन्नरः ।  
अन्यथा तत्फलं सर्व हरते भैरवः शिवः । २ ।

उस भैरव को चीर (बस्त्र) नैवेद्य धूपादि देने से समस्त पुण्य यात्री को  
मिलते हैं, जो भैरव को चीर आदि न देकर आ जाता है उसकी यात्रा का समस्त  
फल वह चीरवासा भैरव रूपी शिव हरण कर लेता है ।

सभी धर्मावलम्बी तीर्थ यात्री महानुभावों से अनुरोध है कि चीरवासा  
भैरव मन्दिर के जीर्णोद्धार के लिए यथाशक्ति दान देकर कदार यात्रा का पुण्य  
लाभ करें ।

बिनीत-  
राम भरोसे पुजारी  
ग्राम- डुंगर सेमला

पर्वतमित्र प्रिंटिंग वर्क्स गुप्तकाशी ]

Figure I.1. "Situated up from Gauri Tirtha in the direction of the moon is clothes-wearing Bhairava, [who] guards my area. Having given clothing and other [gifts] to him a man gets complete merit. Otherwise Bhairava/Shiva destroy all his fruits [of his actions]." These verses go with a small Bhairava shrine that lies on the Gaurikund-Kedarnath path just up (both in direction and elevation) from Gaurikund. This page was given to me by the custodian of the shrine. Entitled *Cīrvāsa Māhātmyam*, commissioned by Rām Bharose Pujārī, of the village Dūringar Semlā (in the Kedarnath valley) and printed at the Parvat Mitra Printing Press of Guptkashi (also in the Kedarnath valley), it recalls the time when local printing presses were more the norm for the production of religious literature in the Kedarnath valley. The verses, here labeled one and two, come from the upapuranic *Kedārakhaṇḍa* (ch. 42: 57-60).



## Appendix II

### A Visual Introduction to Kedarnath



Figure II.1. Arrival into the horse area just before Kedarnath village.

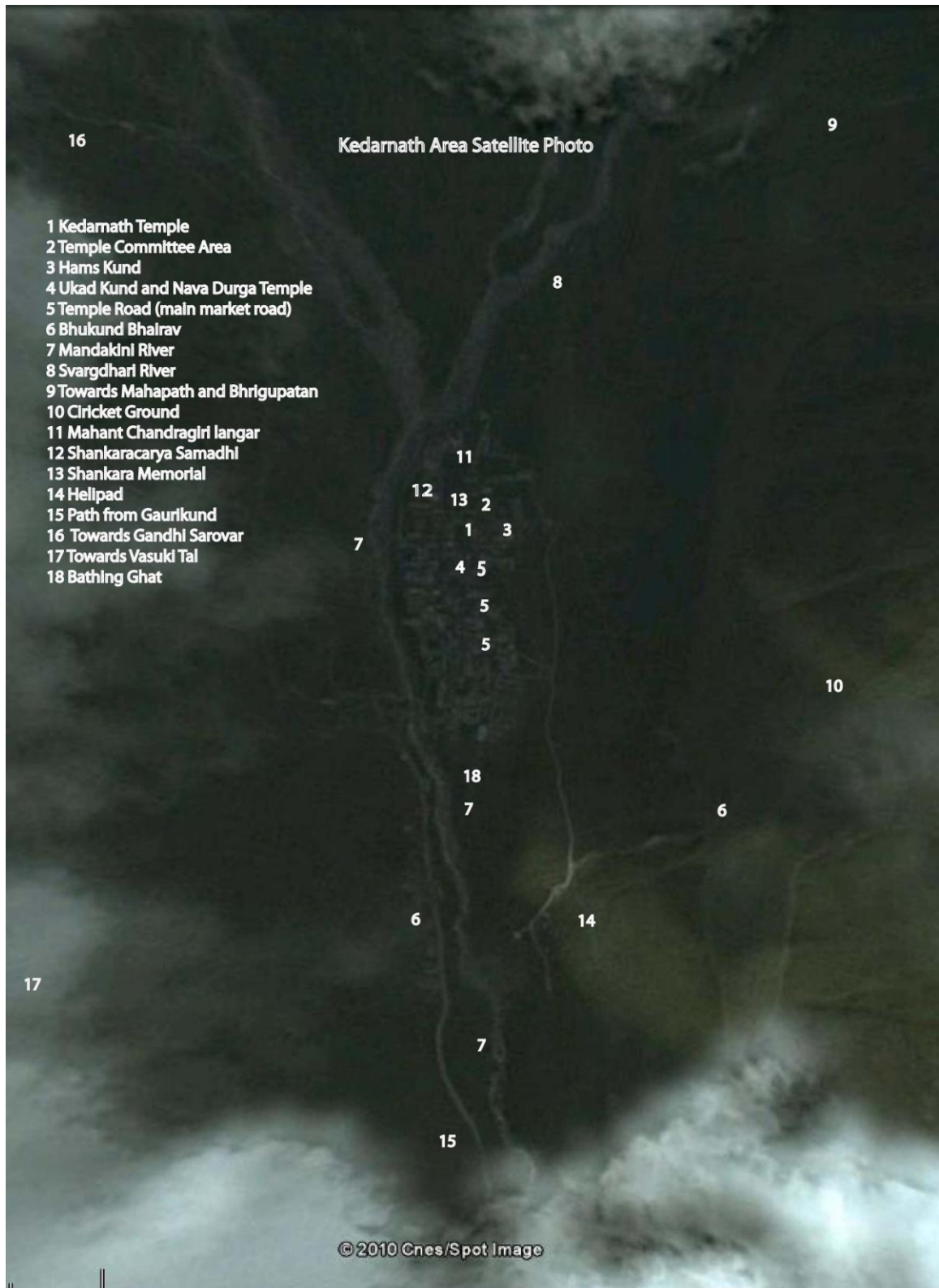


Figure II. 2. Satellite photo of Kedarnath with key. This map is produced by Google Earth in conjunction with Cnes/Spot Image. The labels and numbers are my own.



Figure II.3. Panoramic view of Kedarnath from near Vasuki Tal. The eastward turning valley of Mahapath is visible on the middle right.





Figure II.4. A west-looking view from the shrine of Bhukund Bhairav to the east of the center of Kedarnath village (without the temple just to the north).





Figure II. 5. Northwest looking view from the Bhukund Bhairav Shrine of the northern section of Kedarnath village (including the temple). Gandhi Sarovar lies unseen behind the rise of the pass between the two peaks in the middle background.



Figure II. 6. View of Kedarnath from the north-west (near Gandhi Sarovar) looking south.





Figure II.7. View from the center of Kedarnath village looking northeast towards the Mahapath valley (indicated here by the eastern edge of the cloud bank). The top of the temple is just visible on the east.



Figure II.8. The Kedarnath temple with the pass to Gandhi Sarovar behind and to the northwest.

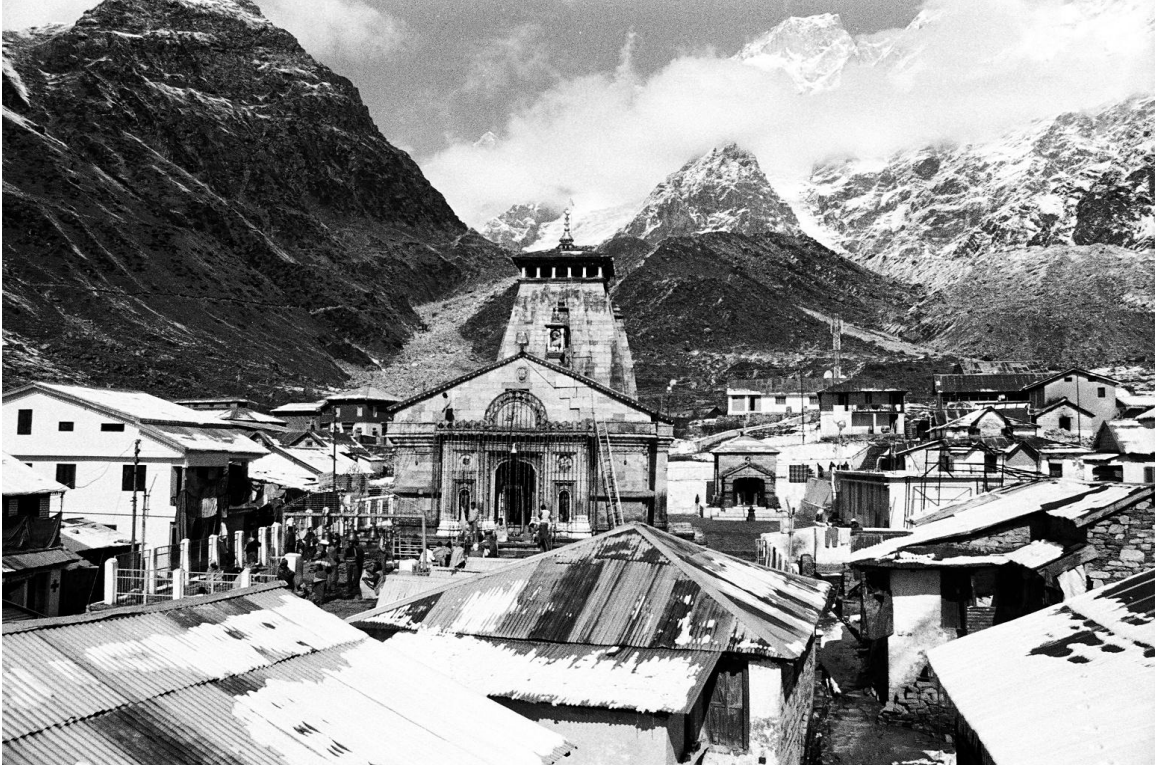


Figure II.9. A wider angle view of the temple.



Figure II.10. A shot of the temple in the fog and rain, garlanded for Bhatuj, from the angle favored by local photographers.





Figure II.11. The shrine of Bhukund Bhairavnath with Bhairavnath Baba in his role as custodian of the shrine and a visiting renunciant.



Figure II.12. The *doli* of Nala Devi having just visited Bhukund Bhairavnath.





Figure II.13. The *murti* of Shankara found at his traditional place of *samadhi*.



Figure II.14. The recently donated crystal *linga* adjacent to Shankara's older *murti*.



Figure II.15. Retas Kund from the outside.



Figure II.16. Walking to Retas Kund with the shrine of Bhukund Bhairavnath almost directly above.





Figure II.17. The *linga* and famous bubbling pool found at Retas Kund.



Figure II.18. A view of (from right to left) Udak Kund, a small shop of *puja* materials, and the Nava Durga shrine (the small red-fronted building) from the main road of Kedarnath, looking northwest.



Figure II.19. Hams Kund, looking southwest.



Figure II.20. One of the two heli-pads, looking south with the path to Kedarnath in the background on the other side of the valley.





Figure II. 21. A view of the two heli-pads from the opposite side of the valley just before the horse area, looking east.



Figure II.22. The queue stretching back to the northwest towards Bharatsevashram, signaled here by building with the red flag. The temple is to the immediate right of this view.



Figure II.23. A view of the queue looking directly south.



Figure II.24. The final section of the queue during high season, looking south.



Figure II.25. The queue for *shringar arati darshan* in the evening, looking southeast.



Figure II.26. A basic *puja thali*, ready for a dollop of semi-solid *ghi* (from the jar) to be placed on to the empty space in the *thali*.





Figure II.27. *Brahmakamal* (Brahma-lotus).



Figure II.28. *Brahmakamal* for sale in the bazaar.





Figure II.29. Proofs of instant photographic portraits of *yatris* in the temple courtyard.



Figure II. 30. Sitting in the temple courtyard after *darshan* and *puja*.



Figure II.31. In the courtyard of the Aumkareshvar temple in Ukhimath, preparing the Kedarnath *doli* for the opening procession.



Figure II.32. The Kedarnath *doli* being adorned with flowers prior to departure on the procession.



Figure II.33. A close-up of the *murti* that travels in the *doli*.



Figure II.34. The opening procession of the Kedarnath *doli* on the path between Gaurikund and Kedarnath.





Figure II.35. The Kedarnath *doli* about to cross the Mandakini and enter into Kedarnath proper.



Figure II.36. The Kedarnath *doli* proceeds through the main bazaar towards the temple.



Figure II.37. The Kedarnath *doli* enters the temple courtyard at Kedarnath at the beginning of the season.



Figure II.38. The *doli* of a Garhwali deity on *deora* in the temple courtyard.





Figure II.39. A Garhwali deity on *deora* receives *puja* and *arati* in front of the temple doors.



Figure II.40. A group of Garhwali *yatriis* sits in the temple courtyard while their deity rests on the steps to the temple.





Figure II.41. The Kedarnath *doli*, Shankar Ling (the Virashaiva *pujari* in 2007), and a representative of the Samiti prepare to leave Kedarnath for the closing procession.



Figure II.42. The Kedarnath *doli* on the closing procession between Kedarnath and Gaurikund.

Further cartographic information on the Kedarnath area is available through the Internet in two ways. First, one may view the area using Bhuvan, a browser-based program for viewing satellite imagery with cartographic overlays created and maintained by the Government of India. Use of Bhuvan is free but requires that you install a viewer that will work in conjunction with your browser. See the following link for a point of departure:

<http://bhuvan.nrsc.gov.in/>

Once the program is found the Kedarnath area can be viewed by searching for "Kedarnath, Uttarakhand".

Second, it may be possible to order a physical map of the Kedarnath area from the Survey of India. In particular, there is an excellent trekking map of the Badri-Kedar region (entitled "Badari-Kedar") whose details can be viewed here:

[http://www.surveyofindia.gov.in/trekking\\_maps.htm](http://www.surveyofindia.gov.in/trekking_maps.htm)

Inquiries should be addressed to the following:

Director  
Map Archive & Dissemination Centre,  
Survey Of India,  
Post Box No.28  
Hathibarkala Estate,  
DEHRADUN-248001  
Uttarakhand  
Telephone:- 0135-2747051-58  
Fax:- 0135-2749793  
[E-mail:-bandpsoi@sancharnet.in](mailto:bandpsoi@sancharnet.in)

This contact information may also be found here:

<http://www.surveyofindia.gov.in/Contact%20us.html>



## Glossary of Select Terms

**abhiṣeka** (S).<sup>1</sup> The pouring/offering/anointing of a deity or religiously marked object (such as the highest spire of a new temple) with auspicious substances such as milk, yoghurt, honey, *ghi*, and water.

**adhikār** (H). Traditional right or privilege.

**ākarsaṇ** (H). Attraction.

**akhand jyoti** (H). Eternal (lit. “unsectioned”) light; in Kedarnath it refers to an oil lamp in the inner sanctum that according to tradition remains continually alight.

**āliṅgan karnā** (H). To embrace.

**Amarnāth** (H). One of the other significant Shaivite shrines in the Indian Himalayas, located in Jammu and Kashmir. The *linga* there takes the form of natural ice stalagmites that reform each year, and the pilgrimage season is less than two months, typically in July-August.

**ārati** (H). The offering of light/fire usually in the form of hand-held lamps, often with song, to a deity or other entity of marked ritual attention.

**āśīrvāda** (S). Blessing, benediction.

**āśrama** (S). A place of religious striving, often related to a specific guru, sage or community.

**Badrī-Kedār Mandir Samiti** (H). Badri Kedar Temple Committee, a state governmental organization created in 1939 tasked with the administration of Kedarnath, Badrinath, and numerous other shrines and educational institutions in the Kedarnath and Badrinath areas.

**Badrīnāth** (H). Abode of Vishnu in the form of Badrivishal, one of the pre-eminent shrines in north India, normally the last of the four shrines of the Uttarakhand Char Dham Yatra to be visited.

**Bamsū area**. The Bamsu/Lamgaunḍi/Sonitpur area is located directly opposite Ukhimath on the Guptkashi side of the valley. It is perhaps the most central area of the *tirth purohit* families who work in Kedarnath.

**Baṇāsūr** (H). The *rakshasa* devotee of Shiva who is the village deity of the Bamsu region.

---

<sup>1</sup> “S” designates a Sanskrit form, “H” and “G” likewise for Hindi and Garhwali.

- Bhatuj** (G). local Kedar valley form of the *annakut* festival, observed in Kedarnath and several other area temples in August-September, in which the *linga* is covered by bricks of boiled rice that create a pyramidal shape.
- Bhīma** (S). One of the Pandava brothers; he is best known for being the strongest and most impulsive of the five Pandavas.
- Bhṛigupatan (Bhṛigutīrtha/Bhṛigutumga)** (S). The high/falling place/*tirtha* of the sage Bhṛigu, possibly the place from which devotees may have leaped.
- Bhūkuṇḍ Bhairavnāth** (H). The Kedarnath form of the Himalayan deity, lieutenant (and active form of) Shiva who is the guardian of the Kedarnath end-valley.
- brahmakamal** (H). Brahma lotuses, a type of lotus that is one of the distinct items offered in the Kedarnath (and other high altitude Garhwali) temples; it reportedly only grows about fourteen thousand feet, that is to say several thousand feet above the altitude of the Kedarnath temple.
- Cār Dhām** (H). “Four abodes” – while in an all India sense this refers to the pilgrimage places of Badrinath, Puri, Rameshvaram, and Dvarka in north India and especially in Uttarakhand it refers to Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath, and Badrinath.
- dakṣiṇā** (H). Fee paid to a ritual specialist for services rendered or to a teacher for their instruction.
- daldali bhūmi** (H). “Marshy ground”, the Hindi translation for Sanskrit word *kedāra*.
- darśan** (H). The act of seeing and being seen by the deity (or other entity of marked attention) which comprises one of the fundamental forms of Hindu devotion and practice.
- deora** (G). A Garhwali version of the more Sanskritic term *devra*, presumably a contraction of *devta-yātrā*, this term refers to the pilgrimage processions of Garhwali deities when they leave their villages and, like human Garhwali *yatris*, embark on pilgrimage within Garhwal accompanied by residents of their village or group of villages.
- dev bhūmī** (H). “Land of the gods”, commonly refers in the modern period to Garhwal.
- dhandhā** (H). Occupation.
- dharmśāla** (H). A pilgrim rest house existing primarily as a service to *yatris* rather than as a commercial undertaking.

***dharm/dharma*** (H/S). “Tradition”, “religion”, “duty”, “that which upholds.”

***ḍolī*** (G). The Garhwali word for the palanquin/litter in which deities/the *murtis* of deities are carried.

**Durgā Pūjā** . The festival of the “worship of the Goddess in her form of Durga”; especially prominent in West Bengal, it is when many Bengalis travel to other parts of India on vacation and *yatra*.

***dvādaś jyotirling*** (H). The twelve *lingas* of light, a linked group of approximately twelve Shaivite shrines found in different parts of India.

**Gandhi Sarovar**. Also known as Corabari Tāl, it is the small glacial lake several kilometers northwest of Kedarnath that reputedly received a portion of Gandhi’s ashes.

**Gaṅgotrī** (H). The pilgrimage place that marks the source of the river Ganga; the second of the Uttarakhand Char Dham.

**Garhvāl** (G). The region of Uttarakhand in which Kedarnath is located; to the east is the region of Kumaon which is also a part of Uttarakhand.

**Garuḍ Chatti** (H). “The way-station of Garuda [eagle vehicle of Vishnu]”; one of the last stops on the path between Gaurikund and Kedarnath before Kedarnath itself; there is a Ramanandi ashram located here.

**Gaurīkuṇḍ** (H). The trailhead for Kedarnath and home to Parvati in her form of Gauri; also famous for baths fed by a warm mineral spring.

***ghī*** (H). Clarified butter, an important substance for cooking, medicinal, and ritual usages.

***ghī malīs / ghī lepan / ghṛt lepan*** (H). The massaging/anointing/smearing (of the Kedarnath *linga*) with *ghī*.

***ghoṛā-parāv*** (H). “Horse halting area”; the area where *yatris* mount and dismount from the horses and ponies they have ridden up from Gaurikund; on the opposite, western, side of the Mandakini river from Kedarnath proper.

**Gorakhnāth** (H). One of the most important figures in the history of the Nath tradition, a north Indian Shaivite and primarily renunciant group with a significant presence in medieval and modern Garhwal.

- Guptkāśī** (H). The town on the western side of the Mandakini river valley directly opposite Ukhimath that functions as the transit gateway and staging point for transportation to Gaurikund.
- Haridvār** (H). “Vishnu’s door”, traditionally known as *māyāpuri*, the pilgrimage place on the banks of the Ganga that lies just below where the Ganga begins to enter the mountains and Rishikesh.
- jāgar** (H/G). A genre of Garhwali song in which deities are invoked/awakened and then invited to hear sung narratives of their deeds.
- jyotirlinga** (S). Shiva’s form as a *linga* of light, traditionally associated with a series of twelve temples (the exact list is variable) found in different parts of India. Kedarnath is a *jyotirlinga*.
- Kālamukha** (S). One of the early (first millennium CE) social formations in the history of Shaivism, based in Karnataka.
- Kalpanāth / Kalpeśvar**. The fifth of the five (*panch*) Kedar, a series of five Shaivite shrines found in the Rudraprayag and Chamoli districts of Garhwal. Kedarnath is the most well known of the five.
- Kāpālīka** (S). Another early Shaivite group often associated with antinomian practices; iconographically often depicted with a human skull as a begging bowl.
- Kashmir Shaivism**. A tantric, sometimes non-dualist and often Brahmanical form of Shaivite thought that arose in Kashmir around the ninth century CE in conversation with Shaiva Siddhanta.
- kathā** (H). “Story”; depending on usage this term mean simply “a story, a narrative” or it may refer to the public narration and exposition of texts such as the Puranas and the *Ramayana*.
- kedāra** (S). “Marshy soil”; joined with *-nāth* to create Kedarnath, “the lord of the marshy soil” / the place of Kedarnath / Kedarnath-Shiva.
- Kedārakalpa** (S). A tantric Sanskrit text about the especial power of the Garhwal region.
- Kedārakhaṇḍa** (*Ukkh*) (S). An upapuranic Sanskrit text about the region of Garhwal that describes itself as the identically named first section of the *Skanda Purana*.
- kunḍ** (H). “Basin, pool, tank” – in the context of Kedarnath a *kund* is an auspicious pool of water housed in a stone base of human construction.
- Lamgaunḍī** (H/G). See Bamsu.

- liṅga** (S). The columnal form that constitutes the symbolic/indexical presence of Shiva in a specific location.
- maṭh** (H). A religious establishment and/or residence of a religious community.
- Madmaheśvar** (H). The second of the Panch Kedar shrines, located directly north of Ukhimath. Ukhimath itself lies in Madmaheshvar's "area".
- mahāpātha** (S). "Great road", the road in the Himalayas, beginning near Kedarnath, that is the passage to heaven on which the Pandavas famously embarked.
- melā** (H/G). "A fair"; in Garhwal a *mela* is usually also an occasion on which local deities are invoked, emerge from the temple, and dance and are danced in view of the public.
- mūrti** (H). Images/image-forms, often of deities, that receive *pūjā*.
- Nāth** (H). A medieval and modern north Indian Shaivite group comprised primarily, but not exclusively, of renunciants, tracing its lineage back to the legendary teacher and sage Matsyendranath.
- Pāśupata** (S) "Lord of creatures"; one of the earliest Shaivite groups, the Pashupatas appear to have been devoted to Shiva in his (somewhat mysterious) identity of the Lord of Creatures and to have worshipped him in his *liṅga* form.
- pañhārī** (H). "Of the mountains"; the general designation in Hindi for the ethnic groups and cultures found in the Himalayan areas of northern Indian.
- Paṇḍav Nr̥tya** (H/G). "The dance of the Pandavas" ; the Garhwali performance tradition in which specific villages sponsor a month-long performance in song and dance of the story of the Garhwali *Mahabharata*.
- pārthiva** (S). A form constructed for the worship of Shiva that is in some way made from earthen material.
- Phegu (Phegu Devī)** (H/G) . One of the most important forms of Devi located in the Kedarnath valley, found in the Bamsu area.
- piṅḍādāna** (S). The act of ritually nourishing ancestors through the creation and offering of small balls or cakes made from food substances such as rice and wheat flour.
- prasāda** (S). Materials, objects, and substances that have been offered to a deity or other entity of marked significance and received back as a form of blessed remnant.

**pūjā** (H). The act of offering to, propitiating, worshipping, and venerating deities or other entities of marked religious significance.

**pūjāri** (H). One who carries out *puja*; typically (in the Kedarnath valley context) this indicates someone whose designated role is the daily worship of the deities in a temple whether or not there are any specific human patrons who which to offer individual or family *pūjā*.

**rākṣas** (H). Demon, evil spirit.

**retas** (S/H). Stream, mercury/quicksilver, semen (especially of Shiva); a powerful fluid of alchemical significance.

**Rishikesh**. Just north of Haridwar, Rishikesh is a small city on the banks of the Ganga that functions as the most common point of departure for the Uttarakhand Char Dham Yatra.

**Rudranāth** (H). The fourth of the Panch Kedar.

**Rudraprayāg** (H). The administrative center of the Rudraprayag district in Uttarakhand in which Kedarnath is located. The district of Rudraprayag did not exist prior to 2000 when Uttarakhand became its own state; it was created out of the Tehri and Chamoli districts.

**sākṣāt darśan** (H). The sight of the real, true form of the divine with one's own eyes.

**samādhi** (H). Particularly advanced or final stage of meditation, the place where the body of a saint or hero has passed away through cremation, burial, or entombment.

**sarūpatā** (S). The condition of having attained the same form as a deity, often mentioned in puranic literature as something that happens in a *tirtha*.

**sevā** (H/S). "Service"; the semantic range of this term in Hindi includes worship and other forms of altruistic practice such as volunteering or the caretaking of elders.

**Śaiva Siddhānta**. A system of Shaivite thought and practice and an institutional network once found all over the Indian subcontinent; in the modern period it is found primarily in South India.

**śrāddha** (S). Part of the complex of practices that make up funerary rites and rites of remembrance and worship for deceased parents and ancestors.

- svargārohana** (S). “Ascent to heaven”, most famously the ascent of the Pandavas to heaven after their journey through the Himalayas.
- svarūpa** (S). “One’s own form”, the final, most real form of a thing; the concept sometimes functions as a key philosophical/theological term for describing the nature and form of a deity.
- tantra** (S). At the most general level, this term refers to the substratum of thought and practice in South Asia dedicated to self-perfection and interaction with entities of power with and through the body; it may often involve the worship of forms of the Goddess and Bhairava.
- tapas/tapasya** (S). “Heat” – often translated as “inner heat”, this refers to a wide range of practices (often described as ascetic) through which inner heat may be generated. Once generated to a sufficient degree, it is often the key to power and/or divine favor.
- tarpaṇa** (S). The satisfying, literally “pleasing” of ancestors, especially through the offerings of water.
- Tehrī Garhvāl** (H/G). The eastern section of Garhwal that remained in Garhwali hands during the period of British rule in Garhwal and Kumaon.
- tīrth purohit** (H). Pilgrimage priest; someone whose role as a priest is bound by tradition to a particular pilgrimage place and whose patrons are primarily those who come on *yatra* to that place.
- tīrtha** (S). “A place of crossing” – a pilgrimage place, a place of significance and power where a particular deity is especially present and which possess especial power to purify, heal, efficaciously grant requests, and sometimes to function as the location for ancestor worship.
- Triyūgi Nārāyaṇ** (H/G). “Narayan of the three ages”; one of the most important shrines in the Kedarnath valley and one of the closest. It is located just south of Gaurikund in a side valley above Sonprayag to the west.
- Tuṛṅgnāth** (H). The third of the Panch Kedar, located just east of Ukhimath on the way to Badrinath via Gopeshvar.
- Udak Kuṇḍ**. “Water pool”; *yātris* are often told in Kedarnath that drinking the water of this pool means that they will not be reborn.
- Ukhīmāth** (H). Also known as Uṣamāth (the residence of Usha, daughter of Banasur) and Kedar Peeth (by the Virashaivas), Ukhimath is the administrative center of what is known as “Ukhimath block”, one of several subdivisions of Rudraprayag

district. While not on the actual road to Kedarnath, Ukhimath is the administrative center of the Kedarnath valley system. It houses the local court, jail, property records, and is the Kedarnath valley center for the Badri Kedar Temple Committee and for the Kedarnath-Ukhimath Virashaiva community.

**Vāsuki Tāl** (H). The lake of Vasuki, king of the serpents, found about six kilometers west of Kedarnath.

**ved-pāṭhi** (H). “Reciter of the Vedas”; these are Brahmans employed by the Badri Kedar Samiti who perform *puja* for *yātris* who have purchased a ticket for a specific *puja* from the Samiti office next to the temple.

**Vīraśaiva** (S). One of the main terms (the other being *liṅgāyat*) that, beginning around the fourteenth century CE, refers to a Shaivite group based in Karnataka.

**Vīraśaiva jaṅgama jāti** (S) – The *pujari* of Kedarnath is, by tradition, from the *jaṅgama* Virashaiva caste.

**Rāval** (H/G). In Garhwal *rawal* is typically the title of someone who bears the chief religious authority for a particular community, village, or set of villages. In a larger historical sense it may refer to a Shaivite advisor to a king. In the case of Kedarnath, the *rawal* refers to the Virashaiva leader (one of five *jagatgurus*, each associated with one of the five *mathas* of the Virashaivas) who, in the Virashaiva framework, is in charge of Kedarnath and who is himself understood by some to be a walking form of Kedarnath.

**yajamān/jajmān** (H). One who requests/sponsors a *puja* or sacrifice, or other service typically rendered by a Brahman.

**Yamūotrī**. The source of the river/goddess Yamuna and typically the first visited of the four sites of the Uttarakhand Char Dham Yatra.

**yātrā** (H). Often translated as pilgrimage, in Hindi this polysemic term covers many forms of religious travel, journey, and tourism.

**yātrī** (H). One who is on *yatra*.

**Yudhiśhtira** (S). The oldest of the five Pandavas, known to be especially praiseworthy in his knowledge and practice of *dharma*.



## Bibliography

### Primary Sources:

- Aiyangar, K. V. Rangaswami, ed. *Krtyakalpataru of Bhatta Laksmidhara*. Baroda: Oriental Institute, 1942.
- Atkinson, Edwin. *The Himalayan gazetteer, or, The Himalayan districts of the North Western Province of India*. [Complete and unabridged]. New Delhi: Low Price Publications, 2002.
- . *Notes on the History of Religion in the Himālaya of the N.-W. Provinces*. Calcutta: Edward T. Atkinson, 1883.
- Auḍharnāth, Bāba Śrī. *Bhagavān Śamkar ke 22 avatāroṃ aur 12 Śivliṅgoṃ kī kathā*. Haridvār: Raṇdhīr Prakāśan, n.d.
- Sharma, Vishnu Prasad, ed. *Vīramitrodayaḥ [Tīrtha Prakāśa] of M.M. Pt. Mitra Mishra*. Varanasi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office, 1987.
- Bhaṭṭācārya, Vrajaratna, trans. *Maharṣivyāsapraṇītaḥ Skandamahāpurāṇāntargataḥ: Kedārakhaṇḍaḥ (ratnaprabhābhāṣāvyākhyāśahit)*. Delhi: Caukhambā Saṃskṛt Pratiṣṭhān, 2007.
- Cār Dhām Yātrā*. Dehra Dun: Data and Expo India Press Limited, Uttaranchal Tourism, n.d.
- Crown Representative's Records: Political Department Records. "Tehri-Garhwal Darbar's claim for the Kedarnath and Badrinath shrines," 1936. IOR/R/1/1/2951. India Office Library.
- Dvādaś Jyotirling - Bhagavān Śamkar ke 12 Jyotirlingoṃ kī kathā*. Delhi: Lāl Cand and Sons, n.d.
- Dwivedī, Vācaspati, ed. and trans. *Kedārakhaṇḍa of Mahārṣi Vyāsa with the Hindi Commentary*. Vol. 1. 4 vols. Gaṅgānāthajhā Granthamālā 17. Varanasi: Sampurnanand Sanskrit University, 2001.
- Government of India Foreign and Political Department. "Representation from the Tehri Darbar in regard to the Badrinath Temple, restoration of the village of Tapoban, and the settlement of the Sankot leases. File No. 306 - Political / 1931," 1931. R/1/1/2129. India Office Library.
- India Office. "Appointment of a Chief Priest, or Naib Rawal, at the temple of Badrinath in British Garhwal," October 1895. Judicial and Public Annual Files 1901-1999. IOR/L/PJ/6/408. India Office Library.

- Krṣṇākumār, ed. and trans. *Kedārahāṇḍa Purāṇam (mūl saṁskṛt, hindī anuvād evaṁ viśṛt samīkṣā)*. Kankhal, Haridvar: Prācyā Vidyā Akādāmī, 1993.
- Koṭhiyāl, Rāmprasād, and Paśupatiṅāth Lālmohariyā. *Śrī Kedārnāth Mahātmya*. Lamgaunḍī/Gwalior: Devīprasād Koṭhiyāl, n.d.
- Jolly, Julius, ed. *Nāradaśmṛt with the Bhāṣya of Asahāya*. Calcutta: Asiatic Society, 1885.
- Muir, John. *Notes of a Trip to Kedarnath and Other Parts of the Snowy Range of the Himalayas in the Autumn of 1853. with Some Account of a Journey from Agra to Bombay*. Edinburgh: Printed for private circulation, 1855.
- Mukhopādhyāya, Umāprasāda. *Pañca Kedāra bhramaṇa kāhinī*. Kalikātā: A. Mukherjī, 1968.
- Padumā, Nārāyaṇasinhajūdeva Bahādur, and J. Hajārībāg, trans. *Śrīkedārahāṇḍa*. Bombay: Khemarāja Śrīkrṣṇadās (Śrī Venkateśvar Press), 1907.
- Savāser Jī Mahārāj. *Śrī Cārom Dhām Yātrā va Mahātma – Śhrī Badrināth – Kedārnāth-Gaṁgotrī – Yamunotrī*. Haridvār: Raṇdhīr Prakāśan, n.d.
- Śrī Badrināth evaṁ Śrī Kedārnāth Mandir Samiti. *Śrī Badrī-Kedār Mahātmya*. Jośīmaṭh: Śrī Badrināth evaṁ Śrī Kedārnāth Mandir Samiti, 2000.
- Śrī Śivamahāpurāṇa. Mumbai: Khemarāja Śrīkrṣṇadās (Śrī Venkateśvar Press), 2004.
- Śrīskandamahāpurāṇam. Vol. 6. Delhi: Nag Publishers, 2003.
- Śrīskandamahāpurāṇāntargatakedārahāṇḍaḥ. Bombay: Khemraj Shrikrishnadas 'Shri Venkateshwar' Steam Press, 1906.
- “The United Provinces Shri Badrinath Temple Act, 1939,” in *A Collection of Acts Passed by The Legislature of the United Provinces in the year 1937*. Allahabad: Superintendent, Print and Stationery, United Provinces, India, 1939.
- Traill, George William. “Report on the districts of Kumaon and Garhwal by the Commissioner, George William Traill (with associated correspondence),” September 1823. Records of the Board of Commissioners for the Affairs of India 1784-1858. IOR/F/4/828/21951. India Office Library.
- Nivedita, Sister. *Kedar Nath & Badri Narayan: (a Pilgrim's Diary)*. 2nd ed. Calcutta: Udbodhan Office, 1928.
- Vajpayee, Gangadhar, and Gobind Ram Shastri. *Shri Kedar Mahatmya: Shri Kedarnath Dham, Its Importance and Historical Description*. Semwal Printing Press, Rishikesh: Gangadhar Vajpayee, n.d.

Viśālmaṇi Śarmā Upādhyāya, ed. and trans. *Kedāra Kalpa*. Nārayaṇ Koṭi, Garhvāl: Viśālmaṇi Śarmā Upādhyāya, 1952.

Walton, H. G. *British Garhwal. A Gazetteer*. New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1994.

## Secondary and Translated Sources

Ahir, D. C. *Buddhist Sites and Shrines in India: History, Art and Architecture*. 1st ed. Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 2003.

Alter, Stephen. *Sacred Waters: A Pilgrimage up the Ganges River to the Source of Hindu Culture*. 1st ed. New York: Harcourt, 2001.

Appadurai, Arjun. "Playing with Modernity: the Decolonization of Indian Cricket." In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, 89-113. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

———. "Sovereignty without Territoriality: Notes for a Postnational Geography." In *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*, edited by Denise Lawrence-Zunigais and Setha M. Low, 337-350. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003.

Archer, Margaret Scotford. *Being Human: The Problem of Agency*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Arnold, Philip, and Ann Grodzins Gold, eds. *Sacred landscapes and cultural politics : planting a tree*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001.

Babb, Lawrence A., John E. Cort, and Michael W. Meister. *Desert temples : sacred centers of Rajasthan in historical, art-historical, and social context*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2008.

———, Susan Snow Wadley, Joint Committee on South Asia., and American Council of Learned Societies. *Media and the transformation of religion in South Asia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995.

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Translated by Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.

Bader, Jonathan. *Conquest of the four quarters : traditional accounts of the life of Śaṅkara*. New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 2000.

Badone, E., and S. R. Roseman. *Intersecting Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage and Tourism*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004.

Baltutis, Michael. "Renovating Bhairav: Fierce Gods, Divine Agency, and Local Power in Kathmandu." *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 13, no. 1 (April 1, 2009): 25-49.

- Basso, Keith. "Wisdom Sits in Places: Notes on a Western Apache Landscape." Edited by Keith Basso and Stephen Feld, 53-90. In *Senses of place*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1996.
- . *Wisdom sits in places : landscape and language among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996.
- Bauman, R., and C. Briggs. "Genre, intertextuality, and social power." *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 2, no. 2 (1992): 131-72.
- Bell, Catherine M. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Ben-Israel, Hedva. "Hallowed Land in the Theory and Practice of Modern Nationalism." In *Sacred Space: Shrine, City, Land*. Edited by Benjamin Z. Kedar and R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, 278-294. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Belknap Press, 2002.
- Berremen, Gerald Duane. *Hindus of the Himalayas: Ethnography and Change*. 2nd ed. Oxford India paperbacks. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Bharati, Agehananda. "Pilgrimage in the Indian Tradition." *History of Religions* 3, no. 1 (Summer 1963): 135-167.
- Bhardwaj, Surinder Mohan. *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India*. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1973.
- , and James. G. Lochtefeld. "Tirtha." In *The Hindu World*, edited by Mittal, Sushil, and Gene R. Thursby, 478-501. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Bharucha, Rustom, and Komal Kothari. *Rajasthan an Oral History: Conversations with Komal Kothari*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2003.
- Bisht, Harshwanti. *Tourism in Garhwal Himalaya: With Special Reference to Mountaineering and Trekking in Uttarkashi and Chamoli Districts*. New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1994.
- Bisschop, Peter Christiaan. *Early Śaivism and the Skandapurāṇa: Sects and Centres*. Groningen Oriental studies. Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 2006.
- Brett-Smith, Sarah. "The Knowledge of Women." In *Anthropologies of Art*, edited by Mariët Westermann, 143-162. Clark Studies in the Visual Arts. Dalton, Massachusetts: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2005.
- Capila, Anjali. *Images of Women in the Folk Songs of Garhwal Himalayas: A Participatory Research*. Concept's discovering Himalayas series. New Delhi: Concept Publishing, 2002.

- Carmichael, David L., Jane Hubert, Brian Reeves, and Audhild Schanche, eds. *Sacred Sites, Sacred Places*. One world archaeology 23. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Casey, Edward. *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- . “How to get from space to place in a fairly short stretch of time: phenomenological prolegomena,” in *Senses of Place*, edited by Keith Basso and Stephen Feld, 13-52. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1996.
- Chakrabarti, Kunal. *Religious process: the Purāṇas and the making of a regional tradition*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Chandra, Subhash. *Yatra Shri Kedarnath Dham Ki*. Ambey, 2007.
- Clark, Matthew. *The Daśanāmī-Saṃnyāsīs: The Integration of Ascetic Lineages into an Order*. Leiden: Brill, 2006.
- Collins-Kreiner, N., and N. Kliot. “Pilgrimage tourism in the Holy Land: The behavioural characteristics of Christian pilgrims.” *GeoJournal* 50, no. 1 (2000): 55-67.
- Cort, John E. *Framing the Jina*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Crain, Mary M. “The remaking of an Andalusian pilgrimage tradition: debates regarding visual (re) presentation and the meanings of “locality” in a global era.” In *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, edited by James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, 291-311. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Crapanzano, Vincent. *Tuhami, portrait of a Moroccan*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.
- Cresswell, Tim. *Place: A Short Introduction*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2004.
- Csordas, Thomas J. *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Ḍabarāl, Śivaprasād. *Śrī Uttarākhaṇḍ Yātrā Darśan*. Nārayaṇ Koṭi, Gaṛhvāl: Viśālmaṇī Śarmā Upādhyāya, 1961.
- Daniel, E. Valentine. *Fluid Signs: Being a Person the Tamil Way*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.
- Davis, Richard H., “The origin of liṅga worship,” in *Religions of India in practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, 637-648. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995.

- , trans. *A priest's guide for the great festival : Aghorasiva's Mahotsavavidhi*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- . *Ritual in an Oscillating Universe: Worshiping Śiva in Medieval India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991.
- Debal Sen. *Panch Kedar*. Calcutta: Debal Sen and Saurabh Enterprises, 2007.
- Desjarlais, Robert. *Sensory Biographies: Lives and Deaths among Nepal's Yolmo Buddhists*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.
- . *Shelter Blues: Sanity and Selfhood Among the Homeless*. Contemporary ethnography. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1997.
- Dube, Ishita Banerjee. *Divine Affairs: Religion, Pilgrimage and the State in Colonial and Postcolonial India*. Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 2001.
- Durham Peters, J. "Seeing Bifocally: Media, Place, Culture," in *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*, edited by James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, 76-92. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Dyczkowski, M. S. G. *The doctrine of vibration*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987.
- . *The Stanzas on Vibration: The Spandakarika with Four Commentaries*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.
- Eade, John, and Sallnow, Michael J. *Contesting the sacred: The anthropology of Christian Pilgrimage*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Eck, Diana. *Banāras, City of Light*. 1st ed. New York: Knopf; Distributed by Random House, 1982.
- Eliade, Mircea. *The sacred and the profane: The nature of religion*. Harvest Books, 1968.
- Eschmann, Anncharlott, Hermann Kulke, and Gaya Charan Tripathi, eds. *The cult of Jagannath and the regional tradition of Orissa*. New Delhi: Manohar, 1978.
- Feld, Stephen and Basso, Keith, eds. *Senses of Place*. 1st ed. School of American Research advanced seminar series. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1996.
- . "Waterfalls of Song: An Acoustemology of Place Resounding in Bosavi, Papua New Guinea." *Senses of Place* (1996): 91-135.
- Feldhaus, Anne. *Connected Places: Region, Pilgrimage, and Geographical Imagination in India*. Religion/culture/critique. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

- Ferguson, James, and Akhil Gupta, eds. *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.
- Fiol, Stefan. "Dual Framing: Locating Authenticities in the Music Videos of Himalayan Possession Rituals." *Ethnomusicology* 54, no. 1 (2010): 28–53.
- Fisher, Elaine. "Fascist Scholars, Fascist Scholarship: The Quest for Ur-Fascism and the Study of Religion." In *Hermeneutics, Politics, and the History of Religions: The Contested Legacies of Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade*, edited by Christian K. Wedemeyer and Wendy Doniger, 261–284. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Fleming, Benjamin. "The cult of the jyotirlingas and the history of Śaivite worship." Ph.D., McMaster University, 2007.
- Flood, Gavin D. *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion*. London: Cassell, 1999.
- Flueckiger, Joyce Burkhalter. *Gender and Genre in the Folklore of Middle India*. Myth and poetics. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.
- Gaenzle, Martin, and Jörg Gengnagel. *Visualizing space in Banaras: images, maps, and the practice of representation*. Ethno-Indology, v. 4. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006.
- Galey, J. C. "L'universel dans la localité. Implications sociologiques du pèlerinage en Inde." *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 211, no. 3 (1994): 259–296.
- Gell, Alfred. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.
- Gladstone, David L. *From Pilgrimage to Package Tour: Travel and Tourism in the Third World*. 1st ed. New York: Routledge, 2005.
- Gold, Ann Grodzins. *Fruitful Journeys: The Ways of Rajasthani Pilgrims*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
- . *In the Time of Trees and Sorrows: Nature, Power, and Memory in Rajasthan*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Goldman, Robert. *Gods, priests, and warriors: the Bhṛguś of the Mahābhārata*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977.
- Good, Byron. *Medicine, rationality, and experience: an anthropological perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Gordon, Stuart and John F. Richards. "Kinship and pargana in eighteenth century Khandesh." *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 22 (December 1985): 371–397.

- Granoff, Phyllis, and Koichi Shinohara, eds. *Pilgrims, Patrons, and Place: Localizing Sanctity in Asian Religions*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2003.
- Grapard, Allan G. "Geotyping Sacred Space: The Case of Mount Hika in Japan." In *Sacred Space: Shrine, City, Land*, edited by Benjamin Z. Kedar and R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, 215-249. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- Guha-Thakurta, Tapati. *The Making of a New "Indian" Art: Artists, Aesthetics, and Nationalism in Bengal, C. 1850-1920*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.
- Haberman, David L. *Journey Through the Twelve Forests: An Encounter with Krishna*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- . *River of Love in an Age of Pollution: The Yamuna River of Northern India*. 1st ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.
- Hall, David D., ed. *Lived religion in America: Toward a history of practice*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Handa, Omacanda. *Buddhist Western Himalaya*. New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 2001.
- Handelman, Don and David Shulman. *God Inside Out: Śiva's Game of Dice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- . *Śiva in the Forest of Pines: An Essay on Sorcery and Self-Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Hiremath, Shobha S. *Kedar Vairagya Peetha: Parampara & Rawal Jagadguru Shri Bheemashankarlinga Shivacharya*. Ukhimatha (Ushamath): Himavat Kedar Vairagya Simhasana Mahasamsthana, 2006.
- Hirsch, Eric, and Michael. O'Hanlon, eds. *The anthropology of landscape: perspectives on place and space*. Oxford studies in social and cultural anthropology. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
- Humes, Cynthia Ann. "Vindhyavāsini: Local goddess yet great goddess." In *Devī: Goddesses of India*, edited by John Stratton Hawley and Donna Marie Wulff, 49-76. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Idel, Moshe. "The Camouflaged Sacred in Mircea Eliade's Self-Perception, Literature, and Scholarship." In *Hermeneutics, Politics, and the History of Religions: The Contested Legacies of Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade*, edited by Christian K. Wedemeyer and Wendy Doniger, 159-196. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Inden, Ronald B. *Imagining India*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990.
- Ivakhiv, Adrian J. *Claiming Sacred Ground: Pilgrims and Politics at Glastonbury and Sedona*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.



- Jackson, Michael. "The Shock of the New: On Migrant Imaginaries and Critical Transitions." *Ethnos* 73, no. 1. March 2008): 57-72.
- Jacobsen, Knut A. *South Asian Religions on Display: Religious Processions in South Asia and in the Diaspora*. New York: Routledge, 2009.
- Kulke, Hermann and Burkhard Schnepel, eds. *Jagannath Revisited: Studying Society, Religion, and the State in Orissa*. Studies in Orissan society, culture, and history vol. 1. New Delhi: Manohar, 2001.
- Jain, Jyotindra, and Los Angeles County Museum of Art. *Kalighat Painting: Images from a Changing World*. Ahmedabad, India: Mapin Publishing, 1999.
- Jain, Kajri. *Gods in the Bazaar: The Economies of Indian Calendar Art*. Objects/histories. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007.
- . "New Visual Technologies in the Bazaar: Reterritorialisation of the Sacred in Popular Print Culture." In *Sarai Reader 2003: Shaping Technologies*, 44-56, 2003.
- Jain, Madhu. *The Abode of Mahashiva: Cults and Symbology in Jaunsar- Bawar in the Mid-Himalayas*. New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1995.
- James, William. *The varieties of religious experience*. New York: Library of America, 2010.
- Joshi, M. C. "The Khasas in the History of Uttarakhand," in *Himalaya: Past and Present*, edited by Maheshwar P. Joshi and Allen C. Fanger, 193-200. Almora: Shree Almora Book Depot, 1990.
- Joshi, Maheshwar P., ed. *Uttaranchal Himalaya: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art, Botany, Economics, Geography, Geology, History, and Sociology*. Almora: Shree Almora Book Depot, 1995.
- . *Uttaranchal (Kumaon-Garhwal) Himalaya : an essay in historical anthropology*. Almora: Shree Almora Book Depot, 1990.
- Kalian, Moshe, and Eliezer Witztum. "Facing a Holy Space: Psychiatric Hospitalization of Tourists in Jerusalem." In *Sacred Space: Shrine, City, Land*, edited by Benjamin Z. Kedar and R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, 316-330. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- Kāṇe, Pāṇḍuraṅga. *List of tīrthas : being an off-print from MM Dr. P.V. Kane's History of dharmasāstra*. Poona [India]: Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1953.
- Kleinman, Arthur., Leon Eisenberg, and Byron Good. *Culture, illness, and care: clinical lessons from anthropologic and cross-cultural research*. Vol. 4. American Psychiatric Association, 2006.

- , Veena Das, and Margaret M. Lock. *Social Suffering*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Knott, Kim. "From locality to location and back again: A spatial journey in the study of religion." *Religion* 39, no. 2 (2009): 154–160.
- . "Spatial Theory and the Study of Religion." *Religion Compass* 2, no. 6 (2008): 1102–1116.
- Knudsen, Britta Timm, and Anne Marit Waade. *Re-Investing Authenticity: Tourism, Place and Emotions*. Channel View Publications, 2010.
- Knut A. Jacobsen. "The Child Manifestation of Siva in Contemporary Hindu Popular Prints." *Numen* 51 (July 1, 2004): 237–264.
- Kramrisch, Stella. *The presence of Śiva*. Princeton University Press, 1981.
- Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992.
- Levy, Robert I., and Kedar. Rāj. Rājopādhyāya. *Mesocosm: Hinduism and the organization of a traditional Newar city in Nepal*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Lienhardt, Ronald Godfrey. *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987.
- Lochtefeld, James. "Haridvara, Haradwara, Gangadwara : the construction of identity and meaning in a Hindu pilgrimage place." Ph.D., Columbia University, 1992.
- Lorenzen, David. *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas two lost Śaivite sects*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972.
- Low, Setha M., and Denise Lawrence-Zunigais. *The Anthropology of Space and Place: Locating Culture*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2003.
- Mahmood, Tahir. "Religion, Law, and Judiciary in Modern India." *Brigham Young University Law Review* 2006, no. 3 (2006): 755–776.
- Malik, Aditya. *Das Puṣkara-Māhātmya: ein religionswissenschaftlicher Beitrag zum Wallfahrtsbegriff in Indien : Erörterung, Text, Übersetzung*. Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1993.
- Malpas, Jeff. *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*. 1st ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Mawa, Sushma. *Pilgrimage Tourism, Marketing Strategy: With Special Reference to Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine*. New Delhi: Kaveri Books, 2004.

- MacLean, Kama. "Making the Colonial State Work for You: The Modern Beginnings of the Ancient Kumbh Mela in Allahabad." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 62, no. 3 (2003): 873-905.
- Mels, Tom, ed. *Reanimating Places: A Geography of Rhythms, Re-materialising cultural geography*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2004.
- Michaels, Axel. *Śiva in Trouble: Festivals and Rituals at the Pāsūpatinātha of Deopatan (Nepal)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Mines, Diane. *Fierce gods : inequality, ritual, and the politics of dignity in a South Indian village*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.
- Mittal, Sushil, and Gene R. Thursby, eds. *The Hindu World*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Mitter, Partha. *Art and nationalism in colonial India, 1850-1922*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Mokashi, Digambar Balkrishna. *Palkhi, an Indian Pilgrimage*. Translated by Philip C. Engblom. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987
- Morinis, E. Alan. *Pilgrimage in the Hindu Tradition: A Case Study of West Bengal*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Morphy, Howard. "Seeing Indigenous Australian Art," in *Anthropologies of Art*, edited by Mariët Westermann, 124-142. Clark Studies in the Visual Arts. Dalton, Massachusetts: Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, 2005.
- Muller-Ortega, Paul Eduardo. *The Triadic Heart of Siva: Kaula Tantricism of Abhinavagupta in the Non-Dual Shaivism of Kashmir*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.
- Myers, Fred R. *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place, and Politics Among Western Desert Aborigines*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- Naithānī, Śivaprasād. *Uttarākhaṇḍ ke tīrth evaṃ mandir: Himālaya, yātrā aur paryaṭan sahit*. 3rd ed. Srīnagar, Gaṛhwāl: Pavetrī Prakāśan, 2006
- Nand, Nitya. *The Holy Himalaya: A Geographical Interpretation of Garhwal*. Delhi: Daya Publishing House, 1989.
- Nandy, Ashis. *At the edge of psychology: essays in politics and culture*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- Nath, Vijay. *Purāṇas and acculturation : a historico-anthropological perspective*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 2001.

- . *The Puranic World : environment, gender, ritual, and myth*. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2009.
- Nauṭiyāl, Śivānand, trans. *Kedārahāṇḍam - Skandapurāṇāntargata (Hindī anuvād sahit)*. Ilahabad: Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, 1994.
- Negi, S. S. “Back and the Beyond: Races, Dynasties, Rulers, Socio-cultural Setup,” in *Garhwal Himalaya: Nature, Culture and Society*, edited by O. P. Kandari and O. P. Gusain. Srinagar, Garwhal: TransMedia, 2001.
- Oakley, E. *Holy Himalaya: The Religion, Traditions and Scenery of a Himalayan Province (Kumaon and Garhwāl)*. Gurgaon (Haryana) India: Published by Vipin Jain for Ltd. Editions Book Club, 1991.
- Obeyesekere, Gananath. *Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Otto, Rudolf. *The idea of the holy an inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational*. Translated by John W. Harvey. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.
- Paden, William. “Before ‘the Sacred’ became Theological: Rereading the Durkheimian Legacy.” In *Mircea Eliade: A Critical Reader*, edited by Bryan Rennie, 68-80. London: Equinox, 2006.
- Pande, Govind. *Life and thought of Śaṅkarācārya*. 1st ed. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1994.
- Parry, Jonathan P. *Death in Banaras*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Pathak, Vishwambhar Sharan. *History of Śaiva Cults in Northern India from Inscriptions (700 A.D. to 1200 A.D.)*. Allahabad: Abinash, 1980.
- Patton, Laurie L., and Wendy Doniger, eds. *Myth and Method*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996.
- Pfaffenberger, Bryan. “Serious pilgrims and frivolous tourists the chimera of tourism in the pilgrimages of Sri Lanka.” *Annals of Tourism Research* 10, no. 1 (1983): 57-74.
- Pinney, Christopher. *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- . “Moral Topophilia: The Significations of Landscape in Indian Oleographs,” in *The Anthropology of Landscape: perspectives on place and space*, edited by Eric Hirsch and Michael O’Hanlon, 78-113. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
- . *'Photos of the Gods': The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2004.

- Pinto, Sarah. *Casting Desire: Reproduction, Loss, and Subjectivity in Rural North India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Polit, Karin M. "The Effects of Inequality and Relative Marginality on the Well-being of Low Caste People in Central Uttaranchal." *Anthropology & Medicine* 12, no. 3 (2005): 225-237.
- . "Performing heritage through rituals, the case of Uttarakhand," in *Religion, Ritual, Theatre*, edited by Bent Fleming Nielsen, Bent Holm, and Karen Vedel. Peter Lang, 2008.
- Portugali, J. "Complexity theory as a link between space and place." *Environment and Planning A* 38, no. 4 (2006): 647.
- Prasad, Leela. *Poetics of conduct: oral narrative and moral being in a South Indian town*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Proudfoot, Wayne. *Religious experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.
- Purohit, Aravind, and Bina Banjval. *Garhvālī Hindī Śabdkoś*. Dehra Dun: Vinsar Publishing Company, 2007.
- Razak, Raj, and Nigel D. Morpeth, eds. *Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Festivals Management: An International Perspective*. Wallingford, Oxfordshire: CABI, 2007.
- Ramaswamy, Sumathi, ed. *Beyond Appearances?: Visual Practices and Ideologies in Modern India*. Contributions to Indian sociology 10. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003.
- Rangan, HariPriya. *Of myths and movements: rewriting Chipko into Himalayan history*. London: Verso, 2000.
- Rennie, Bryan. *Reconstructing Eliade: Making Sense of Religion*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996.
- Rāvat, Śivraj S.. *Kedār Himālay aur Pañc Kedār*. Dehra Dun: Vinsar Publishing Company, 2006.
- Rawat, Ajay Singh. *Garhwal Himalaya: A Study in Historical Perspective*. New Delhi: Indus, 2002.
- . *History of Garhwal, 1358-1947: An Erstwhile Kingdom in the Himalayas*. New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1989.
- Rodaway, Paul. *Sensuous Geographies: Body, Sense, and Place*. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Rohe, Mark. E. "Ambiguous and Definitive: The Greatness of Goddess Vaiṣṇo Devī," in *Seeking Mahadevi: Constructing the Identities of the Hindu Great Goddess*, edited by Tracy Pintchman, 55-76. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001.

- Roy, Srirupa. "A Symbol of Freedom": The Indian Flag and the Transformations of Nationalism, 1906-2002." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 65, no. 3 (August 2006): 495-527.
- Saklani, Atul. *The history of a Himalayan princely state : change, conflicts, and awakening : an interpretative history of Princely State of Tehri Garhwal, U.P., A.D. 1815 to 1949 A.D.* 1st ed. Delhi: Durga Publications, 1987.
- Saklani, Dinesh Prasad. *Ancient communities of the Himalaya*. New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 1998.
- Saliers, Don E. et al. "Ethnography and Theology A Critical Roundtable Discussion." *Practical Matters* 3 (2010), <http://practicalmattersjournal.org/issue/3/centerpieces/ethnography-and-theology> (accessed May 27, 2010).
- Sāṅkrṭyāyan, Rāhul. *Himālay-paricay*. Ilāhābhād: Ilāhābhād Lā Jarnala Prēsa [milanē kā patā Sāhitya Ratna Bhaṇḍāra Āgarā, 1953.
- Satayajit Ray. *The Complete Adventures of Feluda*. Translated by Gopa Majumdar. Vol. 2. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2000.
- Sax, William S. *Dancing the Self: Personhood and Performance in the Pāṇḍav Līlā of Garhwal*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- . "Divine Kingdoms in the Central Himalayas," in *Sacred Landscape of the Himalaya: proceedings of an international conference at Heidelberg, 25-27 May 1998*, edited by Niels Gutschow, Axel Michaels, Charles Ramble, and Ernst Steinkellner, 177-194. Vienna: Austrian Academy of Sciences Press, 2003.
- . *God of Justice: Ritual Healing and Social Justice in the Central Himalayas*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- . *Mountain Goddess: Gender and Politics in a Himalayan Pilgrimage*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Sharf, Robert H. "Experience," in *Critical terms for religious studies*, edited by Mark C. Taylor, 94-113. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Shastri, J.L, ed. *The Siva-Purana Volumes I-IV*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977.
- Shobhi, Prithvi Datta Chandra. "Pre-modern Communities and Modern Histories: Narrating Vīraśaiva and Lingayat Selves." Ph.D., University of Chicago, 2005.
- Shulman, David. *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South Indian Saiva Tradition*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980.

- . “The Murderous Bride: Tamil Versions of the Myth of Devī and the Buffalo-Demon.” *History of Religions* 16, no. 2 (1976): 120–146.
- Singh, Rana P. B. *Towards the Pilgrimage Archetype: The Pañcakrośī Yātrā of Banāras*. Pilgrimage & cosmology series 3. Varanasi: Indica Books, 2002.
- Smith, Frederick. *The self possessed : deity and spirit possession in South Asian literature and civilization*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Smith, H. Daniel. “Impact of ‘God Posters’ on Hindus and Their Devotional Traditions,” in *Media and the transformation of religion in South Asia*, edited by Lawrence Babb and Susan Snow Wadley, 24-50. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995.
- Smith, John D. “Talking about dancing: the language of anthropology.” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 19, no. 1 (2005): 134-137.
- Smith, Jonathan Z. *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*. Chicago studies in the history of Judaism. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- . “The Eternal Deferral.” In *Hermeneutics, Politics, and the History of Religions: The Contested Legacies of Joachim Wach and Mircea Eliade*, edited by Christian K. Wedemeyer and Wendy Doniger, 215-240. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Smith, Travis LaMar. “The Sacred Center and its Peripheries: Śaivism and the Vārāṇasī Sthala-Purāṇas.” Ph. D., Columbia University, 2007.
- Soja, Edward W. *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory*. London: Verso, 1989.
- Sourvinou-Inwood, C. “Myths in Images: Theseus and Medea as a Case Study,” in *Approaches to Greek Myth*, edited by Lowell Edmunds, 395–445. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. “Moving Devi.” *Cultural Critique*, no. 47 (Winter 2001): 120-163.
- Sutherland, Peter. “Travelling gods and government by deity : an ethnohistory of power, representation and agency in west Himalayan polity.” Ph.D., Oxford University, 1998.
- Swatos, W. H., and L. Tomasi. *From Medieval Pilgrimage to Religious Tourism: The Social and Cultural Economics of Piety*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2002.
- Taves, Ann, Aaron W. Hughes, Kim Knott, Finbarr Curtis, Manuel A. Vasquez, and Thomas A. Tweed. “Assessing Theories of Religion: A Forum on Thomas A.

- Tweed's Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, no. 2 (June 2009): 404-445.
- Thapliyal, Uma Prasad. *Uttaranchal: Historical and Cultural Perspectives*. Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation, 2005.
- Thomas, Christine M. "Place and Memory: Response to Jonathan Z. Smith on To Take Place, on the Occasion of Its Twentieth Anniversary." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 773-781.
- Timm, Jeffrey. *Texts in context : traditional hermeneutics in South Asia*. Albany NY: State Univ. of New York Press, 1992.
- Tolia, R. S. *British Kumaun-Garhwal: An Administrative History of a Non-regulation Hill Province*. Almora: Shree Almora Book Depot, 1994.
- Tripathi, Gaya Charan. *Communication with God: The Daily Pūjā Ceremony in the Jagannātha Temple*. New Delhi: Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2004.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and place: The perspective of experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001.
- Tweed, Thomas A. *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008.
- Tyagi, Ishwar. *Shaivism in ancient India : from the earliest times to c. A.D. 300*. Meerut: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1982.
- Uberoi, Patricia. "Unity in diversity?' Dilemmas of nationhood in Indian calendar art." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 36, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 191-232.
- Veer, Peter van der. *Gods on Earth: Religious Experience and Identity in Ayodhya*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Waghorne, Joanne Punzo. *Diaspora of the gods: modern Hindu temples in an urban middle-class world*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- White, David Gordon. "At the Maṇḍala's Dark Fringe: Possession and Protection in Tantric Bhairava Cults." in *Notes from a Mandala : essays in the history of indian religions in honor of Wendy Doniger*, edited by Laurie L. Patton and David L. Haberman. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2010.
- . "Bhairava." *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*. Leiden: Brill, 2009.
- . *The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.



- Willen, Sarah S. "Toward a Critical Phenomenology of Illegality: State Power, Criminalization, and Abjectivity among Undocumented Migrant Workers in Tel Aviv, Israel." *International Migration* 45, no. 3 (2007): 8-38.
- Yandell, Keith. E. *The epistemology of religious experience*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Yang, Anand A. *Bazaar India: markets, society, and the colonial state in Gangetic Bihar*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.
- Younger, Paul. *The Home of Dancing Sivan: The Traditions of the Hindu Temple in Citamparam*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.