



universität
wien

DISSERTATION / DOCTORAL THESIS

Titel der Dissertation /Title of the Doctoral Thesis

„Badrīnāth – A Temple at the Periphery of Cultures“

verfasst von / submitted by

Mag. Hans Jürgen DAVID

angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doktor der Philosophie (Dr. phil.)

Wien, 2017 / Vienna 2017

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
degree programme code as it appears on the student
record sheet:

A 092 387

Dissertationsgebiet lt. Studienblatt /
field of study as it appears on the student record sheet:

Dr.-Studium der Philosophie Indologie

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Martin Gaenzle

for Moni

Contents

1 Introduction	17
1.1 The Two Sides of Badrīnāth	19
1.1.1 The State of Research	20
1.1.2 The Hyposthesis	23
1.1.3 The Structure of This Study	28
1.2 Narratives and Oral History	32
1.2.1 Narratives in Badrīnāth	34
1.2.2 Establishing Badrīnāth	35
1.2.3 Tholing	39
1.3 Borderland or Contact-Zone?	40
1.4 A Theory of Settlements, or Scott’s Zomia in the Western Himalayas	46
2 A Tour of Badrīnāth	51
2.1 “Tīrtha ek, nām anek”	51
2.2 The Temple	53
2.3 Its Surroundings	56
2.4 Mānā	60
2.5 Pāṇḍukeśvar/Bāmni	60
2.5.1 The Flag of Badrīnāth	62
2.6 Pilgrim Destination	63
2.7 Clusters of Badrīnāth	70
2.7.1 Cār Dhām	71

Contents

2.7.2	108 Divya Deśams and the Svayam Vyakta Kṣetras	72
2.7.3	The Five Badrī Temples	73
2.7.4	The Badrī Temples of Kinnaur and Kumaon	87
2.7.5	Kinnaur	88
2.7.6	Kumaon	110
2.7.7	The Role of the “other” Badrī Temples in the Understanding of Badrīnāth	113
3	Historical Sources	117
3.1	The History of Badrīnāth	117
3.2	The Political History of Uttarākhaṇḍ	123
3.2.1	The Katyūris	124
3.2.2	Parmar Dynasty	125
3.2.3	Gorkha Rule	127
3.2.4	Tehri and British Garhwal	128
3.2.5	Post Independence	129
3.3	Buddhism and Badrīnāth	130
3.3.1	The Tibetan Side of Things	136
4	The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside	141
4.1	Badrīnāth in the Scriptures	141
4.1.1	Epics	141
4.1.2	Purāṇas	143
4.2	An Alternative Location of Badrī	146
4.3	Kailāś, Gaṅgā and Svargarohini – Geographical Reasons for the Im- portance of Badrīnāth	148
4.4	The Badarī-Tree, the Hermitage and Lord Viṣṇu	149
4.4.1	The Badarī Tree	151
4.4.2	Nar and Nārāyaṇ	154

4.5	Ādi Śaṅkarācārya and Badrīnāth	157
4.5.1	Narratives, Hagiographies and the Purāṇas	157
4.5.2	The Maṭhs and their Heterodox Past	168
4.5.3	Śaṅkarācārya's Northern Conquest	173
4.5.4	Ādi Śaṅkarācārya as a Means for Legitimation	174
4.6	Rṣabha's Enlightenment at Aṣṭāpada	179
4.7	Maps and the Visual Presentation of Badrīnāth	182
4.7.1	Maps	182
4.7.2	Pictures	191
4.7.3	Film	193
5	Badrīnāth's Religious Setup	197
5.1	Rawal	197
5.1.1	The British Administration	202
5.1.2	The Land Question	212
5.2	The Ḍimrīs	215
5.3	The Paṇḍās	218
5.3.1	Lawsuits	224
5.4	The Priests of Brahmkapāl	226
6	Rituals in and around Badrīnāth	229
6.1	Processions in Badrīnāth	229
6.1.1	Frame Processions	230
6.1.2	Intra-Local Processions	241
6.1.3	Link Processions	253
7	Badrīnāth from a Local Perspective	255
7.1	The Bhotiya Mahals and their Connection to Badrīnāth	255
7.1.1	Lifestyle	260
7.1.2	Trade	261

Contents

7.1.3	Political Situation	266
7.1.4	Religion and the Connection to Badrīnāth	267
7.2	Kedārnāth – or Śiva in Badrīnāth	271
7.3	Badrīnārāyaṇ as a Royal Deity	277
7.4	The Role of the Local Devatās	283
7.4.1	Kuber	283
7.4.2	Ghaṇṭākaraṇa	292
7.4.3	Summary	294
8	Conclusio – Entangled Narratives	297
8.1	Cultural Transfer	298
8.2	Sanskritization, Hinduization and Inclusivism	299
8.3	Badrīnāth in Translation	300
8.3.1	A Hypothetical History of Badrīnāth	300
8.3.2	The Entanglement of Badrīnārāyaṇ	305
8.3.3	The Entangled Mūrti	306
	Zusammenfassung	327
	Abstract	329

List of Figures

- 0.1 Map of Garhwal. Green stars mark the Badri temples and red stars the shrines of the Char Dham. Violet hexagons show Bhotiya villages and their respective place of trade - the dashed line represents the most likely trading routes. Based on Nelles Map Himalaya; 1:1 500 000; Edition 2006. 14
- 0.2 Map of Badrinathpuri. Orange represents build-up areas, violet the busterminal and red religious sites in the area. Based on Google Earth. 15
- 1.1 Map of Zomia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Zomia.jpg>). 43
- 2.1 Sketch of the temple's floor plan. 55
- 2.2 Map showing the origins of pilgrims by district during the year 1968 (Bhardwaj 2003:126). 67
- 2.3 The original image is reproduced from Singh (1984:173). The group of the five Kedār shrines are highlighted in red by the author, and, since most of the Badrī temples are not located in the map above, their nearest settlements are highlighted (blue). 74
- 2.4 Yogdhyān Badrī and Vāsudeva Temple with the *ḍolī* of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya in the front. 79
- 2.5 The shrine of Dhyān Badrī in the hamlet Urgam. 80
- 2.6 The temple of Vṛddha Badrī. 81
- 2.7 The *mūrti* of Narasiṅha in Joshimath (Naithānī 2008). 83

List of Figures

2.8	The Narasiṅha temple, decorated in celebration of the start of the pilgrimage season. In the foreground a drum and bagpipes of the band, leading the procession to Badrīnāth.	83
2.9	The <i>mūrti</i> of Bhaviṣya Badrī.	85
2.10	The Bhaviṣya Badrī temple under renovation at the time of my visit.	86
2.11	Map of the <i>parīkramā</i> of the Kinner Kailash (Sanan and Swadi 1998:278)	95
2.12	Gate at the foot of the Kamru village.	97
2.13	Signboard at the Kamru temple reading <i>Śrī Badrī Viśāl jī Mandir Kamrū</i> .	97
2.14	Cat-like figure at the Kamru Badri temple.	100
2.15	The wood-carvings of a Sikh guru and Jesus on the temple of Batseri.	101
2.16	View of Batseri.	102
2.17	The temple of Badrīnārāyaṇ in Batseri.	103
2.18	Badrīnāth temple in Dvārāhaṭ.	111
2.19	Idol inside the Badrīnāth temple in Dvārāhaṭ.	112
4.1	A monument in Kedārṇāth, dedicated to the memory of Śaṅkarācārya, as well as to the idea that he attained <i>samādhi</i> at Kedārṇāth. Out of a wall reaches his (?) hand that holds the staff (<i>daṇḍa</i>) of Śaṅkarācārya. The monument was destroyed, along with most of the buildings surrounding the temple, in the terrible flood in July 2013.	158
4.2	The Kalpavṛkṣ with the adjacent Śiva temple in Joshimath.	175
4.3	“Marathi world map with accompanying traditional cosmographic world image,” in a simplified version, as redrawn by Woodward (1992:399).	184
4.4	Detail of the “Map of Badrinarayan” (Gole 1982:62).	185
4.5	Modern pilgrim’s map.	187
4.6	A classical print of the Cār Dhām with the Badrīś Pañcāyat in the middle.	187
4.7	A similar representation of Badrīnarāyaṇ.	188

4.8	Another Version of the Cār Dhām pilgrimage.	189
4.9	A print on a metal sheet, showing a representation that is closer to reality.	190
6.1	The opening procession on entering Pandukeshwar. The pot of oil and its bearer are in front, followed by the <i>ḍoli</i> of Śaṅkarācārya, the scepters of the Rawal and the Rawal himself (red turban and red shawl) along his successor the Naib Rawal (dressed in white). Behind the head priest, wearing a red vest, is the Dharmādikāri and, to his left, one of the four Vedpāṭhīs.	233
6.2	The priests of Mana enjoying tea after the procession.	249
6.3	The <i>hariyālī</i> plant.	250
6.4	The <i>ḍoli</i> of Uddhav takes a different route.	252
7.1	Young Bhotiya woman at the Mātāmūrti Melā	257
7.2	The Vasudhārā fall near Mana.	269
7.3	Group of Bhotiya Women worshipping Ghaṅṭākaraṇa.	270
7.4	The entrance to the Ādi Kedāreśvar temple during cleaning for the final <i>pūjā</i> in November 2011.	273
7.5	Kuber in his <i>ḍoli</i>	287
7.6	The Kubernālā along the way to Mana.	289
7.7	Ghaṅṭākaraṇa in front of his temple in Mana.	293
7.8	Kuber during the Naṅḍā Devī Melā in Bamni.	295

Note on Transliteration

Italics are used for words in Hindi and Sanskrit, which are transliterated according to the standard system (e.g. *ḍoli*), with the use of the English plural (e.g. *ḍolis*). Proper names are given with full diacritics (Badrīnārāyaṇ), and the proper transliteration of toponyms with diacritical marks is given in parentheses at their first appearance. The personal names of historical characters are given in their English equivalent.

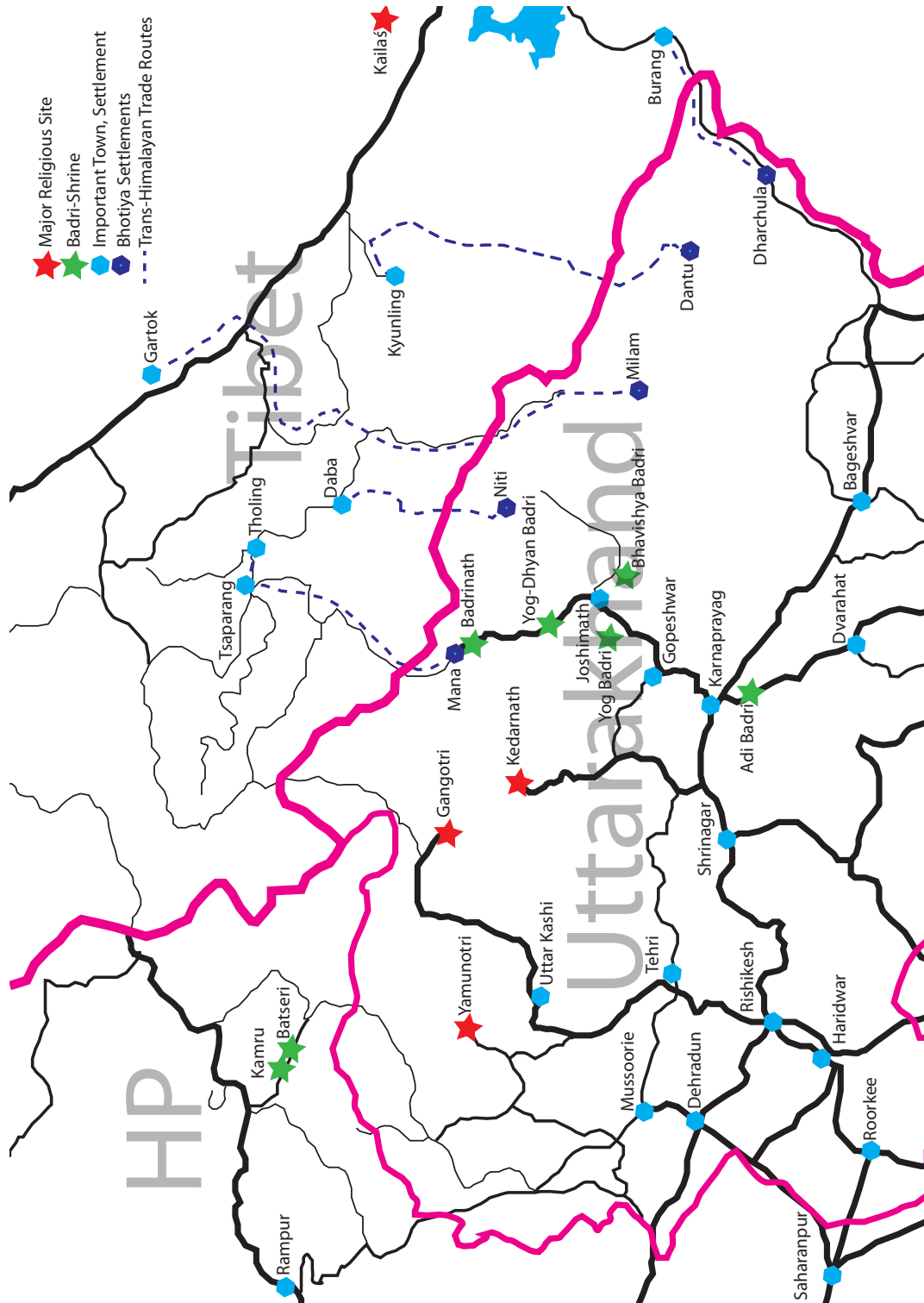


Figure 0.1: Map of Garhwal. Green stars mark the Badri temples and red stars the shrines of the Char Dham. Violet hexagons show Bhotiya villages and their respective place of trade - the dashed line represents the most likely trading routes. Based on Nelles Map Himalaya; 1:1 500 000; Edition 2006.

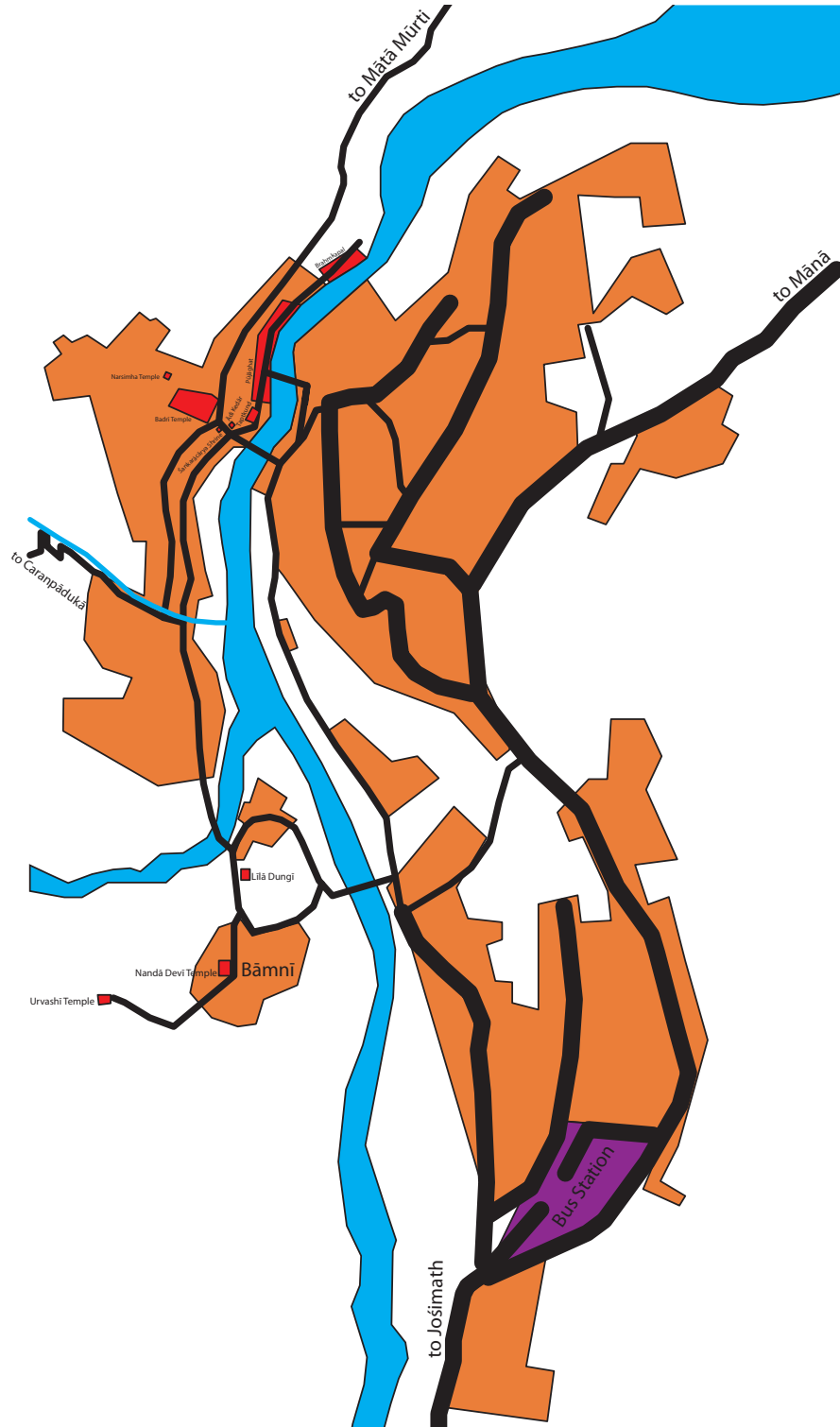


Figure 0.2: Map of Badrinathpuri. Orange represents build-up areas, violet the busterminal and red religious sites in the area. Based on Google Earth.

1 Introduction

The Himalayas¹ have always played an important role within Hinduism, as a place of worship, as the abode of numerous Gods, as sites of pilgrimage, and as places of asceticism. There are uncountable *tīrthas*² all over India, but only few *tīrthas*, four of them to be exact, are considered *dhāms*³– dwelling places of Viṣṇu himself.

These four *dhāms* are Badrīnāth, Rāmeśvaram, Dvārka and Jagannāth Purī.⁴ All four of them are connected to Viṣṇu and to the four *maṭhs* of Śaṅkarācārya. They are situated at the borders of Bhārat, all but Badrīnāth at the sea.

The temple of Badrīnāth is located around 320 km⁵ northwest of Delhi, in the Garhwal (Gaṛhvāl) Himalaya, on the banks of one of the tributaries of the Ganges, the Alakanandā river. The name Garhwal is thought to be derived from “land of forts” (*gaṛh*) and it is believed that 52 of these forts were once conquered and united by the legendary leader Ajay Pal. Garhwal remained one kingdom, although the cap-

¹Although one could argue that there is only *one* Himalayan range, I still use the plural as it is used for the Alps, the Andes or the *Montes Libombos*. This plural is also helpful to indicate the subdivisions of this mighty mountain range. To my knowledge, there are no criteria where the Western Himalaya begins or where the central Himalaya is precisely located. There are several scholars who see Garhwal as being situated within the central Himalaya (for example Sax 2009), yet I choose to locate Badrīnāth within the Western Himalaya, also because the temple is situated to the South of Western Tibet.

²*Tīrtha* means “crossing,” “ford” (Apte 1965) and not only implies that most pilgrimage destinations in India are located near or directly on the banks of a river, but can also be understood in a metaphorical way, crossing over to the spiritual world.

³*Dhāman* means “abode,” “residence” (Apte 1965).

⁴The four *dhāms* are also connected with the four *yugas* Badrīnāth is the *dhām* of the *kṛtayuga*, Rāmeśvaram of the *tretāyuga*, Dvārka of the *dvāparyuga* and Jagannāth Purī of the *kaliyuga*. In a myth, it is also said that they represent the daily routine of Viṣṇu, as he takes his bath in Badrīnāth, gets dressed in Dvārka, eats in Purī and finally takes his rest in Rāmeśvaram (Gupta 2003:32).

⁵In linear distance. The actual roads are twisting and turning, especially after Haridwar (Hardvār) – the so-called gate to the mountains, therefore the actual distance one has to cover is more than twice as much.

1 Introduction

itals shifted more than once, until it was conquered by the Gorkhas in 1803 and finally was divided into the states of Tehri Garhwal and British Garhwal in 1815. Today, Garhwal forms the state of Uttarakhand (Uttarākhaṇḍ)⁶, together with Kumaon (Kumāūm). Garhwal borders on Uttar Pradesh (Uttar Pradeś) in the South, Himachal Pradesh (Himāchal Pradeś) in the West, Tibet in the North and Kumaon in the East. The main sources of the rivers Gaṅgā and Yamunā are situated within Garhwal, and most of these sources mark a holy place as well, with four of them being especially important sites. They are called Cār Dhām as well, but in order to distinguish them from the other Cār Dhām they are sometimes referred to as the *choṭā* (small) or *uttar* (northern) *cār dhām*. These four shrines are traditionally visited from west to east – first Yamunotri at the source of the Yamunā, then Gaṅgotri, the mythological source of the Gaṅgā, and afterwards Kedārñāth and Badrīñāth. In the Epics and Purāṇas, the place was commonly named Badarikāśrama or Badrīviśālā. Today, the word Badrīñāth is not only used to describe the temple, but it also refers to the settlement around the temple and the *mūrti* inside the temple. In order to clearly distinguish these in this work, the temple will be referred to as Badrīñāth, the settlement as Badrīñāth-purī and the *mūrti* as Badrīñārāyaṇ. Most travelers from the West who visit Badrīñāth for the first time feel disappointed, because what they expect is a scenic Himalayan pasture, with the calm and solitude one associates with the mountains. Instead they arrive, after long hours in crowded buses, at a hustle and bustle that is known from the rest of India – and at the first glance, there is nothing secluded or peaceful about the place. For myself it was different when I first arrived in Badrīñāth, because I arrived right after I had visited the first four of the Pāñc Kedār and after a few days of hiking in the Himalayas along with the daily monsoon showers, and thus I was rather happy to be someplace with at least some amenities (later, during longer stays for the fieldwork, I realized that there is in fact too much of a crowd and that I missed simple things

⁶The state became independent in the year 2000 and was called Uttarāñchal until 2004.

like heating or internet a lot). In any case, the expectations of what to encounter at the goal of the pilgrimage are even more prominent for the actual pilgrims.

1.1 The Two Sides of Badrīnāth

When Dayanand Saraswati, the founder of the Arya Samaj, travelled to the Himalayas and finally to Badrīnāth, he was in search of “learned scholars and *sanyasis*” as well as “some really genuine *yogi[s]*” and “true ascetics” (Yadav 1978:40-41 and 38). However, his endeavor to do so, was unsuccessful, since he only “encountered profound ignorance or ridiculous superstition” (ibid:39). The few people he did meet along his travels through the mountains and who he considered learned and genuine were from the South of India, as for example the “Rawalji, the chief priest of the temple at Badrinarayan” (ibid:41). In the local population and their practices, he did not find the expected transcendence and dignity suggested by the episodes of the Epics and Purāṇas, and he left the Himalayas seemingly disappointed. This dichotomy between the holy Himalayas as portrayed in the Sanskrit scriptures and the actual mountains is something that becomes apparent with the temple of Badrīnāth and its history. In the words of Professor T. V. R. Murti (as cited in Bharati 1978:78): “This is true: the Himalayas of the rishis and the yogis, is more important to us than are the actual rocks and the miserable huts of the people there.” Yet, there is another dichotomy that weaves itself through the myth and history of Badrīnāth, the one between the “us” and “them.” “Them“ being the Pahārīs, the mountain dwellers, and the Bhotiyas, the trans-Himalayan traders who would even eat cows. “Us,” of course, represents the view of the great tradition, the view of the orthodox Hinduism or the *Sanatāna Dharma*.

The holy and the miserable, the genuine ascetic and the dubious Pahārī, these pairs, if not in opposition then at least still apart from each other, are forced to interact at meeting places such as Badrīnāth. These pairs, however, are not equal in their representation, since the holiness of the Himalayas will always be more important

1 Introduction

to the pilgrim that the actual mountain, as the yogi or the learned Brahmin have predominance over the Pahārīs. The same is also true for the narratives that accompany both dichotomies. The picture drawn by the dominant narratives is of a pilgrimage destination from the golden age (*kṛtayuga*) which was always deeply embedded in the holiness of the mountains – a place of gods and genuine asceticism. The alleged but quite probable past as a center of Buddhism is another reason why the connection to the lore of Sanskrit scriptures and to “the great tradition” was sought out and intensified. Today, the common pilgrim sees Badrīnāth as the northern *dhām* – unaware of the rich history and unique culture of the place. However, before going into the details of the changes that have occurred at this shrine, an evaluation of the state of research is first required.

1.1.1 The State of Research

The shrine of Badrīnāth is indeed frequently mentioned in literature concerned with the Western Himalayas, however, in most cases the temple receives no more than a few lines of treatment. At present, there is only one scholarly monograph, to my knowledge, that deals exclusively with Badrīnāth, the published doctoral thesis of Dinesh Kumar (1991). His work gives a detailed description of the different groups of priests in Badrīnāth as well as a few interviews with representatives of the respective groups, but it is not able to meet the quality of Bhardwaj’s study (2003) in terms of the sociological context. Further, there are two dissertations that deal with Badrīnāth, neither of which is published to date. One is written by Kevin Mayo, which I had no chance to consult⁷ and the other one is by Corin Golding, which focuses on the synergy between Badrīnāth and the Bhotiyas of Mana. Although I have met Corin in Delhi during his research and he received his PhD during the times of my writing, I was unable to investigate his study.

⁷He presented an article entitled *The Metaphor of Nar and Narayan at the Himalayan Pilgrimage Shrine of Badrinath* at the Biennial Conference of the ASAA (Asian Studies Association of Australia) in 2004. It was available through their webpage (<http://coombs.anu.edu.au/SpecialProj/ASAA/biennial-conference/2004/Mayo-K-ASAA.pdf>).

1.1 *The Two Sides of Badrīnāth*

The other literature vital to the study of Badrīnāth has its focus somewhere else and mostly deals with the temple only in a few side notes. One of the most important works is still Atkinson's Gazetteer (2002), which was first published in 1881 and covers, as the subtitle suggests, the whole of the "Himalayan Districts of the North Western Province of India." The Gazetteer deals not only with culture and religion in this area, but also goes into detail concerning flora, fauna, politics and so forth. Since Atkinson's work intends to cover such a wide field, his observations on Badrīnāth, while immensely useful, are limited to only a few pages.

The first work of Western origin to mention the temple of Badrīnāth is a letter from the Jesuit padre António de Andrade (Aschoff 1989, Wessels 1992) to his superior in 1624. His account is very valuable, since he is the only person to give any details on the shrine in the early 17th century. Yet, for him, the pilgrimage to Badrīnāth is only a step on his journey to go further north to the empire of Guge, where he believed to find Christian brothers, and therefore only writes marginally about the practices of the so-called "pagans."

Following in his footsteps, there have been several other travelers to Badrīnāth, but again their main goal was something different. For Webb and Raper (Ritter 1833) it was the search for the origin of the Gaṅgā, for Boeck (1900) it was simple interest, for Traill (1992, 1992b) duty⁸ and for Swami Tapovanam (1990) a classical pilgrimage. All of them give us some important, though fragmented, information on the shrine, especially in its historical aspect of the more recent past, but they do not bother to go beyond and towards a deeper meaning of the narratives or the status Badrīnāth possesses in the Himalayas and in the whole of India.

Another very informative monograph was published in 1928, containing the travelog of Sister Nivedita.⁹ This "Pilgrim's Diary" is one of the first works that describes the pilgrimage to Kedārīnāth and Badrīnāth from the perspective of an actual pil-

⁸He was the first commissioner of British Garhwal.

⁹She was born under the name Margaret Elizabeth Noble. After she met Swami Vivekananda, she became his disciple and followed him to India.

1 Introduction

grim. Although she frequently mentions the Buddhist influence on this region, she leaves a more historical explanation to Sāṅkṛtyāyan. Rāhul Sāṅkṛtyāyan (1953) traveled through this region of the Himalayas in the middle of the last century and published his thoughts and experiences under the title *Himālaya Paricaya*. He was more inclined than others to look closer at the idol of Badrīnārāyaṇ and at the narrative concerning Badrīnāth's time in Tholing. If it was his reputation that allowed him to gather the information, or if these topics were handled more openly during his time remains unknown. In any case, his descriptions of the idol leave little doubt about its Buddhist origin (see chapter 2.2.), and he certainly disclosed that the knowledge about the connection to Tholing was much more widespread in this region and more openly discussed.

In recent years, more and more works on Badrīnāth have been published, mainly by locals of Garhwal, some of which are worth mentioning in detail. The book by Asha Dhayani Babulkar and Shri Pushp Dhayani (n.d.) has a special value, because both their families belong to the paṇḍā community of Devprayāg¹⁰ and therefore they are able to give insights otherwise not easily found elsewhere. The majority of Garhwali authors publish their works in Hindi, such as the historian Śivprasād Naithānī (2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2010), Dhan Singh Rāvat (2010) or Śivrāj Rāvat (1994). Furthermore there are two works by J. P. Nambūrī (n.d., 2009) which are very interesting. One covers the Cār Dhām of Uttarakhand and the other refers only to the shrines of Kedārñāth and Badrīnāth. According to his publications, he is the Mukhya Kāryādhikārī of the temple committee. What makes his publications noteworthy is that both his books can be bought directly from the small and unorganized museum *cum* shop of the temple committee and that the narratives which link the shrine of Badrīnāth to Tholing in Tibet are missing in both of them. This may be a coincidence, but it seems that this issue receives less attention in the younger publications, which adds to my theory that some things of Badrīnāth's past

¹⁰Dhayani are the paṇḍās for eastern Uttar Pradesh and the Babulkars for Maharashtra (Mahārāstra) and parts of Madhya Pradesh (Madhya Pradeś).

are gladly forgotten. The latest monograph to give a longer description of Badrīnāth is Diana Eck's *India, A Sacred Geography* (2012). Eck gives a detailed summary of its myth, narrative and description, and even though she states that "in Buddhist times [...] this image [...] was understandably worshipped as the Buddha" (Eck 2012:340), she is unwilling to reflect on the importance of Badrīnāth beyond the sphere of Hinduism's great tradition.

Thus, while there is sufficient material on Badrīnāth that allows to sketch a history of the shrine, it also leaves wide gaps in terms of its precolonial times as well as in respect of its local culture. The following will describe my contributions to the study of Badrīnāth and my hypothesis concerning the changes that happened in the reception of the temple as a pilgrimage destination.

1.1.2 The Hypothesis

During my years as a postgraduate, I became a frequent visitor to Badrīnāth and was first interested in the rituals in and around the temple. Although I was already aware of the special geographical and inter-religious status of Badrīnāth, even before I was accepted as a fellow of the IK (Doctoral College) "Cultural Transfers and Cross-Contacts in the Himalayan Borderlands," it was only when I discovered the richness of the local narratives that the whole picture started to present itself.

Thus, the basis for this study has been established by several periods of fieldwork,¹¹ during which I not only have investigated the meaning of Badrīnāth for the priests and pilgrims, but also the underlying matrix of this Himalayan pilgrimage center. During these stays, I have lived with a group of priests¹² most of the time, and during the periods when they could not provide a bed they persisted to feed me. This close contact to the Tirthpurohīts provided a firsthand experience of their daily

¹¹May to July 2009, May 2011 and October to November 2011 and August to October 2012.

¹²A family of Paṇḍās from Devprayag (Devprayāg), but now living in the area of Rishikesh, and having *jajmān* relations to Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

1 Introduction

lives, and they were eager to point out aspects of my interest. The first period of fieldwork was chosen in order to being able to experience the main pilgrimage season and to observe the priests in their element. The other three periods were centered around the major processions and festivals in and around Badrīnāth; i.e. the processions commencing the opening and closing of the temple and the festivals of Ghaṇṭākarna, Nandādevī and Mātāmūrti. These performances have not yet been recorded and analyzed in detail, although they reveal many aspects of the cultural and religious background of the temple.

While participant observation was important understanding the organization of this pilgrimage center, I argue that it is equally important to locate this center in the broader landscape of the Western Himalayas. The fact that Badrīnāth is situated in a vast borderland has not yet been sufficiently addressed. This borderland, barren, inhospitable and economically uninteresting in itself, was defined by trade, since it was the settlement area of the Bhotiyas, a group of semi-nomadic traders. Here my interest was startled: how does it come that this place, literally at the end of the world, draws so many pilgrims from all over India, indeed from the whole world? It might be that Victor Turner (1973:2011) has a point when he notes that “pilgrimage shrines [...] tend to be located not in the centers of towns and cities but on their peripheries or perimeters or even at some distance beyond them.” Badrīnāth certainly is “at some distance beyond,” and the hardships encountered along the pilgrimage route certainly add to their gain, however, the importance of Badrīnāth is connected to its location within the Himalayas as well as at one of the sources of the Ganges. According to Inden (1990), the Himalayas do not only represent a liminal state, but they also represent a center within themselves which is identified by the Mount Kailāś. Grünendahl (1993) published an excellent article on early references to Badrīnāth, though his focus was more on the mountain Badrīnāth is supposedly situated – the Gandhamādana. This mountain, he believes, is basically the same as Mount Kailāś. This may be another reason why this area was explored

1.1 *The Two Sides of Badrīnāth*

so early and then became a prominent center, even for South Indian *sampradāys*. In this respect, it is important to mention that no scholar has yet addressed the possibility that Badrīnāth, or Badrikāśrama, as it was called then, might have represented a imaginary place during the time of the Mahābhārata (see chapter 2.6) and that, when Badrīnāth was initially located in the real world, it may not have been where it is today (see chapter 4.2).

Today, the importance of Badrīnāth as a pan-Hindu pilgrimage site remains unquestioned, but the past significance of the shrine to the whole of the Western Himalaya has not yet been addressed in a scholarly way. There are various shrines connected to Badrīnāth, within Garhwal four to be exact, which are known as the five Badris. However, especially interesting for the understanding of Badrīnāth's significance are the Badrī temples outside of Garhwal. It is almost unknown that there are four further Badrī shrines within Kumaon, in fact it is almost impossible to identify their precise location, apart from the one in Dvarahat. The two Badris of Kinnaur have received a little more attention, yet the similarities of the temples of Kamru and Batseri to the one in Badrīnāth have been mostly neglected. The works of Tobdan (1990 and 2008), Singh (1990), Sanan and Swadi (1998) as well as the recent publication of Sur Das' narratives by Arik Moran (2012) provided a good starting point to explore the parallels between these temples and point towards an "entangled history" (Randeria 2002) of these shrines. The most important "entanglement" concerns the former capital of the Guge empire in Western Tibet – Tholing. Today, all connections between these two sites have been severed by the differing views on the exact location of the border between India and China. This is one of the main reasons that those narratives which recall this cultural and religious connection are a vital point to this study. One may consider it naive to work with "stories" to reconstruct a history of a certain place, but it has been demonstrated by Vansina (1995) that narratives can be valid sources for an historical approach. According to this argumentation oral histories only survive through time when they deliver a

1 Introduction

message that is also of importance to a specific group. The questions raised by the narratives and the gaps they leave open will be filled with reports from colonial times as well as court transcripts.

Of course it is possible that there may no concise history of Badrīnāth at all, but I will demonstrate in this study that the discrepancies found in the descriptions of Badrīnāth in the Mahābhārata, the Purāṇas, within the lore of local narratives and its status today result from different motivations. These motivations can best be analyzed by the methodological framework of “Sanskritization” (Srinivas 1952, 1966) and “Hinduization” (Eschmann/Kulke 1978, Kulke 2001 and Hardenberg 2010). It was the struggle of the priesthood to overcome the stigma of being the “backward Other” (Sax 2002:190) and the challenge of the Pahārīs and Bhotiyas to keep alive their culture and heritage, while at the same time striving to be accepted within the caste system and allowed to partake in the worship of Badrīnārāyaṇ.

While most narratives which circulate in Badrīnāth have already been recorded in writing, mostly in the small pamphlets distributed for a few rupees, their implications to the status of the temple within the sacred topography, not only for the Western Himalayas but for the whole of India, have not yet been sufficiently addressed.

While many of these narratives are considered mere folk stories, because they portray the shrine as part of the local culture, and are in the process of being forgotten, the processions and rituals in Badrīnāth still keep them alive. Since the processions that mark the opening and closing of the shrine refer to the once important royal patronage, especially in the festivals in honour of Mātāmūrti and Nandādevī, the local narratives are weaved into their performances.

Of course, Badrīnāth’s narratives do not only deal with Tibet but also connect the temple to a rich lore of Sanskrit texts. Another aspect that is closely related are the other gods that are worshipped in Badrīnāth. Thus, it becomes clear that the region of Badrīnāth, as described in the Epics, was the place of Kuber and that the

1.1 The Two Sides of Badrīnāth

hermitage of the Badri tree was only but a small site within his kingdom. Considering the position, of Kuber today, as the cashier of Badrīnārāyaṇ, and the names and narratives of the region, it is very likely that he had a much greater importance during the early history of the temple.

Today, Badrīnāth's origin is almost solely connected to Adī Śaṅkarācārya. His life events and hagiographies have already been widely discussed by Bader (2000), Pande (2004) and Sax (2000), yet all of them take his alleged visit and the connected retrieval of Badrīnārāyaṇ's idol more or less as a fact. This study will demonstrate that there is actually no consistency within the different *digvijayas* that would point towards Śaṅkarācārya having ever visited Badrīnāth and that the hypothesis of Paul Hacker (1978), namely that a political policy by the Vijayanagar kingdom during the 14th century is responsible for the establishment of the four Śaṅkara *maṭhs* (see chapter 4.5.2) and his alleged visit, is much more likely the reason for this connection.

Badrīnāth is significant not only within religion, but it also had and has an influence in politics which will be demonstrated throughout this thesis. The most obvious point is of course the connection to the ruling dynasties of Garhwal,¹³ but further implication may be found in the British administration of the temple which is recorded in a document entitled *Appointment of a Chief Priest, or Naib Rawal, at the temple of Badrīnāth in British Garhwal* (IOR 1895), which, to my knowledge, has not yet been examined in this context. This record documents the struggles of the British after discovering that they had not only gained control over the borderland to Tibet, but also resumed the duties formerly vested with the Rāja of Garhwal. Finally, many court procedures are also included in this study, because very often they shed a different light on the relevant contexts.

It is further important to examine the role of the British rule on the temple of Badrīnāth. Even though today there is nothing in Badrīnāth that would point to the

¹³This is addressed by Galey (1992) and Malaviya (1934).

1 Introduction

British influence at first sight, yet, not only did the whole organization and the traditional rights dramatically change when Badrīnāth was included within British Garhwal after 1815, but it is also a fact that most of the relevant documents and literature was written after this date. Before the usurpation by the Gorkha forces, there was a close link between the ruling dynasties of Garhwal and Badrīnāth which was finally severed when the British administration started.

Another fundamental change was brought to the region through the closing of the border after the Sino-Indian War of 1962. I will argue that, before 1962, Badrīnāth was one of the major centers within a broad borderland, stretching from Western Nepal (Nepāl)¹⁴ to Himachal Pradesh and up to the southern parts of Western Tibet. Furthermore, I aim to show that there are actually two different perspectives on Badrīnāth: one is the view of the “orthodox Hindu” and describes a place connected to Nārāyaṇ, while the other view takes into account the folk landscape and speaks of a contact zone and gives more importance to the other deities within this region. Within all these parts and perspectives runs a red line which draws the evolution of the temple from a small mountain shrine to a unique pilgrimage center and gives insights into how the narratives that accompany the mentioned changes complete this picture, or how they were constructed to prove the correctness of these alterations.

1.1.3 The Structure of This Study

This work consists of eight chapters which give a complete description of Badrīnāth from its beginnings to the pilgrimage center it is today. In order to map the full dimension of Badrīnāth, the study does not only describe the views of the Hindus and the Sanskrit scriptures, but it looks beyond the border and into the cross-border

¹⁴This is owed to Tucci (1956:127-128), who, in his *Preliminary Report on two expeditions in Nepal*, mentions two *tāmrāpatras* he discovered in Jumla, both starting with “the invocation to Badrīnāth and Muktināth.”

1.1 *The Two Sides of Badrīnāth*

contacts between the pilgrims, traders, Bhotiyas, Tibetans as well as the neighboring states. Before addressing the details of the actual temple of Badrīnāth, I will focus first on its narratives and oral history, since they play such an important role in this study. This will be followed by a selection of theories on Badrīnāth as a pilgrimage site and the name of the borderland in which the temple is located, including also the discussion why people chose to live in this part of India.

Chapter 2 will start with a general description of the physical place Badrīnāth, in order to provide a mental map of the location of this study. This chapter covers not only the temple *per se* and its closest surroundings, but also goes beyond the borders of Uttarakhand to explore the other temples that bear the same name.

This is followed by a historical part on Badrīnāth itself in chapter 3 and a brief history of the State of Uttarakhand. Although there are several works on the history of Uttarakhand and its neighboring areas (Atkinson 2002, Handa 2002, Rawat 2002, Naithānī 2006a, 2006b, 2008, Vaiṣṇav 2010, Ratūrī 2007, Sāṅkṛtyāyan 1953 etc.) these short treatise on history are necessary, to focus on events elementary to an understanding of Badrīnāth's past. Finally, this chapter concludes with a discourse on the connection of Buddhism to Badrīnāth.

Chapter 4 looks at Badrīnāth as the northern *dhām* and how the temple is perceived in mainland India. This begins with an examination of the Mahābhārata, the Rāmāyaṇa, and the corpus of different Purāṇas and their references to the temple. Especially in the Purāṇas, there are a few hints to an earlier, alternative location of Badrīnāth. It was the vicinity of Mount Kailāś, the river Ganges and the Svargarohini Mountain that made this area a perfect place for pilgrimage. Another important aspect is the significance of the Badri tree and how the brothers Nar and Narayan were eclipsed by Viṣṇu. It is very difficult to discuss Badrīnāth without

1 Introduction

referring to Adi Śaṅkarācārya. Today, most people see him as the founder of the temple, and many others see him also as the bringer of the Sanātana Dharma to this region through his defeat of the Buddhists and all other heterodox influences on the shrine. While there is no proof of his visit to Badrīnāth, his persona is used to furbish Badrīnāth with a respectable past as well as a legitimation for the priests and their rights to conduct rituals at the shrine. Badrīnāth's past is also connected to yet another Indian religion, namely Jainism. It is said that the first Tirthaṅkara attained *mokṣa* in the Himalayas, at the Ashtāpad Mountain to be precise. In this respect, it is revealing how a dispute concerning a Jain prayer hall was fought over at court and the arguments used by both sides in the process. Finally, this chapter concludes with a look at the visual material available on Badrīnāth. In this respect, a movie named "Badrinath" transports many of the common perceptions on the shrine and especially the prejudice towards the Pahāṛīs.

Chapter 5 deals with the structure of the pilgrimage complex. The first part addresses the position of the head priest, the Rawal (*Rāval*). Today, the Rawal is an employee of the temple committee, but throughout the last centuries his role was much more powerful. Because his position was on one of the main agendas of the British administration and since he also played an important role in questions of sovereignty over the temple, these sections are introduced by a general description of his position and predecessors. Further, it will be demonstrated how the view on Badrīnāth gains different facets, dependent on which group of priests recounts which episodes.

Chapter 6 is based on the processions in and around Badrīnāth. Three different kinds of processions may be differentiated, which also have their individual meanings and symbolisms. Here, a special focus is laid upon the opening and closing processions, which under a closer look reveal hierarchic matters and political influ-

1.1 The Two Sides of Badrīnāth

ences. These two processions along with the other festivals are especially relevant to the question of how many, if any, pilgrims from the plains are invited to participate and for what reasons.

In chapter 7 Badrīnāth is depicted from a local perspective. As previously stated, there is, or rather was, quite a discrepancy in the views people held on Badrīnāth. Here, I will deal with the role of Badrīnāth as a Himalayan shrine, separate from Sanskrit scriptures and the pilgrim economy. The chapter first deals with the Bhotiyas, a semi-nomadic group, that for a long time had the strongest impact on this region. The significance of Badrīnārāyaṇ as a royal deity and its connection to the different rulers of Garhwal will also be addressed. I firmly believe that Badrīnāth cannot be seen without the contrast to Kedārnāth – the neighboring shrine dedicated to Śīva. There are many similarities between these two temples, starting with a narrative that connects them together. Yet, based on their geographical locations, they have been connected to a very different set of correlations.

Thus, Badrīnāth is not only connected to temples and villages outside of Garhwal, but it is embedded into a local cultural matrix that reveals itself in the sacred landscape of Badrīnāth as well as in the whole of Uttarakhand. In this respect, the significance of the smaller deities of Badrīnāth is highlighted in the sections about Ghaṇṭākarna and Kuber as well as the question of how the connection of Badrīnāth to the kings of Garhwal altered its status and reputation in the course of time.

The conclusion forms last chapter. It reviews the findings and conclusions of this study in the light of the theories on “cultural transfer,” *“histoire croisée”* and “Hinduization,” and it gives an outlook and perspective on further studies of the Western Himalayan contact zone.

1.2 Narratives and Oral History

What is a narrative and why is it significant in the study of religious places? In the context of Hinduism, narratives are quite important, they not only deliver meaning and history, but they also let the individual know how to behave at certain times or at certain places. Since this work focuses on a site of pilgrimage, I will investigate also on narratives in this perspective. How do they deal with the place and its history? And how do they alter the place and the pilgrimage? There are texts called *Sthalapurāṇa* or *Māhātmya* to almost every, at least important, *tīrtha* in India. They describe not only the establishment of the place, its history and its significance, but also the merits one can expect by visiting this specific place.

To complicate things, there are many kinds of narratives and not few are contradictory. To solve this problem, the Hindus have made a distinction between different narratives: if they are consistent with the scriptures (Vedas, Śāstras, Purāṇas etc.), they are considered “shastrik” (Parry 1989:45-63); and if they are not, that means they were told by “ordinary” people and are therefore considered “laukik.”¹⁵ Thus, this generally constitutes two classes of narratives, which is actually close to what we have in academia: the problem of textual and oral traditions. In both approaches textual traditions are seen as more reliable, because they have stood the test of time – many people have read them, and they were considered true. With oral accounts, one is always the first to hear them in this setting, or in this version, or from that person, and thus the truth within them is more difficult to prove. Of course, it is true that oral accounts change much faster than written ones, it is easy to adapt them to present day actualities. To put it in different terms – textual sources have a “restriction of spontaneity” (Goody 1977:144). The oral, or local, traditions keep the views and culture of the lower castes, or even of the subaltern,

¹⁵Again this term is used by Parry (1989) In the area of Badrīnāth “laukik,” or folk narratives are called *kiṃvadantī* (as it is said [by ordinary people]; rumor; hearsay) or *dāntkathā* (literally tooth-story, but might be the exact Hindi term for orality) and sometimes, but more often in textual sources, one finds the term *janśruti* (rumor; hearsay) for it.

1.2 Narratives and Oral History

alive. In the end, the textual sources are therefore the “stronger” ones because, as soon as they can be connected to a larger corpus (i.e. Purāṇa) or attributed to a well-known or influential author, they can “overwrite” these local traditions.

This distinction between “shastrik” and “laukik” is only a formal one for the Indian context and to the area of Badrīnāth as well. There are plenty of narratives that deal with Badrīnāth, some are found in the Epics and Purāṇas, some in local pamphlets, a few are reproduced in books and some again are only oral. Yet, the main narrative on the (re-)establishment of the shrine by Śankarācārya is considered to be “shastrik,” although, it is nowhere to be found in any of the scriptures.

Thus, in reality there is another mechanism at work which defines what is “shastrik,” and therefore true, and what is not. I propose that narratives are less concerned about the past but aim to explain the present. Therefore, it will make a significance difference who reproduces a narrative, either orally or in written form, and the status of the said person, in terms of whether the narrative is considered “laukik” or “shastrik”.

Why use narratives as means to study history? It may be a truism that there is some truth to every story, but narratives transport certain explanations about time and space, or at the very least they add meaning to these. I argue that narratives, no matter if they are written down or circulated orally, are essentially about the present, since narratives aim to explain how the present has come into being. These narratives do not matter *per se*, it is their message that gives them significance, and this message requires to convey meaning. As Vansina (1985:100) notes, “every traditional message has a particular purpose and fulfills a particular function, otherwise it would not survive.” In the context of Badrīnāth this means that all the found narratives serve a purpose, at least for a specific group. This is true again for both written and oral narratives, even though written narratives and their purpose disappear more slowly. For example, the narrative of the migration of the deity from Tibet to Badrīnāth is no longer alive within Badrīnāth-purī while it may can

1 Introduction

still be found in the local pamphlets about the temple, the same narrative is already omitted in the more recent publications. There may be two reasons for this: for one, there is another more fitting narrative for the majority of priests and pilgrims about the origin of the temple; and, on the other hand, since the connection between Tholing and Badrīnāth has already been severed long ago, there is no need to keep this connection alive via the narrative.

Narratives in the context of pilgrimage attempt to explain why it is important to travel to this place and how it came into being. This is achieved, usually in the “shastrik” context mentioned above, by connecting the place to the “shastrik” lore of writings. In this sense, there are different kinds of pilgrimage places: there are those who were established by a deity, others, where Ṛṣis or other saints practiced meditation, and then there are places where important events took place. This connection between narrative and place can happen in two ways. One is that a certain place, say where a certain Purāṇa was recorded, is re-located. Thus, there is the text, for example the “Amār Kathā” recounted by Śiva to his wife Pārvatī, and now the place where this incident took place needs to be located, in this case the cave of Amārīnāth in Kashmir (Kaśmīr). Another way is when there is already a place of pilgrimage, but no narrative to connect it to the “shastrik” lore, thus one that is fitting is taken to bring the place in line with the “shastrik” tradition. That is why one finds the same story connected to various places. For example, after Śiva had cut off the fifth head of Brahmā, he gets rid of the head stuck to his *trīśūl* or hand, at a dozen of different places, the most famous of course being Gaya (Gayā), followed by Allahabad (Ilahābād) and Badrīnāth.

1.2.1 Narratives in Badrīnāth

Where are the narratives found which concern Badrīnāth? Incidentally, all the narratives that deal with the origin of the temple are local ones. I refer to them as local, because most probably they used to be oral narratives which were written

down and published in the last 150 years. Today, there is a back and forth between textuality and orality: pilgrims read the pamphlets and priests recounts the narratives, although every group of priest will have a different emphasis.

There are three main narratives constituting the heritage of the temple. One is indeed what we may call “shastrik.” It tells the story of Nar and Nārāyaṇ, who came to this place to practice meditation. The second narrative is believed to be part of the puranic lore and hence “shastrik,” but is in fact *janśruti*, as are most of the narratives concerning the temple. It tells the story of how Śankarācārya came to this place at a very tender age and freed the temple of Buddhist heresy, transforming it into a beacon of Sanatāna Dharma. Finally, the third group is indeed a local or “laukik” one, and it connects the temple of Badrīnāth with Buddhism and Tibet.

The interesting fact here is not that this may in fact have been a Tibetan or even Buddhist shrine, but the fact that this must not be believed as true. When we look into the the neighboring states, such as Nepal or Himachal Pradesh, we find that there is no such straight line separating Hindu and Buddhist heritage, but that mostly they go hand in hand and many people will say that they are both Hindu and Buddhist. Since I will refer to the contents of the different narratives throughout this study, this is a good place to introduce them in more detail.

1.2.2 Establishing Badrīnāth

Nar and Nārāyaṇ

Today, the importance of these two brothers is mainly limited to the names of the two mountains¹⁶ towering over Badrīnāth and to their images to the left side of Badrīnārāyaṇ, inside the *garbha grha*. Their hermitage (Badarikāśrama) that is mentioned in the Mahābhārata, and most of their important life events happened in or around Badrīnāth, such as their mother Mūrti coming to bring them home, fights with different demons or the temptation of Nārāyaṇ by the *apsarā* Urvaśī.

¹⁶The mountain west of the Alakanandā is called Nārāyaṇ and the one opposite Nar.

1 Introduction

The reference to the hermitage of Nar and Nārāyaṇ is – to my knowledge – the only narrative in circulation in Badrīnāth that has its origin in the actual śāstras. While this narrative, is mentioned in several pamphlets today, it is rarely repeated by the priests to their pilgrims. The memory of Nar and Narayan is kept alive mainly through the homonymous mountains and in part through the festival in honor of their mother Mūrti.

The significance of the two brothers in the early references of Badarikāśrama, and their later diminished importance, will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.4.2.

Viṣṇu and the Badrī-tree

Probably most widely known among the pilgrims and repeated innumerable times by the priests is the story of how Viṣṇu chose this place for meditation. Since I will refer to specific details of this or other versions of the narrative, here I will present the story from one of the most widely circulated English pamphlets in Badrīnāth, entitled *The Story of Badrinath Ji*.¹⁷

According to the Puranas the living place of Lord Narayana is the Ksheer Sagar.¹⁸ Lord rests on Shesh Shaiya¹⁹ and Goddess Laxmiji serves Him. [...] But once upon a time, Devarishi Narad did not like the life style of the Lord and he asked Lord Narayana, “You are the creator of this universe, so what ever you do that sets an example for this mortal world and this universe follow suit. You are resting on Shesh Shaiya and Laxmiji is serving you, this gives the glimpse of mortal-world affairs.” Hearing such complaint from Naradji, Lord felt very sad and he decided to renounce all these activities and live a secluded life. By some prevention He sent Laxmiji in the company of Nag-Kanyas²⁰ and He himself

¹⁷Even though it is not written in proper English, it is still important to show what non-Hindi speakers will read when they inquire about Badrīnāth. The text is reproduced with all its grammatical and spelling quirks.

¹⁸Ocean of milk.

¹⁹Śeṣnāg – the king of the Nāgas.

²⁰Serpent virgins.

went for Tapa in the Himalayas. There he went to a place named Kedarkhand at the Himalayas. [...] After watching the beautiful chain of mountains of Badri Place, the flow of stream of river Alaknanda and the celestial fragrance of flowers and leaves and the surrounding beauty of Kedarkhand, Lord Narayana felt happy and He decided to accomplish Tapa at this beautiful place only. [Then follows a long and detailed version of how Viṣṇu tricks Śiva to leave Badrināth. I refer to this episode later in chapter 7.3. This is followed by the narrative of how Narad learned the “Panchratra Prayer Process” from Viṣṇu.] There is a mythological tale behind why Lord Narayana is also called Shri Badrinathji. [...] After that²¹ the Lord got busy in Tapa but on the other hand when Laxmiji returned from Nag Kanyas to Ksheer Sagar, She found that Lord is not there, She became very anxious and started searching him. In the process of searching, She went to Kedar Khand’s huge forest valley. There She saw that Lord was busy in Tapa. When Laxmiji saw that Lord is in hard Tapa in the midst of rain, sun, storm and other natural disasters, She felt very sad. At that time Laxmiji transformed Herself into Badri, (means the tree of Ber) for the protection of Lord and offered shade over Lord. Laxmiji, while in the transformation of Badri protected Lord Narayana from natural disasters. So Lord is called, one who is busy in Tapa midst of Badri trees (means Shri Badrinath). Lord Shri Badrinathji is always busy in Tapa under the cool shade of Badri tree. Because of this Badri tree, this place is called Badri Kshetra and Badrivan. Today, it does not matter whether Badri tree existed or not, but in ancient times there must be the existence of Badri tree. (Tajendra n.d.:6-26)

This narrative is still in oral circulation, and one version or the other will be told

²¹Tajendra is refers to the two side-stories, i.e. tricking Śiva and teaching Nārada.

1 Introduction

to every pilgrim by a priest, fellow pilgrim or even by the chaiwala. As in almost all other pilgrimage destinations, these sort of narratives have been textualized in small and cheap printed pamphlets. Sometimes, they are referred to as grey literature, since in most cases neither date nor the place of publication is given, and often, like here, the author humbly gives only his first name.

The question remains if this recorded narrative was aimed to include as many versions as possible, if it was the version of this specific time, or if it represents the version the author considered the most authentic. For example, mentioned here was the teaching of the “Panchratra Prayer Process” to Nārad, which is something omitted today in most cases, and might point to the religious background of “Tajendra.”

Śaṅkarācārya

It is said that the shrine fell into oblivion in the course of time or it was taken over by the Buddhists. Therefore, one also frequently comes along another narrative, which may be referred to as the second founding or the re-establishment of the temple. I will discuss the role of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya in chapter 4.5. At this point I will only give the narrative in a nutshell, since I will be referring to it regularly throughout this study.

The narrative starts with Ādi Śaṅkarācārya coming to Badrīnāth as a young boy with the desire to see the very famous four-armed statue of Viṣṇu. To his disappointment, the priest at Badrīnāth tells him that this very image has long gone missing, because it was either hidden or thrown away by the Buddhists. Śaṅkarācārya began to meditate and in this altered state of mind discovered the place where the *mūrti* was hidden. He immediately went down to the river, below the hot spring, to a place called Nāradkuṇḍ, dived into the ice cold water, and when he re-emerged he held the statue that is now inside the temple in his hands.

1.2.3 Tholing

The narrative which connects Badrīnāth with Tholing and therefore also with Tibet and Buddhism is a very delicate topic. Most people in and around Badrīnāth are cautious or even dismissive about this story. Although it is still known to the majority of priests and locals, most of them do not like to talk about it and usually refer to it as unimportant or a plain lie.

This narrative states that Badrīnārāyaṇ was originally worshipped in Tholing, but when the people of Tholing were converted to Buddhism and began to eat meat, Badrīnārāyaṇ decided to leave of this new environment. There are plenty of versions of his journey over the Mana pass to Badrīnāth – they will be discussed, from different point of views, in chapter 6. Finally, he settled down at the place we know as Badrīnāth today. It is said that the inhabitants of Tholing, struck by grief, went searching for their God, and kept sending gifts to the temple until the border crossing was closed after the Sino-Indian War in 1962.

There is a another narrative connecting the local gods with Tibet. I discovered this narrative on the 1st of June in 2011 from a mountain guide in Jośīmaṭh, who had heard it on one of his treks. Since I have witnessed this once, I will only mention it here:

One day, all the gods of Garhwal were invited to Tibet, but it was a trick. As soon as they entered the temple there, the Tibetans sealed the shrine with bands of yak-leather. However, on the very top of the temple, they forgot to cover a small hole. Viṣṇu transformed himself into a bee, flew through the hole and hid in the tail of a yak – this is the reason why the yak's tail is still considered sacred today. Stinging the yak from time to time, he forced the yak to cross the Himalayan range, until he arrived at Badrīnāth.

These narratives not only constitute four different perspectives on the temple, but together they form a framework of the different influences that shaped and formed the religious and cultural background of the temple. Since the importance of each of

1 Introduction

these narratives was more or less relevant in different times, or to different groups, more and more facets were added to the shrine, most of them now lost in oblivion. The aim of these following pages is to shed light on these facets once more, or, if that is not possible, to propose hypothetical ones.

To this effect, I will start out with with a general exposition on the problem of borderlands, Zomia and the phases of migration into this area. This will be followed by a brief and selective view on the history the Western Himalayas in chapter 2.

1.3 Borderland or Contact-Zone?

The Himalayas form a natural border between South and Central Asia, and even though it is difficult to traverse this mountain range, it is not impossible, and thousands of traders used to do this every summer. It was their wealth, accumulated through trade, that awakened the interest of the kingdoms on both sides of the Himalayas. It seems that, as trade decreased (mid-18th century) and along with this the revenue for the dominating realms, the interest in these inhospitable places ceased and was rekindled again only by the idea of nationalism, starting in the middle of the 20th century. In this process, two different ideas entered in the dispute, which still resonates today, not only in politics but in academia as well. The Indian administration under Nehru chose the position of a geographical solution, emphasizing the ultimateness of the Himalaya.

It is natural that peoples tended to settle upto and on the sides of the mountain ranges; and the limits of societies and nations were formed by mountain barriers... But if mountains form natural barriers, it was even more logical that the dividing line should be identified with the crest of that range which form the water-shed in that area. Normally, where mountains exist, the highest-range is also the watershed; but in a few cases where they diverge the boundary tends to be the watershed.

1.3 Borderland or Contact-Zone?

(Reports of the Officials of the Government of India and People's Republic of China on the Boundary Question: Ministry of External Affairs 1961, in: Chakravarti 1971:3-4)

The officials of China, on the other hand, while accepting the mountain range as a traditional border, saw that people and their culture still moved across it and therefore stated:

It is well-known that the traditional customary line is formed gradually through a long process of historical development according to the extend upto which each side has all along exercised its administrative jurisdiction...As to people living in high mountainous regions, mountains do not necessarily constitute obstacles to their activities (particularly when the mountains are intersected by rivers and passes) and the administrative jurisdiction is not confined by mountains. (ibid.:4)

There is no doubt that the main reason, for choosing their position was to the possibility to gain the maximum amount of territory. This dispute climaxed in the Sino-Indian War, with the consequence that the border was closed, not only to the trans-Himalayan traders, but to all communication, thus transforming the borderland into a borderline.

Yet, the question remains: how we are supposed to treat this region from a pre-1962 point of view? Should it be seen as a borderland, a contact zone (Pratt 1992), an ethnoscape (Appadurai 1996)²² or is it even a part of Zomia (van Schendel 2002)? Initially I thought to name this region the Western Himalaya Borderland (since borderland studies are increasingly receiving attention), but, the fact, it later became two Western Himalaya Borderlands – one on each side of the border. The word “border” delivers the meaning of separation and division, but this region was a place of meetings, connections and encounters throughout history. Such a view is also shared by Zou and Kumar (2011:141), although their area of research is

²²“The landscapes of group identity [...]” (Appadurai 1996:48).

1 Introduction

located in the Northeast of India: “The sub-Himalayan area is not simply a barrier dividing ‘riverine communities’ in India and China. In the eyes of mountain dwellers, mountain crests appear rather like bridges, not necessarily barriers (as perceived by lowlanders).”

Therefore I propose to refer to this region as *Western Himalaya contact-zone*.²³

What Willem van Schendel (2002) has brought to our attention with Zomia is an important concept which has been widely discussed, also in terms of its further implications. His idea derives from the problems intrinsic to Area Studies – they have borders. These borders are sometimes clear and sometimes vague, but if we look into the Western Himalayas, we often see that researchers affiliated to South Asian Studies stop as soon as Buddhist culture starts, since Tibetologists and Buddhist Studies scholars usually are in search of the unaltered centers of Buddhist learning. Thus, I think that the “classical area studies” South Asian Studies and Tibetology²⁴ may be limited in their approach, conceding to the peripheries of their respective fields.

My proposition of a wide contact-zone, stretching from Kinnaur to Nepal and through the southern parts of the former Guge empire, has not yet been sufficiently addressed or discussed.

How is the use of the concept of Zomia helpful in this endeavor? First of all should be the question whether or not the Western Himalaya contact-zone is indeed part of Zomia. The region is included in van Schendel’s maps,²⁵ but does this concept really apply to in the Western Himalaya? Schendel’s idea was to bring the highlands of Southeast Asia to attention. Yet, he stretched Zomia even further, over Northern Nepal and India as well as Tibet. He has done rightly so, because I believe that the

²³“Contact-zone” is clearly borrowed from Pratt (1992): “‘Contact zone’ is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historical disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect.” However, I use the term the other way around – it is *now* that this landscape is separated.

²⁴These two are the Area Studies relevant for this region, not *the* “classical area studies” *per se*.

²⁵An very important detail he left out the are bigger river valleys as part of Zomia, a detail unfortunately missing in the map used to illustrate the extent of Zomia.



Figure 1.1: Map of Zomia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Zomia.jpg>).

Western Himalaya contact-zone fits perfectly into the concept of Zomia. While the term Zomia received great attention in the academic world, most scholars (Giersch 2010, Jonsson 2010, Turner 2010, Sidaway 2012) remained within the original region Zomia was developed for – South East Asia.²⁶ In the following I will attempt to build upon this concept and see which ideas of van Schendel and Scott fit into the landscape of Badrināth.

Regional studies use a geographical metaphor to legitimate the production of specific types of knowledge. This knowledge is structured geographically as well as according to academic disciplines. The geographical metaphor demands that one ‘area’ ends where the next one begins, but in reality area studies resemble the mandalas of old (Schendel 2002:650).

²⁶With the notable exemption of Shneiderman (2010), who asked: *Are the Central Himalayas in Zomia?*, but also focused on the Eastern part of the central Himalaya.

1 Introduction

Here, van Schendel makes two important points. First is of course the limitation of Area Studies, since they lack expertise when it comes to the borderlands of the said areas. This is even more evident, when we go back in history where no clear cut borders existed, and areas resembled interlapping fringes or were vast no-man's-lands. The second point revolves around the term mandala and its comparison by van Schendel to Area Studies). I would like to make a different point than he intended. I think that Area Studies, as well as cultural studies, the history of religion etc. focused for a long time on the centers of their field. This does not necessarily refer to a geographical center, but it concerns the high culture, the texts and interpretations of the educated elite. Whereas nowadays we have Borderland Studies and scholars who work with women, Dalits, and others, the so-called subaltern. In fact areas and with them space are defined differently by different groups in different times.

Though van Schendel includes the Himalayas in his concept of Zomia, he does not specifically refer to them and keeps his argumentation limited to the part of Zomia that covers South-East Asia. While the inclusion of the Himalayas is in principle agreeable in the aspect of Scott's Zomia (who did not bother to include the central and Western Himalayas into his picture of Zomia), I fail to see how the concept should help to overcome the boundaries between different Area Studies. Further, I believe that by focusing too strongly on the concept of Zomia, there is the danger of constructing a new area, one too vast to be covered culturally, not to mention linguistically. There is no doubt that academia has to free herself from the idea of rigid areas, but at the same time she needs to be careful not to overstretch these new and expanded areas. Jean Michaud (2010:202) puts it nicely: „While to certain extent I see van Schendel's reason for his greater Zomia project and the macro-geomorphologic logic to it, the magnitude of social diversity that it encompasses precludes any conclusive cultural assessment.”

Returning now to the area at hand – Badrīnāth and its surroundings – to simply

1.3 *Borderland or Contact-Zone?*

place this pilgrimage center into the framework of Himalayan Studies would be too broad an approach and at the same time possibly leave out areas that are vital for its understanding. The difficulty here lies in the drawing of new boundaries. If we want to present Badrīnāth as one of the major centers of the Western Himalaya contact-zone, where do we say its connections and influences stop? Where we do no longer find temples of Badrīnārāyaṇ, or a Nārāyaṇ that cannot be connected to Badrī? At localities that are not mentioned in the narratives concerning this shrine? Along the former borders of kingdoms that ruled over Badrīnāth?

Space should not be defined by Western scholars as something abstract and empty, since that landscape and with it the area of research is determined by its inhabitants and their culture. As the trans-Himalaya once played a vital role in the lives of the Bhotiyas and Pahārīs, it was part of their geography as well. Today, as the land North of the mountains has lost its significance, new areas, this time in the South of India, are added, meaning that for the Pahārīs concerned with Badrīnāth, Kerala – the homeland of the Rawal and the origin of the Ḍimrīs – is now closer related to the Alakanandā valley than the ruins of Guge, only 100 km away. In this respect, van Schendel (2002:664) is absolutely correct when he proposes that the new geographies will have the shape of “lattices, archipelagos, hollow rings, [and] patchworks.”

While I agree with van Schendel’s inclusion of the Western Himalayas into Zomia, in terms of a neglected borderland or highland, I do not think that Zomia is a helpful concept for this region. The crucial point here is to define, or rather to find the definitions, of new areas, much in the sense of Appadurai (2000:7), who has proposed the idea of “process geographies” stating that, “regions are best viewed as initial contexts for themes that generate variable geographies, rather than fixed geographies marked by pre-given themes.”

Nonetheless, I wish to return once more to the issue of Zomia, this time referring to Scott’s interpretation and the question why people decided to settle in the high

1 Introduction

Himalayas in the first place.

1.4 A Theory of Settlements, or Scott's Zomia in the Western Himalayas

It is not only the Rawal who hail from the South of India, but in fact most inhabitants of Garhwal arrived there from somewhere else and there have been several stages of immigration to the mountains of Uttarakhand.

The first ones to arrive, apart from the Bhotiyas (who are referred to as *Ādivāsis*²⁷ by the locals occasionally) and have a whole chapter (7.1) dedicated to themselves, were the Khaśas. Not much is known about where they came from and when they actually came to Garhwal, but most scholars say that they came from somewhere in Central Asia. Yet, according to Joshi (1990:198) they did not come across the Himalayan passes, but “via north west and the Punjab.” As a proof of their long history, they are often connected to short references in the Epics, but these links of different groups to certain incidents in the Mahābhārata are suspicious and usually there is not much evidence apart from their own claim.

Harikṛṣṇa Ratūrī (2007:77-84) gives a detailed list of the different *jātis* who migrated to Garhwal, starting with the “*sarolā*” Brahmans (from Mālvā) and continuing with the four oldest “*gaṅgārī*” Brahman castes, called the “*cauthokī*,” who migrated between 945 and 982 V.S. from *gaur* Bengal, Karnataka and Mithalā (Mithilā?). The other Brahman *jātis* followed in the years 1100 to 1830 V.S., migrating from all over India, ranging from the South (only specified as *dakṣiṇ*), Ujjain, Rājputānā and Jammū to Gujarāt, Karnāṭaka etc. The *Ḍimrīs* are said to have arrived from Karnataka in the year 980 V.S.

The last stage of migration is marked by pilgrimages to Himalayan shrines. This is the time, approximately three hundred years ago, when Brahmins from all over

²⁷Usually meant in the way of “primitive,” yet could be interpreted as “first” settlers as well.

1.4 A Theory of Settlements, or Scott's Zomia in the Western Himalayas

India but especially from Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat settled down around Devprayāg and started business as pilgrim guides. While for the Deoprayāgi Paṇḍās the reason for migration lies in the pilgrimage, already established at this time, what were such reasons for those others who settled in this region before them?

Reasons for Living in the Mountains

James C. Scott (2009) proposes in his interesting monograph, is that people in the hills or highlands of Southeast Asia were not forgotten by civilization, but they deliberately chose to stay away from it. Why would they do such a thing? Scott is of the opinion that these early civilizations were mainly based on slavery and that there was only a small minority that profited from the surplus production of the irrigated rice fields that made it possible to establish states in the first place. Therefore, the slaves actively considered living in the surrounding hills and highlands as an alternative. While I think that Scott has a point here, I strongly believe that there were also other reasons to settle away from the centers of the civilization. For example the role of the climate in this migration to higher ground should not be forgotten. When the British arrived in India, they realized fairly soon that the Indian summer was an unpleasant and something to be avoided. Soon the first Hill Stations began to manifest and since 1864 even the place of power was shifted to Shimla during the summer. It may be argued that this was a problem more relevant to the British, who came from a moderate, cold climate to India and thus were not fit for the tropical conditions on the subcontinent. Yet, as a matter of fact at an elevation of around 1500m to 2000m, the conditions for living are much better, especially during the summer. There is sufficient rain to grow rice, amaranth and other crops. There are less mosquitos and therefore less diseases connected with them, and there is a never-ending supply of fresh water provided by the glaciers

1 Introduction

during the dry season. Of course, there is winter on the other side, with no opportunity to grow winter crops. There is also the immanent danger of landslides and floods, yet, the advantages of settling in the Himalayas must not be discarded and I am inclined to think that the benefits outweigh the downsides.

If we look at the Bhotiyas, why did these people choose to settle even higher, where the climate is more aggressive again? Apart from a more moderate climate, the Himalayas also offers diverse niches for the cultivation of different crops and the breeding of various animals, but most importantly the trade with places that are not easily reached otherwise. This may have been the main reason for the Bhotiyas to settle so high up in the Himalayas. Although politics may also have played a role, religion and culture might have been even stronger incentives to move to higher altitudes. This may be the case especially for the Bhotiyas, because it seems certain that they came from Tibet in an earlier time which might correlate with the decline of Bön in this region. The question emerges whether they did not migrate because of their beliefs, their religion and culture remain unaltered, or whether it just developed differently in this isolated environment?

If we look at the various great empires that ruled over Northern India, starting with the Kushans, the Guptas, Palas up to the first Muslim empires in India, they never extended deep into the Himalayas. Therefore, if one wished to evade these empires for economic, political or religious reasons, the Himalayas were a safe haven. Of course this does not mean that, within the Himalayas themselves, kingdoms did not rise and fall, and yet it is interesting to see that the capitals of the major kingdoms in Garhwal slowly moved towards the South. The first capital was Karitkeyapur, believed to be today's Joshimath (Jośimath). The next rulers had their center in Śrīnagar, which was later abandoned for Tehri (*Tihri* or *Tehri*). As last step before the Garhwal kingdom became obsolete, the royal palace was moved to Narendranagar, barely inside the hills anymore.

To conclude this discussion, both notions of Zomia enable us to gain new perspect-

1.4 A Theory of Settlements, or Scott's Zomia in the Western Himalayas

ives – in this case – of the Western Himalaya contact-zone. While Schendel's Zomia allows us to create, or rather discover, new areas, Scott's interpretation gives us insight into why people chose to settle in places away from centers and resourceful locations. There are more reasons to this than Scott admits, but it still proves to be a very helpful construct. The other reasons given by me above might only touch upon the real motivations to settle in the Himalayas, but certainly evading state power was merely one of them.

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

2.1 “Tīrtha ek, nām anek”

This wonderful phrase which acts as a heading for this paragraph is not my own creation but is taken from one of Naithāṇī’s books (2006:286). The second part of this phrase is undoubtedly true, since there are numerous different names for Badrīnāth, as mentioned above. Yet, there are even more, since Badrīnāth has had different names in different eons. The Skanda Purāṇa II, iii, 1.57¹ mentions that there have been four different names for this place, each corresponding with one of the four *yugas*:

Muktipradā	<i>kṛtayuga</i>
Yogasiddhā	<i>tretāyuga</i>
Viśālā	<i>dvārparayuga</i>
Badrikāśrama	<i>kaliyuga</i>

One of the narratives which explains the origin of the name “Badrīnāth” was already mentioned in chapter 1.1.2, but at this point it is necessary to focus more specifically on “*Badrī*.” Most scholars do not doubt that this refers to the jujube tree or shrub (*ziziphus jujube* or Indian fig) and virtually all people I have interviewed in

¹*kṛte muktipradā proktā tretāyām yogasiddhidā | viśālā dvāpare proktā kalau badrikāśramah ||* (Vedavyas 1960). “In the *kṛta* [yuga, this place] was called Muktipradā [bestower of salvation] and in the *tretā* [yuga] Yogasiddhidā [bestower of powers]. In the *dvāpara* [yuga] Viśālā [“spacious”] and in the *kali* [yuga] it is called Badrikāśrama [the hermitage characterized by a Badrī tree].”

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

Badrīnāth reported that it means *ber* (the Hindi equivalent). While this plant is said to survive colder temperatures, it is not hardy enough to survive at altitudes above 3000m.² Therefore, the question remains why this place is named after a tree that is nowhere to be found in this region? The first idea that comes to mind is that it may be an alteration of a local name or, in relation to the narrative concerning Tholing, an originally Tibetan name. The inhabitants of Mana refer to Badrīnāth as *Lāmlō* or *Lāmlū*, which according to them has no other significance than a name, and the word “Badrī” in Tibetan also refers to the same species of plants. Therefore, from an etymological point of view, it seems quite certain that Badrī indeed refers to the Indian fig. The possibility that the original Badrīnāth was located somewhere else will be discussed in chapter 4.2, and at this point I would like to focus on the other names and their implications. Thus, returning to the list mentioned above, the names Viśālā and Badrikāśrama refer to the last two yugas. The name Viśālā, or more commonly Badrīviśālā, is also explained via a narrative taken from the Varāha Purāṇa (Kalkidvādaśīvrata, 48.1-24, in: Iyer 1985:135-137).

It is said that once there was a powerful King, named Viśāla in Kaśī,³ but luck left him and he lost his kingdom. “Deprived of his kingdom by his kinsmen, he went to Gandhamādana and from there reached Badrī in a canoe [...]” Here, he started to practice meditation, and after a while this came to the attention of Viṣṇu, who was pleased by the devotion of the former king. Upon his request which boon the king desired as reward for his *tapasyā*, the king answered: “Grant me the boon by which I will be able to propitiate the lord of sacrifices (Viṣṇu) by various sacrifices.” Viṣṇu then informed him of the different gains he could achieve by worshipping different forms of Viṣṇu. At last, “He then told him about this Dvādaśī. By observing this vow, the king became an emperor, and through his name Badrī come to be known as Viśālā.”

This narrative is available in many versions, often in more elaborate ones and

²The significance of the Badrī tree is further explained in chapter 4.4.1.

³Tajendra (n.d.:28) says he was from the “Suryavansh” dynasty.

without the reference to the Kalkidvādaśīvrata, but the fact remains that the name Badrīviśālā relates to a king of the same name.

It seems that the original myth in the Purāṇa concentrates more on the importance of the Dvādaśīvrata than on the locality, however, it manages to explain another name of Badrīnāth, and in the end all versions of this narrative sound rather generic. There is, however, another explanation for the name Viśālā. Grünendahl (1983:126) suggests that Viśālā refers to a (protruding) jujube tree, after which the *āśram* is named. This is so common that several translators do not hesitate to substitute Badarī for Viśālā in their works.⁴ This Viśālā tree is an integral part of the landscape of the two mountains, Kailāś and Gandhamādana, both places of residence of Kuber. As in the list of different names mentioned in the Skanda Purāṇa, it is clear that Viśālā was the name before the place was called Badrī(nāth). It is therefore possible to argue that the temple refers to the place of the Viśālā tree and that the name Badrī originated later as a reference to that tree, but without any connotation to Kuber.

As for the other two names, Yogasiddhā and Muktipradā, they are only very rarely mentioned in Badrīnāth and are basically only featured in this list. The reason for this may lie in the fact that there are multiple names for Badrīnāth, and the Skanda Purāṇa attempted to arrange these names into or reference them to the four *yugas*.

2.2 The Temple

The exact date the first structure in Badrīnāth was erected remains unknown to history, but it is certain that the present temple is not the original one, since the temple was damaged by earthquakes and avalanches several times. For example, almost all structures throughout Garhwal were destroyed by a severe earthquake in 1803 (Oakley 1991:152). Tajendra (n.d.:48) argues that the present temple was

⁴”So zögern Nilakaṇṭha und die modernen Übersetzer auch nicht, für *Viśālā* den Namen *Badarī* einzusetzen” (Grünendahl 1983:126).

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

built in the 15th century „by the King of Garhwal with the inspiration of Swami Bardaracharya, – a member of the *Śrī Rāmānuja* community. According to Thapliyal (2005:98), “the temple is built in Nagar architectural style with some local imprint,” while its main gate, the *śimha dvār*, is oriented towards Mogul style. The golden canopy (*kalaś* or *kalsā*) on top of the *śikhara* was donated by the *mahārānī* of Indore, *Ahilyābāi*.⁵ The latest renovation took place in 1978 (Tajendra n.d.:48), when “the mandapam has been enlarged with granite stones from Andhra Pradesh” (Babulkar n.d.:25).

Badrīnāth-purī is divided into two spaces separated by the river Alakanandā. Both areas are named after the mountains on whose slopes they are located: Nar and Nārāyaṇ. The Nar side to the East is considered to be more profane and therefore houses hotels, the bus stand and most of the amenities for the pilgrims. The temple of course is located at the foot of the Nārāyaṇ mountain, where also most of the priests reside. Beneath the temple there is a pond called Taptkuṇḍ, which features scalding hot water. Every pilgrim is supposed to take a bath here before entering the temple. Besides Taptkuṇḍ, there is one bathing place for women, two other ponds with hot water and a special *kuṇḍ* reserved for the head priest alone. From the Taptkuṇḍ, stairs lead up to the temple, passing the Ādi Kedār temple on the right and the residence of the Rawal along with a small shrine for Śaṅkarācārya on the left side. In front of the temple, there is a platform, from which again a few steps lead to the entrance of the “lion gate,” the main door to the inside of the temple area (Fig. 2.1). To the South, there is a second entrance which leads into the Kubergalī, and, to the North, there is a third gate usually used as an exit point. Inside the walls of the temple precinct, there are the following shrines arranged in clockwise direction on the outer wall, starting from the main entrance: a Hanumān and Gaṇeśa shrine, the Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇ temple, a niche that houses the image of Badrīnāth *svārūp* (the true form), a figure of Śaṅkarācārya and four of his pupils, a

⁵She lived between 1725 and 1795 and is regarded as a benefactor to many temples, foremost the temple of Somnath in Gujarat, which she had rebuilt after it was destroyed by Aurangzeb.

2.2 The Temple

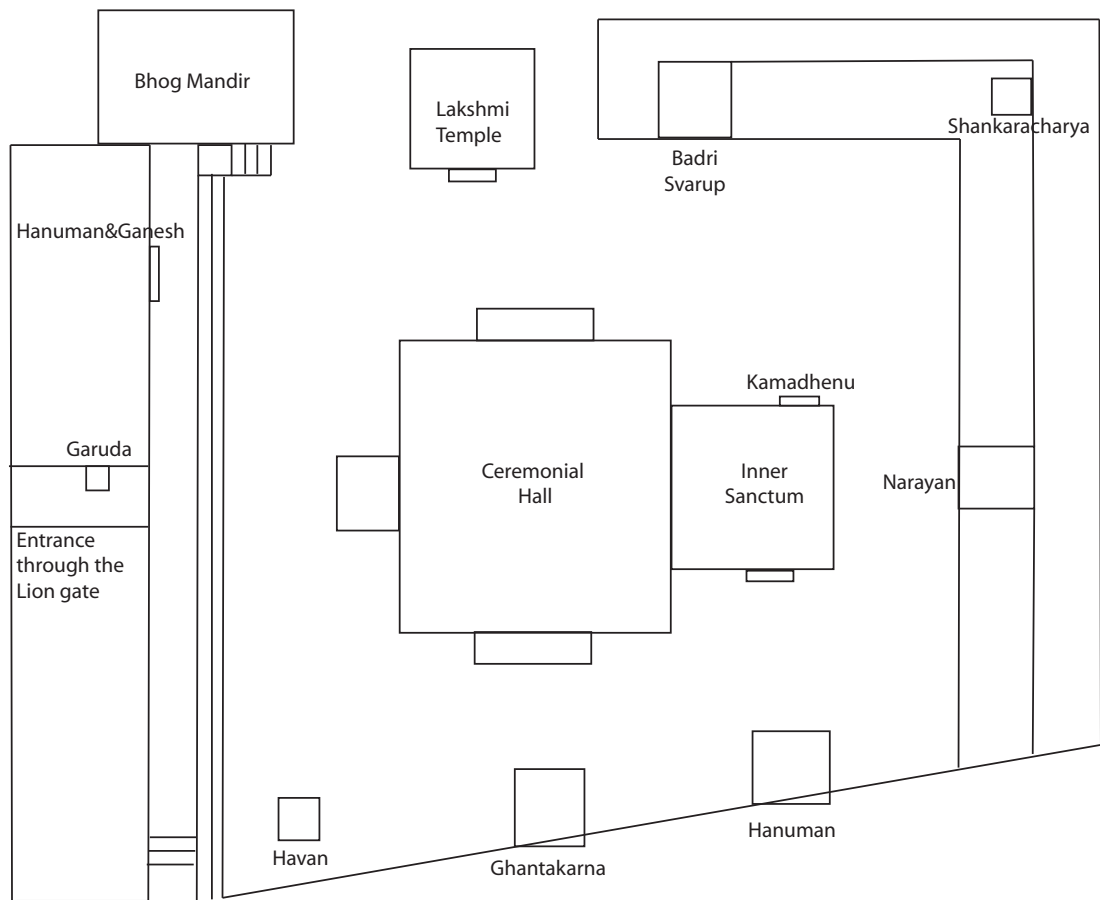


Figure 2.1: Sketch of the temple's floor plan.

statue of Nārāyaṇ, a Hanumān shrine and the shrine of Ghaṇṭākaraṇa. On the outside of the temples, south of the *garbha grha*, there is a shrine for Kāmadhenu, and, on the northern side, there is a place where the water from the *abhiṣek* is collected and sold. There is also a *bhog mandir* and a *havan* inside the temple precincts.

The *mandir* itself consists of a *maṇḍap* and the *garbha grha*. The *maṇḍap* has three entrances: the main one faces east, the one to the South is used as an exit and the one to the North is opened only for special occasions.⁶ Inside the *garbha grha*,

⁶For example, when processions reach Badrināth and the *ḍoli* is allowed to be brought inside the temple for *darśan*.

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

from left to right, are the images of Kuber, Ganeśa, Garuḍa, Badrīnārāyaṇ, Uddhav, Nārada, Nar and Nārāyaṇ.

The entrance to the *garbha grha* is plated with gold and silver, and above it is written “*om namo bhagavate vāsudevāya.*” Only one of the Ḍimrī priests (see 5.2),⁷ the Naib Rawal and the the Rawal (see 5.1), himself are allowed to enter the *sanctum sanctorum*, however only the Rawal himself is allowed to actually touch the idol. The image of Badrīnārāyaṇ is made of black stone and usually only his face is visible. The *mūrti* is said to possess four arms, but two of them are damaged. According to Sāṅkṛtyāyan (1953:340), “the frontside of its [i.e. the *mūrtis*] stone-head is broken, because of which the brow, eyes, nose, mouth and chin are missing.” He (1953:475) further mentions that “in this empty space [i.e. where the face is supposed to be] they put sandalwood paste and remodel the eyes in the morning,” and while the right hand is missing “it appears to be in *bhūmisparśa-mudrā.*” Yet, Sāṅkṛtyāyan (ibid.) also notes that it is possible to see a faint line of what could be a holy thread on the idol’s chest, and therefore he concludes that it is “not without doubt that the idol is of Buddhist origin.” On the other hand, Sāṅkṛtyāyan also mentions that, about 30 years earlier, the former Rawal, who had been to Sarnath and other places and therefore had seen plenty of Buddha statues, believed that the *mūrti* of Badrīnārāyaṇ was in fact of Buddhist origin. This Rawal also mentioned that the statue of Badrīnārāyaṇ had hair similar than that of the Buddha on the back of its head.

2.3 Its Surroundings

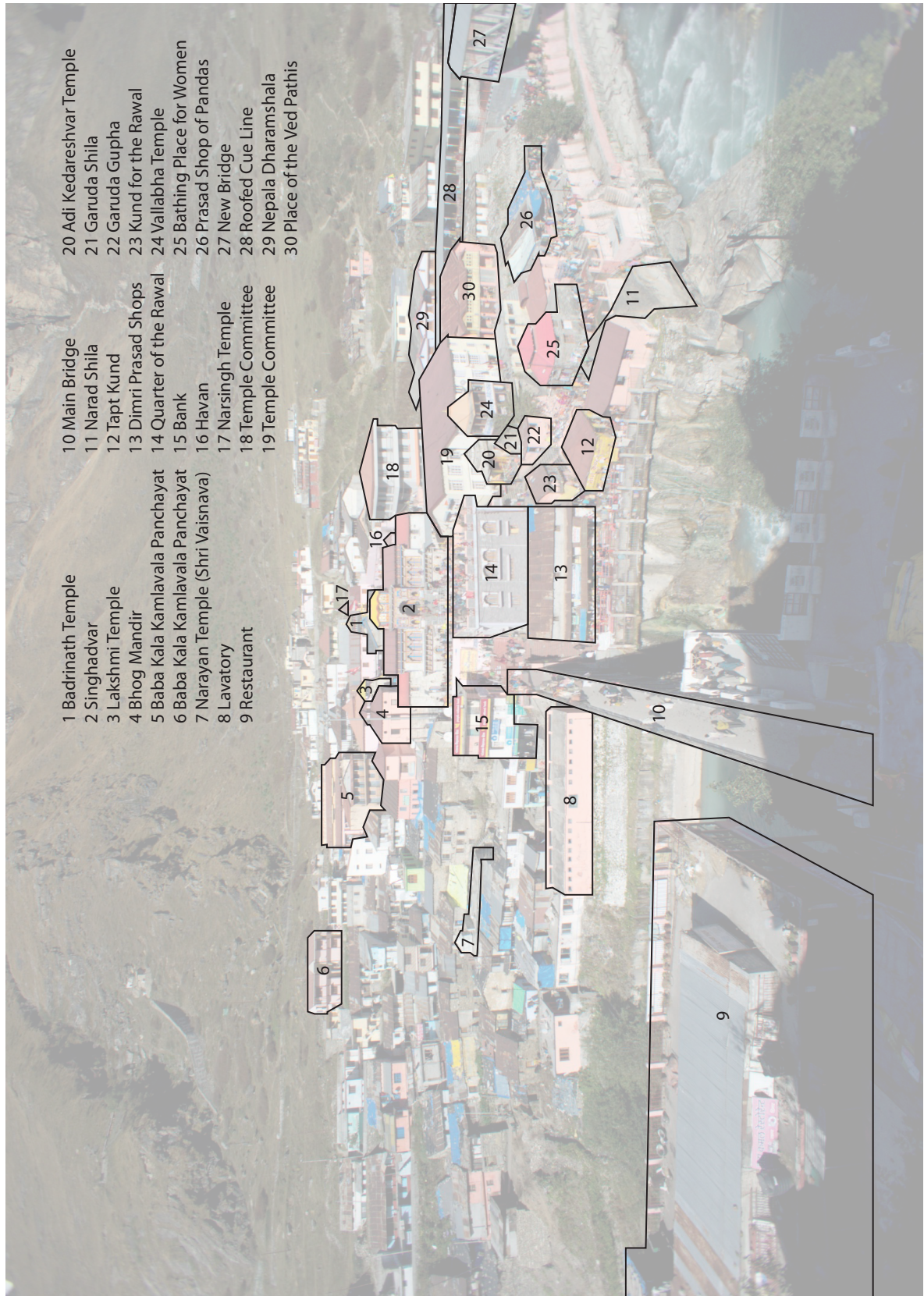
Apart from the main temple within Badrīnāth-purī there are more sacred sites. Some of them have a prominent role with the pilgrims, others are only referenced in the Purāṇas and Māhātmyas and seldom visited, or it is even unclear where they

⁷Every year one of the Ḍimrī *gotra* is chosen as personal assistant to the Rawal during worship. This position is called “*Pithla*” according to Kumar (1991:41).

2.3 Its Surroundings



2 A Tour of Badrināth



are actually located.

Most popular with the pilgrims are the previously mentioned Taptkuṇḍ and the Brahmkapāl. The Brahmkapāl is a large rock in the northern direction, partly submerged in the Alakanandā. There is a platform annexed to the rock, where pilgrims offer *piṇḍ-dān* to their ancestors. Next to this there is also a *havan* site and a place where to offer *tarpaṇ*. The Brahmkapāl itself is thought to be the fifth head of Brahmā, which was cut off by Śiva and stuck to his hand or trident. After a long search of getting his guilt of Brahmin slaughter redeemed, Śiva finally came to Badrīnāth, where the head fell off and remained in form of this rock.

Next to the Taptkuṇḍ, there are five rocks known as the *pañc śilās*. They have no religious significance today, yet they are pointed out by the priests to the pilgrims and hold a prominent place in the Purāṇas. Below the Nāradsīlā, there is the Nāradskuṇḍ, where, according to legend, the *mūrti* of Badrīnārāyaṇ was retrieved from.

Among the lesser known and visited places is Vasudhārā, a beautiful waterfall three kilometers from Mana. On the way there, one passes the Mātāmūrti temple, which is dedicated to the mother of Nar and Nārāyaṇ. This temple is honored with a procession once a year, usually in September. Continuing further up the valley, past the Mātāmūrti shrine and the Vasudhārā fall, one passes the Lakṣmīvan, a small grove of *Bhojpatra* trees,⁸ and then comes to the Cakratīrtha, the place where Arjun received the *pāśupatāstra* from Śiva. Even further up the valley lies at last the Satopanth, the the spot where Yudhiṣṭhira made his way into the heavens. Above Badrīnāth, towards mount Nīlkaṇṭh, there is another sacred rock called Caraṇpādukā (see figure 0.2). It is believed that Badrīnārāyaṇ left his footprints here when he first arrived to this area. In the adjoining village, Bāmṇī, there is a temple for Nandādevī and Urvaśī. This temple makes Badrīnāth also a *śaktīpīth*, and it is be-

⁸*Betula utilis*, their bark was used for writing, and today some people of Mana use their bark to make souvenirs.

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

lieved that this is the place where the derrière of Caṇḍī Mā Durgā lies.⁹ Close to the village of Bamni is the Lilāḍhuṅgī, a stone supposedly the place where Viṣṇu, upon arriving to this area,¹⁰ transformed himself into a small child. As this child, he was later found thereby by Śīva and Pārvaṭī tricking them into leaving the place of Badrīnāth (see chapter 7.2).

2.4 Mānā

Mana (or Māṇā) is a small settlement about three kilometers North of Badrīnāth-purī. While Mana itself and its inhabitants may have played a vital role in the history of this region (see chapter 6.1), today it is a picturesque, laid-back village that is only visited by a minority of the *yātrīs*. Yet, Mana contains many important sites connected to the sacred landscape of Badrīnāth. For example, there is the (main) shrine of Ghaṇṭākarna, the temple of Mātāmūrti, the caves of Vyās and Ganeśa and a little further away also the Vasudhārā fall and the cave of Mucukuṇḍ. For the pilgrims the caves of Vyās and Ganeśa often have a religious significance, while the other sites and Mana itself seem to be perceived as a place of leisure with the curiosity of being the last settlement of India before the border.

2.5 Pāṇḍukeśvar/Bāmni

Pandukeshwar lies on the way to Badrīnāth and marks almost precisely the mid-way point between Jośīmaṭh and Badrīnāth. Almost all pilgrim vehicles stop at this village, not in order to visit one of the five Badrī shrines, but simply because there is a gates to control the one-way traffic up and down the mountain. Thus, they miss the magnificent temples situated in the proper village (see chapter 2.7.3), however this is not all there is to this settlement. The name of the village refers

⁹According to Ajay Dimri.

¹⁰There are sign boards at both Caranpādukā and the Lilāḍhuṅgī which mention Viṣṇu's arrival there from Tholing. The signs are placed by the *Navayuvak Maṅgal Dal* (NYMD) of Bāmni.

to the father of the Pāṇḍavas, Pāṇḍu, who is believed to have practiced asceticism there after being cursed for (accidentally) killing a saint. The main temple in the village is dedicated to Viṣṇu in his form of the Yog-Dhyān Badrī, whose image has a strong resemblance to the South Indian artistic style. A local from Pandukeshwar, Śrīkanth Bhaṭṭ,¹¹ reported in 2011 that the two old temples (Yog-Dhyān and Vāsudeva) were built by his sons (Pāṇḍavas) within a single night. He further explained that Arjuna later practiced asceticism at the same spot and was given the statue now inside the temple, by Indra. Before this statue was installed, there was a *liṅga* at this place, but this *liṅga* slowly sunk into the earth and is now underneath the visible *mūrti*.

Yet, the main *devatā* of this village is not to be found within the pantheon of these two shrines, but it is Kuber. While the former mentioned shrines are at the outskirts, his shrine is in the middle of the village, and his image is kept inside the Yog-Dhyān shrine for three month after the the closing procession has reached Pāṇḍukeśvar in mid-November. I am in debt to Śrīkanth Bhaṭṭ again for solving this mystery; he explained that the reason for this practice lies in the fact that during this time the main harvest is brought in from the surrounding fields and therefore there is no time to properly re-install Kuber in his own shrine. Kuber is brought back to his temple every year on the 15th of January in connection with a festival in his honor. I did not have the chance to witness this, but I was told that the sequence and activities¹² resemble the ones of similar *melās* in the region. It is not only Kuber who leaves (or joins, depending on the direction of) the procession, but also Uddhav, the procession idol of Badrīnārāyaṇ is kept and worshipped in the Yog-Dhyān temple during the winter. This, in my opinion, further demonstrates of the importance Pāṇḍukeshwar and its inhabitants once had for pilgrimage and the administration of Badrīnāth.

Vaiṣṇav (2010:120) reports that, in earlier times, after the doors of the Badrīnāth

¹¹According to him, his family came to Pandukeshwar from the South four generations ago.

¹²I.e. possession, the pouring of cold water and sitting on a sword.

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

temple had been closed, the priest, then a *Ḍaṇḍīsvāmī*, used to worship Badrīnārāyaṇ, in the form of the Yogdhyānī *mūrti*. Once the temple had opened again, they left the worship of the Yogdhyān temple to one of their disciples. When the priest of Badrīnāth later moved to Joshimath during the winter, another priest from the South took over worship there.

While the significance of Pāṇḍukeshwar as a mandatory halting point for the pious pilgrim has fallen into oblivion, its inhabitants still play a role at Badrīnāth and most of them spend the summer there. They live in a hamlet on the Western bank of the Alakanandā, a little south of Badrīnāth, called Bamni. Most of the people of Bamni work the fields in the vicinity, but some Mehtas and Bhaṭṭas have rights to the *ārti*¹³ inside the temple. Further, there are the Bhaṇḍārīs, who are not only the store keepers in Badrīnāth but also possess one of the three keys to the main gate of the temple. The Pujārīs of the Ghaṇṭākaraṇa shrine within the Badrīnāth temple also hail from the Bhaṇḍārīs, and they treasure the second key to the shrine, leaving two out of three keys within the villages of Pandukeshwar and Bamni.

In comparison to Mana, almost none of the pilgrims ever make it into the hamlet of Bamni, despite its vicinity. Even during the time of the Nandādevī Melā, when most of the inhabitants of Badrīnāth-purī partake in this festival only a few pilgrims will join out of curiosity.

2.5.1 The Flag of Badrīnāth

Flags are symbols most commonly used for national states, but they carry a symbolic meaning within themselves too. The flag of the Badrīnāth temple is triangular shaped and comes in the colors red, white, red. These flags appear not only on top of the Badrīnāth temple, but in fact there are several within the temple complex, for they fly over the Lakṣmī temple, the entrance door and all the other little shrines

¹³In order to put this in perspective, it needs to be added that only four of them are needed, or allowed, to conduct this ritual, and since there are around one hundred people eligible to do so, everyone gets the chance once every 25 years.

as well. Actually, when one enters the Himalayan hills at Rishikesh (*Rṣikeś*), the first, one gets to see is the one above the Raghunāth temple in Devprayag. From thereon, one will frequently encounter these flags. It seems that they were actually connected to Badrīnāth itself and became a kind of symbol for temples along the pilgrim route to Badrīnāth.

I have asked several people on my various field trips about the meaning of this flag, and most people had no idea that there was any symbolic meaning to it. Yet, I heard two interpretations. One was that it represents the *tilak* of the Rāmānuja-*samprādaya*, which sounds quite plausible. The other one was reported by a taylor from Gopeśvar, who, among other things, makes clothes for the Rawal. He said that the color red symbolizes *tamas* (even though I believe that red usually stands for *rajas*) and the white for *sattva*. Therefore, in the course of pilgrimage or especially while staying in Badrīnāth, one leaves behind ignorance and enters a state of equilibrium. The shape of the flag, he said, represents the Hindu trinity. When Brahma, Viṣṇu and Śiv are sit in a triangle they can see each other while at the same time gazing upon a *yantra* in the middle. To me, the second explanation sounds like an attempt to recreate a symbolic meaning that has been forgotten in the course of time.

The flags do not only mark the *vaiṣṇavakṣetra*, but they can also be obtained as a sort of *prāsād*, and many of these flags now fly at local shrines in the vicinity of Badrīnāth and probably further away as well.

2.6 Pilgrim Destination

Since a long time Badrīnāth has been a pilgrim destination, and numbers of pilgrims have multiplied especially during the last fifty years. According to Arya (2004:206), this pilgrimage movement has started during the Gupta period. This date is questionable, although Badrikāśrama is in fact mentioned in Mahābhārata and the Gupta period marks its final form, but I believe that Badrīnāth was not

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

yet established during this time and that this rather refers to a mystical place. Bhardwaj (2003:43-56) lists all *tīrthas* found in the *tīrthayātrā* section of the Mahābhārata (3.80-83). In this section, Pulastya describes what Bhardwaj believes to form “a Grand Pilgrimage of India.” Pulastya tells the Pāṇḍavas that pilgrimage “is the highest mystery of the seers – the holy visitation of sacred fords, which even surpasses the sacrifices” (van Buitenen 1975:374). The Pāṇḍavas are further instructed which *tīrthas* should be visited and in which sequence. In this long list of sacred places, while there are a few names or descriptions that could be brought in connection with Badrīnāth, like “River Viśālā” or “the sanctuary of Nārāyaṇa, where Hari always dwells close by, called the Śālagrāma of miracle-worker Viṣṇu” (van Buitenen 1975:391), the name Badrīnāth or Badarikāśrama itself is mentioned nowhere. Even though Badrīnāth is visited later by the Pāṇḍavas in the Vana Parva, it does not appear in this list, obviously designed for the actual pilgrim. It is only during the time of the Purāṇas (or some time later, since the section dedicated to Badrīnāth in the Skanda Purāṇa is not yet critically edited and likely to contain apocryphical material) that we find detailed descriptions of Badrīnāth and its surroundings.

Thus, in the early years, we have to see Badrīnāth as an *tapovan* (place of asceticism), suggested by the plate of Lalitśuradēva : “the *tapōvana* belonging to Badarikāśrama” (Sircar 1960:284). Even later, in the 17th century, it seems that Badrīnāth was the goal of Sadhus as well as a final destination for the *mahāprasthān*, the final journey of the *saṃnyāsis*, since Andrade (Aschoff 1989:21) informs us that “[...] there were many, among the aforesaid idolators, who had one foot in the grave and were, neither in youth nor in strength, comparable to us; on one side they humiliated us, but on the other side they encouraged us on our way.”¹⁴ Francisco de Azevedo mentions in a letter that “a troop of 8,000 jogis, ‘the greatest loafers of

¹⁴ “[Zum anderen aber] befanden sich unter den besagten Götzendienern viele, die schon mit einem Fuß im Grab standen und weder an Jugend noch an Kraft mit uns zu vergleichen waren; einerseits beschämten sie uns, andererseits aber ermutigten sie uns auf unserem Weg.”

India', went up to the shrine carrying arms, but as the raja of Srinagar did not care for such a regiment of vagabonds" (Wessels 1992:97-98). On the other hand, Badrīnāth already seems to have drawn quite a number of pilgrims during that time and especially during the years when the Kumbh Melā took place in Haridwar. Azevedo gives the number of 80,000 for the year 1630 CE (Wessels 1992:97), while the Schlagintweit brothers speak of 40,000 to 50,000 in the 1850s, and Oakley (1991:152) again writes that in ordinary years the place is visited by "five to ten thousand pilgrims, mostly ascetics," while every twelve years "the number rises to thirty or forty thousand of all classes." Oakley's numbers are probably closest to reality, especially those concerning the ordinary years, and it becomes clear that there was an enormous rise in pilgrims during the years of the Kumbh Melā in Haridwar, something that is no longer the case when we look at recent statistics, since in 1998 and 2010 the Kumbh Melā was held in Haridwar as well.

Year	Number of Pilgrims	Year	Number of Pilgrims
1990	362,757	2002	448,517
1991	355,772	2003	580,913
1992	412,597	2004	493,914
1993	476,523	2005	566,524
1994	347,415	2006	741,256
1995	461,435	2007	901,262
1996	465,992	2008	911,333
1997	361,313	2009	916,925
1998	340,510	2010	921,950
1999	340,100	2011	980,667
2000	735,200	2012	985,631
2001	422,647	2013	497,744

(Number of Pilgrims 2016)

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

In the last years, the gathering of large crowds in Haridwar for the Kumbh Melā, if not essentially restricting the pilgrimage to the Himalayan shrines, this festival no longer draws more pilgrims further upstream. In his study on “Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India,” which was done in 1968 Bhardwaj (2003) notices, that changes in pilgrim numbers, and especially their “caste composition” (Bhardwaj 2003:176), also reflect economical realities, and he writes that “cultivating castes may increase in proportion following a period of good harvest.” Bhardwaj also inquires from which castes and where the pilgrims came to Badrīnāth. In 1968, when he conducted his study, he interviewed 400 pilgrims, and since pilgrims came to Badrīnāth from all over India, he dubbed Badrīnāth a “Pan-Hindu” pilgrimage site. Therefore, it is not surprising that Bhardwaj found that several of these 400 pilgrims, came from the South of India, while the majority of course came from the states closer by (see Figure 2.2). It is surprising is that none of the pilgrims included in his study were Rajputs or of cultivating and scheduled castes,¹⁵ nor were there any Sikhs, while 120 (30%) were Brahmins, 63 (16%) were of the Khatri-Arora caste and 135 (33%) were of “other mercantile castes.” Kumar (1992) did a similar study more then 20 years later for which he interviewed 150 pilgrims. He (1992:54) presents the reader with a detailed list of where theses pilgrims hailed from:

¹⁵Bhardwaj (2003:194) gives a diagram in which Rajputs, “Cultivating Castes” and “Artisan and ‘Clean’ Service Castes” are mentioned with about 5%, while scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are given at about one or two percent.

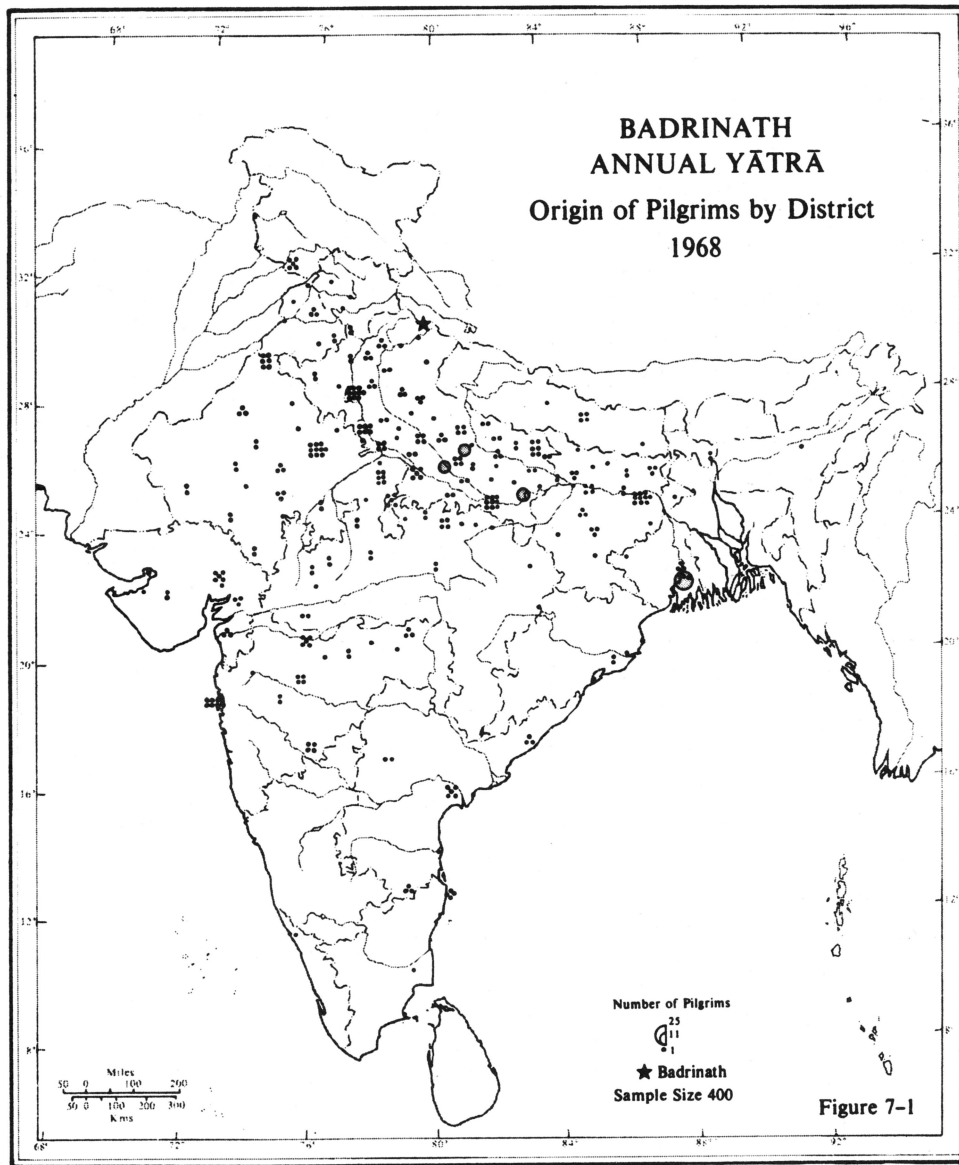


Figure 2.2: Map showing the origins of pilgrims by district during the year 1968 (Bhardwaj 2003:126).

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

Name of the State	Number of Pilgrims	Percentage
Uttar Pradesh	49	32,6
Bihar	30	20
Madhya Pradesh	17	11,3
Haryana	10	6,6
Maharashtra	8	5,3
Orissa	8	5,3
Gujarat	5	3,3
Rajasthan	5	3,3
West Bengal	8	5,3
Andhra Pradesh	3	2
Kerala	2	1,3
Punjab	2	1,3
Assam	2	0,6

This list is based on Kumar (1992:54)

It is interesting to note here that although Badrīnāth has a strong attraction all over India and it makes sense that more pilgrims come from close by, one can see from the map and the list above that of those who live closest to Badrīnāth only a few or none at all take part in this pilgrimage. There are two reasons for this. First, anecdotal evidence suggests, if pilgrims from Himachal or Uttarakhand come to Badrīnāth, it is almost exclusively as part of a procession of their village deity – this means if they would have been taken into these studies, they would raise numbers significantly, since usually there at least 20 people involved. The second reason is that Badrīnāth is simply unimportant to the average Paharī. Most people I have met in Garhwal, Kumaon or Himachal Pradesh, who were not part of the “pilgrimage industry,” had never been to Badrīnāth or any of the other famous

shrines of the area. They usually reply that they have not yet received a call or an urge to go there. This in no way means that they do not go on pilgrimage, since most of them have been to Vārāṇasī or Prayāg. Yet, the main reason behind this is explained by Sax (2009), in his book *God of Justice*.

Local peasants seldom visit them [Badrīnāth, Kedārnāth etc.], perhaps only once or twice in their lives, whereas they visits the *devtas'* shrines often, in order to solve their immediate problems. Local shrines are also important because they are part of a landscape to which people are deeply and substantially related. (Sax 2009:54)

Therefore, it seems that Badrīnāth does not share the importance the temple has within the sacred landscape of India with the local inhabitants. It can be argued that while pilgrims from the plains are drawn to Badrīnāth because of its prominent place in the Purāṇas and by the experience of traveling through the Himalayas, the local inhabitants have their own narratives and practices that focus on the neighboring landscape with its shrines and temples.

There are two more issues in Kumar's (1992:55 and 58) study that I have to comment on. He mentions that the distribution between the sexes was 73% males and 27% females. This is something I can not confirm; from my experience, the distribution was almost equal. Once, to prove this, I went along the long cue of pilgrims waiting for *darśan* and found out that there were actually more women than men. The second concerns the people accompanying the pilgrims. Kumar notes that more than 28% visited Badrīnāth alone. I believe that this number is too high, since I almost never met a pilgrim who was traveling alone. To clarify this, I have to mention that nowadays many pilgrims visit the shrines in Garhwal as part of organized tours, and it might be the case that single pilgrims who come with such tours consider themselves as traveling without close friends or family and hence alone.

However, not only the number and composition of pilgrims to Badrīnāth has changed,

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

but the pilgrimage as a whole. Today Badrīnāth is perceived as a pilgrimage *site*, since virtually all pilgrims arrive by motorized transport, whereas previous to the construction of decent roads, the whole journey from Haridwar to Badrīnāth formed the pilgrimage; and although Badrīnāth and Kedārnāth were certainly the cornerstones of this tour, the whole route through the Himalayas certainly had a much greater importance, especially because it used to take at least a month. The roads or paths were a difficulty in themselves as Raper (1994:72) notes in 1807:

The road of to-day is considered, and justly so, the worst between Srinagar and Bhadri-Nat'h. Although great pains have been taken to render it passable, it is still in need of much improvement; and there are some parts of it, which few people, unaccustomed to such passages, could traverse, without feeling some sensation of apprehension.

Yet, it was not only the hardships of travel that were eased by modern transportation, one of the main changes¹⁶ also involved the importance of temples and townships along the way. Especially those temples closer to Badrīnāth are connected to the main shrine through more or less elaborate narratives. While these narratives are still alive today, only few pilgrims take the detours necessary to visit these shrines. The following section will thus focus on these shrines, and also show the importance of Badrīnāth as a pan-Hindu pilgrimage site, since the temple features at prominent places in various lists of *tīrthas* all over India.

2.7 Clusters of Badrīnāth

Badrīnāth is an independent shrine, but, as its importance and prestige grew, the shrine also became part of or was added to different clusters of temples. The most notable and well-known ones are the Cār Dhām (both the “original” and the choṭa Cār Dhām) and the Pañc Badrīs, but Badrīnāth is also included in lists that feature

¹⁶There are several others, of course and the most obvious was the alteration of the Paṇḍās – from mountain guide to semi-stationary priest.

South Indian shrines, and there are also temples in Kinnaur and Kumaon that bear the same name, or have their origin attributed to the original shrine. These clusters and different temples have an immense value in understanding Badrīnāth, both historically as well as in terms of its importance as an pan-Indian pilgrimage site.

2.7.1 Cār Dhām

As previously stated, there are actually two versions of this four-fold pilgrimage tour. The most extensive one, which covers the corners of India, is attributed to Ādi Śaṅkarācārya. The other one includes the three sources of the Gaṅgā and the source of the Yamunā. These sources and their respective temples are traditionally visited from West to East: Yamuntori, Gaṅgotri, Kedārñāth and Badrīnāth. Both Cār Dhāms have in common that their time of establishment is unclear, but the choṭa Cār Dhām is without doubt by far the younger one. In fact, the small Cār Dhām is not mentioned anywhere¹⁷ before the 1950s. Documents dealing with pilgrimage in this area usually only refer to Kedārñāth and Badrīnāth. In the case of British authors, this may be attributed to the fact that only these two temples were located within the British administration, but even, Indian authors do not mention the term “Cār Dhām” before that date. For example, the two earliest accounts (ca. 1920 and 1926) of these four shrines (Tapovanam 1990 and Vaiṣṇav 2010) do not make use of the term and while giving information on all four of these temples, they never refer to them as a group. If temples are joined together at all then it is usually Kedārñāth and Badrīnāth, which are sometimes referred to as *Kedār-Badrī*. It seems that this pair was later expanded into a four-fold group, but it is obvious that the importance of the other two shrines (Gaṅgotrī and Yamunotrī) never came anywhere near to the original pair. For example, Vaiṣṇav (2010) spends 36 pages on Badrīnāth and 10 pages on Kedārñāth, but only 4 pages on Gaṅgotrī and half a page on Yamunotrī. It may be that Gaṅgotrī and Yamunotrī received more attention

¹⁷According to the literature in use for this study.

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

during the years when the two other shrines lay outside of the kingdom of Tehri, however, I believe that the main reason to establish this Himalayan pilgrimage was the idea of bringing more pilgrims into this region.

2.7.2 108 Divya Deśams and the Svayam Vyakta Kṣetras

Badrīnāth is also featured in two different lists of important pilgrimage sites. One covers 108 Viṣṇu temples, or sacred sites dedicated to Viṣṇu, prominently featuring South Indian places. This list is attributed to the Alvars (*Āḷvārs*), 12 saints who lived between the 5th or 6th and the 12th century (Bhandarkar 2001:50). According to Hardy (2001), it becomes clear that the Alvars mention only 97 shrines in their *Prabandham*. The number of temples was later expanded by the *Śrīvaiṣṇavas*. “Śrīvaiṣṇavism gives 108 – the sacred number – as the figure for the total number of temples” (Hardy 2001:257fn). It remains unclear when this list of 108 sacred sites first appeared, but it certainly must have appeared after the 12th century at earliest. It is not surprising that Badrīnāth is part of different lists or clusters, but out of these 108 places, only eight are situated in Northern India, and three of these eight are within Garhwal: Badrīnāth (*Vatariyācciramam*), Joshimath and Devprayag. The other list, commonly known as the Svayam Vyakta Kṣetras, contains only eight sacred sites and is attributed to Rāmānuja. While out of these eight, only half are located in the North (Muktināth, Puṣkar, Naimiṣāraṇya and Badrīnāth), the other four are centered in or around Tirupati in Tamil Nadu. Even though there is currently no academic publication concerning these lists, it is safe to say that they emphasize the past and present importance and prestige of Badrīnāth for the South of India.

2.7.3 The Five Badrī Temples

The number five is an important and far-spread number in Garhwal¹⁸: there are five gods (*pañc devatā*), five confluences (*pañc prayāg*), five rocks in Badrīnāth (*pañc śīla*), and so on. There are also five Badrī temples (*pañc Badrī*) in the region of Garhwal, even though the people are not entirely sure which five temples are included in the *pañc Badrī*. There is, of course, no doubt about the first, Badrīnāth itself, which in this context, to set it apart from the others is usually called Viśāl Badrī, Rāj Badrī (Atkinson 2002:III:24) Badarikāśram (Handa and Jain 2003:202), Arthātbadrīnāth (Ratūrī 2007:22) or Badrīnārāyaṇ, as Sāṅkrtyāyan (1953:339) prefers. The second of the five Badrī shrines, which is usually undisputed as well, lies in Pandukeshwar and is called Yogdhyān Badrī¹⁹. For the other ones, different shrines are given by different people, and some, like Gupta (2003:65), have decided that it would be all more convenient speak of the *sapta Badrī* – the seven Badrī temples. It may have been the case that every Viṣṇu or Nārāyaṇ temple in the vicinity of Badrīnāth was eligible to be considered as one of the five Badrīs, and that they did not represent anything special in this regard. On the other hand, these four²⁰ temples, along with their corresponding narratives, point towards an evolution from the valley upwards. This stands in opposition to the explanations of the establishment of sacred sites by the inhabitants of Bamni and Mana, where the story line is more North to South. Yet, the five Badrīs are about time than about space, as is evident from names like Ādi (first, primary) or Bhaviṣya (future).²¹ According to this view, Badrīnāth is just the one temple of the five that is “in use” now, but it is not more important *per se*. Before Badrīnāth, Badrīnārāyaṇ was worshipped in Ādi Badrī, and when the Alakanandā valley will be shut, he will be worshipped in Bhaviṣya

¹⁸See Zoller 1990.

¹⁹Sāṅkrtyāyan (1953) and many others call this temple simply Yogbadrī.

²⁰Even though I mentioned before that there are more than five Badrī temples, I will stick to the term of the *pañc Badrīs* in this section and therefore always refer to five temples, irrespectively to which temples are actually in question.

²¹The idea that the five Badrīs represent time while the five Kedār temples represent space was first considered by Bettina Bäumer.

2 A Tour of Badrināth

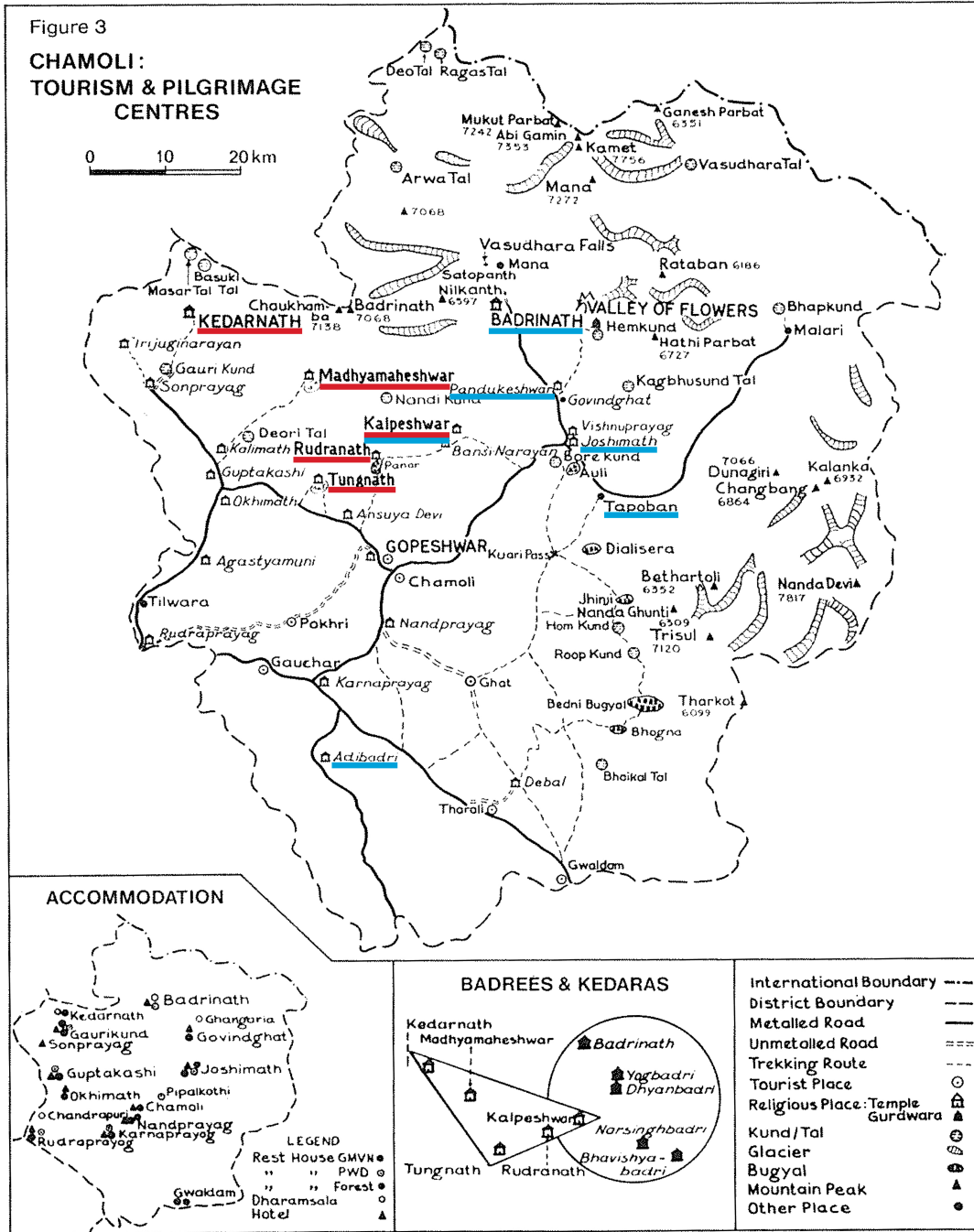


Figure 2.3: The original image is reproduced from Singh (1984:173). The group of the five Kedār shrines are highlighted in red by the author, and, since most of the Badri temples are not located in the map above, their nearest settlements are highlighted (blue).

Badrī.

This cluster of five temples cannot be seen as distinct from the other “groups of five” mentioned before, but they are especially close to the five Kedār temples, which follow the same concept – a fivefold emanation from one sacred center. However, while the pañc Badrīs correspond to the aspect of time, it is different for the five Kedār temples: they represent space²² The following is the narrative about the origin of these five shrines.

Sought after by the Pāṇḍavas, Śiva changed his form into that of a bull and dived into the ground. Only because Bhīm held him back by his tail, there is a liṅga to worship in Kedārñāth. There all the five temples have the same hierarchy in time but not in importance. It is obvious that Kedārñāth, despite being the derrière of Śiva, is the main pilgrim spot. The other parts of his body are neglected by most pilgrims, while his head is believed to have arisen in Nepal’s Paśupatināth – making a bonding together these two important śaiva shrines.

Another interesting difference between these two groups lies in their locality. While all the Kedār temples are situated in high altitudes and far away from any settlements²³ and therefore have different *gaddī sthāns*²⁴ the Badrī shrines are mostly²⁵ village shrines.

Looking closer at the geographical distribution of both the five Kedār and the five Badrī temples, it becomes clear that they are all situated along the pilgrim’s trail from Kedārñāth to Badrīnāth,²⁶ which suggests that they may have been founded or given a new identity by the passing pilgrims. There is another aspect to this set of temples, which is often found throughout India – the idea of a substitute temple (see Feldhaus 2003). If a pilgrim gets too tired or becomes sick along the way, it

²²For a deeper reflection on the five Kedār temples, see David (1998).

²³With the exception of Kalpeśvar, which might represent a later substitute for the Paśupatināth temple of Nepal and is also not found in all lists of the Kedār temples.

²⁴Their “home” or “royal” temples, where the gods return for winter.

²⁵Again, there is the exception to the rule. Bhaviṣya Badrī is not within a village but has, in my opinion, a special position within the five Badrīs. See the paragraph about Bhaviṣya Badrī.

²⁶Of course, some of them involve a small detour, and Adī Badrī is situated on the way back from Badrīnāth towards the plains.

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

is often said that another temple *en route* will have the same merit for him as his desired destination. There were also other reasons for not reaching Badrīnāth, and Gupta (2003:66) mentions that “in ancient times, when roads were primitive and were often blocked by landslides, pilgrims who could not reach the main Badrin- arayan temple used to perform their puja here [in the given example, Adī Badrī].” This is in fact still true today and hundreds of people lost their lives in this way in the Uttarakhand floods of 2013.

The concept of the pañc Badrī is an important and fundamental one, and almost every pilgrim is aware of them, however the individual temples usually receive little attention from the pilgrims and their significance seldom reaches beyond the borders of their respective villages. Very little is known today about these temples and usually they are only listed in books or pamphlets, sometimes even without their location. In the following I have gathered all available information on these temples accessible to me.

Ādi Badrī

The prefix ādi- means “early,” “primitive,” and it can also be used in the connota- tion of “first” or “original.” The “first” of the five Badrī temples is situated along a tributary of the Piṅḍar river, about 12 km south of Karṇaprayāg, on route to Ku- maon. The Ādi Badrī²⁷ temple is part of a complex of fourteen²⁸ shrines which are located right besides the motor road. This is where one enters the realm of the *Vaiṣṇavakṣetra* when coming via the eastern pilgrim track, starting in Haldvānī or Rāmnagar. The temple complex of Ādi Badrī is only a few kilometers away from the Cāndpur fort, “which was the seat of the first rulers of Garhwal as a whole before Dewalgarh and Srinagar were founded” (Atkinson 2002:III:165). This may be one of the reasons for its designation as the “original” Badrīnāth. Also, the structure it-

²⁷Sometimes also called simply Ādbadrī.

²⁸A sign by the Archaeological Survey of India, which is placed at the entrance to the complex states that formerly there were sixteen temples.

self is most certainly one of the oldest of the various Badrī shrines. Gupta (2003:66) thinks it belongs to the Gupta period, but Nauṭiyāl (Naithānī 2006a:355) believes that the shrine was built in the 10th century, which seems more likely.²⁹ Ghosh (2004:30) states in his travelogue that the “ancient badri or Adi Badri justifies its name because way back in history, the pilgrims who couldn’t reach Badrinarayan, crossing the hostile terrain, used to pay their homage here instead.” Ghosh (ibid.) further mentions that “during his pilgrimage, Shankaracharya established an idol in the temple.” The same belief is described by Walton (1994:139): “Local tradition assigns the building of the temples to Shankara Acharya [...]” who further remarks that “two residents, Thaplyal Brahmans of the village of Thapli close by, are the Pujārīs of the temples [...]” Another explanation is given by Uniyal (2011:320), who states that this was the first place Nārāyaṇ chose for his *tapas*, and therefore it was called Nārāyaṇmaṭh in ancient times.

Yogdhyān Badrī

The Yogdhyān temple in Pāṇḍūkeśvar is not only one of the oldest structures in the area,³⁰ but it also brings Buddhist culture into the discussion of the five Badrī temples. It is a common view of the locals that this temple was formerly a Buddhist *stūpa* or at least constructed in the image of one. This view is also expressed in a pamphlet issued by the Archaeological Survey of India, Dehradun Circle (Dimri 2010:22):

In conception the cylindrical dome shaped super structure of the temple under reference bears morphological likeness with an elongated dome shaped *stūpa*, particularly the Dhamek *stūpa* at Sarnath.

Independently of whether this is true or not,³¹ the history of the temple can also

²⁹The previously mentioned sign of the Archeological Survey is more vague and dates the temples between the 8th and 12th century CE.

³⁰9th to 10th century CE, according to Dimri (2010:22).

³¹When I had a closer look at the structure of the temple, the drainage for the *abhiṣek* did not seem to be installed retroactively, which should be the case if the temple was originally built to facilitate

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

be seen in the light of Śaivism. Rāvat (1994:102) notes that “it is said that below this mūrti [of Yogdhyān Badrī] is a *sphaṭik śivliṅg*. This *śivliṅg* is well known in the Kedārkhāṇḍ under the name Paṇḍīśvar. [...] It is [further] told that on top of this śivliṅg there is a eight paddled lotus made of metal³² [...] on which Lord Yogdhyān Badrī’s statue was placed.”

This temple further was the place for the winter worship of Badrīnārāyaṇ,³³ and the Rawal stayed there also during the cold times of the year. Later, this arrangement was abandoned and the winter worship is now conducted in the Narasiṅha temple in Joshimath with the Rawal being allowed to return to Kerala during this time. The procession idol of Badrīnārāyaṇ is still kept and worshipped in the Yogdhyān temple from November to April. One would expect that there are several narratives which explain why the temple is called Yogdhyān, but most of the narratives only refer to *Pāṇḍu* or his five sons, thus explaining the name of the village while I have found only two attempts to explain the name of the temple: because “the idol of Yogbadrī inside the temple, [seems to be] absorbed in posture (yog) and meditation, the ordinary people call it also Yogdhyān Badrī” (Naithānī 1996a:272), while Rawat (2010:53) notes that supposedly Viṣṇu performed *tapasyā* there, which in turn gave the temple its name.

Dhyān Badrī

This temple marks the border or transition between the space of the pañc Kedārs and the five Badrī shrines. It is located near the small village of Urgan, in which the last of the Kedār temples, Kalpeśvar, is also situated. The shrine lies within a tributary valley that starts at the village Helang, around ten kilometers before Joshimath. Nowadays, it is possible to take a jeep most of the way, but until five years ago it still involved a trek of about eight kilometers to get there. The temple

Buddhist rituals. Naithānī (1996a:272) mentions the idea by S. K. Sarasvatī that the form of the Śikhar is an imitation of a stupa, due to the proximity to Tibet.

³²*Dhātu kā aṣṭadal kamal*.

³³Rawat (2010) mentions the alternative name of “Śītabadrī,” or “Winter Badrī.”



Figure 2.4: Yogdhyān Badrī and Vāsudeva Temple with the *ḍoli* of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya in the front.

is unimposing and is constructed in the usual Himalayan style. If pilgrims make it into this remote valley, their goal usually lies at the Kalpeśvar shrine – at least to my experience.

According to Naithānī (1996a:242), the original *mūrti* was stolen in 1982. He further notes that there are statues of Uddhav and Kuber inside the *garbha grha*, as well as several broken idols.

Vṛddha Badrī

Where the Badrināth highway starts to ascend from the Alakanandā valley up to the town of Joshimath, there lies a small and easily overlooked village called *Aṇimath* or *Aranyamath*. The temple of Vṛddha Badrī is in the middle of this village. Babulkar and Dhayani (n.d.:53) mention that this is the place where Ādi Śaṅkarācārya “established Lord Badrinathji [...] for a brief period before finally shifting the seat

2 A Tour of Badrināth



Figure 2.5: The shrine of Dhyān Badrī in the hamlet Urgam.



Figure 2.6: The temple of Vṛddha Badri.

of the Lord to Badrikashram.” The temple has no remarkable features and is generally overlooked, by most of the pilgrims like most of the other four shrines of the pañc Badrī. Besides this shrine, there is also a small temple dedicated to Śiva, and Naithānī (2006a:236) mentions a saying: “Just as Badrināth has a Śiva temple [Ādi Kedāreśvar], so there is a Śiva temple in Vṛddhbadrī in Aṇimaṭh.” As the name suggests (vṛddha meaning “old”) the temple is believed to mark an earlier site where Badrinārāyaṇ was worshipped (Naithānī 2006a:235).

Ardha Badrī

This shrine remains a mystery to me, and to many others as well, since the only information available on this shrine is that the temple “is in a village on the road between Jośimaṭh and Tapovan. The road is steep and pilgrims will have to walk along hill paths to reach this remote and quiet village. Here the black stone image of Viṣṇu is a tiny one and probably that is why the icon is affectionately called *ardha* or ‘half Badri’” (Gupta 2003:66). Gupta (ibid.) only states that Ardha Badrī

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

is situated “up the same hill” as Bhaviṣya Badri, therefore I can only assume that he might refer to the Nārāyaṇ temple in the village Sūmāī, about two kilometers away from Bhaviṣya Badri.

Narasīṅha Badri

The temple of Narasīṅha in Joshimath is not included in most lists of the five Badri temples, and the temple is often simply called “Narsīṅh.” There are two reasons why the shrine of Narasīṅha is sometimes referred to as one of the Badri temples in the area. One reason most probably lies in the relocation of the winter worship of Badrīnārāyaṇ from Pandukeshwar to Joshimath. The other motive is its connection to Bhaviṣya Badri (see the following section); the narrative connects them in a way that Bhaviṣya Badri would lose its significance without Narasīṅha’s *mūrti*. The importance of this *mūrti* relates to its unique shape. The posture or *āsana* of the statue does not reflect a traditional depiction, but it shows Narasīṅha in a relaxed pose, holding what resembles a *cakra* in his right hand. What fuels the imagination and narratives in the area, however, is the other hand, or rather its wrist. I once had the chance to see the idol without the clothes it is usually covered in, when I made it for the morning *abhiṣek*. Though it is not as impressive on the photograph (the only one to my knowledge) the thinness of its wrist actually gives the impression that it could easily break by the touch of one’s fingers.

The shrine of Narasīṅha is only one building in a whole complex of other small shrines, houses and storage rooms, which at one time formed the seat of the former rulers of this region – the Katyūris. To the South of the shrine lies the Ganeśa temple, in which the initial *pūjā* is held to commence the procession and hence the start of the pilgrimage season to Badrīnāth. The same building also houses the *gaddī sthal* of Adī Śaṅkarācārya, not only keeps his *ḍolī* (palanquin), but also serves as audience chamber for one of his three successors in this *maṭh*. This shrine is the

2.7 Clusters of Badrināth



Figure 2.7: The *mūrti* of Narasiṅha in Joshimath (Naithānī 2008).



Figure 2.8: The Narasiṅha temple, decorated in celebration of the start of the pilgrimage season. In the foreground a drum and bagpipes of the band, leading the procession to Badrināth.

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

most³⁴ visited one between Rishikesh and Badrīnāth, because the one-way traffic starts in Joshimath, and pilgrim vehicles are stopped right above the temple until they can proceed towards Badrīnāth, which can take up to a few hours.

Bhaviṣya Badrī

Bhaviṣya Badrī is a short but steep hike from the road that leads further up the Niti (Nīti) valley. The starting point itself, a few kilometers after Tapovan, is inconspicuous in a sense there is only one small shop and even the path up the mountain is barely visible. Before reaching the shrine, one has to pass the village of Sūmāi, where another Nārāyaṇ temple is located.

As previously mentioned the narrative concerning the temple is closely connected to the statue of Narasiṅha in Joshimath. In this narrative, it is said that, one day, the wrist of Narasiṅha will break and with that the mountains (Jay and Vijay) atop Viṣṇuprayāg will collapse, thus blocking the passage to Badrīnāth. To make it even more definitive, it is sometimes added that even the mountains Nar and Nārāyaṇ will give in and bury the temple of Badrīnāth (Gupta 2003:68). Locals add to the story that it is not only the wrist that dwindles in strength every year, but that also the *mūrti* in Bhaviṣya Badrī slowly emerges from the ground and when it is completely surfaced, it will represent the new Badrīnārāyaṇ.

According to Walton (1994:144) “the following sloka occurs in the Sanat Kumar Saṃhita:-

‘Yavad vishnoḥ kala tishthej,

Jyotiḥ saṃgye nijalaye.

Tatah param tatah purva.

Magamya Badari bhavet.’

“The road to Badari never will be closed

The while at Jyoti (Joshimath) Vishnu doth remain;

³⁴Apart from Hemkuṇḍ, of course.



Figure 2.9: The *mūrti* of Bhaviṣya Badri.

but straight when gods shall cease to dwell,
The path to Badri will be shut to men.”

The shrine lies in a picturesque forest, and during my visit there were only a few workers around who were engaged³⁵ in the renovation of the temple. Although the temple is very close to the next village, it still closes and opens on the same days as the temple in Badrināth. When, walking up to the temple, I was able to see far into the upper Alakanandā valley with a clear view on the Nilkaṇṭh and Nārāyaṇ mountains. I then considered, since it is almost possible to see both shrines from this mountain ridge, this might be the origin of the connection between these two temples.

While the available material is limited, one can still see the different perspectives on the importance of these shrines. While most, one way or the other, are linked

³⁵At the time of my visit, they held siesta a few hundred meters away from the shrine.



Figure 2.10: The Bhaviṣya Badrī temple under renovation at the time of my visit.

to Śāṅkarācārya, there are only two possible scenarios for the origin of the Pañc Badrīs. Hence, the five Kedār temples certainly formed the blueprint³⁶ for the Pañc Badrīs.

The first scenario builds upon the previously mentioned concept of “substitute shrines,” as most shrines (Ādi, Vṛiddha, Narasiṅha and Yogdhyān Badrī) are situated *en route*, and thus these may have been the farthest points pilgrims could venture to, due to bad weather, sickness, roadblocks or landslides. The second scenario was touched upon before as well: the aspect of time. There are of course the past (Ādi and Vṛiddha) and the future (Bhaviṣya) Badrīs, but there are also shrines that represent time on a smaller scale, as they represent places of worship during winter (Yogdhyān and Narasiṅha Badrī) which makes them also known as *Śīta Badrī*.

However their grouping occurred, one thing is certain: they had a much more important role at the time when pilgrimage was still engaged in afoot, and their fall

³⁶There is not only little debate about which shrines are part of this group and which are not, but further they are mentioned in the Kedārkaṇḍ and have a clear narrative that links them together.

into (relative) oblivion is very recent.

2.7.4 The *Badrī* Temples of Kinnaur and Kumaon

While the temple of *Badrīnāth* is known throughout India, it remains widely unknown that there are more sacred sites that bear the name of *Badrī*. Apart from the rather famous group of the Pāñc *Badrīs* within Garhwal, there are four *Badrī* temples in Kumaon and another two *Badrī* shrines in Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh. There are few available sources concerning these temples, and I was unable to localize most of the ones in Kumaon. Yet, especially the shrine of Kamru *Badrīnāth* in Kinnaur is fundamental to understanding the sacred topography of the Western Himalayas.

These shrines in Kinnaur and Kumaon are rarely seen in connection to the perspective of *Badrīnāth*. Most of the people simply denied any knowledge about these shrines outside of Garhwal, yet some of them added that, if such temples really existed, they bear the name of *Badrī* without any right and only to take part in the glory of *Badrīnāth*.

It is certainly nothing special for shrines and temples in India to be reduplicated, the best example is probably *Kāśī*, which is found all over India, with attributes like *gupt* (hidden), *uttar* (northern), *dakṣiṇa* (southern), *Śiva* etc. Why should this not be the case for the *Badrī* temples in the neighboring states or districts?

On one hand it is advantageous to the reputation of a shrine when it is reduplicated in other areas of the same faith. On the other hand it seems that this also threatens the uniqueness of the original temple, or that there is doubt as to whether the “substitute shrine” keeps the expected standards.

I will argue here that such similarities are not present, because of reduplication or imitation, but rather because the area in which these temples are located, forms a contact zone (see chapter 1.3) beyond the borders of the nation states we know today.

2 *A Tour of Badrīnāth*

These six Badrī shrines outside of Garhwal did not draw much scholarly interest, but they are in a good position to add to our understanding of the Western Himalaya contact-zone,” the importance of the Bhotiyas and their cultural heritage and of the religious and cultural significance of the high-altitude Himalayas. While the main focus of this study lies upon Badrīnāth itself, it also presents a fundament for future research on these six temples.

2.7.5 Kinnaur

If one was to travel today from Badrīnāth to Kinnaur, one would have the impression that both places are far apart, because the road first leads to Dehra Dun (Dehrādūn), then up to the capital of Himachal Pradesh, Shimla, further down into the Sutlej valley and, after following the river for a long stretch, the road finally ascends to reach Sangla (Sāṅglā) in the Baspa valley. The distance is about 700 kilometers and the travel would take, with luck and no landslides, a little short of three days. Yet, if one looks at a map, they are not so far apart via the Himalayas or via Tibet, and this is the way also taken by the deities of this area when they visited Badrīnāth in Garhwal.³⁷

Thus, ignoring the border which only came into effect after 1962 and was previously defined a few years previously, we encounter a region connected through trade and mountain passes, not much further apart than Badrīnāth and Haridwar, and previously one was able to travel between both places within a day thanks to buses and jeeps. This relatedness and the shared trading places within Tibet are mainly visible in the similar narratives prevalent in Garhwal as well as in Kinnaur. To discover the importance of the narratives accompanying the shrines and the similarities concerning the royal patronage of these temples, it is paramount to first have a quick look into the history of Kinnaur.

³⁷For a detailed description on the section between Chitkul and Gaṅgotrī, see Sanan and Swadi (1998:270-275).

History of Kinnaur

If one takes for a fact the notion that the people of Kinnaur are descendents of the Kinner tribe, then their history goes back to the times of the great Epics or even further. It is not possible to speak of Kinnaur as a sovereign state before the 14th century, and even though Buddhism plays an important role in the cultural history of Kinnaur, there is no evidence of Indian Buddhism³⁸ (Tobdan 1990:119). It seems that Buddhism did not come from India *per se*,³⁹ but via the Guge empire, where Buddhism was introduced by Padmasambhāva in the 8th century, ending the Bon era (Tobdan 1990:120). It is disputed if Kinnaur itself, was part of the Zhang Zhung or the Guge empire,⁴⁰ but Upper Kinnaur certainly has a much stronger Tibetan influence than Lower Kinnaur, which may be a clue of how far these empires have reached in the past.

Singh (1994:107) on the other hand states that “there is no evidence of Western Tibetan suzerainty of Kinnaur at any time, but its location and trade across the border promoted cultural interaction and Kinnaur and the adjoining districts on the Tibetan side of the border appear in many respects to form a unitary culture.”

One of the first historical periods of Kinnaur could be named “the eras of the Thakurs,” even though the actual Thakurs (independent rulers of petty lordships) are, at least in my opinion, very much mixed with mythological views and ideas.

It is not entirely clear when this “era of the Thakurs” commenced, but we know it did so in Kamru. Arik Moran (2007:149) states that “[...] the lord (ṭhākur) of Kamru established his rule over the neighbouring tracts after the decline of Tibetan rule in the twelve century,” while Tobdan (2008:83) claims, strongly on Sāṅkrtyāyan’s book *Kinner Deś Mem*, that their rule came to an end around the 14th to 15th

³⁸Although Sāṅkrtyāyan states that Kinnaur was part of the Aśoka empire in the 3rd century BC (Tobdan 1990:119).

³⁹According to Tobdan (1990:119), there is the “possibility of Kinnaur having been in contact with the Indian Buddhism, that is during the Kushāṇa period.”

⁴⁰Upasak (1990:142) claims that, during the rule of Songtsan Gampo (617-649), Kinnaur along with Ladakh were part of his empire. This view is shared by Sāṅkrtyāyan (1956:294), as cited in Tobdan (1990:120), while Tobdan (1990:121) himself argues that “political influence [of Guge] was confined perhaps only around Upper Kinnaur.”

2 A Tour of *Badrināth*

century, when the Thakur of Kamru usurped the other rulers.

It is unclear where the Thakurs came from, but “it is generally believed that the Thakurs were outsiders” (Tobdan 1990:124). Before the ruler of Kamru took supremacy over the region, Kinnaur was ruled by several different Thakurs. The unification under the Thakur of Kamru is recounted in several local narratives, and most of them identify the ruler of Kamru with the – probably mythological – figure of Dev Purna. “[...] Dev Purna went to Kamru and after killing the ruling Thakur of the village and that of the adjoining village of Bangla proceeded to Tangling.” He then killed “the Tangling Thakur [...], the Chini (Kalpa) Thakur named Amuruch [...], the Thakur at Choling,” and finally “waged a great battle in which Banasur was defeated and vanquished” (Bajpai 1991:27).

Dev Purna is an interesting character, because in another narrative he takes on the role of *Badrināryāṇ*. “[...] Dev Purna is said to have come from Badri Nath in Garhwal through the Himalyas and first halted at Tholing Muth [...].” Like *Badrināryāṇ*, he did not like the place and “is said to have escaped to reach Kamru.” Later, Dev Purna decided that Pradyuman should sit on the throne and he “himself assumed the role of a deity” (Bajpai 1991:28).

Again in another narrative, recounted by Tobdan (1990:127), he is one of three gods who have been living at “Mathura-Brindaban.” Further, he may also correspond to the “fugitive cadet”⁴¹ who brought the idol of *Badrināryāṇ* to Kinnaur (Handa 2008:II:78).

This is the mythological origin of the Bushahr⁴² kingdom, which later, “capitalizing on the flow of goods between India and Tibet,” established its “capitals at Sarahan (summer) and Rampur (winter)” (Moran 2007:149).

An important incident is posed by the Tibeto-Ladakhi-Mughal War of 1681-83, in which the rulers of Kinnaur sided with the Tibetans, who in the end were victori-

⁴¹More of this narrative can be found in the next section on Kamru.

⁴²There are many different spellings, I went with the version that is predominately used in the Indian publications and which most probably is the version taken over from the British.

ous. This not only brought Upper Kinnaur into the Bushahr kingdom, but it also gave way to “a treaty of peace and trade with Tibet, which gave great benefit in trade to Bashahr continuing till about the time of Independence of the country” (Tobdan 2008:112).⁴³

In 1811, the Gorkhas invaded (Tobdan 1990:133). After their defeat by the British in 1815, the Bushahr kingdom “became a dependency of the British government making payment of annual tribute and fulfilling the obligations of their master till 1947” (ibid.).

This short and selective history of Kinnaur and the Bushahr kingdom demonstrates two things. First, the ties with Tibet were quite strong and were mutually beneficial concerning trade. Secondly, both rulers as well as the ruling deity of Kamru came from the outside, and migrated into this region and in the early times of Kinnaur it is difficult to separate religion and politics as well as mythology .

What folloes next is a more detailed description of the different *Badrī* temples, first in Kinnaur and then within Kumaon.

Kamru

Kamru⁴⁴ is probably most famous today for the fort that towers over the valley of the Baspa river and reminds of the important role Kamru has once played, especially in the early history of the Bushahr kingdom. Yet, the main concern here lies a few meters below – the temple of *Badrī*.

Apart from the obvious similarity of the name, Kamru is also located “along the old trading route connecting Kulu and Chamba with Tholing [...]” (Singh 1994:106). Yet, *Badrīnāth* (Mana) and Kamru did not only share the same trading market in Tibet, both of its deities were also used to legitimize the royal rule of the two states (the Garhwal and Bushahr kingdoms). While in Garhwal there exists no document

⁴³According to Singh (1990:245), “this treaty remained in force down to 1962 when the border with Tibet was closed [...]”

⁴⁴Kamru is also known under the name “Mone”.

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

or narrative that actually describes how the connection between the rulers of the kingdom and Badrīnārāyaṇ was established,⁴⁵ in the case of Kamru we have a few narratives that revolve around this topic. The house of the Bushahr rulers officially traces its origin back to Pradyumna, Lord Kṛṣṇa's son, although the narratives about the establishment of the Bushahr kingdom, as well as the origin of the Badrī *mūrti* features mostly the hero Dev Purna.

In addition to the narratives already mentioned in the history of Kinnaur, narratives about how the idol of Badrīnārāyaṇ arrived to Kamru are presented in the following. One such narrative states that a “fugitive cadet from the mainland“ came from Badrīnāth via the Baspa valley “in the unknown past.“ He brought “a replica of the image of lord Badrinath,” which became “a clan deity of the ruling house of that unnamed kingdom,” which later became known as the Bushahr kingdom “after the name of Basharu Devta” (Handa 2008:II:78).

Another narrative is given in an article by Tobdan (2008:97). “Once there appeared three gods at Brindaban in Mathura,” and they all went to Badrīnāth, but the youngest one later “came to Kamru and sat on the throne of Bashahar, who then came to be recognized as Badrinath of Kamru.”

In many narratives Dev Purna, is the main hero, who there after defeating most of the local kingdoms, became the king himself or (as in Bajpai 1991:27) went “to Kashi Nagar [...] and brought from there a man named Pradumna who belonged to Chandravanshi Dynasty and installed him as king at Sarhan.⁴⁶ In another version, Dev Purna went from Badrīnāth in Garhwal to “Tholing Muth.” “There Dev Purna did not feel at home and is said to have escaped to reach Kamru” (Bajpai 1991:28). In Singh's article (1994:108), the narrative takes a different direction:

“[...] the deity of Kamru first came to Badrinath in Garhwal from Tholing

⁴⁵I believe that the assumed appointment of the Nambudri cook to the post of Rawal in Badrīnāth by the king of Tehri in 1777 marks the beginning of this relationship.

⁴⁶This is an important change to the narrative, because the Bushahr rulers trace their origin to Lord Kṛṣṇa's son, while they might not be too happy with the version of them originating from a “fugitive cadet.”

monastery in West Tibet, but not feeling comfortable at Badrinath it proceeded to Kamru for permanent resort.”

Singh (1994:106) further mentions a local story which claims “that the village deities of Kamru (Kinnaur), Badrinath (Garhwal), and Tholing (Guge) are brothers and that they used to visit each other in former times.”

In order to compliment the different versions of the narrative of how *Badrinārāyan* came to be in Kamru, here a longer version told to me by Rameshwar Dass Negi⁴⁷ will also be given.

In the beginning, there were three brothers, who lived in a place called *Badrīsthān*⁴⁸ At a certain point, all three brothers decided to leave the place and everyone went separate ways. The oldest one went to *Badrīnāth*, the middle one to Tholing and the youngest brother went South to Tehri, where he became the *Rāja*. This narrative concerns the middle brother.

After arriving in Tholing, he had the intended to stay there forever, but he did not like the food and drink [*khān pān*] of the place. So, he decided to leave. He wandered westwards, until he finally came into the Sangla valley and first settled down in *Śundīngsthān* – a place not far above Kamru. A while after, he was disturbed by the cravings for power by the Kamru Thakur, and so he killed the Thakur [*mār diyā*]. Then *Badrī* went further to Sangla and killed the Thakur there as well as the Thakur of Thangling. He then proceeded via Harang Gatti to Kalpa and killed the local Thakur there and then the Thakur of Choling. At this

⁴⁷He was pointed out to me by several people I interviewed about the cultural history of Kamru. This conversation took place in his house, right beside the *Badrī* temple of Kamru, on the 28th of August 2012.

⁴⁸I inquired if he knew the story that they originally came from Mathurā, and he replied that some people give this version. Although even if they first came from Mathurā/*Vṛindāvan*, they again first proceeded to *Badrīsthān*. This place is supposedly in the vicinity of Uttarkāśī, or Uttarkāśī itself.

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

time, Bāṇāsūr was the king of Sarahan, who had received a boon from Śiva [Śiv kā pradān milā], and when Badrī arrived here a battle started between the two. Later, this fight was joined by Śrī Kṛṣṇa, because his son Pradyumna was in love with Bāṇāsūr's daughter Usha, but Bāṇāsūr was strictly against this marriage. Together, Badrī and Kṛṣṇa, defeated Bāṇāsūr. Aniruddh (Pradyumna's son) stayed in Sarahan but gave Pradyumna the throne [gaddī]. Then Badrī returned to Kamru, and when he was visited by Pradyumna, Kamru became the second seat of Pradyumna.

122 kings of the Bushahrs came to Kamru and to have their coronation there, in Sarahan it was 131⁴⁹, thus nine kings did not go to Kamru, because there were either too old, too young or too sick. Since the visit of Pradyumna to Kamru, Badrī was the *kuldevatā* of the Bushahrs. Whenever the king had any problems or was sick, he would go to Kamru and ask Badri for advice through an oracle. Seeds would be thrown into the air by the oracle and caught again, and when their number were uneven it was a good sign, while even numbers were a bad sign (or the ritual before not correctly done).

Bering Nāg came to this area from a rural area, and Badrī and Bering Nāg are related, since Badrī is the *māmā* [maternal uncle] of Bering Nāg. Every few years (three, five or more) Badrī performs a *yātrā* though the local landscape, which lasts for nine days – always staying on the left side of the river [Sutlej]. During this procession, he visits the following places: Wari, Mewar, Barang, Powari, Purpani, Ribba, Murang, Rispa, Thangi, Gunon, Charang and then across the mountain to Chitkul and on to Raksham, Batseri, Sangla, Chasu and Shong.⁵⁰

⁴⁹They received two coronations, one in Sarahan and the second, the *rāj tilak*, in Kamru.

⁵⁰These places visited are almost identical to the Kinner Kailash Parikrami as it is described by Sanan and Swadi (1998:277-286). The route can be seen in the map in figure 2.11.

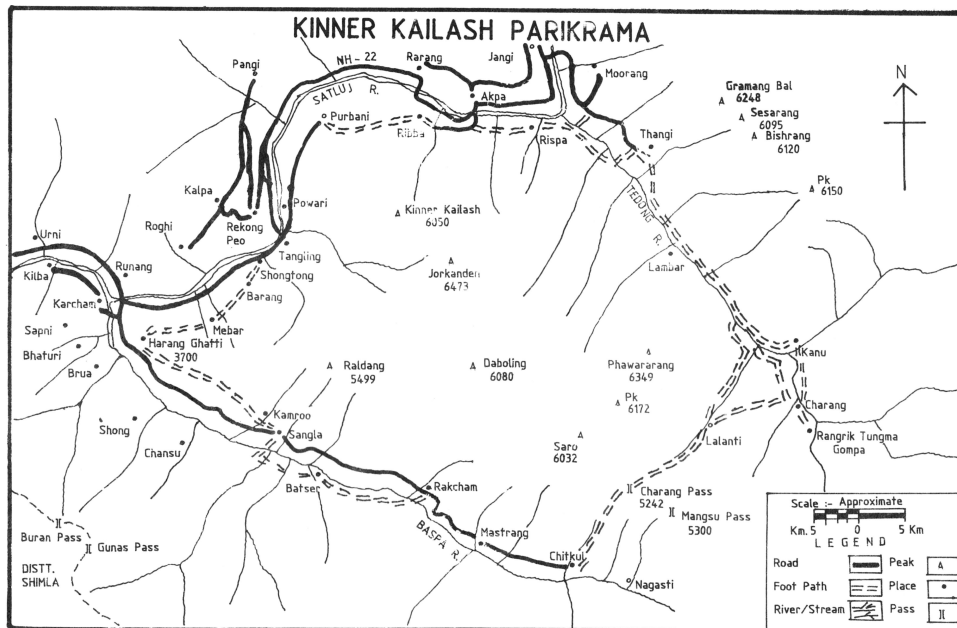


Figure 2.11: Map of the *parikramā* of the Kinner Kailash (Sanan and Swadi 1998:278)

Most, if not all, of these narratives demonstrate the connection of three places, namely Kamru, Badrīnāth and Tholing. In the case of Tholing, or Tibet *per se*, there are a few details in Kamru that point to these contacts. Handa (2009:78) mentions that “on the first floor” of the Kamru fort, there is a “larger room [which] enshrines Buddhist tutelary deities. It is believed that these deities were brought here from Tholing [...]” There is another “fort-like tower much like the one at Kamroo” in Sapni, a village at the beginning of the Baspa valley. Next to it, there is “a crumbling structure called Guge Rani Ka Mahal (the palace of the Guge Queen)” (Sanan and Swadi 1998:128).

Thus, there are many similarities between the two temples. Further, there are also narratives that contribute to this picture by saying that the idols inside the temples of Kamru and Badrīnāth came from somewhere else.⁵¹ Interestingly, the narratives

⁵¹In the case of Badrīnāth, I consider the narrative concerning the retrieval of the idol by Ādi Śaṅkarācārya also as representing a form of migration, since the statue was in the river, installed by a South Indian saint and presented with a new personality.

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

about the foundation of the kingdom and the arrival of Badrīnārāyaṇ in the valley are sometimes overlapping, as are the figures of Badrīnārāyaṇ – Dev Purna and the “fugitive cadet.” It makes sense that the Bushahrs would connect their history to that of their family-*devatā*. The main point is the connection between Kamru, Tholing and Badrīnāth. Even though the chronology and the agency differ from one narrative to the other, the main statement remains the same: the origin of the rulers as well as their *devatā* lies outside of Kinnaur and revolves, at least as places of transit, around Tholing and Badrīnāth.

It is obvious that, from the side of Kinnaur, the Badrī of Kamru and Badrīnārāyaṇ are equals, but there is also a need to distinguish both places. One such possibility was presented to me by two pilgrims from Himachal I encountered in Mana⁵² who told me that the Badrīnāth of Kamru is considered the *gupt* (secret/hidden) Badrīnāth, while the other one is *viśāl* (great/spacious)⁵³ and that otherwise it is not different (*ekhī*) from the Badrīnāth in Garhwal. It is interesting to note that on most signs in Kamru,⁵⁴ the temple is specifically referred to as “*Śrī Badrī Viśāl jī Kāmru*.” In Badrīnāth, there are different attempts to explain the meaning of *viśāl*, while I have not heard of any any explanations in Kamru. These two Badrīs, if not indeed “*ekhī*,” have a lot in common. According to certain narratives, they both come from or via Tholing, both their abodes lie on former trade routes into Tibet, and both Badrīs are the *devātās* of the respective ruling dynasty.

This connection between the two temples is not only based on similarities and connecting narratives, but it takes place on a material level as well – “every few years he [Badrī of Kamru] visits Badrinath and occupies pride of place on the altar, just below the presiding deity“ (Sanan and Swadi 2002:35). “Thus Badrinarayan,

⁵²15th of November 2011.

⁵³This concept of “famous” and “hidden” is not unheard of, but in the case of Kamru it is nowhere found in the literature. It might not be an uncommon idea, since Deborah Klimburg-Salter was told the same idea a few years earlier.

⁵⁴At the gate at the foot of the village as well as on a board fixed to the temple.

2.7 Clusters of Badrināth



Figure 2.12: Gate at the foot of the Kamru village.



Figure 2.13: Signboard at the Kamru temple reading *Śrī Badrī Viśāl jī Mandir Kamrū*.

2 A Tour of Badrināth

the deity of Kamru, was carried across the southern mountain passes to the pilgrimage of Badrinath in Uttar Pradesh in the years 1866, 1874, 1894, 1901, 1920, 1926, 1930 and 1968 A. D.” (Bose 1972:114).⁵⁵ These pilgrimages happen irregular, with intervals of six to thirty-eight years. On the other hand, Singh (1989:292) mentions that “Devta Badrināth of Kāmru went in procession to visit the guardian deity at Badrināth in U.P. once a year,” and that this later changed to every three years. Singh (ibid.) reasons that these visits imposed financial burdens, as “at least one person per household had to accompany the deity’s entourage,” and thus they “could not work and earn money” during this time.

The most recent visit of the Kamru Badrī to his brother was, according to the *bahī* in possession of the Ḍimrī priest responsible for the pilgrims from Kinnaur, on the 24th of May 2010.⁵⁶ Before its return, the Badrī of Kamru rested inside the *garbha grha*⁵⁷ for three days, and while the deity does not visit any other places in Badrināth, he was brought to see the Vasudhārā waterfall near Mana. Badrinārāyaṇ of Kamru used to travel over the passes beyond Chitkul (Ciṭkul) to Gaṅgotrī and from there via the Kalandani pass, Ghastoli and Mana to Badrināth – today the procession uses jeeps and the southern route via Shimla and Rishikesh. Unexpectedly in the notes of the Paṇḍā I found that also the Mātā Devī of Chitkul as well as Bering Nāg, who is also allowed to stay in the *sanctum sanctorum*, perform processions to Badrināth. In contrast to most of the other gods who travel to Badrināth, Bering Nāg is still carried barefoot over the mountain passes, and in the priest’s notes it says that he came via Gaumukh and Ghastoli and last arrived in Badrināth on the 19th of May 2006. Thus, Bering Nāg and Badrināth share a narrative, as they are both thought to have entered the Baspa valley at the same time and consequently held a fight about the best place there. One version of this narrative is given by

⁵⁵Bose actually cited this sentence from someone else, who is only mentioned as “Sen” and since no bibliography is included in his book I was unable to trace the original author.

⁵⁶His records went back to the year 1982.

⁵⁷The priest further told me that all visiting Nārāyaṇs were allowed to stay next to the *mūrti* of Badrinārāyaṇ.

Tobdan (2008:95): both came to Kinnaur from a certain lake (Baural) in Garhwal. Bering Nāg arrived to a lake in the Sangla valley, ready to settle down there, when “another devata named Badrinath also reached there.” In fighting they changed their form: “Bering Nag turned into a mouse and Badrinath into a cat.” Thus, Badrīnāth, in the form of the cat, won the fight and established his home at today’s Kamru. In the meantime Bering Nāg, dug a hole in the earth, draining the lake, where “a beautiful ground“ emerged and he “got his castle constructed there.“ One would assume that the idea to transform into a cat is more clever than turning into a mouse, but Sanan and Swadi (1998:127) retell the story with a slightly different turn:

“He [Bering Nāg] came to the valley from across the Dhauladhars and found the Narayan already holding sway above Sangla area, which at the time was still under a lake. A contest was arranged to decide whether the Nag could also reside in the valley. The Narayan assumed the form of a cat and the Nag became a rat. Both entered the lake, with the cat in hot pursuit. The rat burrowed his way through the rocks at Ruttrang to escape. The lake drained out and the Nag won his right to stay in his temple in the middle of Sangla.”

Badrīnārāyaṇ’s temple in Kamru has a sort of balcony flanked by catlike figures on either side. Which may be a reference to this narrative.⁵⁸

Batseri

Batseri lies a few kilometers away from Sangla, further up the valley. The road does not lead directly to the village and ends right after a bridge over the Baspa river. The village itself is quite small and can be crossed in all directions within ten minutes at moderate pace. There are various temples in Batseri, but only two are

⁵⁸The few people I inquired about this figures, replied that they had never really given them much attention and thought that they were some “jungle animals.”



Figure 2.14: Cat-like figure at the Kamru Badri temple.

easy to spot – an almost decayed Buddhist temple and the Badrinārāyaṇ temple. This temple is mentioned as one of the Badrī temples in the Western Himalayas in a few sources, and usually it is only included in lists of temples dedicated to Narayan in this area. At to this point there is very little we know about this temple.

The structure of the temple today was rebuilt after the old one was destroyed in a fire on the 24th of November 1998. The new temple has a certain pan-religious feel to it, since the outside carvings that include images usually not found on a Hindu temple. There are, for example, images of Swami Vivekananda, Sikh gurus, Tirthaṅkaras and Jesus. During my short stay there I, had no opportunity to see the *mūrti* of the Batseri Badrī since, it was out on one of its frequent processions, or to to record any narratives concerning the origin of the temple. Yet, in different conversations, it became evident that the inhabitants of Sangla and Kamru do not regard the Batseri Badrī on equal footing with the other Badrīs – which is a very similar scenario as in the case of Badrināth and Kamru.



Figure 2.15: The wood-carvings of a Sikh guru and Jesus on the temple of Batseri.

The shopkeeper in front of the temple reported that also the Batseri Badrī performs pilgrimages to Badrīnāth in Garhwal and while he used to travel afoot, today he is taken by car, however not via Gaṅgotrī, like the others, but via Tibet. This travel route also became obsolete in 1962, and the notes of the Tīrthpurohit in Badrīnāth recorded a visit of ten pilgrims from Batseri, but they came without their *devatā*. Based on the little available information, I would say I the temple is in accordance with the tradition of the Western Himalaya borderlands. It would take an extended stay and more intensive fieldwork to discover all the narratives concerning the temple, as well to assess its status and role within the Baspa valley. For now, the temple is especially interesting concerning its name and the similar reverence of the earth goddesses (see next section).



Figure 2.16: View of Batseri.

The Other Gods of Kinnaur and their Connection to Royal Rule

As the focus of this study here is mainly on the temples dedicated to Badrīnārāyaṇ, it could give the impression that there are no other gods in Kinnaur or the Baspa valley, which in fact is not the case at all. Generally, the whole of Kinnaur is divided into six khunts (regions), with their respective principal deities. Three of these khunts, “Atharabis, Rajgram and Wangpo,” belong to “Maheshwar (Moin-sires). For Shua khunt the principal deity is Chandika. Similarly, for Thukpa, the presiding deity is Badrinarayan. In Hangrang the khunt deity (Dabla) and the set of its subordinate deities are not well organized” (Raha 1978:96).

The Baspa valley is part of the Thukpa khunt with Badrīnārāyaṇ as the principal deity featured in two temples in the valley, yet, this does not mean that there are no further gods in this region. On the contrary, there are in fact different gods in every village, but interestingly the major ones all perform pilgrimages to Badrīnāth in Garhwal.

2.7 Clusters of Badrināth



Figure 2.17: The temple of Badrinārāyaṇ in Batseri.

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

Apart from the Badrīs, the main gods of the Baspa valley are the Bering Nāg of Sangla and the Mātā Devī of Chitkul. These gods, as so often are related to one another. Bering Nāg is the *māmā* of Badrī and the Mathi Devī of Chitkul is considered the spouse of Badrī.⁵⁹ Chitkul Devī is also interesting, because she is believed to have come to Chitkul from outside the valley as well and her traveling route has similarities to the one of Badrīnārāyaṇ.

“There [in Chitkul] are three temples of the village deity. Mathi, one of them, it is said, is five hundred years old. The legend says that after a long journey from Mathura, Brindavan, Badrinath and then through Tibet goddess Mathi settled in this village.” (Maitra 1989:22)

Mathi also performs processions to Badrīnāth, whether this is a recollection of her former migration or whether its significance lies in seeing the brother of her consort remains unknown. Yet, it seems that all the gods who have migrated to this valley have urges to travel, be it local processions or pilgrimages to famous shrines, however there are also those gods that resided in the Baspa valley before they arrived and do not travel. Not much is known about them, and for example Singh (1990:248), who is among the few to even mention them, only states their place of worship, but not the name of the deities themselves.

”At Astankche near Tahsil Office in Sangla there exists a site with a few stones but no idol. Rajas of Bushahr used to offer sacrifice here. Devta Badrinath of Kamru paid his respects at the site. It was held as a great honour to be allowed to offer sacrifice here. The fact that the Rajas and their kuladevta used to pay respects at Astankche hints at the existence of some ancient animist cult that was subsequently harnessed by the Thakur of Kamru to enhance his legitimacy by reserving its use for his deity and for himself.” (Singh 1990:248)

⁵⁹“[...] the mysterious Mathi Devi of Chitkul is said to be the consort of the Kamroo Narayan” (Sanan and Swadi 1998:128).

Fortunately, Arik Moran (2012) has published the work of Sur Das, who sheds more light on these local deities. According to Das (Moran 2012:20), there are actually two kinds of such gods – “Kalis or Jogins or Sonigs and Matingos, the Goddesses under [the] earth [/ground]”⁶⁰ (Moran 2012:20). While their dwelling places are different – Kalis “live high in the mountains, [among] their peaks and in their depressions, the lakes,” the Matingos “live under [the] earth, lower down the mountains and near habitations” – their appearance is quite similar.

“They wear black garments and they keep their head uncovered with[out] any headdress. They have long golden hair flowing down to their waist. They never grow old and they are ever in their bloom.” (Moran 2012:20)

It is interesting that they no longer play a great role, at least in the recent publications on this area, since they are thought to be “more powerful than village devtas and devis” (ibid.). The most famous Matingo is situated between Sangla and Kamru and called Astangche (Moran 2012) or Astankche (Singh 1990). These Matingos are crucial, because they are only worshipped by the Badrī of Kamru, and Moran (2012:25-27) mentions an illustrative narrative of the importance that the pūjā is exclusively offered by Badrī.

Once upon a time, during the reign of Rajah Mahendar Singh of Bashahr [1815-1850], Maheshawar Deota of Sungra Village, at the concluding of Dasehra Festival at Sarahan, solicited the then Rajah’s permission in writing to go up to Kāmru and offer ‘puja’ to the earth goddesses at Astangche. [The] Rajah [at] first refused permission, saying that anything bad may happen since the earth goddesses know Badri Nath Deota of Kāmru alone and no other deota ever did go there. Maheshawara Deota persisted and the Rajah’s permission had but to be given. Maheshawara of Sungra, with all pomp and show [and] with all his musical

⁶⁰The squared brackets in the citation are Moran’s addenda. This is also true for the following citations of his article.

2 A Tour of Badrināth

instruments being played upon, went to Kāmru. A warm reception was offered by Badri Nath of Kāmru for his guest deota, the Maheshawara of Sungra. A peaceful night [passed] for the deota and his ‘parja’ [*praja*, subjects] of Sungra at Kāmru. [The] next morning, Maheshwara asked Badri Nath to accompany him to Astangche to offer ‘puja’ to the great earth goddess there. Badri Nath refused to go with Maheshawara and advised him not to go himself too, saying that no other deota ever gave ‘puja’ at Astangche but Badri Nath himself, and that the idea of Maheshawara’s going there should be dropped lest any harm may befall to either of the parties concerned. The resolute Maheshawara would not drop his idea and alone he went to Astangche. He bowed down his head to the earth and [raised his] feet up in the sky. Whenever any deota goes to meet and offer ‘puja’ to any Matingi, the earth goddesses, the deota throws his ‘yak’ hair head down in the earth and his feet up in the air so that the deota assumes the posture of a man’s summersalt. Maheshawara Deota assumed this posture at Astangche. Lo! He could not rise up, his head sticking to the ground. The earth goddesses at Astangche were enraged at having a stranger deota at their place to offer them ‘puja’. From under [the] ground, some of the earth goddesses managed to catch hold of [the] hair of the deota’s head and held him firm with his head downwards.

Badri Nath was informed of the Maheshawara’s [being] stuck to the ground with [his] downward head at Astangche. He (Badrinath) ordered Kalan Singh deota’s arm, the pole, to be sent on the spot at Astangche and to put one end of the pole sufficient[ly] down below the earth near the stuck head of Maheshawara and then to pull up the pole with a jerk, as if the deota of Sungra was a big stone or a log stuck to the ground, and [the] lifting up was to be done by a big pole [that was] held and

being manipulated by so many hands. The process was acted upon and up erect the deota of Sungra rose, but with him and stuck firm to his gigantic yag [yak?] hair head, rose two Matingos, the earth goddesses, in rage [and] holding the deota head hair in their clutches. They were attired in black and their golden hair waved down to their waist. They were very beautiful virgins, but they were seen by [the] Sungra and Kāmru people [assembled] there [so] they flew down to Gurguro near Sangla and the two Matingos have since then become [the] Gurguro ‘Matingos’ [who] are given ‘puja’ by Nāg [Deota] of Sangla. Poor earth goddesses! They were enraged with the deota of Sungra and they insulted him very much [by] keeping him stuck to the ground. But they themselves also lost their home for their becoming [exposed in] public. They could not, and still cannot, go to Astangche as their home. Later on they were seen by many in daytime going to Astangche to see their sisters underground at Astangche and then to return [on the] very [same] day to their new abode, Guguro [sic!]. Nay, even some people heard [the Astangche Matingi] calling, ‘Oh Gurguro living elder sisters; come to us, have a talk with us and then go back to your place Gurguro’. [The] Astangche living goddesses liked their elder sisters going to them for a chat and then back to their new place [that they’d] earned by their wrath at Maheshawara. As for Maheshawara, he could not dare to go to Kamru from Astangche but home to Sungra he went, [travelling for a] day and [a] night with his dignity lowered down by the earth goddesses of Astangche. (Moran 2012:25-27)

Thus, it is important who worships the Matingos, especially at Astangche, and while not all earth goddesses are worshipped by Nārāyaṇs, the two most important ones in the Baspa valley are.

Their second important dwelling site is near the Batseri bridge, where they “are

2 A Tour of Badrināth

given 'puja' by [the] devta of Batseri [...] generally, and occasionally by the devtas of Sangla and Kamru for the welfare of the respective villages. But whoever the 'puja' giving devta may be, the devta of Batersi must be there to preside over the 'puja' ceremony of the Batseri Bridge Matingos" (Moran 2012:25). The importance of the Matingosis also evident from the fact that they are also visited by "the presiding goddess of Bashahr, Bhimakali of Sarahan" (Moran 2012:10) and further from their financial support by the state.

The state has sanctioned budget provision for puja in the Kamru Fort and at Astangche. The provision is renewed from year to year. [...] 100 goats are cut at Astangche by the state when Bhima Kali meets those goddesses at Astangche. (Moran 2012:18)

Thus, the older *devatās* of Kinnaur have not been displaced by the gods that have migrated to this area, nor have they been "sanskritized" in order to fit into the Hindu pantheon. Instead, they were given respect by the new gods as well as by the rulers of Bushahr. This treatment of the gods of Kinnaur as sovereigns has two reasons: first, important *sampradāys* from the plains did not have much impact in Kinnaur, and secondly because of their relation to the Bushahr dynasty. There are in fact two views on this relationship, and perhaps both perspective hold a certain truth.

Singh (1990:247) argues that, in the case of Bhima Kali, "though no inscriptions have been found showing when the Raja formally handed over his kingdom to the Goddess Kali, nobody doubts that the Goddess was the rashtradevta." In the sense that the king was only the worldly representative of the goddess's will, it makes sense that "any resistance to the Raja's commands thus became a crime likely to incur divine wrath" (ibid.). Further, since the king was unable to be at all places simultaneously, the *devatās* "frequent tours manifested divine sanction of royal rule" (Singh 1990:248). On the other hand, Singh (ibid.) also notes that "in a sense the village godlings represented the collective will of the people against unchecked

absolutism by the Raja.”

Thus, the rulers were able to legitimize their rule and commands in their realm through the consent of the *devatās*, but they were also depended on them. For example, it is “Badri Nath of Kamru village [*who*] performs [the] ‘raj tilak’ [ceremony] of a new Raja of Bashahr ascending to the ‘Gaddi’. [...] The new rajah has to go there (to Kamru Fort) for Rajtilak” (Moran 2012:17). Other gods in the realm have different obligations or authorities concerning the continuity of the Bushahrs. “The state has different devtas for different purposes. As Basahr Deota is for the weather, Badri Nath is for the Raj Tilak [ceremony], Maheshawara of Sungra village is for the Dasehra festival performance [...]” and “Narain Deota of Jabbal [Jubbal] village in Rohru Tehsil is for warding off evil spirits causing harm to the royal family” (Moran 2012:19). This may not include all gods and their authorities concerning the royal rule, but it is sufficient to get a picture of their interdependence. Through this bond between rulers and deities, the gods owned large land properties and, with “the introduction of horticulture in a big way since 1960,” they became owners of orchards as well (Singh 1990:250). According to Singh (*ibid.*), the fruits were auctioned off or the orchards leased to farmers – in this way “the devta[s] had adopted modern economics!” The land owned by village deities in fact was so large that, when the *H. P. Abolition of Big Landed Estates Act* was introduced in 1953, “only five landholders were affected in Kinnaur and all five were village deities – the three Maheswars, Badrinath and Bairing Nagjee of Sangla. [...] The devtas had been functioning as surrogates of the Raja of Bushahr and had acquired immovable property as a mark of such authority” (*ibid.*).

To close this digression, I let T. S. Negi, Jogishvar Singh (1990:247) respectively have the last word: “As so rightly explained by T. S. Negi, the Rajas of Bushahr from the very start recognized the importance of the village deities so that ‘Throughout, an arrangement of mutual respect and »live and let live« worked satisfactory to both sides till the last day of the Raja regime’.”

2.7.6 Kumaon

Atkinson states that “there are four others [i.e. temples] of the same name [Badrī] in Garhwal and four in Kumaon” (Atkinson 2002:II:784). The four Badrī temples in Kumaon he specifies as “Sainana in Nayan; Kurget in Sult; Dwara Hat and Garsir in Katyur” (2002:2:784fn). The same temples in almost the same form are mentioned by Thapliyal (2005:100), therefore it is likely that they have been taken from Atkinson’s work. Among these, the town of Dwarahat (Dvārāhaṭ) was the easiest one to locate. It is close to Ranikhet (Rānikhet) and situated along the road leading to Kārṇaprayāg. I was unable to locate the other three temples, and even though I asked around a lot, no one had ever heard of these temples or places.

According to Handa (2003:146), “Dwarahat had been an important stage on one of the traditional pilgrimage routes to Badrinath until a new township of Ranikhet came up in AD 1869.” Although Dwarahat obviously has lost some of its importance, the town is still famous for its architectural marvels that are clustered all around. One of these is the temple of Badrīnāth.

The Badrīnāth temple in Dwarahat was constructed by the Katyūrīs. According to an information board by the Indian Archaeological Survey, probably somewhere between the 11th and 12th century CE; and according to Handa (2003:148) by Sudhar Dev in 1318 CE. According to Handa (2003:154), there is also another temple “dedicated to Badrinath or Adibadri,” which was constructed by Sadhuvaradeva in 1084 CE.

The main Badrī temple is situated above the famous Mrityunjaya temple and consists only of the Śīkara, with a square *garbha grha* beneath. The *mūrti* inside the temple seems not to be as old as the temple and features a four-armed standing Viṣṇu. There were a few signs of recent *pūjās*, but it did not seem like the temple was an important part of the religious life of the people in and around Dwarahat. It remains unclear whether the temple was indeed dedicated to Badrīnārāyaṇ from the beginning. The temple certainly lies on one of the pilgrim treks to Badrīnāth



Figure 2.18: Badrīnāth temple in Dvārāhat.



Figure 2.19: Idol inside the Badrināth temple in Dvārāhaṭ.

and it could have served as a substitute goal for those pilgrims who were unable to continue. Yet, Viṣṇu temples in this area are sometimes prematurely and sometimes intentionally called *Badrī* temples, because for one *Badrī* is more or less a synonym for Viṣṇu in this region and second it is advantageous to the reputation. Since no narratives or oral histories have survived, it is difficult if not impossible to reconstruct the connections between *Dwarahat* and *Badrināth* today.

I have inquired in *Badrināth* about the other *Badrī* temples in Kumaon the response was similar to my question about *Kinnaur*: there are no *Badrī* temples outside of *Garhwal*! Concerning the other three temples that presumably exist somewhere in Kumaon, it would be extremely helpful to find their location – and see if they are located along old and traditional pilgrim routes, placed within old capitals of the *Katyūri* successors, or located within the sphere of the *Bhotiyas* – thus possibly adding further evidence to the theory of Tibetan origin.

2.7.7 The Role of the “other” *Badrī* Temples in the Understanding of *Badrināth*

In light of the presented material, it is now possible to look into the significance of these *Badrī* temples outside of *Garhwal* for the reconstruction of the entangled history (Randeria 2002) of this Western Himalaya Borderland.

Unfortunately, one can only speculate about the temples in Kumaon, and there is not much to say about *Batseri*, apart from the fact that this temple has great potential for future research.

The *Badrī* shrine of *Kamru* in *Kinnaur*, on the other hand, enables us to look at the original *Badrināth* in a different way. Both temples lie on a trade route into Tibet, have strong affiliations to the respective ruling dynasties and are connected to *Tholing* through similar narratives.

Their difference lies in the fact that *Kinnaur* never became a pan-Indian pilgrimage site, and therefore its local culture was never altered to fit into the concept of ortho-

2 A Tour of Badrīnāth

dox Hinduism. Yet, both shrines did attempt to establish a link to the rest of India – in Badrīnāth this succeeded by including Ādi Śaṅkarācārya as a (re-)founder, while in Kamru there is a connection to Mathurā and Pradyumna, but in no way comparable to that of Śaṅkarācārya.

There is the possibility that the connection of Kamru to the pilgrimage shrine in Garhwal through the “invention” of similar narratives was to profit from the reputation Badrīnāth has. However, would it not have been better and easier to connect the two shrines through Ādi Śaṅkarācārya?

This connection is based on Tholing, since both deities have their original home there, and even though this narrative may have lost its importance in Badrīnāth in the past hundred years, in the context of the *mūrti* inside the temple with a Buddhist past, it certainly was something that the priests and pilgrims would always turn a blind eye to. Further, the narratives are too numerous and too heterogeneous to see in this an imitation of the original shrine.

A complete picture of the *devatās* in Kinnaur has to include Singh’s (1990:248) opinion:

With increasing hinduisation the devtas in Kinnaur, most of whom appear to have been objects of earlier indigenous animist worship, were brought into the Hindu pantheon. They were given myths of origin showing them as having flown into the area from various centres of Hindu pilgrimage such as Devtas Badrinath of Kamru, Bairing Nag of Sangla and Nages of Sapni. Devtas in Upper Kinnaur were said to have flown in from holy places in Tibet like mT’oldin’ or Tsaparang.

The Badrī temples of Kinnaur are so important to the understanding of the “original” Badrīnāth, because they represent a situation that was prevalent in Badrīnāth maybe a hundred or two hundred years ago, before the culture was remodeled according to the views of the followers of Sanatan Dharma and orthodox Hinduism. In Kamru, there obviously also was a difference in opinion as to whether Badrīnārāyaṇ

was of Buddhist or Hindu origin,⁶¹ but I have personally never encountered any uneasiness towards one or the other religion and culture – in fact, people sometimes were not even sure which religion they were following primarily.

Thus, we may conclude that if not both shrines in the Baspa valley then certainly Kamru shares a related cultural past with *Badrīnāth*, but while *Badrīnāth* became a shrine of Hindu orthodoxy over the course of time, Kamru remained a local shrine that sustained an equanimous relationship with its local culture as well as towards Buddhism.

⁶¹“A letter from Raja Shamsheer Singh of Bushahr in 1875 A. D. describes Devta Badrinath as an incarnation of Lord Krishna (*krishan rupi*) whereas a letter from the devta’s caretaker (Rawal) Purushottam Sharma in 1869 A. D. describes the deity as an incarnation of the Buddha (*bauddh rupi*). This indicates an effort at legitimation *via-a-vis* Buddhists as well as Hindus. The same phenomenon is discernible in the fact that the Rajas of Bushahr were held to be of divine origin, claiming descent from Parduman, the grandson of Lord Krishna, while the Lamaic theory held that the Raja of Bushahr was after his death reincarnated as the Guru Lama or Guru of the Lamas, understood to be the Dalai Lama of Tibet. But vested with such high legitimacy the Rajas did not disturb the animistic practices of the *devi/devta* cults in Kinnaur” (Singh 1990:274).

3 Historical Sources

3.1 The History of Badrīnāth

The history of Badrīnāth is difficult to trace, as it is lost in a mythological past. Further, most of the extant scriptures about Badrīnāth were written in later times and have not yet been critically edited¹.

The first time Badrīnāth is mentioned with a verifiable date is on the plate of Lalitaśūradēva, which was found in the Yog-Badrī temple in Pandukeshwar (Sircar 1960:277-284). This copper plate can be dated with great certainty to 853/54 CE (Sircar 1960:278). The inscriptions state that the plate originates from Kārttikēyapura² (Line 1). In lines 17-24, it says that a grant should be given “in favour of the god Nārāyaṇa-bhaṭṭāraka installed by *Bhaṭṭa Śrīpurusha* in a village called Garuḍāgrāma” (Sircar 1960:279). It says further that “[s]omething proper may be done in regard to the dwelling of that god by the *Brahmachārins* attached to the *tapōvana* at Badarik-āśrama; whatever is to be done in this regard should all be done by the *Brahmachārins*” (Sircar 1960:284). The *tapōvana* is identified with the village Tapoban³ in the Niti valley (Sircar 1960:279), which is unconvincing, because there are numerous “tapovans” all over India and especially in Garhwal. Tapovan literally means, “a place (forest) to practice asceticism” and this is what Badrīnāth is famous for in the scriptures, because even Viṣṇu chose this place for

¹Especially the *Skandapurāṇa*, but also the *Kedārkhanda*.

²It is considered to be a sanskritized form of the name Katyūr and is thought to be today’s Baijnāth or Vaidhyanāth in Kumaon, but Naithānī (2010) thinks that it was the old name of Joshimath.

³Famous for a hot sulfur spring.

3 Historical Sources

his meditation.

Theoretically, there are two textual sources prior to this plate: The Mahābhārata and Bāṇabhaṭṭa's *Kādambarī*. The Mahābhārata is a well-known Epic, receiving a form close to what we know today around the 4th or 5th century CE. Badrīnāth is mentioned in several *parvas*, but most frequently in the Āraṇyakaparva and the Śāntīparva (Sörensen 1904:103). In the third book of the Mahābhārata, there are two episodes, in which the Pāṇḍavas visit Badarī or the *āśram* of Nar and Nārāyaṇ: Mahābhārata 3.140-152 and 3.155-162 (Grünendahl 1993). The second time Badrīnāth is mentioned in the Nārāyaṇīya section of the Śāntīparva. Here, Badrīnāth is the location where Nar and Nārāyaṇ practice their *tapas* and hence it is called Nara-Nārāyaṇa-āśrama. Yet, however the Badarikāśrama mentioned in the Mahābhārata most likely does not correlate with the Badrīnāth we know today, but it was a place closer to the realm of gods than to that of men.⁴ In the *Kādambarī* it says:

[...] from Gandhamādana, beautiful with the hermitage of Badarikā marked with the footprints of Nara and Nārāyaṇa, where the peaks are resonant with the tinkling of the ornaments of the fair dames of Kuvera's city [...]. (Ridding 1974:216)

Bāṇabhaṭṭa lived in the early 7th century, and as it would be great to have a source for Badrīnāth from that time, but this part is from the appendix⁵ and therefore might have been added later on. The main reason I doubt its originality is because it widely refers to the sections of the Mahābhārata where a mystical place is described instead of the Badrīnāth we know today.

In the 7th century, Xuanzang came from China to India, and during his travels, he also visited a place called Po-lo-ki-mo-pu-lo, which was identified as Brahmapura (see Watters 1904:329 and Atkinson 2002:II:452) and located by Cunningham (Atkinson 2002:II:452) in the North-East of Haridwar (Source of the Ganges/Gaṅgādvāra, Watters 1904:319), thus in Garhwal-Kumaon. Xuanzang reports:

⁴See especially chapters 4.2 and 4.4.

⁵Labelled as this in the book itself (Ridding 1974).

3.1 *The History of Badrināth*

This [Po-lo-hih-mo-pu-lo country] was more than 4000 li in circuit, with mountains on all sides, its capital being above twenty li in circuit. It had a rich flourishing population, and a fertile soil with regular crops: it yielded bell-metal and rock-crystal: the climate was coldish: the people had rough ways: they cared little for learning and pursued gain. There were five Buddhist monasteries, but there were very few Brethren: there were above ten Deva-Temples and the sectarians lived pell-mell. [...] To the north of this country (Brahmapura), and the Great Snow Mountains, was the Suvarṇagotra country. The superior gold which it produced gave the country its name. (Watters 1904:329-330)

Atkinson (2002:II:452) quotes Cunningham, who attempts to prove his argument of the location of Brahmapura within the Katyūri kingdom by referring to the bell-metal, which coincides with the “well-known copper mines of Dhanpur and Pokhri in Garwal, which have been worked from an early date.” There have been many speculations about the exact location of Brahmapura, and they range from Lakhanpur (Cunningham), Śrīnagar in Garhwal (M. Vivien de St. Martin) and Barhepura, near Najibabad (others), to Barahat in the Bhagrathi valley (see Atkinson 2002:II:453). Thus, it is far from clear where exactly Xuangzang set his foot on his travels in this region, but it is obvious that he encountered several Buddhist monasteries and monks, and there seems to have been no tensions between them and the Hindus.

The next travelers to Badrināth were South Indian saints, foremost Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, Rāmānuja, Madhava and Vallabha. While they did not leave any testimonies of their travels themselves, their followers and disciples made up for that. Yet, since their respective hagiographies were written quite late, there is very little historical value⁶ to them.

The next is a foreign account by the Portuguese Jesuit missionary António de An-

⁶This does not mean that they have no historical value for the time they were written in.

3 Historical Sources

drade, who in 1624 traveled via Badrīnāth to Tibet. He was the first European who set a foot into the valley of Badrīnāth. He arrived there with another Jesuit,⁷ two servants and other Hindu pilgrims, but their ultimate goal was Tsaparang in Western Tibet (Aschoff 1989:12). The details of his travel are known from a letter he wrote to Pater Provincial in 1624.⁸ In this letter,⁹ he states that when he was in Delhi many heathens joined together for a pilgrimage to a famous pagoda (Badrīnāth). It took about one and a half months to get there. He decided to go, because he had heard that the neighboring kingdoms were of Christian faith (Aschoff 1989:19).

Even though Andrade did not care much for the practices of these so called heathens, he gives an interesting account of the pilgrimage to Badrīnāth in the 17th century. He describes that the paths were so small that it was only possible to set down one foot at a time and the use of hands was often required as well. After some hardships, they reached Shrinagar, where they were questioned upon their motives. Andrade was particular interested in the dietary habits of the people in this region. He noted that the inhabitants of Shrinagar kill mutton and goat not by slaughtering them, but by suffocating them so that the blood remains in the meat. Andrade also mentions that they love to eat snow, just like he would eat bread or sweets. Meat is roasted only briefly so the blood runs out when they eat it. While the Bhotiyas eat meat and herbs, they eat the meat raw and are partial to the fat. Further, he also gives details about the political realities in the area, for example that Badrīnāth borders with the kingdom of Śrīnagar. He noticed many pilgrims, even from the southern parts of India like Ceylon and Vijayanagar. He also mentions two narratives¹⁰ connected to the temple of Bādīrīnāth. One which is still told today is about the Taptkuṇḍ. It says that Agni felt guilty for burning things and

⁷Manuel Marquez.

⁸Brief aus Agra, 8. November 1624, an Francisco de Vergara, zur Weiterleitung an den Generaloberen des Ordens (Aschoff 1989).

⁹This letter is reproduced in Aschoff's book in German. The following is a paraphrased translation of the same.

¹⁰He calls them ludicrous legends (alberne Legenden) (Ashoff 1989:26).

3.1 The History of Badrīnāth

therefore sought forgiveness in Badrīnāth. Agni stayed in Badrīnāth to do penance, heating up the water in the Taptkuṇḍ. The second narrative mentioned by Andrade is that formerly everything that touched the *mūrti* turned into gold. One day, a blacksmith arrived to Badrīnāth with the wish to become immensely rich, and he put all the iron he had brought with him in a fire burning below the temple in order to flatten it. When he touched the idol with it, the iron was still hot, which enraged Badrīnārāyaṇ so much that after that incident he would no longer turn anything into gold.

Next, Andrade gives a description of the inhabitants of the Badrīnāth valley in which he states that the peasantry at this place is of another lineage and speaks a different language, even though they are within the kingdom of Shrinagar.

When he is about to leave for Tibet, he notes that as soon as the passes stay clear of snow, the Rāja of Śrīnagar would send messengers to the king of Tibet¹¹ to pay tribute to the caravans venturing into Tibet (Aschoff 1989:29). The journey over the Mana pass had almost cost his life, but in the end he made it safely into the kingdom of Tsaparang. When he was about to return to India, a war broke out between the king and three of his sovereigns, and very soon also the king of Shrinagar saw his chance and joined the three sovereigns. Andrade observed that many messengers from Shrinagar were intercepted by Tibetan forces. These messengers attempted to secure their freedom or maybe even their life by stating that they came with letters for negotiations from the temple of Badrīnāth. With this excuse, they were allowed to return (Aschoff 1989:42). When Andrade writes about the inhabitants of Tibet, he remarks that they think of the laws of the Muslims as abominable and that they deride the pagans (i.e. the Hindus) as fools (Aschoff 1989:44). Nowhere does Andrade mention any connection between Tholing and Badrīnāth. Andrade returned to Tibet in 1625, but he never mentions Badrīnāth again.

More than 180 years later, the next Europeans came to Badrīnāth in search of the

¹¹He probably means the king of Guge.

3 Historical Sources

source of the Gaṅgā. Lieutenant William Spencer Webb and Captain F. V. Raper reached Badrīnāth on the 30th of May 1808. They mention the Taptkuṇḍ and the Vasudhārā waterfall, where many pilgrims go to stand under its holy spray. They note that there were between 40,000 to 50,000 pilgrims from all parts of India. Further, they remark that Badrīnāth is the richest temple within the mountains, possessing around 700 villages, huge treasures and a proud and wealthy priesthood (Ritter 1833:500).

Moorcroft (1937) and Captain Hearsay did not pass through Badrīnāth on their expedition to lake Mānasarovar in 1812, but they went through the Niti valley and from there to the first township on the Tibetan side of the Himalayas – Daba. In Daba, they were given a tour by a Lama who showed them the temple of Narāyaṇ. Though Moorcroft does not reveal anything about the religious practices inside the temple its caretaker is obviously the same Lama who was showing them around, there cannot be much doubt that this was a genuine Hindu shrine. Relying on Moorcroft's account, it becomes evident that the cult of Narāyaṇ was not limited to the southern side of the Himalaya.

After the Gorkha War (1814-16), George William Traill became the first commissioner of the area then known as British Garhwal. He also was the author of two important reports. One covers the whole of the newly acquired region, which he refers to as Kumaon (Traill 1992b), and the second report mainly deals with the Bhotiyas of the same region and their dealings in the trans-Himalayan trade (Traill 1992a).

In 1890, Kurt Böck (1900), a German traveller, stayed for one night at Badrīnāth. Upon his arrival, he was not even allowed to cross the Alakanandā to get across to the bank on which the temple is located. Only the next day, when he had persuaded (or tricked) the locals that he was not an impure beef eater, he was allowed to continue on to other bank. At the same time, he also knew that he should not

3.2 The Political History of Uttarākhaṇḍ

even dare to look towards the open temple doors if he valued his life.¹² No one before Böck mentioned any such strict rules concerning the entrance to the temple, let alone the crossing over to the Narāyaṇ side. The question remains if the other visitors simply did not care about whether they were allowed to enter the temple, or if more orthodox ideas had only developed in this area around this time. When Sister Nivedita (1928) visited the temple, she does not explicitly mention whether she was allowed to enter the *sanctum sanctorum*, but she describes the shrine of Ghaṇṭākaraṇa, and thus was obviously allowed into the temple courtyard. She does mention any restrictions but she writes that “the Vaishnava temple is even more exclusive than Kedar Nath.” Her account is the only one to my knowledge that frequently mentions the connections to Buddhism and Tibet, something the other travelers from the West did not look for and the Indian pilgrims probably did not want to see.

3.2 The Political History of Uttarākhaṇḍ

The history of Badrīnāth is deeply entwined in political contexts, especially after Badrīnārāyaṇ became the royal deity of the rulers in Garhwal. Even though Atkinson (2002:II:444) notes that “the local collections of legends regarding the places of pilgrimage in Kumaon and Garhwal afford us no aid for their political history,” in fact the political history seen alongside the local narratives allow for new perspectives on the cultural history not only of Badrīnāth, but the whole of the Western Himalayan contact zone.

There were two major dynasties in the area of Garhwal: one in the North name of Katyur and another one, slightly younger but longer lasting – the Parmar dynasty.

¹²“Ich vermied es absichtlich, in den offenen Tempel hineinzusehen, und bemerkte, daß diese Vorsicht von den nachfolgenden Brahminen [sic] mit großer Genugtuung aufgenommen wurde; dieser Tempel wird nämlich als das Werk höherer Wesen noch weit mehr vor aller Schändung behütet als jeder andere.” (Böck 1900:199)

3 Historical Sources

3.2.1 The Katyūris

The origins the Katyūris are unclear. There are different theories,¹³ but since they are speculative and unrelated to Badrīnāth, I will not mention them here.

The Katyūris founded their empire in Kārtikeyapur in the 6th century CE, but later they resettled to the Katyūr valley in Kumaon.¹⁴ It was a vast empire and stretched “from the Satlaj as far as the Gandaki and from the snow to the plains including the whole of Rohilkhand” (Atkinson 2002:II:467). According to Atkinson (2002:II:469), “the only actual records of the Katyuris that have come down to us consist of six inscriptions,” four of which were found in the temple of Pandukeshwar. One of these inscriptions was just mentioned in the beginning of this chapter and deals with the grant given to the “tapōvana at Badarik-āśrama” (Sircar 1960:284). One of the other inscriptions also records a grant given to the temple of Badarī.¹⁵ The youngest inscription was written in Kumaon and is called “The Bageswar Inscription” (Atkinson 2002:II:469). The end of this inscription features one interesting paragraph: “Bhudeva¹⁶ [...] was king of kings, a zealous worship-

¹³See Handa (2002:22-25).

¹⁴“The Katyuris of the Katyur Valley trace back their origin to Jośimāth, and every existing branch of the family traces back its origin to Katyur” (Atkinson 2002:II:467). Further, Atkinson (2002:II:467-68) mentions a local narrative of how the Rāja was forced to leave Joshimath: “A descendant of Basdeo went to hunt in the jungles one day, and during his absence Vishnu, in his man-lion incarnation as Nar-Sinha, taking the shape of a man, visited the place and asked the wife of the absent prince for food. The Rani gave the man enough to eat and after eating he lay down on the Raja’s bed. When the Raja returned from the chase and found a stranger asleep in his bed, he drew his sword and struck him on the arm, but lo! instead of blood, milk flowed forth from the wound. The Raja was terrified at the omen and called his Rani to counsel and she said:–“No doubt this is a *devta*: why did you strike him?” The Raja then addressed Nar-Sinha and asked that his crime might be punished. On this the deity disclosed himself and said:–“I am Nar-Sinha. I was pleased with thee and therefore came to thy darbar: now thy fault shall be punished in this wise: thou shalt leave this pleasant Jyotirdham and go into Katyur and there establish thy home. Remember that this wound which thou hast given me shall also be seen on the image in my temple, and when that image shall fall to pieces and the hand shall no more remain, thy house shall fall to ruin and thy dynasty shall disappear from amongst the princes in the world.”

This narrative is still in circulation in Joshimath, but now it is connected to Badrīnāth or even more to Bhaviṣya Badrī, since when the indeed very thin wrist of the *mūrti* of Nar-Sinha will break, it is said that the mountains above Viṣṇu prayāg will collapse and block the path to Badrīnāth. For more on this narrative see, chapter 2.7.3

¹⁵It is addressed to the officials in the district of Tanganapura and records the grant to the temple of Badari by Padmata Deva, son of Desata Deva, of the Baleshvar plate of four villages situated in Drumati in the district of Tanganapura (Atkinson 2002:II:472).

¹⁶According to Viyogi and Ansari (2010:366), he reigned between 854-876 CE, while Handa (2002:31) gives the dates 955 to 970 CE. Handa’s dating seems to be wrong considering that

3.2 *The Political History of Uttarākhaṇḍ*

per of Brahma, an enemy of Budha Sravana” (Atkinson 2002:II:470). This is also exemplified by Handa (2002:31), who writes that “despite the anti-Buddhist campaign of Shankaracharya and his followers, the Buddhism continued to survive in Uttarakhand until Bhu Dev came to power.” Handa (ibid.) further suggests “that Patmata Dev was as much inimical to Buddhism as his predecessor, Bhu Dev.” It seems that there had been a gradual change in the faith of the Katyūrī rulers. While tradition has it that Vasu Dev, who founded the “Katyuri dynasty at Jyotirmath” (Handa 2002:25), was “originally a follower of the Buddhism, but later turned to the Brahmanic faith” (Handa 2002:25-26), his later successors were eager to leave no trace of Buddhism in their kingdom.

When the Katyūrī domination of this area finally ended in the 12th century, and a few centuries previously in Garhwal, they left this landscape enriched by numerous temples they had commissioned and given a unique style. The question remains, if it were the Katyūrīs who were the first to extensively built temples in this area, or if it was indeed a lack of sacred structures due to the anti-Buddhist efforts of Bhu Dev and Patmata Dev that made new temples necessary.

3.2.2 Parmar Dynasty

While the Katyūrī kings still ruled the North of Garhwal a second lineage established their reign in the mountains, first in Kumaon. There are several lists¹⁷ of the Parmar rulers, and generally it is believed that Kanak Pal was the founder of the Parmar dynasty of the Garhwali sovereigns. Yet, neither the date¹⁸ of his arrival nor his region of origin are undisputed. According to Beckett, Kanak Pal came from Gujarat (Atkinson 2002:II:446). This was obviously something of interest to the Rājas of Garhwal for a long time, and they made an enquiry to the royal family

Bhudeva was the successor of Lalitsuradeva, whose date is pretty much confirmed to be around 850 CE (Sircar 1960).

¹⁷Those by Captain Hardwick (1796), Beckett (1849) and William (see Rawat 2002:22).

¹⁸Rawat (2002:27) gives two different years – 688 and 888 CE – both years are approved by several scholars.

3 Historical Sources

of the Dhār State in 1927 (Rawat 2002:27). Yet, the rulers of Dhār denied any relationship between the two families (Rawat 2002:28). In 1940, inscriptions had been discovered in Cāndpur (close to Ādi Badri) which “clearly evidenced” that “Kanak Pal came from somewhere in Goojar Desh”¹⁹ (ibid.). Atkinson (2002:II:446) remarks that there was another migration from the South: “A cadet of the Panwar house of Dharanagar came on a pilgrimage to the holy places in the hills and visited Son Pal²⁰ on his way” (ibid.). Son Pāl had no son and thus he gave his daughter to him in marriage. This cadet (Kadil Pāl), who would later become the 25th sovereign of the Parmar dynasty, founded the city of Shrinagar according to Beckett’s list, (ibid.). Instead Walton (1994:114) notes that it was Ajay Pal²¹ who shifted the capital from Cāndpur to Devalgarh²² in the 14th century. Further Walton (ibid.) notes that “it was not until the reign of Ajai Pal that they acquired the hegemony of the country by subdueing the indigenous Khasiya Rajas.” Ajay Pāl is not only compelling as the first person to unite the different *garhs* (forts) into Garhwal (land or kingdom of forts), but he was also a very prominent member and guru of the *Nāth sampradāy*.

Briggs (2001:74) remarks that “Raja Ajay Pal was the founder of one of the ten sects of Gorakh Panthis,” and Rawat (2002:34) notes that “Devalgarh is the ‘Pith,’ i.e. the seat of saint Satnath of the Gorakhnath Panth [...]” Mahipat Shah²³ was the 46th Rāja²⁴ in the Parmar dynasty, and thus most likely the one who Andrade met on his way to Tsaparang and whose war with the Guge empire²⁵ was described

¹⁹“Goojar Desh comprised the states of Rajasthan, a part of Maharashtra, a part of Madhya Pradesh, Malwa and Gujarat” (ibid.).

²⁰24th Raja, died in 1216 CE, according to Beckett’s list (ibid.).

²¹37th Rāja, died in 1446 CE, according to Beckett’s list, or 1358-1370 CE according to Walton (ibid.).

²²Devalgarh is fairly close to Shrinagar, up on the hill.

²³The title “Shah” was given by the Buhlul Khan Lodhi to Balbhadra Pal (reigned from 1473 to 1498 CE). All sovereigns after him wore the name Shah instead of Pal (Handa 2002:118).

²⁴Reigned from 1631 to 1635 CE, according to Rawat (2002:39), or 1582 to 1631 CE according to Handa (2002:123).

²⁵Handa (2002:123) notes that according to “folk traditions [...] Mahipati Shah led an expedition in the north against the bordering Tibetan kingdoms and subdued them so that the north-Western border of his kingdom extended to the source of the Sutluj.” We know this incident from Andrade, but here with a different outcome.

3.2 *The Political History of Uttarākhaṇḍ*

later on. Garhwal bordered with Tibet, the Mugal empire and Sikh kingdoms as well and those relationships were not always peaceful: during the reign of Prithvi Pat Shah, Aurangzeb attempted a failed annexation of Garhwal (Rawat 2002).²⁶ Also during the reign of Prithvi Pat Shah, the Jesuits were allowed to build a church in Shrinagar (Rawat 2002:47). Yet, not everything was favorable under his rule, since he had to accept a defeat as well, when Kehri Singh of the Bushahr kingdom vanquished him and made Prithvi Pat Shah his tributary (Handa 2002:126).

It is mostly such warfare that is recorded in the histories of Garhwal, but there have also been considerable contacts to the surrounding kingdoms and different religions. There is almost nothing recorded in writing that would connect these politics directly with the shrine of Badrīnāth, but we will see later how these two may in fact be connected. Finally, we should mention Pradīp Shāh (1717 - 1772 CE, Handa 2002:138) and his connection to a local narrative. It is said that Pradīp Shāh was visiting Badrīnāth on pilgrimage and noticed that there was no head priest at the spot, and so he appointed the cook Gopāl as Rawal (Babulkar n.d.:48). The year of installment of the first Rawal is supposed to be 1777 CE, by which Pradīp had already died, according to the dates of Handa, while according to Beckett's list he died in 1829 CE. This may also be the time when Badrīnārāyaṇ first became connected to the dynasty of Parmar.

3.2.3 **Gorkha Rule**

The last king of Shrinagar was Pradyumna Shah²⁷, who was driven away from his kingdom by Gorkha forces in 1803 and finally died at the battle of Khurbura (near Dehra Dun) (Rawat 2002:64). Prior to the usurpation of the Gorkhalis, Garhwal was already weakened by two famines and an earthquake (ibid.). The invasion

²⁶The mother of Prithvi Pat Shah, who ruled instead of the underage king, was called "Nak Katti Rani," since she had the noses of all survivors of Aurangzeb's army chopped off (Rawat 2002:41-44).

²⁷Again, the dates of his rule are not entirely clear: "Beckett states that he ruled from 1786 to 1804. Ratūrī is of the view that he ruled from 1797 to 1804, and Mukandi Lal has fixed his period from 1785 to 1804" (Rawat 2002:65).

3 Historical Sources

of Gorkhas actually started in 1791, but it was delayed when the Chinese in turn invaded Nepal (Rawat 2002:63). By the year 1804, most of Garhwal was in the hands of the Gorkhas, who according to local sentiments have a bad reputation, as cruel and suppressing. Raper, on his way to the source of the Ganges in 1808 gives a small taste of why the Gorkha rule was perceived as gruesome:

At the foot of the pass leading to Har-ka-pairi is a Gorkhali post, to which slaves are brought down from the hills and exposed for sale. Many hundreds of poor wretches, of both sexes, from three to thirty years are brought down from all parts of the interior of the hills and sold at Hardwar from ten to one hundred and fifty rupees each. (Atkinson 2002:II:620)

Even though the Gorkhas had little benevolence towards the population, the important temples were not plundered, but received respect and donations. The Rāja of the time, Sudarshan Shah, stayed in Bareilly, where in 1811 he promised Captain Hyder Young Hearsay to give him the Doon valley and Chandi in order to free Garhwal²⁸ (Atkinson 2002:II:680). This contract proved to be the initial separation of Garhwal into Tehri Garhwal and British Garhwal.

3.2.4 Tehri and British Garhwal

In 1815, the British had freed the kingdom of Garhwal from the usurpers from Nepal, but the Rājas of Garhwal would lose not only the Doon valley but more than half of their old kingdom to the British. In this way, “[...] Mr. W. Fraser in 1815, was authorised to hand over to the king the portion of Garhwal situated to the west of the Alakananda with the express reservation of the Dehra Dun and the parganah of Rawain laying between. [...] Mr Fraser was directed to consult with Mr. Gardner as to the actual boundary which should be fixed with a view to control the route to Tibet by passes available for commercial intercourse” (Atkinson 2002:II:680).

²⁸Rawat (2002:79) writes that Sudarshan Shah sold these lands to Hearsay for Rs 3005.

3.2 *The Political History of Uttarākhaṇḍ*

Through such intent of keeping the passes leading into Tibet for themselves, it happened that Badrīnāth came under British rule. Why Kedārīnāth was included as well may also become clear from following statement: “The furnishing of supply to the pilgrims who annually visited the shrines of Badrinath [and Kedarnath] was also an important source of income [and tax]” (Rawat 2002:73). The fact that the ruling house of Garhwal had a close relationship to both shrines remained unknown to the British for a longer time, or actually was used by them to show their hegemonic power. In later years, this issue of the two temples inside the British territory would lead to dissonance between the Rājā and the British.²⁹

3.2.5 Post Independence

“In 1949, it [Tehri Garhwal] merged into the young State of the Indian Union after the abdication of its king and the almost total renunciation by the ruling clan of its former privileges” (Galey 1992:179-180). While Uttar Pradesh emerged out of the United Provinces in 1950, the idea of dividing this large state into smaller ones³⁰ never ceased to attract support. While the idea of the Indian states is based on languages, in the process of the separation of Uttarakhand³¹ “dialect communities” (Kumar 2000:80) were taken into account.

The process of establishing the state had many aspects, both political and culturally, but two aspects are noteworthy: Uttarakhand is essentially formed of the two traditional kingdoms of Garhwal and Kumaon, and it was difficult to convince the inhabitants of both regions to work together, since the two kingdoms had engaged in military conflicts in the past. Further, certain issues of this rivalry survive to this day:

The tradition is popularly known by the name “Khatarwa” [...]. The

²⁹This will be explained in detail in chapter 5.1.1 and 5.1.2.

³⁰The notion of splitting UP into Bundelkhand, Braj Pradesh, Harit Pradesh and Poorva Pradesh was rekindled again recently after the proclamation of Telangana in 2013.

³¹Uttarakhand became an independent state in the year 2000, but it was known under the name Uttaranchal until 2006.

3 Historical Sources

popular history attributes this name of the festival to Khatar Singh who was said to be the General of the Garhwali King, and when defeated, was hanged by the Kumaonis. The news of the Kumaoni's victory on the Garhwal King was conveyed to the Kumaoni King by making a bonfire on the hill tops. Thus the celebration of the event, and now its commemoration, involves the bonfire on hill tops (Kumar 2000:164-165).

The pilgrimage sites played a major role in overcoming difficulties like this, in the area. They played “a crucial part [...] among the hill dwellers who consider ‘their hills’ as central to the very sacred history of the Hindus” (Kumar 2000:173). On the other hand, Sax (2011:175-176) points out that the major pilgrimage centers are located very disproportionately: “[they] are almost all in Garhwal.” As an alternative “symbol of belonging,” Sax (2011) suggest the goddess Nandādevī whose cult has many followers, both in Garhwal and Kumaon.

Thus, this section has demonstrated that Badrīnāth is deeply embedded in the histories of the kingdoms of Garhwal, British Garhwal and Uttarakhand, and that it played a vital role in the politics that governed this region.

3.3 Buddhism and Badrīnāth

Surprisingly, many pilgrims see the main entrance of the temple as proof of its former use as a Buddhist shrine, since it reminds them of Buddhist³² architecture. In the last fifty years, the question, whether the temple was indeed once worshipped by the followers of the Buddha has lost its importance. It is difficult to say, if this was due to the cessation of cross-border traffic from Tibet or due to the commitment of the priests in Badrīnāth – probably both played a role. There still are two narratives alive that imply this past, i.e. Badrīnārāyaṇ's escape from Tholing and Śāṅkara's visit to Badrīnāth. Yet, how can these claims be treated historically?

According to the report of Xuanzang, who came into this region in the 7th century

³²Actually, it is closer to a Mughal style in my opinion.

(see chapter 3.1), we can assume that at that time there had been a vital Buddhist community within this part of the Himalayas. Further, it is said that Bhudeva, a Katyūrī king who lived in the 9th century, was “an enemy of Budha Sravana” (Atkinson 2002:II:470). In the 12th century, the reign of the Katyūrīs ended with the invasion of Aneka Malla³³ or Ashoka Challa. During this time, at least the region between Gopeśvar and Joshimath was under the rule of the Mallas and Atkinson (2002:II:515) notes that “Aneka Malla was a devout Buddhist and the Nepālese records also state that the Mallas were Buddhists.” Ratūrī (2007:143), also refers to Atkinson when he claims that there had been a Buddhist monastery in Joshimath prior to Śaṅkarācārya, because of the Buddhist king of Kārtikeypur.

The history shows that the rulers in this region changed fast and so did their support or persecution of different religions. Thus, at least since the time of Andrade’s visit, all traces of (living) Buddhist culture had vanished and Badrīnāth is described as a distinctly Hindu pilgrimage center. The fact that Buddhism was previously practiced in the region is not only evident from the caravans coming from Tibet but also by the collection of Mani-stones in Mana. However, did the Buddhists come into this region primarily for trade, did they pass through on pilgrimage, or was Badrīnāth in fact of importance to them?

Andrade notes that, during a short encounter between Tsaparang and Śrīnagar, scouts that had been captured by the army of Guge had achieved their freedom by claiming that they carried letters for peace negotiations from Badrīnāth.³⁴ This demonstrates not only that Badrīnāth was indeed known to the rulers of Guge, but it also had a significance to them. This connection is further evidenced as it in that the temple of Badrīnāth received presents such as tea and yaks were from the monks of Tibet who received *prasād* and clothes from the temple in return (see

³³“Aneka Malla was the conqueror of Garhwal and the sacred Kedar-bhumi.” (Atkinson 2002:II:515)

³⁴“Außerdem konnte der tibetische König eine Menge Kundschafter abfangen, die allerdings vorgaben, mit einem Brief vom Heiligtum Badrinath zwecks Friedensverhandlungen unterwegs zu sein. Mit dieser Ausrede erreichten sie, daß man sie zurückkehren ließ” (Aschoff 1989:42).

3 Historical Sources

Ratūrī 2007:26). Sāṅkṛtyāyan has no doubt about the Buddhist origin³⁵ of the idol of Badrīnārāyaṇ, and he even suggests that the metal image of Nārada is in fact a Buddhist *mūrti*. The following quote gives his view on the history of Badrīnāth:

Thus, during this time [9th century] Buddhism was well-known in Himalayas, like in Nepal, however, because the Tibetan rulers had great devotion for the Buddhist faith, they built many Buddhist *vihārs*, also in Kedārkhāṇḍ during this time. In the middle of the 9th century, when the Tibetan empire was beginning its decline, it seems at the same time, their rule in this region came to an end. Through the rebellions [in Kedārkhāṇḍ] and conflicts with other countries, Buddhism, being the religion of the [foreign] rulers also suffered. This is the reason, why there is such an absence of Buddhist *mūrtis* in Kumaun and Garhwal. In such places like Kumaon's Dwarahat, Baijnāth and Bāgeśvar, are hundreds of broken idols, yet no [intact] Buddhist idol can be found. [...] In Garhwal only three idols or stupas can be found; there is no doubt that one of these Buddhist *mūrtis* is the standing metal image, [now] worshipped under the name Dattātreya in Bārahāt (Uttarkāśī).³⁶ This image was made on the order of king Nāgrāj, who ruled Western Tibet in the beginning of the 11th century. In the Maṇḍākinī valley, outside the temple of Nālācaṭṭī is a Buddhist Stupa made of stone [...]. If the metal statues of Tuṅgnāth and Badrīnāth (Nārada) are omitted, then the third is the Buddhist-statue of Badrīnāth. [...] The previous Rawal, Śrī Bagvārī jī as well as many other virtuous men, said that even today

³⁵Sāṅkṛtyāyan (1953:475) even notes that a former Rawal believed that it was in fact a Buddhist idol, since he could see the *mūrti* from up close and has been to Sārṇāth and saw the similarities. This may also explain why it was previously allowed to take pictures of Badrīnārāyaṇ, which later was forbidden by the temple committee.

³⁶Handa and Jain (2003:134), note that when they went looking for this statue in September 2002, they were "told that the image of Dattātreya has been removed to safe custody." They further remark that "those important evidences – [the] trident inscription and the image [Dattātreya's] inscription – and the local tradition may lead us to conclude that Nagaraja and Devraja brought the northern part of Garhwal to the subjugation of Guge (Tibet)" (ibid.).

there are some statues inside the Nārādkuṇḍ. [...]

This is my hypothesis about the *mūrti* of Badrīnāth: in the 9th century, local leaders [aristocrats] were in struggle with the Tibetans to remove the Tibetan rule. During this time many Buddhist temples and idols were destroyed. Among these destroyed *mūrtis* was the present statue of Badrīnāth, which was thrown into the Nārādkuṇḍ. Reference of the Mānāvālī tradition about the presence of this statue must be an indication towards those *vihāras* and statues in the 9th century. During this time, or later, upon the removal of the Buddhist's *mūrti*, some Katyūri king had a temple for Vāsudeva or Badrīnāth built, if there had not been any before. Whether Tukariyā Husain Khān³⁷ had reached here, he must have destroyed the *mūrtis* in the fourth quarter of the 16th century, otherwise it were the Rohillas, who, after plundering and utterly destroying the temple, broke the idol, and also then the *mūrti* of Badrīnāth arrived [was thrown] in the Nārādkuṇḍ, the place where the present Buddhist *mūrti*, in form of Badrīnāth, together with his companions, originally was. The Nārādkuṇḍ became a kind of “Samādhi-sthān” of Buddhist and Brahman idols. Later some *saṃnyāsī*, heard of this tradition and attempted to bring the idol out of the Nārādkuṇḍ. Back in this time the *mūrti* of Badrīnāth that had been thrown [into the river] was not found, but an old Buddhist idol came to hand. Any Paṇḍit did not realize that this is a Buddhist *mūrti*. It is said, the idol was just so placed and worshipped for some time, until some king of Garhwal had a temple built; then it was placed there. We cannot say that the old *mūrti* of Badrīnāth

³⁷According to Handa (2002:72-73), “Emperor Akbar had appointed a Kashmiri fanatic Muslim named Husain Khan as the governor of Lahore”. Because Husain once “mistook a bearded Brahman to be a Mullah,” he ordered that all Hindus “should carry a cloth-piece (called *tukara* in the vernacular) on their shoulders as visible identification marks – this led to his “nickname”. After he was removed as the governor of Oudh, “he advanced to Kumaon with ‘the design of breaking down down the idols and of demolishing the idol-temples’” (Abdul Quadir Badauni as cited in Handa 2002:73).

3 Historical Sources

is certainly in the Nāradaḅḅ. If it was thrown in the Nāradaḅḅ, then it must be found there and if it was thrown somewhere in the stream of the Alakanandā, then it is impossible to find it. However, to know more about the history of Badrīnāth, it is necessary to retrieve the [original] *mūrti* [of Badrīnārāyaḅ]. (Sāḅkrityāyaḅ 1953: 476-477, translated from Hindi by the author)

In respect of the early history of Badrīnāth, Sāḅkrityāyaḅ adds in a few interesting views, although he too is bound to vague speculations. Intriguing is the addition of a second time the *mūrti* of Badrīnārāyaḅ is thrown into the Nāradaḅḅ. It remains obscure why this is necessary to his narrative. If his intention was to keep the cult of Nārāyaḅ safe of Buddhist “heresy,” I fail to see the point. Why would it be better to worship a Buddhist *mūrti* as Badrīnārāyaḅ, while the “real” one still lies at the bottom of the Alakanandā, than worshipping a *mūrti* of Badrīnārāyaḅ that was previously worshipped by the Buddhists, especially since he even admits that also the statue of Nārada might be of Buddhist origin?

There are no documents about the exact routes Tukariyā Husain Khān or the Rohillas took, and thus it is uncertain if they ever made it in this high valley. Concerning the political influence of the rulers of Tibet, Sāḅkrityāyaḅ sees the end of their impact on the region and the temple far too early. The Guge empire only collapsed after Andrade set foot there, and while it seems clear that Badrīnāth was already a site for Hindu pilgrimage during his time, one can also assume that this happened a few years earlier. Considering Hacker’s (1978) thesis of the instrumentalization of the Cār Dhām by the Vijayanagar kingdom, one can assume that the “Hinduization” of the temple started in the 14th century and perhaps it was during this time that the Buddhists were driven away “with both weapons and arguments” (Sax 2000:47). Further, it is not necessary to look beyond the borders of Uttarakhand, since Handa (2002:31) already notes that “[Bhu Dev³⁸] is known to have wiped

³⁸A Katyūri ruler of Jośimath. See also chapter 3.2.1.

out the extant evidences of Buddhism in his kingdom”.

There is an additional point worth adding here. Vaiṣṇav (2010:130) remarks that, Rāhul Sāṅkṛtyāyan according to his book entitled *Badrīnāth Yātrā*, spent one night in Tholing. Sāṅkṛtyāyan states that the *pūjā* there and in the temple of Badrīnāth is in no way different. The Lāmā priest there told them that in the same way you worship the lord in Badrīnāth, we worship our lord here.

A few decades before Rahūl set his foot inside the temple, the pilgrimage was performed by a disciple of Swami Vivekananda – Sister Nivedita. Unexpectedly, she sees traces of Buddhism everywhere in the Himalayas and believes that “with Buddhism we come to the bedrock of Himalayan religion” (Nivedita 1923:81):

There is only a trace here and there. Most of the evidence is built upon inference. One or two of these chaitya-like³⁹ buildings, and here and there the head of a bodhisattva are all the direct testimony that I have been able to find, yet it seems probable that the first religious organization of the Himalayas was the work of Buddhism, that all subsequent movements poured their influence in upon the spots which that first enthusiasm had created, and that therefore all the most ancient sites in the Himawant derive their authority and sanctity from the Buddhist orders.” (Nivedita 1928:81-82)

Even though she is even inclined to think that “Badrī” might be a corrupt form of “Buddha,” she has also an interesting observation to add:

The true place of Badri Narayana in history may perhaps be better understood when it is mentioned that it was long a pilgrimage of obligation to the Tibetan Lamas, and that even now certain Tibetan monasteries pay it tribute. It is for them, in fact, the first of a chain of sacred places that ends, for the Buddhistic nations, with Gaya. (Nivedita 1923:68)

³⁹She particularly refers to a “a little shrine of Anusuya Devi, standing to the side of the main temple” (ibid.)

3 Historical Sources

Following Nivedita's claim, the pilgrimage of Badrīnāth was performed not only from the South to the North, but also vice versa. Yet the exclusive depiction of the culture and religion of the Himalayas as either Buddhist or Hindu is concerning. Apart from the fact that, in many regions, such as Kinnaur, both religions complement each other, there certainly was, and maybe still is, a distinct "Himalayan culture"⁴⁰ that though time was colored by one or the other great tradition and becomes most visible at the periphery of the centers of either religion. Therefore I believe that the following statement of Nivedita is only partially true.

"For the Himalayas have not been central. They have been receptive, not creative. The forces that have overswept them have all originated elsewhere." (Nivedita 1928:75)

Finally, it is unfortunate that the need to obscure an undesired past succeeded over the notion that God is one, as put so eloquently by Vaiṣṇav (2010:129): "the Hindus believe in this *mūrti* in every aspect, because Nārāyaṇ, Buddh and Ṛṣbhadev are all three incarnations of Viṣṇu." While this may sound patronizing to the followers of the Tirthaṅkaras and the Buddha, it at least accommodates a certain respect for the views of the others.

Molārām (1740-1833 CE) has put this antagonism into verse, which in Handa's and Jain's (2003:209) translation reads: "[in] Kedarhkand [sic!] on [sic!] the north, the God [Viṣṇu] is in the form of the Buddha. He, having pleasing black complexion, sits there in meditation."⁴¹

3.3.1 The Tibetan Side of Things

India as the place where the Buddha lived and preached, has always played a big role for Buddhists all over the world. In this sense it unsurprising that India has an important role in Tibet as well. Since Buddhism was virtually inexistent in

⁴⁰This concerns the Western Himalayas, i.e. from Himachal Pradesh to Muktināth in Nepal.

⁴¹"*Keḍārṣaṇḍ [sic] uttar diṣai, bhaye bauddha hari-rūpa. Baiṭhyai dyān lagāya kai, sundar śyām anūp*" (Ratūrī 2007:143).

India until the Tibetan diaspora in the late 1950's, there was a renewed interest to rediscover places of Buddhist interest. Of course this focused on places, now in the hands of the Hindu traditions, or what Toni Huber (2008:161) calls “seeing Buddhism in Hinduism.” Huber (ibid.) defines this as “a phenomenon which has allowed Tibetans to keep claiming the survival of Buddhism in India for many centuries after [...] the religion had died out completely in its land of origins.” The fact that India was then predominantly Hindu is not a problem *per se*, since, as a justification they assumed that the Hindus “remained essentially ‘Buddhist’ in their [...] thought and action” (Huber 2008:163).⁴² Apart from the obvious sites like Bodh Gaya or Sarnath (Sārṇāth), they often went by name.

For example. Śrīnagara (“Srinagar“) is an auspicious and attractive name which means something like “City of Fortune” or “Splendid City” [...]. For Tibetans, the name Śrīnagara has been related to the sought-after sites of the life of the eleventh-century Tantric Buddhist Siddha Nāropa. [...] Another Tibetan tradition, this time based upon knowledge of the Śrīnagara which was once the capital of Garhwal on the upper course of the Ganges, accordingly identified Pūllahari at the nearby and very important Hindu tīrtha of Haridwar, and Tibetan pilgrims set about visiting that site as a Buddhist destination. (Huber 2008:162-163)

Even though names often served as a marker for the acknowledgement of former Buddhist place, it seems strange that Badrīnāth, with the Buddhist narratives of its history, seems never to have been reclaimed by Tibetan Buddhists.

Although there are few accounts (Sāṅkṛtyāyan 1953 and Tapovanam 1990) of people of Tholing or Tsaparang being inclined to acknowledge Badrīnārāyaṇ as part of their tradition, from the official side there is only one slight hint which points in this direction. On the 10th of December 1952, Raghubir Singh inquired to the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in reference to the “occupation of Indian

⁴²Another explanation for the decline of their faith in India is that “Indian Buddhism fell victim to Muslim invasions.” (Huber ibid.)

3 Historical Sources

Territory by Tibetans,” “whether it is a fact that the Tibetans have claimed the areas where the Gangotri and Badrinath temples are situated” (Rajya Sabha 2006:5). The Deputy Minister for External Affairs replied with a simple “Government is not aware of this and such a question does not arise” (ibid.). If there was no basis for this inquiry, it would be unlikely that this question would have arisen in the Rajya Sabha. Nonetheless, this does not simply imply a religious motivation of this claims and in fact it is more probable that it was based on the Bhotiyas living in these regions, who were for long taxed by the Tibetan rulers.

One explanation for this obvious neglect of Badrīnāth on behalf of the Buddhists is that it never was an important shrine for the Buddhists in Tibet in general. Although there are only a few accounts of the Tibetan point of view, it seems that if Badrīnāth had an importance for them, then it was limited to Tsaparang and Tholing. According to Huber (2008:7), there were in fact plenty “pilgrims from Tibet traveling to India during the eleventh through thirteenth centuries,” and it would seem likely that they had a small shrine to give thanks after traversing the treacherous Mana pass and the same is true for the traders coming from Tibet to sell their goods in India. Even though Huber (2008:2) states that “if there is one place, one land, which the people of Tibet have held in highest esteem, above all others – even often above their own land – it is India,” I believe that at least after the 13th century, when Buddhism became virtually extinct in India, the focus of the Tibetan Buddhists was more on their own country and their travels to India became meaningless, at least from a religious point of view. While Sāṅkṛtyāyan believes it were rebellions that caused the Buddhists to abandon Badrīnāth, it is more likely that the living centers of Buddhism in Tibet became more interesting than the southern Muslim and Hindu side of the Himalayas.

Apart from the political implications such a claim by Tibetan Buddhist would have had, especially after 1950, and based on the critical response the small Jaina prayer hall in Badrīnāth evoked, it becomes clear why such claims have not been uttered.

Yet the main reason is that the connection was primarily to Tholing, and when the Guge empire collapsed in the early 17th century, so did most of the ties between these two places.

There are very few accounts of pilgrims who made their way further north from Badrīnāth. One of these accounts is from Sri Swami Tapovanam, who first came into this region on pilgrimage in 1924. A few years later – he does not give the exact year – he ventured further to visit the holy mountain of Kailāś. He traveled in a group of seventeen or eighteen sadhus and describes the hardships of crossing the Mana pass in great detail: “Up to Badrinath, it is different. There is a clear path; but beyond it, there is none” (Tapovanam 1990:219). Most of the way, they were following a party of Tibetan merchants “who were on their way home from Badrinath” (ibid.:220). Upon reaching the pass, they came to a place “where the Deity of the Pass was supposed to reside. Here it is a heap of stones that is believed to represent the Deity” (ibid.:224). On the way down to the Tibetan plateau, there is a spot with the hoof marks of the horses of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa. “These marks are regarded as the memorials of Rama’s trip to Kailas in the company of his favorite brother” (ibid.:225). It took them thirteen days to cover the distance between Badrīnāth and Tholing and this is how Tapovanam describes Tholing:

Thholingamatam is a vast lamaseri in Western Tibet. The area surrounding the mutt also is called Thholingamatam. The lamaseri stands on a vast plain stretching along the bank of the Sutlej. It is an uncommonly beautiful and holy place. The land here is reddish in colour and it is surrounded on all sides by chains of bare, dark mountains whose peaks are capped with snow. The building is surrounded by walls of mud. The walls of the building too are made of mud and are erected in a particularly fashion, with no roofing.⁴³ Compared with the other structures of the region, the monastery is indeed majestic with its grand

⁴³This may be a reason for, why in many versions of the narrative of Badrīnārāyaṇ’s escape, he often destroys the roof of his own temple.

3 Historical Sources

decorations and lavish furnishing. It has a dignity of its own. High over the edifices of the monastery, fluttered flags in different colors. It is said that usually hundred to hundred and fifty lamas reside at this lamaseri. (Tapovanam 1990:217)

They stayed a few days in Tholing, and while they did not get the opportunity to meet the “High Lama as he was just then away at a famous health resort called Garthoke where he used to spend his summer” (1990:227), they were shown around by another lama:

The lama, who acted as our guide, pointing out the gigantic figure of Lord Buddha, told us that it was Badrinarayan. The lamas of Thholingamatam, as well as the mountain-folk living among the Himalayas, believe that Thholingamatam was the original seat of Badrinarayan and that the temple of Badrinarayan was built at a lower level later on as Thholingam proved to be almost inaccessible to people from the southern plains. (Tapovanam 1990:226)

Tapovanam further adds his own perspective of this explanation by the lama, saying: “To me this view does not seem cogent but I do not here propose to set forth my reasons why the view is unacceptable, for fear of over elaboration” (1990:226-227). It might be a coincidence that he does not reproduce this narrative in his chapter on Badrināth, but it also fits the main theme demonstrated in this work that the people in and around Badrināth try to avoid this topic as much as possible. Tapovanam is the only who mentions the Tibetan side of this narrative, which shows that it is not an invention of the people of Mana, but that they might in fact have acted as its messengers.

4 The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside

4.1 Badrīnāth in the Scriptures

In order to present the full picture of the development of the temple and the importance of Badrīnāth as a pilgrimage center, it is necessary to investigate also the Epics and Purāṇas.

There are basically three types of scripted references to Badrīnāth: either the benefits of visiting the area of Badrīnāth and its various *tīrthas* are described, or Badrīnāth serves as a stage for a particular myth, or Badrīnāth is simply part of a list of sacred sites. The first reference is usually found in sections of Purāṇas, which are often tellingly titled as Māhātmyas or Sthalapurāṇas.

4.1.1 Epics

While there is no reference to the hermitage of Nar and Nārāyaṇ in the Rāmayaṇa *per se*, one does come across a few *ślokas* which mention Badarī, the fruit of the jujube tree or the tree itself.¹ In the Mahābhārata, the area of Badrīnāth is extensively described in two similar stories, which Grünendahl (1993) has named “the Gandhamādana-Episodes” (MBh 3.80.40 - 83.95 and 3.85 - 88). It is interesting to note that while the hermitage of Nar and Nārāyaṇ is mentioned in one of the two episodes, neither the brothers themselves nor Viṣṇu, in any of his forms, play any

¹The tree and its significance in the Hindu culture will be discussed later on in chapter 4.4.1.

4 *The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside*

role. In both of these episodes, the Pāṇḍavas travel into the Himalayas and take the difficult and treacherous way to the Gandhamādana²-mountain. In both episodes, Bhīma kills a large amount of *rākṣasas* and *yakṣas* who refused him access to the mountain top, from where Bhīma wanted to gather the saugandhika³ flowers for Draupadī.⁴ However, these two narratives differ in one important detail. In the first episode, they stay in the *āśrama* of Nar and Nārāyaṇ, where they admire “the beautiful, round-stemmed Jujube Tree, sleek, casting unbroken shade, over-spread by a superb luster, shining with a smooth and thick foliage of soft leaves, wide, with heavy branches, boundlessly radiant, piled up with plentiful sweet berries that dripped honey – forever divine and sought out by the hosts of great seers” (van Buitenen 1975:2:497). The second narrative is similar, but they spent their time in the hermitage of Ārṣṭiṣeṇa, “which stood full of flowers and fruit-laden trees” (van Buitenen 1975:2:523), and is without any reference to a Badrī-tree. Grünendahl (1993:110-117) gives a good explanation for both the similarities as well as the differences of these narratives. He argues that the first narrative is the younger one and also the first to be “interspersed with theological ideas, whose center forms the adoration of Nārāyaṇa” (Grünendahl 1993:113).

In this light, it seems improbable that the Gandhamādana region was the initial place of the hermitage of Nar and Nārāyaṇ. The connection between the Gandamādana mountain and Badrikāśrama may correlate with the other part of the Mahābhārata which mentions this hermitage – the Nārāyaṇīya. Also in this case Grünendahl (1997:209) has a possible solution at hand. He states that “the geography of the Nārāyaṇīya has three fixed points of reference, the mountain Gandhamādana along with the *āśrama* Badarī (321.10; 321.13f.) and – quasi on a higher plane – Śvetadvīpa, the place of the released [beings].” Grünendahl (1997:209) further proposes that “these coordinates [form] a mythic-religious geography that is

²“Intoxicating with fragrance” (Monier-Williams).

³The “good smelling,” probably the main reason for the name of the mountain.

⁴Grünendahl (1993:105fn) remarks that in the second episode Bhīma was not in search for the flowers, but was asked by Draupadī “to grant ‘his friends’ access to this wonderful mountain.”

closely bound with the Nārāyaṇa-theology.” Therefore, it is highly probable that it was the early followers of Nārāyaṇ who stressed the connection of Gandhamādana and Badarikāśrama, and that both places as well as the Kailāś (which most likely is identical to the Gandhamādana mountain, as shown by Grünendahl (1993) and further discussed later in this chapter), actually did not refer to real places, but were part of a mythological landscape – no realer than Śvetadvīpa, and were only re-located later on.

4.1.2 Purāṇas

The Purāṇas are a vast and valuable collection of texts, but due to their heterogeneity they also pose great difficulties to scholarly study. While there is a superficial classification of Mahā and Upapurāṇas, there are also Sthala and Kulapurāṇas as well as “additions” to Purāṇas, like the Kedārahāṇḍa⁵, which is part of “*antargata*” of the Skanda Purāṇa.

While the Mahāpurāṇas are considered more authentic than those in the other groups, even these have been subject to change, over a long time and different manuscripts of the same Mahāpurāṇa may vary greatly. Taking this into account, it is unsurprising that dating the Purāṇas poses great difficulties. Wendy Doninger O’Flaherty (1987:16-17) believes that “the dating of the Purāṇas is [...] an art – it can hardly be called a science,” and she continues by saying that “since the Epics and Purāṇas represent an oral tradition that was constantly revised over a period of several thousand years, a passage actually composed in the twelfth century A.D. may represent a surprisingly accurate preservation of a myth handed down since the twelfth century B.C. – or a completely original retelling of that myth” (ibid.). Thus, it becomes clear that the Purāṇas are not of much help in the search of the (historical) origin of Badrināth, but may still provide a few interesting insights.

In fact, Badrināth or the Gandhamādana mountain are referenced quite frequently

⁵The Kedārahāṇḍa must not be confused with the first section of the Maheśvarahāṇḍa that bears the same name.

4 The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside

in the Purāṇas, although more detailed descriptions or even entire sections are rarely devoted to this pilgrimage place. Most of the time Badrīnāth serves as a marker, but more in a religious and spiritual sense than in a geographical one. Often, when a Purāṇa mentions Nārāyaṇa, his name is followed by Badarikāśrama, or when different people decide to do penance, such as Uddhav, Tulasī, Urvaśī or others, they are referred by the saints or gods to go to Badrīnāth.

In the following, the longer sections which provide more details on Badrīnāth will be discussed only briefly, since the passages worth mentioning, will be given in more detail in the respective chapters of this study.

It is the Skanda Purāṇa which deals most extensively with Badrīnāth, and it even possesses a section entitled *Badarikāśrama-Māhātmya* (Tagare 1994; SkP II, iii). While many refer to a passage (SkP II, iii, 5.24) for proof of the retrieval of the idol by Śaṅkarācārya (see chapter 4.5.1), the text mainly explains in great detail the merits that may be expected by the pilgrims.

In verse 1.59 of this part of the Skanda Purāṇa, the reader is informed that the name “Badarikāśrama” derives from the tree of the same name and that a group of sages dwell there. The following parts then deal with the five *śilās*, which is surprising, because today these rocks are usually enumerated to the pilgrims, but not always the same five rocks. Further there is often some confusion among the priests which rock is which, however the main point is that they have no real importance, neither for the priests nor the pilgrims today. This is different for another rock in the vicinity of Badrīnāth – the Kapālamocana, or Brahmkapāl. At this site, also called Pitṛtīrtha in the Skanda Purāṇa (II, iii, 6.4), pilgrims offer rice balls (*piṇḍas*) to their deceased ancestors. Gāyā in Bihar is generally considered the most auspicious site to contact this ritual, however the Skanda Purāṇa states that the Brahmkapāl is in fact “eight times more meritorious than Gāyā” (Tagare 1994:29; Skanda Purāṇa II, iii, 6.4).

Since in the Skanda Purāṇa it is Śiva who eulogizes Badrīnāth, there is explicit men-

tion of to his “Linga [that] has been installed [there] in the form of Kedāra” (Tagare 1994:8). Further, the Skanda Purāṇa praises the Vahnītīrtha (Taptkuṇḍ), Vasudhārā and the *tīrthas* of Mūr̥ti and Urvaśī. Although the Badarikāśrama-Māhātmya lists most of the places still venerated today, and even some that have no importance today or lost their significance over time, it seems that the main purpose of this Māhātmya was to give new meanings to places originally worshipped and venerated by the Pahārīs and Bhotiyas. This concerns especially also the five *śilās*. The Skanda Purāṇa deals with them extensively, but the attributed narratives sound generic and seem to simply attempt to explain why they are named that way. This leads to the idea that the reason for composing these descriptions was only aimed at giving them a new identity. Since the five *śilās* play almost no role anymore, it seems that these narratives succeeded in erasing their former significance but failed to give them a new and proper one.

The Nārada Purāṇa (Tagare 1982) also has a chapter dedicated to “the greatness of Badarikāśrama” (Uttarabhāga 67). This chapter follows the praise of Gaṅgādvāra (Haridwār) and leaves little speculation about the location or the name of the place: “There, lord Nārāyaṇa and the holy sage Nara who were born of Mūr̥ti and Dharma, went to Gandhamādana mountain where there is a Badarī tree endowed with many fruits of sweet fragrance” (Tagare 1982:1975; Uttarabhāga 67.4-5). Agnitīrtha (Taptkuṇḍ) and the five *śilās* are mentioned as well, but not in great detail, and so is the Nārada Kuṇḍ, although here it is Brahmā who retrieves the “image of rock situated in the Nārada Kuṇḍa” (Tagare 1982:1978; Uttarabhāga 67.35). In verses 72b-74a, it says “that Tīrtha where the Bhāgīrathī is joined by the Alakanandā [Devprayāg] is the most excellent of all holy spots in the sacred Badarikāśrama” (Tagare 1982:1981-82). It remains unclear whether this only shows a certain degree of ignorance to the actual geography, or if it means to show the vastness (*viśālā*) of Badrināth. While there is usually a certain vagueness about the exact location of Badrināth in all the scriptural sources, the Padma Purāṇa, while still unclear about

location, seems to place Badrīnāth in the vicinity of Mathurā.

4.2 An Alternative Location of Badrī

Many of the places mentioned in the Epics, Purāṇas or even Vedas have been long forgotten, however, many of them have been rediscovered, either by bold statements (this is the place!) or by connecting new places to old narratives. In this light, it may not be completely out of reason to propose that the original Badrīnāth might not have been where it is today and, in fact, a lot of narratives emphasize exactly this point.

The idea that Badrīnāth was not always where it is located now is deeply rooted in the concept of the five Badrī temples. The names of these shrines point to the idea that Badrīnārāyaṇ was previously worshipped in other temples (Ādi- and Vṛddh Badrī). Further, there is the idea that the real temple was still located in Tholing, depicting Badrīnāth as a more accessible waypoint or substitute shrine rather than the pilgrim's actual goal. Yet, usually there is no doubt that Badrīnāth is an Himalayan shrine, high up in the mountains, but there are a few hints which point towards a location further South.

The first hint lies in the name itself: the jujube tree does not grow in the high Himalayas, and therefore this famed “forest of Badrī trees” must have been situated at least in the lower valleys of the Himalaya. There are in fact a few references that place Badrīnāth closer to Mathurā than close to the Tibetan border.

The first reference is found in the lengthy narration of the Nāradiśilā (SkP II, iii, 3. 20-42). There, it is said that “Nārada of great splendor stayed at Badarī along with (the Lord) for a few days. Being delighted he went to Madhupurī (Mathurā) from there” (Tagare 1994:15). Gods and saints can travel great distances at ease, and the Purāṇas are often little concerned about their itinerary. However, this is not the only reference. In the Padma Purāṇa (Deshpande 1991:3099; PaP VI, 216), Nārada explains, “this Badarīkāśrama is situated in the region of just eleven dhanus

4.2 An Alternative Location of Badarī

(i.e. forty-four hastas) [i.e. about two kilometers] from this Madhuvana.”

Whether or not this Madhuvana really corresponds with today’s Mathurā is difficult to say, but it is clear from the preceding chapter (Padma Purāṇa VI, 215) that this forest was situated on the banks of the Yamunā. In Despande’s (1991:3102) translation of the Padma Purāṇa there is another reference to said river: “Once my celebrated teacher, Kapila, went from his hermitage to the very holy (place) called Badarī, to bathe in the water of Yamunā.” Finally chapter 216 ends with the statement that “this (holy place) called Badarī, is in Indraprastha” (Despande 1991:3106). The location of Indraprastha is unclear, and most consider that it might have existed in the vicinity of Delhi, but most likely on the banks of the Yamunā. There is no reason for only the Padma Purāṇa not to localize Badarīnāth in the Himalayas and on the banks of the Gaṅgā, but instead somewhere between Mathurā and Delhi along the Yamunā.

In fact, there was another Badarikāśrama on the banks of the Yamunā, but it was further downstream. The reference is found in an inscription dating to the reign of the king Vaiśravaṇa and “may be assigned to the fourth century A.D.” (Chakravarti 1942:146). “The language of the inscription is a mixture of Sanskrit and Prākṛit” (ibid.) and therefore it speaks of Badarikārāma. The inscription tells of a dedication of “an umbrella in the temple of Pūrvasiddha in Badarikārāma, for the worship of the lord, the *pītāmaha*, i.e. the Buddha” (Chakravarti 1942:148). Although the inscription gives no further information, Chakravarti (1942:147fn) notes that Badarikārāma is also mentioned in the Jātaka, Tipallatthamiga-jātaka and the Saṃyutta-nikāya, where it is localized “in the vicinity of Kauśāmbī” (ibid.). While these alternative locations may just be homonyms, coincidences or simple errors, the possibility that Badarīnāth was not always at the spot it is today should not be disregarded.

4.3 Kailāś, Gaṅgā and Svargarohini – Geographical

Reasons for the Importance of Badrīnāth

maharṣiṇām bhṛgur ahaṃ girām asmy ekam akṣaram |
yajñānām japa-yajño ‘smi sthāvarāṇām himālayaḥ ||

This is proclaimed by Lord Kṛṣṇa in the Bhagavadgītā (10:25): “I am Bhṛgu among the Mahārṣis, Om̐ within a speech; I am chanting among the sacrifices and of the mountains the Himalaya.” Satapathy (2002:22) notes that already “in the Ṛgveda the mountains are conceived as divine powers.” Their relative inaccessibility, especially for those who dwelt in the plains, made the Himalayas the ideal abode of the gods, a region where the mystical and arcane were allowed to *take place*. This quality of the Himalayas is also taken into account by Grünendahl (1993:136), when he argues that the “relocation” of the Kailāś to Tibet, (or rather the later union of Mount Kailāś with Ti-se) became necessary when the “cosmographic and mythological-religious conceptions became unsustainable” due to “increasing geographical knowledge of the northern Region (Garhwal).”

Of course it were also the Himalayas who hid the sources of the most important rivers within Bhāratavarṣa. Darian (2001:14) argues that “among the many symbols of India endowed with spirituality, water is the most sacred, at once the purifier and the origin of the mystery. It is the real and imagined source of life.” Hindus argue that there is no water more precious than that which forms the river of the Gaṅgā. While there are several sacred cities along its banks and although the river forms a whole from its beginning to its end at the ocean, it is especially the source of the Gaṅgā, the point where she is imagined to fall from the heavens, that is considered the most pure and valuable. And yet, it is not only the water within the river, “the Ganges itself is an object of pilgrimage, as are other rivers, such as the Godavari in Andhra Pradesh or the Kaveri in Tamilnadu, which are regarded as forms of the Ganges but do not attract so many pilgrims” (Fuller 2004:205). It

4.4 *The Badarī-Tree, the Hermitage and Lord Viṣṇu*

is therefore of little surprise that the most revered places of pilgrimage in the Himalayas are also situated at the sources of Gaṅgā and Yamunā.

Further, the Himalayas are not only the source of the Ganges or abodes of the gods, but they are also seen as place from which to ascend to the heavens. This most likely goes back to a story of the seventeenth book of the Mahābhārata – the Mahāprasthānika Parva. In this book, the Pāṇḍavas and Draupadī, having fulfilled their duties on earth, venture into the Himalayas in order to climb Mount Meru. While one after the other dies due to the exhaustion and the environment, at last only Yudhiṣṭira remains, who is escorted to heaven by the god Indra. Since the location of Mount Meru is far from clear, there are several candidates in the Himalayas where this “ascent to heaven” might have taken place. One of these is a mountain behind Yamunotrī, actually even called Svargarohini, and another is located in the vicinity of Badrīnāth. It is likely that the importance of these Svargarohinis is based upon the fact that many pilgrims chose the Himalayas as a destination to end their lives, by jumping down ledges, as in the case of the Bhairav jump in Kedārīnāth, or by continuing their journey to the North, without any food, for as long as their feet would carry them.

4.4 The Badarī-Tree, the Hermitage and Lord Viṣṇu

I argue here that there are two different perspectives on Badrīnāth: one seen from the local perspective and one from mainland India, i.e. the view of the “great tradition.” It does not mean that these perspectives themselves did not change during the last centuries. What is known about the local point of view is very limited, since it consists exclusively of oral accounts that were only collected and put into writing by the first visitors to this region in the last two centuries. The changes that occurred within the local perspective are therefore limited to this short period and to my understanding these alterations are only reflected in the omission of the

4 *The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside*

said accounts in the last decades.

On the other hand, the perspectives and representations of Badrīnāth within the Sanskrit literature and the general view of Hindus changed quite a lot as well.

Here I will leave the beginnings of Badrīnāth as a small mountain shrine to the imagination of the reader, while I will start to discuss the importance of this place with the name-giving Badrī-tree. Mythical trees are usually treated with similar religious importance as mountains. They are either capable of fulfilling wishes (*kalpavṛkṣa*) or have immense dimensions, as Hopkins (1910:353-354) remarks, “it [Sudarśana tree] is one thousand and one hundred leagues in height and touches the sky; its fruit being measured by fifteen and ten hundred cubits (2500 aratni).”⁶

Most if not all of the places of religious importance in the Himalayas are described as heavenly gardens, full of flowers, trees and ponds. Whether this represents a theme (leitmotif), or whether it is due to a lack of geographical or even general knowledge about the place remains unclear. It often seems out of place when, for example, Kailāś is described as “clad with many trees and many a creeper, melodious with the song of many a bird, scented with the fragrance of all the season’s flowers, most beautiful, fanned by soft, cool, and perfumed breezes, shadowed by the still shade of stately trees; where cool groves resound with the sweet-voiced songs of troops of Apsara [heavenly nymphs] and in the forest depths flocks of kokila [cockatoos] maddened with passion sing” (Avalon 1931, as cited in Snelling 2006:23-24).

The term Badarī does not always refer to the temple or the specific tree of the hermitage, but sometimes it simply means the tree or its fruits of the same name. For a better understanding of the jujube’s importance, or merely for the sake of completeness, the following part is dedicated to the plant itself.

⁶If my conversions are right, then this should equal roughly one kilometer, if not, the fruit is still incredibly large.

4.4.1 The Badarī Tree

The Badarī is called “*ber*” in Hindi and is referred to by biologists as either *ziziphus jujuba* or *ziziphus mauritiana*. As evident from the latter name, the tree is not only to be found in India but also in Africa and further in China and Korea, where it is known as Chinese or Korean date⁷. Even though its fruits can be used to make pickles and its wood “is used for making agricultural implements, wheels, and charcoal” (Krishna and Amirthalingam 2009), the tree does not seem to be of special value.

There are two interesting descriptions of forests in the Rāmayaṇa that both feature the tree in question. In the Bālakāṇḍa, Viśvamitra requests the king for his sons Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa to defeat the demons Mārīca and Subāhu, who have made his sacrifices impossible. First, the journey was an easy one by boat, “but soon they came to a trackless dreadful-looking forest” (Goldman 2009:131; Rām 1.23.11). At this point, Rāma tells Viśvamitra:

“What a forbidding forest this is! Echoing with swarms of crickets, it swarms with fearsome beasts of prey and harsh-voiced vultures. It is filled with all sorts of birds, screeching fearsome cries, as well as lions, tigers, boars and elephants. It is full of *dhava*, *ashva-karna*, *kakubha*, *bilva*, *tinduka*, *patala*, and *badari* trees. What dreadful [*dāruṇa*] forest is this.” (Goldman 2009:131; Rām 1.23.24)

It does not seem that these trees are mentioned to emphasize the dreadfulness of the forest, but rather the wilderness it was part of, and therefore the Badrī tree or the Bilva tree are not seen in their religious significance here. In the second book (Pollock 2008), after Rāma finds himself in exile, he does not lose heart and shows his wife Sītā the wonderful and pleasing mount Citrakūṭ:

What a sight the mountain makes, swarming with birds and teeming
with herds of beasts, panthers, hyenas and monkeys, all of them tame.

⁷If the fruit is comparable to a date or rather to a fig is unclear – both terms are in use.

4 *The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside*

The trees that cover the mountain heighten its majesty, flowering, fruitful trees, shady and enchanting: mangoes, rose-apples, *asana*, *lodhras*, *priyalas*, jackfruit trees and *dhavas*, *ankles*, the gnarled *tinishas*, *bilva* trees, ebonies, bamboo, white Kashmiri teaks, soap nut trees, quince and butter trees, evergreens, jujubes and myrobalan trees, *nipas*, cane, *dhanvanas* and pomegranates. (Pollock 2008:451; Rām 2.887-10)

Thus, the descriptions of both places are almost identical, but one is dreadful and the other majestic. Perhaps, this is in the eye of the beholder, but they both represent the wilderness and Rāma refuses to venture into them out of free will. A more detailed textual study would be necessary, but we can so far assume that the Badrī tree is associated with the wilderness in general and, in particular, as it will become more obvious in the following, with asceticism.

In the second book (95.30) of the Rāmayaṇa, after Rāma is informed that his father had passed away, he offers Yama “a cake of almond meal mixed with fruit of the jujube tree” and asks the god of the underworld “be pleased to eat this, great king, such food as we ourselves now eat, for man’s gods must feed on the same food as he” (Pollock 2008:491).

The quality of the jujube fruit might be best described in the meeting of Rāma and Śabarī towards the end of the Araṇyakāṇḍa. This episode does not always feature the jujube fruits specifically, and it is more about the fact that Rāma accepts a fruit from a woman of low birth who had already tasted it in order to ensure its sweetness. It is also noteworthy what Philip Lutgendorf mentions in his article, entitled *Dining Out at Lake Pampa: The Shabari Episode in Multiple Ramayanas*, about the fruit of the jujube:

[...] the ca. twelfth century *lilavati* of Bhaskaracharya mentions [...] the jujube fruit, which is referred to as *shabarahara* – “the food of Shabaras.” Jujube (*Ziziphus jujube*) is a small, wild plum-like fruit with a greenish or yellowish skin; inside the pulp can vary from tardy sour to moderately

4.4 *The Badarī-Tree, the Hermitage and Lord Viṣṇu*

sweet. [...] One seldom finds it in bazaar fruit stalls, however, for it is regarded as a wild and second-rate fruit, and it is mostly sold along the roadsides in rural areas, usually by elderly women or small children who harvest the fruit that has fallen from the trees. As is the case with wild cherries or plums, a bag of *ber* is likely to contain at least some sweet and juicy fruits, but also many that will prove, to any but the hungriest eater, too sour to bother with. (Lutgendorf n.d.:7)

Finally, there is an episode in the ninth book of the Mahābhārata (Meiland 2007; Mbh IX. 48) which praises the *tīrtha* of Badarapācana. At this place, Śrutāvati practiced “severe austerities and followed numerous acts of discipline” (Meiland 2007:223; *ibid.*). As a test, Indra, in disguise as Vasiṣṭha, approached her and asked her to “cook these five jujube fruits”, but had priorly made the berries “un-cookable” (Meiland 2007:225). After some time, she ran out of firewood. For some reason, she did collect more wood, but instead fed her own body parts to the fire, thinking only of the saint’s wish. This place of the “cooking of jujube berries” is close to the “the sacred site of Kaubera” (Meiland 2007:221), and while it is not specified where this sacred site is exactly located, it may again refer to the Kailāś area and the Viśālā. Badarapācana is said to be close to the Himavant (mountains) and forest in the next narrative (Mbh IX.48.31). Arundhati is another female renouncer who is asked to cook the jujube fruits – this time by Śiva – and again the berries are given only because nothing else appropriate is at hand: “my store of food is used up” (Meiland 2007:229). Arundhati cooks the jujubes for twelve years, not even noticing “the gruesome twelve-year drought.” Śiva praised her by telling the returning Brahmins: “this women has achieved ascetic attainments that are, to my mind, superior to the ones that you have achieved on the ridge of the Himavat” (*ibid.*)

In general, trees seem especially important to hermitages, which are often only referred to by the specific tree that grows in their midst, as in the case of Badarikāśrama.

4 The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside

Since the “*badarī* is the most important of the many ‘divine trees’” (Hopkins 1910:362), and since it is often described as “vast” (*viśālā*), “Nilakaṇṭha and modern translators do not hesitate to substitute *Badarī* for *Viśālā*” (Grünendahl 1993:126). While the extent of this connection of *Viśālā* and *Badarī* is not explicitly mentioned by Grünendahl, it very well might have enabled a relationship of the hermitage of Nar-Narayan to any “vast tree” in the region.

Yet the tree is connected to the temple by two very different narratives. Although it is clear that *Nārāyaṇa* is another name for *Viṣṇu*, I also believe that they represent two different aspects of *Badrīnāth*. This is evident not only through the narratives, but also in the fact that their *mūrtis* are worshipped separately inside the temple, where *Viṣṇu* (*Badrīnārāyaṇ*) forms a union with his wife *Lakṣmī*, while *Nārāyaṇ* is grouped with his brother *Nar*.

4.4.2 Nar and Nārāyaṇ

Even though *Nar* and *Nārāyaṇ* are frequently mentioned in the *Mahābhārata* and most often in reference to *Badarikāśrama*, their hermitage itself does not receive much attention. The first (Mbh 3.140-153) of the two “*Gandhamādana* Episodes” is actually the only part that reflects in more detail on said hermitage. Yet, it is more concerned with all sorts of demons, and *Viśālā* (*Badarī*) is more of a landmark within *Kuber*’s kingdom than a place on its own. After an exuberant description of the *Badrī*-tree and its “honey-dripping berries” (van Buitenen 1975:498), the story soon focuses on the *Gandhamādana* mountain and does not return to the hermitage. There are two such episodes, and as Grünendahl (1993:110) suggests, the first episode is probably the younger one. Since the *Pāṇḍavas* visit the hermitage of *Ārṣiṣena* in the second episode, Grünendahl (1993:115) argues that the first episode reflects “the influence of the *Nārāyaṇa*-theology.”

There are one lakh and twenty-five thousand mountains. In the midst of them stands the very holy, excellent *Badarikāśrama* where, O *Nārada*,

4.4 *The Badarī-Tree, the Hermitage and Lord Viṣṇu*

lives Nara-Nārāyaṇa. (Deshpande 1990:2318)

While the later praise, “The Greatness of Badarikāśrama” (Padma Purāṇa VI, 216), is less about Badrīnāth itself and more about an incident that took place there, it says that “this holy place of Lakṣmī’s lord called Badarī is very meritorious” (Deshpande 1991:3104). In the Skanda Purāṇa, Nar and Nārāyaṇa are hardly mentioned, and when Skanda asks Śīva about the origin of this place (SkP II, iii, 2), he answers that Hari directed him there, after he was unable to get rid of the severed head of Brahmā. Only one verse refers to Nārāyaṇ (Skanda Purāṇa II, iii, 5.3), which is translated by Tagare (1994:23) as:

Formerly, in the beginning of Kṛtayuga, the Lord himself incarnate resorted to Tapas and Yoga for the welfare of all living beings.

Nar and Nārāyaṇ are mentioned in the Nārada Purāṇa, Uttarabhāga 67, however not necessarily as the founders of the hermitage, as it is only said that they “went to Gandhamādana mountain where there is a Badarī tree endowed with many fruits of sweet fragrance” (Tagare 1982:1975).

In the Varāha Purāṇa, Nar and Nārāyaṇ are not even referred to anymore:

Many years passed as I thus practiced penance, but the deities except Brahmā and Maheśvara, did not know of it. In this Badarī sanctuary, I had practiced penance for a thousand celestial years living on a single fruit during each (year). There did I steadfastly practice austerities, O Earth, for ten crore (10 million), ten arbuda (100 million) and ten padma (10.000 billion) years. (Bhattacharya 1981:589)

While this may also refer to Nārāyaṇ, the text continues that “we are not having peace in the world without Viṣṇu“ (ibid.). I believe that this text really refers to the penance of Viṣṇu, in his form as the husband of Lakṣmī and not as Nārāyaṇ. Thus in the in the course of time, the penance of the two brothers lost in importance, while the story of the meditating Viṣṇu, protected by his loving wife, became more

4 The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside

prominent in the minds of the pilgrims. Today, even the concept of penance has lost its value, and Viṣṇu is visited by pilgrims in his abode, his *dhām* of the North.

4.5 Ādi Śaṅkarācārya and Badrīnāth

Thus, there has been a gradual change in the conception of Badrīnāth, from a hermitage connected to Nar and Nārāyaṇ to an abode of Viṣṇu. A more dramatic and swifter alteration to the cultural history of Badrīnāth was enabled through a philosopher and saint from South India.

The whole of Garhwal, especially the upper Alakanandā valley as well as the shrines of Badrīnāth and Kedārīnāth, is connected to the heritage of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya⁸ and his successors, primarily through the *maṭh*⁹ in Joshimath. Yet it seems – considering the academic writings – that Śaṅkarācārya might have never had, historically speaking, such a great impact on the region of Garhwal, and it is not even certain that he really ever set foot into the Himalayas.

Not only the major stations of his life are disputed, but even the dates of his life itself. Traditionally, and this is believed by most people in Badrīnāth as well, he is thought to have lived between 508 BC and 476 BC¹⁰, while most scholars have decided that the second half of the 7th and beginning of the 8th century are a much safer guess. In any case, if one travels through Garhwal and especially when one comes to the shrines of Kedārīnāth and Badrīnāth, it is difficult to ignore the presence of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya's legacy.

4.5.1 Narratives, Hagiographies and the Purāṇas

In Garhwal, many narratives are in circulation, in which Śaṅkarācārya plays a major role, be it the abolishment of human sacrifice in Śrīnagar, the foundation of several temples and shrines or the re-discovery of idols, as in the case of Badrīnāth.

⁸The founder of the Advaita Vedānta is called Śaṅkarācārya throughout this thesis. Sometimes Ādi is added to emphasize that he was the first to bear that name, and in distinction to the heads of the different *maṭhs* of his order, who are always named with their respective *maṭh*. Śaṅkarācārya is also known simply as Śaṅkara in the scriptures, which is also a name for Śiva (of whom Śaṅkarācārya is said to be an *avatār*).

⁹*Maṭha* in Sanskrit means a “hut” or “cottage,” especially a place of an ascetic, or a college for young Brahmins (see Monier-Williams 2002:774). The translation of *maṭh* as a monastery might not be exact, but I think it gives the right picture.

¹⁰According to the Kāñcī Maṭha tradition (Pande 1994:41).

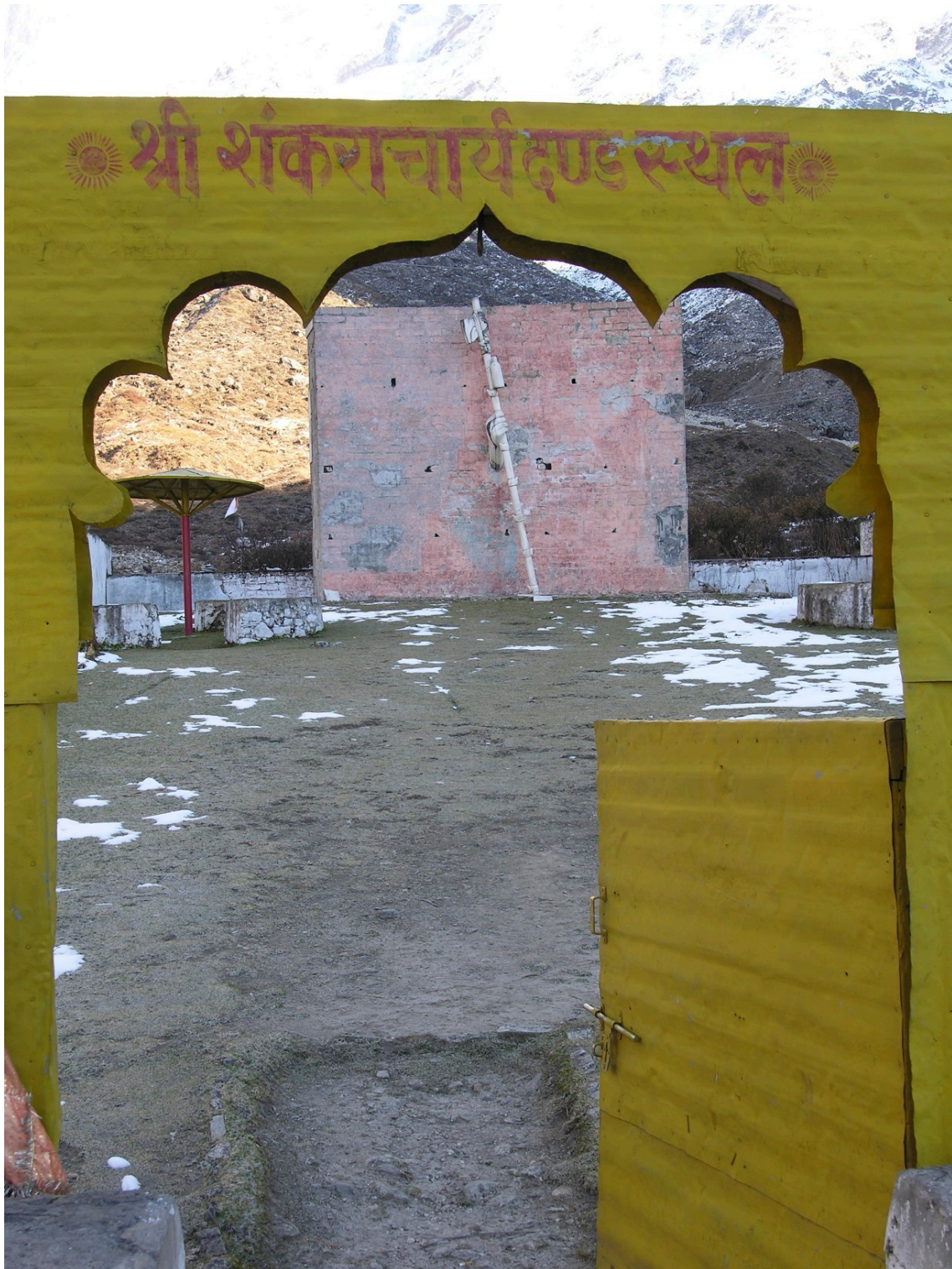


Figure 4.1: A monument in Kedārñāth, dedicated to the memory of Śaṅkarācārya, as well as to the idea that he attained *samādhi* at Kedārñāth. Out of a wall reaches his (?) hand that holds the staff (*daṇḍa*) of Śaṅkarācārya. The monument was destroyed, along with most of the buildings surrounding the temple, in the terrible flood in July 2013.

4.5 Ādi Śaṅkarācārya and Badrīnāth

Apart from these local narratives, other sources on Śaṅkarācārya's life that are considered authoritative are seven hagiographies¹¹, written between the 14th and the 18th century. There is no evidence in these hagiographies that Śaṅkarācārya actually visited Badrīnāth. While all hagiographies do mention Badrīnāth, neither are the chronologies similar, nor are the activities of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya in Badrīnāth identical.

According to the *Śaṅkaradigvijaya* of Mādhava,¹² Śaṅkara took *saṃnyāsa* at the age of seven and then went to Kāśī, where he was commissioned by Śiva himself to write a commentary on the Brahmāsūtras. Leaving Banāras, he made his way to Badrīnāth, where he “held many discussions with resident sages on the six systems of heterodox and seven systems of orthodox philosophies and on the nine categories [...]” (Madhava-Vidyaranya n.d.:63). Later during his stay at Badrīnāth, he also composed most of his works (Madhava-Vidyaranya n.d.:63).

His actions and the people he met there differs with almost every hagiography. According to the *Guru-Vaṃśa-Kāvya* of Kāśī Lakṣmaṇa Śāstrī, “he went on a pilgrimage to Badarikāśrama and met Vyāsa” (cited in Pande 1994:27), while in the *Digvijaya* (Madhava-Vidyaranya n.d.:70-75) it is written that he met Vyāsa on the banks of the Gaṅgā¹³. In the *Śaṅkarācāryacarita* of Cidvilāsa, Śaṅkara met Dat-tātreya in Badrīnāth (Bader 2000:158), and in Anantāgiri's work “Nārāyaṇa grants him the boon of a hot spring to facilitate ritual bathing in this icy climate” (Bader 2000:148). Yet it is interesting to note, and reflects on the importance of the place that he visited Badrīnāth in all seven versions of his hagiography,¹⁴ but the places he visited before and after Badrīnāth differ from one version to the other.

¹¹Bader (2000) suggests to call them hagiographies, which makes sense, because they can be seen best as narratives, as they are praising and retelling Ādi Śaṅkarācārya's life and philosophy. They are also known under the term of Śaṅkaravijayas (Sundaresan 2000:109).

¹²Bader (2000:55) dates the work between 1650 and 1798.

¹³According to Bader's list in Kāśī (200:143).

¹⁴They are in chronological order, according to Bader (2000:26-62 and 142-143): Anantāgiri's *Śaṅkaravijaya* (around 14th century), Cidvilāsa's *Śaṅkaravijayavilāsa*, Vyāsācala's *Śaṅkaravijaya*, Rājacūdāmaṇi-Dikṣita's *Śaṅkarābhyudaya* (c.1650), Govindanātha's *Śaṅkarācārya-carita* (first half of the 17th century), the *Guruvamśakāvya* of Lakṣmaṇa-Śāstrī and the *Śaṅkaradigvijaya* of Mādhava (the best and widest known hagiography).

4 The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside

In Anantānandagiri’s work, Śaṅkarācārya went from Prayāga to Kāśī and then to Kailāsa/Amaranātha and Badrīnāth. After his stay in Badrīnāth, he continued to Kurukṣetra and Dvārakā. In most of the works he visits Badrīnāth twice, and in the *Śaṅkaradigvijaya* and the *Śaṅkarācāryacarita* of Cidvilāsa, at the end of his life, as he entered *samādhi* in Kedārñāth¹⁵ or Kailāsa respectively. Badrīnāth is usually visited first between Prayāga and Kālaṭī (Śaṅkarācārya’s birthplace), where he had to return to, in order to perform his mother’s funeral rituals.

The places visited by Śaṅkarācārya during his life are the following, according to Bader (2000:142-143):¹⁶

¹⁵It is a popular belief that his *samādhi* is in Kedārñāth, while Bader (2000:158) writes that, according to the *Śaṅkarācāryacarita* “he [Śaṅkarācārya] is escorted by the gods back to his silvery peak [Kailāsa]”.

¹⁶The Himalayan shrines of Badrī and Kedār are highlighted. Abbreviations are as following: AŚV = Anantāgiri’s *Śaṅkaravijaya*; CŚV = Cidvilāsa’s *Śaṅkaravijayavilāsa*; VŚV = Vyāsācala’s *Śaṅkaravijaya*; GŚC = Govindanātha’s *Śaṅkarācārya-carita*; RŚA = Rājacūḍāmaṇi-Dikṣita’s *Śaṅkarābhyaudaya*; GVK = Lakṣmaṇa-Śāstri’s *Guruvamśakāvya*; ŚDV = *Śaṅkaradigvijaya* of Mādhava.

4.5 Ādi Śaṅkarācārya and Badrināth

AŚV	CŚV	VŚV	GŚC
Cidambaram	Badarī	<i>dūradeśa</i>	Kāśī
Madhyārjuna	Kālaṭi	Badarī	Badarika [meets Vyās]
Rāmeśvara	Prayāga	Kālaṭi	Kālaṭi
Anantaśayana	Gayā	Prayāga	Badarika
Subrahmaṇya	Vārāṇasī	Magadha	Prayāga
Gaṇavara	Ruddhanagara		Magadha
Tulajābhavānī	Vijvaladvindura	[Sanandana's	Gokarṇa
Ujjayinī	Amṛtapura	pilgrimage:	Śivavihāra
Anumallapura	Vijvaladvindura	Kālahasti	Haridvāra
Nirundha/Marundha	Śṛṅgerī	Kāñcī	Kālahasti
Māgadhapura	Kāñcī	Cidambara	Kāñcī
Indraprastha	Veṅkaṭeśvara	Śrīraṅga	Cidambara
Yamaprashta	Cidambara	Agastyāśrama	Śrīraṅga
Prayāga	Madhyārjuna	Rāmeśvara]	Rāmeśvara
Kāśī	Rāmeśvara		Kāśmīra
Kailāsa/Amaranātha	Vakratuṅḍapurī	Gokarṇa	Kāñcī
Kedāra, Badarī	Madurai	Śrīvaligrāma	Vṛṣācala
Kurukṣetra	Anantaśayana	Śāradā-pīṭha	
Dvārakā, Nīlakaṇṭha	Vāsukikṣetra	<i>rucitadeśa</i>	
Ayodhyā, Gayā	Mṛdapurī, Gokarṇa		
Jagannātha, Śrīsaila	Śrīsaila, Pāṇḍuraṅgeśa		
Rudranagara	Jagannāthapura		
Vidyālaya	Ujjayinī, Dvārakā		
Śṛṅgerī	Haridvāra, Badarī		
Ahobila, Veṅkaṭagiri	Dattātreyā's cave		
Kāñcī	Kailāsa		

4 The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside

RŚA	GVK	ŚDV
unspecified	unspecified	Indu-bhāva (Narmadā)
Badarī	Badarikā	Kāśī
Prayāga	Prayāga	Prayāga
Magadha	Magadha	Māhiṣmati
Narmadā (Magadha)	Revā (= Naramadā)	Narmadā (in Magadha)
Kālaṭi	Kālaṭi	Mahārāṣṭra
around Kerala	Subrahmaṇya	Śrīsaila
Mahāsurālayeśa	around Taulava	Gokarṇa
Śivavalli <i>agrahāra</i>	Madhyārjuna	Harihara
Gokarṇa	Anantaśayana	Mūkāmbikā
Harihara	Rāmeśvara	Śrībali <i>agrahāra</i>
Mūkāmbikā	Śrīraupya- <i>pīṭha</i>	Śṛṅgerī
Anantaśayana	Gokarṇa	Kālaṭi
Madhurā (Madurai)	Sahya mountain	around Kerala
Rāmeśvara	Śṛṅgerī	Mahāsurālayeśa temple
Śrīraṅga	Śrīsaila	Padmapāda's pilgrimage
Cidambara	Śeśācala (Tirupati)	Rāmeśvara
Śoṇagiri (Aruṇācala)	Narasimhagiri	Kāncī, Veṅkaṭācala
Kāñcī	Jagannātha	Karṇāṭaka, Gokarṇa
	Kāśī	Dvārakā, Ujjayinī
	Śārādā- <i>pīṭha</i>	Bāhlika-deśa, Naimiṣa
	Śṛṅgerī	Darada, Bharata
	Kāñcī	Sūrasena, Kurupāñcāla
	Badarī	Kāmarūpa
	Kāśī	Videha, Kośala,
	Nepāla	Aṅga, Vaṅga, Gauda
	Dattātreyā's <i>āśrama</i>	Śārādā- <i>pīṭha</i> [Kaśmīra]
		Badarī, Kedāra

4.5 Ādi Śaṅkarācārya and Badrīnāth

This list demonstrates that his visits to Badrīnāth are without any special order and he often goes from South India directly to Badrīnāth, while in the *Śaṅkarācārya-carita* of Govindanātha he visits Haridwar without going further north to the Himalayan shrines.

Nowhere in the hagiographies it is mentioned that Śaṅkarācārya founded the temple, or that he at least retrieved the idol from the icy waters of the Alakanandā. Yet, these two narratives are immensely popular in Garhwal as well as with most of the pilgrims from all over India. Pande (1994:347) suggests that this narrative “is implicitly attested by” a *śloka* in the Skanda Purāṇa (II, iii, 5, 24). Even though he (ibid.) later admits that “the Skanda Purāṇa [...] has not been critically edited and contains apocryphal material.” Pande (ibid.) further remarks that “from the traditional account it is clear that there was no Vaiṣṇava temple at Badari before Śaṅkara,” implying that the shrine was founded by Śaṅkarācārya. I believe instead that the notion of a Vaiṣṇava temple before his time is clear, because in many narratives the reason for his pilgrimage to Badrīnāth is this very shrine. Yet, I believe it is best to first look at the *śloka* in discussion:

Then in the form of a recluse (i.e. Ācārya Śaṅkara) I (i.e. Śīva [sic])
will raise Hari from the Tīrtha named Nārada and instal him with a
desire for the welfare of the worlds. (Tagare 1994:25)

In his translation, Tagare is eager to identify the said recluse as Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, which is a bit premature considering the original text,¹⁷ because although there is an ascetic¹⁸ mentioned (*yatirūpeṇa*), the “I” (*ahaṃ*) refers to Brahmā, who is first addressed by Viṣṇu only three *ślokas* above. Brahmā later reveals to the other gods what he was told (SkP II, iii, 5, 22-23) and further tells them that he will retrieve the said idol himself (SkP II, iii, 5, 24), since Viṣṇu does not want to be seen in his real form by anyone during this dark age.

¹⁷ *tato 'haṃ yatirūpeṇa tīrthān nārada saṃjñakāt |
uddhṛtya sthāpayaṣyāmi hariṃ lokahitecchayā ||*

¹⁸ According to Monier-Williams the term *yatin* also describes a devotee.

4 The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside

This is also the case in the other Purāṇas, where it is usually Brahmā, or Brahmā along with other gods, who rescue the idol from the *kunḍ* – like in the Nārada Purāṇa, Uttarabhāga 67. Because in the *kaliyuga* Viṣṇu is invisible to everyone, not even the Gods can see him, Brahmā and the other *devas* pray to him that he may show himself. Viṣṇu’s answer is as following:

“O leading Devas, if you have faith in viewing the Maṇḍapa (ceremonial hall) take up my image of rock situated in the Nārada Kuṇḍa.”
On hearing those words, Brahmā and others became delighted at heart. They took out that divine rock image situated in the Nārada Kuṇḍa and installed it. (Tagare 1982:1978; Nārada Purāṇa, Uttarabhāga 67:35-36)

Yet, in local mythology, the retrieval of the image of Badrīnārāyaṇ is mainly connected to Ādi Śaṅkarācārya and its story is retold in many narratives. This main narrative has a lot of variations, and it has been already retold above, but to bring it into memory again, I will mention it again here in a very short form:

Ādi Śaṅkarācārya arrived in Badrīnāth, but to his disappointment the idol of Badrīnārāyaṇ was missing. The priest told him that the statue was thrown into the river by the Buddhists, or, according to another version, was thrown into the river by the priests in order to save it from the Buddhists. After a dream, in which Viṣṇu told him where he could find it, Ādi Śaṅkarācārya retrieved the *mūrti* and reinstalled it inside the temple.

The interesting thing about this narrative is that there are very similar versions but with different agents, such as the following example.

During ancient times this area was rarely visited by pilgrims. The local poojari had great difficulty in continuing the regular pooja at this shrine. The offerings by pilgrims was [sic] so meagre one year that the poojari could not meet both ends meals even. Dejected and angry, the poojari threw down the statue in the Tapta Kund and left the place closing temple gate. Ghantakaran, dwarfpal of the shrine, entered on some

4.5 Ādi Śaṅkarācārya and Badrīnāth

local people at PanduKeshwar [sic] (some miles away) and revealed the action of poojari and state of the statue. Then Local [sic] people from Pandukeshwar rushed towards Sri Badrinath and retrieved the statue from Tapta Kund. Then they established back the idol properly at the shrine. (Babulkar and Dhayani n.d.:17)

There is yet another version of how the idol ended in the Alakanandā. The Ḍimrīs were the first to worship Badrīnārāyaṇ in Badrīnāth, and when the Buddhists invaded this region it was a Brahmin of the Ḍimrīs who took the idol and drowned himself along with the idol. Again it was Śaṅkarācārya who brought the idol back inside the temple.¹⁹

Babulkar and Dhayani (ibid.) also mention the belief “that the idol of Sri Badrinath ji was established by Bhagwan Ramanujacharya [...]” Further, there is an interesting statement in Bhandakar’s (2001:58) book *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems*, which is not directly based on this narrative structure but also aims to establish a connection, this time one of Madhva and Badrīnāth: “After his initiation he [Madhva] went to Badarikāśrama in the Himalaya and brought back the idols of Digvijaya Rāma and Vedavyāsa.”

From these different but similar accounts, it becomes obvious that different groups or schools attempted to form ties between themselves and the temple of Badrīnāth. Another theme that is often connected to the advent of Śaṅkarācārya in Badrīnath is the expulsion, or conversion of Buddhists in the region:

[...] Shankaracharya, in his great reformist zeal, eliminated the one [Buddhism] and cleansed the other [Brahmanism]. In order to revive orthodox Hinduism in Kumaon and Nepal, Shankaracharya began by dispersing the Buddhist monks and nuns. He then established the worship of Siva at Kedarnath and of Vishnu at Badrinath. In place of the old Baudhmargi priests, who were disbanded, came priests from Kerala who

¹⁹This version was told by Suman Ḍimrī, the trustee of the Nepal *dharamśālā*, on the 17th of November 2011.

4 *The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside*

manage these two temples even today. Pilgrimage to the two shrines was encouraged as the constant influx of pilgrims ensured that the area did not relapse into Buddhism again. In all fairness, it must be admitted that there seems to be no historical evidence that Ādi Śaṅkarācārya visited these regions, but popular belief attributes the establishment of the Kedarnath-Badrinath temples to him. (Ramesh 2001:53)

Further, Sax (2000:47) quotes two works²⁰ that I was unable to consult:

Popular traditions, however, do not limit Śaṅkara’s activities to intellectual jousting: Himalayan peoples preserve legends that he fought his Buddhist rivals ‘with both *śāstra* and *śāstra*’, that is, with both weapons and arguments, destroying many of them with the aid of Rājā Sudhanvan’s army.

This account resembles a narrative of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya and Sudhanvan encountering the Mahākāpālin Krakaca in which “[t]he king of ascetics [Śaṅkarācārya] (then) reduced those (Kāpālikas) [who were fighting on the side of Krakaca] ... to ashes in an instant through the fire which arose from his *huṃkāra*” (Mādava’s *Śaṅkaradigvijaya* XV, 21, cited in Lorenzen 1991:41), after which “Sudhanvan rejoined Śaṅkara and slaughtered a thousand more of their enemies” (Lorenzen 1991:41).

Apart from the fact that in the hagiographies there is no mention of Śaṅkarācārya retrieving the *mūrti*, while in the Purāṇas and local narratives it is often someone else (i.e. Brahmā, Rāmānuja or the priests), there is an even greater uncertainty about the Himalayan travels of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya.

While it is not entirely impossible that Śaṅkarācārya traveled through most of India, the order in which Badrīnāth appears in his hagiographies is suspicious. It might not be unlikely for a renunciate to travel in the Himalaya, however it sounds unlikely for a boy of eleven years or even younger. Even if we take into consideration

²⁰Atkinson, E.T. 1974 [1882]. *Kumaun Hills: Its history, geography, and anthropology with reference to Garhwal and Nepal*. Delhi: Cosmos; and Ḍabarāl, Ś. 1965-78. *Uttarākhaṇḍ kā itihās*. 8 vols. Dogadā: Vir Gāthā Prakāśan.

4.5 Ādi Śaṅkarācārya and Badrīnāth

that Ādi Śaṅkarācārya visited Badrīnāth, there are no accounts in the hagiographies or Purāṇas that he was involved in the foundation of the shrine or the installation of the idol.

Further, it seems that, since the narrative about the retrieval of the statue from the Alakanandā is often repeated, with different agents, the narrative primarily represents an explanation of why the idol inside the temple is not completely intact, while at the same time it also enables different groups to authorize their legitimation to certain rights in the temple.

There may be two reasons for why the act of retrieving the idol is missing in all the hagiographies. First, none of these hagiographies were written before the 14th century (Bader 2000:19) – a while after Badrīnāth evolved into a distinguished pilgrimage center and certainly a while after the lifetime of Śaṅkarācārya. Nonetheless, stories about the retrieval of the idol are frequently found in local narratives, which could mean that these narratives are even younger than the hagiographies. However, it is much more likely that the authors of these hagiographies never went to Badrīnāth or even Northern India, thus they had no idea of the importance Śaṅkarācārya to this place. They probably did know that Badrīnāth was a distinguished pilgrimage center (and there might have been a *maṭh* already) and that it was important to have a connection to the Himalaya and Vedic religion – meaning that for them it was Badrīnāth which gave credibility and legitimation to Śaṅkarācārya and not vice versa. The local narratives in Garhwal go the other way around: one important theme here is the Buddhist influence (or even Buddhist past) of the temple itself and the surrounding area. This was something that had to be dealt with, and there is probably no better agent than Ādi Śaṅkarācārya to bring the Vedic religion into the mountain region, defeat the Buddhists and install the *mūrti*. Thus, Śaṅkarācārya gives credibility and legitimation not to Badrīnāth alone but to the whole region of Garhwal. Slightly different is the position of the Jyotirmaṭh, which has published a leaflet, in which they not only emphasize Śaṅkarācārya's

4 The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside

role in establishing the Sanātana Dharma against the “heterodox atheists such as the charwaks, the Jains, the Buddhists and Kapaliks” but also try to prove²¹ the local narratives as true.

Bader (2000:161) gives two reasons for the frequent mentioning of different pilgrimage places in the hagiographies of Śaṅkarācārya. One is that “however remote the figure of Śaṅkara may be to the audience, the way is open to a direct experience of his life story: those who visit the sacred sites will walk in his footsteps.” The second reason already discussed here is that: “[Śaṅkarācārya] lends further glory to the place by virtue of his divine presence.”

To understand the significance of the order of the Daśanāmīs and their *maṭhs*, it is useful to first look into the other centers of this school, because it becomes evident that this was also a political dispute, and that the other *maṭhs* and Badrīnāth have a similar past.

4.5.2 The Maṭhs and their Heterodox Past

One way to solve the riddle of the symbiotic relationship between Śaṅkarācārya and Badrīnāth is to look at the *maṭhs* connected to Ādi Śaṅkarācārya and his order. If there are in fact four or five of them has been a long dispute²² I will not discuss here, but for convenience I will refer to the traditional number of four. Today, these *maṭhs*²³ are widely known and they are often seen as the cornerstones of the Bhāratavarṣa – the holy land of India. Yet, again their history may not be as long and ancient as believed.

First of all, the places mentioned in the hagiographies do not directly match the

²¹It says that “the records and documents maintained in Badrikashrama furnish the informations that Shankaracharya (The First) got the present shrine of Badrinath repaired two thousand four hundred sixty years ago from today“ and that he reinstalled the *mūrti*, after retrieving it from the *kuṇḍ*. Apart from citing different authors to prove the date and his deeds in Badrīnāth, they also claim that there is a *Shankar Digvijaya* by Kalidas.

²²There is an article by Sundareshan (2000) that deals on length with the fifth *maṭh* in Kāñcī.

²³They are called *āmnāya maṭhas* and are Jyotirmaṭh (Uttarāmnāya) in Joshimath and/or Badrīnāth, Goverdhanmaṭh (Pūrvāmnāya) in Pūrī, Śāradāmaṭh (Daṣiṇāmnāya) in Śṛṅgerī and Kālikāmaṭh (Paścimāmnāya) in Dvārakā; see Sundareshan 2000

4.5 Ādi Śaṅkarācārya and Badrināth

Cār Dhām or the *maṭhs* we know today. “Four places figure prominently in all the Sanskrit sources [...]: Badarī and Prayāga in the north and Kāñcī and Rāmeśvara in the south” (Bader 2000:160).

Further, as stated in the citation above, it was the idea of the North-South axis that was important,²⁴ and not so much the trapezoid construction of India. The oldest of the hagiographies, the *Śaṅkaravijaya* of Anantānandagiri, mentions Śaṅkarācārya visiting all the *dhāms* and places where *maṭhs* of Śaṅkarācārya were later established, while many of the other hagiographies, for example Vyāsācala’s *Śaṅkaravijaya*, do not mention Dvārkā or Jagannāth.

A direct reference to the four monasteries is only given in Lakṣmaṇa-Śāstī’s *Guruvaṃśa-kāvya* and in Cidvilāsa’s *Śaṅkaravijayavilāsa*, where Śaṅkarācārya “dispatches his closest disciples to establish monastic centers in each of the four quarters: Padmapāda goes to Jagannāthapurī in the east, Hastāmalaka to Dvārakā in the west, Toṭaka to Badarī in the north, and Sureśvara (who was installed previously) is in the south at Śṛṅgerī” (Bader 2000:179; see also Bader 2000:237 and 239).

There is certainly a need for the *mahants* of the different *maṭhs* to present a continuous *paramparā* of all the the prior heads of the *maṭhs*. In the case of the Jyotirmaṭh, the factitiousness of the said *paramparā* is evident, since the dates of the first 21 *ācāryas* of the Jyotirmaṭh are unavailable. It is also interesting that the first date, presenting the appointment of the 22. *mahant*, Ācārya Bālkr̥ṣṇa, gives the 16th century²⁵, corresponding roughly to the deliberations of Paul Hacker.

Hacker (1978:479) writes in his article *Zur Geschichte und Beurteilung des Hinduismus* that there is no epigraphical evidence to support an existence of Śaṅkara-Maṭhas before the 14th century CE. His theory states that the legends of the foundation of the *maṭhs* by Śaṅkarācārya and his *digvijaya* result from the defeat Hinduism has suffered from the Muslims and were an act of conscious Hindu cultural policy, by

²⁴“More important for the construction of the life story is the north-south axis of the subcontinent, whose poles are at Badarī and Rāmeśvara” (Bader 2000:160-161).

²⁵1500 V.S., equals about 1556/7 CE.

4 *The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside*

Vidyāraṇya (late 14th century), a minister to the court of Vijayanagar.

Kulke (2001:237) informs us that “the early history of Sringeri is unknown but the earliest historical evidence which dates from the 12th century shows that it was a center of Jainism.” Kulke (ibid.) comes to the conclusion that “at least hypothetically [...] the *maṭha* [Sringeri] was established only some time between 1346 and 1356.”

This raises the question if the hagiographies of Śaṅkarācārya – the earliest appear around the same time – were actually written to support the idea of the four *maṭhs*. Considering the (scarce) sources, naturally everyone is careful, when it comes to dating the establishment of the *maṭhs*, but it is usually undisputed that Ādi Śaṅkarācārya did not found them himself. Yet, what remains almost unquestioned is his travel into the Himalayas itself.

Taking into account the theories of Hacker and Kulke, the hagiographies were probably written after or around the “invention” of the *maṭhs* and therefore it would be likely that they were the first to give a textual basis for these claims. Consequently, it did not matter if Śaṅkarācārya in fact ever did go to Badrīnāth, since now there was a monastery he had supposedly founded – he had to have been there.

Taking from Hacker and Kulke the possible dating of the establishment of the *maṭhs* in the 14th century, allows for another hypothesis. When one looks into the founding stories of Indian temples, they either go back to the ancient past (mostly the mystical yugas of satya etc.) or they are connected to an important saint, king, philosopher etc. and his time. There are two reasons for this. First, the older or the closer to the actual founder the temples are, the more prestige and authority they inherit. Second, there is the *guru-paramparā*, the succession from teacher to student, which also means that the student does all things in the name of his guru. In this sense it is very likely that followers of Śaṅkarācārya founded the *maṭhs*, but they did this in his name. Further, there is also something like a “folk simplification” – leaving out the *paramparā* and going straight for the end of the line. Thus

had the different *maṭhs* been founded by disciples, a long way down in the succession, they would have done it in the name of their *paramguru*, or they founded the *maṭhs* in their own name, and people later deduced the *paramguru*.²⁶

Apart from Dvārka²⁷ in Gujarat, which has a strong affiliation to Kṛṣṇa, and was most likely under Muslim rule in the 14th century, all other places of the *maṭhs* have a heterodox past. This is nothing special in itself, since many other Hindu pilgrimage places today have also been holy centers of other religions. However, especially the philosophy of Advaita has the ability to accommodate these religions, and therefore it may be possible that this was the reason for these places to be chosen, especially if there was a vacuum of other major religious movements. Based on the hagiographies and other epigraphical records, it is clear that the idea of the four *maṭhs* and the Cār Dhām is a later construction, but looking closer at the case of Jagannāth Purī, it is evident that there are many similarities with Badrināth – and that there may be a reason for this.

Jagannāth Purī

The largest temple in Purī, named after the main deity, Jagannāth, actually houses a trinity of gods: Jagannāth, Balbhadrā and Subhadrā. Since all their *mūrtis* are made from neem (*nīm; azadirachta indica*) wood (*dāru*), they are also known as “*daru-devtas*” (Jha 1985:57). Besides the fact that Purī marks another station of the Cār Dhām and is therefore also a seat of one of the four Śaṅkarācāryas, the narratives which describe the past of the temple demonstrate a few other similarities – similarities that may also provide an insight as to why these four places were chosen to religiously “fence” India.

As mentioned above, there is a set of narratives about the establishment of Bad-

²⁶The fact that the abbots of the *maṭhs* use the title Śaṅkarācārya as well might have helped to draw these conclusions as well.

²⁷Again, there is a narrative that the image (Chandra Moulisvara) that is worshipped inside the Saradamath, was retrieved by Śaṅkarācārya himself from the Gomati river (Gupta 2003:110).

4 *The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside*

rīnāth that does not mention Śaṅkarācārya and is remembered by the local inhabitants of the region, and the deities within the Jagannāth temple have a similar story to tell:

The Puri region has a large tribal population and blocks of wood are worshipped by them. Also, even today, members of the Shabar tribe are intimately connected with the rituals of the temple, something that the conservative and exclusivist brahmin priesthood would never allow unless they were forced to do so. (Gupta 2003:134)

The story of how a tribal god came to be associated with Viṣṇu begins with the king Indradyumna. In a dream, Viṣṇu tells him to build a temple in his honor that and the image to be placed inside the temple, can be found in the Nilachal (*Nīlācala*) hills. The king did not know these hills and thus he sent out a few men to search for them. A young Brahmin among them finds the hills and also hears of a deity that is secretly worshipped by the Shabars. In order to get his hands on the deity, he marries one of the chief's daughters and upon being initiated, he steals the image and brings it to Purī (Gupta 2003:136). The story is actually much longer and often reverts to other places of Kṛṣṇa's life, but the important point is included in the first part of the narrative: it was a tribal god that was incorporated into Hinduism over the years.

Purī also has a Buddhist past, which is not surprising in itself, however “it is [...] argued by many that the present temple of Jagannath is built on the site of an old Buddhist temple where the tooth-relic of Lord Buddha had been preserved. It is further argued by such scholars that the present form of the *Rath-yātrā* (car festival) of lord Jagannath is the modified form of *Danta* (tooth) *yātrā*, which the followers of Buddhism used to perform” (Jha 1985:58). Based on these two examples, it is permissible to draw parallels and ask why these two places received so much attention from the followers of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya.

Both places *might* house *devatās* that only later became identified with Viṣṇu, and

both temples *might* have a Buddhist past. Further, both shrines attempt to draw authority and legitimatization through a connection to previously established places of vaiṣṇavite pilgrimage or sanctity.

Therefore, the places were not only chosen for their location at the periphery of India and in order to serve as beacons of Hinduism, but also and perhaps foremost because they were not claimed by any other tradition at this time. Thus, another reason for the location of the four *maṭhs* and for the Cār Dhām may be the result of a phenomenon referred to as the *digvijaya*.

4.5.3 Śaṅkarācārya's Northern Conquest

The hagiographies of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya often feature the name *digvijaya* as part of their title, which is often translated as “conquest of the quarters” (Bader 2000, Sax 2000). Sax (2000:39) explains *digvijaya* as “originally a strategy for imperial military expansion, it came in late medieval India to be associated with proselytizing missions of the founders of major Hindu renunciant traditions – Caitanya, Madhva, Śaṅkara, and Vallabha, for instance.”

Obviously, the idealized concept of an emperor to ride out in all four directions in order to expand his empire has later been adapted to the lives of the great sages. Their conquest was not a military or political one, but a religious one.²⁸ Interestingly, Sax (2000:48) believes that the “other founders of the principal Vaiṣṇava traditions [...] unquestionably did undertake journeys that came to be understood as *digvijayas*.” While the travels of other saints may not be “unquestionable,” Sax (ibid.) has a point when he argues “that Śaṅkara’s hagiographers [...] were in fact emulating historical accounts of actual journeys by the Vaiṣṇavas”.

Thus, *digvijaya* basically means that there is no one more powerful in all four directions. In this sense, the concept of *digvijaya* in terms of these saints would translate

²⁸Sax (2000) argues in his article that these two classifications do not constitute opposites but go hand in hand. I believe that the *digvijaya* is an ideal and therefore a ritualized concept, and, in the case of Śaṅkarācārya and other saints, it was used as a leitmotif in later times.

4 The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside

into that no doctrine within India was able to resist their brilliant minds. In order to conquer all of India, one has to conquer its borders or the symbol of these borders – the Cār Dhām. All the sacred places of this four-fold pilgrimage, except for Badrīnāth, are situated at the shores of India and therefore along a distinct border. In this aspect I am inclined to think that, since traditionally the Himalayas formed the northern border of India, it was Badrīnāth, together with Kashmir that stood for the northern end of Bhāratavarṣa.

4.5.4 Ādi Śaṅkarācārya as a Means for Legitimation

As shown above, there is no evidence of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya ever coming to Badrīnāth, and most of his hagiographies deal either with hagiographies *per se* or they have a political connotation. Since the political aspect is rooted in South India, they do not pay much attention in the *math* far in the North.²⁹ Secondly, the narratives which deal with Śaṅkarācārya and circulate in Badrīnāth and Garhwal have no basis in the scriptures and are actually a local phenomenon. So why does Ādi Śaṅkarācārya have such a vital role in the foundation of the temple and the order of the priesthood in Badrīnāth?

From a traditional point of view, there is no doubt about the foundation of Badrīnāth in the *kr̥tayuga*. During this time Lord Viṣṇu was at least the *tretāyuga* before the Pāṇḍava brothers made their appearance in this part of the world. Yet for the *kaliyuga* only one name presented itself – Ādi Śaṅkarācārya. Of course the main reason why the figure of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya was so pleasing to be incorporated, was most probably the fact that there were already narratives bringing his person in contact with Badrī. His popularity and his narratives grew more interesting, because they offered a great opportunity to connect the heritage of one's own group to it. In this way the Rawal gives legitimization to his post, because Ādi Śaṅkarācārya was a Nambudri, and it would only seem logical that he would appoint one of his

²⁹See Sundareshan 2000.



Figure 4.2: The Kalpavṛkṣ with the adjacent Śiva temple in Joshimath.

own family as the head priest of his newly re-founded temple. The Ḍimrīs argue that their ancestors were his cooks, who came along with him on pilgrimage from the South and then settled down in Garhwal at his request, to cook for the Lord he had rescued from the waters. A good example of how places and agents may be altered to fit into a desired picture is given by a signboard in Joshimath.

In May 2011, when I was waiting in Joshimath for the procession up to Badrināth to begin, I took a little walk up the hill towards the Śaṅkarācāryamaṭh. In the upper part of Joshimath, near the Jyotirmaṭh, there is a tree called Kalpavṛkṣ, where it is believed that Śaṅkarācārya had meditated – which makes the tree more than 2,500 years³⁰ old. Next to the tree is placed a bilingual³¹ board, donated by the Field Ambulance (Army Medical Corps) of the Ibex Brigade, although the text itself is very much in line with the pamphlet issued by the Jyotirmaṭh. It starts with the

³⁰According to the traditional dates of Śaṅkarācārya's life.

³¹Hindi and English.

4 *The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside*

birth of Śaṅkarācārya³² in Kālatī and mentions that he came to Badrikāraṇya at the age of eleven. It was the word “Badrikāraṇya” that startled my interest, since the narratives usually do not speak of a Badrī forest. This mentioning of the forest Badrīnāth expands the area of all the way down to Joshimath.

In line with many temples and shrines in the area, it also says that the *liṅga* inside the Śiva temple was placed there by Ādi Śaṅkarācārya himself. Another interesting detail on the board states that there were “heterodox atheist forces” at work and *they*³³ “damaged [the] Badrinath Temple and threw the idol of Badrinarayan into Narad Kund of Alaknanda.” These “heterodox atheist forces” are specified as “Jains, Buddhist [sic!] Kapaliks and Charwaks.” The “Jains” had been erased by someone in both the Hindi and English texts, while in the English one it was rewritten, which demonstrates the conflict potential inherent to the shrine of Badrīnāth (for the background of this dispute, see the next chapter “Ṛṣabha’s Enlightenment at Aṣṭāpada”).

To conclude, it is safe to state that the idol was in fact found in the Alakanandā, and that this led to the production of a narrative concerning the divine intention of this event. Following Paul Hacker’s (1978:479) argumentation of the “conscious Hindu cultural policy” by the Vijayanagar kingdom in the 14th century and the concomitance of the appearance of the first hagiographies on Śaṅkarācārya and the first evidences of the four *mathas*, it is certain that the connection of Badrīnāth and Śaṅkarācārya was an idea that originally spread from the South.

However, none of the hagiographers make reference to the retrieving of the idol from the Nāradkuṇḍ and thus this narrative appears to be local, therefore the merging of the two apparently is a product of Garhwal. Just when this connection was precisely established is difficult to say. The only hint previous to the 19th century is the *Śaṅkaradigvijaya* of Madhava, which dates to the 17th or 18th century. Just as the other hagiographers, Madhava does not mention the retrieval of the

³²On the board, he is defined as the protector of Sanātana Dharma and the Kalpavṛkṣa.

³³It were not only the Buddhists, but “all of them.”

idol by Śaṅkarācārya. Thus, it is likely that Madhava took the older hagiographies as reference, but it seems that, had this narrative already been well-known in Badrīnāth he would have heard about it and also included it. On the other hand, taking the the later date for the composition of this hagiography, this coincides with a certain neglect of the shrine that finally resulted in the vacancy of the *gaddī* of the Śaṅkarācārya of Jośīmaṭh for 165 years, starting in the year 1777. Either way, this connection was established or even established itself through the continuous narration of both stories around the very dates of Madhava's Śaṅkaradigvijaya, especially since this narrative is not mentioned by Andrade, who otherwise explicitly mentions pilgrims from the kingdom of Vijayanagar.³⁴

The importance of this narrative does not lie only in the connection of these two stories but especially in the importance of this “merged” narrative on the foundation or origins of the pilgrimage center. Through Ādi Śaṅkarācārya it had, to the function of explaining where the idol came from, Buddhists and an orthodox system of worship added.

It is also important to note that the Skanda and Nārada Purāṇa mention the retrieval, however, there is no word on the Buddhists or any heterodox systems. The reason given for the idol being rescued from the river is rather the unwillingness of Viṣṇu to show his true form during the kali age, and the conviction of Brahmā that a broken stone statue was good enough for this wicked time.

Two different instances have to be added. First, it is frequently mentioned that before the appointment of the first Rawal the Daśanāmis of Jośīmaṭh were managing the shrine, but there is no proof for this. While the “merging” of these two narratives might be a product of the Daśanāmis of Jośīmaṭh to legitimize their position in the area, on the other hand it is also clear that it was Pandukeshwar and not Jośīmaṭh which was chosen for the winter worship of Badrīnārāyaṇ. If this was the case indeed, the narrative of the first appointment appears in a different light.

³⁴“Zu diesem Heiligtum wallfahrtet viel Volk von weit her, auch aus den entferntesten Gebieten Indiens wie von Ceylon und von Vijayanagar” (Aschoff 1989:24).

4 *The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside*

While this narrative proclaims that the king arrived to Badrīnāth by chance and simply appointed the first person that met his eyes, I doubt that the ruler was so naive. Politics and religion were always closely related in South Asia, and in the case of the Śāṅkarācāryas³⁵ is certainly true. Sundaresan remarks that “certainly, there is a substantial amount of documented evidence to show for many centuries now, the Śāṅkarācāryas and their maṭhas have not been strangers to the rulers of India and their politics.” Unfortunately however, there are very few of these documents that would shed light on the time before the 19th century and the entanglement of the kings and the Śāṅkarācāryas of Jośīmaṭh.

Secondly, even today, the narrative of its Buddhist past and the retrieval of the statue is not public knowledge. In an article by M.P. Veerendrakumar, later translated by P. Bhaskaran Nayar and published on the “Namboothiri Websites Trust” (Veerendrakumar 2009), it is stated was Śāṅkarācārya “started and ordained” the tradition of the Nambudris as temple priests of Badrīnāth and that the “worship rituals of Badari temple were systematised by Sree Sankara.” It is further even mentioned there that “it is again Sree Sankara who stipulated that the Raaval at Badarinath should be a celibate bachelor” (ibid.), while at the same time keeping quiet about the disputed past of Badrīnāth. They only dedicate one short paragraph to this topic: “The construction of the temple at Badarinath is shrouded in the mists of antiquity. It is generally believed that it was Brahmaavu, the creator, who installed the idol there and that the worship was set in place there right from the beginning of Kaliyugam” (ibid.).

There may again be a different motivation behind this omission, since it it would reflect better on the Nambudris if they have authority over a temple that was established by Brahmā, rather than over a formerly Buddhist shrine. Yet, this does not mend the fact that the narrative of the recovery of the statue is one that originated

³⁵Sundaresan (2001:3) notes that, in 1941, when the lineage of the Śāṅkarācāryas in Jośīmaṭh became reestablished “another important factor that legitimated the Jyotirmaṭh revival should not be overlooked.” “This is the involvement of the Hindu kings in north India in the process, and their acceptance of Brahmānanda Sarasvatī.”

in Garhwal and is still mostly known there.

4.6 **Ṛṣabha's Enlightenment at Aṣṭāpada**

While there is no obvious claim to the temple of Badrīnāth by the Buddhists, some Jains believe that Ṛṣabhadeva, the first of the 24 Tīrthaṅkaras, attained enlightenment near Badrīnāth and that the idol inside the temple represents his image and not that of Viṣṇu. According to Jaini (1977:323), Ṛṣabha not only discovered the use of fire for mankind, he was also its first king and “the first anchorite (*śramaṇa* or *muni*), the first omniscient being (*sarvajña* or *jina*), and the first great teacher of the path of liberation (*tīrthaṅkara*).” He became a renouncer, “continued in this ascetic life for over a thousand years” and finally attained nirvana “on Mount Kailash in the Himalaya” (ibid.). The Jain canon does not speak of Kailāś, but uses the term “Aṣṭāpad,” while John Cort (2010:134) remarks in this aspect that “Digambaras prefer to call the mountain by the name shared with Hindus, Kailasa.” While Aṣṭāpad is mainly identified with Kailāś or some mountain next to it,³⁶ some believe that this site might have been in the vicinity of Badrīnāth. This claim in itself should not cause controversy, although it seems that certain people in Badrīnāth, those already eager to neglect its Buddhist past, take this as an assault on the sanctity of the temple, especially since this claim sometimes re-enforces the idea that the *mūrti* is indeed that of Ṛṣabhadeva. Even though there is no real proof for either position, Sāṅkrtyāyan (1953:340) was probably aware of the allegations and remarks that the curled hair on the back of the head is also found on Jain *mūrtis*, but he notes that he does not follow this lead, since the chest of the *mūrti* has a *cīvar* like Buddhist idols.

John Cort (2010:136) notes “that by medieval times any tradition of Jain pilgrimage to Ashtapada Kailasa [and most probable to Badrīnāth as well] had long ceased

³⁶There is a research group called “The Ashtapad Research International Foundation (ARIF),” which is dedicated to finding the original site.

4 *The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside*

– although it has resumed to a limited extent in recent years, as part of the revival of pilgrimage among Indians more generally in the new form of religiously motivated tourism.”

Today, the Jain pilgrims attempt to stay mostly unnoticed. There is a board of regulations inside the Jain *dharmśālā* which mostly concerns the house rules, but one point addresses the behavior of the pilgrims within the temple: “Within the Aṣṭāpad area, or in the Vaiṣṇav temple of the Badrīnāth *dhām*, please do not unnecessarily discuss the *mūrti* with anyone and keep the worship in the temple according to the [local] custom.” This is probably based on the fact that a “society known as ‘Adinath Nirman Kalyan Trust Ahmedabad’” (High Court of Uttarakhand at Nainital 2009) within the Śvetāmbara denomination was eager to construct a temple or prayer hall in the vicinity of the Badrīnāth temple and certain persons, i.e. “many sadhus, Shankaracharyas and Mahamandaleshwars have come out openly against the proposed temple” (Kazami 2014). This trust had “obtained a permission from the ‘authority’ under the relevant law” (High Court of Uttarakhand at Nainital 2009), which was met with strong opposition in Badrīnāth. Kevin Mayo (2004:10) notes that, during the first construction work in 2000, “sections of the building intended as the temple were demolished and workmen threatened with being thrown in the river”.

The dispute was addressed in court and appealed twice. I was able to access only to the second appeal, which has already vanished from the internet. This second appeal is interesting in various aspects, but concerning this study especially in the respect that none of the alternative views on the *mūrti* of Badrīnārāyaṇ are addressed. The case was based on the agenda of the committee that “the construction of a ‘Jain Temple’ in Shri Badrinath Temple area would hurt the ‘Hindu religious sentiments’ and would also make it difficult for the plaintiff [Shri Badrinath & Kedarnath Temple Committee] to perform its statutory duties under the Act” (ibid.). In their response the defendants state that they did not plan to construct “a temple

4.6 *Ṛṣabha's Enlightenment at Aṣṭāpada*

but a 'Prarthna Sabha'" (ibid.). The committee then admitted that the new construction does not affect the area "as far as morality [and] health [...] are concerned" (ibid.), however it does affect the "public order" and further "would also hurt the religious sentiments of 'Vedic [sic!] Sanatan Hindus,'" one of which has already "threatened self-immolation in case such a construction is allowed" (ibid.). In addition, the committee also argued that according to the Purāṇas the "Shri Badrinath Dham is not restricted to merely the temple premises, but [...] is 48 miles from one side and 12 miles from the another," and it harshly states that Jains "are not only not Hindus but their religion is against the basic tenets of Hinduism inasmuch as Jains do not believe in God or Vedas nor in the principle of re-birth" (ibid.). Finally, the plaintiff argues that "from a religious point of view, there is no purpose for establishing a Jain Temple in the Badrinath Dham area" (ibid.). "Curiously," and this is also the word used in the act itself, "the defendant in their written statement have stated that it is not separate or distinct from Hindu religion, but is a part and parcel of Hindu religion" (ibid.). It remains unclear whether the defendants missed the passage of "not believing in rebirth" or whether they simply chose to ignore it, but their written statement may be difficult to accept for other Jains. This argumentation circumnavigates gracefully the notion of Aṣṭāpad being in Badrināth. The Jains argue that their wish simply is a place for contemplation and the reason for their pilgrimage is founded "in the faith and devotion in Lord Badrinath," because "the entire Jain community in the past as well as today worships Lord Badrinath i.e. Lord Vishnu at Badrinath temple" (ibid.). Thus, the plaintiff was only able to argue about the differences between the two faiths and to stress that "by establishment of a Jain Temple in Badrinath area will give rise to tension between the followers of these two religions, which will affect the law and order as well as public order in the area" (ibid.)

Be it as it may, the appeal was dismissed and today there is a small temple/prayer hall close to the Śvatāmbar *dharmśālā*. It is clear to the keen observer why the

4 *The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside*

Jains wanted the temple there (the name of their trust, Adinath, already addresses it) and why the committee (in this case obviously as a front man) was opposed to it. Whether the Aṣṭāpad mountain represents a metaphysical concept, is indeed the same as Mount Kailāś, or is even located in Badrīnāth is something likely never to be proven. Yet, it seems that the interest in this place within the Jain community has been kindled only recently, as Cort (2010:134-135) notes that “the foundation stone for a modern temple of Ashtapada on the Delhi-Jaipur highway was laid in December 2005,” and there is even “an elaborate representation of Ashtapada³⁷ in the United States as well.” It may be the uncertainty connected to this place which makes it so interesting, but it is also evident that a place with a disputed past may evoke reactive impulses when different claims are confronted.

4.7 Maps and the Visual Presentation of Badrīnāth

Even today it remains difficult to obtain proper cartographic material of the upper Garhwal area, and it is close to impossible to get an actual photograph or even a realistic sketch of the idol inside the temple. None the less, there are several old and new maps that not only show the location of Badrīnāth but also the routes the pilgrim is supposed to follow. Concerning the idol of Badrīnārāyaṇ, the devout pilgrim can buy various artistic versions of the *garbha gr̥ha* along with other representations of gods at the local bazaars.

4.7.1 Maps

The two Himalayan shrines of Badrī and Kedār are often included in older maps that depict not only the whole of India but sometimes even stretch beyond the sub-continent. Woodward (1992:338-400) gives a good example for such a depiction

³⁷“The icons were carved in Jaipur. [...] Planning this display was the work of several members of the New York temple who formed an Ashtapad Research Foundation, and in 2006 traveled to the Himalayas to try to find the lost site.” (Cort 2010:135)

4.7 Maps and the Visual Presentation of *Badrīnāth*

via a Marathi world map. The map³⁸ is centered on India and it details the Indian river systems, but it also marks Lanka, China, Turkey and even includes, in a very schematic way, Arabia, England, France and “other hat-wearing islands.” The Himalayas, represented by a horizontal line with little hills on it, is separated from a similar representation of the Shivaliks. In this region, there are only two places plotted: Himachal and *Badrī-* and *Kedār*nāth, together as one square. Since the map can only function as an idea, considering the lack of detail, it emphasizes the importance of these two mountain shrines to the essential nature of India (or the world). Since every pilgrimage involves travel, maps are helpful in this endeavor, yet most pilgrimage maps evolve more around the idea of the significance of certain places along the way rather than actually assisting navigation. One of these early maps, and in fact the only one I know from this time, covers the area of the Ganges sources and is entitled “Map of *Badrinarayan*.” According to Gole (1989:62), the map is kept in the City Palace Museum in Jaipur. While Gole does not date the large map (129 x 48 cm), Woodward (1992:439) places it in the early 18th century. Woodward (1991:441) believes that “details of temples, towns, villages, bridges, and fords along the route and of tributaries to be crossed appear to be rendered with some concern for fidelity to the real world,” However, it would be very difficult to locate a single temple with this map. Interestingly neither of the two authors directly comment on the paths that are marked on the map. They seem to be subsequently added, since they are clearly painted over the actual map. Another correction is then mentioned by both of them. The *Gaṅgā*³⁹ on this map is depicted as continuing up to lake *Mānasarova*, but it makes a turn to the West above *Badrīnāth*. This seems to be altered in later times, by painting a similar turn towards the East. Thus, it seems that the original painter never really set foot into this region and that later pilgrim paths and other changes were added by, or on accounts of, actual pilgrims. There are further points concerning this map that

³⁸The map is unfortunately not dated.

³⁹According to the map, it should be the *Viṣṇugaṅgā*, coming through the *Niti* valley.

4 The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside

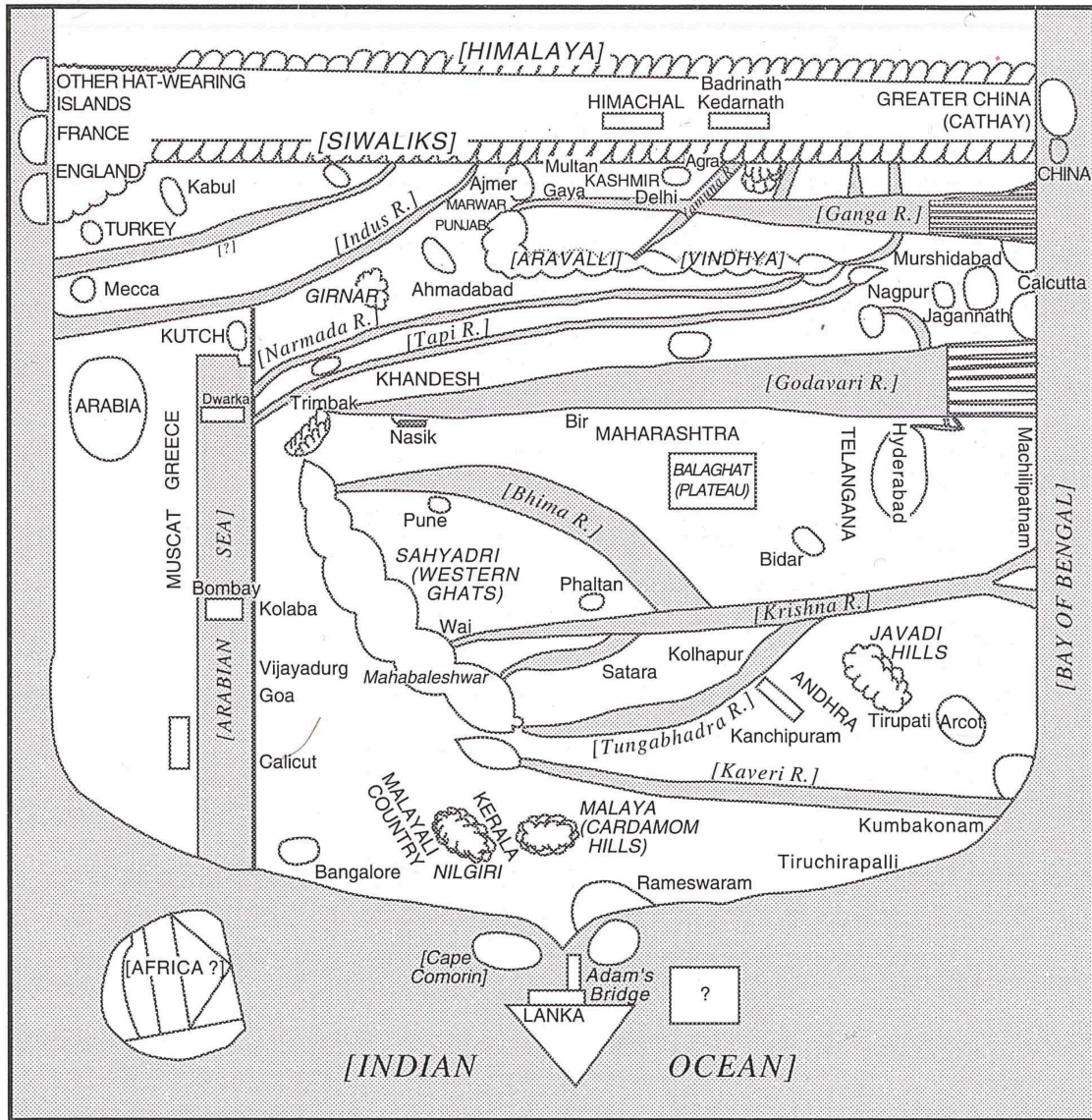


Figure 4.3: “Marathi world map with accompanying traditional cosmographic world image,” in a simplified version, as redrawn by Woodward (1992:399).

4.7 Maps and the Visual Presentation of Badrināth

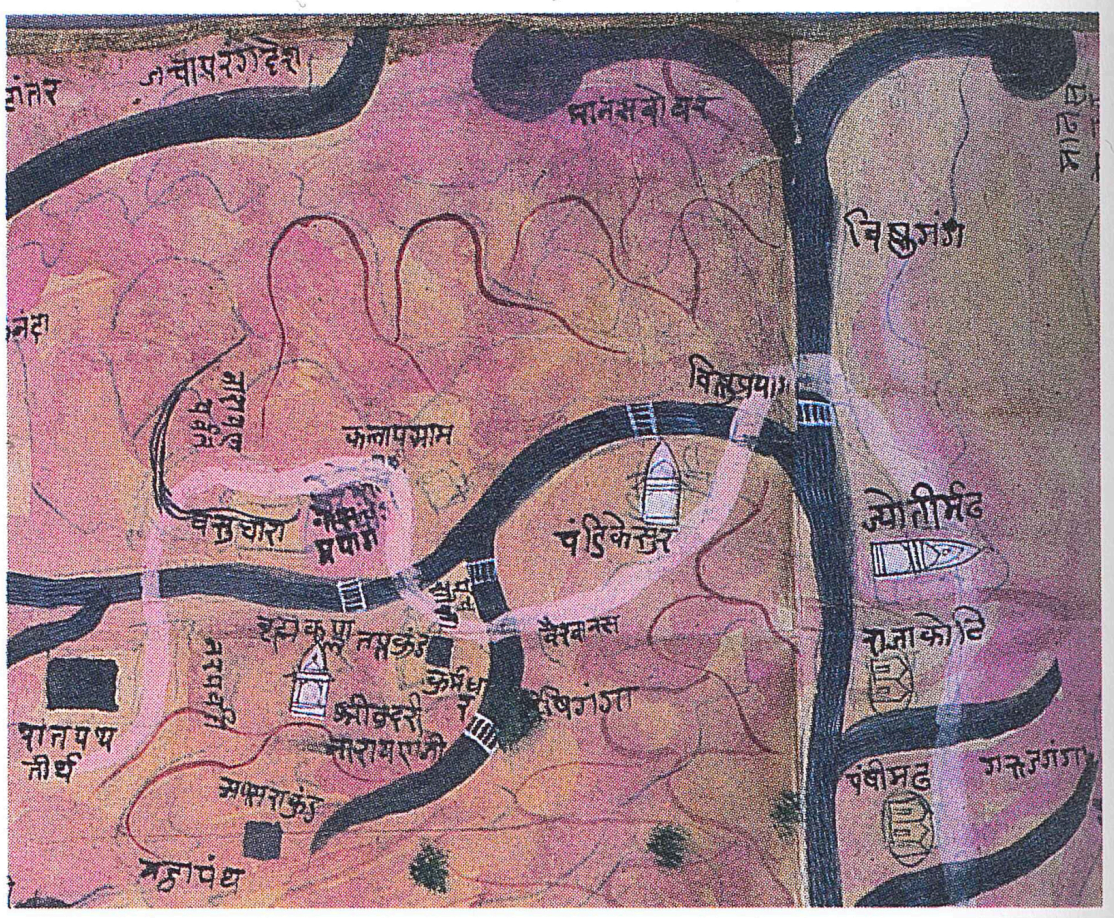


Figure 4.4: Detail of the “Map of Badrinarayan” (Gole 1982:62).

4 *The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside*

seem noteworthy. First of all, Sister Nivedita (1928:7) writes that “it was the railway,⁴⁰ we are told, that has popularised Haridwar. Until a few years ago, Kankhal had been the long recognized centre and people made pilgrimage only to Haridwar, for bathing and praying being exceedingly careful to be back before nightfall, so probable was the appearance of a tiger on the road between the two places.” Still, on the map, the pilgrimage starts in Haridwar⁴¹ and proceeds to Rishikesh from there. Secondly, the whole area of Badrīnāth is topsy-turvy: Pandukeshwar is on the wrong side of the Alakanandā, as is the Vasudhārā (depicted somewhere between Badrīnāth and Mana), and the Nar and Nārāyaṇ mountains are inverted. On the other hand, the map also shows a great detail of holy places that surround the temple of Badrīnārāyaṇ – the Taptkuṇḍ, Brahmkapāl, Ṛṣigaṅgā, Śatapatthatīrtha as well as the Kurmadhārā. Thirdly, the region north of Badrīnāth is not simply referred to as “Bhoṭāntar,” which is written as well, but also specifically as “Cāparangdeś.”

Taking into account that pilgrims were usually guided by Paṇḍās along their way and also the size of the map (48 x 129 cm), its purpose seems to have been to demonstrate a general overview and describes what the future pilgrim would have encountered on his way. At the same time, it depicts a idealized geography in which the source of the Gaṅgā is actually situated at the feet of Mount Kailāś. Looking next at maps that are now printed in the thousands and glued to the back of almost every guide book or brochure, the difference is not as great as one would expect. While today these maps include charts of various distances and are geographically slightly more correct, their main idea is still to inspire the religious imagination of the pilgrim, rather than giving an aid to navigation.

⁴⁰Haridwar was connected via the railway in 1886.

⁴¹Here I have to trust the judgement of Susan Gole, since I can not make out the words on the photo she published.

4.7 Maps and the Visual Presentation of Badrināth



Figure 4.5: Modern pilgrim's map.



Figure 4.6: A classical print of the Cār Dhām with the Badriś Pañcāyat in the middle.



Figure 4.7: A similar representation of Badrīnarāyaṇ.

4.7 Maps and the Visual Presentation of Badrināth



श्री बद्री केदार यात्रा दर्शन

Figure 4.8: Another Version of the Cār Dhām pilgrimage.



Figure 4.9: A print on a metal sheet, showing a representation that is closer to reality.

4.7.2 Pictures

As it is the case in most temples within India, taking a picture of the *mūrti* is considered extremely rude and is therefore often forbidden. While Sāṅkṛtyāyan (1953:475) mentions that it was allowed to take pictures before he came to Badrīnāth, “it was the committee that, after considering the purity of the *mūrti*, put an end to this.” Of course, it takes a while to adopt to new technologies, and this may be the reason for why it was allowed for a certain time. There are in fact a few photographs left from this time, although I believe that they were taken later than the 1950s, but they are only shown with extreme caution, and I consider myself very lucky to have had the chance to see one for a short glimpse. This is also the reason why there are exclusively painted representations of Badrīnārāyaṇ available in the market.

During the peak season, when the larger part of the million pilgrims rushes to Badrīnāth, the time every individual receives for *darśan* is very limited. Sometimes they cannot even stop in front of the *mūrti* – after waiting for long hours in the queue. This may be one reason why pictures of Badrīnārāyaṇ, mostly along with the other major deities, are so popular. Of course there are other reasons as well, such as having a representation of Badrīnārāyaṇ at one’s shrine or house or as a souvenir. The question to be pursued here is what we can deduct from the different versions of these pictures.⁴²

Figure 4.6 and figure 4.8 both show an artistic rendering of the Cār Dhām. While figure 4.6 depicts the four temples along with their corresponding goddesses⁴³ and views of the *garbha grha*, figure 4.8 also illustrates important places along the way, but it only denotes the sacred springs of Gaṅgā and Yamunā by reproducing the images of their respective goddesses. Figure 4.7 and figure 4.9 are both represented, in different variations and detail, in the former two. They depict an idealized

⁴²Dates and artists (apart from the artist’s signature in figure 4.7 and 4.9) of all the pictures remain unknown.

⁴³In the case of Gaṅgotrī and Yamunotrī.

4 The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside

version of Badrīnārāyaṇ,⁴⁴ while figure 4.9 may be recognized by the pilgrims. If we look at the depictions of Kedārñāth, especially the ones that show the inner sanctum, we find that the actual liṅga is depicted very close to its actual shape. This is also true for most of the prints that depict the liṅga of Kedārñāth, although there are pictures that add an anthropomorphic form of Śīva as well. Before we jump to conclusions however, it has to be added that the individual worship in these two shrines is distinctly different. In Kedārñāth, every pilgrim is allowed to walk into the *sanctum sanctorum* and touch the actual liṅga. Also most of the rituals, performed for the pilgrims by the Paṇḍās, are conducted right in front of Śīva's symbol, while in the case of Badrīnāth, only the Rawal is allowed to touch the *mūrti* and only he and one helper of the Dimrīs are allowed to enter into the *garbha grha*. Yet, the main reason for the different forms of representation lies in the very nature of these two idols: as the *liṅga* of Kedārñāth is seen as *svayambhū*, and therefore something exceptionally holy, the *mūrti* of Badrīnārāyaṇ is damaged and of dubious if not flawed origin.

Most of the idealized depictions of Badrīnārāyaṇ (figure 4.6 and 4.7) are entitled Śrī Badrīś Pañcāyat. The question remains whether this is understood as actually five members or just an assembly of the important gods and saints. They are depicted and their names are given in Devanāgarī, from left to right: Ganeśa, Kuber, (below kneeling) Garuḍ, (standing next to Badrīnārāyaṇ) Uddhav, Badrīnārāyaṇ, (flanking his side) Lakṣmī, (kneeling on the floor) Nārad, Nārāyaṇ and Nar. Interestingly, Ganeśa, who plays an important role, since he is worshipped and prepared for winter when the temple is closing, is not featured in the *ārti darśan* depiction (figure 4.9). A reason for this could be that he is kept before and below Badrīnārāyaṇ, but the small picture at the lower right corner on figure 4.6 also shows the floor in front of Badrīnārāyaṇ and Ganeśa is missing there as well.

⁴⁴His body is colored in blue and Badrīnārāyaṇ holds in his hands either conch and discus, or, as in figure 4.8, all four emblems of Viṣṇu.

4.7.3 Film

In 2011, a film named *Badrīnāth* was released. The film title is not only a reference to the main character, named Badrī, but the story is in fact based around the pilgrimage center. While the narrative of the movie is not exceptionally inspiring, there are a few details that are worth mentioning.

In general, it is remarkable that there is a movie centered around the shrine of *Badrīnāth*, but even more interesting is the fact that it does not rank among the hundreds of films produced each year in Bollywood which feature Hindi as medium. *Badrīnāth* is a product of Tollywood⁴⁵ and was released simultaneously in Telugu and Malayalam.⁴⁶ Contrary to expectations, Tollywood does not release much fewer films than Bollywood, but, since the audience is much smaller, it also has a significantly smaller budget. Pilgrims from Andhra Pradesh (Āndhra Pradeś) frequently visit the shrine, and they are most visible during the processions that mark the beginning and end of the pilgrimage season. I had the impression that pilgrims from Andhra and from the South of India in general have a deep devotion towards Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, so it is even more surprising that his person and role is missing in the film completely. From a general point of view, it illustrates the significance and prestige of *Badrīnāth*, as the producer clearly considered the temple powerful enough to turn the film into a success. The movie is said to have had the largest budget⁴⁷ (Arjun's 'Badrinath' 2011). Since they were obviously not allowed or willing to shoot near the actual temple (there are scenes showing houses of Paṇḍās and the Taptkuṇḍ etc.) the film team constructed an extensive replica of the shrine near Manali in Himachal Pradesh.

The movie starts out with an attack on the Akṣardhām temple in Gujarat, which prompts the organization of a martial arts army in order to protect all (or most –

⁴⁵There are two main understandings of Tollywood, one refers to the Bengali film industry and the other one to movies that feature Telugu – in this case Tollywood refers to the latter.

⁴⁶The film was later released in a dubbed Hindi version, which was also renamed *Sangharsh aur Vijay*. There may be an interesting reason for this, but I was unable to receive any information on this renaming.

⁴⁷41 crore Rs, equaling about 5 million Euros.

4 *The Dhām of the North – The Perspective from the Outside*

only Kāśī, Amarnāth and Badrīnāth are explicitly mentioned) sacred sites in India. In order to train this army, which initially is solely constituted by children, it is sent to Bishma Narayan, high in the Himalayas – a place called Takṣaśilā in the movie. The main character, named Badrī, is a Pahārī who is chosen later, because the other children, already in training, were unable to remember the Viṣṇusahasranāma, whereas he was able to do so by just hearing it once. This is also where the film demonstrates a strong dichotomy between the views on the Himalayas and its inhabitants: the Pahārīs in this film are either extremely gifted (like Badrī and Bishma Narayan), opportunistic (Badrī’s parents) or simply greedy and crooked (Cupke Bābā, his helper, which resembles a Paṇḍā and Batting Bābā), while the Himalayas themselves are portrait as the eternal, holy abode. The producer Allu Aravind attempted to position the film somewhere between a religious commercial for the shrine, a praise of devotion and an action movie. When the *kṣetrapāls*, now adult, have finished their education, they are sent away to their individual sacred sites (chosen by chance), and Badrī leaves for the shrine of the same name. With this, the first song is featured, praising and describing Badrīnāth in detail. It starts with a voice-over which explains the sacredness of the temple as the first and foremost temple, the place where Viṣṇu stepped onto the earth for the very first time and where the eight-syllabled mantra, “om namo Nārāyaṇāya,” originated. The song starts with the following phrase, which also serves as the refrain: “It’s Badrīnāth, the holy shrine of Lord Śrī Hari. It’s the heaven [*vaikuṅṭha*] on earth, abode of wealth and holy shrine. As our saviour, Lord Viṣṇu’s holy feet appeared on the hill. It’s the place where sage Vyāsa wrote the holy Vedas.”⁴⁸ In the following the narrator lists important sites, which are also shown in the meantime: Alakanandā, Taptkuṇḍ (shot on the actual site), Gaṅgā (shot opposite Nārādkuṇḍ), the unseen river of Virajā (I never heard of, shot at the Bhīmphūl), Saravatī (shot at the gorge near Gaṅgotrī?), Brahmkapāl, Vyāsguphā (shot in Mana, also inside the cave itself)

⁴⁸According to the subtitles, additions from the author in brackets.

4.7 Maps and the Visual Presentation of *Badrināth*

and Ganeśguphā (also filmed in Mana). Throughout the song, “*Hari bol*” is chanted in the background. While the Vasudhārā plays no role in the song, it has a whole scene dedicated to it later. This was shot in the studio, and shows the water actually withdraws when bad, or atheist people walk under it.

Throughout the film, the Pahārīs are mainly supernumeraries, and only a few of them are given more attention. Two of them are Badrī’s parents. When they meet the girl, tellingly named Alakanandā, who falls in love with Badrī and then plans on marrying him (though Badrī does not know of her love), they see her as snobbish and rude, but as soon as they learn that she is immensely rich, they immediately change their attitude and try to win her over. The other ones are a Paṇḍā/barber/hawker, a bābā and his guru. All three of them are tricksters. In the scene at Vasudhārā, the Paṇḍā, after shaving the head of a pilgrim, attempts to trick another pilgrim into giving him a large amount of money. The three of them together, later on have a side story where they try to deceive a family of pilgrims (portrayed as featherbrained city dwellers) while the shrine is closed. One of them, Cupke Bābā, is dressed like a mixture between a Tibetan and a Chinese. If this represents an actual reference to the vicinity to Tibet, or even a potential shared history is questionable, since Chinese characters often play comical parts in Indian movies. On the other hand, in the first song, the background dancers resemble Tibetan temple dancers as well, but both of these cases might be incidental.

To conclude, the part of the film that revolves around the temple represents a mostly accurate view of ordinary pilgrims on the shrine and the Pahārīs. Further, the fact that there is a movie with *Badrināth* as its central theme demonstrates the importance and publicity of the shrine and, since it is a Telugu cinema production and released in all of India it also shows that *Badrināth* is indeed a pan-Indian pilgrimage center and landmark.

5 Badrīnāth's Religious Setup

Over the years, the shrine of Badrīnāth has changed dramatically in various aspects. It is not only that pilgrim numbers have multiplied or that the roles and esteem of the different priests have adopted, but even the temple itself came under different spheres of power. Due to these changes in history, the shrine and its priests had to adapt and redefine themselves to meet the respective challenges of each time. There are several groups of priests at Badrīnāth, and while all of them have their specific fields of action, they are also inclined to affect the meaning of Badrīnāth in their favor. The multiple lawsuits and acts that were necessary to end conflicts and establish a structural system in Badrīnāth reflect both the importance of the place as well as its potential for prosperity. While most of the resultant quarrels remained among the priests in Badrīnāth, the head priests also took part in related discourses in national politics.

5.1 Rawal

It may be surprising that the head priest of the highest temple of Viṣṇu in terms of altitude, located deep in the Himalayas, originates from the South, yet this is also the case in the neighboring shrine of Kedārnāth, or the Paśūpatināth temple in Kathmandu.

The Rawal is not only supposed to hail from the South of India, but he also needs to be a member of the Nambudiri *gotra* and remain a *brahmacarya* (celibate). It

5 *Badrīnāth's Religious Setup*

is not widely known, but the candidate is in fact chosen from amongst only seven families among the Nambudiris of Kerala. According to the “Namboothiri Websites Trust” (Namboothiri), these families belong to the so-called “Sagara Dwijans,” who came from Gokarṇa by the order “of the king of Kolathunaadu in the 17th century AD.” These seven families are:¹

- Vaśiṣṭh – Keśav Prasād
- Viśvāmitra – current Rawal
- Kaśyapa
- Aṅgirasat – Badrī Prasād
- Bhārgava
- Garga
- Bharadvāja

The importance of the Rawal lies in the fact that he is the only one allowed to touch the statue of Badrīnārāyaṇ and therefore the only one capable of conducting the rituals inside the *garbha grha*.

The six months the Rawal spends in Badrīnāth are tightly restricted and well-scheduled. His daily routine revolves around the three sacred baths. For this purpose, there is a special *kunḍ* called “Garam Kunḍ” (Kumar 1991:70), right behind the Taptkunḍ. Although Kumar (ibid.) writes that the Rawal takes his first bath around 4:00 a.m. and then, after conducting his personal *pūjā*, enters the shrine at 5:30 a.m., the times have been adjusted to manage the increasing pilgrim numbers. Today, the *abhiṣek* starts already at 4:30 a.m. and therefore we can assume that the Rawal is required to take his first bath at least an hour earlier than he used to.²

¹According to Shankaran Namboodiri. He is from the Kaishyaba family and secretary to the “Aadi Sankara Adwaita Foundation”.

²According to Shankaran, the timings of the *abhiṣek* in the morning are flexible. During the renovation of the temple in 1984, the *abhiṣek* already started at 3:30 a.m., while in November, when only few pilgrims remain, it does not start before 6:00 a.m.

After the bath, he walks up to the shrine, proceeded by his helpers who carry the golden staffs of the Rawal. The Rawal must not be touched on his way from the Garam Kuṇḍ to the temple, and during the main season his helpers have a hard time to keep the pilgrims from touching his feet. When he has finished the rituals, he is allowed to retire to his residence, right below the temple, before he has to take a second bath at noon. The evening *ārti* requires yet another cleansing bath from the Rawal, and while the temple usually closes around 9:00 p.m., during peak season it remains open for pilgrims until well after midnight. Further, the Rawal is only allowed to go from his residence to the temple and back, until the Mātāmūrti Melā in September, after which he is, theoretically, since I never saw any Rawal wandering around, allowed to walk around between his duties.

It is said that the “worship rituals of Badari temple were systematised by Sree Sankara” (Veerendrakumar 2009), and Śāṅkara wished that Badrīnārāyaṇ would be taken care of by a Brahmin from his own family – the Nambudiris. At the same time, it is also said that he chose one of his closest disciples, Toṭakācārya to be his representative at Badrīnāth. It is not entirely improbable that Toṭaka was a Nambudiri, however it is very unlikely. According to Madhava’s *Digvijaya* Toṭaka was known by the name of Giri before he met Śāṅkarācārya in Śringeri. While “he was noted for his obedience, industry, righteousness and taciturnity,” he was also “dull as that wall” (Madhava-Vidyaranya n.d.:143).

Totakācārya is regarded as the first Śāṅkarācārya of Joshimath-Badrīnāth. He was followed by 41 Ācāryas. The 42nd Ācārya was Rām Kṛṣṇa, and after his death there was no successor and the seat remained empty for 165 years.

Up to this day there have been 23 Rawals. They were:³

³Rawals 1 to 19 according to Rāvat (1994:119-120). The other Rawals were either mentioned by priests in Badrīnāth or are known through my fieldworks. The dates are given by Babulkar (nd:51), and since some (Rāvat 1994) are in *Samvat*, they were approximately converted into Gregorian. The 21. Rawal Badrī Prasad Nambūdri only conducted the opening procession in 2009, but was already unable to walk due to a severe sickness and retired soon after. The 22. Rawal was suspended in February 2014 after molesting a woman in a hotel in New Delhi (Chief Priest arrested 2014), and finally removed in April of the same year (Negi 2014).

5 Badrīnāth's Religious Setup

Name of Rawal	Date	Time of Service
1. Gopāl Rāval	1777-1786	9 years
2. Rāmchandra Rāmbrahm Raghunāth Rāval	1786-1787	1 year
3. Nīladatta Rāval	1787-1792	5 years
4. Sītārām Rāval	1792-1803	11years
5. Nārāyaṇa Rāval (first)	1803-1817	14 years
6. Nārāyaṇa Rāval (second)	1817-1842	25 years
7. Kṛṣṇa Rāval	1842-1846	4 years
8. Nārāyaṇa Rāval (third)	1846-1860	14 years
9. Puruṣottama Rāval	1860-1901	41 years
10. Vāsudeva Rāval (removed)	1901-1902	1 year
11. Rāmā Rāval	1902-1906	4 years
12. Vāsudeva Ravāl (reappointed)	1906-1942	34 years
13. Śambhu Govinda Rāval	1942-1949	7 years
14. Kṛṣṇa Nambūdri Rāval	1949-1956	7 years
15. Mādhava Keśavan Nambūdri	1956-1959	3 years
16. Viṣṇu Keśavan Nambūdri	1959-1972	13 years
17. C. P. Gaṇapati Nambūdri	1972-1988	16 years
18. P. Nārāyaṇa Nambūdri	1988-1991	3 years
19. P. Śrīdharan Nambūdri	1991-1994	3 years
20. P. Viṣṇu Nambūdri (removed)	1994-2002	8 years
21. Badri Prasad Nambūdri	2002-2009	7 years
22. Keśav Prasād Nambūdri (removed)	2009-2014	5 years
23. V. C. Īśvara Prasād Nambūdri	2014-present	

According to tradition, the king of Garhwal, Pradeep Shah came to Badrīnāth that same year, in 1777, and found no priest at the shrine. Without hesitation, the king appointed the only person present as the new priest of Badrīnāth. This person was

the cook Gopāl, a Nambudiri Brahmin and the first person to hold the title of Rawal in Badrīnāth. Since then, the final installment of every new Rawal is performed by the Rāja of Tehri who puts *tilak* on his forehead. Today this is only a symbolic act, because the Rāja has lost every influence in matters concerning the temple.

While the common notion implies that the *daśanāmīs* not only managed the *maṭh* in Joshimath and the temple in Badrīnāth but also served as the head priests, I was told by Shankaran Namboodiri that the priest in Badrīnāth had always been a Nambudiri. In his view, this made sense, because the Śāṅkarācāryas would cut their *janeū*⁴ and *coṭī*⁵ both of which are paramount to conduct the rituals inside the temple.

Since the first appointment of a Rawal, this position is impossible to discuss isolated from the political events that took place in the following years, especially since most of the available information comes from the British, after Badrīnāth fell under their jurisdiction.

Garhwal was overrun by Gorkha forces in the year 1804, and the temple of Badrīnāth remained under the rule of the king of Nepal for almost 11 years. In 1815, the temple was regained by the Tehri kingdom under prince Sudarshan Shah, but this was done with the help of the British and thus had its price. One cost was that the temple of Badrīnāth came under British administration. Thus, the British now had a direct way into Western Tibet, which they intended to use for trade, but they also had to take over the previous responsibilities of the king of Garhwal. Since what time the temple and the king were connected in this way is unclear, but it seems that his role of supervisor and superior to the chief priest might in fact correlate with the appointment of the first Rawal in 1777. This not exclusively ceremonial tie was severed in 1815, and since then “and until the year 1841 the Commissioner of Kumaon exercised the full authority which by custom was vested in the Raja or ruling power” (IOR 1895:1). It seems that the British did not care much about the

⁴Also called *yajñopavīta* – the holy thread, worn by the upper three *varṇas*.

⁵*Śikhā*, a lock of hair that remains on the top of the shaven head.

5 *Badrīnāth's Religious Setup*

Rawals or the management of the temple, and they finally considered the “connection between the British Government and the temple of Badrinath involved in the investment of the Rawal [...] objectionable” (ibid.). Therefore they rested “the actual nomination to the office of Rawal [...] with the Rawal” since the year 1841. The only reliable evidence is accounts of the British administration, while the conditions at Badrīnāth before their advent remain unknown, but it seems that the kings of Garhwal at least attempted to keep the situation agreeable to both priests and pilgrims. Raper (1994:86) notes that, before the Gorkha invasion, the Rawal was “well aware of his actual weakness,” but that “since the *Gurc'hali* conquest, the pontificate is up for sale, and disposed of to the highest bidder.” Most of those who visited Badrīnāth or wrote about the temple had little good to say on behalf of the Rawal. Atkinson (2002:III:25) notes that “a large establishment of servants is kept up both male and female, the latter as dancing-girls and mistresses of the celibate priests,” thereby already pointing out that the Rawals did not always live a celibate life, but instead fathered many children. G.T. Lushington argues in a report dated the 27th May 1847 (IOR 1895:21) that many of them [Bhaṇḍārīs and Mahtas], *strange* to say, [are] the illegitimate children of former and present Rawals, by hill women of the Rajput caste. Lushington (ibid.) further notes that even though the Rawals are supposed to lead a life of celibacy, “nevertheless, ‘owing to the depravity of the impure age’ and to the ‘infirmities of poor human nature’, a custom became established several generations ago of allowing the Rawal and the subordinate priests to contract a sort of left-handed marriage with women of the place or country (usually of the Rajput caste) and as a natural consequence the issue of such marriages is left to be provided for out of the temple funds.”

5.1.1 **The British Administration**

After British Garhwal became established, the first commissioner took over the role of the king, yet it seems that the position for the appointment of the Rawal

himself was left with the Rāja of Garhwal – the commissioners merely managing the financial matters of the shrine. “In this state matters remained till 1841, when Mr. G. Lushington or his predecessor transferred the management of both lands and funds to the Rawal of Badrinath. There is no report or correspondence of any kind seemingly to be found from which the grounds of this alteration can be gathered. We are left to suppose with Mr. Batten that it was the ‘no connection with idolatry’ which moved the measure” (IOR 1895:26).

The reason might very well correspond with the idea that “a Christian Government can hardly be expected to look strictly after heathen worship, and there is no one entitled to prosecute the grants having been originally given by the native kings” (IOR 1895:44). Yet, the changes applied by Lushington also give the impression that a further intention was to weaken the Rāja’s authority on Badrīnāth. This resulted in the decision to make the Rawal the sole manager of the temple, including the right to nominate and appoint his own successor. The questions in this respect concern the influence of the changes of the British on the shrine, and the extant of influences of internal conflicts due to the increased influx of pilgrims and therefore money.

“In former times, when the temple was all but inaccessible, the Rajas portioned off different duties connected with the temple to different men and clans. Now [1877] that there is a tolerable footpath from the plains up to the temple, and during good seasons an influx of from twenty to thirty thousand pilgrims may be expected, the profits have largely increased.” (IOR 1895:53)

To put the material wealth the temple had accumulated into context, a *Statement showing average income of the Badrinath Temple and its dependent shrines* was composed by G. E. Reade, Senior Assistant Commissioner, dated 31st January, 1877 (IOR 1895: 54-55):

5 *Badrināth's Religious Setup*

	Rupees	Collected at present by
1 Fixed income	7,299	Under orders of Rawal
Offering to temple	7000	Do.
Ataka	4000	Do.
Gadi bhet	3000	Do.
2 Kuber Sila	10	Dimri
3 Risi Ganga	10	Do.
4 Kuram dhara	10	Do.
5 Parlad dhara	5	Do.
6 Narad kund	25	Do.
7 Surj kund	10	Do.
8 Gauri kund	10	Do.
9 Tapt kund	15,000	Deoprayagi
10 Addey Kedareswar	15	Dimri
11 Fees from bathing in Tapt kund	500	Deoprayagi
12 Shankaracharj-ki-gaddi	5	Rawal
13 Gauriji-ki-bhet	150	Dimri
14 Hanuman-ki-bhet	5	Do.
15 Ganeshji-ki-bhet	10	Do.
16 Dharam Sila	6,000	Do.
17 Charanmirt kund	25	Do.
18 Hahu kund	15	Do.
19 Ghanta karn	10	Do.
20 Brahan kapal	4,000	Kothyal and Hatwal
21 Lachhamiji-ki-bhet	500	Dimri
22 Basu dhara	4	Do.
23 Mata murti	2	Mana villagers

	Rupees	Collected at present by
24	Byas Pustak-ki-bhet	2 Do.
25	Pandukeswar temple	200 Bhat
26	Joshimath temple	250 Do.
27	Durga temple	5 Do.
28	Byasdeo	5 Do.
29	Kholi	400 Kholia
30	Phul Basad	300 Dimri
31	Baikar	250 Do.
32	Bhahisya Badri	15 Bhat
33	Bridle Badri	10 Do.
34	Urgam	5 Dimri
35	Bishanu Prayag	30 Joshyal Brahman
36	Jotling	5 Do.

Even though it is said that it was Lushington who gave more power to the Rawal, in two reports in 1842 and 1846, he expressed his suspicion that “the temple of Badrinath [...] is conveniently situated for purpose of intrigue (should the Rawal be disposed to countenance it) between Nepal and Lahore” (IOR 1895:17). He further explicates by theorizing that “Brahmans and religious mendicants [...], who might meet at those shrines [Kedārnāth and Badrināth] from the opposite quarters of Khatmandu [sic] and Lahore, passing through Jumla and Dhoti into Kumaun and Garhwal to Badrinath and Kedarnath and thence issuing, on the opening of the passes, into the trans-Himalayan plateau bordering on the Sikh countries of Ladakh, Balti, Chumba, &c. [...]” (IOR 1895:15). In Lushington’s (ibid.) thinking, this would result in “an unbroken line of communication [...] [that] would thus be again established from Khatmandu to Lahore, and the secret messages and communications which the events of late years have brought to light when transmitted

5 *Badrināth's Religious Setup*

through the plains of India, would again start into life under the fostering care and protection [sic] of the Rawals.”

Since the whole management of the temple was already transferred to the Rawal, J. Thornton (IOR 1895:30), in the position of the Secretary to Government of the North-Western Provinces, in 1850 suggested in a letter to the Sadr Board of Revenue “that some respectable native Hindu inhabitants of the province should be associated with the European local agents in the management of the trust.” This suggestion was taken up by Strachey,⁶ and the trust began its work as the “Local Agency Committee,” constituted as following:

(1) The Commissioner of the province to be *ex officio* the President of the Committee.

(2) The Senior Assistant in Garhwal to be *ex officio* Secretary [...].

(3) The following native gentlemen to be members of the Local Agency:–

The Rawal of Kedarnath

The Rawal of Badrinath

Amba Datt, Sadr Amin of Srinagar

Sewanand, Munsif of Srinagar

Rudr Datt Pant, Tahsildar of Srinagar.

(IOR 1895:30)

Further, Strachey noted that a Sub-Committee should be formed of “the Hindu members” of the Local Agency Committee “for the settlement of all questions regarding the temporal affairs of Badrinath” (ibid.). This committee was put in office especially because “no provision had been made for the choice of a successor to the Rawalship of Badrinath” (IOR 1895:2). “The result of the rules was to destroy all responsibility, to deprive the Rawal of all authority, and to establish confusion

⁶Senior Assistant Commissioner, Garhwal.

in the temple affairs” (ibid.). Therefore, it was decided “on the recommendation of Sir Henry Ramsay” to return the rights of appointing the Rawal as well as the Likhwar to the king of Garhwal (ibid.). While this change should indicate a loss of power of the Rawal, the opposite was the case and the Rawal began to interfere “in nominations to posts which are the hereditary right of one of the four *thoks*” (IOR 1895:3). The reason for this lies in the fact that the Rawal was also “paid by his nominees” (ibid.).

It seems that there have been continuous quarrels between the Rawal, the Naib Rawal, the *Ḍimrīs* and the Rājā of Garhwal. In 1875, the Senior Assistant Commissioner reports that “the valuable jewelry and ornaments belonging to the temple has disappeared [...] purloined by the Rawal and others; I say the Rawal, because in the list of debts he entered one of Rs. 8,458, due to his concubines” (IOR 1895:52). In 1880, the Rawal refused to pay allowances to his successor, and in 1882, Colonel Fisher “recommended the location of a police force at Badrinath, explaining that the Rawal was unable to maintain order; that the offerings were intercepted by the the *Ḍimrīs*, and that the Rawal was assaulted in the previous year by some of these people” (IOR 1895:4). These cases, among many other, forced the Senior Assistant Commissioner to admit: “I am afraid the system inaugurated in 1862 has not worked up to the expectations hoped for” (IOR 1895:53).

The issue of the Naib Rawal gained importance when the present Naib Rawal Narain Lamburi passed away in June 1888. Even though it was priorly agreed in 1862 to return the right of appointment to the Rājā of Garhwal, the Rawal “asked the Commissioner to obtain a successor from the southern Mahratta country, through British Residents” (IOR 1895:4-5). The British on their part attempted to delegate the appointment to Sir T. Madhava Rao⁷, “but nothing further was received from him” (IOR 1895:5). At the same time, the Rawal sent a petition of “the four clans of temple officials, servants, &c., giving their approval of the choice of a man named

⁷The chief revenue officer of Travancore.

5 *Badrināth's Religious Setup*

Benkitish" (ibid.) for the post of Naib Rawal. While the British wanted to wait for word from Travancore, the petitioners stressed that the Rawal was already very old and a successor was urgently needed. It is important to note that, even though the British administration was asked to select a new Naib Rawal through intermediaries, they thought that the Tehri Darbar should be first consulted (ibid.).

In the end, it was decided that Benkitish should become the Naib Rawal, since "all except the Rawal were in favor of Benkitish" (ibid.). When Benkitish was appointed in 1891, it was obvious that there was a severe mismanagement at the temple, as W. R. Partridge reports in a letter to the Commissioner of Kumaon:

The present 'Likhwar', Kashi Ram, has not held his post, I believe, for more than six or seven years. I understand his pay is not more than Rs. 15 or Rs. 20 per mensem. He is reported to be now worth a lakh and a half of rupees. The Rawal himself has, I believe, or has had, three wives (if they may be so called), by whom he has, I understand, four children living. These ladies are said to be in possession of large sums of money and jewelry of great value. If the report is true, the source of the money and jewelry is not hard to find. The golden vessels on which the idol used to be served, I have been informed, within the last few days lately disappeared. (IOR 1895:64)

Therefore, the Rawal "on account of his old age and the misbehavior of the temple officials, was relieved of all responsibilities of the management, and was to confine himself to religious duties," and Benkitish was "appointed Naib Rawal on probation for one year and was invested with the entire management of the temple" (IOR 1895:65).

Benkitish took this new responsibility seriously and quickly made the following changes in the management of the shrine:

- (a) that the Likhwar's post should not be conferred on a Dimri, urging that a Dimri might make a bad use of the power likely given to him, and

that the post is not hereditary [...]. (b) That the offering made to the Goddess Lakshami [sic], wife of (Vishnu) Badrinath, should, as a rule, go to Badrinath's *'bhandar'*⁸ (c) that the *'bhog'* allowances to Dimris who hold offices of *'udasi'* (cook) and *barwa* should be stopped and they may be directed to receive their wages in cash. (IOR 1895:70)

These changes were certainly not to the liking of the Dimrīs, and soon rumors circulated that “the Naib Rawal is not a true Namburi” (IOR 1895:71). In February of the following year (1893), Benkitish resigned. The Commissioner Roberts presumed that “he is afraid of the Dimrīs and others at Badrinath and Joshimath, especially since a disturbance took place in Joshimath, at which he says he was assaulted” (IOR 1895:73), citing this as the reason for his resignation.

Thus, Badrīnāth was without a Naib Rawal again, and in 1894 the Rāja of Tehri informed the Commissioner Colonel Grigg “in a very decided manner that he had made up his mind to have nothing further to do with the appointment of either Manager or a Naib Rawal” (IOR 1895:7), and that “it would be better if the Maharaja of Travancore were to furnish a Naib Rawal” (IOR 1895:8). The difficulties were based on the fact that “no Namburi Brahmin was willing to proceed to Garhwal to take up the vacant place” (ibid.). In the end Colonel Grigg was forced to publish following notice in the *Travancore Official Gazette* in October 1894:

REQUIRED

For the Hindu shrine of Badrīnāth in British Garhwal in Northern India, a Naib Rawal, who will, on the death of the present Rawal, now more than 70 years old, succeed to the office of the Rawal or Head Priest. The Naib Rawal must be a Namburi Brahman, and the rules require that he should not be a married man. He must be an educated man, possessing a thorough knowledge of Sanskrit and be well versed in the form of worship usually observed in the Hindu temples of Vishnu. His

⁸Before and even afterwards, offerings to Lakṣmī are for the use of the Dimris.

5 *Badrināth's Religious Setup*

age must be between 25 and 40. During his probation the Naib Rawal will receive a fixed salary for his maintenance; but when he succeeds to the office of the Rawal, he will be practically at the head of the entire management of the temple, the income of which varies from ten to thirty thousand rupees a year according to the number of pilgrims. The Naib Rawal must be of a respectable family and one who hitherto borne an unblemished character. The applicant for this post must be prepared to produce, if required, conclusive proof of his being a Namburi Brahman. Applications should be addressed by post to—

The Commissioner,⁹ Kumaun Division,
Naini Tal,
N.-W.P.

Necessary passage expenses will be sent for the approved candidate through the Resident of Travancore and Cochin.

The document ends with the notice above, but Walton (1994:145-6) continues with a suit from 1896 that “the sole management of the secular affairs of the temple rests with the Rawal subject to the control of His Highness the Raja of Tehri-Garhwal, who can also arrange for the appointment of the naib Rawal if the Rawal fails to appoint one himself.” As the position of the Rawal became even more powerful, the frictions between the Rawal, the Raja and the other groups at the temple did not diminish and finally resulted in the *Shri Badrinath Temple Act*.

“The Badrinath Temple which is one of the foremost sacred place of Hindu pilgrimage in India is situated in the Garhwal District on the heights of the Himalayas. Under the scheme of 1899 at present in force its management is in the hands of the Rawal, while the Tehri Durbar is invested with certain supervisory powers. The defective nature of the

⁹Colonel E. E. Grigg.

scheme has been the source of constant friction between the Rawal and the Tehri Durbar. As a result, supervision of the temple has suffered, its income has been squandered and the convenience of the pilgrims as been neglected. The unsatisfactory condition of the temple which has existed for a long time was specially brought to notice of Government by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Committee in 1928. Since then public agitation has been continually pressing for reform in its management. The Bill which is now introduced seeks to remove the chief defects of the present scheme. It restricts the Rawal to his priestly duties and places the secular management of the temple in the hands of a small Committee which would be partly elected and partly nominated.”¹⁰

Through this act, the era of the Rawal as an almost sovereign priest and manager came to an end after more than 150 years. The act¹¹ itself came into effect in 1939. It was amended frequently and in 1964 the temple of Kedārñāth was included into the responsibility of the committee. Even though the act was essentially issued to cut the rights of the Rawal, the Rawal plays a minor role in the act itself, as his position is only mentioned in the sense that “the Committee shall appoint a Rawal and a Naib-Rawal for the Temple” (§14).

In fact, I was told that today, and in the previous decades the Rawal himself usually recommends one of his nephews from one of the other six eligible families to become his Naib Rawal. Although this recommendation is accepted most of the time, the appointment of the Rawal still carries a political dimension, as demonstrated by Mayo (2004:9):

“The contemporary political scene at the shrine is strongly marked by the internal wranglings of the temple committee and the temple priests.

¹⁰Prefactory Note of the United Provinces Shri Badrinath and Shri Kedarnath Temples Act, 1939 (U.P. Act no. XVI of 1939).

¹¹U.P. Act No. XVI of 1939.

5 *Badrināth's Religious Setup*

Most recently this was enacted in a dispute in 2001/2002 between the BJP appointed committee and the Congress Party supporting Rawal or chief priest. The Rawal eventually resigned in 2002.”

Another question that is very closely related to the Rawal but even more so to the king of Tehri and the British is the issue of sovereignty.

5.1.2 The Land Question

As discussed above, the temple came under British administration after the Gorkha war in 1815. While the first kings seem to have accepted this new political landscape, the first claim that “both shrines [Kedārnāth and Badrināth] to be situated within the Tehri State” (IOR 1937) dates back to 1824. The question of political authority over both shrines gained momentum again in the 1930s.

This time, it was Narendra Shah¹², who “was aware [...] that the lack of territorial control over the shrine undermined the social basis of his legitimacy” (Guha 2002:65). He offered the British “in exchange for four square miles on which the temple stood, to relinquish control over the hill station of Mussoorie (leased to the British) and to forgo the claim to seven hundred square miles of disputed land between Garhwal and Tibet” (Ibid.). This claim is reproduced in the File No. 224-P/37 of 1937¹³ (IOR 1937), where it was discussed very briefly and succinctly, as the British never even thought of letting this strategically important region return under the king’s reign.

However, this claim was debated for a while among the different sides, and after a few letters and articles appeared in the *Leader*, a daily newspaper based in Allahabad, its owner and the founder of the Benares Hindu University, Madan Mohan Malaviya published a pamphlet entitled *Badrinath Temple: Question of Transfer* in 1934. In this publication, he takes the side of the king and argues against those

¹²He was coronated on the 4th of October 1919 and ruled “for approximately 27 years” (Rawat 2002:291).

¹³Marked “confidential” in red.

who think that the temple should remain under the British administration. While he traces the close relation between the ruling dynasty and the temple of Badrīnāth back to Kanak Pal, his main argument lies in the assumption that Sudarshan Shah was tricked into ceding the area of the two shrines to the British “He [Sudarshan Shah] agreed to do so because the British Government which had helped him recover his lost kingdom from the Gurkhas of Nepal, insisted on including it [Badrīnāth] in the territory to be ceded to it in lieu of the help given” (Malaviya 1934:1-2). In Malaviya’s view, this was only agreed on based on the assurance that “it would leave the religious and financial administration of the temple to the Tehri Darbar” (Malaviya 1934:2). Malaviya argues that this agreement was violated by the Code of Civil Procedure in 1899, which reduced the role of the king to a simple trustee. This stands in opposition to the reports of the File 1930 of 1895, where it clearly states, several times in fact, that “the Commissioner of Kumaun exercised the full authority which by custom was vested in the Raja” (IOR 1895:1) until 1842. Therefore, it is doubtful that the British would have made such an agreement to Sudarshan Shah in 1815, especially since the British later seemed reluctant to return part of the authority back to the Darbar in 1862.

While the main arguments for supporting the king in his claims are focused on the ancient tradition of the rulers’ control over Badrīnāth, it seems that the underlying perspective was more a question of how a Hindu sacred site could be placed under the control of ignorant Christians: “It is admitted on all sides that the present ruler of Tehri State is a strict Sanatanist [therefore] every Hindu must feel thankful that [...] the Government is willing to return to this ancient Hindu State that portion of the ceded territory in which the most sacred shrine of Badrinath lies [so that] Badrinath will rest with the Ruler of a Hindu State [...]” (Malaviya 1934:18 and 21).

Those that were opposed¹⁴ seem to deem the British better guardians of the shrine,

¹⁴Malaviya mainly refers to Pandit Tara Datt Gairola and Mr. B. N. Sharga.

5 *Badrīnāth's Religious Setup*

as they accuse the Rāja of taking advantage of the temple funds and because they were of the opinion that the king did a worse job, particularly since “the management of the temples of Gangotri, Jamnotri, and Raghunahtji which lie in the Tehri State is as bad as, if not worse than that of Badrinath” (Gairola cited in: Malaviya 1934:12). Interestingly, they also opposed the transfer because they believed that with this transfer “the temple entry movement” would be favored by the king and that the Rāja “would recognize the right of Harijans to enter the temple” (Ibid.). Before continuing to explore the role of the Rawal, I wish to once again return to the British and their reason for keeping control over the Badrīnāth temple. In the early 19th century, the British were still hoping to engage in direct trade with Tibet, but over time they realized this was unlikely to happen. The British then demonstrated great interest in the Bhotiyas, as the various and detailed accounts evidence, but their trade system was highly organized and proved inaccessible to the British. As a last resort for trade agents were left the pilgrims: “There was an overlap between traders and pilgrims, with even renunciates carrying out trade to finance their pilgrimage” (McKay 1999:309). It was Charles Sherring, Deputy Commissioner at Almora, who saw the possibility of utilizing even pilgrimages for purposes of trade.

There were two clear messages here for his [Sherring's] readers. Imperial officials would see the economic and political benefits of stimulating pilgrimage while retaining resources within Indian borders. Educated Hindu readers – by that time [early 20th century] a not unimportant consideration to imperial authors – could see that Kailas-Manasarova was both a highly desirable and increasingly feasible destination.

(McKay 1999:312)

How does this relate to Badrīnāth? During the early 20th century, there were very few pilgrims who were eager to undertake this long and dangerous journey into Tibet, but in order to best gain advantage of the pilgrimage there needed to be

many of them. “In 1913 the Gartok Trade Agent, noting that Badrinath attracted thousands of pilgrims, suggested that opening a ‘direct route’ to the Kailas region would bring a large increase in the numbers of pilgrims, who could continue on north from Badrinath” (McKay 1999:314). While this did not directly bring the results the British had hoped for, it does demonstrate that the idea of continuing further north of Badrīnāth was taken up by several pilgrims.

In a way, this brings us back to the beginning: the British renewed and expanded the roads leading to Badrīnāth and therefore brought more pilgrims to the shrine, who then in turn left more offerings to the temple and the priests; this again came with an increased appeal for the priests and in turn quarrels about distribution, and again the British were forced to change the traditional rights for the temple.

5.2 The *Ḍimrīs*

The *Ḍimrīs* are certainly the strongest group of priests in Badrīnāth. While almost all others priests had to part from some of their hereditary rights, the *Ḍimrīs* were able to defend most of them, even in court. According to their own history,¹⁵ they hail from a small village in Kerala called “*Ḍamar.*” While the temple is thought to have been built by Viśvakarmā¹⁶, the *Ḍimrīs* were the first¹⁷ to come to Badrīnāth and initiate worship. At this time, there were four *Ḍimrī* families, who in turn each sent one son to Badrīnāth. This son needed to be a *brahmacarya* and he returned to Kerala at the end of the season. According to Suman *Ḍimrī*, there were only two brahmacaris, with a birthmark in the form of the holy thread on their body, who alternately were responsible for the temple rituals. When the Buddhists arrived in Badrīnāth at a certain point in history, the *Ḍimrī* priest took the idol and jumped into the Nārādkuṇḍ to protect the statue. Later Śāṅkarācārya came to Badrīnāth

¹⁵As told by Sumān *Ḍimrī* from the Nepal *dharamśālā*.

¹⁶In contrast to the general belief that it was Śāṅkarācārya.

¹⁷According to Ajay *Ḍimrī* around 900 years ago. Ajay was the assistant to the Rawal in 2011.

5 *Badrināth's Religious Setup*

and installed the *mūrti*, but it is stressed that he only re-installed it, because originally this was done by the *Ḍimrīs*. In another interview,¹⁸ I was told that the *Ḍimrīs* received the duty of worship by Śaṅkarācārya, while the Rawal is only his representative and thus only an employee. This, together with the fact that the Rawal used to have his head shaved by the *Ḍimrīs* to maintain purity,¹⁹ is often used as a proof of the *Ḍimri's* superiority or their power over the Rāval. Further, it is emphasized that originally they did all the work and worship at Badrināth. They willingly shared these responsibilities with the Paṇḍās and priests of Brahmkapāl only at a later date.

While they were celibate in the beginning, in the course of time the *Ḍimrīs* were allowed to marry. At the same time they had to share the area with the Haṭvāls, Nautiyāls, Sātīs and Koṭvāls. Today they live in many different villages²⁰ along the Alakanandā or even outside of Garhwal, but in earlier times all of them lived in the village Dimmar, close to Karṇaprayāg. When they started marrying outside of their village, a distinction was required to define who was and who was not a “pure” *Ḍimri*. In this way there are *sarolā* and *gaṅgārī*²¹ Brahmins.²² Upon my question why this distinction is there in the first place, I was told²³ that as the child receives the name of the father it does not become clear by the name, if the mother was also of the “right” *jāti*. Thapliyal (2005:16) gives a different explanation of the two groups. He argues that “the Sarolas lived on the hill tops and the Gangadis along the river valleys.”

The *sarolā* *Ḍimrīs* who work in the kitchen (*bhog mandir*) are also called “Prasad Baruwa” (Kumar 1991:41), and from amongst them a helper is provided to the

¹⁸Again with Suman *Ḍimri*.

¹⁹Ajay *Ḍimri*, on the 17th of November 2011.

²⁰Ajay *Ḍimri* said there were ten traditional villages, but he himself lives in Delhi.

²¹This distinction is not only valid for the *Ḍimrīs*, but it is also applied throughout the Brahmins of Uttarakhand. They are also called – especially in Kumaon – *uccī doṭhī* and *choṭī doṭhī*.

²²When I was told this, we were sitting inside the temple premises. Ajay *Ḍimri* started to whisper when he came to speak about the *gaṅgārī* Brahmins, because one of them was sitting close by and he did not want him to hear him speak – it seemed it was awkward for him to speak of the differences. He also told me that *sarolā* and *gaṅgārī* were not supposed to sit together.

²³As explained by Shankaran.

Rawal (Brahman-Sevarkar, or Phitla), who is also allowed to enter the *sanctum sanctorum* but not to touch the *mūrti*. Further the *sarolā* *Ḍimris* work at the Garuḍa shrine and in the temple of Lakṣmī (“Laxmi Baruwa” *ibid.*). The *gaṅgārī* Brahmins work at the Taptkuṇḍ, Mātāmūrti temple and in various shrines in Joshimath, but their main occupation are the pilgrims from Garhwal, Kumaon, Himchal Pradesh and Nepal²⁴. Further, it is the responsibility of the *Ḍimris* to bring the oil prepared during winter in the former palace of Narendranagar to Jośimaṭh and finally to Badrīnāth.

Today the *Ḍimri gotra* is far too numerous to provide a post for every member each year. Theoretically, there is a four-year-rotation of the different positions eligible to the *Ḍimris*. Practically, it is the Panchayat which makes the decisions while also considering the financial situation of their members. There is also the notion that if everyone was newly appointed each year, no-one would know what is to be done or how to do it. Further, it is also possible to represent a chosen member or to be substituted should one feel too old or too busy.

The *Ḍimris* are organized in two *pañcāyats*: the Umata (*Ḍimrī Umata*) *pañcāyat* and the Pakhi (Ravi Gaon Pakhi) *pañcāyat*. Interestingly, these *pañcāyats* are not based on the *sarolā/gaṅgārī* distinction, but rather on the respective villages. Since *Dimmer* is considered to be the original settlement of the *Ḍimris*, it is not surprising that their *pañcāyat* “shares 2/3 parts and the Ravi gram Pakhi Panchayat shares 1/3 parts in the rotation-wise appointment” (Kumar 1991:41). Together, they form the *Śrī Badrīnāth Ḍimrī Dharmik Kendriya Pañcāyat* – this is usually the denomination for official appearances in public.

Within the responsibilities of the *Ḍimris*, the Lakṣmī temple generates by far the most wealth. In the year 1964, the temple committee desired its share of the pilgrims’ offerings and demanded “that the money of the ‘Dan Box’ will be fully taken” (*ibid.*) by the committee. In return, they offered a salary to the priests of Lakṣmī.

²⁴There is no pilgrim register or *bahī* for the Nepālī pilgrims, but it is claimed that there exists a contract between the *Ḍimris* and the Rāja of Nepal.

The Dīmris fought this new apportionment up to the Allahabad High Court. Since the court ruled in their favor, they are now the only group to work inside the temple premises within their own hereditary rights and not to be employed by the temple committee.

5.3 The Paṇḍās

In terms of size and visibility, the Paṇḍās form the most prominent group of priests in Badrīnāth. They are the first to welcome the pilgrims as soon as they arrive at the bus station and in course offer their services. Tirthpurohits, or Paṇḍās in general have a bad reputation, since they are often not simply offering their services but almost forcing them onto the pilgrims. Yet, there is a very strict and precise system that manages the relationship of pilgrims and priests.

Every Paṇḍā family has rights to perform rituals for pilgrims from a precisely defined area. These regions are smaller the closer they are to Badrīnāth, for instance there is only one priest for the region of South India, including the states of Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka. On the other hand, families with *jajmān* relations in Uttarpradesh may only perform rituals for pilgrims from one defined city. One area is usually not attended by only one priest, but shared by a few. In the case of the Paṇḍās for Maharashtra, there are three families that are allowed to serve these pilgrims. The decision who has the responsibility for the specific pilgrims is made with the help of the *bahī* – a book owned by every Paṇḍā which records all his *jajmān* relations. The *bahī* is bound together by one thread, which enables the priest to rearrange the order of the book, or to give different parts of his *bahī* to his successors if he decides to retire, or to even sell parts of the book. In case a family has never visited Badrīnāth before, it is decided on a first-come first-served basis.

In the way the *bahīs* grew more extended and became dispersed throughout the Paṇḍā's families, in the same way the situation of the Paṇḍā priests themselves has

fundamentally changed in the last 100 years, respectively adjusting itself to the changes in pilgrimage. Traditionally, the Paṇḍās functioned foremost as guides, since they had to take the *yātrīs* from Haridwar first to Kedārñāth and then to Badrīñāth and back. One such trip usually took around two months, and in this way a priest was able to guide about two groups per pilgrimage season. When a road was constructed, first to Shrinagar and later to Jośīmaṭh, the Paṇḍās started to settle down in Badrīñāth during the pilgrimage season, also provided shelter to their *jajmāns* and only sent helpers down the valley to pick up the pilgrims. Due to the Indo-Chinese border conflict, the Indian military expanded the road as far as Badrīñāth and Mana to provide supplies for their troops. When the road was opened for pilgrim traffic soon after the conflict, all the Paṇḍās had to do was to wait at the bus stop.

Today, many Paṇḍā priest have connections to various travel agencies, and they not only perform rituals for the groups but also arrange accommodation and meals for their *jajmāns*. During most of the winter, the Paṇḍās used to visit their *jajmān* area to bring *prasād* and advertise the *tīrthayātrā* to Badrīñāth, while nowadays they basically renew their alliance with the agencies and work out the itinerary for the coming pilgrimage season. Yet, the region of their *jajmāns* is still important to them, and they still refer to their visits to the homes of their *jajmāns* as “going to the *deś*.”

At least one of each Paṇḍā *gotra* comes to Badrīñāth a week before the doors of the temple open – to clean the houses, put the beddings and mattresses out in the sun to free them from their dampness and reconnect the electricity. The rest of the Paṇḍās come a day before the procession arrives or even later in the first two weeks after opening. Since not all the pilgrim priests can afford a living just from performing rituals in Badrīñāth, some of them leave as soon as the main season is over – in the beginning of August – and return to their various other occupations. In the same manner, wives and children, who often help during the peak season

5 *Badrināth's Religious Setup*

and are happy to escape the heat in the valley, return to their native place.

The quality of life of a Paṇḍā strongly depends on his *bahī*. Paṇḍās serving the poorer parts of Bihar or Madhya Pradesh can manage, but they will not get rich. On the other side, when one has the good fortune to have the names of Birla or Tata in his *bahī*, one can do fairly well. I ought to say that all make good money during the peak season, yet no one makes a fortune.

Deoprayāgī Brahmins are considered extremely orthodox. They are strict vegetarians, never drink alcohol, rarely smoke, but they seem to have a taste for *pān* and chewing tobacco (chewing is less obvious to pilgrims than smoking). Until recently, they did not marry outside of Devprayāg, but nowadays this is no longer strictly enforced, yet of course it has to be another Brahmin family. It still makes a difference whether someone marries a Deoprayāgī or a Pahārī Brahmin.

The following describes the usual day of a Paṇḍā during peak season.²⁵ The road from Jośimāth to Badrināth is still only capable of one-way traffic, therefore it opens every 90 minutes in one direction. Most pilgrims arrive at the last chance, before the road is closed for the night, and thus pools of busses and cars arrive at the bus stand in Badrināth between 6 and 7 p.m.²⁶ During this time, the Paṇḍās²⁷ wait at the gateway of the bus stand – some of them trying to find “their pilgrims” amongst the vehicles, others waiting for a specific bus. If a Paṇḍā is expecting a group of pilgrims sent by “his” travel agency, the accommodation is usually pre-arranged. The Paṇḍā is also eager to find accommodation for pilgrims who come without prior arrangements or will offer them to stay at his house for free – something accepted only by very poor pilgrims. When the pilgrims finally arrive at their night shelters, they are given about an hour to refresh and unpack. Then, one of the Paṇḍās gives an introduction to Badrināth and the benefits of a *pūjā* at this place.

²⁵This report is mainly based on the Camanpūrkar *gotra* whose *jajmāns* hail from Maharashtra.

²⁶During May and June, it may be that the last vehicles do not arrive before 11 p.m.

²⁷When only a few pilgrims are expected, usually someone of less importance from within each family, i.e. a nephew or even a paid helper, is sent to the bus stand, but when an important *jajmān* or a whole bus of the travel agency is expected, the head of the family will be present to welcome them to Badrināth.

Even though the pilgrims might have come via a travel agency and the Paṇḍā is responsible for their well-being during their stay, they still have to be instructed about the importance of the different rituals that could be performed for them next morning.²⁸ In the end, the names of the participants are written down and the itinerary for the next day is presented.

I was allowed to record one of these “introductions”, up to the part when the Paṇḍā speaks to the pilgrims directly, giving them reasons for why they should partake in the ritual.

I will tell you why it is called Badrikāśram and the procedure of worship. *Bol Badriviśāl kī! Jay!* See! This *dhām* of Badrikāśram is the *dhām* of *satyug*. In the time of *satyug* its name was Cautiavasthā or Cautād-hām. Whenever someone took *vānaprasth*, he went on pilgrimage to Badrikāśram. Even today, when a child comes inside his mother’s womb - even so it does not have any knowledge where it is going – it will also have accomplished this pilgrimage. This is all due to the influence of the *kaliyuga*. This is the *dhām* of Badrikāśram, the *dhām* where one will leave this body. Pilgrims came here to leave their bodies behind. There is a saying: *gayā, gayā aur gayā*. However, see! in every *yug* its name has changed, but the place did not. The place is [still] of *satyug*. A new name was given each *yug*. In this way the name given to it in the *satyug* was Cauthiavasthā or Cauthādhām. In *dvāpar*, it was known as Yogsiddha, in *tretā* it was known by the name Muktiprada and in the advent of *kalikāl* became Badrikāśram. You have been to Haridwar. Three kilometers from here is the Mana village. Mana is the last village of North-India. After [this village] there is nothing but mountains. However, Mana is its wrong name. The real name is ... Māñibhadrapūr.

²⁸The Paṇḍās see as a tourist every pilgrim who does not participate in the *pūjā-pāṭh*, even if he stands in line for *darśan* for hours. I had the impression that the reason for this was not only income-related, but that the Paṇḍās are indeed so convinced of the importance of their services.

5 Badrināth's Religious Setup

Here is the Gandhamādan mountain, the Nar-Narāyān mountain, this is Badrikāśram. However, Mānibhadrapur is a place of [unintelligible]. It was the place of the king Narkāsur, a *rākṣas*. In the *satyug* Narkāsur worshipped Śaṅkar intensely so that he would receive a boon from Śaṅkar that no one in the world would be able to kill him, that he would become immortal. Lord Śaṅkar said: “Not in this way, what has been born has to have an end - without a doubt.” Yet, Lord Śaṅkar gave him one thousand armors (*kavac-kuṇḍal*) as a boon and gift. He also granted him a second “boon”: “Whenever one person practices austerities for one thousand years, one of your armors will be destroyed.” [Sanskrit verse] Whenever, someone developed superhuman powers, he would crush him to powder in a frenzy. This was the nature of the *rākṣas*. The *rākṣas* acted in such a frenzy because [he thought]: If I will not allow anyone to do austerities on this earth [or this place] then my death will never occur.

Then, since Lord Śaṅkar had given him a thousand armors, his name Narkāsur was given up and he became known as Sahasrabāhu [?] instead. Whenever Brahmins of Devghar or a Ṛṣimuni came here, the *rākṣas* would not let them practice austerities. He committed terrible atrocities. Thus, the gods became annoyed and traveled to the milk ocean to see Viṣṇu. “Tell us, Bhagvān, you lie here in the milk ocean, while the demon Narkāsur got a boon from Lord Śaṅkar, and now no one in the world can practice austerities.” Lord Vishnu replied: “You go and practice austerities. I will soon find a solution for this!” Then he said to Laksmī: “You stay here at the milk ocean. I will go for the well-being of the world,” without telling her in which direction he would go. The real [*śuddh*] Badrikāśram is said to be the place in the middle of the five *śilās*. What is the temple? The temple was built by Ādi Śaṅkarācārya

– the temple has no importance! But you will say: We all came here for *darśan*. See, the Lord is all-knowing, all-pervasive, the supreme being. The lord of Pune is the same as in Badrikāśram. The Lord cannot be kept locked up. But the whole place is important. The main site is the the middle of the five *śilās*. What are the five *śilās*? Garuḍśilā, Varāhaśilā, Narasiṃhaśilā, Kuberśilā and Mārkaṇḍeyśilā. Above the Mārkaṇḍeyśilā is the Vanikṣetra, the Agnikuṇḍ, where you will bathe in the morning. In the middle of the five *śilās* is the Nārāyaṇśilā. There, it is said, is the manifested Badrīviśāl. After sitting down In the middle of the five *śilās*, Viṣṇu, began his austerities. For centuries, he practiced austerities there and his body was covered in snow.

What is stated in this introduction is that the temple is neither special nor does it mark the actual place of Lord Viṣṇu’s penance. Rather the whole sacred landscape of Badrīnāth should be worshipped, which incidentally is the service offered by the Paṇḍās. Further, this worship should be conducted at the actual place of Viṣṇu’s presence, which is next to the Taptkuṇḍ, and only the Paṇḍās are allowed to offer rituals at this site.

During peak season, a new group of pilgrims arrives virtually every day, and due to the immense traffic their busses often arrive late. The Paṇḍās frequently return home after 10 or 11 o’clock in the evening, and they have to wake around 5 a.m. After a bath, which should be done in the Taptkuṇḍ but is usually done at home²⁹ he performs his home *pūjā*. The pilgrims are picked up at their hotel an hour before the *pūjā-pāṭh* and brought to the *ghāt*. There, they perform their bath, and subsequently the *pūjā-pāṭh* is undertaken by the Pujārī of the respective Paṇḍā. The Paṇḍā usually is present only at the end of the *pūjā*, when he collects the dan and gives last instructions to the pilgrims who then go for *darśan* and those who decided to perform a *śrāddha*. The pilgrims give the lump sum to their Paṇḍā. In the case

²⁹Multiple reasons for this were given, most prominently the following two: there is too much of a crowd at the Taptkuṇḍ, or there is too much sulphur in the water for a daily bath.

5 *Badrīnāth's Religious Setup*

of a *śrāddha* ritual, the Paṇḍā will pay the priest of Brahmkapāl. No later than 11 a.m., the Paṇḍā returns home to prepare lunch, and after lunch everyone holds a siesta until 3 p.m. The afternoon is usually reserved for leisure, and most of the time is spent at the *ghāṭ* chatting with the other priests.

5.3.1 **Lawsuits**

The Paṇḍās frequently went to court against the Rawal and later the temple committee, but they lost all cases. They wished to accomplish being allowed inside the temple along with their pilgrims and receiving the offerings of their *jajmān* there. The importance lies here, apart from a certain right, in the material sphere – a pilgrim is more willing to give *dān* in front of the *mūrti* than outside by the river bank, and more likely to give his consent to a *pūjā* in his name. This *dān* would not be received by the Rawal and the Ḍimrī priests inside the temple.

As above mentioned the pilgrim business of the Paṇḍās changed between one and two hundred years ago. When the road up to Kirtinagar was completed, it was no longer necessary for the priests to walk from Devprayag to Haridwar to accompany the pilgrims and the number of the pilgrims steadily rose. Thus, the Paṇḍās built houses and settled down in Badrīnāth for half the year. What was their previous source of income? They used to be paid for being guides – they did not make money sitting in Badrīnāth, waiting for pilgrims. So they had to adapt their livelihood and become Tirthpurohīts, offering *pūjā-pāṭh* to their *jajmāns*. Since they were the last to arrive in Badrīnāth, only the rights to rituals at or by the Taptkuṇḍ were left over for them. The first complaint was issued in 1882.³⁰ The next complaint was filed in 1896, and an appeal was issued to the first order of Mr. E. K. Pauw, to the court

³⁰It is not entirely clear if at that time it was the Rawal who sued the Paṇḍās to not enter the temple along with their *jajmāns*, or if it were the Paṇḍās already trying to reverse this prohibition. On the other hand, it says in the judgement of 1952 (Supreme Court of India 1952) “it appears that in 1892 certain rules were framed by the then ‘Rawal’ for regulation of the pilgrims in the Badrinath temple [...] that ‘at the time of »darshan« by the pilgrims, no other persons and Paṇḍās shall be allowed to go inside the temple along with the pilgrims’.”

of Colonel E. E. Grigg, Commissioner of the Kumaun Division.³¹ There are a few stunning details within this court decision. First, there had obviously been a very rough customs at Badrīnāth, because the Rawal requested the stationing of a police force in March 1882 and again in 1894 in order to keep the Deoprayāgīs out of the temple. The court deemed most of the documents brought forth by the Paṇḍās as “an obvious interpolation and a forgery.” This document was kept in the possession of this member of the Ḍimrīs, because of the last paragraph, being part of a letter from “Sir Henry Ramsay dated 22 February 1882 to the Secretary to Government, N.W.P.:

The [blackened] and Deoprayagi Brahmans are such a troublesome and drunken set that they may create disturbances and rob the temple of its offerings to such an extent that the Rawal requires protection. Pilgrims have repeatedly represented the hardships they have to submit to. Thefts are not uncommon and even murder took place at Badrinath last year [blackened]. The Rawal came to see me last month and complained against all these Brahmins.

The first line clearly misses one group, and another, unaltered copy of this letter is found in the India Office Records (IOR 1895:56) and clearly states “the Dimri and deoprayagi Brahmans.” There may be two reasons for why the Ḍimrīs were left out in this court order. It might be that Grigg only had an already blackened copy available, or he was in fact favoring the Ḍimrīs, in which case the inclusion of them in the same paragraph would have set aside the point he was trying to make. Grigg closes the court order with his acknowledgment that “the Deoprayagis suffer considerably in pocket,” but he also comes to the conclusion “that they have no right to enter the temple with the pilgrims their-guests.”

More than fifty years later, the Paṇḍās of Devprayag again tried to gain access to

³¹A copy of this document was in the possession of one of the Ḍimrīs, and I was allowed to take a photograph of it – with the explicit request not to show it to any Paṇḍā, especially concerning one of the last paragraphs, describing them as a drunken set. This document was published by the Garhwali Press in Dehra Dun in 1929 and contains the “Special Civil Appeal No. 15 of 1896.”

5 *Badrīnāth's Religious Setup*

the temple. This time, they went to the highest level of jurisdiction³² – the supreme court of India.

While the civil suit of 1896 ruled that it was the Rawal's decision to allow the Paṇḍās inside the temple or not, after the year 1921 “the practice became lax to a great extent and from the evidence of respectable witnesses examined on behalf of the plaintiffs, the learned Judge was of the opinion that in many cases the Paṇḍās were able to go inside the temple without any let or hindrance and without seeking any express permission from the ‘Rawal’” (Supreme Court of India 1952).

The verdict finally allowed the Paṇḍās to enter the temple in company with their *jajmān*, but it also laid down that it was illegal to take any “gift by any person within the temple.” Further, the judge argues that “in our opinion, the Paṇḍās do not stand to lose anything by reason of this regulation and their grievance is more or less a sentimental one.”

Although the Paṇḍās are thus allowed to enter the temple with their pilgrims, they seldom make use of this right. In my observations, they do so only when they have someone important among their *jajmāns*.

These different trials did not only bring order into the system of priesthood in Badrīnāth, but in view of the reflections on the priests of Badrīnāth by the early commissioners and visitors compared to today, it might have also been a reason for more orthodoxy and strictness in their lifestyle, to be favored in the judge's future rules.

5.4 The Priests of Brahmkapāl

Brahmkapāl is the site in Badrīnāth where *śrāddha* and *piṇḍ-dān* are offered and it is located upstream on the eastern side of the river. Its name derives from mythology, as it marks the site where Śiva finally had the sin of cutting off the fifth head of

³²There were quite a few steps before that: It started in 1934 at the court of Pauri in Garhwal and was then transferred to “the High Court of Judicature at Allahabad” and tried there in 1941 and 1946.

5.4 The Priests of Brahmkapāl

Brahma redeemed. A huge rock symbolizes the head that fell of Śiva's hand – or trisul – depending on the narrative. Every famous *śrāddha* place is connected with this myth, foremost Gaya and Allahabad. Even in the count of the local priests, Badrīnāth is ranked third, but they also make it clear that when one has performed *śrāddha* at Brahmkapāl once, then one is bound to perform it here only. The priests at Brahmkapāl belong to four different lineages that rotate on a yearly basis. The following list starts with the *gotra* whose turn it was in 2009.

- Haṭvāl – 12 Brahmins who live in the area between Śrīnagar and Chamoli.
- Haṭvāl – Reside in and around Haridwar.
- Koṭiyāl
- Satī and Nauṭiyāl – Both families live in Jośīmaṭh and the surrounding areas.

The first three groups consist of 10 to 15 priests each, while the Satī and Nauṭiyāl group has over one hundred members. During the peak season, the first three groups hire other priests to deal with the stream of pilgrims. These “hired priests” pay between one and three lakhs Rupees at the beginning of the season and then work on their own account.

Priests at Brahmkapāl are not as independent from the committee as the Paṇḍās, since all their earnings first go to the temple trust and then is returned to them as salary – minus taxes. This collecting of dan is done publically, as one priest puts the collected money in the dan box, which is placed in the middle of the ritual space for every one to see.

The majority of pilgrims come to the Brahmkapāl with their Paṇḍā. Usually, they hand over all their *dakṣiṇā* directly to the Paṇḍā, who then pays the *śrāddha*-priest around 100 Rs for his services. While there is no real dispute between the two groups, the priests from Brahmkapāl still feel disadvantaged, because the Paṇḍās usually demand more from the pilgrims than they will return to them.

When the main season is over – at the end of July – a part of the priests return home

5 *Badrināth's Religious Setup*

and the gifts of the pilgrims are distributed among them. These include essentially pieces of cloth, which are arranged in equal piles for every priest.

The priests' competencies covers *piṇḍ-dān*, *tarpaṇ* and *havan*, and every ritual has its own place. *Piṇḍ-dān* is offered in front of the rock³³ identified as Brahma's head, *Tarpaṇ* is offered down by the river and for *havan* there is a small building next to the *piṇḍ-dān* platform. The rituals part of the ceremonies for the deceased do not differ much from those done anywhere else, and they are very well explained, for example, by Parry (2011). Yet, there are small peculiarities, for example that participants would often sit bare chested during the ritual – something probably demanded by their own tradition, because I never heard a priest ask them to take off their shirts. Together with the excessive use of water, this illustrates that these rituals did not originate in this climate.

Most priests at the Brahmkapāl are quite casual about their status. Unlike the *Ḍimrīs* or the *Paṇḍās*, they hardly ever dress in traditional dress and usually wear whatever they feel comfortable in or keeps them warm. They are also those ones who openly (as I suppose many others do it secretly) proclaim to follow the rule that even an orthodox Brahmin is allowed to drink above 10.000 feet (for health reasons). Since alcohol is outlawed in *Badrināth*, they have to indulge in *Mānā ka pāni*³⁴. In the afternoon they will sit usually around the *havan*, prepare potatoes and ginger in the remaining glow of the fire and count the *dān* of the day. Their casualness results from the fact that their positions are well-ordered and they never had to oppose another group. This also leads to my assumption that, over time, the other groups became more “puritan” in their lifestyles and more inclined towards orthodox Hinduism in order to gain the favor of judges, pilgrims and the general Hindu population.

³³With the exception of very large groups or during May and June when every available place is used.

³⁴Local liquor made mostly from rice.

6 Rituals in and around Badrīnāth

Rituals in general – and especially those involving movement, such as processions – give important information about the cultural and religious heritage of Badrīnāth. While the previous sections were mainly based on historical documents and narratives, here the living tradition will come into focus. These festivals and processions may also tell us more about the relation of different gods and traditions in this area. The rituals conducted for the sake of the pilgrims were mentioned in the previous chapter, and in fact they are not greatly different than at any other place in the North of India. The ones that will be described below are not meant for the pilgrims, and indeed only few pilgrims ever partake in them, but they are of immense importance to the locals of Badrīnāth – the Bhotiyas and the inhabitants of Pandukeshwar and Bamni. Although all of them have a reference to Badrīnārāyaṇ, or at least start or end at his shrine, the other gods of the valley feature a more distinct role in them. These rituals demonstrate, sometimes even more explicitly than the narratives, the close relationship of the gods within this sacred landscape and enable a view beyond the pilgrim industry.

6.1 Processions in Badrīnāth

Processions are fundamental to Badrīnāth. The main reason for this lies in the location of the temple. At an altitude of over 3,000 m, year-round living is impossible, or at least not recommended.¹ This makes it necessary that also the worship of

¹A few hermits stay during the winter with prior permission from the authorities, and an army and police post is kept guarded with a few men as well.

6 Rituals in and around Badrīnāth

Badrīnārāyaṇ is transferred between Badrīnāth and Jośīmaṭh. During the pilgrimage season, there are frequent other processions in Badrīnāth, and some involve local gods, while others accompany visiting gods from further away. These are different types of processions with different agendas and motivations, and therefore they may be subdivided into three classifications. There are two processions from and to Jośīmaṭh, bringing the *mūrti* of Uddhav², the Rawal, the other priests and the first, although few, pilgrims to Badrīnāth. Since they mark the beginning and end of the pilgrimage I called them “frame processions.” The processions concerning the local gods take place in late autumn, when most of the pilgrims have already visited the shrine, and I termed them “intra-local processions” to distinguish them from other processions involving local gods from further away. These processions, along with the visits of saints, sect leaders and politicians that also often take the form of processions, are referred here as “link processions,” because they attempt to establish, or renew their connection to the shrine of Badrīnāth, with the wish to be associated with its glory.

6.1.1 Frame Processions

Every year, when the winter approaches in the middle of November, the shrine of Badrīnāth is closed and everyone retreats to his home in the valley. This concerns not only the pilgrims, Tirthpurohīts and Paṇḍās, but also the different *mūrtis* in Badrīnāth who also leave for warmer realms or stay, to enjoy the quiet time. The idol of Badrīnārāyaṇ remains in the temple the whole time, since Badrīnāth is considered not only a *tīrtha* but a *dhām* – a dwelling place of God. The *mūrtis* of Badrīnārāyaṇ, Nar, Nārāyaṇ and Ghaṇṭākaraṇa³ are therefore *acal*, immovable. The following spring, when the snow melts and the road to Badrīnāth is again accessible, the hustle and bustle returns in the thin mountain air. This coming and

²Uddhav was a friend of Kṛṣṇa, whom he sent to Badrīnāth (for example, Bhāgavata Purāna III.4.4; Tagare 1976). The statue that is used in the procession is said to depict Uddhav.

³This is only true for the Ghaṇṭākaraṇa of Badrīnāth. The Ghaṇṭākaraṇa of Mana is moved from its temple to his winter home in autumn.

going of priests and the *mūrtis* is celebrated by two processions – one to arrive at Badrīnāth and one to return after the shrine has been closed. It is believed that Badrīnārāyaṇ is worshipped by humans for six months and by the Gods during the six months of winter (Eck 2012:342), with Nārada⁴ conducting the pūjā.

Each year on *vasant pañcamī*, it is decided by the king of Tehri, his Rājpurohit and the Dharmādhikāri when the *kapāt* (door) of the temple will be re-opened. The opening of the shrine concurs with the period from the last week of April to the second week of May and the procession is usually held two days before the temple is opened.

I had the chance to witness the opening-procession twice. Once on the 29th and 30th of April 2009 and a second time on the 7th and 8th of May 2011. For the first procession I observed the beginning in Joshimath and the end in Badrīnāth. For the second one, I was able to follow the procession all the way. The following is a generic summery of these opening-processions.

The main protagonists are the leading priests, i.e. the Rawal, the Naib Rawal, the Dharmādhikāri and the Vedpāṭhīs, the oil, which during the winter is made by the Mahārānī of Tehri, and the *ḍolīs* of Ādi Śaṅkarachārya, Uddhav and Kuber.

The present *ḍolī* of Ādi Śaṅkarachārya was donated in 2009 by the Śṛṅgerīmaṭh (Śṛṅgerī in Karnataka) and assembled and decorated by devotees from Andhra Pradesh. In 2009, the temple of Narasiṅha in Joshimath, where the procession has its origin, was adorned with numerous flower garlands (see figure 2.8), while in 2011 this was not the case. Therefore, the preparations also took much longer in 2009, especially concerning the temple and the *ḍolī*. Both the processions started around 10 a.m., when the Rawal left his room in the *mandir samiti* guest house above the temple. There are dhol player leading the procession, followed by two samiti employees who carry the two golden staffs of the Rawal and the Rawal himself. After them follow the Dharmādhikāri and the Vedpāṭhīs. In 2009, the Rawal was Badrī

⁴Nārada was cursed, so that he cannot stay at one place but has to roam the three worlds – only in Badrīnāth he can stay six month at one place.

6 Rituals in and around Badrīnāth

Prasād Nambūdiri. He had problems walking due to a severe illness that finally forced him to retire only two month later, and therefore he was carried down to the Ādi Śaṅkarachārya gaddhi sthal. There, he was awaited by the already decorated *ḍolī*. The local priest conducted a Ganeśa *pūjā* for the Rawal and his staff, for which most of them were late and arrived in the middle of the *pūjā*. After the worship of Ganeśa came to an end, they all proceeded into the atrium, where there is a small shrine for Rājarājeśvarī. After a small *pūjā* there, the Rawal and the others proceeded outside again. In 2009, the Rawal was carried directly to the Narasiṅha temple, but in 2011 the new Rawal Keśav Prasād walked to the main entrance along with the *ḍolī* and went to the Narasiṅha shrine from there. The *ḍolī* remained at the entrance both times. Then, the Rawal went inside the Narasiṅha temple, followed by a *pradakṣiṇā* around the temple, and then he left the compound again through the main entrance. At the Narasiṅha temple, another important aspect joins the procession – the oil for Badrīnārāyaṇ. This oil is made out of black sesame seeds on the day of vasant pāṁcamī, and it is called *gārūgharī* in Garhwali, or simply *til kā tel* in Hindi. The process of producing the oil is initiated by the Mahārānī of Tehri herself, but she is later aided by several local women. The oil actually has a procession of its own, since it is carried from Narendranagar to Joshimath in the weeks before stopping at numerous villages along the way. Once it reaches Karnaprayāg and the village Dimmer, it is placed under the care of a *Ḍimrī*, who later brings the oil to Jośīmaṭh. From the main entrance, the *ḍolī* and Rawal proceed together to the Vāsudeva temple. The Rawal goes inside while the *ḍolī* waits outside.

The band of the Garhwal Rifles accompanied the procession with bagpipes and drums both times. Additional music come from local women who sang devotional songs and clapped their hands to the rhythm. When the Rawal emerged from the Vāsudeva temple, the whole procession proceeded up to the road, where the *ḍolī* was then placed on a jeep and the procession was joined by a car of the *Śrī Badrīnāth Ḍimrī Dhārmik Kendriya Pañcāyat*, playing devotional songs through speakers



Figure 6.1: The opening procession on entering Pandukeshwar. The pot of oil and its bearer are in front, followed by the *ḍoli* of Śaṅkarācārya, the scepters of the Rawal and the Rawal himself (red turban and red shawl) along his successor the Naib Rawal (dressed in white). Behind the head priest, wearing a red vest, is the Dharmādikāri and, to his left, one of the four Vedpāthīs.

and two priests sharing *prasād* with participants and later those who welcomed the procession along the way. Once the whole procession had been moved into or onto cars, it then left Joshimath for Paṇḍukeśvar. On the side of the road, people were waiting for the procession to pass by. They watched with folded hands, but sometimes they also threw flowers, always accompanied by a “*Jay Badrīnāth viśāl.*”

The first stop on the road was at the head quarters of the General Reserve Engineering Force (GREF), mainly a honorary visit. The Rawal and the other leading priests were invited to a talk with the general and were served snacks and tea. Afterwards, there was a small public address, in which the Dharmādhikāri gave a small speech on the importance of *sevā* (service) in general and especially for Badrīnāth, as the GREF does service by keeping the road in a good condition. After fifteen minutes, the procession reached its next stop at Viṣṇuprayāg, where a small *pūjā* was held at the temple above the confluence. The actual *pūjā* was again performed by the

6 Rituals in and around Badrīnāth

local priest, but usually the Vedpāṭhīs recited along. The next stop was at the Śīva temple, inside the compound of the Jaypee Viṣṇuprayāg Hydro Electric Project. The procession stopped again at Govindghāṭ this time to inaugurate a restaurant named “Badrīś,” while this makes sense in terms of its name, it does not represent a traditional stopping point, and after some inquiry it became clear that the owner of the restaurant was a member or close to the temple committee. The participants of the procession were welcomed with snacks and coffee. When the procession finally arrived in Paṇḍukeśvar, it began to rain lightly. The procession was led by the band of the Garhwal Rifles, followed by the *ḍolī*, then the staff-bearers and finally the Rawal. At the entrance to the village was a guard of honor, welcoming the procession formed by local school children in uniforms. The procession arrived at the Yog-Badrī temple at quarter past twelve and abruptly ended for this day after a small *pūjā* in both temples (Yog Badrī and the adjoining Vāsudev temple). The Rawal immediately retired to his room close to the temple, and the *ḍolī* was put undercover after the silver and golden spikes that fix the decoration had been removed. Many members of the procession then returned to Joshimath or continued to Badrīnāth. The Vedpāṭhīs returned the following day, while the Dharmādhikāri who had gone to Badrīnāth waited there for the procession to arrive.

The next day started with the preparation of two other *ḍolīs* around 9 a.m. – one for Kuber and the other for Uddhav. The temple of Kuber is in the center of the village, while Yog-Badrī is on its edge. The procession began with Kuber being carried down to the Yog-Badrī mandir. The people involved with Kuber wore yellow *dhotīs* or a yellow to golden piece of cloth somewhere around their necks or heads. In front of the *ḍolī* was carried a silver bowl with incense.

The *ḍolī* of Kuber was also the first to emerge out of the temple, go around the back and enter the Vāsudeva temple. Then, the *ḍolī* proceeded to the entrance of the temple complex and waited there. In the meantime, the *ḍolī* of Ādi Śāṅkarachārya remained at the platform above the two temples and was prepared only after the

band proceeded towards the entrance. Finally, the *ḍolī* of Uddhav emerged out of the temple, followed by the oil and the Rawal. Again, they walked around the back of the Yog-Badrī temple, and the *ḍolī* approached the entrance while the Rawal entered the Vāsudeva temple. The procession then continued through the village up to the Badrīnāth-highway (National Highway 58). The order of the procession remained the same, except that the *ḍolī* of Kuber was in the front and moved faster, sometimes even out of sight for the rest of the procession. Approaching the road, the procession transformed again – from feet to vehicles. Kuber’s part of the procession had two jeeps, one carried the idol and *ḍolī*, the other the pole, which was not part of this procession⁵. The *ḍolī* of Uddhav was placed into the jeep of the *Ḍimrī pañcāyat*, while the idol itself traveled in the lap of the Rawal.

The first halt on the second day was at a Nāga shrine, where a small *pūjā* was held and snacks and tea were served. Hanumān Caṭṭī was the final stop before reaching Badrīnāth, again with a brief veneration of the deity, but since the temple is so small it was witnessed only by a few lucky ones.

In 2009, I did not see the *ḍolī* of Kuber and the cars drove down to the rope bridge (*jhūlā*) towards Bāmṇī. In 2011, initially only the cars of Kuber drove down and the procession headed for Bāmṇī before the rest of the procession arrived. The *ḍolī* of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya was unloaded above the bus stop and then carried down, followed by the jeep of the Rawal and the jeep of the *Ḍimrī pañcāyat*. The *ḍolī* of Kuber was brought to the Nandādevī temple in the village Bāmṇī in the meantime, and the people hurried to get back to the procession. The procession then continued for the Lilāḍhuṅgī stone⁶ and its circumambulation – the bearer of the oil prostrating before it. When the procession reached the temple, in 2011 the doors remained closed for a few minutes while in 2009 they were already open. The *ḍolī*

⁵The pole is carried in front of the *ḍolī* when Kuber is brought from Bāmṇī to the Badrīnāth temple and vice versa. It seems to have served in the same way as the pole of Ghaṅṭākaraṇa in Mana – a device to carry the idol. It was possibly replaced by the more respectable *ḍolī*, but it is obviously still considered important and holy, as it is used for his processions within Badrīnāth.

⁶The stone marks the spot where Viṣṇu was found by Pārvatī in the form of a baby.

6 Rituals in and around Badrīnāth

of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya was placed in the south-west corner, and the *ḍolī* of Uddhava, after being brought to the *kapāṭ* for a moment, was carried to the residence of the Rawal. This conducted the second day of the procession.

In 2011, the last day started at 4:30 a.m. with the procession of Kuber from Bāmṇī, entering the temple through the southern door. The Rawal arrived with the *mūrti* of Uddhav and the oil, and the *kapāṭ* was opened at 5:30 a.m. The door of the temple is secured by three locks with different keys. One is kept by the *pujāris* of Ghaṇṭākarna, one by the Mehtas of Bamni, who have the rights to the *ārti* in the temple, and the other one by the *rāj* purohit. Then, everybody except the *ḍolī* of Ādi Śaṅkarācārya, which was already stored away, entered the temple.

To receive the first glimpse of Badrīnārāyaṇ after his six month of solitude is a rare gift and a privilege. Inside the temple there is an oil lamp and it is considered a good omen if it is still burning after the winter. The first devotees to have *darśan* are presented with single threads of the woolen blanket that keeps Badrīnārāyaṇ warm. Finally, the worship starts with a *mahābhiṣeka*.

In the autumn, the temple usually closes in the second week of November and most of the priests and shopkeepers have already left Badrīnāth by then. The procession starts the day after the temple is closed, but the closing happens gradually. It is a process of five days in which the different *mūrtis* are put to rest. On the first day, Ganeśa receives his final *pūjā* and is then placed in a small niche on the right side of the *sabhā maṇḍap*. On the next day, the temple of Ādi Kedārnāth is closed. This happens after the main temple is closed for the mid-day break. The priest of Ādi Kedārnāth and some Sadhus cleaned the temple with water from the Taptkuṇḍ, and the final *pūjā* was performed by the Rawal and his Ḍimri assistant⁷. At the front entrance, the Vedpāṭhīs formed a guard of honor, chanting vedic mantras. At the conclusion of the *pūjā*, the *liṅga* was covered in rice and pieces of white gauze, but this was removed and washed away by the Sadhus after the Rawal and

⁷Ajay Ḍimri in 2011.

the Vedpāṭhis had left the temple. The Rawal and ved pāṭhis then proceeded to the Ādi Śaṅkarācārya temple and performed a similar ritual there. During this time, the locks at the temple of Ādi Kedārnāth are locked and there is no audience at all. On the third day, the *kaṇḍu* and the *kanth-pustak* are worshipped. The *kaṇḍu* is a sword associated with Dūrgā and the *kanth-pustak* is a copper plate. Some say the Yajurveda is written on it, some say its language is Pāli and its contents unknown, either way I was unable to even catch a glimpse of it. On the fourth day, the final *pūjā* for Lakṣmī is held. Even though the her worship stops after that, the temple is not yet closed, because her idol is placed to be next to Badrīnārāyaṇ the following day. The time of the closing of the Badrīnāth temple is decided about two months in advance, and although the numbers of pilgrims decrease with every day in November, on the final day numerous devotees come for a last glance at Badrīnārāyaṇ. In 2011, the *kapāṭh*s were closed exactly at 3:30 p.m., but no pilgrim was admitted into the temple 45 minutes before that. At around 3 p.m., the *ḍolī* for Kuber was ready. It was then carried around the temple, halted for a moment at the Ghaṅṭākarṇa shrine and then left the temple premises through the south gate to be brought to the Bāmṇī village, where it stayed at the Nandādevī mandir until next morning. Before the doors were finally closed, the Rawal brought the *mūrti* of Lakṣmī inside the main temple. Since no male is supposed to carry the wife of Viṣṇu and no-one is ritually more pristine than the Rawal, he is disguised as a woman, wearing a *sāṛī* during the process. When later the Rawal emerged from the temple with Uddhav in his hands, he was almost run over by the masses of pilgrims trying to receive his blessings. Again the actual closing, i.e. putting the locks on the door was not observed at all.

In 2012, the procession itself started on the 18th of November at 9 a.m., but an hour before the Rawal had already left his residence with the *ḍolī* of Uddhav and walked up to a room within the temple committee's building. A few minutes before 9 a.m., the *ḍolī* of Śaṅkarācārya, which was decorated inside the temple premises,

6 Rituals in and around Badrināth

was brought out in front of the main gate, where the Garhwal Rifles had already started playing. The Rawal along with his scepters, which were carried by two helpers wearing a white turban, and the *ḍolī* of Uddhav arrived to the main door as well. They ascended the steps and payed honor to Badrinārayaṇ for a final time. The procession was joined by the *ḍolī* of Kuber in the village Bāmṇī. In 2011 this merging of the two processions happened not at Bāmṇī but later at the bus stop where the *ḍolis* were placed onto cars, jeeps and trucks. After crossing the suspension bridge, the Rawal removed Uddhav of its *ḍolī* and sat down in his jeep – keeping the *mūrti* on his lap. The rest of the procession continued on foot until it reached the main road besides the bus stop, where the *ḍolis* were placed on the roofs of jeeps. There was a bus for employees of the committee and a truck for everyone else without means of transportation. The stops of the procession were identical to the ones on the second day of the spring procession, only in reversed order. The first stop was Hanumān Caṭṭī, and then the Mahādev temple of the Vishnu Prayag Hydroelectric Project. A few kilometers ahead, the procession stopped at a Nāg temple, connected to the Boarder Roads Organization (BRO), where a small *pūjā* was performed and tea and snacks were served, but everyone was in a hurry to get down to Pandukeshwar or Joshimath respectively. The *ḍolī* of Kuber did not reach Pandukeshwar the same day, but it halted in a village approximately 2 km in the North. In Pandukeshwar, the procession was greeted by bands of school children who led it down to the temple. There, the Rawal and *ḍolī* circumambulated both the Yog-Badrī and the Vāsudeva temple before entering the former. Following a *pūjā*, Uddhav was installed inside the Yog-Badrī temple, and the Rawal, the Dharmādhikāri and the Vedpāṭhīs circumambulated the two shrines again before entering the second – the temple of Vāsudev. After this, everyone dispersed rather quickly. The Rawal is bound to stay over night in Pandukeshwar, but most people went down to Joshimath and waited there for the procession to arrive the following day. The next day the procession reached Joshimath. The *ḍolī* of Śaṅkarācārya

was removed from the car and carried down to the courtyard. The regular dhol players had an unexpected death in their family and therefore did not play along the procession. Instead, the honor was given to one rather peculiar Sadhu who had played his drum in Badrīnāth already in the last weeks, so he was probably easy to recruit. Before the Rawal came down to the courtyard, he made a short visit to the Vāsudev temple. At the gate, he was greeted by the local women touching his feet. The Rawal then proceeded to the Narasiṅhamandir, and after *pūjā* and *pradakṣiṇa* he went on to the Śaṅkarācārya *gaddī sthal*. While a *pūjā* was performed inside the passage to the inner courtyard, the decorations were taken off the *ḍolī* so that it was already stowed away after the *pūjā* for Rājarājeśvāri was finished. The Ved-pāṭhīs gave a short interview to various reporters, and then again everyone was in a hurry to get back home or further down the valley. The Rawal went to Gauchar on the same day and then had another obligatory stay in Devprayāg. Thereafter, the Rawal is free to go wherever he desires.

It is interesting to observe how during spring everyone is eager to get to Badrīnāth – the rituals are done with enthusiasm and no-one is in a hurry. During autumn, the need and wish of most people in Badrīnāth to leave is palpable and thus reflected in the processions. Coming down from Badrīnāth, everything is done in a hurry and not as festive, since everyone is looking forward to six months of rest and ease.

The procession was performed on foot throughout most of history, and even when the road was opened in 1965 it continued in this way. Around 1975, it caught up with technological progress and people and *ḍolīs* travelled to their destinations by cars. Yet, the two-day schedule⁸ of the procession remained the same, even though nowadays it would be easily completed within a few hours.

The procession is not only divided in time but also in space – concerning the participating parties. For one, there is the Rawal along with the other priests. He is the

⁸When one also considers the opening day, with its small procession, one could say it takes three days.

6 Rituals in and around Badrīnāth

key figure in this procession, since it is paramount that he arrives at the temple, for only he may initiate the process of worship in Badrīnāth. There is not much symbolic meaning connected to in his travel, which is rather a necessity.

Secondly, there is the *ḍolī* of Ādi Śaṅkarāchārya. It moves along with the Rawal, but whenever he stops at an invitation or *darśan*, it will stay on the road. The *ḍolī* of Ādi Śaṅkarāchārya is carried and adorned without any formalities by sadhus who do this voluntarily but nevertheless with pride. I witnessed the decoration and procession of this *ḍolī* the three times, and most of the sadhus were the same, although it seemed that everyone was welcome to help or carry the palanquin for a short distance. Although the *ḍolī* of Ādi Śaṅkarāchārya is honored everywhere along the way, it is not the center of the procession, and it could be said that the actual procession really starts on the second day when Kuber and Uddhav join in. Uddhav represents the *utsav mūrti* of Badrīnārāyaṇ, and many people believe that it is actually Badrīnārāyaṇ who is carried to and from Pandukeshwar every year. Yet, the people of Pandukeshwar do not seem to show much interest in his worship. Their ruling deity is Kuber, who is only cared of by inhabitants of Pandukeshwar during the procession, but he is not worshipped directly during his stay in Badrīnāth.

Another central element of the procession is the oil. Because it is manufactured under royal patronage in Narendranagar, the oil has its own procession through different villages before it reaches Joshimath and joins the main procession.

On a meta-level, the procession has four aspects that are merged into one, but in the end they still maintain their individuality. First, there is the official part, concerning the priests and members of the temple committee along with the *mūrti* of Uddhav. Secondly, there is the local aspect within the procession, represented by Kuber and the people of Pandukeshwar. The third aspect is more difficult to point out. At first glance, it seems to be the part that allows pilgrims to participate and demonstrates the devotion towards Śaṅkarāchārya. It is quite certain that

the temple of Badrīnāth was once managed by the followers of Śaṅkarāchārya, and even though the local *math* in Joshimath does not seem eager to be represented within the procession, there still is a strong affection from his followers especially from South India. Finally, there is the aspect of the century-old patronage of the rulers of Garhwal. Thus, the king and his wife are paramount to the procession: the king decides the date, his wife manufactures the oil, but most prominent is the connection between the palace of the king and the temple of Badrīnāth as the intrinsic starting point and goal.

6.1.2 Intra-Local Processions

Deities are not static, at least not in Badrīnāth.⁹ Here they sometimes escape their temples and wander around in the valley with the help of people who carry them. These intra-local processions are dedicated to the gods neglected by the ordinary pilgrim. Most of these intra-local processions have a strong reference to the adjoining villages of Bamni and Mana, or even have their climax in said hamlets. Before the *Shri Badrinath Act* came into existence, non-Hindus or low-castes were not allowed inside the temple, and this was especially the case for the Bhotiyas. The local deities, i.e. Kuber and Ghaṅṭākarna, were incorporated into the orthodox pantheon, but they remain mostly unappreciated by priests and pilgrims. Therefore it seems only fair that they are allowed to return to their followers at least once a year. It is difficult to say, whether in this course the local gods had been sanskritized and given new Sanskrit names, but it is obvious that their heritage is acknowledged through this processions. While many of these processions are only a small part of larger festivals, they still demonstrate the connection of Badrīnāth to the sacred landscape surrounding the temple. The first example below is closely related to the “frame processions” since it is also rooted in the geographic location of the shrine.

⁹With the prominent exception of Badrīnārāyaṇ.

The Last Procession of Ghaṇṭākaraṇa

The *mūrti* of Ghaṇṭākaraṇa in Māna has three processions a year and two temples – one is his summer residence, the other a small winter shrine. As in the case for Badrīnārāyaṇ, in spring (15th of June) there is a procession from his winter home to the actual temple. In autumn, the same procession is repeated in reverse order. This procession is part of a five-day festival during which most of the festivities take place during the evening and night. In the following, I will give a detailed description of the first day of this *melā*, which fell on the 10th of November in 2011.¹⁰

The procession commences with the entrance of four different families into the courtyard before the temple. They come in turns, each family preceded by drum players, a sheep and two or more young men of the family. When all have arrived at the courtyard, they form a circle around the already present *mūrti* of Ghaṇṭākaraṇa, who is mounted on his pole. In the middle of this circle there is a hole in the ground and upon tying yellow¹¹ cloths around the pole above Ghaṇṭākaraṇa's *mūrti*, which represents the *coṭī* of Ghaṇṭākaraṇa the pole is lowered into this hole. Following a small *pūjā*, the procession starts by going around the courtyard once. It is led by the drum players, then come the sheep and the young men of each family, dressed in white turbans and yellow cloth diagonally bound around their torsos. Then come the families, the women dressed up in their local garments and most of the others that take part in the procession, including a trumpet (a local variation). The last is Ghaṇṭākaraṇa along with the priest, preceded by his scepter (*niśānā*). At the first crossing, the pole and the priests take a detour to visit a house and a small shrine nearby. These detours continue and Ghaṇṭākaraṇa receives presents and yellow cloths along the way. While the families and sheep have already reached his winter home, the pole still travels through the village. After paying a short visit to the Vyāsguphā, the *mūrti* of Ghaṇṭākaraṇa also makes

¹⁰Since I witnessed most of the ritual from some distance an informant explained several details.

¹¹Yellow is the favorite color of Ghaṇṭākaraṇa.

his way to the second temple where the actual ritual is about to start. Here the pole is again lowered into a hole, but it is supported by one man to keep it straight. To the South, five priests are seated on a small wall and enter trance one after the other. The first one to do so is the Jitu Badwāl, who is dressed in a white *luṅgī* and is the farmer of the *brahmkamal*¹² (*brahmkamal kā kisān*). He dances around the *mūrti* with a sword (*talvār*) throwing it to his back. In the meantime, helpers are sent down to the Sarasvatī river to bring back water in large pots. The other priests of Caṇḍikā, Nandā and Bālāsundarī¹³ are all dressed in red *luṅgīs*, and the priests of Ghaṇṭākarna and Viśvakarmā are both covered by a yellow *luṅgī*. When the priests have entered trance,¹⁴ they will signal this by waving their right arm up and down from the elbow, the fingers pointing down and touching each other at their tips. Then there follows a small dialog between Ghaṇṭākarna and Viśvakarmā (*bhāi bhāi haim*). First, Ghaṇṭākarna gives *śakti* to Viśvakarmā, and then Viśvakarmā states that he will protect the whole village. When the helpers return with the water pots, each of them presents one to the possessed priests. Some of them pour the ice-cold water over their heads, which is a heroic act, because the temperature is only a few degrees above freezing. The others, and especially the priest of Ghaṇṭākarna, will sit for the purpose of having a cold bath on a small sword. The meaning of this according to my informant is to say: “Look I have the power to withstand these ordeals (sitting on a sword and bearing this ice cold water), therefore trust me that I can easily protect this village.” After a possessed priest has shown his abilities, he is given a dry cloth and some put red cloth on their heads. When all priests have finished their performance – the priest of Ghaṇṭākarna being the last – the young men of the four families form a circle around the sheep, and each sheep, one after the other¹⁵, is lead outside the circle and ridden (more walked between the

¹²Himalayan lotus (*saussurea obvallata*).

¹³The priest of Maṅgaleśvar had passed away and there was no replacement for him until that day.

¹⁴In Mana, they say that they become their respective god.

¹⁵The order in which they leave the circle is based on their *śakti*, which sometimes takes a few minutes to decide.

6 Rituals in and around Badrīnāth

legs, holding it by its horns) by the priest of Ghaṇṭākaraṇa. This riding of the sheep is the acceptance of the *prasād*. Later the sheep are sacrificed and consumed by every family of the village. After the end of the performance *prasād* was given to the spectators. I had to hurry back to Badrīnāth, since it already had begun to get dark. The rest of the festival coincided with the closing preparations in Badrīnāth, and thus I was unable to attend the following days.

Almost nobody from Badrīnāth takes part in this procession *cum* festival. The main reason for this lies in the fact that most of the priests have already left the valley, and those still present were busy packing up or occupied with the closing ceremonies at Badrīnāth. This does not amend the fact that it is primarily a ritual of the Bhotiyas, and thus it has few connections to the orthodox practices of Badrīnāth. The same is true for the festival of Nandādevī in Bamni, yet in this case all the higher temple priests are present to grant their blessings and even partake in the rituals. The Rawal is not in their midst, but this is due to his restrictions that until the festival for Mātāmūrti he may only travel between his home and the temple.

Nandādevī Melā

Nandādevī is famous all over Garhwal and there are numerous temples dedicated to her. Sax (2011:180) argues that her importance in this region might even make her “one of the foremost symbols of belonging in Uttarakhand.” In the area of Badrīnāth, her temple lies in the hamlet of Bamni. All across Garhwal, a few days before *vāman dvādaśī*, Nandādevī has processions in her name – the most famous one being the Rāj Jāt, close to the actual Nandādevī mountain. In the village Bamni, the festival starts unnoticed when two boys of the village wander up the steep valley towards the mountain Nīlkaṇṭh, which many consider the Kailāś and Nandādevī’s *sasurāl* (the house of her father-in-law), to bring back *brahmkaṃal* the following day. With these lotuses of the mountains, the shrine is decorated and then opened for everyone’s *darśan*. In 2012, it fell on the 24th of September, and two days after

the flower-gatherers had returned the *melā* is reached its climax with the arrival of Kuber from the Badrīnāth temple. Kuber leaves the temple at 4:30 p.m. and is carried to Bamni without much pomp. The procession includes only a drum player, the Pujārī of Ghaṇṭākarna, someone who carries *agarbattī* in front of the pole and then the pole itself, carried by two men. In the behind someone follows with a *thālī* (a plate made of metal) full of *candan* (sandalwood). There were not more than five people following the procession, including myself. When Kuber reaches the courtyard in front of the Nandādevī temple a crowd is already assembled, but the procession first makes its way up to the Urvaśī shrine, where Kuber receives an *abhiṣek* as well as *bhog*. Then, the procession returns to the courtyard and the pole is lowered into a hole in the ground, facing the south side of the Nandādevī temple. The Dharmādhikārī from Badrīnāth is also present and what follows is a *pūjā*, which I was unable to perceive in detail. When the *pūjā* was finished, two men entered the courtyard, both clad in a white woolen coat. They stood left and right of the pole, and when the drums reached a climax they were taken over by the gods, marked by a high-pitched scream of each. Next they stood in different corners of the courtyard, and the smaller one of them was being dressed with a sari. In the meantime, a half circle of cow dung was drawn out on the pavement. First, the priest, now embodied by Kuber, sat down on a sword and poured milk and then yoghurt first over the other priest, who was possessed by Nandādevī, and then over himself. After this, he poured a pot of cold water over his head. Then it was the turn of Nandādevī, who did the same thing standing up, after which she climbed up on the temple roof and beat herself four times with an iron sword or saw. Then, both of them received dry cloth, a yellow turban and flower garlands. To conclude the festival, both climbed up on the temple roof, where cut fruits were already waiting for them, and finally, together with the helpers, they threw the fruits into the crowd as *prasād*. Since there was a considerable amount of cutten cucumber and apples, this took a long time. Then again quickly and without much

6 Rituals in and around Badrīnāth

notice, the pole was lifted from its hole, carried back to Badrīnāth and it entered the temple a few minutes later – again quite unnoticed.

It is apparent that this festival is clearly dedicated to Nandādevī. Nonetheless, Kuber and the priest he is about to possess also play a crucial role in this ritual. While the festival for the goddess Nandā might not represent anything extraordinary for this region, Kuber's role in it is still noteworthy. As mentioned above many of Badrīnāth's priests take part in the festival, either actively by conducting and supervising a ritual or simply as spectators, yet Kuber's procession that passes right outside of their homes is neglected. This strongly relates to the two personae Kuber possesses in Badrīnāth: for Badrīnārāyaṇ and his priests he is the trustworthy but otherwise unimposing cashier, while for the people of Bamni he is closely associated with his role as king of *yakṣas* and *rākṣas*. It seems that as soon as his idol is placed on the pole and carried outside the temple, the latter persona takes over, making him “unrecognizable” for the orthodoxy.

Ghantakarna's Invitation

Ghaṇṭākarna of Mana travels to Badrīnāth only once a year. This procession is closely related to the festival in honor of Mātāmūrti and is regarded by many as an invitation to Badrīnārāyaṇ to come and visit his mother.

I was told that the procession would start somewhere between 2 and 3 p.m. When I inquired the situation at 1 p.m., nothing was being prepared. Shortly before 2 p.m. people were slowly gathering at the courtyard in front of the temple. A fire was burning, providing the glowing ember needed for the incense. The drums and trumpets were brought from the temple, and the youth who would be playing them along the procession started to practice. Little was happening, while inside the temple various people were preparing the *mūrti* and pole. Then everything went quite fast – there was a small *pūjā*, the Pujārī's body was taken over by Ghaṇṭākarna

6.1 Processions in Badrīnāth

and then the procession moved out. It did not proceed along the road but crossed the Alakanandā and went along the footpath. The first stop was a small place inside the village, along the way down to the river, where a small *pūjā* was held. The drums and trumpets went ahead more quickly, and soon after the army camp, on the other side of the river, the pole took a detour through the fields to the temple of Patiyār (a companion of Ghaṇṭākarna) close to the banks of the Alakanandā then returned, crossed the path again and went through the potato fields on the other side to a place dedicated to Ghaṇṭākarna's horse. The next stop was the temple of Bogdwāl, right along the path. While the pole did not stop here, someone tied a yellow flag on the top of the temple and left a box of *harīyālī*. Along the way, there is a stone which is to be passed on the left, although the path passes its right side, but again the drum players did not know or care. The last stop before Badrīnāth was at the crossing to Bṛghūguphā, but it was mainly a halt to collect together the procession, which had already widely dispersed. Everyone sat down to have a *bīṛī* (bidi - kind of cigarette). Then the procession finally entered Badrīnāth. The drummers went straight for the temple, while the rest of the procession proceeded down to the Brahmkapāl, where another small *pūjā* took place. The *mūrti* was then carried to the Taptkuṇḍ, but it did not stop there and continued on to the Badrīnāth temple, passing the Kedāreśvar and Śaṅkara shrines.

Ghaṇṭākarna enters the temple through the main gate and is positioned in front of the temple's *kapāt*. His priest stands in the middle, and inside the temple an aisle is formed so that he is able to see Badrīnārāyaṇ. Since there were many pilgrims around who were eager to receive *darśan*, the aisle was sometimes blocked and the priest or his helpers had to make space. The priest falls into trance, swings the empty pot over his head a few times and then gives it to the *pradhān* who runs down to the river to fill it. In the meantime, there is a lot of pushing and shifting, because not only people from Mana are present, but also other pilgrims who want to get a glimpse of what is going on. As the Pujārī waits for the water, he placed his left hand

6 Rituals in and around Badrīnāth

behind his head and swings the right one, demonstrating that he is the embodiment of the *devatā* now. From time to time, he throws water and rice on the floor. When the water arrives by the *pradhān*, now dressed in a *dhotī*, the Pujārī again sits on a dagger, but his back is turned to Badrīnāth. The helpers pour yoghurt and milk over his head and with a scream he pulls the pot over his head and pours the water over himself. Then he stands up, faces Badrīnāth and is handed two daggers with orange cloth tied around them, which he thrashes twice on his left shoulder and twice on his right. After this he is dried and given new clothes, and the *mūrti* moves inside the temple but not inside the *garbha grha*. Then, emerging from the southern *kapāt*, another *pūjā* is held by the Dharmadikhari and another Vedpāṭhis, during which everyone tries to touch the pole for a moment or tie money into its the yellow cloths. Subsequently, the Pujārīs have turbans wrapped around their head the main Pujārī receives a yellow one, another one a safron-colored one and two further Pujārīs receive pink turbans. The rest of the helpers get mostly yellow-colored cloth around their necks. When the *pūjā* is finished, there is some dancing with the pole, for which the drums play a different rhythm. One man will hold the pole, balancing it on his shoulder and walking around a circle. Everytime the drums play faster he shakes the *mūrti* on the top. This seemed to be a great honor as well as a demonstration of power, because some had to be assisted so that the pole would not fall on the ground. The “dancing” *mūrti*, then moves to the Badrīnāth Ghaṇṭākarṇa shrine and receives a garland and two cloths from the its Pujārī. After the whole procession has left the temple – the drummers and I passed through the northern gate and the pole and the rest of the procession through the main gate (and this sort of confusion where to proceed in different parts of the procession was not uncommon) – the participants are offered *prasād*, consisting of *halvā*, in one of the rooms of the temple committee. The whole procession then stops again in front of a chai shop, where a small *pūjā* is held by, or with the assistance of the Dimrī priests. After this everyone relaxes, drinks chai, receives more *prasād* and



Figure 6.2: The priests of Mana enjoying tea after the procession.

chats. Finally, around 4:30 p.m., the procession starts to move back to Mana.

I was told that the purpose of this procession, which takes place every year one day prior to the Mātāmūrti Melā, was for Ghaṇṭākarna to go to Badrīnāth and invite him to visit his mother. One aspect is especially important in this procession: the flower *harīyālī* – a small yellow plant that is grown in little paper boxes or empty yoghurt cups. It resembles thick grass. Part of the procession are two men with baskets full of these, which are given away as *prasād* along the way. The one who carries the pole close to the *mūrti* has a yellow cloth wrapped around his face, in order for him not to breathe directly on Ghaṇṭākarna.

Mātāmūrti Melā

This procession *cum* festival happens each year on *vāman dvādaśī*. In 2012, when I had the opportunity to take part in it, it fell on the 26th of September. It should have correctly been the 27th, but obviously the date is flexible. The procession



Figure 6.3: The *hariyāli* plant.

commenced on time at 10 a.m. The *ḍolis* of Śaṅkarācārya and Uddhav were already lined up inside the temple premises, in front of the little shrine of Śaṅkara inside the temple's courtyard. I waited outside to observe the procession emerging from the temple and had a talk with the Pujārī of Ghaṇṭākarna. He shared with me that he is participating as the representative of Ghaṇṭākarna, thus he is supposed to walk in front of the procession, in his job as *kṣetrapāl* – “for security.” When the actual procession started, I did not see him or the *ḍoli* of Uddhav in front. There were five horses in the procession: one each for the Rawal, the Naib Rawal, the president of the *mandir samiti*, the Dharmādhikārī and one for the Ḍimṛī priest who assisted the Rawal this year. As usual there were two drummers in front, who also accompany the opening and closing processions as well the procession of Kuber to and from Bamni. At the crossing to the Bṛghuguphā the *ḍoli* of Uddhav suddenly joined the procession again. The drummers were followed by the *ḍolis* of Uddhav and then Śaṅkarācārya, someone carrying the flag of Badrīnāth, the staff bearers and the

horses of the Rawal, Naib Rawal, Ḍimrī and Dharmādhikārī. The procession did not make halt anywhere, even though there was *prasād* given away to the participants at several points along the way, such as at the Nāg-Nāginī shrine. When the procession arrived at the Mātāmūrti temple, everything was already prepared. Several tents had been set up and many locals had set up shop, selling everything from plastic toy guns to snacks – hoping for the opportunity of the year and obviously doing quite well. The *ḍolī* of Uddhav was carried to the Mātāmūrti temple and the idol placed inside. Then, both the *ḍolīs* (the one of Śāṅkarācārya did not enter the premises of the temple) were carried to a tent erected for the leading persons of the Badrīnāth establishment, where they were served snacks and chai. In the meantime, the tent of the Mana-*pāñcāyat* was in full swing, with the *pradhān* giving a speech and welcoming everyone after which the music started. While this was happening, the people lined up to receive *darśan* of the Mātāmūrti. Then, all the members of the Rawal's tent proceeded down to the Mana stage and exchanged courtesies. Everyone was praised and in turn praised the others. Around noon, the *abhiṣek* was prepared by the Rawal and his Ḍimri assistant. Opposite them sat the Dharmādhikārī and the Naib Rawal. The *abhiṣek* was for both Uddhav and Mātāmūrti, and although it drew a great crowd, even more people chose to remain in front of the tent where the Bhotiyas of Mana were playing music. Finally, everyone went for lunch, which was provided for free. The army gave out *pūrīs* (deep fried bread), and another kitchen gave out rice and lentils. At 2 p.m., everyone from Badrīnāth was ready to leave, while the dancing and music around the Mana tent continued, probably until late in the evening.

During its return, the procession did not stop again. However, at the crossing towards the Bhṛguguphā, the *ḍolī* of Uddhav suddenly proceeded up the hill, and when I followed it and inquired about this detour, it became clear, why I did not see Uddhav on the way there: He takes a different route, above the Badrīnāth temple, and then enters via the Kubergalī, through the southern door. The reason



Figure 6.4: The *ḍolī* of Uddhav takes a different route.

for this remains unclear. Some said that he has to sneak out unnoticed to see his mother. I was also told that the *ḍolī* was not allowed to pass a certain spot along the way which was polluted by a demon.

When Uddhav arrived inside the temple premises, the *ḍolī* of Śaṅkarācārya was already dissembled. As usual for the end of a procession, as soon as the *mūrti* is taken out of the *ḍolī*, everything except the *ḍolī* itself is free to take as *prasād*, but one has to be quick and without hesitation to push others away. The idol of Uddhav was then placed inside the *garbha grha* again, and with this the Mātāmūrti Melā ended at least for the Badrīnāth side, as in Mana they continued to dance and play.

It is interesting to observe how the orthodoxy of Badrīnāth and the Bhotiyas of Mana meet in these processions. While there are many contacts between the two groups, such meetings remain on an official level and it is easily to distinguish which part of a procession or festival belongs to which group.

6.1.3 Link Processions

During the summer months, every now and then a procession from within Garhwal arrives in Badrīnāth. These are dedicated to the respective village *devatā* and are sponsored in turns by the families of the village. Some are periodical and others happen on special occasions. When they originate far away they usually arrive in vehicles, processions from closer by on foot. The number of participants is usually between ten to fifty. During my stays in Badrīnāth, I had the chance to witness several of them and they were all very much alike.

These processions enter the area of Badrīnāth via the bus stand, no matter if they come in vehicles or on foot, and then they proceed to the main *ghāt*. There, a *pūjā* is performed, either by their own priest or a Paṇḍā of the Ḍimrī *gotra*, since they all stem from areas that fall under the Ḍimrī's responsibility. During this ritual, pilgrims, priests and other spectators join the participants of the procession. Sometimes participants fall into trance while intensely dancing or drumming during the *pūjā*. The procession is always accompanied by drummers and sometimes they carry wind instruments with them for ritual purposes. There are usually also ritual weapons, which are the attributes of the respective *devatās*. The main aspect of the procession is the *ḍolī* of the deity which is always covered with a thick red cloth and adorned with flowers and colorful ribbons. The red cloth is fixed on the *ḍolī* by means of an ornamented silver belt. The *ḍolī* keeps rocking until it touches the water of the Alakanandā, sometimes rhythmic, sometimes violently. The people say that this is not because of the bearers, but is done by the *devatā* inside the *ḍolī* himself. All ritual items are put into the water of the Alakanandā and the participants sprinkle water over their head as a symbolic bath, since it is too cold and due to the river rapids too dangerous to take a bath. Everybody longs to see the *ḍolī* inside the temple, but sometimes it is too crowded. However, if they hire a Paṇḍā, a door may be opened. If they allowed inside the temple, the procession first performs a *pradakṣiṇā* around the temple and then enters through the north-

6 Rituals in and around Badrīnāth

ern entrance and leaves the temple premises again after a second *pradakṣiṇā*. In the following, some go to Mana or Bamni, but the majority leaves right away. The participants of the procession usually keep to themselves, and apart from a few interested pilgrims, they do not receive much attention from the people of Badrīnāth.

The second group in this category are processions of famous gurus or leaders of different South Indian *sampradāyas* from one of the several *āśrams* and *maṭhs* around Badrīnāth. The gurus start at their *āśram* and then proceed to the temple, followed by their entourage. Since most *maṭhs* within Badrīnāth are well-renowned, these processions are often also joined by the local priests, especially when they are followed by a feast afterwards.

Last but not least, Badrīnāth is used by politicians to demonstrate their devotion and spirituality. Although they are not intent to form a procession themselves, security matters, and especially the eagerness of officials and priests to demonstrate their respect and offer as much assistance as possible often turns their visits into a sort of procession. Since I was not deemed sufficiently important to join these processions, I either had to watch them from afar – as in the case of Narendra Modi’s visit – or was not even allowed to be present when the former President of India, Pratibha Patil, came to visit, since the whole area was declared off-limits.

I do not wish to imply that all visits of politicians to Badrīnāth are instrumentalized for future elections, but an English professor at Srinagar told me that before elections a pilgrimage to Badrīnāth (and the media reporting about it) is almost essential for any promising candidate.

7 Badrīnāth from a Local Perspective

7.1 The Bhotiya Mahals and their Connection to Badrīnāth

The term “Bhotiya” is derived from *bod* or *boṭ*, which means Tibet,¹ and its use for an entire, yet heterogenous, community was started by the British. According to Brown (1992:158-159), in 1772 the word (Bhoteas) was used by the British in the beginning for the inhabitants of Bhutan, and later “the whole of Tibet including Ladhak [was referred to by the British] as ‘Boutan’.”

To complicate things, it has to be noted that Tibet was usually referred to by the Pahārīs as *Hundeś* and its inhabitants as *hunas* or *huniyas*. Therefore, Brown (1992:160) gives following explanation: “the term ‘Bhot’ admittedly did serve the purpose of identifying a specific group of people in distinction to other groups of the area. More specifically, it was meant to distinguish the ‘Bhotea’ from the Pahari or ‘Khasa’ people of the hills as well as from the ‘Huniyas’ or the Tibetans proper of Hundes.” Atkinson (2002:III:84) further mentions that “the Huniyas of Nari call themselves Naripas and call the bhotiyas of our hills Monpas,” while the Bhotiyas of Mana and Niti refer to themselves as Rongpas.² The main reason for this obvious confusion was that the Bhotiya people show distinctive Mongolian features and are therefore easily confused with Tibetans. It is also believed that they ori-

¹Sabine Leder (2001:22) notes that “dieser Name [Bhotiya] leitet sich von der geographischen Benennung ihres Siedlungsgebietes Bod (auch Bhot) ab. Bod heißt wörtlich ‘der Norden’ und wird von den Pahari gleichzeitig als Synonym für Tibet verwendet.”

²Monpas are “mountain dwellers” and Rongpas “valley dwellers.”

7 *Badrināth from a Local Perspective*

ginally migrated from Tibet to the Indian Himalayas, although we will see below that there may be no reason to distinguish between Tibet and India in this region, and that one might rather speak of a “ethnoscape” (Appadurai 1990) or “contact zone” (Pratt 1992) in this region until 1962, when the border was finally defined and closed.

In 1832, an article by George William Traill (1992a) was published entitled *Statistical report on the Bhotia Mehals of Kamaon*, which is one of the earliest descriptions of the Bhotiyas. In the first paragraph, Traill (1992a:99) mentions that the name Bhot actually refers a region “which once formed a part of the adjacent Tibet province of Bhot” and that part of this region was later incorporated “to the states of Kumaon and Garhwal.” A map complementing Sherring’s (2012) book features “Bhot” for the entire norther part of today’s Uttarakhand. Yet, there is no evidence that there has ever been a sovereign “Bhotiya-land”, and there certainly have never been *the* Bhotiyas.

In the State of Uttarakhand alone, according to Leder (2001:24), there are five different groups, subsumed under the term Bhotiyas.

Bhotiya groups	Division	District	Tahsil	Tal
Jadh	Garhwal	Uttarkashi	Bhatwari	Nilang, Jadung
Marcha	Garhwal	Chamoli	Joshimath	Niti, Mana
Tolcha	Garhwal	Chamoli	Joshimath	Niti
Johari-Shauka	Kumaon	Pithoragarh	Munsiyari	Johar
Rang-Shauka	Kumaon	Pithoragarh	Dharchula	Vyans, Darma, Chaundas

While all Bhotiya groups had a strong connection to specific markets within Tibet, only the Marchas of Mana also share a strong connection to the shrine of *Badrināth* and therefore also with Hindu orthodoxy and pilgrims from all over India. In order to contextualize the relationship between the Marchas and *Badrināth*, I will first

7.1 The Bhotiya Mahals and their Connection to Badrināth



Figure 7.1: Young Bhotiya woman at the Mātāmūrti Melā

give an introduction to the Bhotiya community.³

Origins

The origins of the Bhotiyas are almost impossible to trace, but it seems clear that they migrated to this area at some time in the past. Most groups are considered to have come from Tibet to settle in the Indian part of the Himalayas. The Bhotiyas themselves argue that they have no relationship with Tibet and Buddhism⁴ – especially in Mana – for reasons that will be discussed later. Yet, there are Bhotiya narratives that mention that they had lived in Tibet for a few generations, but originally they are Indians. One of these narratives, or actually two versions of the

³The focus lies with the Marchas of Mana, but certain characteristics of the Bhotiyas were maintained more among the other groups, therefore I will also give examples for the other groups.

⁴“[...] it cannot be doubted that they are of Tibetan origin. [...] the Bhotiyas themselves, however, do not admit their Tibetan origin. They state generally that they are a Rajput race who dwelt originally in the hill provinces south of the snowy range, and that they migrated to Tibet, whence, after a residence of several generations, they again crossed the Himalaya and established themselves in the districts which they now inhabit” (Atkinson 2002:III:112-113).

7 *Badrināth from a Local Perspective*

same, are given by Pangti (translated and cited in Brown 1994:215 and 246-247).

By order of King Botchhogel⁵, Dham Singh, after living in Tibet for many years, was sent to Milam [a village in upper Kumaon], where he established a village on the King's authority and continued to collect *chhonkal* from the Huniya traders. Dham Singh arrived at Milam by chasing a deer which changed its form at every halt. Dham Singh named each halt according to the form the deer took, *suh* [sic!] as *Dung*, *Samagan*, etc.⁶ On reaching Milam, the deer disappeared, and both Dham Singh and his dog became lame. Thus, the place was named *Midum-Khidum*, or *Milam*.

In the second version of this narrative, Dham Singh and his brother Hiru came to the town of Malari. His brother stayed there and “Dham Singh continued on to Kailash” (Brown 1994:246) In Daba, he met the king Botchhogel and “was made a soldier in his army” (ibid.:247). “Due to his heroism, Dham Singh was made ‘*sardar*’, and eventually awarded several villages in Johar after the cessation of the Ladhak wars” (ibd.).

The Johari Bhotiyas are also called *Sokpas* or *Shauka*. A narrative explains their second name, as demonstrated by Brown (1994:220-221): “They were said to have been descendants of a Rajput group from Tibet who moved to the Johar valley and subdued the inhabitants there who were known as *Sokpas*. These Rajputs assumed the name *Sokpa*, and signify the fact that ‘*Sokpa*’ has the same meaning as *Rawat* (Rajput) as well as the fact that their ancestors were Hindus even if they were residing in Tibet.” It is in line with the negation of their Tibetan origin, that if pressed

⁵This might be a generic term meaning *bod chos rgyal* – the Dharma King of Tibet. Brown (1994:255) mentions in a note that “this was the last independent ruler of the region and thus contemporary to the last Ladakh war [...]. Dham Singh would fit into this period so that the legendary founder of Milamwal could possibly be placed between 1625 and 1650 AD.”

⁶Leder (2001:196) gives a similar narrative. A Lama comes from Tibet to help the Bhotiyas in Johar, and he is accompanied by a young man who can change his form. This young man changes into a dog (*kungri*), a deer (*dol*), a bear (*topi*), a camel (*unt*) and a tiger (*dung-udiyar*). The passes they traverse are named according to the animal forms he took.

7.1 *The Bhotiya Mahals and their Connection to Badrināth*

on this matter, they can state at least that they have always been Hindus – something important to their social status among the “Khas-Hindus.” The assuming of the name of the defeated however seems strange, because I cannot think of any reason for the victor to take the name of the subdued, except for the reason that there had never been any war, and that they have been Sokpas all along and established their rajput origin by means of a trail that was impossible to trace beyond the border.

There is also a third theory on the origins of the Bhotiyas, especially of the Darma-Bhotiyas. Traill (1992:115) mentions in his “report” that the inhabitants of the Darma Ghat “though equally of Tartar origin, are traditionally derived from a different race.” Further he argues that they are “considered as the descendants of a body of Mongol Tartars, which was left to secure possessions of Kumaon after its subjection to TIMUR. This force, thinned by disease and sword, ultimately retreated to the Darma pass, and there formed a permanent establishment” (Traill 1992:115). However, Atkinson (2002:III:124) contests this view by arguing that Timur forces “never approached Kumaon nearer than Hardwar,” and since this event “took place in 1398 A. D.” there would be very little evidence for this theory. Apart from their true origins, the Darma Bhotiyas seem to be excluded from the Bhotiya community, as Atkinson (2002:III:113) remarks that “both [Marchas and Sokpas] alike look down on the Bhotiyas of the Darma patts, and neither eat nor intermarry with them.” Also Traill (1992a:117) notes that “the Bhotias ought necessarily to have have no distinctions of caste: the *Māna*, *Nitī*, and *Juwār* Bhotias, however, pretend to consider those of the *Darma* and *Byanse* Ghats as an inferior sect, and neither eat nor intermarry with them.”

Saklani (1998) introduces a fourth possibility by arguing that the Bhotiyas’ Tibetan origin was an invention of European scholars led by Atkinson and that the Bhotiyas never came from Tibet but are descendants of the Bhill-Kirata tribe. Their Mongolian features were inherited by intermarriage and close contacts with the Tibetans.

Yet, I believe that the retracing of groups to “semi”-mythological tribes from the Epics, is far-fetched and usually based on homonyms.

7.1.1 Lifestyle

This brings us to a closer look at the social system of the Bhotiyas and their lifestyle. The Bhotiyas have no caste system as known from the followers of Hinduism, but like other Hindus they have a viri- or patrilocality (Leder 2001:86). The European travelers generally seemed fond of the Bhotiyas and for example, Traill (1992a:144) writes: “of the Bhotias, it may be observed generally, that they are an honest, industrious and orderly race, possessed of much good humour and patience: in their habits they are commonly dirty [...]”

This “commonly dirty” certainly carries different meanings for Traill and their Hindu neighbors or the pilgrims from the plains, and for the latter it is mainly concerned with the consumption of meat and liquor. Even if the Bhotiyas “scrupulously abstain from the use of beef”⁷ (Traill 1992a:143), they do eat sheep and goats and “do not scruple to eat and drink with the cow-killing people of Hundes” (Atkinson:III:113). Concerning their use of alcohol, Traill (1992a:143) states: “The Bhotias are much addicted to the use of spiritous liquors.” This goes as far as that the Marchas of Mana supply the priests in Badrināth with their famous *Mānā kā pānī*. Still, their social status is defined by the Hindu majority, and Traill (1992a:117) remarks that they “continue to be regarded with abhorrence by the Hindus, as decendants from a cow-killing race.” Yet, question of status arise also among the Bhotiyas themselves since “agricultural Bhotias regard trading Bhotias lower, while all think the Tibetans are lower than them” (Traill 1992a:117).

Major Bruce (1910:63-64) has an interesting anecdote to add:

Two days after our arrival [in Mana] a middle-aged young lady sent a

⁷Traill (1992a:143) mentions that “by the *Dharma* and *Byanse Bhotias* the *Chownr Gae* [Yak] is eaten.” It might have to do with the vicinity of the religious shrines of Hinduism in the West that towards the East the Bhotiyas become less strict about the consumption of beef.

7.1 *The Bhotiya Mahals and their Connection to Badrīnāth*

message to me that ever since she had seen me on the day of our arrival she had been ill I was very much hurt, I allow; during the course of a short but interesting career, no such snub had ever been administered to my self-respect. I said, “But can’t I do anything?” She said, “Yes; wash your face and let me have the water.” So we got hot water and soap, and she sat a rock to see that there was no deception. The water, or rather the decoction, was then put into a long tumbler, and she then and there drank it all! What is more, the next day she sent word that she was quite cured. It is a blessing to have been of some use in this world anyhow. Evidently I’ve got a more serviceable face than I thought.

The Bhotiyas have a “semi-nomadic lifestyle” (Leder 2001:31), which means that they retreat to their winter homes in the middle of November and return to their higher situated villages in the end of April or the beginning of May, which correlates with the opening and closing of the temple of Badrīnāth – yet, this analogy has more to do with the climate than with a cultural connection between the two.

The villages of *Josi-mat’h*, *Panc’heser* [Pandukeshwar?] and their vicinity, afford them an asylum, for the four inclement months of the year. After the first fall of snow, they retire, with their wives and families, carrying all their property with them; excepting the grain, which they bury in small pits, securing the top with stones. (Raper 1994:77)

7.1.2 Trade

Until 1962, the main occupation of the Bhotiyas was trade with Tibet. Every valley of the Bhotiyas had a defined trading market in Tibet. For Mana it was Tsaparang and Tholing, the people of Niti traded with Daba, the Darma with Kiunlang, the Bhotiyas of Byanse with Taklakot, while the Joharis were not restricted to any special place and mainly traded with Gartok. The Bhotiyas virtually had a monopoly on trade with Tibet. According to Traill (1992a: 132), “the landholders from the

7 *Badrināth from a Local Perspective*

northern pergannas [...] are compelled to barter their merchandize with the *Bhotias*.” Each Bhotiya trader had one or more partners in Tibet. These partners were called *mitra*, and the contract between them was recognized by a stone that was broken in two and each partner kept one half.

The Tibetan *mitra* (status) could be bought and sold by the Bhotiyas only. One Tibetan to one Bhotiya *mitra* was generally the rule, but new ones could be established by Bhotiya initiative if the older agreements were not affected. The status was inherited in both Tibet and India, but whereas in Tibet both male and females could inherit, among the Bhotiyas the status was inherited by sons or, if no sons, by the daughter’s husband. The relationship (*gamgia*, “agreement”) was expressed by the breaking of a small stone done with the *serji*. [...] The establishment of a new *mitra* relationship (a ceremony called *sulji mulji* according to Upreti) takes place when tea or “wine” is taken together, first by the Tibetan and secondly by the Bhotiya *mitra*. Presents of “standard good” are exchanged, and the Bhotiya presents his Tibetan *mitra* with either a white scarf or a “special turban” (Brown 1994:239-241).

Traill (1992a:132) further notices that when the partner in Tibet “becomes bankrupt, the trader is under the necessity of purchasing the right of dealing with some other individual.” In this way, “many Bhotiyas collectively, possess a single correspondent” (Traill 1992a:132). Even if the partner does not go bankrupt, it is possible to sell or buy a *mitra*, as noted by Brown (1994:242): “in 1950, for example, it [*mitra* right] was worth Rs. 3000 to Rs. 4000.” The trade through the Himalayas was not just a business opportunity, but according to Atkinson (2002:III:128) “the real fact is that Hundes is so utterly dependent on India for its supplies [...] if the passes were closed [...] for a single season there would be a famine in Tibet.” In this way, it was the borax and salt that came from Tibet that was valuable for India, but it was the grain that was given in exchange that was vital for Tibet.

7.1 *The Bhotiya Mahals and their Connection to Badrināth*

Usually, a long list of trade items is given when it comes to the trans-Himalayan trade, and it is certainly true that many different products were traded, but only a few of them were traded in a larger quantity. These include foremost salt, borax and grain. “Grain forms the staple article of Bhotia export [...]” (Traill 1992a:133). During the cold months the Bhotiya traders went from village to village and exchanged salt for grain. In order for the whole amount of products not having to be constantly carried around “the Bhotias have, accordingly, three depots – one at their Bhot village, the second at the base of the Himalaya, and the third, some three or four days journey below” (Traill 1992a:133).

The importance of salt is easy to understand, while the importance of borax is not so widely known. Borax or tincal (from *ṭāṅga* or *ṭāṅgaṇa*) was and partly still is used, for the procession of iron, as an ingredient to enamel, for gold mining and for the local production of ink. The importance as a trade item lay not only in its different uses, but it was mainly that “western Tibet seemed to be the centre of borax mining and apparently the only source of this item in South Asia” (Joshi and Brown 1987:311). So with monopolies both on the trans-Himalayan trade as well as borax, it is no surprise that the Bhotiyas accumulated great wealth and that the Himalayan kingdoms and later also the British wanted a share of this. Yet, with the arrival of the British there was also an advance in technology: “Borax was formerly a much more profitable investment than it now is. The great European demand for this mineral was formerly in a great measure met by the Tibetan trade, but [...] the immense development which European and American science has given to the manufacture of Borax from Boracic acid has greatly curtailed the demand, but still the borax trade exists and is sufficiently considerable to render it of prime importance to the Bhotiyas” (Atkinson 2002:III:129-130). Of course, this was not the end of the Bhotiya economy, since they traded a large variety of products on either side of the Himalaya. There was another great advantage for the Himalayan traders, as mentioned by Raper (1994:78):

7 *Badrināth from a Local Perspective*

In exchange [for grains], they bring back the produce of *Butan*, for which the annual pilgrimage ensures them a certain and advantageous sale. In this traffic, many of them acquire very large fortunes; and there was then present a young man, who was offering a few articles of small value for sale, whose grand-father, as we were informed, had, on one occasion, come forward with a loan of two lakhs of rupees, to assist the Raja of Srinagar in the first *Gurc'hali* invasion.

If we were to look back in history – at least a thousand years – we would see that, apart from the inscription on the plate of Lalitaśūrādēva,⁸ there is not much mentioning of pilgrimage or religious activity in this area. On the other hand, borax and salt were always in demand. In this way, it were the Bhotiyas who had their influence in this region and the pilgrims made their way into this high valley only later on. Following the argumentation of Joshi and Brown (1987:312), “we may be able to trace its [borax] importance to local trade from the sixth century B.C., and certainly from the sixth century A.D.” Further, according to the copper plate of Padmaṭadēva⁹, there was a district named Ṭaṅgaṅāpura (borax-town). The town Yōśi is mentioned together with Ṭaṅgaṅāpura and Sircar (1960:292-293) is of the opinion that “Yōśi is modern Jōshimāṭh and Ṭaṅgaṅāpura was probably the district around it.” Although borax trade was the most lucrative, a more valuable substance was traded as well – gold.

The Question of Gold – *Badrināth* as *Suvarṇagotra*

We know that the Bhotiyas also traded gold next to the above mentioned salt, borax and grain. It is unclear in which quantities or if there even were goldmines within Garhwal, but it was certainly not scarce since they paid their taxes to the hill kingdoms in gold dust (Atkinson 2002:III:143). There are more hints to gold traded or

⁸See chapter 3.1.

⁹He lived in the “first half of the tenth century A.D.” (Sircar 1960:284) and was “a devout worshipper of Mahēśvara” (Sircar 1960:289).

7.1 The Bhotiya Mahals and their Connection to Badrīnāth

found around Badrīnāth, but we will start with the past.

There was once a land called Suvarṇagotra,¹⁰ Suvarṇabhūmi (Tucci 1956:92) or Suvarṇa-kutula (Atkinson 2002:II:454). The localization of this kingdom is difficult since the sources are few and offer many interpretations. Thus, Atkinson (2002:II:455) locates the kingdom in the Gori valley and with the Joharis, while Tucci (1956:92) is “inclined to think that *Žaṅ žuṅ* corresponds to Suvarṇabhūmi, Svarṇabhūmi, Suvarṇagotra of the Sanskrit sources [...]” Denwood instead is of the opinion that Suvarṇagotra was North of Zhang Zhung, roughly in the area of Aksai Chin. Wherever it was actually located, or maybe it was even was only an imagined land, the famous *pipīlika*¹¹ gold came from somewhere and it was traded through the Himalaya region.

Badrīnāth seems to have been a rich temple from its very beginning. It is likely that much of its wealth came from the offerings of pilgrims, but its location on the trade route and possibly even near sources of gold leads to the possibility that not all the pilgrims came for *darśan* only. According to Joshi and Brown (1987:309), gold particles can be found on the banks of several rivers in Uttarakhand, and “it is said that until as late as the 19th century people of this area used to collect these particles.”

Further adding to this theory is the fact that there is a a small river besides the Nar mountain that is said to contain gold and the associated region is the abode of Kuber – the god of wealth and riches. Even more interesting is a short narrative mentioned by Andrade. Since it is available to me only in German translation (Aschoff 1989:27) I will paraphrase it here:

They [i.e. the pilgrims] also told that in the beginning this sanctuary turned everything it was touched with into gold, be it wood, stone or whatever. But there have been a greedy blacksmith who brought an

¹⁰Denwood (2008:7) notes that it literally means “gold clan,” but *gotra* can also denote an enclosure (primarily for cows, since *go* means “cow”), a possession, a forest, a field, as well as a mountain (Monier-Williams 2002:364).

¹¹It means “ant”, as well as the “gold supposed to be collected by ants” (Monier-Williams 2002:627).

7 *Badrināth from a Local Perspective*

huge amount of iron to the sanctuary in hope of becoming rich. Before entering the temple, he put the iron into a fire which was burning below the pagoda, to make it soft and form it to receive even more gold. Yet, when he touched the idol with the iron, it was still hot, which made the god so angry that he refused to turn anything into gold, as he had done before on every occasion. That sort of tall tale they tell a lot.

Around the time of Traill's travels, the gold trade had decreased. "The frauds found to be practiced by the Hiuniyas or Bhotias, in alloying this metal and in mixing copper or brass filings with the dust, have created a general distrust in the purchase of this article [...]" (Traill 1992:138).

7.1.3 Political Situation

Because the Bhotiyas were active on both sides of the Himalayas, they also were subject to two different governments or sovereignties. The main interference which resulted from this was that the Bhotiyas were taxed twice. According to Traill (1992a:122), in Tibet they had to pay, a "Sinh Thal', land revenue, 'Ya Thal', tax on sun-shine¹²" and "'Kiun Thal', tax on the profits of trade." In respect to the Indian kingdoms, "the assessment was fixed at a quit-rent payable in gold-dust" (Atkinson 2002:III:143), but Mana was exempt from tax to the Indian side since "[it] appears to have been, from the first, granted in religious assignment to the temple of Badrinath" (Traill 1992a:124).

It is difficult to say whether there ever was an independent "Bhotiya land." Atkinson notes that the "mahals belonged to Tibet up to the time that Garhwal became consolidated under the chiefs of Srinagar and Kumaon" (Atkinson 2002:III:125). According to Brown (1994:220), this was in 1670 CE under the rule of Baj Bahadur Chand, "but in becoming subjects of the cis-Tibetan States, the Bhotiyas were by no means drawn from their allegiance to the parent state, but still continued to

¹²"The 'Ya Thal', which, from its name, probably originated in the migratory habits of the Tartars who, during the winter, remove to the warmest situations [...]" (Traill 1992a:122).

7.1 *The Bhotiya Mahals and their Connection to Badrīnāth*

acknowledge the supremacy of both [...]” (Atkinson 2002:III:125). They were administered from Tibet in relation to their trading markets, and in this sense “Daba administered all the passes between Tibet and Johar and Niti, and Tsaparang administered Mana” (Brown 1994:236). In the course of time, the bond with Tibet weakened, as Atkinson mentions that “the Bhotiyas have gradually become more and more independent of Tibet, and more obedient to their European rulers, attaching themselves, as might have been expected, to the stronger side.”

However, before the Bhotiyas came under British rule, they were fierce fighters against the Gorkhas, and Traill (1992a:126) remarks that “[...] the principal opposition made to their [Gorkha] arms was from the Bhotias: for the period of nine years, after the submission of the rest of Kumaon, the Juwaris frustrated every effort made for their conquest, and it was a consideration of their commercial interests, rather than any successes of the invaders, which ultimately induced a subjection to that power.” Thus, what was not achieved by weapons was done by money: “Formerly, it is said, one of the them [Bhotiyas of Mana] lent the Raja of Garhwal two lakhs of rupees to assist in repelling the Gorkhals [...]” (Atkinson 2002:III:587).

7.1.4 Religion and the Connection to Badrīnāth

With all of the above in mind, we may now turn to the main question of this chapter: how are the Bhotiyas connected to Badrīnāth?

Since Badrīnāth is first and foremost a religious center, the little available information about Bhotiya religion must also be considered. There are various theories on the Bhotiya beliefs. The Bhotiyas themselves, as mentioned above, will usually (and especially in Mana) claim that they have always been Hindus. Others think that they were inclined to the Buddhist faith (Traill, Atkinson), since they came from Tibet and travelled there at least once a year, while still others see their beliefs more in an animistic and shamanic sense and connect them to the Bön

7 *Badrīnāth from a Local Perspective*

religion (Leder 2001).

The Bhotias have been compelled to conform with the Hindu prejudices; continued intercourse with the latter sect has also led to a gradual adoption of many of its superstitions, while the annual communications maintained with Tibet have served to keep alive the belief of their forefathers. The Bhotias may now be regarded as Pantheists, paying equal adoration at every temple, whether erected by the followers of Brahma, of Buddh, or of the Lama. (Traill 1992a:116)

A closer look into the sacred topography of Badrīnāth reveals that most of the minor religious sites – such as the Vasudhārā fall, the Mātāmūrti shrine and the Satopanth lake – have an important role within the religious life of the Bhotiyas, while the major ones – foremost the shrine of Badrīnārāyaṇ, the Taptkuṇḍ and the five *śīlās* – have been cleansed of any connection to the Bhotiyas. Leder (2001) argues that the Bhotiyas might have been followers of the Bön religion, which theoretically is a valid theory but at the same time very hard to prove. Saklani (1998:62-63) comments on this idea rather harshly: “They [i.e. the Bhotiyas] have so little of the degrading immorality and demon-worship of the Bon-faith [...] they have never absorbed into their own simple religion the extravagancies and demonology of Lamaism.” This citation might sound almost ironic, but it demonstrates the pejorative view of the Hindus on Tibetans and why the Bhotiyas attempt to distance themselves from their “homeland.”

The Himalayas are usually seen as a place of Śīva and there are very few places of Viṣṇu worship in this region, yet interestingly those few are found inside or in the vicinity of Bhotiya settlements or at trading hubs to Tibet. If we recollect the narrative that connects Tholing with Badrīnāth, it seems more than a coincidence that the people of Mana were engaged in trad with Tholing. It is unclear if there ever was Nārāyaṇ worship in Tholing, but we know from the report by Moorcroft that in Daba a temple was dedicated to Nārāyaṇ – and this was the trading correspondent

7.1 *The Bhotiya Mahals and their Connection to Badrināth*



Figure 7.2: The Vasudhārā fall near Mana.



Figure 7.3: Group of Bhotiya Women worshipping Ghaṇṭākarna.

of the Niti Bhotiyas:

Immediately in the center of a semi-circular sweep by the houses, are temples or mausolea of *Lamas*, with small ones attached to them. These are circular at their base, diminish by small circles, and terminate in a point covered by plates of copper, like umbrellas, and gilt: in the centre above these, surrounded by horns, and painted of a red colour, stands an irregular building with one door, and surmounted by a square smaller building, tiled with brass gilt, and decorated with grotesque figures; it is the temple of *Narayan* or the great spirit (Moorcroft 1937:45).

Yet, no one would argue that *Nārāyaṇ* is the main deity or even a deity usually brought in connection with the Bhotiyas. Their main gods, in Garhwal, are “Ghantakarn or Ghandyal, Mata Murti, Bampanag, and Acheri” (Atkinson 2002:III:117). On the other hand, it is also *Vyās* who is often connected to Bhotiya settlements, at

7.2 Kedārnāth – or Śiva in Badrīnāth

least his alleged dwelling places are found nearby, as in the case of Mana and the whole of the Vyans valley which has derived its name from the saint and features three temples dedicated to him (Leder 2001:140).

Mana seems to no longer be a gunth village of the Badrīnāth establishment, since boards along the way to Mana and in the village itself state that it is the “State Bank of India’s Apna Gaon,” with “100% Financial Inclusion.”¹³ However, Raper (1994:78) reports that “[t]he town of Manah forms the boundary of the Srinagar possessions in this quarter. It belongs to *Bhadri-Nat’h*, and is under the jurisdiction of the *Rauhil* or high priest, on which account the inhabitants are exempted from the duties and exactions to which the people of lay villages are subjected.”

The duties and rights of the Bhotiyas of Mana to the temple of Badrīnāth are limited but still vital to the religious traditions of the shrine. One of their duties before the closing of the temple is the presentation of a cloth (*ūn*) and a chili to Badrīnārāyaṇ to keep him warm during winter. The other one, which clearly demonstrates the connection between the two villages, is the procession of Ghaṇṭākarna on the day before the Mātāmūrti Melā, when a delegation from Mana along with the deity delivers the invitation to Nar and Nārāyaṇ to visit their mother (see chapter 6.1.2). Yet, the *melā* itself was characterized, at least in my observation, by a cool separation between the Bhotiyas and the religious specialists from Badrīnāth.

7.2 Kedārnāth – or Śiva in Badrīnāth

After the pilgrims have taken their ritual bath and are ready to receive *darśan* of Badrīnārāyaṇ, they are requested to walk up a flight of stairs and pay reverence to Śiva in the form of Kedāreśvara before continuing to the temple of Badrīnāth. The reason for this lies in the belief that this was the dwelling place of Śiva and Pārvatī before Viṣṇu came into this area. Before pointing out the similarities of these two

¹³Nobody in the village could explain satisfactorily to me what this actually meant for the village.

7 *Badrīnāth from a Local Perspective*

major pilgrim shrines of Garhwal, I will briefly address the narrative of how this valley turned from *śaiva-* to *vaiṣṇavakṣetra*.

Because there are so many different versions of this narrative and it has been recounted to me innumerable times, I will reproduce it here in my own words.

Once, a sage visited Viṣṇu in his home, where he noticed that he was only resting all day long and having his feet massaged by his wife. The sage dared to tell Viṣṇu that this was no proper conduct for a god and that it would be much better if Viṣṇu spent his times in meditation. Viṣṇu felt humbled by the sage and soon left his home and wife to find a suitable place for contemplation. After a while, he found the perfect place, however it was already occupied by Śiva and Pārvatī, and thus Viṣṇu tried to deceive them and take this place.

Everyday, Śiva and Pārvatī went to bathe in the Taptkuṇḍ. One day, Viṣṇu transformed himself into a little child and lay down on the way back to their home. When they came to the spot, Viṣṇu started crying. Pārvatī was overcome by pity and insisted on taking the child home and caring for it, but omniscient Śiva knew that it was Viṣṇu tricking them into leaving this place and told her to leave the child alone. However, in the end Pārvatī took the child home and cared for it. When, on the next day, Śiva and Pārvatī returned from their bath, they found that they were locked out of their home. When they looked inside through a window, they saw Viṣṇu standing there saying that this was his home now. Śiva smiled at Pārvatī, telling her “I told you so,” and both went over the mountains to the West, where they found a new home which later came to be known as Kedārñāth. This is the narrative which explains why Śiva still has a small temple within the realm of Viṣṇu and why he is still venerated in Badrīnāth, however the connections and similarities between the shrines of Kedārñāth and Badrīnāth go much deeper. Despite this resemblance in terms of their history and affiliations, their geographical location represents two very different “sacred landscapes.” The Alakanadā valley continues beyond Badrīnāth and finally allows forms of access to the Tibetan plateau over



Figure 7.4: The entrance to the Ādi Kedāreśvar temple during cleaning for the final *pūjā* in November 2011.

7 *Badrīnāth from a Local Perspective*

the Mana pass. This possibility to cross over to Central Asia awarded the temple with a special importance and also for traders and pilgrims who further helped to establish a “contact-zone”. The result of this can still be seen today in the form of narratives. In the case of Kedārñāth, the situation is quite different – the site of Śiva’s northern *ḥyotirliṅga* also marks the end of the path. While the contacts or entanglements of Badrīnāth stretch from the South to the North, in the case of Kedārñāth they align West to East.¹⁴ Therefore, both temples have a connection beyond the borders of India, but with different effects.

Their separate locations and the fact that they are dedicated to different gods is the major difference between these two temples, and both shrines seem to have been within the focus of South Indian rulers and *sampradāys*. Interestingly, it was Kedārñāth that was visited earlier than Badrīnāth by royal pilgrims and received earlier attention by *śaiva* groups from South India. According to Atkinson (2002:II:492), Dharma Pala [~875 CE], a patron of Buddhism and emperor of the Pala empire, “visited Kedar, a connection that was kept up by Deva Pala [~895 CE].” At what time exactly the South Indian schools and priests took over control of the temples remains unclear, but “another 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” as Bader (2000:251-252) remarks. The history of the *daśanāmīs* has already been discussed in the chapter on Śāṅkarācārya (chapter 4.5), and unfortunately the Liṅgāyats of Kedārñāth have an even more elusive history. Luke Whitmore (2010:64) states that “it is decidedly unclear when Kedarnath came to be associated with Virashaiva leadership,” yet, there are a few decisive leads to follow.

It seems that the first Śaivas from South India to establish a pilgrimage tradition to the temple of Kedārñāth were the Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas. According to Lorenzen (1991:97), the Kālāmukhas were divided into two groups, “the *Śakti-pariṣad*

¹⁴This has already been discussed in the context of the five Badrī temples (see chapter 2.7.3).

and the *Siṃha-pariṣad*.” The Śaktipariṣad was again divided into four groups, and “the most prominent division was centred in the Kedāreśvara temple at Belagāve in Shimoga District [in Karnataka]” (ibid.). Lorenzen (1991:98-103) mentions several epigraphs and records of the Kedāreśvar temple which dates to the late 11th and 12th century. In 1162, the Kōḍiya *math*, which seems to have been a synonym to the monastery adjacent to the temple, was referred to as “the abode of the god Kedāra of the South” (Fleet, John Faithful 1898-9. *Inscriptions at Ablur*, EI, V, p. 221, cited in Lorenzen 1991:101). Furthermore, “[t]he full name of the form of Śiva who presided over the Belagāve temple was Dakṣiṇa-Kedāreśvara, Lord of the Southern Kedāra” (Lorenzen 1991:100). Lorenzen (ibid.) arrives at the conclusion that “this implies a comparison with the northern Kedāreśvara, the god of the famous and holy Kedāra Mountain in the Himālayas.” There is also further evidence for that the Kālāmukhas had already established a pilgrimage tradition in this region of the Himalayas in the 11th century. The reasons for the decline of the Kālāmukha sect remains unclear, however, fact is that “many [...] former Kālāmukha temples are now controlled by the Viraśaivas, [...] they include the Kedāreśvara Temple in Belagāve [...] and [...] Kedārnāth in the Himalayas” (Lorenzen 1991:170). The exact time of this transfer or accession is not mentioned by Lorenzen, but Schouten (1995:15) remarks that the Liṅgāyats were supported, among others, by the Vijayanagar kings, “particularly under the rule of King Prauḍhadēvarāya II (ca. 1426-1446).” Whether the Viraśaiva indeed represent a schism of the Kālāmukhas (Lorenzen 1991:167-168) or whether they just took opportunity of their decline it is difficult to say, but in any case they took control over most of the former Kālāmukha shrines and eventually reached the frosty heights of the Himalayas. During fieldwork for my master thesis (David 2008:112), I was told that the first Liṅgāyat Rawal of Kedārnāth was invited and appointed by the king of Garhwal in the 17th century. The main difference between the positions of the two Rawals of Kedārnāth and Badrīnāth is that the head priests of Kedārnāth almost attempt to

7 *Badrīnāth from a Local Perspective*

cover their belonging to the Vīraśaiva community, while the Rawals of Badrīnāth are proud to be Nambudris and regard this as their legitimation. Also, while the Rawals of Badrīnāth were able to strengthen their position, the Liṅgāyats lost most of the temples under their supervision to the claims of local priests and today only hold offices in Kedārñāth and Ukhīmāth.

With the example of Kedārñāth, the role of the Himalayan shrines for South India becomes even more evident. Although, the question remains, if Kedārñāth received attention earlier because Badrīnāth was then within the sphere of Buddhism, or if the original Kedārñāth was, as the narrative in the beginning suggests, indeed in Badrīnāth, since Badrīnāth is described as a former site of Śiva worship and still features the Kedāreśvar shrine – and that it was only later that Rāmānuja, or some other follower of Viṣṇu, forced them to leave. This question is purely hypothetical, but it is obvious that both shrines share a similar if not “entangled” history that finally led to a single administration¹⁵ for both of them.

Finally, the connection between the two temples also has a more peculiar aspect. It is said (Naithani 1999:42, Kapadia 1998 and Shipton 1999) that previously, both temples of Badrīnāth and Kedārñāth were taken care of by a single priest who would cross the mountains every day to conduct worship in both shrines. This narrative was recounted to two explorers from England in 1934. These two, Eric Shipton and Bill Tilman, were intrigued by this idea and made an attempt to discover the route of this priest – with disastrous results. While both barely survived “on bamboo shoots in the forest fighting with the bears to gather them” (Kapadia 1998), a team of Bangladeshi trekkers was not as fortunate in 1984 (ibid.). Kapadia and Eric Shipton’s son later revisited the original route taken by the two explorers and reported some interesting anecdotes from Badrīnāth. Kapadia (1998) met a Paṇḍā at Badrīnāth, who had told that this region might have previously been flat and thus possible (if not easy) to travel between the shrines in a straight line. This option

¹⁵With the amendment to the *Shri Badrinath and Kedarnath Temples Act* of 1964, Kedārñāth and its tutelary shrines came under the administration of the temple committee of Badrīnāth.

7.3 *Badrīnārāyaṇ* as a Royal Deity

brings him to another conclusion: “This place is named Badri, after a fruit that can grow only in a flat country. At present there are no badris growing here. So once all this area must have been flat land” (ibid.). Finally Shipton (1999), reports that “we were blessed by the Rawal (High Priest) of Badrinath, who had told us of the possibility of a long forgotten tunnel under the mountains.”

Since the actual fast route or tunnel remain to be discovered, the importance of this narrative lies in its emphasis on the connection between these two temples. They are often referred to as one – Badrī-Kedār – and while there are many parallels between these abodes of Śiva and Viṣṇu, the majority of them seem to converge in the agency of the royal ruler of Garhwal.

7.3 *Badrīnārāyaṇ* as a Royal Deity

Discussions of the phenomenon of “divine kingship“ in general – or even in its South Asian context¹⁶– would fill a book on it own. Here, I wish to refer only to the connection of the ruling dynasties with the temple of Badrīnāth and its consequences. The king of Garhwal was not only responsible for the pilgrim routes to the shrines within his realm, but he was also closely connected to the shrine of Badrīnāth as the worldly representative of its deity:

One has, therefore, to distinguish between the king in the palace who is treated as a divinity, who is the god, and is accordingly called “the speaking Badrīnātha” (*bolāndā Badrī*), and the king in the temple who stands as the main worshipper, “the first servant” of the god (*pradhana sevaka*). (Galey 1992:211)

When exactly the connection between the king of Garhwal and *Badrīnārāyaṇ* was established remains a mystery, but it may correlate with the appointment of the

¹⁶There is a short but excellent article by William Sax (2006) and a longer article by Jean-Claude Galey (1992), dealing especially with “The Garhwali Configuration” of the Hindu kingship.

7 *Badrināth from a Local Perspective*

first Rawal by Pradīp Shāh in 1776. Sāṅkṛtyāyan (1953:345) quotes the Garhvāl kā Itihās (86-89):

When the last *mahant* of the Śāṅkar-*sampradāy*, Rāmkrṣṇa Svāmī, died in 1776, there was no other learned *daṇḍī samṇyāsī* during that time and Badrināth could not have remained unworshipped. Fortunately, at that time the ruler of Garhwal, Mahārāj Pradīpshāh, was in the [Badrināth] village for pilgrimage. The Mahārāj adorned Gopāl [...] with the title of Rawal, appointed him to the [former] position of Rāmkrṣṇa Svāmī and presented him with a parasol, fly-whisk [made of the yak's tail] and a robe of honor.

According to a certain Mr. Gairola, the connection on a political basis was established already five centuries¹⁷ previously:

The ancestors of the Raja of Tehri extended their dominion over the whole of Garhwal, including Badrinath, in the thirteenth century, since when their control of Badrianth, Kedarnath and other important temples of Garhwal dates (Malaviya 1934:3).

Whether it was indeed that there was simply no successor within the dasanami community or the interest of Śāṅkaracaryas followers in this northern branch was diminished during this time is likely to remain shrouded in history. Yet, we can assume that the appointment of the first Rawal by the king of Garhwal was not by coincidence but rather a carefully intended decision. Further, one cannot discard the possibility that it was the king in the first place who no longer allowed the chief priest to be selected among the *daśanāmīs*.

We should also note that the first rulers of the Parmar dynasty ruled from the fort of Cāndpur, proudly overlooking one of the tributaries of the Piṅḍar river and controlling the trade between Garhwal and Kumaon. Close to this fort lies the temple

¹⁷Malaviya argues that according to the list of Rājas published by Atkinson, the kings of the Parmar dynasty are connected to Badrināth since the reign of Kanak Pal (1934:2).

7.3 *Badrīnārāyaṇ as a Royal Deity*

complex of Ādi Badrī, and this may be no coincidence. Unfortunately this remains rather speculative, since there is little available historical data.

We know that the Katyūrī emperors lived in Joshimath and that most of their inscriptions were left behind in Pandukeshwar. According to one of these inscriptions,¹⁸ Badrīnāth was not only known to them in general, but they were deeply concerned about the place and its inhabitants.¹⁹ In this sense, it might be possible that the new (Parmar) dynasty was trying to set its foot in the Garhwal hills and started imitating the ruling house by accepting the same god as they did, by building a Badrī temple next to their capital.

More certain is that in the 19th century the latest there was a close bond between the king and the shrine of Badrīnāth, as evident from the following statement:

The Bhotiyas say that when Kumaon was invaded by the British [?], the Raja proceeded to invoke the aid of Badrinath, but when he came to Basodhara, the water fall ceased to flow and they then knew that the Raja would cease to reign. (Atkinson 2002:III:27)

The dimension of the bond between the king and the deity became more explicit when they were separated by a border. In 1815, Garhwal was freed from the Gorkhas but as a consequence also divided, with the result that Badrīnāth then was in British Garhwal and no longer under the supremacy of the Garhwali regent.

The king of Tehri first claimed both temples of Badrīnāth and Kedārīnāth in 1824, but it was not until 1932 that the whole issue gained momentum: “In 1932 the Tehri-Garwal Darbar raised the question of the cession of the Badrinath village and temple to the Darbar in return for an adequate strip of land to be ceded by the Darbar but no finality was reached on the question [...]” (India Office 1937).

In the aftermath of the official dispute, a small book was published by Madan Mohan Malaviya (1934), which demonstrates that there was also a public discussion

¹⁸See chapter 3.1.

¹⁹“Something proper may be done in regard to the dwelling of that god by the *Brahmachārins* attached to the *tapōvana* at Badarik-āśrama [...]” (Sircar 1960:284).

7 *Badrināth from a Local Perspective*

on this subject. In this booklet, he lists 22 reasons, why the two temples should be returned to the king of Tehri, in response to an earlier letter by Pandit Tara Datt Gairola, published by *The Leader* on the 13th of August in 1933. Some of these reasons are worth being examined and discussed here in terms of the connection between king and deity.

The first points deal mainly with the financial situation and the gunth villages. In his tenth argument, he attempts to connect the crest of the Tehri state with Viṣṇu:

A cursory glance at the Tehri State crest which consists of two eagles, the carriers of Vishnu, *viṣṇuvāhan* [Devanāgarī in the original] supporting the State shield containing the Turi of Sri Siddhanathaji, who is believed by the orthodox in the State to be Badrinath's incarnation, with the motto at the bottom *pakṣīyo śaraṇamaham* [Devanāgarī in the original] 'I am under the protection of the eagles' makes this absolutely clear. (Malaviya 1934:9).

He further continues that even though the rulers of Tehri are worshipping the Devī [Rājṛājeśvarī], this does not mean that they cannot worship Viṣṇu as well. At the end of his argument, he makes it clear that the kings of Garhwal are not *śaktas* but *smārtas* (ibid.). His argument may sound naive, in regard to the correlation of the eagles (*pakṣī* are actually just birds) with Garuḍa, but on the other hand he may have borrowed from local beliefs, because in his next argument he does exactly that:

The Raja of Tehri is called 'Bolanda Badrinath' by the public probably because they believe that it is through him that Sri Badrianth speaks (Malaviya 1934:10).

Proceeding this statement, he attempts to put the term "Bolanda Badrinath" into perspective by stating that, to his knowledge, "no ruler of Tehri ever claimed to be the incarnation of Badrinath" (ibid.). Yet, Malaviya is eager to show that the

7.3 *Badrinārāyaṇ as a Royal Deity*

title of “the speaking Badrīnāth” is not only a local one but also known to officials outside of Garhwal as well (ibid.). Further, he argues that the temple belongs to the king of Tehri since it is he who is responsible for certain rituals at Badrīnāth:

Among many other ceremonies which His Highness is required to perform or control, the most important is the invocation, as it is called, of Sri Badrinathji from his *samādhi* [Devanāgarī in the original] or *dhyān avasthā* [Devanāgarī in the original] after a period of six months, during which it is not possible to contact Pooja or offer Bhog on account of the snow, by the rubbing of the oil which is prepared in the palace by the Maharanees after religious ceremonies and conducted to the Puri with great pomp. This ceremony is regarded as a shortened form of *prāṇa pratiṣṭhā* [Devanāgarī in the original], the invoking of life. (Malaviya 1934:10).

Two years after the independence of India, the kingdom of Garhwal ceased to be a kingdom and became a part of the state of Uttar Pradesh, or the United Provinces, as it was referred to until 1950. Interestingly, the kingship itself “survived [in Garhwal] the eviction of the king and the disappearance of the dynasty. In spite of the fact that it has been officially removed and its palatial headquarters abandoned, its importance as an operating agency has remained almost unaffected” (Galey 1992:181). Galey (ibid.), further argues that if anything changed in the state it were “institutionalised aspects of royalty” which were abandoned in favor of democracy, but the “values of kingship” remained intact – and this is especially true when it comes to the traditions of the major pilgrimage sites within Uttarakhand.

Today, these “values of kingship” are mostly visible during the opening procession. Although the actual procession starts in Jośīmaṭh, a major part of it has an earlier beginning. The oil used for the *abhiṣek* of Badrīnārāyaṇ is produced by the women of Narendranagar, the seat of the rājas from 1919 until the end of their reign,²⁰

²⁰Today most of the palace is converted into a quite luxurious spa.

7 *Badrīnāth from a Local Perspective*

but the first sesame seeds are crushed by the Mahārāṇī. During the production process it is also decided on which day the temple will open in spring. When the oil is finally handed over to a Ḍimri priest, it has its own procession, one could argue as the royal representative, through the former kingdom. The descendent of the ruling house of Garhwal or rather his personal priest, the Rājpuṛohit, also still possesses one of the three keys needed to unlock the doors of the Badrīnāth temple. The reasons for the connection between king and god are of course found in authority and legitimation as well as in power, prestige and wealth. The fact that a shrine receives offerings and the resident god of the temple has no need for money leads to the other fact that kings frequently “borrowed” money from the gods. Often it was not money that was given in return but land. This land along with villages are called “gunth” and all its revenue go to the temple. According to Traill (Malaviya 1934:8) in 1823, there were 226 gunth villages in Garhwal and 56 in Kumaon. Yet, there is more to consider: although the Jesuit Azevedo mentions 80,000 pilgrims in the year 1630 (Wessels 1992:97), others, like Oakley (1991:152), speak of significantly fewer pilgrims in the 19th century, and fewer pilgrims also means less money. Finally, there is the question of locality. It is unknown if Badrīnārāyaṇ was already a royal deity under the Katyūris. Badrīnāth is in the vicinity of their former capital, much closer than to Śrīnagar or even Tehri, but even then the question remains why they would choose a site high in the Himalayas, as home of their god which is accessible only for half of the year. I argue the reason is the same already presented in this work several times: life, culture and in this case politics, were oriented to the North. The Guge empire or Western Tibet was not only closer in a geographical sense but also in a cultural and religious sense. Both rulers and subjects of the Garhwal kingdom had more ties with the Buddhists north of the mountains than with the Muslims at the end of the valley.

However, this situation changed with the advent of British rule. With the appointment of the first Rawal, a paradigm shift took place in this Himalayan kingdom:

now they started to look South, something that is also reflected in the shifting of capitals. This may correlate with the demise of Guge and later the Mughal empire or also with the rise of Sanātan Dharma as an unifying concept. When trade to the North lessened and with the advent of orthodoxy at Badrīnāth, the local gods also lost their traditional place in Badrīnāth.

7.4 The Role of the Local Devatās

7.4.1 Kuber

The connection between Viṣṇu and Badrīnāth is an accepted fact today, but considering the early references it seems that Kuber was more important if not to the temple or hermitage, then at least to the region in general. The role of Kuber is difficult to trace, since his abodes shifted between the far North and South of India. According to Satapathy (2002:42), Kuber makes his first appearance in the Atarvaveda, but in the Brāhmaṇa literature he is not only closely connected to robbers and all kind of evil-doers, but in fact he is the king of *rākṣas*. In the Taittirīya Āraṇyaka (1.31.4), his abode is described to be located on three mountains:

O Vaiśravaṇa! your city [...] is on the three great mountains (*mahā-girau*) Sudarśana, Krauñca and Maināga. (Satapathy 2002:51)

These three mountains are difficult to identify. Sudarśana is a name seldomly included when it comes to Himalayan peaks and therefore impossible to locate properly. Satapathy (2002:69, n51) makes an educated guess by stating that it may refer to Mount Meru. According to Saxena (1995:384-5), “the Krauñca mountain is said to be the son of Menā and Himavān” and “that portions of the Kailāsa on which Mānasa is situated included Krauñca-randhra.” Saxena (1995:378) writes that, according to the Mahābhārata, Maināka “is a part of the great Himalayan range near Kailāsa,” but while the abode of Kubera is described in the Vana Parva (87)²¹ along

²¹“Dhaumya said: I shall now recite the purifying and holy places that are found in the west, in Avanti. There is the river Narmadā, flowing westward [...]. In that region lies the scared seat of

7 *Badrināth from a Local Perspective*

with Mount Maināka, the mountain there is located near the river Narmadā. Even with this exception, it becomes clear that Kubera's place is located in the Himalayas. The *Kiṣkindhākaṇḍa* (42) of the *Rāmāyaṇa* features a detailed characterization of Kubera's place. King Sugrīva orders Śatabali to search for Sītā in the North and provides him with a good description of the places he will eventually encounter:

Passing beyond that great mountain [Kāla], you should then go to the mountain called Sudarshana, a king of mountains filled with gold. [...] Beyond it lies an open space, a hundred leagues on every side, without mountains, rivers or trees, devoid of any living thing. But if you quickly cross that horrifying wasteland, you will be delighted once you reach the white mountain Kailāsa. There, bright as a white cloud and embellished with gold, stands Kubera's heavenly dwelling, built by Viśvakarmaṇa. Near it is a vast [viśālā] lotus pond filled with red and blue lotuses, crowded with geese and ducks, and frequented by hosts of *apsarases*. [...] Beyond Mount Krauñcha lies a mountain called Maināka, where stands the *dānava* Maya's place [...]. Beyond this region stands an ashram frequented by *siddhas*. In it are *siddhas*, Vaikhanasa hermits and Valakhilya ascetics. [...] Kubera's royal mount, the bull elephant Sarvabhauma, always roams about that region with his cows. (Lefebber 2005:279-281)

Even though this already points to the location of Kubera's abode close to Badrināth, it seems that not only his address has shifted, but also his conception as a god. Before continuing with the implications involved in the chosen abode in the Himalayas, a brief discourse on the character of Kuber will be helpful.

The status of Kubera is difficult to grasp. He is, even in the earliest²² references, seen as a king worshipped for the accumulation of wealth. On the other hand, he is

the hermit Viśravas; the Lord of Riches Kubera [...]. Here too is Holy-Lake [puṇyahrada], and the mountain Maināka [...]" (Van Buitenen 1975:401-2).

²²"[I]t appears that Kubera's association with wealth is perfectly established by the time of the *Gṛhyasūtras*" (Satapathy 2002:60).

also the king of *rākṣasas*, of “robbers (*selaga*) and evil-doers (*pāpakṛt*)” (Satapathy 2002:47). The Hiraṇyakesi Gṛhyasutra (2.3.7-8) illustrates the dubious character of Kuber’s servants even more:

Wearing variegated garments, the servants of Kubera, sent by the king of Rakṣases, all of one common origin, walk through the village, wishing (to harm) those who are unprotected. Svāhā! Kill them! Bind them! [...] I, the Brahmaṇa, know them who seize (men), who have prominent teeth, rugged hair, hanging breasts. Svāhā! (Max Müller [Ed.], Sacred Books of the East, XXX, pp. 211f, as cited in Satapathy 2002:59)

With the Epics, there is an interesting turn in Kuber’s esteem. He loses his kingship over the *rākṣas*, which is taken over by his evil half-brother Rāvaṇa.²³ However, Kuber does not lose his royal status, since he becomes king of the *yakṣas* and is turned into a god himself. This change from (demon-)king to god does not occur overnight, and so in the Saura Purāṇa (26.45ff) he takes three births, from an illicit child to a wicked king, until he finally becomes Kuber (Satapathy 2002:103). Kuber is transformed not only in the Epics and especially in the Rāmayaṇa but also relocated to the South – Laṅkā to be exact:

In connection with some issue between us Vaishravana, my half brother, and I [Rāvaṇa] came into conflict. In a rage I attacked and defeated him in battle. Tormented by fear of me he left his own prosperous realm [Laṅkā] and now dwells on Kailasa, highest of mountains, with only men to convey him [naravāhana²⁴]. For the aerial chariot that flies where one desires, the lovely Pushpaka, once belonged to him. But I took it by force [...]. (Pollock 2006:275; Mbh III.46)

This leads Satapathy (2002:104) to the conclusion that Kuber was actually a deity of the non-Aryans in the South, who after gaining popularity made his way to the

²³Kuber is also called Vaiśrava – the son of Viśrava, who is also the father of Rāvaṇ, while their mothers are different.

²⁴Another name for Kuber, since his means of transportation is a human.

7 *Badrīnāth from a Local Perspective*

North. That Kuber's origin as non-Aryan god is obvious for many reasons, but his connection with the Himalayas is described well before the Epics and therefore it is likely that it was the other way around, since also in the Epics his abode is mostly the Himalaya.

Kuber's connection to Badrīnāth has many levels, and one of these is connected to the Himalayas and mount Gandhamādan.

Mountains in general and especially those in the Himalayas were already "conceived as divine powers" (Satapathy 2002:22) during the time of the Ṛgveda, and one must also remember that these mountains were known for their mineral treasures and gold as well. In terms of the Himalayas Kuber's abode is often described to be Kailās or Gandhamādan. Grünendahl (1993) not only connects these two mountains but also localizes them within the region of Badrīnāth. In one of the two episodes Yudhiṣṭhira sees four mountains: Kailāsa, Maināka, Gandhamādana and Meru – nearly the same as those mentioned before in the Taittirīya Āraṇyaka. The mountain Gandhamādana is said to be the abode of Kuber and a meeting place of the gods (Grünendahl 1993:120). In its vicinity flows the Gaṅgā and the Naranārāyaṇasthāna is also mentioned. As usual for places in the Himalayas, this location is almost impossible to reach and only Nar and Nārāyaṇa were able to reach it. Grünendahl further argues that both names – that of Kailāsa and Gandhamādana – are interchangeable and that both locations are described in more or less the same way, since both mountains are said to be the abode of Kuber.

The Viśālā Badarī is one of the many characteristics of both mountains – Gandhāmadan and Kailās – and often this protruding jujube tree is mentioned together with the hermitage of Nar and Nārāyaṇ. Yet, the question remains: if this tree is mentioned without the reference to the *āśram*,²⁵ does this imply the tree as a distinctive attribute of the mountain itself, or does it still implicitly convey the hermitage? The underlying question here is whether or not Kuber loses the tree to

²⁵For exam, Mbh 3.140.10.



Figure 7.5: Kuber in his *ḍolī*.

Nar and Nārāyaṇ, as he lost Kailās/Gandhamādan to Śiva?

Grünendahl (1993:127-8) lucidly explains how the Kailās slowly became an independent mountain signifying the abode of Śiva,²⁶ while Kuber and Gandhamādan lost their importance in the “modern tradition.” In the Mahābhārata, Gandhamādan is often mentioned together with the hermitage of Nar and Narayan on its slopes or vicinity, while the passages of the Purāṇas which praise Badrīnāth Gandhamādana is rarely featured – twice²⁷ to be precise. Therefore, in the time of the Purāṇas, the location of Badrīnāth was already well-known and therefore it was not necessary to refer to geographical landmarks, especially those unrelated to the mythology of

²⁶Grünendahl (1993:127) suggests that, as the mountain became associated with Śiva, the name Kailās became more important and the connection between Śiva and Gandhamādan is scarce. Although there is a passage in the Kumārasambhava that suggest the complete opposite: in the 8th canto (*śloka* 24), it is said that “the father of the universe (Śiva) enjoyed bright moonlight on the mountain of Kubera [*ekapiṅgalagiri*] (Kailāsa),” while in the 28th *śloka* he “repaired to the mountain Gandhamādana, when the sunshine was becoming red” (Kale 1981:216).

²⁷SkP II,iii,2.31-32 and Nārada Purāṇa Uttarahāga 67, 4-5.

7 *Badrināth from a Local Perspective*

Viṣṇu.

To conclude this discussion on the Gandhamādan, I argue that these mountains, i.e. Gandhamādan, Kailāś, Meru etc., were metaphysical objects for a long time, since their main characteristic was their inaccessibility (Grünendahl 1993:121) and it was, as described by Grünendahl (1993:136), the new geographical knowledge no longer allowed these mythic-religious conceptions to *take place* in this region.

Today, Kuber plays a minor role in the pilgrimage to Badrināth, but a closer look at the sacred landscape reveals numerous references to this god of wealth. The most obvious definitely is the river Alakanandā, which originates only a few kilometers north of Badrināth. While Alaka also refers to a curl or lock of hair and thus fits into the idea of the Ganges falling on Śiva's head and flowing down his hair, it also denotes the home and capital of Kuber. The river's source is said to be Mount Gandhamādana,²⁸ and Hopkins (1910:354) writes that the Alakanandā is called "*mahānadī badarīprabhavā*" – the great river that has the Badrī tree at its beginning. Further upstream, along to the way to Satopanth, lies a place called Alakāpurī, further connecting the river to Kubera's residence. In the various enumerations of the five *śilās* of Badrināth, there often also is a Kuberśila. North-east of the temple lies Kuberparvat,²⁹ and along the way to Mana it is necessary to cross the Kubernāla. Finally, there is also the Kubergalī, a small lane that starts at the southern entrance of the temple which is taken by his *mūrti* to enter and leave the temple premises. There is also one other place in the sacred landscape of Badrināth that may be connected to Kubera, namely Vasudhārā. This waterfall is about one hour away from Mana, and despite being only rarely visited by pilgrims these days, is often referenced in old maps and texts. *Vasu* means "wealth" and therefore the connection to Kuber is obvious. According to Apte (2000:838), Vasudhārā or -bhārā denotes the capital of Kuber, and Alice Getty (1962:156) designates Vasudhārā as

²⁸According to Law (1984:64): Bhāgavatapurāṇa IV, 6.24; Brahmāṇḍapurāṇa III, 41. 21; 56. 12; Viṣṇupurāṇa II, 2. 34. 36; Vāyaupurāṇa 41. 18; 42. 25-35.

²⁹Some people also refer to the Nar-parvat as Kuberbhaṇḍār.



Figure 7.6: The Kubernālā along the way to Mana.

the Śakti of Kuber. However, sometimes another consort of Kuber is mentioned:

Although Kubera's place in the Hindu pantheon is difficult if not impossible to classify, he is closely associated with Lakshmi, wife of Vishnu – Lakshmi is sometimes identified as Kubera's consort – and in this sense Kubera's primary association may be seen as Vaisnavite. This eclipse by Shiva may be seen as indicating that the Himalayas were contested ground, in which what we might today call Brahma worshippers, Saivite and Vaisnavite interests competed, with the eventual triumph of the Saivites. (McKay 1998:175-6)

McKay certainly has a point there, while he also may overemphasize the distinction between Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas. However, it is the first line of this citation that touches upon the role of Kubera in the Badrīnāth area: while Vasudhārā is Kuber's Śakti in the Buddhist sphere, in the early Hindu depictions of Kuber, he is often represented along with Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth:

7 *Badrīnāth from a Local Perspective*

In Kushan Mathura he [Kuber] is frequently associated with Sri-Lakshmi, goddess of wealth, but later his spouse came to be called Riddhi, goddess of prosperity, while Sri-Lakshmi became the spouse of Vishnu. (Pal 1985:30)

It would be far-fetched to argue that it was Viṣṇu who replaced Kuber, not only as the partner of Lakṣmī but also as the ruler of this region, especially since there are no other leads apart from the place names. At the same time, we also have to consider the exceptional popularity of these *devatās*, since “Kubera, like Lakshmi, must have been worshipped by a considerable part of the population, especially the wealthy merchants” (Bautze 1995:25), and thus Kuber, in his Buddhist form, became important from Thailand to Japan and most places in between. Kuber also plays a role within Jainism, where he is further identified with his most important characteristic besides wealth, namely the protection of the world. While Kuber is usually the lord of the North in the Jain and Buddhist scriptures, in the “Hindu tradition” it took a while until he was generally “accepted as the guardian of the northern direction,” but finally “his association with the North became so much popular that even the direction itself came to be regarded as *Kauberīdik*” (Satapathy 2002:123). Incidentally, it was not only the protector of the North who lived there alone, but all four Lokapālas “are stationed on the mount Meru or Mānasa or Mānasottara” (Satapathy 2002:124), and thus clearly in the Himalayas. Coomarswamy (1971:36) states the following in his conclusion to the *yakṣas* :

Kuvera and other Yakṣas are indigenous non-Aryan deities or genii, usually beneficent powers of wealth and fertility. Before Buddhism and Jainism, they with a corresponding cosmology of the Four or Eight Quarters of the universe, had been accepted as orthodox in Brahmanical theology.

But why is Kuber so underpresented or even absent in *Badrīnāth* today? In my field research Kuber was virtually nonexistent until my second field trip, when

7.4 The Role of the Local Devatās

I witnessed the engagement of the people of Pandukeshwar in the procession of Kuber. I was already aware that he was part of the Badrīs Pañcāyat and have seen his idol in the temple, but apart from this he was never mentioned or pointed out. Thus, I became curious, especially after finding out that Kuber in fact was the most important deity in Pandukeshwar, but when I inquired about him to the people in Badrīnāth, I simply received the reply that he is the cashier³⁰ of Badrīnārāyaṇ. In some cases, people would add that he is the king of Alkāpuri and thus his presence here makes sense. No-one really knew how he arrived to this service, but an assistant to the Indian Archeological Survey in Pandukeshwar told me that Kuber was a *yakṣ* or *rākṣas* who was defeated in battle by Badrīnārāyaṇ. After his defeat, he offered his service to Badrīnārāyaṇ and was employed as cashier or treasurer. In contrast to the more elaborate narratives that accompany most of the gods and sacred places around Badrīnāth, this brief narrative of Kuber's status in Badrikāśram is suspicious – especially considering his importance to the inhabitants of Pandukeshwar and Bamni as well as the numerable places connected to him, at least by name.

It is difficult to say anything with certainty from a historical perspective, but, as shown above, in the Mahābhārata the place is mainly connected to Kuber, and Nar and Narayan merely have their hermitage there. While there is no doubt about the presence of Viṣṇu in the Purāṇas, it is interesting that neither the plate of Lalitaśūradeva nor Andrade mention the actual god worshipped inside the temple of Badrīnāth. One may assume that the reader of the plate would have known of Badrīnāth's significance, and the lack of interest of a Jesuit in “heathen worship” is comprehensible. This Jesuit priest only devotes a few lines and two narratives to Badrīnāth, but in one of these stories he refers to the miraculous nature of the idol which used to turn everything into gold (Aschoff 1989:27). This narrative may be generic, meaning that the pilgrimage did not only grant spiritual riches, but it

³⁰This was the term actually used.

7 *Badrīnāth from a Local Perspective*

may also hint towards the fact that Kuber had a more important position in earlier times.

Today, Kuber's role in Badrīnāth is very limited. In fact, he is worshipped and visible only during the opening and closing procession (see chapter 6) as well as during the Nandādevī Melā. This clearly demonstrates the dichotomy of his character. While within the temple he is an easily overlooked "employee" of Badrīnārāyaṇ, outside he is allowed to show his more archetypal side through trance and possession. This is especially true since the festival held for him takes place during winter in Pandukeshwar. I did not have the opportunity to observe this *melā*, but it is said to be similar to the festivals held for Nandādevī and Ghaṇṭākaraṇa. As a further indication of his "second" nature, a few people pointed towards the fact that Kuber is offered alcohol and meat as *prasād* in the winter month and the festivities, as Hopkins (1915:68-69) explains, "the food of Yakṣas and Rākṣasas [...] must be a mixture of meat and brandy (any spirituous liquor)."

7.4.2 Ghaṇṭākaraṇa

This is true also for Ghaṇṭākaraṇa, the Lokpāl of Badrīnāth. Supposedly, it was his lust for meat that caused trouble with his mother, Matā Mūrtī. Because Ghaṇṭākaraṇa did not stop to consume meat, his mother kept constantly reminding him of its negative consequences, which led to his name "bell ear," since he put bells on his ears so that he would not hear his mother. Another sign of their troubled relationship is the fact that their temples face the opposite direction – Ghaṇṭākaraṇa's door faces east, while his mother's west. The fact that Ghaṇṭākaraṇa consumes meat is neither negated nor devalued, especially since the offering of four goats is elemental in his festival which marks the end of summer (see chapter 6.2), although today the *prasād* following the ritual is also offered in a vegetarian version. It is noteworthy in this context that a priest in Badrīnāth hesitated for over two weeks to admit to me that the Ghaṇṭākaraṇa of the Badrīnāth shrine was offered meat until about 50 years



Figure 7.7: Ghaṇṭākarna in front of his temple in Mana.

ago. The notion that Ghaṇṭākarna and Badrīnārāyaṇ share the same mother and are therefore brothers (who both come from Tibet) is understandably only evident in Mana. Although, this conception is only visible on the day before the Mātāmūrti Melā (see chapter 6.4), when it is Ghaṇṭākarna, coming from Mana, who invites Badrīnārāyaṇ for the festivities. On the other hand, it is important to add that Ghaṇṭākarna himself plays no explicit role in the *melā*.

Ghaṇṭākarna is not exclusively worshipped in Mana, where he is a god among many others, but the most important but also at a small shrine within the Badrīnāth temple premises. His small shrine is decorated with plenty of bells that are frequently rung by pilgrims. The *mūrti* shows only his face with bells in his ears, while the bells on the image in Mana are far less obvious. His significance in Mana is closer to an equal (i.e. brother to Badrīnārāyaṇ), and his protector aspect is not emphasized, while in Badrīnāth he is simply and exclusively a servant of Badrīnārāyaṇ. In the Mana village, Ghaṇṭākarna has one priest who becomes

7 *Badrīnāth from a Local Perspective*

possessed by him during rituals, while in *Badrīnāth* the priests rotate, but they are always *Bhaṇḍārīs* from *Bamni*.

The stories about *Ghaṇṭākaraṇa* are manifold. The narrative most widely known states that, even though he was a demon, he was also an ardent follower of *Śiva* but only of *Śiva* alone. In order to avoid hearing any other god's name, especially the one of *Viṣṇu*, he places bells on his ears. Yet, when *Śiva* offers him a boon for his devotion and *Ghaṇṭākaraṇa* asks for liberation, *Śiva* answers that this could only be granted by *Viṣṇu*. Angry and disappointed he goes to *Dwarka*, since it was the *Dvārparyuga* and *Viṣṇu* wandered the earth as *Kṛṣṇa*. Upon his arrival he was informed that *Kṛṣṇa* had gone to *Mount Kailāś*, and on his way there *Ghaṇṭākaraṇa* finds *Kṛṣṇa* meditating in *Badrīnāth*. After he tells *Viṣṇu* his story and asks for his blessing, he became liberated but he chose to remain as protector of the temple out of devotion (see *Tajendra n.d.:53-57*).

The narrative in *Badrīnāth* often says that when *Viṣṇu* came to this place it was already occupied by *Ghaṇṭākaraṇa*. They started to fight, and in the end *Viṣṇu* had mercy and he offered *Ghaṇṭākaraṇa* to remain as his protector. *Ghaṇṭākaraṇa* also plays a role in *Nepal* and there is a *Tirthaṅkara* of the same name, but the god worshipped in *Garhwal* under the name of *Ghaṇṭākaraṇa* presents a god unique to this region, *Ghaṇḍyāl*, whose name was later *sanskritized* and connected to *Ghaṇṭākaraṇa*: “*Badarinath* priests equate him [*Ghaṇḍyāl*] with the godling *Ghaṇṭākaraṇa*, but residents of *Chini*, [an] isolated village in *Pauri District* [...], identified him with *Bābarik*, who is also known as *Aravān* in *Tamil Nadu*” (*Sax 2000b:102*).

7.4.3 Summary

The significance of these two deities to this study is certainly not how they originated or if *Kuber* of *Badrīnāth* is indeed the *Kuber* of the *Epics*, but is rather the role they play in this sacred landscape. Both deities are extremely important to the local population, but they have a minor role in the religious conception of the pilgrim-



Figure 7.8: Kuber during the Naṇḍā Devī Melā in Bamni.

age and the shrine. Both deities have *yakṣik* or even *rākṣasik* personalities that are not only evident in their offerings, but also in their rituals and the performances of their (possessed) priests.

Their importance further lies in the fact that they are only allowed to show their inherent character outside of the orthodox system that dominates Badrīnāth. None the less, it was important for the Badrīnāth establishment to include these two deities into their pantheon but only with an altered persona, which is also expressed visually. When Kuber partakes in the procession to and from the temple together with Uddhav, he is kept in a silver *ḍolī* similar to that of Badrīnārāyaṇ's *utsav mūrti*. A pole is carried along with the *ḍolī* (see figure 7.4), which is kept in the Naṇḍā Devī temple during summer. On the day of the Naṇḍā Devī Melā, a few people from Bamni come with the pole to pick Kuber up, and bring him to the festivities. This is not only visible in the fact that their worship is restricted to the periphery of the shrine, both in a spacial and temporal aspect, but also within their narratives

7 Badrīnāth from a Local Perspective

themselves. The narratives concerning Kuber could have been connected to the many stories and references throughout the Sanskrit scriptures, but instead he is reduced to a simple caretaker of the temple's riches. In the case of Ghaṇṭākarna, the two versions of the "same" god are kept separate: in Badrīnāth, he is the easily overlooked door-keeper, while in Mana he is the brother and therefore (almost) equal to Badrīnārāyaṇ.

8 Conclusio – Entangled Narratives

Badrīnāth represents a center in the periphery. For the pilgrims, it is the “center out there”, but before the Western Himalayan contact-zone was divided, first by religion and later by nationalism, it was a center *of* the periphery. This is evident from the many processions that still arrive in Badrīnāth each year. Thus, Badrīnāth can be seen from many perspectives: the shrine represents the goal of the pilgrim, the working place of the priest, the last outpost of Hinduism or even as a symbol of India’s northern border.

The temple of Badrīnāth, its related pilgrimage and priests might best be understood on the basis of the concepts of *histoire croisée*, entanglement, hybridization and cultural transfer.¹ The remoteness of the Himalayas brought forth a unique culture and religion, which in time became pigmented by the systems of Hinduism and Buddhism and therefore what is described here in terms of *histoire croisée* and cultural transfer is not so much a process that led to transculturalism but rather a procedure that in part resembles Hacker’s (1983) notion of “Inklusivismus” or better even Eschmann’s (1978) use of the term “Hinduization.” Yet, today the emphasis in Badrīnāth lies on what is *not* part of their culture, rather than its composite parts. In other words, it has become common knowledge that Badrīnāth stands for orthodox Hinduism, but there is still the urge to pretend that the temple is not part of its surrounding *pahārī* culture.

¹The observant reader will already have noticed the I see religion not so much in a spiritual, personal dimension, but as something that lends identity, forms community, and originates culture.

8.1 Cultural Transfer

First, I want to discuss the concept of “cultural transfer.” I reference this term because – even though it is deputed for several reasons (Burke 2009:69-70) – it essentially describes the movement of culture: *trans*, as across a cultural boundary and *ferre* as bringing or bringing in, both in a transitive and intransitive sense. The argument that transfer implies a one-way directionality and that the exchange of culture is usually reciprocal, even if disproportionate or hegemonic, is not neglected, but the focus here lies on how one culture reacts to new influences rather than what one culture returns to another culture.

Cultural transfer is the outcome – for the act of including the cultural transfer into one’s culture I chose the term translation – as the act of including something new, never occurs without adaption on part of the receiving culture. Thus, translation seems to be a fitting term for this process (see Burke 2009:70).

Cultural transfer is often described as something neutral and homogeneous, however quite the opposite is true: it is neither uniform nor homogeneous, as culture itself. Different groups or classes are affected on different levels by a cultural transfer. In Badrīnāth, for example, not all groups of priests were equally affected by the Brahmanical ideals of vegetarianism and teetotalism. The impact has been strongest on those in Badrīnāth who still had in mind to raise their position.

A cultural transfer never occurs “clear” and “unaltered,” it is translated into the respective culture. Often this translation changes meanings and contexts and in some cases it creates something completely new – like Yoga in the Western world, which has shifted from a spiritual practice to a spa and wellness program. This translation does not necessarily occur at once, but it might be as part of a reaction to a new phenomenon that seems alien to the culture. Thus, a tribal god can be transferred to Hinduism, but over time he is required to give up his appetite for meat and his way of communication through possessions, or he has to part with his conception as god and becomes a demon.

8.2 Sanskritization, Hinduization and Inclusivism

Cultural transfer urges a reevaluation of the receiving culture, since after the cultural transfer has been translated it has to be decided if it is proper or improper. In case the cultural transfer is considered an improvement, the original state is *ipso facto* deemed less suitable or less advanced. This would diminish the esteem of the culture itself and therefore has to be translated again, so that it seems to derive from the culture itself. If this is not possible, then there is another alternative in the form of a negative cultural transfer – meaning all the things that were decided *not* to be brought into culture.

8.2 Sanskritization, Hinduization and Inclusivism

In South Asia, the cultural transfer and its translation works according to the already described mechanisms. It might have been Alfred Lyall (1882) who first realized that there was a phenomenon² that allowed groups that originally were not part of a caste or Hinduism in general to become a member of the said religion and culture. Later Srinivas (1952,1966) coined the term “Sanskritization.” This term is primarily thought to describe an upward mobility within the caste system. Sanskritization was frequently criticized for being overly focused on language, or too strongly related to the Brahmanical views on Hinduism. As an alternative, the terms of “Kshatriyazation” or “Rajputization” were introduced, but these were overshadowed by the more universal concept of “Hinduization.” Further there is the idea of Paul Hacker (1983) referred to as “Inclusivismus”.

Inclusivism means one asserts that a central belief of a another religious or *weltanschaulichen* group is identical to one or another belief of one’s own group. (Hacker 1983:12)

Hacker sees Inclusivism as a method for an inferior group to ascend to the level of the “included” group, but in the end he is not very consistent in these terms, as he

²He calls it “gradual Brahmanizing of the aboriginal, non-Aryan, or casteless tribes” (Lyall 1882:102).

acknowledges Buddhism in the role of the superior religion and culture, but still dependent on the process of Inclusivism.

In my opinion, all three of these concepts have their eligibility. They may all describe the same phenomenon, but – although not exclusively – in different perspectives. In this final chapter I will reflect on the development of Badrīnāth in the light of these concepts.

8.3 Badrīnāth in Translation

8.3.1 A Hypothetical History of Badrīnāth

Mythological Time

There is very little historical data on Badrīnāth until the British first came into this area as Roland Hardenberg (2010:101) states, “without definite historical knowledge, we cannot know how certain cults developed,” but we do have narratives, performances and the examples of similar places.

Throughout this study I have assumed that this pan-Hindu pilgrimage center and “perhaps the holiest shrine for Hindus” (Guha 2002:64) had its humble beginnings as a simple shrine in the mountains. Today, there still remain several of these isolated temples, which are visited every once in a while by shepherds or the occasional wandering hermit. The reasons why Badrīnāth did not have this fate was not for and why this place is visited by close to a million pilgrims every year is not because it is dedicated to Nārāyaṇ or part of the Cār Dhām. The fact that the shrine is located above or originally besides a hot spring might have something to do with that there is a shrine to begin with, but it is not the reason why this mountain valley trembles under the feet of pilgrims every summer. It was also not because the Bhotiyas and Tibetans would pass this shrine and bring salt, borax, wool and grains to the other side of the Himalayas. While all these circumstances have certainly facilitated its development, the main cause lies in the location of the

temple *per se*. On the Indian subcontinent, there is nothing more sacred than the river Ganges, and what could therefore be purer or more hallowed than its source, the place where it first falls unto earth.

I have argued above that the Badrikāśrama of the Mahābhārata was a place not visited by mortals but reserved for gods and heroes. What is known today as Badrināth is the localization of myth. Thus, the question is: which myth was originally localized there, or did it go in both directions? Did a tradition or cult become part of the myth? Was Kuber localized in Badrināth along with Nar and Nārāyaṇ? Or were the two brothers forced to build their hermitage within Kuber's kingdom? We do not know exactly when the two episodes of the Mahābhārata came into existence, which were explained by Grünendahl (1993). We can only assume the episode which mentions the *āśram* of Nar and Nārāyaṇ to be the younger one. But when did this localization take place?

There is the reference in the Pandukeshwar inscription from the 10th century, and there are also the Sthalapurāṇas that leave no doubt about the actual place but are difficult to date. Therefore, we have an extensive period of time in which this localization might have taken place. Further, this localization of the myth did not happen over night but must be seen as a process of decades or even centuries.

The Time of Narratives

Before this valley was (re-)discovered as the place of Nar and Nārāyaṇ's asceticism and the eternal abode of Viṣṇu, it was simply the home of the Bhotiyas. During this time, we can safely assume that the entanglement between the southern and northern side of the Himalayas had never been stronger. The Bhotiyas, being nomadic traders, finally chose to settle on what today is the Indian side of the mountains, because they could sell their imported goods in the lower valleys during winter. The gods in their narratives make the same choice: they all come from Tibet into this

8 Conclusio – Entangled Narratives

valley. In their narratives, all three major *devatās* – Badrīnārāyaṇ, Ghantakarana und Kuber – are seen as equals or brothers, and this might have been true during the times the Bhotiyas were wealthy and influential. When the revenue of trade decreased and the influence of the kingdoms to the South gained momentum, along with the influx of wandering hermits, one of these brothers also grew important while the others had to be content to serve.

The narrative about Tholingmath, being the original seat of Badrīnārāyaṇ, is freely recounted by the Bhotiyas. In Badrīnāth itself, it was replaced by another narrative. Once this localization had taken place, Hindus from the plains would start going there for pilgrimage, and with the dominance of Islam in the rest of India many chose to stay. These immigrants had no connection to Tibet, and to them this land was the place of barbarian meat-eaters. Why should their god have ever dwelled near these kind of people?

If we follow Paul Hacker (1978:478),³ it was the Vijayanagar kingdom in the late 14th century that most probably with the help of the order of the *daśanāmis*, attempted to establish a symbol of the superiority of the Sanātana Dharma, the Cār Dhām. Th brought forth another narrative, namely the expulsion of all heterodox tendencies in Badrīnāth and the re-establishment of the temple by Ādi Śaṅkarācārya.

Sāṅkṛtyāyan (1953) mentions that there may have been two separate shrines at Badrīnāth, one for Badrīnārāyaṇ and another for Buddha. I believe that only the image which is in use now, was worshipped by the followers of both religions.⁴ If this worship resembled the situation at Triloknāth in Himachal Pradesh (Cousins 2010 and Widorn/Kozicz 2012), where there is one temple but two distinct traditions, or whether we might have to speak of “entangled religions” in this case, is impossible to say. Yet, considering the history of Badrīnāth and its representation today, it becomes evident that the transfer was mainly brought about by orthodox

³Kulke (2001:236) agrees with Hacker’s hypothesis, while noticing that “it is far too early to come to any final conclusions.”

⁴I would even argue that Badrīnārāyaṇ was worshipped by people from what is now Tibet and India, and that they only later became followers of the respective religions.

Hinduism and that its translation in to the local context resulted in a neglect and eventually even denial of this shared past. Under these circumstances, it might be better to speak of a de-hybridization or of a dis-entangled history. Such a process, although in another setting, is excellent described in the article of Berreman (1964).

His article entitled *Brahmins and Shamans in Pahari Religion* focuses on these two ritual specialists.⁵ The situation is based on the general assumption that the form of Hinduism practiced in the Himalayas is “by plains standards [...] not only unorthodox but actually degraded” (Berreman 1964:54). Closer contacts with people from the plains such as “teachers, community development workers, vote-seekers, etc. [...] led many Paharis, especially those with education (mostly the high castes) to adopt high-caste people of the plains as reference group” (Berreman 1964:63). In the case of Sirkanda,⁶ this has led to the formation of a new group of priests, referred to by him as “atraditional Brahmins”, and a disregard for the traditional Brahmins and shamans.

In a similar vein, Sax (2002:190) writes that “[t]he people of Garhwal have long been regarded as distinctive and backward Other by Hindus from the Gangetic Plain [...] to them, the mountain dwellers are thought of as poverty-stricken and backward hillbillies.” They eat meat, drink alcohol, have “unpredictable sex habits” and “are infected by all sorts of northern Buddhist heresy, even if they are Hindus” (Bharati 1978:79). To ensure that the temple did not suffer the resultant ill effects, only two possibilities were available: one was to “sanskritize” the mountain dwellers along with their deities, and the other option was to exclude them and keep them apart from what is considered “real” Hinduism. The visit of Ādi Śāṅkarācārya provided for both. The past as well as the origin of the statue of Badrīnārāyaṇ was no longer in question, and the priests had a foundation on which they could base

⁵I will here not go into detail of his lucid description of them, but refer to the aspect of cultural transfer (Berreman (1964:65) does not use this term, but speaks of “plains emulation or Sanskritization”) in his paper.

⁶Near Mussoorie (Masūrī), where Berreman conducted his research.

their hereditary rights.

The Time of Politics

“It is suggested that historically, the agents of Hinduization were Hindu kings who ventured into tribal territories in search of land and power. When these kings incorporated tribal religious forms into their own cults, both changed: the tribal cults became Hinduized, while Hindu forms of worship became tribalized” (Hardenberg 2010:90).

The *daśanāmis* were the first to come proselytizing, or at least they were the first to leave a lasting mark in this region. While the narrative states that the king had appointed the cook out of necessity, it is much more likely that he did this very intentionally, thus severing a connection that might have become too powerful or was no longer in line with the royal disposition. This is substantiated by the fact that after the first Nambudiri Rawal was appointed the northern *maṭh* remained empty for 165 years.

As soon as the temple was influential enough to matter, it had become a tool for politics, and as soon as its significance reached a certain level, Badrīnāth was seen fit to serve as a means of royal legitimation.

Yet, the transfer of culture that completely deranged the subtle concept of divine kingship in this area happened unintentionally. When the British received their part of Garhwal as payment for their help in defeating the Gorkhas, they were also stuck with the shrine of Badrīnāth. We can be fairly certain that what they really wanted was not the temple but another route into Tibet. We can further assume that they initially saw the temple as an extra source of revenue, and only later, when the succession of the Rawal became their responsibility, they realized that this was a blind bargain. At that time, the British capitulated by claiming that they could not be bothered with heathen worship, but the harm – or the cultural transfer – was already done. While the British actively tried to stay out of religious

affairs, whenever a decision was demanded from them, they would naturally decide according to their European enlightened minds. In this way, the religiously motivated suicide in Kedārīnāth was stopped by Traill (Atkinson 2002:III:561), and at the temple of Badrīnāth they completely rearranged the traditional priesthood – with a less favorable outcome than anticipated.

The war of 1962 brought two major changes for Badrīnāth: it not only finally severed all ties with Tibet, reducing the borderland to a borderline, but in its wake the temple was also linked to the motor road network. When this road was declared open to pilgrims, the temple was quickly greeted by large numbers of *yātrīs*. These two incidents⁷ facilitated the rise of a “pilgrim industry” and accelerated the Hinduization of what was now only the southern half of the Western Himalaya contact-zone.

Today, after numerable acts and law suits, the positions of the priests are settled and the shared part of history is safe behind the border. There are only two things left that still remind the questioning pilgrim, or in this case researcher, of this entanglement.

8.3.2 The Entanglement of Badrīnārāyaṇ

Many gods are connected to Badrīnārāyaṇ, not necessarily by narratives but by rituals in the form of processions. Plenty of the gods’ palanquins arrive during summer and most of them have a relation to Badrīnārāyaṇ one way or another.

Yet, it are the *devatās* of Kinnaur that have sustained an elaborate context of narratives. As above stated (2.7.5) there are many parallels between the temple of Badrīnārāyaṇ of Garhwal and various shrines in the Sangla valley – especially the temple of Kamru. The entanglement of these two Himalayan valleys is kept in place through processions, although this connection seems to have included or even been centered on Tholing. Amy Heller (2008:107 quoting Singh 1994:106) states

⁷The roads were already adapted and extended by the British.

8 Conclusio – Entangled Narratives

that “local tradition [has it] that the village deities of Kamru (Kinnaur), Badrinath (Garhwal) and Tholing (Guge) are brothers and that they used to visit each other in former times.” Tholing is also about the same distance from Badrināth as it is “about 4 to 5 days walk via Chitkul” from Sangla (Heller 2008:107).

This entanglement of Kamru and Badrināth today only exists in the said narratives and processions. Badrināth has evolved into a major pilgrim destination, while Kamru remained a secluded mountain settlement, after it had lost its importance for the rulers of Bushahr and its role as resting place along “the trade route linking Kulu and Chamba with Tholing” (ibid.).

I argue that the Sangla valley serves as a perfect blueprint for the upper Alakanandā valley around 200 years ago, and if we succeed to reconstruct the cultural history of Kinnaur we will gain also the one of Badrināth. Today, the Kamru and Batseri Badris are unable use the old procession routes, for the same reason Tholing is inaccessible, although close to Badrināth, but there is still something that continually gives witness to the shared past.

8.3.3 The Entangled Mūrti

The idol inside the shrine of Badrināth is cause for much speculation, especially since no-one, except the Rawal is allowed to touch it. Pilgrims are shoved by it, happy to grasp just a glance. During their fleeting *darśan* these pilgrims see an opulent crown and clothes. A sight of the *mūrti* without its adornments is reserved for few pilgrims who are ready to rise early and wealthy enough to pay the steep fees for the daily *abhišek* ritual.

The previous chapters have shown that there is little doubt about the origin of the statue, or rather the image depicted on its stone. It is most likely a Buddha but difficult to recognize, due to the aforementioned circumstances, but also because the story of its rescue from the river is also most certainly true. Rahul Sāṅkrtyāyan was one of the last pilgrims able to have a closer look at the material form of Bad-

rīnārāyaṇ, and it seems that for a long time it was almost permissible to regard the statue as an original form of a Buddha. Thus, not only Christians used parts of heathen shrines to construct their cathedrals, and Muslims changed churches into mosques, but similar reallocations happened also within Hinduism. An idol might seem to be of a different religion, but especially in these parts of the Himalayas there is a strong regard for the holy, the worshipped. This may be one of the reasons why the original image of Buddha was kept when Viṣṇu became the lord of this place.

In conclusion, I wish to refer to a more recent example of a reverse religious “take over.” The Halase-Maratika (Halesī-Marātika) caves in East Nepal are venerated by both Hindus and Buddhists, but in 1994, when Katia Buffetrille published her study about this pilgrimage, they were under the control of the Buddhists. How the Buddhists came in control is deeply related to the devotion to this place, but even more so with clever politics on their part especially so the Maratika Lama. What concerns me in this example is the narrative that accompanies this change.

While the local Rāīs never had a Māhātmya for these caves, “there are several Buddhist versions of pilgrimage guides in Tibetan language to Halase” (Buffetrille 1994:7). The local narrative about the discovery of the caves does not imply any god or religion (see Buffetrille 1994:6), the Hindus later identified this place with an adventure of Śiva, and the Buddhists with Cakrasaṃvara and Padmasambhāva. It was Cakrasaṃvara who defeated Śiva, but it was Padmasambhāva’s pilgrimage to this place that marked “the opening up of the holy place (*gnas phye ba*) to the devotion of the faithful” (Buffetrille 1994:56). Buffetrille (*ibid.*) states that the “act of ‘conquest’” of “the previous occupants the places” is what enables “the appropriation of the place.”

One has to keep in mind that this is a recent phenomenon and there are Hindus who still live in the vicinity as well as many who come for pilgrimage, but the concept is essentially the same. The Buddhist are eager to connect these caves to episodes of

8 *Conclusio – Entangled Narratives*

their own scriptures (see Buffetrille 1994:38-42 and 52-55), and if one substitutes Cakrasaṃvara and Padmasambhāva with Viṣṇu and Śaṅkarācārya, the narrative is not essentially different than the ones in Badrīnāth. It depends on the status of the former god, if he is allowed to stay as a helper or guardian or if he has to vanish completely.

I am aware that in these pages I have raised more questions than I have answered – and perhaps it is this mystery which makes Badrīnāth a destination for so many, but I hope I was also able to show that the development of this pilgrimage center was not linear and that this temple was important for many different groups and communities close and far from it. I finally also hope that this study will give an impulse to view the Western Himalayas as a connected contact zone that has a lot in common despite being separated by high mountains.

*

Bibliography

- Alam, Aniket (2008). *Becoming India. Western Himalayas under British Rule*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press India.
- Appadurai, Arjun (1996). *Modernity at Large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- (2000). “Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination.” In: *Public Culture* 12.1, pp. 1–19.
- Apte, Vaman Shivram (2000). *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Arjun’s ‘Badrinath’ (2011). URL: <http://ibnlive.in.com/photogallery/4135-5.html>.
- Arya, Samarendra Narayan (2004). *History of Pilgrimage in Ancient India AD 300-1200*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.
- Aschoff, Jürgen C. (1989). *Tsaparang – Königstadt in Westtibet. Die vollständigen Berichte des Jesuitenpaters António de Andrade und eine Beschreibung vom heutigen Zustand der Klöster*. Ulm/Donau: Fabri Verlag.
- Assman, Jan (1992). *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*. München: C.H. Beck.
- Atkinson, Edwin T (2002). *The Himalayan Gazetteer or The Himalayan Districts of the North Western Province of India. 3 Vols*. Delhi: Low Price Publications.
- Bader, Jonathan (2000). *Conquest of the four Quarters. Traditional Accounts of the Life of Śaṅkara*. New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan.

Bibliography

- Bailey, F.G. (1960). *Tribe, Caste and Nation. A Study of Political Activity and Political Change in Highland Orissa*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Bajpai, S. C. (1991). *Kinnaur. A remote Land in the Himalayas*. New Delhi: Indus.
- Bautze, Joachim Karl (1995). *Early Indian Terracottas. Iconography of Religions*. Leiden: Brill.
- Berremen, Gerald D. (1964). "Brahmins and Shamans in Pahari Religion". In: *The Journal of Asian Studies* 23, pp. 53–69.
- (1974). *Hindus of the Himalayas. Ethnography and Change*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press.
- Bhandarkar, R.G. (2001 [1913]). *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.
- Bharati, Agehananda (1963). "Pilgrimage in the Indian Tradition". In: *History of Religions* 3.1, pp. 135–167.
- (1978). "Actual and Ideal Himalayas: Hindu Views of the Mountains". In: *Himalayan Anthropology: The Indo-Tibetan Interface*. Ed. by James F. Fisher. The Hague, Paris: Mouton Publishers.
- Bhardwaj, Surinder Mohan (2003). *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.
- Bhattacharya, Ahibhusan (1981). *The Varāha-Purāṇa (with English translation)*. Ed. by Anand Swarup Gupta. Varanasi: All-India Kashiraj Trust.
- Boeck, Kurt (1900). *Indische Gletscherfahrten. Reisen und Erlebnisse im Ost- und West-Himalaja*. Leipzig: H. Haessel.
- Bose, Nirmal Kumar (1973). *Some Indian Tribes*. New Delhi: National Book Trust, India.
- Briggs, George Weston (2001 [1938]). *Gorakhnāth and the Kānphaṭa Yogīs*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Brown, Charles W. (1992). "What we call 'Bhotiyas' are in reality not 'Bhotiyas.' Perspective of British Colonial Conceptions." In: *Himalaya: Past and Present*. Ed.

- by Maheshwar P. Joshi, Allen C. Fanger, and Charles W. Brown. Vol. 2. Almora: Almora Book Depot, pp. 147–172.
- (1994). “Salt, Barley, Pashmina and Tincal – contexts of being Bhotiya in Traill’s Kumaon”. In: *Himalaya: Past and Present*. Ed. by Maheshwar P. Joshi, Allen C. Fanger, and Charles W. Brown. Vol. 3. Almora: Almora Book Depot, pp. 215–258.
- Bruce, C. G. (1910). *Twenty Years in the Himalaya*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Burghart, Richard (1984). “The Formation of the Concept of Nation-State in Nepal”. In: *The Journal of Asian Studies* 44, pp. 101–125.
- Burke, Peter (2009a). *Cultural Hybridity*. Cambridge: Polity.
- (2009b). “Translating Knowledge, Translating Cultures.” In: *Kultureller Austausch. Bilanz und Perspektiven der Frühneuzeitforschung*. Ed. by Michael North. Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, pp. 69–77.
- Chakrabarti, Phanindra Nath (1990). *Trans-Himalayan Trade A Retrospect. 1774-1914. In Quest of Tibet’s Identity*. Delhi: Classics India Publications.
- Chakravarti, N. P., ed. (1942). *Epigraphia Indica and Record of the Archaeological Survey of India*. Vol. XXIV. Delhi: Manager of Publications.
- Chakravarti, P. C. (1971). *The Evolution of India’s Northern Borders*. Bombay: Asia Publishing House.
- Chandola, Khemanand (1987). *Across the Himalayas through the Ages. A Study in Relations Between Central Himalayas and Western Tibet*. New Delhi: Patriot.
- Chief Priest arrested* (2014). URL: http://zeenews.india.com/news/delhi/badrinath-shrine-chief-priest-arrested-in-molestation-case_909098.html.
- Coomaraswamy, Anand Kentish (1971). *Yakṣas*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.
- Cort, John (2010). *Framing the Jina. Narratives of Icons and Idols in Jain History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bibliography

- Cousens, Diana (2010). "Multiculturalism on the Tibetan border: the temple of Triloknāth in Lahul". In: *New View of Tibetan Culture*. Ed. by David Templeman. Victoria: Monash University Press, pp. 53–77.
- Darian, Steven G. (2001). *The Ganges in Myth and History*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Das, Sur; introduced by Arik Moran (2012). "An Unpublished Account of Kinnauri Folklore". In: *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* 39, pp. 9–40.
- David, Jürgen (1998). "Pañca Kedāra: Auf den Spuren des Stiers; Eine Untersuchung über die Pilgerschaft zu fünf shivaitischen Tempeln in Garhwal". Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Vienna.
- Denwood, Philip (2008). "The Tibetans in the West, Part I". In: *Journal of Inner Asian Art and Archaeology* 3, pp. 7–21.
- Deshpande, N. A. (1990). *The Padma-Purāṇa*. 6. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- (1991). *The Padma-Purāṇa*. Vol. 9. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Dhayani Babulkar, Asha and Pushp Dhayani (n.d.). *Glory of Badrikashram*. Mussoorie: Dr. (Mrs.) Asha Dhayani Babulkar.
- Dimri, D.N. (2010). *Archaeological Heritage of Central Himalaya*. Dehradun: Archaeological Survey of India, Dehradun Circle.
- Doninger O'Flaherty, Wendy (1987). *Hindu Myths. A Sourcebook translated from the Sanskrit*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Eck, Diana L. (1998). "The Imagined Landscape. Patterns in the Construction of Hindu Sacred Geography." In: *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 2.32, pp. 165–188.
- (2012). *India. A sacred Geography*. New York: Harmony Books.
- Eschmann, Anncharlott (1978). "The Vaisnava Typology of Hinduization and the Origin of Jagannatha". In: *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*. Ed. by Kulke Eschmann and Tripathi. New Delhi: Manohar, pp. 99–117.

- Feldhaus, Anne (2003). *Connected Places. Region, Pilgrimage, and Geographical Imagination in India*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Fuller, Christopher John (1992). *The Camphor Flame: Popular Hinduism and Society in India*. Revised and Expanded 2004. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Galey, Jean-Claude (1992). "Hindu Kingship in its Ritual Realm: The Garhwali Configuration". In: *Himalaya: Past and Present*. Ed. by Maheshwar P. Joshi, Allen C. Fanger, and Charles W. Brown. Vol. 2. Almora: Almora Book Depot, pp. 173–237.
- Getty, Alice (1962). *The Gods of Northern Buddhism. Their History, Iconography and Progressive Evolution Through the Northern Buddhist Countries*. Rutland and Tokio: Charles E. Tuttle.
- Ghosh, Chandan (2004). *Rediscovering Himalaya*. New Delhi: Shrishti Publishers and Distributors.
- Giersch, C. Patterson (2010). "Across Zomia with merchants, monks, and musk: process geographies, trade networks, and the Inner-East–Southeast Asian borderlands." In: *Journal of Global History* 5.2, pp. 215–239.
- Goldman, Robert P. (2009). *Ramāyaṇa. Book One*. Clay Sanskrit Library. New York University Press.
- Gole, Susan (1989). *Indian Maps and Plans. From earliest times to the advent of European surveys*. New Delhi: Manohar.
- Goody, J. (1977). *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grünendahl, Reinhold (1993). "Zu den beiden Gandhamādana-Episoden des Āraṇyaka-parvan". In: *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 18, pp. 103–138.
- (1997). "Zur Stellung des Nārāyaṇīya im Mahābhārata". In: *Nārāyaṇīya-Studien*. Ed. by Grünendahl, Malinar, and Oberlies und Schreiner. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Bibliography

- (2002). “On the Frame Structure and ”Sacrifice Concept” in the Nārāyaṇīya and Tirthayātrā Sections of the Mahābhārata, and the Craft of Citation”. In: *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 152.2, pp. 309–340.
- Guha, Ramachandra (2002). *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gupta, Sen Subhadra (2001). *Tirtha: Holy Pilgrim Centres of the Hindus*. New Delhi: Rupa.
- (2003). *Chaar Dhaam. A Guide to the Hindu Pilgrimages*. New Delhi: Rupa.
- Hacker, Paul (1978). *Kleine Schriften*. Ed. by Lambert Schmithausen. Stuttgart: Steiner.
- (1983). “Inklusivismus”. In: *Inklusivismus: eine indische Denkform*. Ed. by Gerhard Oberhammer. Occasional Papers 2. Wien: De Nobili Research Library, pp. 11–28.
- Handa, O.C. (2002). *History of Uttaranchal*. New Delhi: Indus.
- Handa, O.C. and Madhu Jain (2003). *Art and Architecture of Uttaranchal*. New Delhi: Bhavana Books and Prints.
- Hardenberg, Roland (2010). “A Reconsideration of Hinduization and the Caste-Tribe Continuum Model”. In: *The Anthropology of Values. Essays in Honour of Georg Pfeffer*. Ed. by Peter Berger and Roland Hardenberg. Delhi: Dorling Kindersley, pp. 89–103.
- Hardy, Friedhelm (2001). *Viraha-Bhakti. The early history of Kṛṣṇa devotion in South India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Heller, Amy (2008). *Observations on an 11th Century Tibetan Inscription on a Statue of Avalokiteśvara*. URL: http://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/ret/pdf/ret_14_08.pdf.
- High Court of Uttarakhand at Nainital (2009). *Sri Badrinath & Kedarnath temple ... vs Shwetambar Jain Temple on 2 September, 2009*. URL: <http://www.indiankanoon.org/doc/811429/>.
- Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger, eds. (1992). *The Invention of Tradition*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Hopkins, Edward Washburn (1910). “Mythological Aspects of Trees and Mountains in the Great Epic”. In: *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 30.4, pp. 347–374.
- (1915). *Epic Mythology*. Grundriss der Indo-Arischen Philologie und Altertumskunde, III. Bd., 1. Heft B. Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner.
- Huber, Toni (2008). *The Holy Land Reborn. Pilgrimage and the Tibetan Reinvention of Buddhist India*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Inden, Ronald (1990). *Imagining India*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- IOR (1895). “Appointment of a Chief Priest, or Naib Rawal, at the temple of Badrinath in British Garhwal.” British Library, India Office Records (IOR/L/PJ/6/408).
- (1937). “Tehri Garhwal Darbar’s claim for the Kedarnath and Badrinath Shrines”. British Library, India Office Records (IOR/R/1/1/2951). File 224-P(S)/1937.
- Iyer, S. Venkitasubramonia [Transl.] (1985). *The Varāha Purāṇa*. Vol. 31. Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology Series 1. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Jaini, Padmanabh S. (1977). “Jina Ṛṣabha as an “Avatāra” of Viṣṇu”. In: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 40.2, pp. 321–337.
- J.B., Harley and David Woodward, eds. (1992). *The History of Cartography*. Vol. Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Jha, Makhan (1985). *Dimensions of Pilgrimage*. New Delhi: Inter-India Publications.
- Jonsson, Hjørleifur (2010). “Above and Beyond: Zomia and the Ethnographic Challenge of/for Regional History.” In: *History and Anthropology* 21.2, pp. 191–212.
- Joshi, M. C. (1990). “The Khaśas in the History of Uttarākhaṇḍ”. In: *Himalaya: Past and Present*. Ed. by Maheshwar P. Joshi, Allen C. Fanger, and Charles W. Brown. Vol. 1. Almora: Almora Book Depot, pp. 193–200.
- Kale, M.R. (1981). *Kumārasambhava of Kālidāsa*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Kapadia, Harish (1998). “Lost in the Legends”. In: *Himalyan Journal* 54. URL: <https://www.himalayanclub.org/hj/54/10/lost-in-the-legends/>.

Bibliography

- Kapadia, Harish and Geeta Kapadia (2005). *Into the Untravelled Himalaya: Travels, Treks and Climbs*. New Delhi: Indus.
- Kazami, S.M.A. (2014). *Court clears Badrinath Jain temple, but sadhus won't*. URL: <http://archive.indianexpress.com/oldStory/44241>.
- Khanna, Amar Nath (2003). *Pilgrim Shrines of India. Mythology, Archaeology, History and Art*. New Delhi: Aryan Books International.
- King, Richard (1999). *Orientalism and Religion. Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mytic East'*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Krishna, Nanditha and M. Amirthalingam (2009). *Sacred Plants of India*. Penguin.
- Kulke, Hermann (2001a). *Kings and Cults. State Formation and Legitimation in India and Southeast Asia*. New Delhi: Manohar.
- (2001b). “Mahārājas, Mahants and Historians. Reflections on the Historiography of early Vijayanagara and Sringeri.” In: *Kings and Cults. State Formation and Legitimation in India and Southeast Asia*. New Delhi: Manohar, pp. 208–239.
- Kumar, Dinesh (1991). *The Sacred Complex of Badrinath*. Varanasi: Kishor Vidhya Niketan.
- Kumar, Pradeep (2000). *The Uttarakhand Movement. Construction of Regional Identity*. New Delhi: Kanishka.
- Law, Bimala Churn (1984). *Historical Geography of Ancient India*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal.
- Leder, Sabine (2001). *Zu einer Zeit, als Bäume und Gräser noch sprechen konnten...* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Lefebber, Rosalind (2005). *Rāmāyaṇa. Book Four. Kishkindha*. Clay Sanskrit Library. New York: New York University Press.
- Lorenzen, David N. (1991). *The Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas. Two Lost Śaivite Sects*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

- Lutgendorf, Philip. "Dining Out at Lake Pampa: The Shabari Episode in Multiple Ramayanas." URL: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00generallinks/lutgendorf_santoshi/txt_lutgendorf_shabari.pdf.
- Lyall, Sir Alfred C. (1882). *Asiatic Studies. Religious and Social*. London: John Murray.
- Madhava-Vidyaranya (n.d.). *Sankara-Dig-Vijaya. The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya*. Ed. by Swami Tapasyananda. Madras: Sri Ramakrishna Math.
- Maitra, Kiranshankar (1989). *Himalayan Dreamland. Journey to Kinnarlok*. Delhi: Mittal.
- Malaviya, Madan Mohan (1934). *Badrinath Temple: Question of Transfer*. Benares: Tara Printing Works.
- Mayo, Kevin (2004). *The Metaphor of Nar and Narayan at the Himalayan Pilgrimage Shrine of Badrinath*. URL: <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/SpecialProj/ASAA/biennial-conference/2004/Mayo-K-ASAA.pdf>.
- McKay, Alex (1998). "Kailas-Manasarovar in "Classical" (Hindu) and Colonial Sources: Ascetism, Power, and Pilgrimage". In: *Pilgrimage in Tibet*. Ed. by Alex McKay. Richmond: Curzon, pp. 165–183.
- (1999). "The British Imperial Influence on the Kailas-Mansarova Pilgrimage". In: *Sacred Spaces and Powerful Places in Tibetan Culture. A Collection of Essays*. Ed. by Toni Huber. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, pp. 305–321.
- Meiland, Justin (2007). *Mahābhātata. Book Nine. Śalya. Vol. 2*. Clay Sanskrit Library. New York: New York University Press.
- Michaels, Axel (1998). *Der Hinduismus. Geschichte und Gegenwart*. München: C.H. Beck.
- Michaud, Jean (2010). "Editorial: Zomia and Beyond." In: *Journal of Global History* 5.2, pp. 187–214.
- Monier-Williams, Sir Monier (2002 [1899]). *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Bibliography

- Moorcroft, William (1937). *Journey to Lake Mansarova*. Delhi: Gian Publishing House.
- Moran, Arik (2007). "From Mountain Trade to Jungle Politics: The Transformation of Kingship in Bashahr, 1815-1942". In: *Indian Economic Social History Review* 44.2, pp. 147–177.
- (2013). "Towards a History of devotional Vaishnavism in the West Himalayas: Kullu and the Ramanandis, c. 1500 – 1800". In: *Indian Economic Social History Review* 50.1-25.
- Munshi, Kanaiyalal Maneklal (1953). *To Badrinath*. Bombay: Bharata Vidya Bhavan.
- Naithani, R. C. (1999). *Radiant Himalayas*. New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information & Prodcasting.
- Naithānī, Śivprasād (2006a). *Uttarākhaṇḍ ke Tīrth evaṃ Mandir*. Śrīnagar: Pavetrī Prakāśan.
- (2006b). *Uttarākhaṇḍ kā Sānskr̥tik Itihās. Pratham Bhāg*. Śrīnagar: Pavetrī Prakāśan.
- (2008). *Uttarākhaṇḍ kā Sānskr̥tik Itihās. Dvītīya Bhāg*. Śrīnagar: Pavetrī Prakāśan.
- (2010). *Uttarākhaṇḍ Gāthāoṃ ke Rahasya*. Śrīnagar: Pavetrī Prakāśan.
- Namburī, J. P. (2009). *Himālaya Tīrth*. Kolkātā: Ranju Cakravartī.
- (n.d.). *Uttarākhaṇḍ Cār Dhām*. n.d.
- Nauṭiyāl, Śivānand (1661). *Kedār-Badrī Yātrā-Darśan*. Dillī: Sulabh Prakāśan.
- Negi, Gajendra Singh (2014). *Finally, Badrinath picks new Chief Priest*. URL: <http://www.dailypioneer.com/state-editions/dehradun/finally-badrinath-picks-new-chief-priest.html>.
- Nivedita, Sister (1928). *Kedar Nath & Badri Nath (A Pilgrim's Dairy)*. Calcutta: Brahmachari Ganendranath.
- Number of Pilgrims* (2016). URL: <http://www.badarikedar.org/management/number-of-pilgrims>.
- Nyalankar, Lakshami Narayan [Ed.] (1830). *Hitopadesha: A Collection of Fables and Tales in Sanskrit*. Calcutta: Shashtra Prakasha Press.

- Oakley, E. Sherman (1905). *Holy Himalaya: The Religion, Traditions, and Scenery of a Himalayan Province (Kumaon and Garhwal)*. Reprint 1991. Gurgaon: Vintage Books.
- Pal, Pratapaditya (1985). *Indian Sculpture: A Catalog of Los Angeles County Museum of Art Collection*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Pande, Govind Chandra (1994). *Life and Thought of Śaṅkarācārya*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Parry, Jonathan P. (1989). "The Brahmanical Tradition and the Technology of the Intellect". In: *Literacy and Society*. Ed. by Karen Schousboe and Mogens Trolle Larson. Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag.
- (2011). *Death in Benares*. New Delhi: Cambridge University Press.
- Pollock, Sheldon, ed. (2008). *Rāmāyaṇa. Book Two*. Clay Sanskrit Library. New York University Press.
- Prabhākar, Viṣṇu (1956). *Badrīnāth. Tīrth-Yātra kā Rocak hāl*. Naī Dillī: Sastā Sāhitya Maṇḍal-Prakāśan.
- Prabodhanand, Swami and Swami Anand (1961). *Across Gangotri Glaciers. An account of six Hindu monks reaching Badrinath from Gangotri across glaciers in Garhwal Himalayas*. Bombay: Popular Book Depot.
- Pratt, Mary Louise (1992). *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge.
- Ramesh, S. and Brinda Ramesh (2001). *Kumaon. Jewel of the Himalayas*. New Delhi: UBS.
- Randeria, Shalini (2002). "Entangled Histories of uneven Modernities. Civil Society, Caste Solidarities and the Post-Colonial State in India." In: *Unraveling Ties*. Ed. by Yehuda Elkana et al. Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus/St. Martin's Press.
- Raper, Capt. F. V. (1994). "Narrative of a Survey for the Purpose of Discovering the Sources of the Ganges". In: *Himalaya: Past and Present*. Ed. by Maheshwar

Bibliography

- P. Joshi, Allen C. Fanger, and Charles W. Brown. Vol. 3. Almora: Almora Book Depot, pp. 1–114.
- Ratūrī, Harikṛṣṇa (2007). *Garhvāl kā Itihās*. Ed. by Yaśvant Singh Kaṭhoc. Nayī Tīhrī: Bhāgīrathī Prakāśan Gṛha.
- Rawat, Ajay S. (2002). *Garhwal Himalaya. A Study in Historical Perspective*. New Delhi: Indus.
- Rawat, Dhan Singh (2010). *Pañcbadrī, Pañckedār, Pañcprayāg. Dharm, Āsthā va Sahas kī Triveṇī*. Pauri: Dr. Dhan Singh Rawat.
- Rāwat, Śivrāj Siṃh Sajvān (1994). *Śrī Badrīnāth Dhām-Darpaṇ*. Lakhnaū: Sulabh Prakāśan.
- Ritter, Carl (1833). *Die Erdkunde im Verhältnis zur Natur und zur Geschichte des Menschen, oder allgemeine vergleichende Geographie, als sichere Grundlage des Studiums und Unterrichts in physicalischen und historischen Wissenschaften*. Vol. 3. 2;2. Berlin: G. Reimer.
- Sabha, Rajya (2006). *Indian Parliament on the Issue of Tibet. Rajya Sabha Debates 1952-2005*. New Delhi: Tibetan Parliamentary and Policy Research Center.
- Saklani, Dinesh Prasad (1998). *Ancient Communities of the Himalayas*. New Delhi: Indus.
- Sanan, Deepak and Dhanu Swadi (2002). *Exploring Kinnaur in the Trans-Himalaya*. New Delhi: Indus.
- Sāṅkṛtyāyan, Rāhul (1953). *Himālaya Paricaya*. Vol. 1, Garhvāl. Illāhābād: Illāhābād Lām Jarnal Pres.
- Sax, William S. (1991). *Mountain Goddess, Gender and Politics in a Himalayan Pilgrimage*. New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- (2000). “Conquering the Quarters. Religion and Politics in Hinduism”. In: *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 4.1, pp. 39–60.

- (2000b). “Residence and Ritual in the Garhwal Himalaya”. In: *Himalaya: Past and Present*. Ed. by Maheshwar P. Joshi, Allen C. Fanger, and Charles W. Brown. Vol. 4. Almora Book Depot.
 - (2002). *Dancing the Self. Personhood and Performance in the Pāṇḍav Līlā of Garhwal*. New York: Oxford University Press.
 - (2006). “Introduction: Divine Kingship in the Western Himalayas”. In: *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* 29-30, pp. 7–13.
 - (2009). *God of Justice. Ritual Healing and social Justice in the Central Himalayas*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 - (2011). “Religion, Rituals, and Symbols of Belonging. The Case of Uttarkhand”. In: *The Politics of Belonging in the Himalayas: Local Attachments and Boundary Dynamics*. Ed. by Johanna Pfaff-Czarnecka and Gerard Toffin. Vol. 4. Governance, Conflict, and Civic Action. New Delhi: Sage, pp. 167–181.
- Saxena, Savitri (1995). *Geographical Survey of the Purāṇas*. Delhi: Nag.
- Schendel, Willem van (2002). “Geographies of knowing, geographies: jumping scale in Southeast Asia”. In: *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20, pp. 647–668.
- Schouten, J. P. (1995). *Revolution of the Mystics. On the Social Aspects of Vīraśaivism*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Scott, James C. (2009). *The Art of Not Being Governed. An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sharma, Brahmachari Chakradhar (1930). *A Guide to Badrinath Yatra*. Allahabad: Ram Dayal Agarwal.
- Sherring, Charles A. (2012 [1906]). *Western Tibet and the British Borderland. The Sacred Country of Hindus and Buddhists, with an Account of the Government, Religion, and Customs of Its Peoples*. n.a.: Forgotten Books.
- Shipton, John (1999). “Badrinath to Kedarnath Trek”. In: *Himalayan Journal* 55. URL: <https://www.himalayanclub.org/hj/55/7/badrinath-to-kedarnath-trek/>.

Bibliography

Shneiderman, Sara (2010). "Are the Central Himalayas in Zomia? Some scholarly and political considerations across time and space." In: *Journal of Global History* 5.2, pp. 289–312.

Shooting Badrinath (2011). URL: <http://www.rediff.com/movies/slide-show/slide-show-1-south-shooting-badrinath-in-the-himalayas/20110607.htm#1>.

Sidaway, James D. (2012). "Geography, Globalization, and the Problematic of Area Studies." In: *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*. 00, pp. 1–19.

Singer, Wendy (1997). *Creating Histories. Oral Narratives and the Politics of History-Making*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Singh, A. K. (1994). "An inscribed Bronze Padmapāṇī from Kinnaur". In: *Acta Orientalia* 55, pp. 106–110.

Singh, Jogishvar (1989). *Banks, Gods and Government. Institutional and Informal Credit Structure in a Remote and Tribal Indian District (Kinnaur, Himachal Pradesh) 1960-1985*. Beiträge zur Südasiensforschung. Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden.

– (1990). "A brief survey of village gods and their moneylending operations in Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh; along with earlier importance of trade with Tibet". In: *Wissenschaftsgeschichte und gegenwärtige Forschungen in Nordwest-Indien*. Ed. by Lydia Icke-Schwalbe and Gudrun Meier. Dresdner Tagungsberichte. Dresden: Staatliches Museum für Völkerkunde Dresden, Forschungsstelle, pp. 244–255.

Singh, Sagar (2004). "Religion, Heritage and Travel: Case References from the Indian Himalayas". In: *Current Issues in Tourism* 7, pp. 44–65.

Singh, Tej Vir (1984). "Tourism in the Himalaya: The Case of Garhwal. Problems of resource use and Conservation". In: *Beiträge zur vergleichenden Kulturgeographie der Hochgebirge*. Ed. by Erwin Grötzbach and Gisberg Rinschede. Eichstätter Beiträge. Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, pp. 169–184.

- Sinha, Surajit (1962). "State Formation and Rajput Myth in Tribal Central India".
In: *Man in India* 40, p. 37.
- Sircar, D. C., ed. (1960). *Epigraphia Indica and Record of the Archaeological Survey of India*. Vol. XXXI. Delhi: Department of Archaeology.
- Sörensen, Sören (1904). *An Index to the Names in the Mahābhārata with Short Explanations and a Concordance to the Bombay and P.C Roy's Translation*. London: Williams and Norgate.
- Srinivas, Mysore Narasimhachar (1952). *Religion and Society among the Coorgs*. London.
- (1966). "Sanskritization". In: *Social Change in Modern India*. Ed. by Mysore Narasimhachar Srinivas. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, pp. 1–45.
- Staal, Frits (2004). "Three Mountains and Seven Rivers". In: *Three Mountains and Seven Rivers: Prof. Musashi Tachikawa's Felicitation Volume*. Ed. by Musashi Hino Shoun; Tachikawa. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, pp. 3–24.
- Stietencron, Heinrich von (1978). "The Advent of Viṣṇuism in Orissa. An Outline of its History According to Archaeological and Epigraphical Sources from the Gupta Period up to 1135 A.D." In: *The Cult of Jagannath and the Regional Tradition of Orissa*. Ed. by Hermann Kulke Eschmann Anncharlott and Gaya Charan Tripathi. New Delhi: Manohar, pp. 1–30.
- Sundaesan, Vidyasankar. *The Jyotirmath Śaṅkarācārya Lineage in the 20th century*.
URL: <http://indology.info/papers/sundaesan/>.
- (2000). "Conflicting Hagiographies and History, The Place of Śaṅkarvijaya Texts in Advaita Tradition". In: *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 4.2, pp. 109–184.
- Supreme Court of India (1952). *Shastri vs Shri Badrinath Temple Committee*. URL: <http://indiankanoon.org/doc/801837/>.
- Survey. *Archaeological Survey of India; Dehradun Circle*. URL: <http://www.asidehraduncircle.in/chamoli.html>.

Bibliography

- Tagare, G.V. [Trans.], ed. *The Bhāgavata-Purāṇa*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- (1982). *The Nārada-Purāṇa*. Vol. 19. Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology Series 5. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
 - (1994). *The Skanda-Purāṇa*. Vol. 54. Ancient Indian Tradition and Mythology Series 6. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.
- Tajendra (n.d.). *The Story of Badrinath Ji*. Ed. by Anurag Goel. Delhi: B.S. Pravinder Prakashan.
- Tapovanam, Sri Swami (1990). *Wanderings in the Himalayas*. Mumbai: Central Chinmaya Mission Trust.
- Tobdan (1990). “Kinnaur – A Historical Survey”. In: *Himalaya: Past and Present*. Ed. by Maheshwar P. Joshi, Allen C. Fanger, and Charles W. Brown. Almora: Shree Almora Book Depot.
- (2008). *Cultural History of Western Trans-Himalayas. Bashahar Kinnaur. From earliest Times to AD 1948*. New Delhi: Aryan Books International.
- Traill, George William (1992a). “Statistical Report on the Bhotia Mehals of Kumaon”. In: *Himalaya: Past and Present*. Ed. by Maheshwar P. Joshi, Allen C. Fanger, and Charles W. Brown. Vol. 2. Almora: Almora Book Depot.
- (1992b). “Statistical Sketch of Kumaon”. In: *Himalaya: Past and Present*. Ed. by Maheshwar P. Joshi, Allen C. Fanger, and Charles W. Brown. 2. Almora: Almora Book Depot. Chap. 1, pp. 1–97.
- Tucci, Giuseppe (1956). *Preliminary Report on two scientific Expeditions in Nepal*. Roma: Istituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente.
- Turner, Sarah (2010). “Borderlands and border narratives: A longitudinal study of challenges and opportunities for local traders shaped by the Sino-Vietnamese border.” In: *Journal of Global History* 5.2, pp. 265–287.
- Turner, Victor (1973). “The Center out There: Pilgrim’s Goal”. In: *History of Religions* 12.3, pp. 191–230.

- U.P. Act no. XVI of 1939 (1939). *Shri Badrinath Kedarnath Temples Act*. URL: http://www.badarikedar.org/downloads/130548970931867500_BKTC%20ACT.pdf.
- Vaiṣṇav, Maheścandra Sārasvat (2010 [1926]). *Śrī Uttarākhaṇḍ Rahasya*. Śrīnagar: Maheścandra Sārasvat Vaiṣṇav.
- Van Buitenen, J.A.B. (1975). *The Mahābhārata*. Vol. 2. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Vansina, Jan (1985). *Oral Tradition as History*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Vedavyas, Shrimanmaharsi Krishna Dwaipayana (1960). *Skandapurānam*. Vol. XX. Gurumandal 2. Calcutta: Gopal.
- Veerendrakumar, M.P. (2009). *The Namboothiri Raavaljis of Badari*. URL: <http://www.namboothiri.com/articles/raavaljis-of-badari.htm>.
- Vitali, Roberto (1999). *Records of Tho.ling. A Literary and Visual Reconstruction of the "Mother" Monastery in Gu.ge*. Dharamshala: High Asia.
- Viyogi, Naval and Anawar Ansari (2010). *History of the Later Harappans and Shilpakara Movement*. Delhi: Kalpaz Publications.
- Walton, H.G. (1910). *British Garhwal a Gazetteer, being Volume XXXVI of the District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh*. Reprint 1994. New Delhi: Bhavana Books and Prints.
- Watters, Thomas (1904). *On Yuan Chwang's Travels in India. 629-645 A.D.* London: Royal Asiatic Society.
- Wessels, C. (1992 [1924]). *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia 1603-1721*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.
- White, Hayden (1973). *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- (1987). *The Content of the Form. Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bibliography

- White, Hayden (2010). *The Fiction of Narrative. Essays on History, Literature, and Theory 1957-2007*. Baltimore, London: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Whitmore, Luke (2010). "In Pursuit of Maheshvara: Understanding Kedarnath as Place and as Tirtha". Ph.D. Thesis, Emory University.
- Widorn, Verena and Gerald Kozicz (2012). "The Temple of Triloknath – A Buddhist Nāgara Temple in Lahul". In: *South Asian Studies* 28.1, pp. 15–35.
- Zoller, Claus Peter (1990). "A Preliminary Investigation into the Internal Building Up of the Numerals 4 and 5 in Mythology and Folk Religion of Western Garhwal". In: *Himalaya: Past and Present*. Ed. by Maheshwar P. Joshi, Allen C. Fanger, and Charles W. Brown. Vol. 1. Almora: Almora Book Depot, pp. 145–172.
- Zou, David Vumlallian and M. Satish Kumar (2011). "Mapping a Colonial Borderland: Objectifying the Geo-Body of India's Northeast." In: *The Journal of Asian Studies* 70.1, pp. 141–170.

Zusammenfassung

Diese Dissertation widmet sich dem Tempel Badrinath. Dieser, ist dem hinduistischen Gott Viṣṇu geweiht und befindet sich tief im westlichen Himalaya. Das Hauptanliegen bei der Betrachtung dieses Heiligtums und der dazugehörigen Pilgerschaft, richtet sich auf seine Repräsentation. Steht heute die Darstellung des Tempels als eines der wichtigsten Pilgerziele Südasiens im Vordergrund, so zeigt ein Blick in die Geschichte dieser Region das Bild einer lokalen Kultur die durch eine Vernetzung über den Himalaya hinweg gekennzeichnet war. Aufgabe dieser Arbeit ist es diese Dichotomie aufzuzeigen und die historische Wandlung von einem Bergheiligtum mit lokaler Bedeutung, in eines der wichtigsten Pilgerzentren des Hinduismus aufzuzeigen.

Die wichtigsten Zugänge zur Erforschung dieses Tempels, finden sich in den unterschiedlichen Narrativen, die seine Entstehung und Bedeutung behandeln und des Weiteren, die über den Sommer stattfindenden Prozessionen und Feste. Diese werden, zusammen mit der Forschungsfrage und dem Stand der Forschung in der Einleitung erstmals vorgestellt. Nach einem Überblick über den Pilgerort und seine nähere Umgebung, wird auf seine geschichtliche Entwicklung, auch im Zusammenhang mit den politischen Gegebenheiten eingegangen.

Bevor die religiösen Spezialisten in einzelnen Abschnitten detailliert vorgestellt werden, wird die Sicht auf den Schrein aus der Perspektive des orthodoxen Hinduismus und der Sanskrit-Literatur erörtert. In weiterer Folge wird im Besonderen auf die Figur des südindischen Gelehrten Shankara eingegangen, der einigen Narrativen zufolge den Tempel wiederbelebt hatte, nachdem dieser in den Einflussbereich

Zusammenfassung

der Buddhisten gekommen war.

Zusammen mit den verschiedenen Prozessionen, die eine gute Sicht auf die lokalen Traditionen ermöglichen, setzt sich die Studie mit der Frage nach der regionalen Bedeutung dieses Pilgerortes auseinander. Dies betrifft zum einen die Bedeutung Badrinaths als Ausgangspunkt für den Handel zwischen Indien und Tibet, aber auch seine Rolle für die Herrscherhäuser dieser Region und in weiterer Folge deren Legitimation. Das letzte Kapitel ist einer Schlussfolgerung über die behandelten Themenkreise gewidmet und setzt diese im Sinne der Theorien von Kulturtransfer und *entangled history* in eine neue Perspektive.

Abstract

This study investigates the various historical, cultural and religious layers of the Himalayan pilgrimage shrine known today as Badrinath. The shrine, which is located in the Garhwal Himalayas and dedicated to the god Vishnu, represents an orthodox Hindu pilgrimage destination. However, in the past, it was also a main hub for trans-Himalayan trade and thus closely connected to the surrounding kingdoms. The study investigates the history of this temple on the basis of narratives, processions and accounts of early travelers, and the function of the shrine today is examined through accounts of the British administration, court records and extensive fieldwork. It gives an introduction and general overview of this pilgrimage center and its surroundings and then deals with the temple's past, considering this especially in the context of its connection to Western Tibet. Badrinath is then portrayed by help of two perspectives: first from the outside, which correlates the shrine with Sanskrit scriptures and connects its foundation to the South Indian philosopher and saint Shankara; and then a description of the local priesthood and rituals serves as transition towards the significance of the temple for the local population. This part focuses not only on the trans-Himalayan traders known as Bhotiyas but also regards Badrinath in terms of its importance in the legitimation of the rulers of Garhwal. Many gods are worshipped in this remote valley, but most of them are hardly noticed by the pilgrims and their significance lies with the local population and thus only becomes evident during festivals and processions in their honor. The study concludes with a summary of findings, which are considered in light of the concepts of "cultural transfer" and "entangled histories," and closes with the attempt

Abstract

at a hypothetical history of Badrinath.