Demographic and Social Aspects of Population in Kumaon Division of Uttarakhand, India

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Abstract: *The Kumaon region, a historically and culturally significant part of India, has unique demographic and social characteristics that influence its development. The region, named after the mythological Kurmanchal, is known for its diverse population distribution, growth trends, and density patterns. The study, based on secondary data sources such as census reports and statistical handbooks, examines key demographic aspects, including literacy rates, sex ratio, urbanization, and religious composition. Findings indicate that while the literacy rate has improved over the years, a gender gap persists. The sex ratio is relatively higher in mountainous districts due to male migration, and urbanization levels remain low compared to the state average. Additionally, the study highlights the transhumance practices of the Bhotiya community, emphasizing their seasonal migration and traditional herbal knowledge. This demographic analysis provides valuable insights into regional planning, policy-making, and social welfare initiatives for Kumaon's sustainable development.*

Keywords: Kumaon, Demographic, Social, Population, Transhumance.

1. Introduction

The Kumaon region is a significant part of Indian civilization. According to mythology, 'Kurmanchal' is named after Lord Vishnu's incarnation as a tortoise (Mittal, 1986). The term "Kumaon" originates from "Kurmanchal". The Kurmanchal is derived from two words: "Kurm" (tortoise) and "Aanchal" (mountain). As time passes, people became accustomed to using the word Kumaon instead of Kurmanchal (Melkani & Kumar, 2021). Demographic aspects are related to the distribution, density and growth rate of the population. The population distribution refers to the pattern of spacing individual while density expresses the relation between the total land and population. The analysis of demographic aspects such as population density, distribution and growth, helps in the regional economic development (Ivanov, 2018). It also helps in the policy making and social welfare. The social aspects such as sex ratio, literacy rate, urbanization and migration are also important aspect of a population. The urbanization denotes the level of development as well as transition of a society from traditional to modern (Kumar & Kalotra, 2015). Transhumance shows close knot to natural environment and their knowledge about herbal medicine are excellent (Mehta et al., 2013). The sex ratio is a general indication that shows the realities that are woven throughout society (Ramaiah et al., 2011).

2. Study Area

Kumaon division, adorned with natural beauty, picturesque valleys and religious and mythological places, is situated in the eastern half of Uttarakhand state. Towards the north are the borders of Tibet; in the east it is bounded by Nepal; in the west direction are the borders of Chamoli, Pauri Garhwal and Bijnor districts and in the south direction are the borders of Moradabad, Rampur, Bareilly and Pilibhit districts of Uttar Pradesh. Geographically, the extent of division is between 28'7° to 30° north latitude and 78'7° to 81°1° east longitude. The total geographical area of Kumaon division is 21034 square km, which is 39.33 percent of the total area of Uttarakhand state. Kumaon is a geographical unit with inherent natural boundaries. In the north, a watershed divides it from the Tibet and river kali borders Nepal. It is separated from Chamoli and PauriGarhwal by the high transverse mountain spurs and southern boundary defined by the Tarai belt. In the southwest and south portion, it merges with the plain region of Bhabhar and Terai.
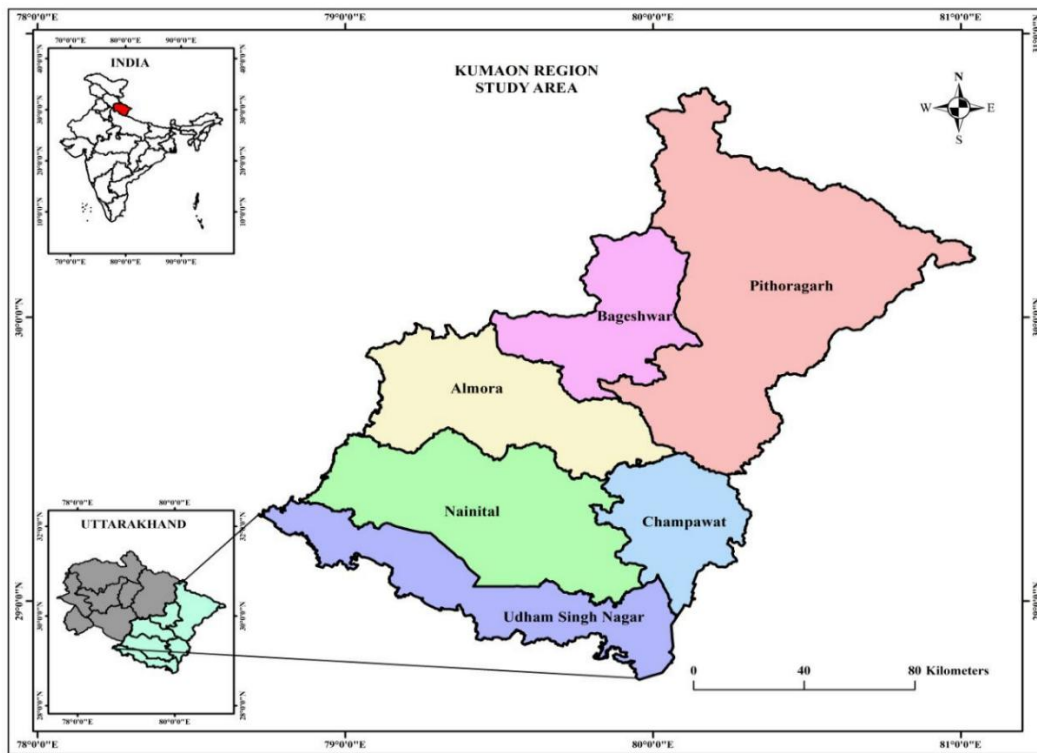
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Figure 1: Location Map of Kumaon Division

3. Methodology

The study is primarily based on the secondary data published from government agencies, various reports, and research papers. The data about various demographic and social aspects was collected and compiled from the district census handbook published under the Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India. Additionally, the information was extracted from the Office of the Commissioner, Kumaon Division's Statistical Handbook, 2022. Microsoft Excel has been used to analyze and interpret the gathered data, and QGIS software has been used to create a variety of thematic maps.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Population Distribution, Growth and Density (2011 Census):

According to the 2011 Indian census, the overall population of the Kumaon Division is 4228998, whereas the entire population of Uttarakhand is 10086292. The total male population of the Kumaon Division is 2138287, which is 50.56 percent, and the total female population is about 2090711, which is 49.43 percent. The Kumaon Division is home to 41.93 percent of the state's population. Pithoragarh is largest district in terms of area in the region, whereas Udham Singh Nagar is the most populous. Nainital and Udham Singh Nagar are two major population clusters in the region due to the migration of people from hilly districts. Champawat is the district with smallest land area and population in the division. The population density of the Kumaon Division is 201 persons per square kilometre, which is higher than the state's population density of 189 persons per square kilometre. Udham Singh Nagar has the highest population density of 649 persons per square kilometer and Pithoragarh district has lowest density of 68 persons per square kilometer. The decadal growth rate of Almora (-1.64%), Bageshwar (5.15%), Champawat (15.63%), and Pithoragarh (4.58%) is lower than the state (18.81%). Nainital (25.13%) and Udham Singh Nagar (33.45%) are the only districts whose growth rate is higher than the state's average. Almora has the lowest growth rate (minus 1.64) in the division as well as in the state.

The population of Kumaon division has been rising continuously since the census of 1901. However, the growth of the population shows an abrupt rise after 1951 due to better living conditions after independence.

Table 1: Population Distribution, Growth and Density of Kumaon Division

Sr. No	Name of District	Geographical area (Sq km)	Total Population	Male population	Female Population	Population Density	Population Growth (2001-2011)
1	Pithoragarh	7090	483439	239306	244133	68	4.58
2	Bageshwar	2246	259898	124326	135572	116	5.15
3	Almora	3139	622506	291081	331425	198	-1.64
4	Champawat	1766	259648	131125	128523	147	15.63
5	Nainital	4251	954605	493666	460939	225	25.13
6	U.S Nagar	2542	1648902	858783	790119	649	33.45
	Total	21034	4228998	2138287	2090711	201	13.61

Source: Data collected from district census handbook, 2011.

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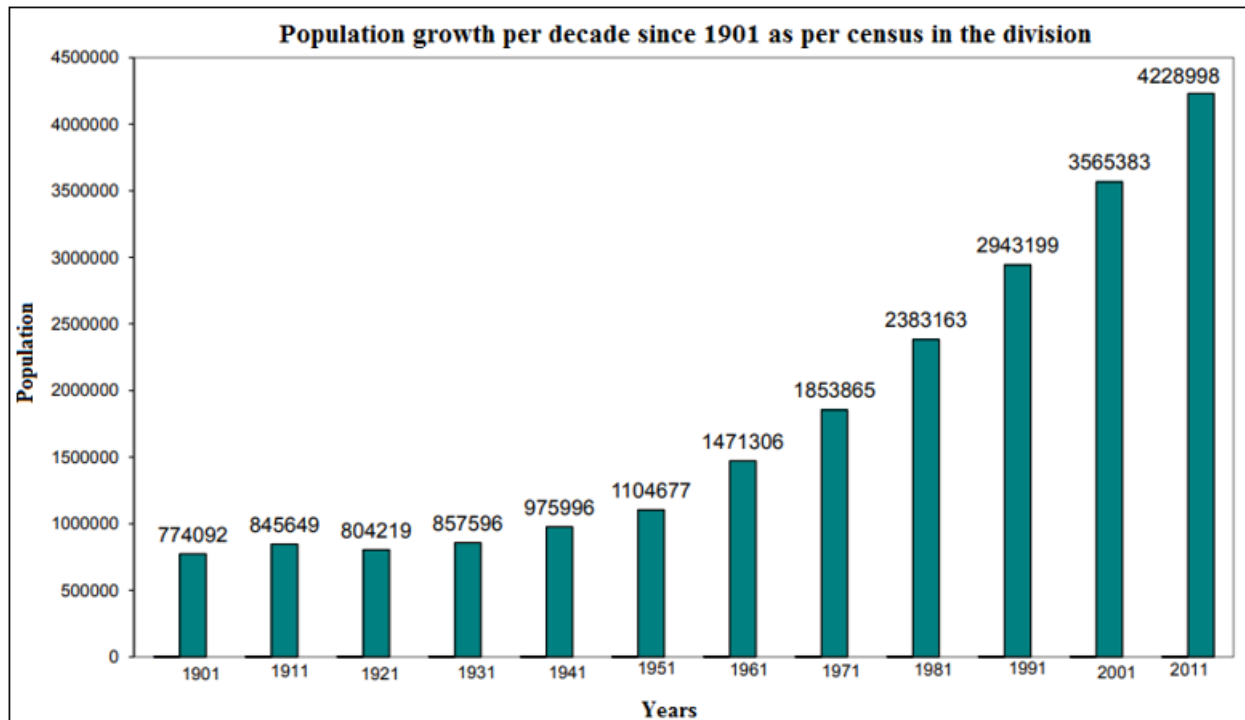
Figure 2: Decade-wise Population Growth in Kumaon Division
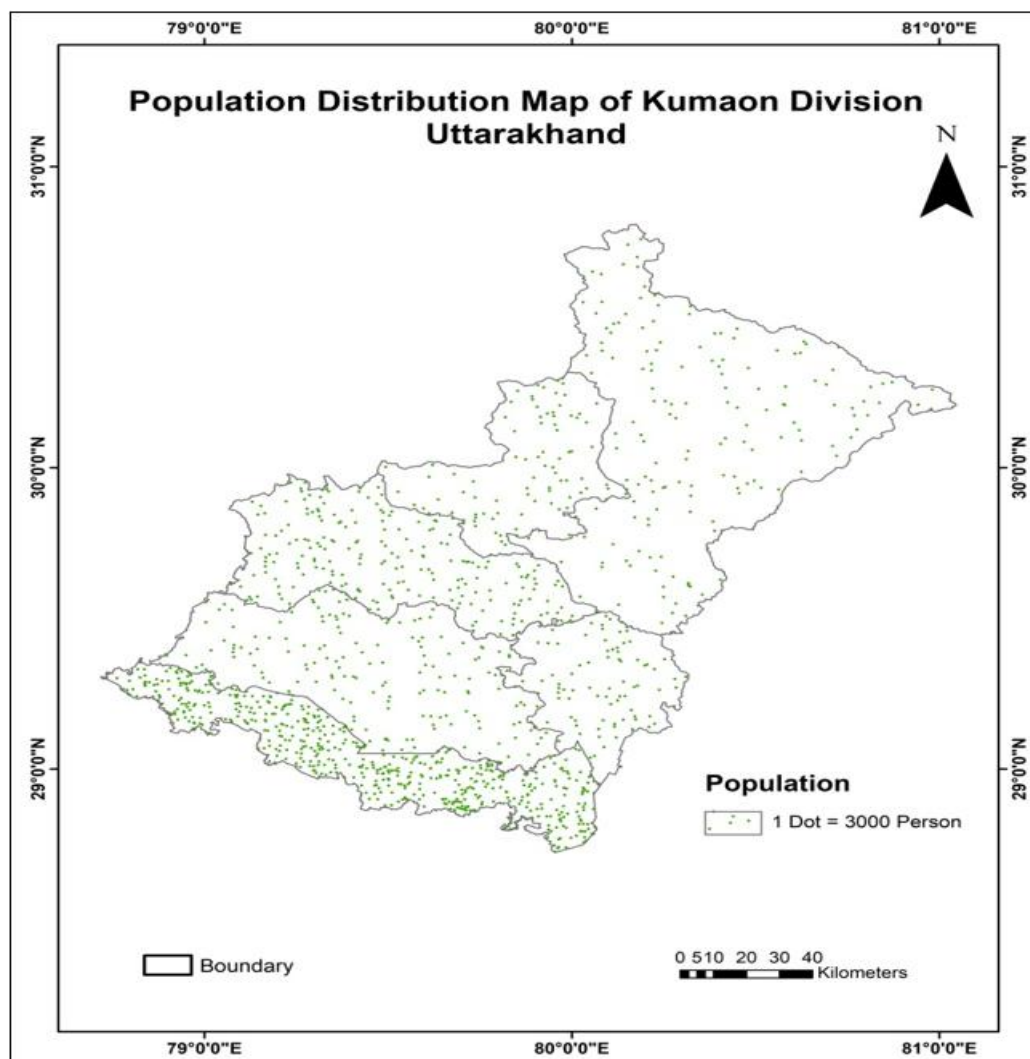Source : Statistical Handbook Kumaon Division 2022

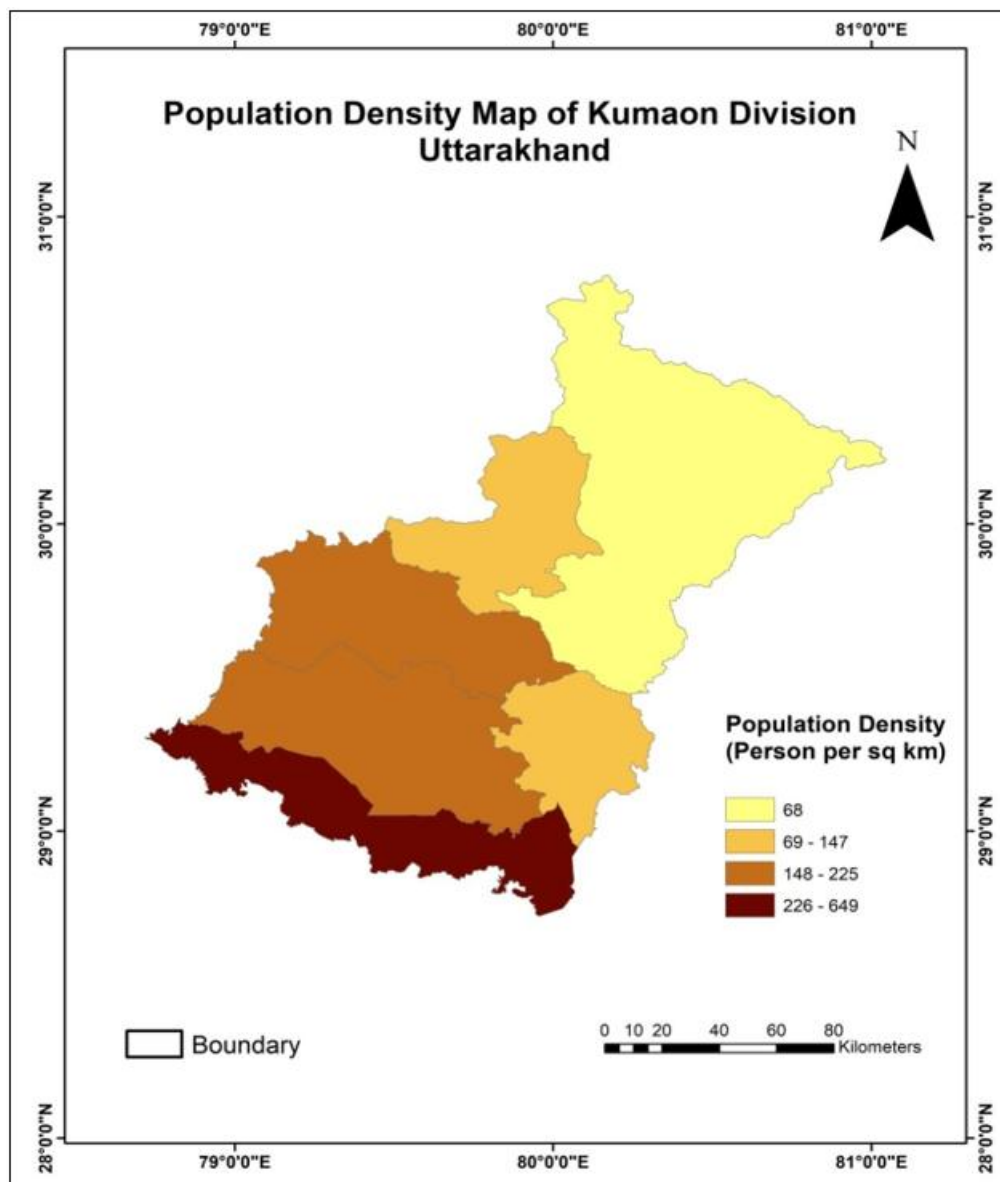**Figure 3:** Population Distribution

Figure 4: Population Density

4.2 Literacy (2011 Census)

The literacy rate of the Kumaon division has improved in the last two decades, from 58.25% in 1991 to 78.52% in 2011. The literacy rate of the Kumaon division has improved in the last two decades, from 58.25% in 1991 to 78.52% in 2011.

However, the wide gap between the male (87.36% in 2011) and female literacy (69.61% in 2011) rates still exists. Nainital (83.88%) registered the highest, and Udham Singh Nagar (73.10%) has the lowest literacy rates. Almora, Bageshwar, Champawat, and Pithoragarh have literacy rates of 80.47%, 80.01%, 79.83%, and 82.25%, respectively.

Table 2: District-wise Literacy Level in Kumaon Division

Year	Literate Population			Percentage of Literacy		
	Male	**Female**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**	**Total**
1991	527862	301152	829014	73.81	42.54	58.25
2001	1248595	886714	2135309	82.67	59.66	71.21
2011	1605092	1268503	2873595	87.36	69.61	78.52
District (2011)						
Pithoragarh	189623	155927	345550	92.78	72.29	82.25
Almora	231604	204893	436497	92.86	69.93	80.47
Naunital	385779	310721	696500	90.07	77.29	83.88
U.S. Nagar	598525	439314	1037839	81.09	64.45	73.10
Bageshwar	97546	81937	179483	92.33	69.03	80.01
Champawat	102015	75711	177726	91.61	68.05	79.83
Kumaon Division	1605092	1268503	2873595	87.36	69.61	78.52

Source: - Statistical Handbook Kumaon Division, 2022

4.3 Sex Ratio (2011 Census)

According to the 2011 census, the sex ratio of the Kumaon division is 978, which is higher than the average sex ratio at the national (933) and state (963) levels. Almora (1,139), Bageshwar (1,090), and Pithoragarh (1020) districts have a sex ratio greater than 1000, while Champawat (980) and Nainital (934) have sex ratios higher than the national average. Udham Singh Nagar (920) is the only district in the division whose sex ratio is lower than the national average. The mountainous districts of Kumaon Division have a higher sex ratio as compared to the plains because the male population generally migrates for jobs.

Table 3: District-wise Sex Ratio in Kumaon Division

Sr. No	Districts	Sex Ratio (Number of females per 1000 males)		
		Urban	Rural	Total
1	Almora	848	1,177	1,139
2	Bageshwar	927	1,097	1,090
3	Champawat	890	997	980
4	Nainital	912	948	934
5	Pithoragarh	913	1,039	1,020
6	U.S.Nagar	903	930	920

Source: - Data compiled from district census handbooks, 2011

4.4 Urbanisation (2011 Census):

The Kumaon division has a relatively low urban population (26.90 percent) as compared to the overall urban population in the state (30.23%). Nainital and Udham Singh Nagar have the highest urban populations of 38.94% and 35.58%, respectively; on the other hand, Bageshwar has the least urban population of 3.49%. Almora (10.1%), Champawat (14.77%), and Pithoragarh (14.40%) have relatively low shares in the urban population of the region. Bageshwar has a low level of urbanization because of its remoteness, sparse population, harsh environment, and lack of industrial growth.

Table 4: District-wise Urbanisation in Kumaon Division

Sr. No	Districts/ Division/ State	Urban Population			Percentage of Urban Population
		Males	Females	Total	
1	Almora	33,722	28,592	62,314	10.01
2	Bageshwar	4,711	4,368	9,079	3.49
3	Champawat	20,283	18,060	38,343	14.77
4	Nainital	194,409	177,325	371,734	38.94
5	Pithoragarh	36,376	33,229	69,605	14.40
6	U.S. Nagar	308,313	278,447	586,760	35.58
7	Kuamon Division	597814	540021	1137835	26.90
8	Uttarakhand	1618731	1430607	3049338	30.23

Source: - Data Collected from District Census Handbook & Statistical Abstract Uttarakhand 2015-16

4.5 Religion

Kumaon Division is home to various ethnic groups or sects that follow their own folk forms of worship. The religious composition of Kumaon shows diversity; Hindus (82.94%) constitute the majority of the population in the division, followed by Muslims (12.22%), Sikhs (4.28%), Christians (0.37%), Buddhists (0.04%), and Jains (0.03%). A small number of people also belong to the categories of other religions (0.01%) and no religion (0.11%).

Table 5: Religious Composition of Kumaon Division

Sr. No	Major Religion	Population			Percentage of total population
		Total	Rural	Urban	
1	Hindu	3507596	2705234	802362	82.94
2	Muslim	516909	212495	304414	12.22
3	Christian	15718	8261	7457	0.37
4	Sikh	181085	160079	21006	4.28
5	Buddhist	1587	953	634	0.04
6	Jain	1173	357	816	0.03
7	Others	398	300	98	0.01
8	No religion	4532	348	1048	0.11
	Total	4228998	3091163	1137835	100.00

Source: Statistical Handbook Kumaon Division 2022

4.6 Transhumance (Bhotiyas):

Transhumance living in mountainous region performs the seasonal migration of humans and cattle from one elevation to another in search of grass.
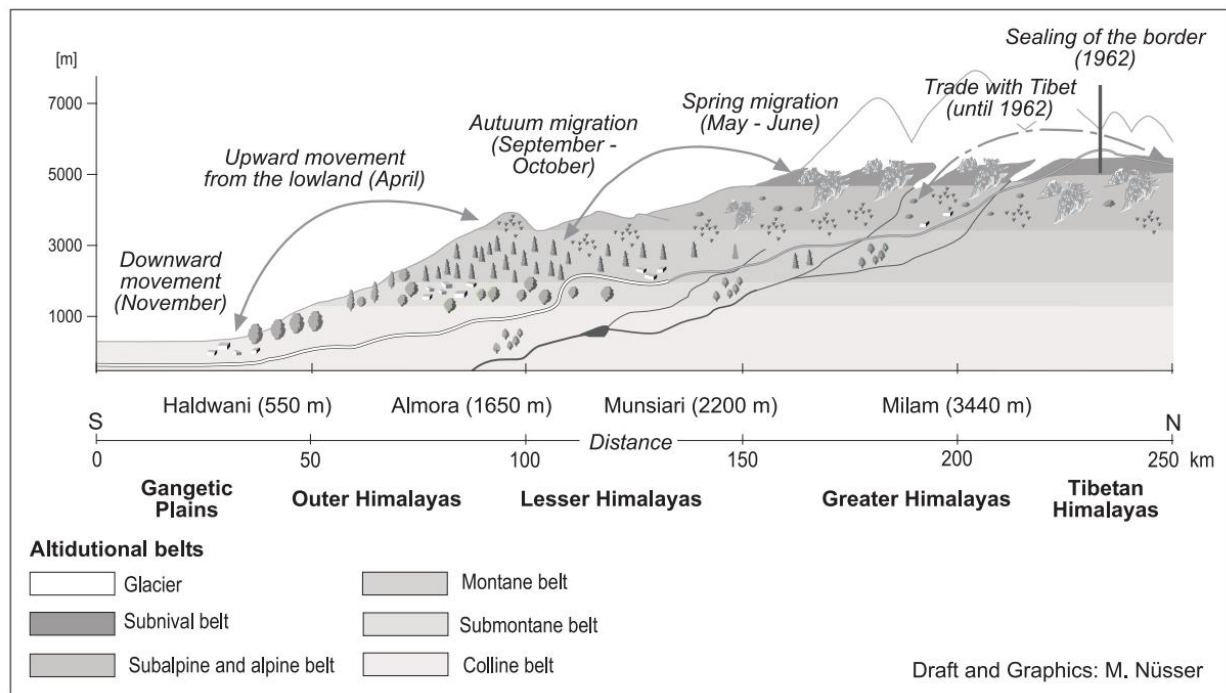
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Figure 5: Vertical Zonation and Traditional Mobility Patterns in Kumaon Himalaya
Source: - Vertical Zonation and Traditional Mobility Patterns in Kumaon Himalaya (Nusser and Gerwin, 2008)

Uttarakhand is home to three distinct tribal communities, including the Jadh and Marchhas who live in the Garhwal area and the Bhotiyas in Kumaon. These indigenous peoples were traders between India and Tibet, but their trade was discontinued in 1962 owing to the Sino-Indian conflict. The Bhotiyas of Kumaon are the largest pastoral community, practicing agriculture, pastoralism, and a limited commerce in medicinal herbs and woollen items. Bhotiyas migrate across several ecological zones in the Kumaon Himalaya, from the plains of Bhabhar to the glaciated parts of Himalayas. The herbal based traditional practice of Bhotiya tribe gaining importance due to no side effect (Mehta et al., 2013)

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