



ISSN: 3049-2017
 IJMh 2025; 2(1): 82-86
 © 2025 IJMh
 www.themultijournal.com

Received: 15-02-2025
 Accepted: 24-02-2025
 Publish : 26-02-2025

Dr. Bhuwan Tiwari

Sr. Assistant Professor,
 Political Science,
 Pt. Purnanand Tiwari Govt. Degree,
 College Doshapani,
 Nainital, Uttarakhand

Anita Negi

Assistant Professor,
 History,
 Pt. Purnanand Tiwari Govt. Degree-
 College Doshapani,
 Nainital, Uttarakhand

Shubhankar Shukla

Assistant Professor,
 Public Administration,
 Uttarakhand Open University,
 Haldwani, Nainital

Correspondence:

Dr. Bhuwan Tiwari

Sr. Assistant Professor,
 Political Science,
 Pt. Purnanand Tiwari Govt. Degree,
 College Doshapani,
 Nainital, Uttarakhand

A Comprehensive Analysis Of The Royal Dynasties Of Uttarakhand And Their Administrative Systems

Dr. Bhuwan Tiwari, Anita Negi, Shubhankar Shukla

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20258084>

The central Himalayan region of Uttarakhand, historically referred to in Puranic literature as *Kedarkhand* and *Manaskhand*, possesses a deeply rooted institutional heritage. Surrounded by high mountain peaks, deep valleys, and strategic trans-Himalayan trade routes, its unique geography directly shaped its socio-political, military, and administrative systems.

Historically divided into the two prominent cultural sub-regions of Kumaon and Garhwal, Uttarakhand witnessed the rise and fall of several foundational dynasties. From the tribal and clan-based confederacies of the ancient Kunindas to the expansive, monumental rule of the Katyuris and the highly structured, defensive feudal setups of the Chand and Panwar kingdoms, governance in this region evolved as a direct adaptation to mountainous isolation, scattered settlements, and strategic border management.

This analysis details the operational systems, political structures, revenue frameworks, judicial institutions, military setups, and cultural expressions of these dominant dynasties, capturing the central theme and spirit of the region's historical narrative.

1. The Kuninda Dynasty (c. 2nd Century BCE – 3rd Century CE)

Historical Emergence and Identity

The Kuninda Dynasty marks the formal transition from fragmented, scattered clan-based tribal settlements to organized, structured political authority within the central Himalayas. Ruling parts of present-day Kumaon, Garhwal, and Himachal Pradesh, the Kunindas unified the upper valleys of major river networks, including the Ganga, Yamuna, and Sharda.

Because written local records from this period are limited, numismatic evidence and stone inscriptions serve as the primary sources for understanding their political economy. Kuninda coins feature symbols associated with both Hinduism and Buddhism, illustrating a pluralistic society that engaged with the wider commercial networks of northern India and Central Asia.

Administrative Framework

The central governance of the Kunindas was built on a flexible monarchical principle. The king sat at the apex of the administrative hierarchy, serving as the supreme commander, chief dispenser of justice, and guardian of the socio-religious order. However, due to the geographic barriers of the terrain and the difficulty of rapid communication across deep valleys, the central authority operated flexibly. Rulers delegated local administrative responsibilities to trusted regional officers, local chiefs, and community advisors who represented the crown in distant valleys.

At the grassroots level, the foundation of Kuninda stability rested on autonomous village administration. Because populations were isolated by physical boundaries, individual settlements managed their own internal affairs. Village elders and community headmen acted as crucial intermediaries between rural producers and the royal court. Decisions regarding land allocation, community welfare, and the maintenance of essential irrigation channels were reached collectively through councils or village assemblies.

Revenue and Fiscal Policies

The Kuninda state treasury relied on a balanced mix of agrarian extraction, forest management, and trade duties. Agriculture formed the core of the domestic economy, and land revenue was collected from terrace and seasonal valley farmers primarily in kind, as agricultural produce. Crucially, the Kunindas leveraged their position along high-altitude mountain passes to control the trade routes connecting the Indo-Gangetic plains with Tibet. The state systematically levied duties and tolls on traders transporting high-value commodities like salt, wool, borax, medicinal herbs, and metals. Forests also served as an active source of state revenue through the regulated collection of timber, wild produce, and aromatic plants. This moderate, trade-supported fiscal policy maintained economic stability without placing an excessive tax burden on the rural population.

Justice and Military Organization

The judicial system during the Kuninda era prioritized social harmony over rigid, codified legal penal systems. While the king remained the final court of appeal for serious offenses and political disputes, everyday legal matters were settled locally by village councils and elders. Disputes regarding land boundaries, water rights, and family issues were evaluated according to customary traditions and localized religious concepts of morality, with punishments focused primarily on restoring community balance. Sustaining this political system required a specialized defensive military apparatus. Given the natural protection provided by steep cliffs and river gorges, the Kunindas had little need for a massive, cost-heavy standing army. Instead, they maintained an efficient, agile force consisting of infantry, archers, and regional hill warriors who were experts in high-altitude warfare. In times of external threat or regional conflict, local tribal chiefs and clan leaders mobilized their personal militias to reinforce the royal forces, securing internal trade corridors and safeguarding the kingdom's borders for centuries.

2. The Katyuri Dynasty (c. 7th Century CE – 11th Century CE)

Unification and Political Hegemony

The rise of the Katyuri Dynasty represented a major milestone in the political development of the Central Himalayas. Emerging after the decline of the Kunindas and subsequent local powers, the Katyuris filled a long-standing political vacuum. They replaced fragmented, clan-based chiefdoms with a unified regional kingdom that extended across Kumaon, parts of Garhwal, and western Nepal.

Initially headquartered near Joshimath, the dynasty later moved its capital to Kartikeyapura (located in the fertile Baijnath Valley of modern-day Bageshwar). This shift allowed them to directly oversee both productive agricultural valley lands and the lucrative trade networks running toward Tibet.

Institutional Structure of Kingship

The Katyuri administrative model centered on a highly formalized system of hereditary monarchy. Grounded in classical North Indian Puranic traditions, the Katyuri kings viewed themselves as the earthly protectors of *dharma*, social stability, and territorial integrity. The king wielded absolute political, judicial, and military authority, but operated with the counsel of a formal court that included ministers, family advisors, royal priests (*purohitas*), and chief military commanders (*senapatis*). As verified by recovered copper-plate grants, all significant policy decisions—ranging from territorial defense to land distribution and temple endowments—required direct royal sanction.

To administer their vast mountain territories, the Katyuris introduced a semi-decentralized provincial administration. The kingdom was divided into distinct administrative zones and strategic border provinces, which were placed under the control of local governors, feudal chiefs, and hereditary family leaders. These regional officials were granted a degree of local autonomy. In return, they were strictly required to maintain internal law and order, secure major pilgrimage and trade routes, collect regional revenue, and provide military levies whenever the king went to war.

Rural Governance and Agrarian Management

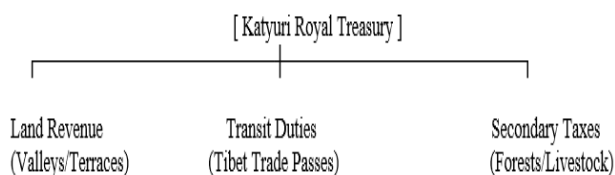
Despite this top-down provincial structure, individual villages continued to function as the primary socio-economic units of the state. The Katyuri crown preserved local autonomy by allowing village communities to handle their own day-to-day affairs. Rural governance was overseen by an appointed village headman (*gram pradhan* or *sayana*), selected from influential local families. These headmen acted as structural links between the rural population and provincial tax collectors. They managed the extraction of land taxes, coordinated the collective repair of community irrigation channels, and resolved minor property disputes.

Forests, communal grazing pastures, and water sources were managed collectively by village councils, keeping rural economic life stable even during times of political change at the capital.

Revenue Framework and Religious Land Grants

The Katyuri state treasury was supported by a well-organized fiscal apparatus. Land revenue served as the state's main source of income, with taxes levied on staple valley crops like rice, wheat, barley, and millets. Depending on regional accessibility and cash flow, farmers paid these taxes either in physical produce or currency. The crown also generated revenue by taxing secondary economic activities, including livestock grazing, forest timber extraction, and artisan workshops.

Furthermore, because the Katyuris controlled major Himalayan passes, they collected substantial customs duties and transit tolls from trans-Himalayan merchants.



A defining feature of the Katyuri political economy was the institutionalization of *Agrahara* land grants. Rulers frequently issued royal decrees donating tax-free tracts of cultivated land to Brahmin scholars and major temple complexes. These grants served a dual purpose: they brought virgin forest lands under active terrace cultivation, and they helped legitimize royal authority by weaving the monarchy into the sacred geography of the region.

Judiciary and Military Formations

The Katyuri judicial system integrated classical Hindu jurisprudence with local customary laws. The king was the supreme legal authority, holding regular court sessions to decide complex land ownership disputes, major criminal cases, and treason charges. For everyday civil disputes within rural communities, the state relied on village councils and elder mediation. Brahmin jurists interpreted religious legal texts (*Shastras*) at higher administrative levels, while local temples often served as neutral grounds for dispute resolution, using religious oaths to maintain social order.

The dynasty's expansive borders were defended by a disciplined, well-organized military. The army consisted mainly of agile infantry forces recruited directly from local hill clans. These soldiers were equipped with traditional weapons like broadswords, bows, spears, and shields, and were highly trained in asymmetric mountain warfare.

To counter potential invasions from the plains or rival hill states, the Katyuris built a network of stone fortifications (*kottas*) at strategic valley entrance points and along high mountain passes. This defensive system successfully protected their trade corridors and internal stability for centuries.

Socio-Cultural and Architectural Impact

The Katyuri era is widely considered a golden age for art and architecture in the central Himalayas. The kings used their wealth to patronize a major revival of Puranic Hinduism, actively supporting Shaivite and Vaishnavite traditions. They funded the construction of massive stone temple complexes, including the famous Baijnath Temple group, the sacred Jageshwar shrine complex, and the early structures at Katarmal.

Built in the classic *Nagara* style of North Indian temple architecture, these monuments feature intricate stone carvings, advanced iconography, and heavy slate roofing designed to withstand severe mountain winters. By blending regional mountain artistic styles with classic north Indian designs, the Katyuris established a cultural identity that continues to define Uttarakhand's heritage.

3. The Chand Dynasty (c. 10th/11th Century CE – 1790 CE)

Rise and Centralization in Kumaon

Following the internal fragmentation and eventual collapse of the central Katyuri kingdom, Kumaon fractured into numerous small, competing principalities ruled by local clan leaders. In the 10th and 11th centuries, the Chand Dynasty emerged to gradually reunify the region. Established by Som Chand, a Rajput prince who originally migrated from Prayag and built his first fortified seat at Champawat, the dynasty systematically consolidated its power. Over several generations, the Chand kings absorbed competing local fiefdoms.

By the 16th century, King Kalyan Chand made the strategic decision to shift the royal capital to Almora. This central location allowed the dynasty to build a highly organized, bureaucratic administrative state that governed Kumaon for centuries.

Bureaucracy and the Council of Ministers

The Chand administrative system combined a centralized monarchy with an organized, functional bureaucracy. At the top sat the king, who held complete executive, military, and judicial authority. To manage the expanding state, the Chand rulers created an institutionalized Council of Ministers. This body was led by a Prime Minister (*Dewan* or *Chief Advisor*) who coordinated overall administration and supervised the execution of royal decrees.

Specific ministerial portfolios were assigned to manage key state functions:

- **Revenue Collection:** Overseeing tax assessments and the royal treasury.
- **Military Affairs:** Managing army readiness and border defense.
- **Foreign Relations:** Conducting diplomacy with neighboring kingdoms.
- **Religious Endowments:** Managing royal temple lands and charitable grants.

Brahmin scholars, record-keepers, and traditional astrologers held prominent positions within this court bureaucracy, ensuring that state policies aligned with traditional religious legal principles.

Territorial and District Administration

To maintain control over distant mountain valleys, the Chand kings divided Kumaon into a clear hierarchy of administrative units:

[Central Crown Capital - Almora]



[Provinces] (Led by Governors/Royal Princes)



[Parganas] (Led by Bureaucratic Officials)



[Autonomous Villages] (Led by Headmen / Sayanas)

Provinces were typically placed under the direct control of royal princes or high-ranking military nobles, who were tasked with maintaining regional security and border

defense. These provinces were subdivided into *parganas* (districts), which were managed by appointed bureaucrats responsible for auditing agricultural land assets and monitoring trade routes.

At the local level, village communities retained an important degree of self-governance. Day-to-day rural life was managed by local headmen (*daftaris*, *pradhans*, or *sayanas*), who resolved minor property conflicts and worked alongside state revenue officials during annual tax assessments.

Revenue Extraction and Agrarian Reforms

The fiscal stability of the Chand state depended on a systematic and rigorous revenue infrastructure. Because agriculture was the backbone of the economy, the Chand kings introduced comprehensive land grading systems. Cultivated fields were classified based on soil quality, water accessibility, and crop yields, allowing the state to set precise tax rates. Revenue officials (*adhikaris*) kept detailed land rolls, collecting taxes from valley and terrace farmers in produce, cash, or compulsory labor services (*bégari*).

To maximize the agrarian tax base, the state actively funded infrastructure projects. The crown built stone-lined irrigation canals (*guls*), hillside water storage tanks, and protected communal stepwells (*naulas* and *dharas*) to ensure reliable water access for valley crops like rice, wheat, and pulses.

CHAND DYNASTY REVENUE SOURCES

- Land Revenue (Graded by soil fertility)
 - Forest Tolls (Timber and medicinal herbs)
 - Transit Duties (Tibet-border trade routes)
 - Pilgrim Taxes (Lowland travelers to mountain sites)
 - Livestock Duties (Taxed per head of sheep/goats)
-

The state treasury also diversified its income by taxing secondary economic activities. It levied duties on timber extraction, forest products, livestock grazing herds, and local artisan markets. Additionally, the dynasty collected substantial revenue from transit duties on trans-Himalayan trade and taxes on lowland pilgrims visiting major mountain shrines.

The Judicial Process

The Chand legal framework operated through a dual system that balanced formal royal courts with traditional community consensus. The king served as the court of final appeal, personally deciding complex property disputes, inter-clan rivalries, and serious criminal cases at the capital.

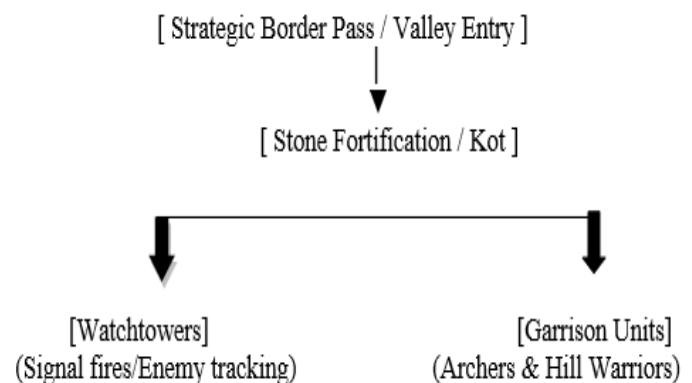
To deter crime, the state imposed strict penalties, including heavy fines, the confiscation of ancestral lands, imprisonment, and physical punishments tailored to the offense.

For everyday civil matters, the state relied on decentralized village administration. Local headmen and village elder councils resolved minor disputes using long-standing

customs and community mediation. If a case lacked clear physical evidence, the judicial system occasionally turned to traditional trial by ordeal at local temples, using religious oaths before regional deities to settle deadlocked legal conflicts.

Military Systems and Border Fortifications

Faced with regular border threats from the Panwar rulers of Garhwal, local revolts, and eventually the expanding Gorkha kingdom, the Chand Dynasty maintained a large, disciplined military force. The army featured a standing core of infantry, archers, swordsmen, and small cavalry units, supported by specialized mountain fighters recruited from the high-altitude border clans. These soldiers were experts in mountain warfare, using their deep knowledge of narrow river passes, thick forests, and steep ridgelines to ambush invading forces.

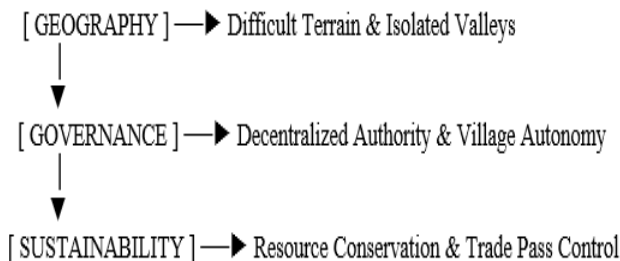


Defensive strategy relied heavily on stone fortifications built at key geographic choke points. Famous strongholds like the Almora Fort and various border outposts featured high stone walls and deep lookouts. These positions were equipped with signal towers that used fires or drums to track enemy troop movements across the valleys.

By placing military commanders (*Kiledars*) in charge of these regional strongholds, the dynasty successfully maintained internal security, protected merchant caravans, and defended Kumaon's independence for generations.

Conclusion: The Integrated Administrative Spirit of Uttarakhand

The dynastic history of Uttarakhand demonstrates how a region's political institutions can adapt to a challenging physical environment. From the ancient Kunindas to the medieval Katyuris and Chands, governance in the central Himalayas successfully balanced centralized authority with local autonomy. Rather than attempting to impose rigid, flat-land administrative models over a fragmented terrain, these rulers built flexible, decentralized networks that respected the independence of isolated valley communities.



This distinct administrative framework was supported by two main pillars:

- 1. Sacred Geography:** Rulers used extensive temple construction and religious land grants to unify diverse local clans and build political legitimacy.
- 2. Economic Adaptation:** States focused on managing trans-Himalayan trade routes, building hillside terrace infrastructure, and protecting communal forest resources.

By blending formal royal authority with flexible village governance, these dynasties preserved a resilient political culture and an independent regional identity that shaped the history of the Indian Himalayan frontier.

Key Institutional Comparison across Dynasties

Administrative Component (prashasnik tatva)	The Kuninda Dynasty (Kuninda Rajvansh)	The Katyuri Dynasty (Katyuri Rajvansh)	The Chand Dynasty (Chand Rajvansh)
Primary Seat of Power <i>(Satta ka mukhya kendra)</i>	Trans-river valleys (Yamuna/Ganga/Sharda)	Joshimath & Kartikeyapura (Bajjnath)	Champawat and Almora
Central Authority Model <i>(Kendriya satta ka svaroop)</i>	Flexible monarchy; heavily reliant on local chief alliances	Formalized Puranic hereditary monarchy	Bureaucratic state with a formal Council of Ministers
Territorial Management <i>(Khetriya prabandhan)</i>	Valley chiefdoms and tribal confederacies	Semi-decentralized zones under feudal governors	Structured hierarchy (Provinces, Parganas, Villages)
Primary Revenue Streams <i>(Aay ke mukhya srot)</i>	High-value transit duties, forest goods, basic crop sharing	Graded agrarian taxes, valley crop surpluses, pass tolls	Highly structured land assessments, commercial transit tolls, pilgrim taxes

Local/Grassroots Governance <i>(Sthaneya/Zamini shasan)</i>	Highly autonomous village councils and elder assemblies	Intermediary village headmen with significant freedom	Appointed district officials working with hereditary village heads
Judicial Philosophy <i>(Nyayik vichardhara)</i>	Customary mediation focused on community balance	Hybrid system using North Indian <i>Shastras</i> and local custom	Strict royal penal options combined with village mediation
Defensive Strategy <i>(Rakshatmak ramniti)</i>	Agile, light infantry militias expert in valley defense	Standing infantry forces supported by stone border posts (<i>kottas</i>)	Deep defensive networks featuring specialized hill warriors and strategic mountain forts
Cultural & Religious Endowments <i>(Sanskritik aur dharmik yogdan)</i>	Pluralistic backing of both Hindu and Buddhist symbols	Large-scale stone temple complexes and <i>Nagara</i> and <i>Agrahara</i> land grants	Widespread patronizing of Sanskrit literature, hill music, and regional shrines

References And Bibliography :

- Garhwal Himalaya: A Study in Historical Perspective — Rawat, Ajay Singh. *Garhwal Himalaya: A Study in Historical Perspective*. Indus Publishing, 2002.
- Cultural History of Uttarakhand — Sharma, D.D. *Cultural History of Uttarakhand*. D.K. Printworld Pvt. Ltd., 2009.
- Central Himalaya: Bibliographic References on Archaeology, Culture and History — Khanduri, B.M. and Saklani, P.M. *Central Himalaya: Bibliographic References on Archaeology, Culture and History*. TransMedia, 2003.
- उत्तराखण्ड का समग्र राजनैतिक इतिहास : पाषाण युग से 1949 तक — Rawat, Ajay Singh. *Uttarakhand ka Samagra Rajnaitik Itihas: Pashan Yug se 1949 Tak*. Ankita Prakashan, 2024.
- उत्तराखंड : लोक संस्कृति और साहित्य — Pokhariya, Dev Singh. *Uttarakhand: Lok Sanskriti aur Sahitya*. National Book Trust, India, 2021.
- Mountain Temples and Temple Mountains — Chanchani, Nachiket. *Mountain Temples and Temple Mountains: Architecture, Religion, and Nature in the Central Himalayas*. University of Washington Press, 2019.
- Atkinson, E.T. *The Himalayan Gazetteer*. Government Press, Allahabad, 1882. Recommended as a major source on the political and social history of Uttarakhand.
- Pandey, Badridatt. *Kumaon Ka Itihas*. A major historical work on the Chand Dynasty and Kumaon region.
- Raturi, H.K. *Garhwal Ka Itihas*. Important source for the history of Garhwal and the Panwar Dynasty.