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PLACE NAMES OF THE RURAL SETTLEMENTS OF THE OUTER HIMALAYA A CULTURAL-GEOGRAPHICAL INTERPRETATON

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ABSTRACT : The place names occurring in a culture region evolve from the interaction of the physico-cultural environment, ecological diversity, cultural perceptions and dialectical wealth. District Solan of Himachal Pradesh, with a remarkable diversity of physical and cultural features is an ideal region for the study of place names. The findings clearly establish a relationship between place names on the one hand and the facets of cultural geography, namely culture, ecology, cultural landscape, cultural history, and settlement processes on theother.

Every rural settlement has a name which gives to it its identity. Most place names consist of two parts, generic and specific. The former is of far greater potential value than the latter in the stndy of cultural geography. Every linguistic or dialectal culture or sub-culture has its own distinctive set of generics in additiou to those which are borrowed from other cultures.

Place names occurring in a culture region evolve from the intercation of three elements constituting the physio-cultural envirenment ecological diversity, cultural perceptions and dialectal wealth.

The genesis of place names can be conceptualised in the following diagram :

CULTURE GROUP	→	PRISM OF CULTURE	→	ECOLOGICAL DIVERSITY	→	PERCEIVED ECOLOGICAL DIVERSITY	→	DIALECTAL WEALTH	→	PLACE NAME

Fig. 1

The culture group perceives (Fig. 1) the ecological diversity through the prism of culture, and translates the body of perceived ecologial diversity through its dialectal wealth into place names.

People, whether original inhabitants or subsequent settlers, perceive a place and its contents according to their cultural background and concretise the perceived reality by naming it according to their dialectal wealth. In course of time the area may undergo a cultural transformation, but place names once transplanted survive for a long time, almost always and everywhere, the culture groups which created them. To quote Mukerji, ' The names of the villages have an inertia of their own and do not change suddenly although gradual transformations do occur (Mukerji 1956-57).

Since the place names are cultural, their connotations are suggestive of cultural heritage, cultural diffusion, the contemporary ecological setting, culture-ecological interactions, and cultural borrowings. As such, they help in

reconstructing a chronicle of settlement processes and the associated cultures, and, thereby, facilitate an analysis of the cultural geography of an area - a mosaic created by the interweaving of the concepts of culture, culture area, cultural landscape, culture history, and cultural ecology. Their significance has, for long, been recognised by human and cultural geographers in general, and by historical geographers in particular, for, they quite often serve as missing links of human history. No wonder Brunhes (1920) calls them ' fossils of human geography'.

Cultural geographers are unanimously agreed upon the proposition that any sign of human action in landscape, such as place name, implies a culture, recalls a history, demands an ecological interpretation, and the discovery of traces it has left on the earth (Wagner and Mikesell, 1962).

The psesent paper examines this hypothesis through the study of place names. An ideal place for such studies would obviously be one which possesses a great variety of ecological and cultural conditions. The district of Solan in Himachal Pradesh answers well to these specifications, as it contains, within a small area, a remarkable diversity of physical and cultural features.

In terms of relief the altitude ranges from less than 300 metres in Nalagarh dun to over 2200 metres near Chail. Between these two physiographic extremes lies a gamut of such diverse geomorphic landscapes as Siwalik Hills, Dun, and outer and Inner Himalayas. (Fig. 2). The region is traversed by young torrential streams and narrow, V-shaped valleys. The slopes are mostly moderate to steep along the scarp faces of ridges and along streams and khads. Along the Sutlej river where the surface drops abruptly from about 2000 metres to 600 metres the slopes are generally steep to precipitous. In contrast, the Dun is a gravel upland, a rather gently sloping stretch of coarse materials laid by highly erosive mountain streams. The diversity of geomorphic appearance contributes significantly to a sharpening of the

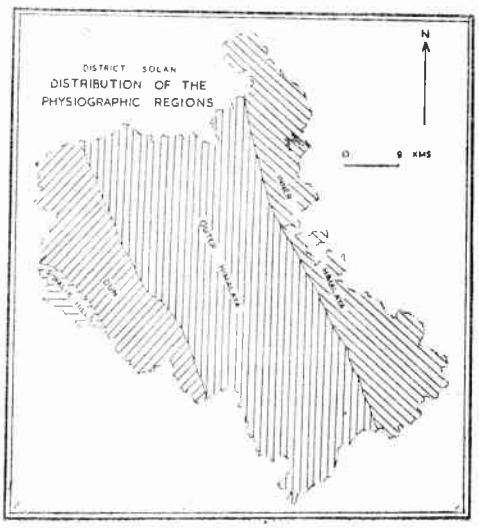

Fig. 2

perception of terrain and is reflected in a large number of place names. To illustrate the point, **dhar, ghat, uparli,** and **nichli,** all of which are derived from Sanskrit, and many more features and aspects of relief, are frequently expressed through place names.

The diversity in vegetal cover closely parallels that of the physiography. The general appearance of the forests in the Siwalik Hills is dominated by a single species. **Acacia arabica (babul).** It is markedly gregarious in habit and froms a solid, more or less pure stand, and a dense cover. A few associated species occur, mainly where the Acacia canopy is broken and, there is usually very little undergrowth. In the Dun one encounters tropical and sub tropical vegetation such as **Dendrocalamus strictus (bamboo), Acacia arabiac (babul),** and **Dalbergia sissoo (shisham).** Over considerable areas in the Siwalik Hills and Dun and extending up into the Himalayan, **Pinus roxburghii (chir)** forest, and down into the mixed deciduous, **Acacia catechu (Khair),** and **Aegle marmelos (bil)** forests, the overwood has been destroyed and has been succeeded

TABLE I

Village Name	Tehsil	Associated Species (Vernacular Name)	Botanical Name
1. Chhibri, Chhibar Patti	Solan	Chhibru	Clematis gouriana, Roxb.
2. Kangu	Arki	Kangu	Syn. F. ramontchi, L. Herit.
3. Simal-Ka-Pani	Solan	Simal	Salmalia malabarica, D. C.
4. Bil	Kandaghat	Bil	Aegle marmelos, Correa
5. Ber	Ber	Ber	Syn. A. Jujuba, Lamk
6. Amb dahar	Nalagarh	Amb / Am	Mangifera indica, Linn.
7. Khairi	Kandaghat	Khair	Acacia catechu, Willd
8. Reru Jhiriwala and Reru Uparla	Nalagarh	Reru	Acacia lencopholea, Willd
9. Kandhar	Arki	Kandhar	Acacia pennate, Willd
10. Kathiala, Kathiar	Kandaghat, Arki	Kathi	Indigoferra punchella, Roxb.
11. Kanthri	Kandaghat	Kainth	Pyrus Pashia, Buch. Ham.
12. Banlag, Banog	Solan, Arki	Ban	Quercus incana, Roxb.
13. Halda	Kandaghat	Haldu	Adina Cordifolia, Benth, and Hoot, F.
14. Lodhimajra, Lodhiwala	Nalagarh	Lodh	Symplocos Crataegoides Buck Him.
15. Banda	Solan	Banda	Syn. Loranthus longiflorus
16. Kaphleda	Nalagarh	Kaphal	Myrica Nagi, Thunb.

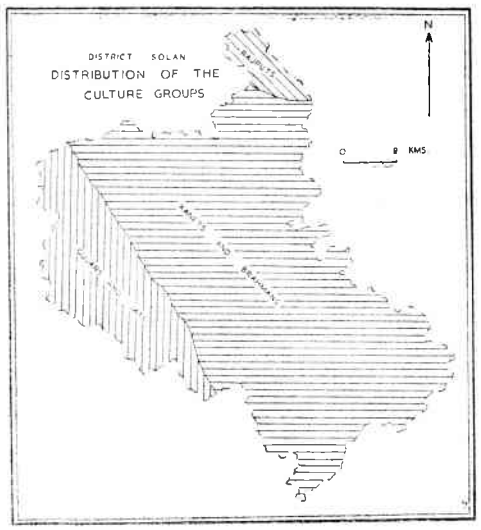

Fig. 3

by open scrubs.

In the outer Himalaya the main tract of **Pinus roxburghii** (**pine**) forests in which there are virtually no other top canopy species, is rather sharply differentiated at the uppr limit from a restricted transition to **Quercus incana** (**ban oak**) forest. At the lower altitudes, however, there is much more intimate mingling with the deciduous appearing to be related mainly to topographically conditioned micro-climatic variations. The **Quercus incana (banemoak)** forests, characterised by a 20 metre high closed canopy, occur mostly in the Inner Himalaya.

Besides these, several other tropical, subtropical and temperate species have become associated with village names. (Table I).

The physiographic and vegetational diversities are well matched by contrasts in culture groups and dialects (Figs. 3 and 4). The dialects spoken in the region form two groups : Western Pahari; comprising of Baghati, Mandeali, and Kiunthali; and Hindustani, constituted by Hindi and Puujabi. The former group is associated with the Khasas, who have been considered as the original inhabitants of this region (Grierson 1916), while the latter has been introduced by Rajputs, Brahmins, Gujars and Jats, who fled the adjacent plains to escape Mughal oppression or settled here on the invitation of the local rulers. Also in the area, there has been an intermingling of the culture traits of the Plain and the Himalaya. Hence, almost all the place names have been derived from these two dialectal groups.

Although the distribution of dialects and culture groups can be identified, we do not have enough evidence to reconstruct their chronological layering. The question as to who introduced a particular dialect and at what time remains controversial.

The Aryans came to the Himalayas in two waves. Probably, the first wave entered the region around early second millennium B. C. when the Dravidians were occupying the lower hills and the Khasas the higher elevations. The advent of the Aryans in the lower hills resulted in the intermingling of their culture with that of the Dravidians, evidenced by such names as **Er** (Dravidian) and **Tal** (Aryan), both of which mean a pond. In course of time the Dravidians lost their cultural identity through assimilation with the Aryan culture. However, even now it is possible to identify their historical

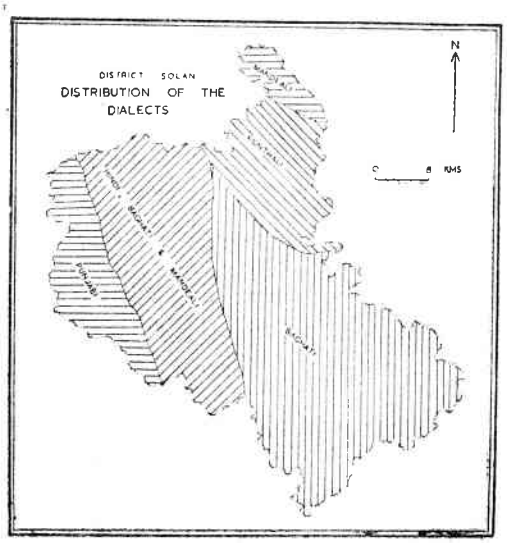

Fig. 4

presence through place names indicated by Sitalpur (**Sital**, the goddess of small pox) and Mar kanal (**Kanal**, forest on the hill slope).

During the second wave the Aryans penetrated deeper into the higher Himalaya where the Khasa culture was still strong and where they could maintain their cultural identity, while many of the khasa traits have been preserved by the Kanets, their present day descendants,the absence of the Dravidian place names in the higher Himalaya indicates that their occupance was limited to the lower Himalyan zone (Cunningham, 1882).

By the time the Aryan culture groups were pushed out from the western part of the North Indian Plain into the Inner Himalaya, the language spoken in the plain had incorporated quite a few Persian, Arabic and Urdu words, pronunciation and placing of generics and specifics, for instance, charand, dar, and dih (Steingers 1970). Hence, along with their settling the Aryans spread the mixed language through the Inner Himalaya. Thus, in an overall assessment the study area emerges as a lower order culture region within the Aryan Culture Realm but it does reflect certain ancient Dravidian influences filtered through the Aryan culture localised in the North Indian Plain.

An attempt has been made here to validate the hypothesis through the interpretation of the distribution maps of two generics, dialects, culture groups, and physiographic divisions and by the classification of selected place names into five categories on the basis of their relationship to different aspectes of cultural geography. The tables show the number and percentage of place names falling in each category.

The findings, as tabulated below, clearly establish a relationship between place names on the one hand and the five facets of culural geography on the other. ' Culture ' and ' Ecology ' account for almost two-thirds of the total place names, followed by ' Cultural Landscape ' expressed through 27.6 percent of the names. A few of the place names give an idea of the processes involved in the settling of area.

We can now proceed to a detailed discussion on the place names in relation to the five facets of cultural geography.

TABLE II

Sr. No.	Category	Total No. of Place names	Percentage to the total Place names analysed (1160)	Percentage to the total Place names of the study area (2508)
1.	Culture	368	31.8	14.7
2.	Ecology	346	29.9	13.8
3.	Cultural Landscape	320	27.6	12.7
4.	Culture History Culture Area	56	4.8	2.2
5.	Settlement Processes	10	0.8	0.4
6.	Miscellaneous	60	5.1	2.4
	Total	1160	100.0	46.2

An elaboration of Table II is given in Table III.

TABLE III

Related	Total place names	Percentage to category total
1. Culture	368	100.00
(a) Specific Names	136	37.0
(b) Culture Groups	99	36.9
(c) Clans	55	14.9
(d) Occupation	46	12.5
(e) Religion	22	6.0
(f) Cultutal Attributes	10	2 07
2. Ecology	346	100.00
(a) Topographical Features	147	42.5
(i) **Dhar**	62	18.4
(ii) **Uparli**	30	8.9
(iii) **Nichli**	25	7.4
(iv) **Ohat**	20	6.0
(v) **Manjhali Chhoti aud Bari**	10	2.9
(b) Vegetational Features	131	37.9
(i) Forest	92	26 6
(ii) Fruits and Trees	39	11.3
(c) Hydrographical Features	68	19.6
(i) Water Channels	41	11.8
(ii) Ponds and Tanks	27	7.8
3. Cultural Landscape		
(a) Settlement Morphology	320	100.00
(i) **Pur**	74	23.1
(ii) **Og**	62	19.4
(iii) **Village**	61	19.1
(iv) **Kalan**	36	11.25
(v) **Khurd**	31	9.7
(vi) **Majra**	23	7.2
(vii) **Kothl**	12	3.7
(viii) **Nagar**	9	2.8
(ix) **Kot**	8	2.5
(x) **Garh**	4	1.25
4. Culture History and Culture Area		
(a) Diffusion	56	100.00
(i) **Wala**	53	94.6
(ii) **Nalag**	3	5.4
5. Settlement Processes	10	100.0
(a) Settling by cutting of the forest cover	7	70.0
(b) Settling by burning of the forest cover	3	30.0
6. Miscellaneous	60	100.0

I. Place names related to ' Culture'

A large number of place names (31.8 per cent) are related to different aspects of the prevalent culture. ' Culture ' has been expressed in terms of culture groups (Banli **Brahmanan, Chamarkhera**, shalog **Kolian**, Chunar **Kanaitan**) ; founding individuals (Beli Diawar, Anwar, Nahar Singh) ; clans (Basowal **Agri, Dolowal, Mattiana**) ; profession(**Jabal, Loharan,Teliwala,** Panda) and religious or deity (Kali Bari, Mahadeo, Anda, Bani Devi). Clearly, all the place names reinforce the evidence of the prevalence and effective functioning of the Hindu Culture and convergence of Aryan and Dravidian cultures and languages, particularly in the Inner Himalaya.

II Place names in relation to ' Cultural Ecology '

' Ecology ' is very widely manifested in the place names of the study area. About 29.9 per cent of the analysed place names bear the imprint of culture-ecological varieties. Such examples as **Khai,** Beli **Khol Dhar Parli**, and **Amb Dahar** suggest their associations with hydrographic, directional and vegetational features respectively. The co-existence of **Khai** and **Dhar** indicates the hilly nature of the region. Furthermore, the occurrence of **Amb** (mango) reflects the tropical/sub-tropical vegetation and climate of the region.

It may be noted that there is a recognisable pattern of distribution of the particular generics referring to the culture-ecological features. **Khol** and **Khai,** both meaning ravine, occur respectively in the Siwalik Hills and Inner Himalaya, the distribution being mutually exclusive. The similarity in the perception of the properties of similar features in Himalaya, Siwalik Hills, and the Plain, in magnified dimensions, facilitated the diffusion of these generics, widely used throughout the plain, into the study area.

The generic **dhar,** which is also a geomorphic term in the context of Himalaya means the long linear edge of a mountain range in the perception of the people of the plain (Willims 1976). This is similar to the long, sharp line of movement in terms of which they develop a daily familiarity with it. Here again, therefore, the diffusion of the generic was prompted by the similarity in the perceived meanings (Fig. 1).

III. place names as indicators of ' Cultural Landscape '

' Cultural landscape ' is revealed in 27.6 per cent of the place names. The related generics suggest the size of the settlement **(gaon, nagar, majra and majri)** and salient culture features **(garh, kot, pur) (Fig. 5). Gaon** and **majri** are smaller settlements than **nagar** and **majra.** Together they are indicative of the presence of different sizes.

IV place names indicating ' Culture History ' and ' Culture Area '

Place names in the Outer Himalaya suggest two kinds of movements : (i) inter-regional, and intra-regional. (Fig. 6).

The distribution of two generics, **pur** or **pura** (Burrow and Emenea 1961), and **wal** or **wala**(Singh 1961) reveals interesting facts about the history of occupance of the area by different culture groups. Since the former is not indigenous to the region and has Dravidian origin, it implies an early movement into the Himalayas of the Aryans who, by the early Christian Era, had adapted and adopted many of the pre-Aryan culture traits of the Plain of which dialectal wealth was an important one. They carried with them the concept of **pur** or **pura** as a settlement associated with permanent field cultivation, and spread it in the Outer and Inner Himalayan parts of the study area. Presently, this generic is associated with two culture groups, Kanets and Brahmans, who have had the closest affinity with the Aryans.

The second generic, **wal** or **wala**, on the other hand,is identified with Gujars and Jats who, on the invitation of the Maharaj of Nalagarh, had come from the neighbouring districts of Ambala and Hoshiarpur, where this generic has its maximum concentrtion,

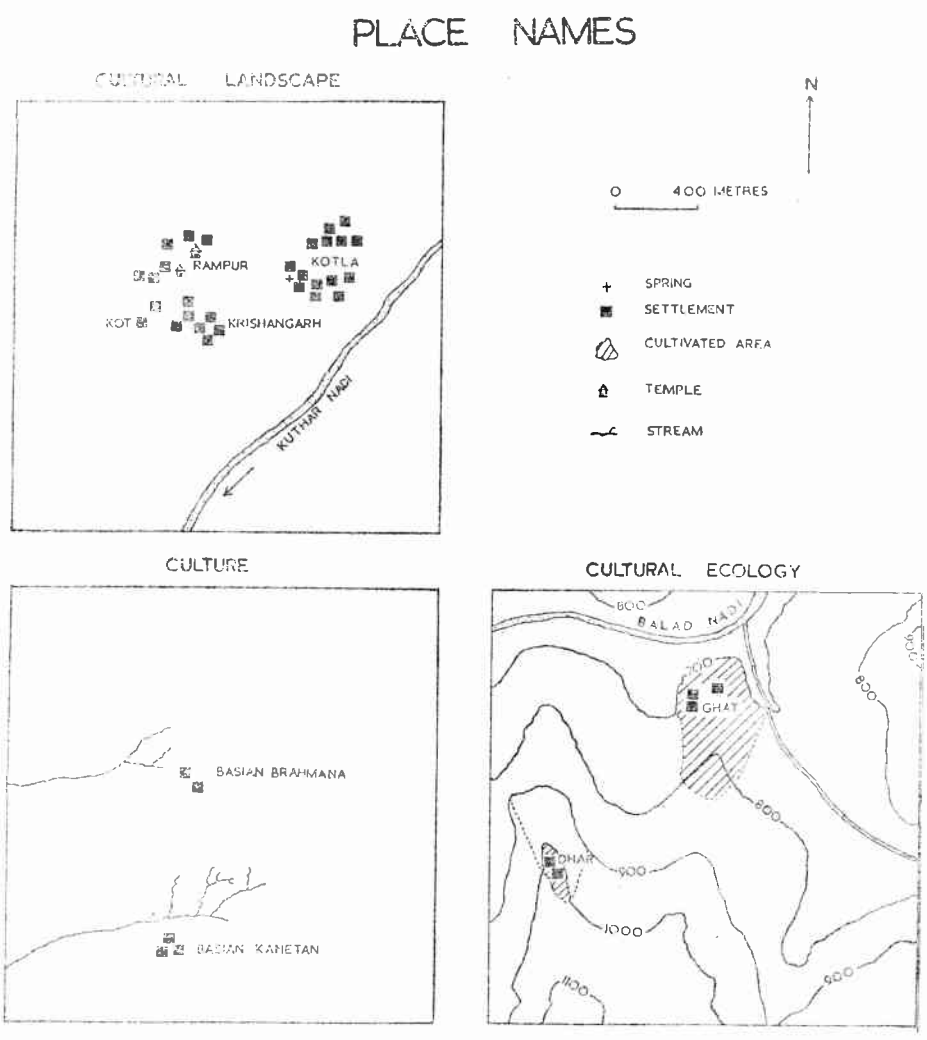

Fig. 5

and settled this region towards the end of the 18th century. They established themselves firmly in the Nalagarh **dun** which eventually developed into a Gujar culture area.The vast Himalayan zone provides only a few examples of this generic suggesting a little migration of these culture groups into the inner areas, a fact suggested even by their present distribution (Fig.6). Thus the mutually exclusive distribution of the two generics points to two movements of culture groups during two historical periods. Also, the occurrence of **Nalag** in three interior areas testifies to the migration of people, in a later period, from Nalagarh into these areas.

A culture history of the study area, representative of the Outer Himalaya, as revealed by the study of three generics should be understood not only in the context of the Himalaya but in the setting of a larger geographic region which encompasses the North Indian plain as well. As a matter of fact, it is the North Indian plain in which lies the hearth of many traits of present ' Pahari ' culture. The

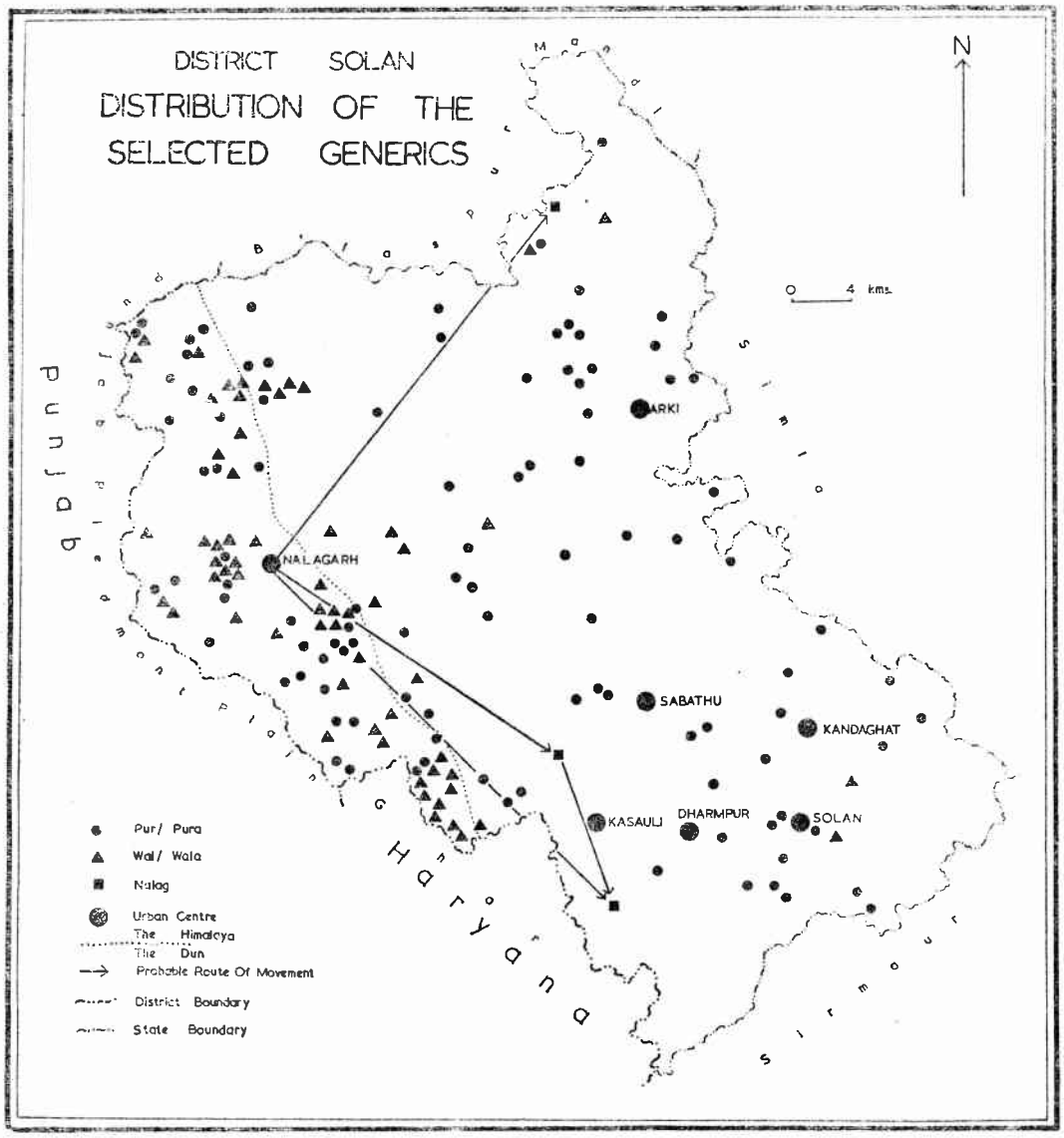

Fig. 6

present 'Pahari' culture is a product of intermixing of the native Khasa and the Aryan cultures, the latter coming with the successive movements of Rajputs, Jats and Gujars from the plain.

V. Place names indicative of Settlement processes.

Some place names occurring in the region are suggestive of the process of settling which, in a preponderantly farming area, consist mainly of the creation of agricultural land either by felling (**Mar-kanal**) or by burning (**Dha neri**).

About 6.3 per cent of the place names could not be put under any of the categories identified above. As such, they were grouped under 'Miscellaneous.'

Conclusion

The hypothesis that place names reflect all the five componets of the cultural geography of a region is amply substantiated by a case study of Solan district. The conspicuously dominant occurrence of generies associated with 'ecology' and 'culture' signifies the large extent of cultural perception of ecological diversity and richness of dialectal wealth to describe and symbolise it. Lastly, it may be suggested that the analysis has provided an effective framework within which the cultural geography of the district can be comprehended.

GLOSSARY OF VERNACULAR TERMS

1.	Amb	mango	28.	Khai	a ditch
2.	And	name of Siva	29.	Khol	a ravine
3.	Baggi/Baghi	gardner	30.	Khurd	new & small settlement
4.	Ban	forest	31.	Kot	fort
5.	Bara/Barot	banyan tree	32.	Kuh	well
6.	Bari	large settlement	33.	Kulhari	axe
7.	Chakli	fruit	34.	Kumhar	potter
8.	Charand	grazing	35.	Kund	a deep pond
8a.	Changar	the land on the hill slopes under cultivation	36.	Lohar	blacksmith
			37.	Majra	settlement
			38.	Mar	to cut
9.	Cjawal	village	39.	Nagar	large settlement
10.	Chhaoi	choe	40.	Nal/Nali/Nalka	channel
11.	Chhoti	small settlement	41.	Nalag	of Nalagarh
12.	Dangri	shephard	42.	Neri	village
13.	Dar	house, swelling	43.	Nichla	low land
14.	Dha	to burn	44.	Pani	water
15.	Dhar	flat ridge crest	45.	Pur	Settlement associated with permanent field cultivation
16.	Din	a village			
17.	Er/Era	pond, tank			
18.	Garh	fort	46.	Sar	pond
19.	Gawali	milk maid	47.	Shamlech	village
20.	Ghat	plain land, a step	48.	Sunaran	goldsmith
21.	Gular	a tree	49.	Tal/Talao	pond/tank
22.	Jabal	shèphard	50.	Tehlu	oil presser
23.	Jal	water	51.	Tikar	a mound
24.	Kalan	old and large settlement	52.	Uncha	high land
			53.	Wala	inhabitant, possessor
25.	Kanal	forest on the hill siope			
26.	Kati	to cut			
27.	Khad	small stream			

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