I. HISTORICAL TRENDS
Historically, obligatory or corvée labour was an intrinsic part of the tax system in Ladakh, Tibet, Kashmir and throughout the Himalayan hill states. Obligatory labour included work that was of communal benefit, for example the repair of roads, bridges and temples, as well as the carriage of goods for senior political and religious figures. On the Indian side of the Himalayas, the most common Persian/Urdu—and later English—generic term for these activities was begar. In Ladakh, the word khral covered tax, tribute, duty and labour obligations. There were specific terms for particular types of tax (for example, 'bru khral, tax paid in corn; dngul-khral, tax paid in silver), while the word for compulsory porterage was 'u-lag.

In an earlier paper, Nicola Grist (1994) analysed the obligatory transport system in pre-1947 Ladakh, highlighting its political and ritual aspects. She showed that at the local level, transport begar was partly an enactment of the social and regional hierarchy. At the state level, Ladakh and Tibet recognised mutual obligations to provide transport labour for key missions travelling between their territories. Grist (1994: 272) therefore argued that begar/'u-lag “provided a mechanism by which they implicitly recognised each other's legitimacy and status”.

This paper builds on Grist's earlier work, and is dedicated to her memory. Its main aim is to show how begar evolved in line with changes in the regional power structure in the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries. The paper points to continuity in that it shows how obligatory labour was rooted in the institutions of the pre-1834 Ladakhi monarchy. It points to change in that it shows how begar was modified in accordance with evolving Dogra and British interests in the course of the 19th century. The paper therefore serves as a case study of the practical workings of British indirect rule in one part of the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. The overall pattern shows many examples of oppression, but also of resistance, bargaining and appeals to higher authority.