II. REGIONAL IDENTITIES
URBANISATION IN KARGIL AND ITS EFFECTS
IN THE SURU VALLEY

Nicola Grist

Note from the editors:
Nicola Grist’s doctoral thesis, Local politics in the Suru valley of northern India (1998), concerns the relations between three Muslim factions, two Shi’ah and one Sunni, in the upper Suru valley of Kargil District. A major source of tension between the Sunnis and one of the Shi’ah factions in the 1990s concerned the fact that in the past two decades many Sunnis had gained secular educational qualifications and white-collar government jobs. This chapter contains edited extracts from chapters one, four and seven of Nicky’s thesis and concerns the development of the urban economy and an urban administrative elite and their effects on the different factions in the upper Suru valley.

BACKGROUND

My research centres on Suru Block, one of the eight administrative sub-divisions of Kargil tehsil. The Suru valley contains three Blocks and Suru Block, itself, is fifty kilometres from Kargil, to which it has been connected by a motorable road since 1978. Taisuru, Namsuru, Panikhar and Prantee are the main settlements in the Block, while Parkachik is further up the valley towards Zanskar. Due to heavy winter snowfall the Block can only be reached on foot or by helicopter for several months in the winter and early spring. The area is still predominantly agricultural and nearly all the permanent households have at least a small plot of irrigated land, which they farm using mainly manual labour. The staple crops are barley, wheat, peas and a few vegetables and the extensive pastures support bovines, sheep, goats and horses.

The Shi’ahs in Sankhoo and Suru Blocks nearly all belong to two factions, the yokma-pa and goma-pa, respectively, which mean ‘lower’ and ‘upper’. Both have, at their core, a lineage of sayyids who claim descent

1 Nicola Grist first visited Suru in 1981. She carried out the fieldwork on which her thesis is based during three visits, totalling sixteen months, in 1993 and 1994. Eds.

2 A tehsil is an administrative division which has its own local administration.