Reconstructing Territory of Chaundkot Fort in Garhwal Himalaya:An Ethno-Archaeological Model

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Abstract

Following the decline of Katyuri rule in 10th century CE, Garhwal Himalaya witnessed a fragmented political system governed by 32 major principalities. Each principalities had their one major fort and numerus small fortalices which formed a unique political landscape in this mountainous region. But despite scholarly interest and existing literature, scholars largely catalogue these forts without delving into their political significance and territorial reach. Therefore, present research problem was taken up to addresses this gap by focusing on the territory of the Chaundkot fort (one of the major forts of region) employing ethnography, historical maps, and usage of Geographical Information System application to construct the most plausible territorial model of Chaundkot fort in Garhwal Himalaya.

Introduction

Garhwal is an administrative division of the Uttarakhand state of India having a rich historical and archaeological background. It is believed that the name 'Garhwal' emerged due to the existence of a large number of *Garh* (forts) in this region in 15th Century CE (Raturi 1928, Handa 2002). The medieval history of Garhwal was dominated by small principalities that came into power after the weakening of Katyuri rule around 10th century CE (Negi 1988; Katoch 2010) and ruled from their existing forts or newly constructed forts. Recent study has shown there were 32 massive forts located on hillocks or on ridges of mountains overlooking valleys. This scattered political landscape remained same until king Ajaypal of the Parmar dynasty defeated all the chieftains of the region and brought them under his rule in 15th century CE (Naithani 2008). Scholars have tried to investigate these forts and their associated chieftains but the available literature only provides lists of the forts rather than their political significance and value (Raturi 1928; Negi 1988; Kathoch 1996; Handa 2002). In recent years notable work has shown that chieftains used the forts for symbolizing their power and also for warfare and residential purposes (Rawat and Nautiyal 2020; Rawat *et.al.* 2021). Yet, there is no information available regarding the territory of any chiefdoms that may aid understanding of the political landscape of the Garhwal Himalaya. When we examined the idea of territorially prior to the emergence of chieftains, several terminologies like *Vishaya* and *Mandala* came to light which were used by the Katyuri and other dynasties for their territories in ancient times (Tripathi 2000; Kathoch 1996). Similarly, in the later medieval period the term '*Pargana*' was used for an administrative unit or territory which further converted into development blocks in colonial period. But the locations of the territories of the major chiefdoms associated with the 32 large hillforts is still unknown. Hence, present works endeavors to understand this important aspect of the medieval polity which has never been investigated before.

In the absence of any conventional source to study this aspect authors have based this study on ethnography, old maps, and GIS techniques to develop a plausible model of the territory of the major fort of Chaundkot. We believe the dominion of power could not have extended beyond the geographical limits of the territory of powerful chiefdoms until some point in later medieval period. This model only suggests possible territory of the ruling chiefdoms in the Central Himalaya during the Ancient and medieval period.

Study area (29°58'41.76"N: 78°54'4.17"E || 2084 MSL**):** Chaundkot fort is located in the southern region of Garhwal on the right bank of the Machhlaad rivulet (locally called *Gaad/Gadhera*), a tributary of the Western Nayar river (**Fig. 1**).

Methodology

In order to ascertain the possible territory of Chaundkot fort, the following proxies were used: historical (1937-1938) administrative maps, natural topographic features as barriers, and ethnographic demarcation

i- Historical (1937-1938) administrative maps

The historical administrative maps of 1930s used in present study refer to map of 8 "Pattis" constituting Chaundkot Pargana. A Patti refers to a small political unit, which consists of a group of villages. Pokhriyal (2002) has defined Patti as a small cluster of villages boarded by a topographical drainage pattern. Similarly, Berti (2008) has used the term Patti for the group of Villages in Kullu Himachal Pradesh. A Pargana (or parganah/pergunnah) refers to an administrative unit comprising various Patti. The term dates back to the Sultanate period of Mughal times and the British Raj (Michael 2007). The maps of eight *patti* constituting *Chaundkot* pargana, accessed from the revenue department, Pauri District, were geo-referenced within a geopgraphical information system (GIS) with a root mean square error (RMSE) error < 0.005, in the WGS 1984 coordinate system and Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM)-44N projection. Such geo-referencing was followed by tracing the boundary of these *patti*, which is discussed in detail in succeeding sections.

ii- Landscape features as territory markers

Natural topographic features like rivers, ridges, and forest have been used for territory demarcation of tribes, kingdom, and nations since ancient time (Semple1907; Day 1949). In order to ascertain the boundary of Chaundkot Fort, we have also used this proxy and therefore accessed the ALOS PALSAR digital elevation model (DEM) (© JAXA/METI, accessed through ASF DAAC, https://asf.alaska.edu) to determine topographic variability around the Fort. The DEM has a spatial resolution of 12.5mt enabling us to demarcate natural topographic features more precisely.

iii- Ethnographic demarcation

Apart from the historical maps and topographic proxies, an ethnographic model was also employed that utilizes concepts of "divinity" in marking the territory. A detailed ethnographic survey was carried out in Chaundkot to prepare a database of local deities/gods and their possible territory. Traditionally, such divine model of territoriality has been applied through construction o temples, establishing stone pillars, and using natural topographical features (Majumdar 1944; Kirk 1960).

Results

Present multidisciplinary methodology yielded results through following three analyses.

1) Traditional demarcation of pargana Chaundkot using old maps: Territories are always considered as the demarcation of influence. Sometimes territories reflect political or other aspects of society. Inscriptions or other textual records help to visualize the territorial demarcation of any state, but maps have always been treated as more authentic and understandable sources for identifying the territories of historical dynasties. This section discusses the territorial demarcation of the Chaundkot fort region on the basis of available maps.

It has been recorded that, Chaundkot is one the parganas of the Garhwal Himalaya which is still divided into eight *patties* named *Guradsyun, Jaintolsyun, Mawalsyun, Ringwadsyun, Mondarsyun* (Northern), *Mondarsyun* (Southern) *KimgarhiGad* and *Pinglapakha*. Pokhriyal (2002, 127) has clearly defined *Patti* as small clusters of villages bordered by topographical drainage patterns. Similarly, Berti (2008) has also used term *Phati* for the group of villages in Kullu Himachal Pradesh. The available maps of patties in the Garhwal Himalaya, particularly of Chaundkot region, were prepared in 1930 by British administrators (**Fig. 2**) which were taken as a source of information to reconstruct the territory of Chaundkot fort.

A closer examination of the old maps shows that they were manually prepared in a coordinate system with a scale of 4 inches =1 mile, with district boundaries designated as *Patti*. The traditional boundary of the *Patti* was carved using boundary pillars, forest pillars, rivers, rivulets, mountain ridges and temples, etc. These attributes certainly lend authenticity to these maps and suggest their usefulness in investigating the past territory of the region. In addition to this it is pertinent to mention here that, the clear endorsement of *'traditional boundary'* (**Fig. 3**) on each map further indicates that the territory mapped in the 1930s must have been existed before it was drawn and used in colonial administrative system.

Further, all the maps were processed in Arc GIS to place them in contemporary geographic coordinates to visualize these old maps in real coordinates and in present geo-administrative setup (**Fig. 4a**). After getting the maps in the WGS84 coordinate system the boundaries and other important landmarks of all patties were digitized (**Fig. 4b**). The mosaic of the eight *Pattis* provided a large polygon which has been taken as the territory of Chaundkot Pargana (**Fig. 4c-d**).

2) Landscape features as territory markers: Although the foregoing analysis and results indicated the territory of Chaundkot *pargana* based on old maps, to further authenticate the territory we also studied the concept of territoriality based on natural markers or barriers, because geographical features play significant roles in demarcating political territories. Prominent geographical features of the region have been identified and mapped. Close observation indicates that the two major rivers (Eastern Nayar and Western Nayar) have their origin in the Dudhatoli range and meet at Banghaat near Satpuli. The route of both rivers covers a large area and forms a polygonal shape. In addition to this, the dense forest range of Ameli also creates a barrier on the eastern side (**Fig. 5**).

This natural setting around the Chaundkot fort allowed us to visualize its territory. Thus, the territory of Chaundkot *pargana* (derived from old maps) overlapped with these natural features and interestingly, the major part of traditional territory of Chaundkot corresponds with these natural features (**Fig. 6**). It confirms that the traditional territory of Chaundkot pargana must have been defined by the western Nayar river from the northwestern side while the Machhlad rivulet forms its southeastern boundary. The Ameli hill range delineates the northeastern border as shown in **Fig. 6**.

3) Ethnographic demarcation: A detailed ethnographical survey was carried out in the Chaundkot area to identify the role of divinities in marking the territory. In this context, one very popular folktale has been recorded, which says that:

'*During ancient time there was a chief who ruled the entire lower Garhwal for many decades who has divided his chiefdom among his four sons. Later on, these four individuals or brothers assumed divine power and became the protector of local peoples who have been identified as the forms of lord Shiva. Presently these four deities are known as- Ekeshwar, Tarkeshwar, Mundeshwar and Binsar*'

(Personal communication with Mr. Mangatram, 2016)*.*

Taking above statement in consideration we found that each of these deities has a direct influence on the socio-cultural aspect of hundreds of villages and forms a territory. It is interesting to note these different temples/deities are associated with different forts *i.e.* Chaundkot fort with Ekashwar, Badalpur fort with Tarkeshwar, Garh-Mundeshwar with Mundaneshwar, and Kot-Binsar is associated with Binsar. These major territorial division in the name of Gods/divinities is also unique in the sense that villages adopted their own local deities not only to define the territories villages, but to ward off evil to protect them from the intrusion of spirits, diseases, ghosts, and for the attainment of the happiness and the larger welfare of village and its subjects.

While studying the divine aspect of territoriality in Chaundkot region it has also come to light that the people of this region celebrate their annual fair in the middle of April, which lasts for two days. On the first day (*eik gate Baishak*) people from every village come to Ekeshwar which is called *Jaatra* or procession. On next day (*dou gate baishakh*) villagers of all eight patties mandatorily offer the first grains of their agricultural production to Lord Ekeshwar for wellness, prosperity, and safety. This shows the authority and power of Lord Ekeshwar over a large area, but interestingly it has also been noticed that all the local and personal disputes and problems of villagers are attended and solved only by the village gods known as '*Bhumia*'. The ethnographic survey further highlighted that there are many villages gods/goddess worshipped in this region which are shown in Table-1.

Table 1 Name of Village Deities in Chaundkot Pargana

S.N.	Name of village deity	No. of covering Villages	S.N.	Name of village deity	No. of covering Villages
1	Betal	1	17	Goddess kamnda	1
2	Bhairava	46	18	Goddess nanda	16
3	Bhumia	73	19	Goddess ufrai	2
4	Binsar	4	20	Goddess Vaisno	1
5	Dhamdev	1	21	Gorakha Nath	16
6	GaribNath	1	22	Guru	5
7	Ghandyaal	3	23	Guru Granth sahib	3
8	Goddess balKunwari	3	24	Kaintyura	1
9	Goddess bhagwati	1	25	Kairan	2
10	Goddess Bhuvnesweri	3	26	Khandudevta	3
11	Goddess deeva	8	27	Krishna	1
12	Goddess durga	5	28	Mahadev	42
13	Goddess janda	10	29	Nagraja	15
14	Goddess jhalimali	12	30	Nirankar	9
15	Goddess jwalpa	8	31	Ramola	3
16	Goddess kali	4	32	Siddha baba	12
Total villages - 315					

The survey shows there were 315 village in all eight pattis of Chaundkot Pargana in the 1930s which were being govern by 32 different village gods within the territory of Ekeshwar (**Fig. 7**). This particular phenomenon of a major deity (Ekeshwer) and minor deities (village gods) reflects the impression of political hierarchy in the form of rituals. It has also come to light that the boundaries of villages were also defined by the village gods mostly using natural markers and sometimes people also used *'Oda'*, a stone pillar to mark the territory if no natural feature was available (Katoch 2010).

The results also show that among the32 village gods are several important historical characters, saints, or kings that belong to the Katyuri dynasty who ruled the Garhwal Himalaya in different periods. The most important historical characters who were transformed into village gods were *Kaintyura* (Katyuri), *Dhamdev, Gorakhnath, Garibnath* and *Ramola*. It has to be noted that *Kaintyura* (Katyuri) was a historical dynasty of the Central Himalaya who ruled this region from around *c.*700CE to *c.*1100CE (Dabral 1994, 43-44). Similarly, *Dhamdev* also became a village god who was also a Katyuri ruler of southern Garhwal (Pande 1937, 219). Apart from political figures some religious icons like *Gorakhnath* and *Garibnath*

belong to the Nath sect and also became village deities. Similarly, *Ganguramola* has also been established as village deity who have been identified a chief of some part of Garhwal and Kumaun.

Apart from native historical characters a few alien characters like *Gurugranth* sahib, *Betal* and few more has also been found as village deities in the region. *Gurugranth* Sahib is a deity of people of the Sikh community of the Punjab region whereas the genesis of *Betal* is still unknown. The spatial distribution of the range of local deities shows that the *Bhumia* controls and defines the territories of 73 villages, while the local deity of *Bhairava* is the territorial deity of 46 villages, and the third largest territory belongs to *Mahadev*, which have 42 villages under its jurisdiction (see **Fig. 7**). Under such ritualistic phenomenon of territoriality, a temple might have also played the role of boundary marker as well. This practice was prevalent in eastern India during the medieval period when *Dharampala* (one of the Pala rulers) issued a land-grant for a village deity (*Devkulika*) named *Kadambari*, and the temple of the deity was also used as a boundary marker in the village (Kielhorn 1896-97 cited in Chattopadhyay 2003, 163). In this context it would be interesting to point out that the location of an important *Shakti Peeth* of *Jwalpa Devi*, a sacred place on the bank of the western Nayar River (see **Fig. 7**), is situated in the territories of Ekeshwar and Mundeshwar.

Conclusion

In political landscape, the desire for territory has always been a primary cause of conflict between two states (Johnson and Toft 2014). Consequently, the demarcation of territory became most important practice to the define area of jurisdiction/s for which natural features have also been used for marking territorial boundaries (Sircar 1971; Chakrabarti 2009, 267; Singh 2013). Natural features have not only been used as territorial markers of political units but in many cases, it also has been used as one of the line of protections of the (Sack 1983; Zedeno 1997; Hensel 2000; Elden 2013). In this context, Chaundkot fort is situated on a strategic location protected by natural features and is associated with ingenious modifications of the landscape (Rawat and Nautiyal 2020). In addition to this, we show that the chieftains of Chaundkot ruled the region between the Nayar River and the Machhlaad rivulet. These two-drainage system provided natural boundaries that demarcated their territory from neighboring chiefdoms. Moreover, this natural boundary system provided by the two rivers on its southeast and northwest sides was further compared with available maps prepared in the 1930s to assess whether they could be of any significance in recreating the real territory of the Chiefdom of Chaundkot fort, and this proved to be the case.

Although there is difference of opinion about the implementation of term 'paragana' in Garhwal, it is clear that this term is associated with the Mughals, which had a direct influence in the foothills of that region and an indirect impact on the political and cultural sphere of the upper Garhwal region during the 16th-17th century CE. In view of this, it may be said that, before the implementation of pargana in 16th-17th century CE, 'Mandal' was the major administrative unit having patties as minor units in the Garhwal central Himalaya. This notion is further supported by the fact that every map of patti created in the 1930s has the clear endorsement of '*Traditional boundary map of the region*', which strongly suggests

that these territories have their genesis in much earlier phases. However, it is noteworthy that the alien term 'pargana' has replaced the traditional or indigenous term 'mandal' in the administrative and political setup during the Late Medieval era.

The term 'Mandala' has its roots in early historical times and remains alive in the present-day socio-cultural practices of this region. For example, every person in the Garhwal region must include their Mandala name on their traditional birth certificate called '*Janm Patri*'. Therefore, in view of looking into the use of the ancient 'Mandala' term in the present-day socio-cultural sphere it can be said that the people of Garhwal region never considered any alien terminology like 'Paragana' in their belief system and always followed their tradition which became another important element to identify the territory of Chaundkot fort. In addition to the two methods of studying old maps and natural features for territory reconstruction, the ethnographic survey carried out in the Chaundkot region also shown that the entire area is still governed by 32 village gods (minor deities) who are responsible to the only major deity known as *Ekeshwar*, which reflects the local political hierarchy. The idea of resolving local issues at the local level by the village gods who offered their first grain of agricultural production to Ekeshwar on a prescribed day again pointed out a transformed version of the ancient taxation system. Our ethnographic study has shown that village gods are nothing but the historical characters (some of them were rulers of the region), religious persons, legendary personalities of the region, and few are the forms of Brahmanical deities. The finding of some Katyuri rulers as village gods clearly suggests that the idea of establishing the king as God goes back to ancient times in the Garhwal region, which remained prevalent until the Late Medieval phase. In addition, it also came to light that out of the 32 major forts of the region, no other major forts (except the Chaundkot fort) have been identified within the area of the pargana Chaundkot, allowing us to conclude that this whole area would have been its core territory. Similarly, the spatial distribution of major forts of Garhwal shows that several forts are located in the surrounding area that are separated by the area's rivers (**Fig. 8**). This spatial distribution of forts indicates no major fort beyond the southern boundary of Chaundkot fort's territory, which identifies it as the conflict zone (see **Fig. 8**).

Thus, keeping in view of the importance of territory to draw a complete picture of the history of the Garhwal region, this study has shown that how old maps, modern GIS application, and traditional knowledge can be used as a foundation to recreate, visualize, and understand the ancient and medieval history of this region in complete manner. The present paper has clearly defined the territory of Chaundkot fort. In view of this it is interesting to add here that out of twelve parganas of Garhwal seven Pargana are named after the Fort of the region: *Painkhanda Fort, Nagpur Fort, Dasholi Fort, Badhan Fort, Chandpur Fort, Deval Fort* and *Chaundkot Fort*, which allows us to state that all these parganas must have been demarcated by following traditional boundaries which can be used to identify their territories. The methodology employed in this paper may permit the reconstruction of the medieval political landscape of Garhwal central Himalaya.

## Declarations

Author Contribution

Acknowledgement

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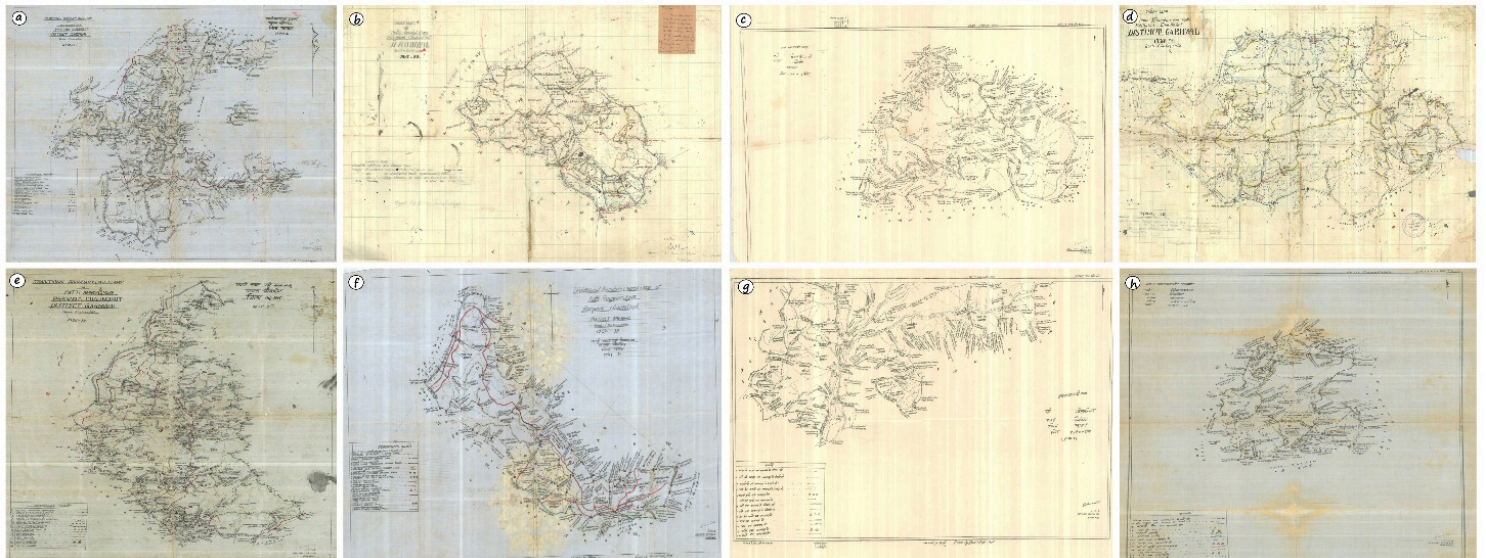
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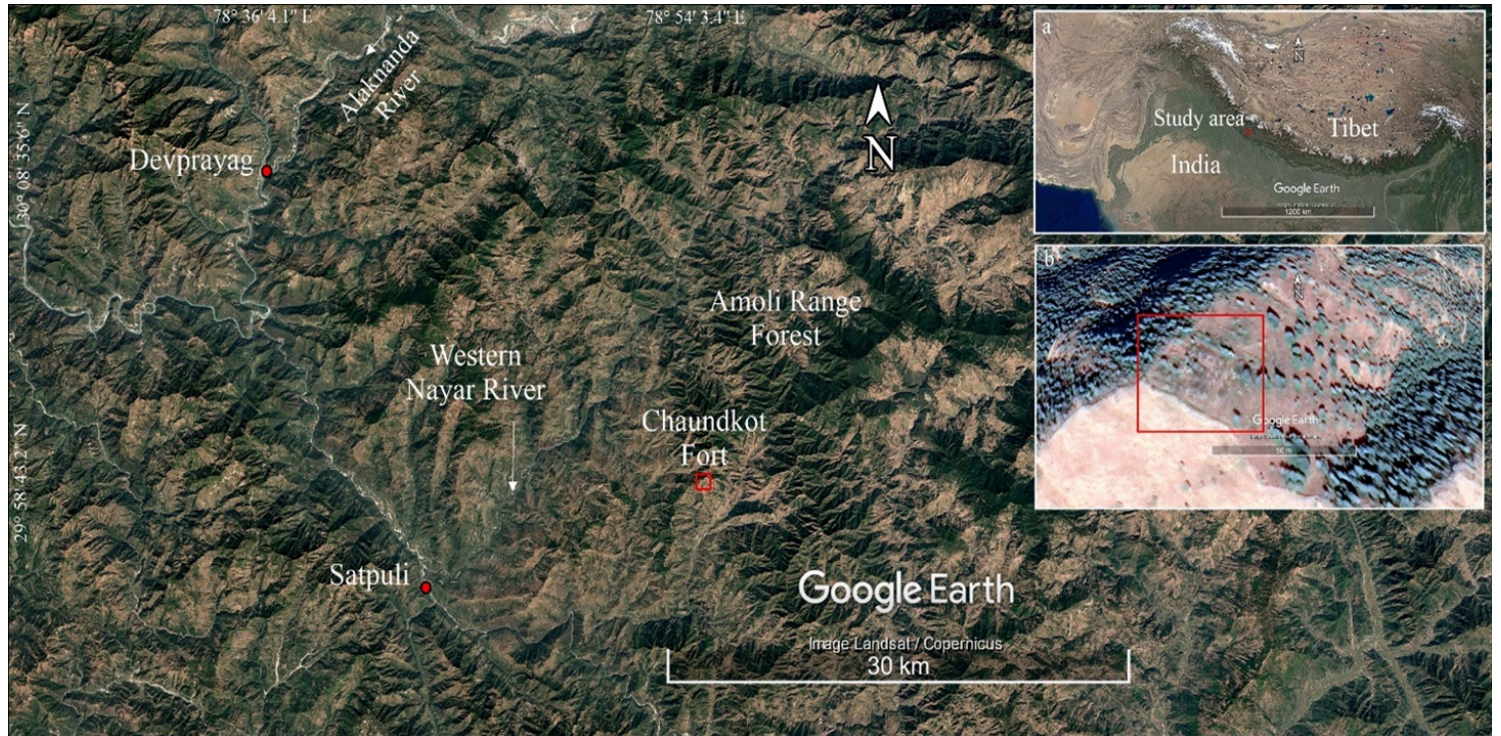
Figure 1

Location of Chaundkot Fort and Study Area (Google earth Image)

Figure 2

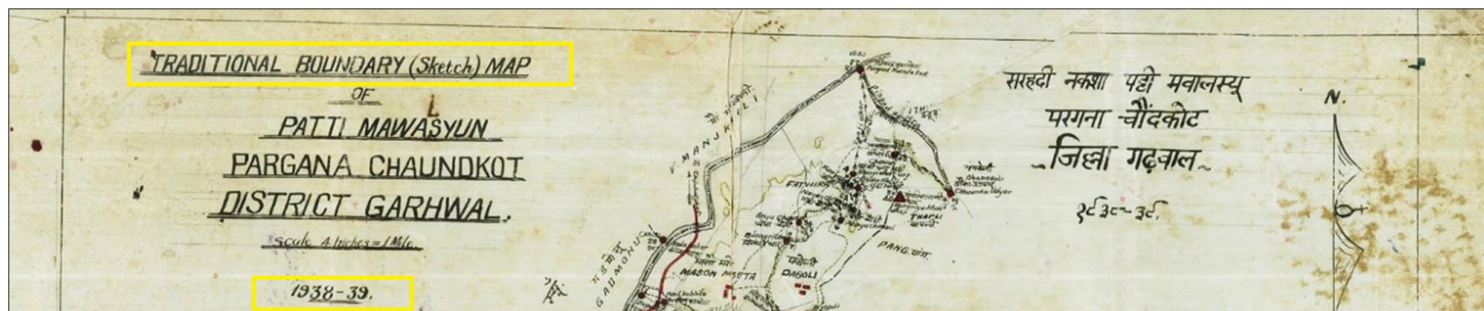Old Maps of patties of pargana Chaundkot (Map Courtesy: District settlement office, Pauri Garhwal)

Figure 3

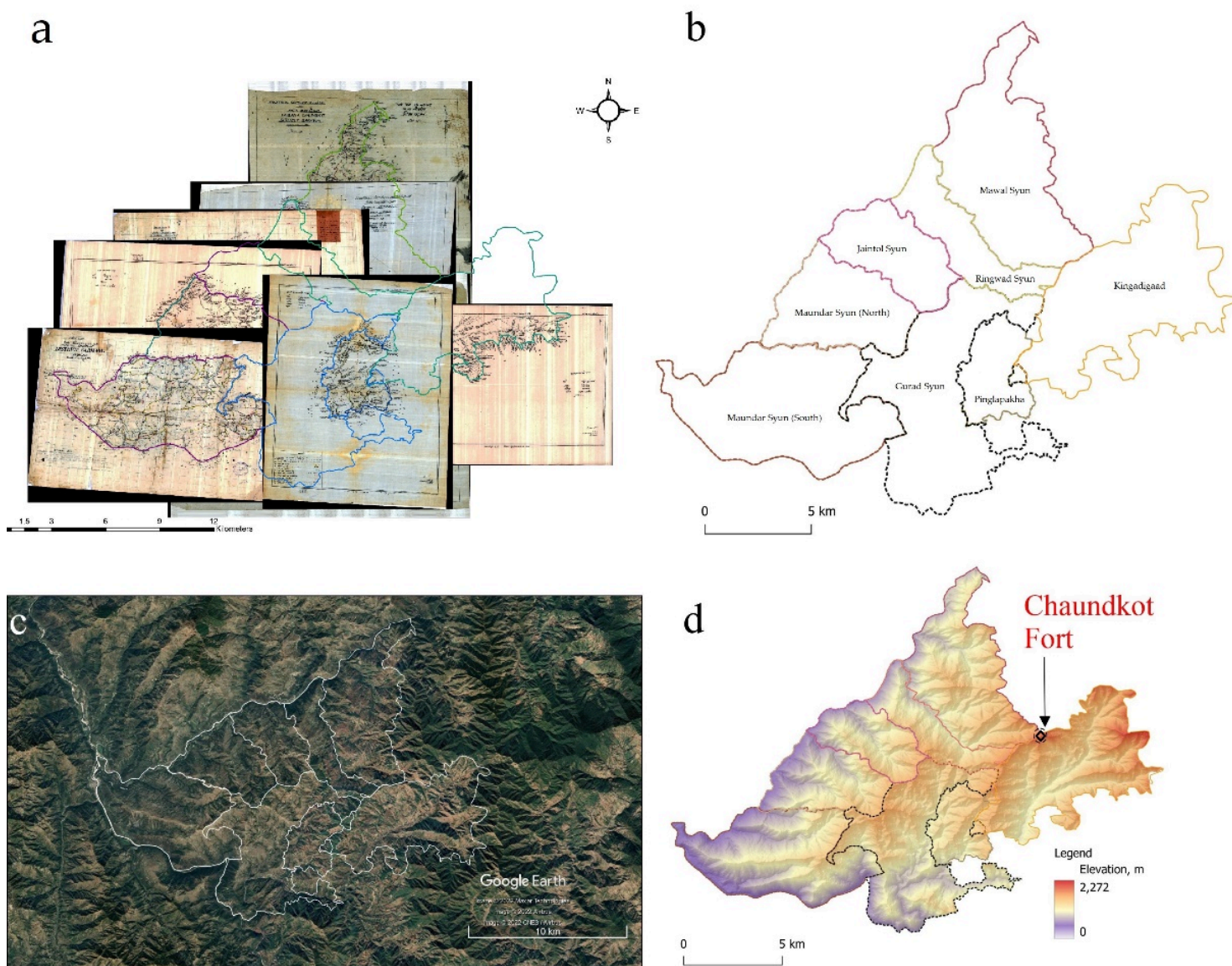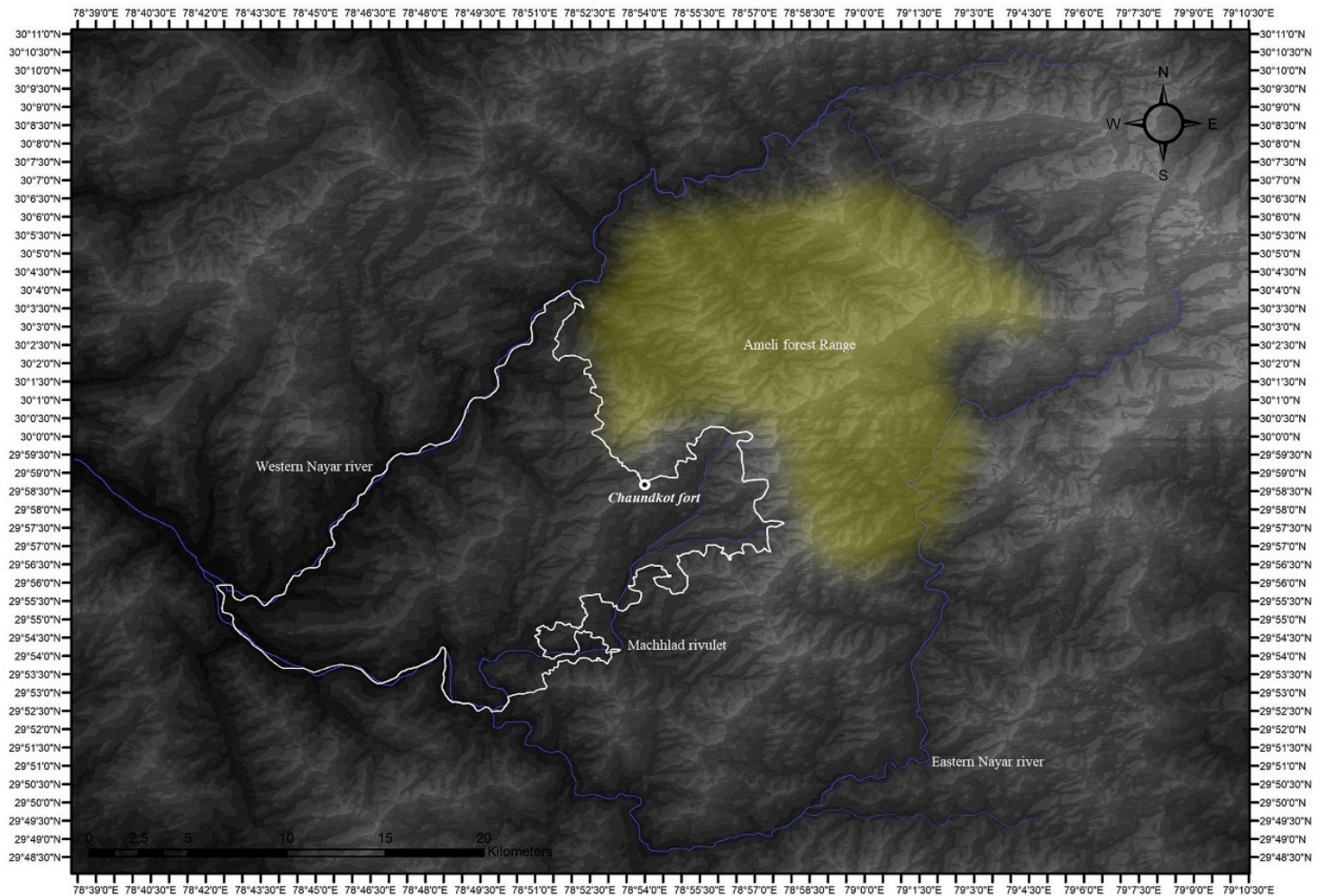Image showing the clear endorsement of '*Traditional Boundary*' on map

Figure 4

Image showing the analysis of old maps in ArcGIS

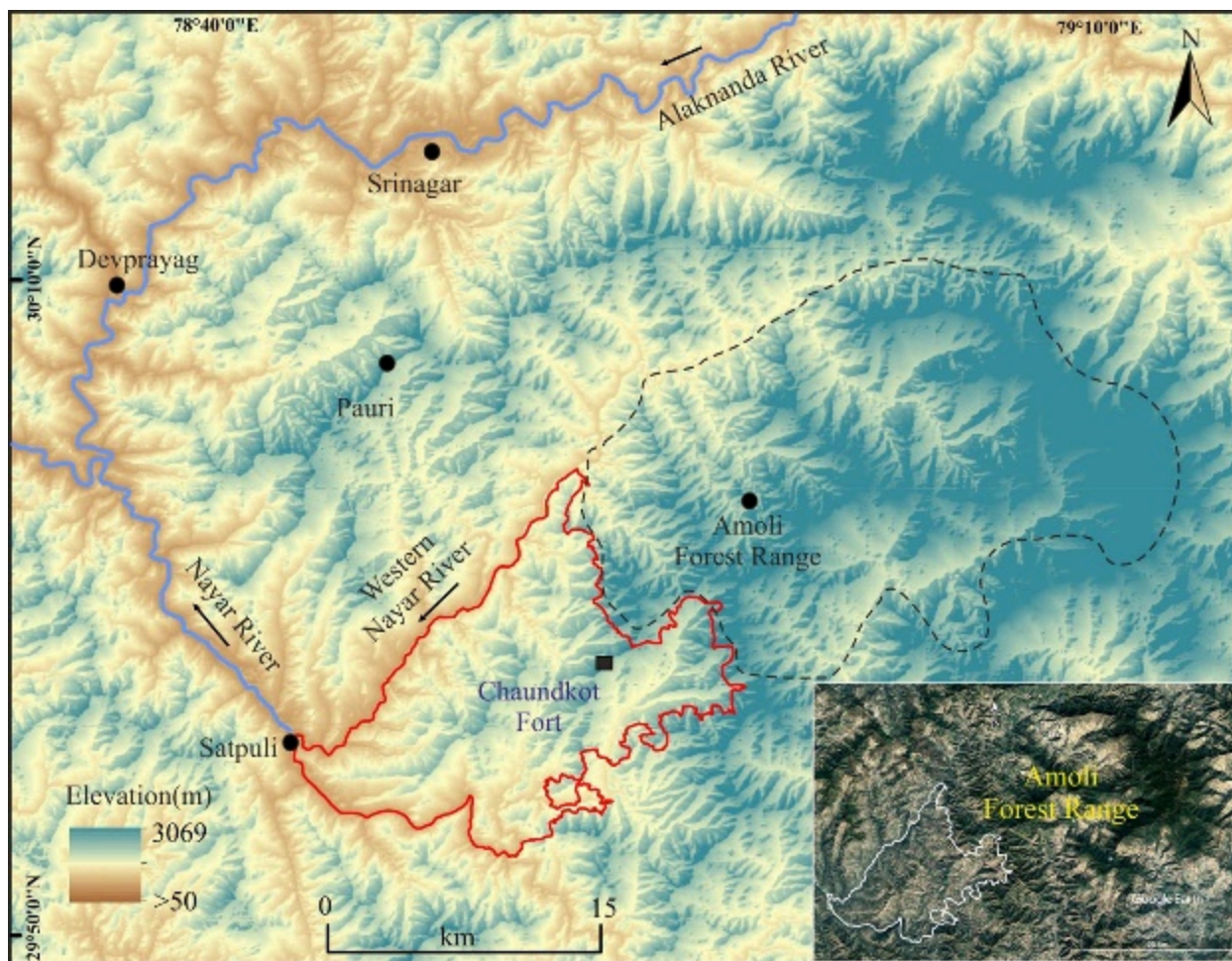(a) -Old maps in WGS84 coordinate system, (b)- Digitization of patti boundaries based on maps,

(c)- Boundaries of eight patties in present physical landscape,

(d) Map of Chaundkot pargana with location of Chaundkot fort
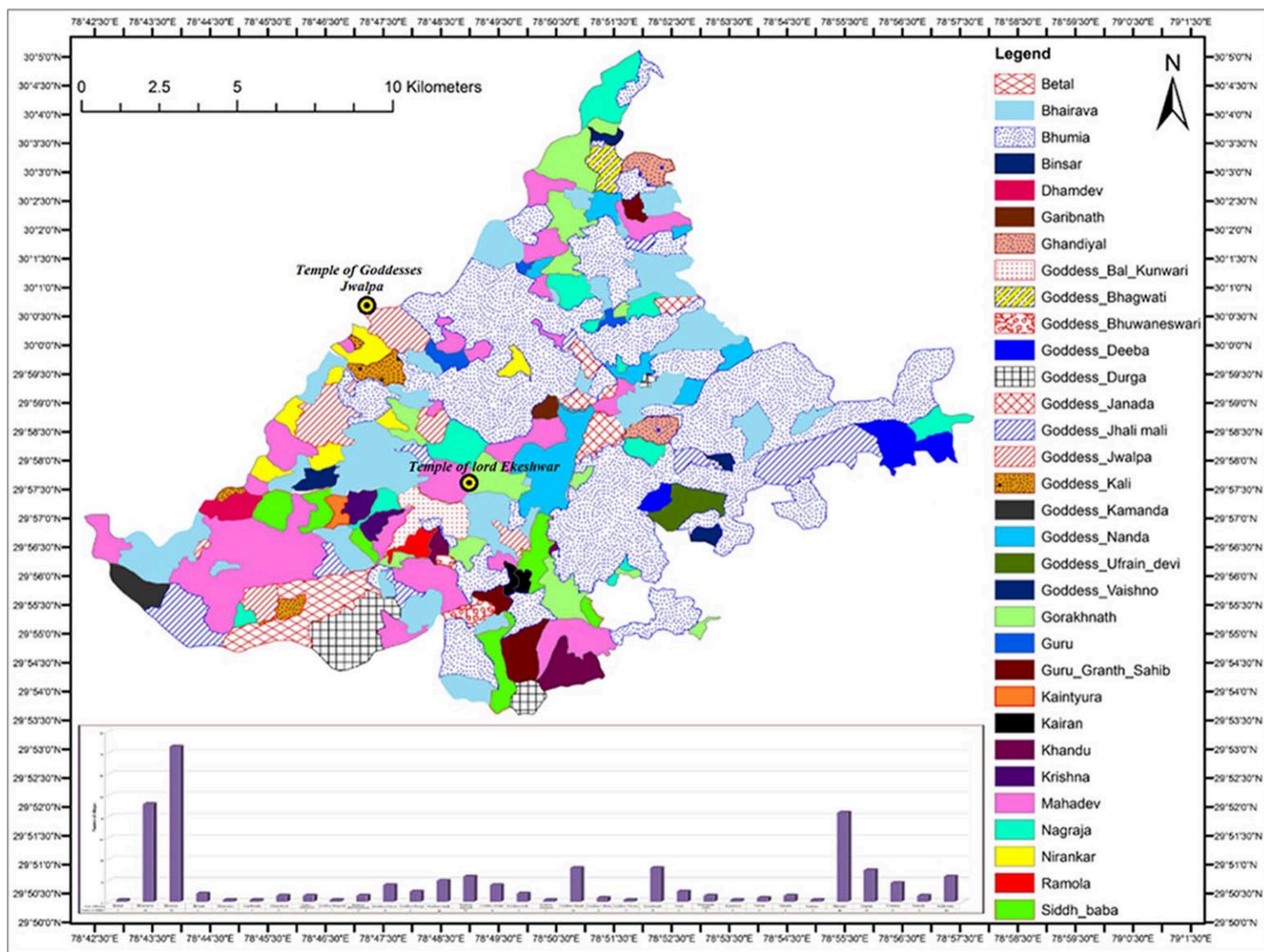

Figure 5

Digital elevation model (DEM) of study area showing the natural profile of the region
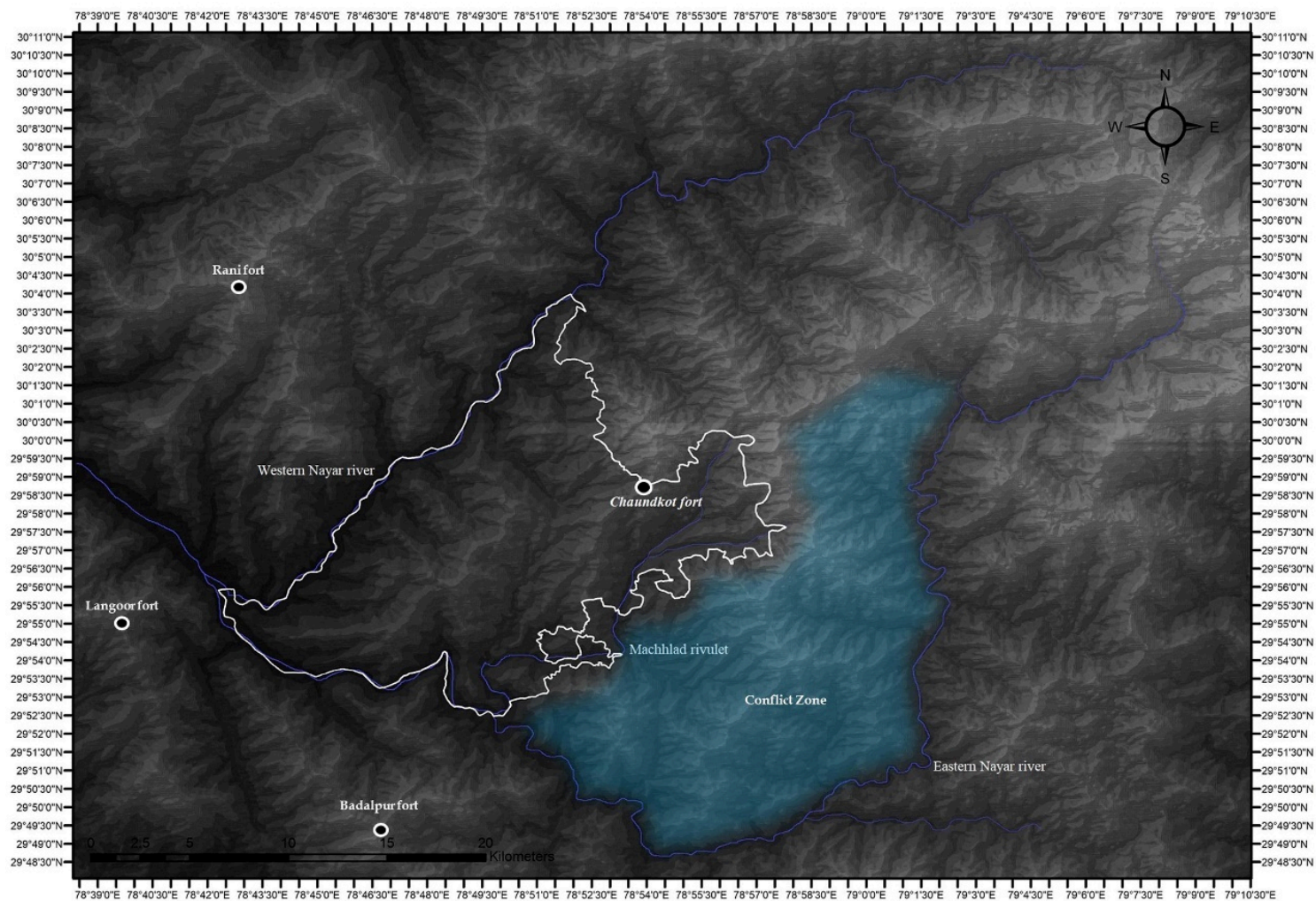
Figure 6

Territory of Chaundkot derived from natural features and old maps.

Figure 7

Map showing the area of influence of different village gods with pargana Chaundkot

Figure 8

Map showing the territory of Chaundkot fort and conflict zone