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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Vanishing Kothars: The Himalayan Granaries and Food Security

DOWN TO EARTH

14 June 2026

ENVIRONMENT

GEOGRAPHY

GS1

GS3

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GS1

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 Source: ujiyari.com — Free UPSC & State PCS Current Affairs


INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Modern supply chains have made food more available but local food systems more fragile. As traditional Himalayan granaries vanish, what is lost beyond the buildings, and can decentralised food security be revived?"

 Source: [Original editorial](#)
[Down to Earth](#)
 Every fact web-verified against primary sources

[HOW](#)

WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

Traditional Himalayan community grain stores, **kothars**, that once secured local food are disappearing. For an aspirant, this is a GS1 and GS3 case on **traditional knowledge, decentralised food security and the climate resilience of mountain economies**.

THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

Kothars, Himalayan community granaries, buffered mountain communities against scarcity, road closures and crop failure where centralised supply chains cannot reach. They are vanishing as cropping shifts to market crops, labour out-migrates, and reliance on the **public distribution system** grows. The loss is material and cultural, erasing seed-storage knowledge. The fix: revive local storage and diverse cropping alongside modern distribution.

THE ISSUE, DECODED

CONCEPT	WHAT IT MEANS	WHY IT MATTERS
Kothar	Traditional Himalayan grain store	Local food resilience in hard terrain
Decentralised food security	Local stores and diverse crops	Buffers remote areas against shocks
Traditional knowledge	Seed storage, crop diversity	Lost as the systems disappear
Food availability vs resilience	Having food vs withstanding shocks	Supply chains give one, not the other

THE ANALYSIS: WHY THE LOSS MATTERS

- ❶ **Resilience in hard terrain.** Local stores buffer communities where roads close and supply chains falter.
- ❷ **A shift, not a single cause.** Market cropping, out-migration and PDS reliance together hollow out local autonomy.
- ❸ **Cultural and ecological loss.** Vanishing kothars erase traditional seed and storage knowledge adapted to the mountains.
- ❹ **Availability is not resilience.** Modern distribution improves availability but cannot replicate local resilience.

DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

*the **Indian Himalayan Region** spans 13 states and union territories and is ecologically fragile and climate-sensitive. **The food link:** millets, championed under India's promotion of **Shree Anna** (millets), are climate-resilient mountain and dryland crops. **The systems:** traditional water and grain-storage systems are recognised as adaptive, decentralised resilience. **Concept:** traditional ecological knowledge; decentralised food security; climate adaptation.*

THE DEBATE

Argument for revival: Decentralised local storage and diverse cropping give mountain communities resilience that centralised chains cannot; their loss erodes food security and traditional knowledge.

Argument for modern systems: Supply chains and the public distribution system have improved food availability; nostalgia for traditional storage should not obstruct development.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT IT

Frame the answer around **availability versus resilience**. Argue that modern distribution and traditional systems are complements, not substitutes, especially in fragile mountain terrain. Connect GS1 (traditional knowledge, geography) and GS3 (food security, climate). Avoid romanticising the past.

THE DIAGRAM IN WORDS

Picture a mountain village with a full ration shop in the valley below and an empty granary on the hill above. When the road washes out in the monsoon, the shop is unreachable and the granary is bare. The kothar, once full, was the village's insurance against exactly that day.

PYQ LINKAGE

UPSC has asked about traditional knowledge, food security and the Himalayan region. This editorial connects those to the erosion of decentralised mountain food systems.

THE ONE-LINE TAKEAWAY

The vanishing kothar warns that food availability and resilience differ; reviving decentralised mountain food systems helps secure the Himalayas against a changing climate.

Source: Vanishing Kothars: The Himalayan Granaries and Food Security — Ujjari.com | Free UPSC & State PCS Editorial Analysis

● KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE

Traditional Himalayan community grain stores, the kothars that once underpinned local food security, are disappearing as cropping patterns and migration shift, and their loss signals the erosion of decentralised, climate-resilient food systems in mountain economies that deserve preservation and revival.

✓ SUPPORTING

- Kothars and similar local stores buffered mountain communities against seasonal scarcity, road closures and crop failure, providing resilience that centralised supply chains cannot

replicate in remote terrain.

- Their decline tracks the shift from diverse traditional crops to market crops, out-migration of labour, and reliance on the public distribution system, which together hollow out local food autonomy.
- The loss is also cultural, erasing traditional knowledge of seed storage, crop diversity and community management.

COUNTER

Some argue that modern supply chains and the public distribution system have improved food availability and that nostalgia for traditional storage should not obstruct development and convenience.

WAY FORWARD

Revive and document traditional storage and seed systems, support millet and diverse local cropping, strengthen mountain-specific food security, and integrate traditional resilience with modern distribution rather than replacing one with the other.

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MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK

QUESTION

"The loss of traditional food-storage systems erodes decentralised, climate-resilient food security." Examine in the context of the Himalayan region. (250 words)

INTRODUCTION

A granary is more than a building. In the Himalayas, the vanishing kothar holds a question: what happens to food security when the local systems that once provided it quietly disappear?

BODY

Across the Himalayan belt, traditional community grain stores, known by names such as kothar, once anchored local food security. Built to preserve grain through long winters, road closures and lean seasons, they let mountain communities buffer themselves against scarcity in terrain that centralised supply chains struggle to reach reliably.

They are now disappearing, and the causes reveal a wider shift. Cropping has moved from diverse traditional grains and millets toward market-oriented crops; labour has migrated out of the hills; and dependence on the public distribution system has grown.

Each change is individually rational, but together they hollow out local food autonomy and the resilience it provided. The loss is not only material.

It erases a body of traditional knowledge, of seed storage, crop diversity and community-managed reserves, accumulated over generations and well adapted to a fragile, climate-sensitive environment. The point is not to romanticise the past or reject modern distribution, which has genuinely improved availability.

It is to recognise that mountain food security is distinctive, and that decentralised, climate-resilient local systems are a complement to, not a relic superseded by, the centralised supply chain. The way forward is to document and revive traditional storage and seed systems, support millet and diverse cropping, and build mountain-specific food security that weaves traditional resilience together with modern logistics.

Resilience in the Himalayas is local, or it is fragile.

CONCLUSION

The vanishing kothar is a warning that food availability and food resilience are not the same. Reviving decentralised mountain food systems is part of securing the Himalayas against a changing climate.

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