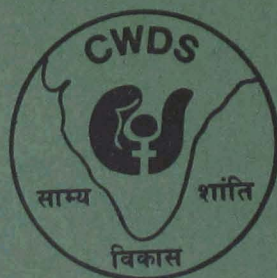


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WOMEN IN STRUGGLE :
ROLE AND PARTICIPATION OF
WOMEN IN THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT IN
UTTARAKHAND REGION OF
UTTAR PRADESH

KUMUD SHARMA
with
KUSUM NAUTIYAL
and
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Kumud Sharma

ROLE AND PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN
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I N T R O D U C T I O N

The whole area of women in social movements is beginning to be explored and consequently some common patterns of women's participation are surfacing. Social scientists have a poor record in documenting women's role in agrarian and workers' struggle in the past and it is now difficult to reconstruct women's role in these struggles historically. This lack of a historical dimension in the analyses of women and movements has obscured our understanding of the emergence and growth of the ideology of women's movement and its relationship with the nationalist and micro social movements.

The debate on women's role and participation in popular movements has raised several questions regarding organisational and leadership issues, nature of struggle, mobilising mechanisms and strategies, perspectives on micro issues in relation to larger political processes and ideological dimensions.

Do women's issues get posed through women's participation in broader movements? Is there a close link between women's activism at grassroots level and their politicisation? It is now widely recognised that while women have been active in militant struggle of poor peasant and working class people the issues of women's oppression and exploitation within the family and the society do not get automatically posed within the movement. It has also been observed that rural women who constitute an important segment of the production process have been by and large neglected by both political parties and other mobilising groups. The autonomous women's groups which emerged in the 70s have challenged the 'Marxist paradigm' that sees women's movement as inseparable from working class movement and autonomous women's groups are seen as a threat to the unity of the working class struggle. There is also a growing criticism of the 'development paradigm' which overlooks the political dimension of women's issue.

Some scholars have suggested that a genuine mass based women's movement can grow out of the grassroot participatory organisations of women as through participation will emerge the critical consciousness. The emergence of autonomous women's groups in the 70s and the re-emergence of women's issues has brought out the contradictions in our understanding of the nature of the linkages between women's participation in the political process and the development of critical consciousness regarding women's issues. All these debates have raised wider questions on women's role in social and political life.

The question arises what does 'participation' mean? Do women's activities in larger movements always have a politicising effect? What are the linkages between women's participation in the political process and the emergence and growth of the ideology of women's movement? Why is it that women have always responded to 'crisis issues' and then retreated to the mundane issues of daily existence? What are the relationships between women's participation in movements, the material conditions of their existence and the ideology of gender? Any attempt to answer these questions involves looking into wider issues of women's role in social and political life.

Some scholars have argued that political participation of women depends largely on the historical tradition of women's participation in political and social movements and on the political milieu. To understand the political behaviour of women and the constraints on their participation it is important to define both the concept of political status and political participation. Political participation is understood generally as the voluntary participation in political affairs through the act of voting, membership and other activities related with political parties, legislative assemblies and socio-political movements. Political status has been defined by the Committee on

the status of women in India as the degree of equality and freedom displayed by women in the shaping and sharing of power and in the value given to women's role in the society.*

The differences between men's and women's participation in the political process is a symptom of a larger process and there seems to be a general apathy among political scientists to raise issues of gender relations and political power and or explain that these differences are rooted not in the socio-cultural norms but in the political and economic systems which maintain these norms through an unequal distribution of power, authority and resources. The power structure is viewed by political scientists in a restricted manner. Most of the analysis of political participation is limited to data on voting behaviour and representation in elective bodies (election studies) than to other aspects of women in politics. Political (non) socialisation of women is often referred to in most studies as the reason for women's lower political participation, yet, women's concern and their roles in shaping and sharing power do not form an important aspect of political debate.

In the 60s as a response to the failure of national level organisations and political parties to take up problems and issues of the oppressed sections, many action groups emerged at micro levels. Each of these groups drew attention to the nature of social transformation and mobilised people to protest on issues which they thought as critical. While explaining the emergence of these protest movements it is necessary to examine the context in which they have developed.

* Maitreyi Chowdhari, Zoya Hasan and Vina Mazumdar - "Women's Participation in Political Life in India"; (Mimeo); Centre for Women's Development Studies; 1983.

Approach

The study is based on both secondary sources and field work using diverse techniques such as observation, survey, historical and case study method, interviews and content analysis of the documents available on the movement in the 70s to understand the genesis, growth, ideology, strategies of collective mobilisation, and leadership and the organisational base.

There are both advantages and disadvantages of studying a contemporary on-going movement. It is argued that a study of social movements belongs mainly to the realm of history and not sociology because a movement is discovered by the sociologists after it has come into existence or is on the wane. It is difficult to do field work when a movement is on and especially when it is violent in nature.** However, in the case of 'Chipko' it is not altogether a 'historic fact' and has no epilogue. The situation within the movement is fluid and the point is reached where emerging patterns are not very clear.

The first part of the report deals with the structural conditions in the area responsible for the emergence of the movement. The documentary evidence has been collected from archival material and official reports, gazetteers, census, working plans and expert group reports relating to British and Indian Forest policies and the consequent changes in the region as far as people's rights are concerned.

The empirical analysis in Section III and IV is based on interviews with key informants i.e. leaders and activists within the organisations who mobilised people, women activists and those who participated in protests and demonstrations and women who did not participate directly in the movement. This information gave knowledge about genesis,

** M.S.A. Rao(ed.) - Social Movements in India, Vol. 1.

occurrence of events, group dynamics, leadership issues, methods of mobilisation and social consequences of the movement for the women activists. It provides a perspective on what kind of change did the movement envisage and what kind of developments it intended to resist.

Practically nothing is available on women's role and participation in the series of rebellion against the British forest policies and management which adversely affected the rights of the forest dwellers. For the 70s newspapers, periodicals and other reports by chipko leaders and activists, journalists and academics were consulted. The reports are the first to make exalting references to women's participation. Women's response to the movement was a consequence of their relative deprivations linked with historical and cultural factors in the region which provided the contextual base.

The problem of methodology is linked to the subject of the study. One set of issues relate to the situational analysis which prevailed in the area at the time of the emergence of the movement and had roots in the past and a second set of issues relate to the forms and manifestation of collective action on the part of a section of population, their understanding of the issues involved and the ideology and orientation to change.

THE CONTEXT

Changing Environment in Uttarakhand
(Himalayan Region of Uttar Pradesh)

The Uttar Pradesh Himalayas consist of eight districts, collectively known as Uttarakhand. The region covers 51,122 sq. km. area and is divided into two administrative divisions - Garhwal and Kumaon. After the India-China War in 1962 the Uttar Pradesh Government separated three revenue divisions of Pithoragarh in Almora district, Chamoli in Garhwal district and Barahat in Tehri district and formed three new districts. Nearly 20 per cent area is covered by snow and between 40-50 per cent area is under forest with varying density. There is no unanimity about the percentage of area under forest and the estimates vary from 32 to 37.45 percent. Physiographically the area is divided into (1) Greater Himalayas; (2) Lower Himalayas; (3) Sivalik Range; (4) Bhabar and (5) Tarai.

According to 1981 census the total population of 8 districts in Uttarakhand was 4.8 million. The population increased from 3.822 million to 4.815 million during 1971-81. The population density varies from 24 per sq. km. in Uttarkashi to 245 in Dehradun which is highly urbanised district. Due to wide variations in climatic conditions there are pockets of large populations in relatively fertile valleys while some areas with rugged terrain have extremely sparse population.

In Uttar Pradesh the forests are mainly concentrated in the eight hilly districts. About 93 per cent of the hill population lives in rural areas comprising of about 15,000 villages. The per capita income in the hills is nearly half of that in Uttar Pradesh. Tehri and Uttarkashi in Garhwal are two of India's poorest districts. Male migration to plains is high and to bridge the subsistence gap families depend on money order remittances. Most of the agricultural operations are done by women who are also responsible for the collection of fuel, fodder and food from the forests.

According to official statistics of the Forest Department, India lost about 4.3 million hectares of forest land to river valley projects, extended cultivation, roads and industries etc. This does not include vast areas adjacent to dams and industries under the control of the Forest Department but where the tree cover has been totally destroyed or areas where illegal fellings have been taking place¹. A report of the National Committee on Environment Planning states that no more than about 12 per cent of the country's total area is under adequate tree cover as against 33 per cent stipulated in the National Forest Policy of 1952. The problem of overgrazing, encroachment of agriculture in forested land due to population pressure and invasion of timber contractors with increased communications have played havoc in the area.

The forest area ranges between 37.95 to 47.2 per cent and including Panchayati Forest it is about 60-63 per cent of the entire region. However unofficial figures estimate that about 50 per cent of this area is degraded and nearly eight per cent of the total area is facing severe soil erosion.² The percentage area under forest varies from 33 per cent in Pithoragarh district to 87 per cent in the Uttarkashi district.

<u>District</u>	<u>Area in sq. km.</u>	<u>Area under forest dept.</u>	<u>Panchayat forest</u>	<u>% of total forest area</u>
Uttarkashi	8000	6956	-	87
Chamoli	9100	3885	1159.26	55
Pithoragarh	7200	771.31	1607.75	33
Almora	7000	2117.06	1989.33	58
Garhwal	5400	2391.84	895.10	60
Tehri-Garhwal	4400	2694.42	-	61
Nainital	6800	3568.67	576.82	61
Dehradun	3100	1505.17	165.00	54

Source : Himalaya Sewa Sangh

The legal status of the forests in the eight hill districts of Uttar Pradesh according to official estimates is as follows:³

1. Total Geographical Area	51,000 sq. km.
2. Forest area under the control of the Forest Department	23,989 sq. km.
3. Civil and Soyam Forest	6,357 sq. km.
4. Panchayat Forest	2,033 sq. km.
5. Private Forests including Municipal Forests	166 sq. km.
<hr/>	
TOTAL	32,545 sq. km.
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According to these statistics the total area of forests as percentage of geographical area is 64 per cent. It is estimated that out of this only 40 per cent is really under forests cover. Civil and Soyam forests though legally protected forests, are in very bad shape with the increasing pressure of bovine and human population. According to the forest department's figures the total forest area as percentage of geographical area of the state is 17.4 per cent.

For more than a century developments in this region have brought about major ecological transformation affecting the life of the inhabitants. The forests, the rivers and the mountains which are the pivot of existence of over 2 million people have witnessed injudicious interference with the eco-system of the region.

In Uttar Pradesh, a quarter of the forest area has been lost to illegal fellings. Much of this region from where few major rivers originate, is prone to land-slides, soil-erosion and floods. Fuel and fodder scarcity is so acute that in many areas women have to spend almost the whole day to get their daily necessities. In the absence of any alternative sources of energy, the present fuel needs of local people are irreducible minimum. By the fifties the forest in the foot-hills of Himalayas were wiped out. After 1962 Indo-Chinese conflict a network

of roads and communication links were built which opened the whole area to timber contractors who indulged in rapacious felling of the forests. In 1978 the Uttar Pradesh Government deforested large areas in the Doon Valley to rehabilitate persons displaced by the acquisition of land for the construction of Tehri Dam in Garhwal. The growing pressure of human and livestock population is playing havoc with the fragile ecological balance in the Himalayan region.

The Uttar Pradesh hills have conifers and broad-leaved forests, rich in timber and medicinal herbs. The broad-leaved oak forests are disappearing and are replaced by chir-pine trees. Local leaders in Garhwal have also drawn attention to the destructive resin-tapping methods. Resin is an important source of revenue for the state. During the 60s, in the Uttarakhand region 7.35 lakh channels were tapped in 1961-62 which doubled by 1974-75 to 15.22 lakhs. In 1977 several demonstrations were held at various places and in Henwal Valley, in Tehri district in Saklana range in a public meeting the demonstrators put mud plaster on deep cuts made on pine trees to extract resin. This symbolic protest was followed by a series of demonstrations at Gotars, Bharari and Jodidada forests. The State Government decided to institute an enquiry and later banned resin-tapping in some areas by private contractors but tapping by the forest department continued. A 'Chipko' leader of Tehri described this region as a "graveyard of pine trees".

The K.M. Tewari Committee which enquired into the excess tapping of resin from pine-trees in the forests of Uttarakhand reported that "In the Chakrata, Yamuna and Tons Divisions, generally irregularities were detected in cent per cent of the cuts made in the pine trees for tapping resin. Either in terms of numbering of trees or in terms of the width, length and depth of the cuts made, rules were not followed".

In the last ten years, mining and quarrying activities in the hills have increased in spite of repeated warnings by the geologists as Himalayas are structurally unstable and young hills. Recent newspaper reports on mining and quarrying activities in Mussorie brought to notice the ecological destruction in that area in the name of 'development'.

In one of the official documents of the Uttar Pradesh Forest Department 'Chipko Movement - State Government's View (1979) written by the then Forest Secretary of the Uttar Pradesh Government, it was stated, 'Due weight in the past has not been given to considerations of ecology and environment while sanctioning leases or actually conducting mining and quarrying operations in pursuance of the sanctioned leases. This needs to be effectively corrected forthwith. A set of guidelines need to be evolved in this regard in consultations with the ecologists and environmentalists and the same should be rigorously enforced'.⁴ In spite of this frank admission the Uttar Pradesh Government claimed that the exploitation of forest in Uttar Pradesh is much less than in similar areas in other developing countries. A "preinvestment survey of forest resources" carried out by a Government of India organisation (1976) in some of the catchment areas came to the conclusion that the removal from the forest are only a small fraction of the potential.

The investment made by the Uttar Pradesh Government in the Forestry sector have not exceeded 1.50 per cent of the total plan outlay as given below :

Five Year Plans	Expenditure (in crores)	Expenditure as percentage to total expenditure
First Plan (1951-56)	1.39	0.91
Second Plan (1956-61)	2.68	1.15
Third Plan (1961-66)	8.33	1.49
Three Annual Plan(1966-68)	6.39	1.49
Fourth Plan (1969-74)	14.83	1.27
Fifth Plan (1974-79)	29.75	1.07
Annual Plan (1979-80)	11.36	1.40

Source : Forest Department Uttar Pradesh - Progress Report 1982.

In the Sixth Five Year plan it is proposed to spend Rs. 99.50 crores which is 1.60 per cent of the total plan outlay. Under the afforestation schemes plantation of trees of commercial and industrial value (2,87,000 hectares) and trees of quick growing variety i.e. Eucalyptus, paper Mulberry, Poplars and Bamboo plantations (1,85,000 hectares) were taken up.

The Uttar Pradesh Forest Corporation was set up in 1974 to replace the contractor system by the co-operative and public sector undertaking. Till 1980-81 the Forest Corporation had taken over around 30 percent of forest departments work regarding exploitation of forest wealth :

Unit	1974-75	1980-81
Timber Cubic Metre	25,966	3,00,800
Fuel Cubic Metre	43,000	1,51,000
Bamboo Cubic Metre	21,300	2,35,100
Value (in lakhs)	20,983	1,01,095
Profit/Loss	+8.82	+53.58
Estimated Number of labourer employed per day (in '000)	1.0	7.0

Source : Progress Report of Uttar Pradesh Forest Corporation 1980-81

The Forest Corporation is guided more by its financial viability rather than by the social purpose, although the Forest Department claims that there is no difference in the basic objectives of the Forest Department and the organisers of 'save forest' movement both in terms of conservation of forest and seeking co-operation and active involvement of the local people.⁵ Reacting to one of the Chipko leaders demand of

complete moratorium on fellings, the Department felt that it will be very difficult to build an organisation specially in the Government and that too of a commercial nature in the teeth of opposition of the private sector and then expect it to switch over from felling and commercial work to welfare and conservation work. This organisation (Forest Corporation) was built for a certain type of work. To expect it to change over to an entirely different type of work and that too not of commercial but social nature yielding indirect not quantifiable returns is easier said than done.⁶

The genesis of 'Chipko' movement and the current ecological crisis lies in the short-sighted forest policies followed by the British Raj and its continuance by the Government after Independence. The 1952 National Forest Policy was only a remodelling of the old system of forest management under the colonial regime.

History of Forest Management in Uttarakhand

The history of forest management in India shows that nothing much has changed in the forest policy of independent India. The fetish that is made out of the protection and conservation of forest wealth actually amounts to monopolistic government control and denial of people's rights in the forest. It appears that the functions of the forest as suppliers of raw materials for commercial interests and as a source of livelihood for the local people are in conflict with each other.

Prior to British occupation of Garhwal and Kumaon in 1815, the political instability in the region for about half a century, Nepalese invasion and tyrannical Gurkha rule (1790-1815), in Garhwal, had already contributed to the disintegration of the economy of this region.⁷ During the period of instability the East India Company was vigorously trying to explore opportunities to create a base in this region which

was both rich in forest resources and would also open avenues for trade with the neighbouring countries particularly China. In 1802 Sir Henry Wellesley had deputed a British to examine Kumaon forests and from some original correspondence of 1811 it appears that the expulsion of the Gurkhas from Kumaon and Garhwal was being seriously planned.⁸ The East India Company acquired control over Kumaon Hills nearly forty years before the annexation of Avadh in 1856.

During the early stage of British Administration in this area, several measures were adopted to curtail native rights to satisfy European interests. The first major step was taken by Mr. Trail who as the Commissioner of Kumaon sent a letter to the Government on 22nd January 1817 in which he said that 'The East India Company had sovereign rights over the lands of Kumaon'. The entire fabric of the fiscal administration of Kumaon in later years hangs over this one loose statement of Mr. Trail.⁹ From 1817 to 1823 he conducted seven settlements of land revenue popularly known as 'sanassi bandobast'.¹⁰

The important features of these settlements were that the village was treated as the unit of the settlement, and the proprietary rights of the landlords were never questioned, and a clear distinction was made between the hissedars (landlord) and the Khatikar (tenants) cultivators. These two categories originally represented not only the land-owning and tenant status but also a distinction between the powerful ruling elites and the ruled class. There was a third category of those who supplied agriculture labour and were called Sirtan but they were not entitled to own land. The feudal structure in the hill region thrived on the system of bonded labour. The system of forced labour continued during British occupation of Kumaon hills. In a note to the Government, Trail wrote in 1825 that "in the greater portion of the villages throughout the provinces, cultivation is in the hands of the actual proprietors of the soil, only in a few the right of property distinguished from actual occupation being vested in different individuals".¹¹

Sanassi settlement did not bring much change in the land tenure system, instead it confined the existing village boundaries in the land settlement records. This did not fulfill the expectations of the British who had expected to acquire rights over land to start tea plantations. In 1828 Lord William Bentinck appointed a Tea Committee. Discussions between 1828-33 in the British Parliament over the issue of British acquiring landed property in India eventually resulted in the passing of the Act IV of 1837 and consolidation of colonial powers regulating and restricting people's customary rights over land and forests on the grounds of wider national and public interest.¹²

Batten, the next Settlement Officer declared the boundaries fixed by Trail in 'Sanassi Bandobast' as mere nominal and for the first time people were told that a record of rights over land was necessary. He believed that large portions of wasteland and waste forests have been from time immemorial included in the boundaries of adjacent villages although not recorded and the records of village administration were imperfect. He started his work with the assumption that "the rights of government to all the forests and wastelands not included in the assessable area of the estates remains totally unaffected by the inclusion of certain tracts within the boundaries of villages and that no one has a right, merely on account of such inclusion to demand payment for the use of pasture-grounds or for the permission to cut timber or firewood. Neither does such inclusion interfere necessarily with the right of Government to accept offers for new (nayat) leases".¹³

People did not, at first, realise the intricacies and implications of Batten's land settlement. As a result before the far reaching repercussions of such legislation were realised in their fullest sense the British administration had already consolidated its base by acquiring cultivable wasteland. In 1852-53 the first rules for the grant of wastelands for tea plantations were made and the tea industry came into prominence. Another legislation brought into force to push

forward their efforts to acquire monopoly over wasteland was the Act XXVI of 1863. This Act was followed by Beckett's Settlement of Kumaon. During this settlement Beckett compelled people to relinquish their claims over forests and wastelands and to provide forced labour which is known as Coolie, Utar or Begar system in the local dialect. With each settlement, the system of forced labour became more exploitative.

During this period the denudation of forest was so much that it became necessary for the administration to realise the negative aspects of such wanton destruction. The first major step to preserve forest was taken by Commissioner Ramsay who abolished the contract system in 1858. "His administration was marked by the control of felling operation, the removal of squatters from the valuable forest tracts to available land fit for cultivation below the forest boundaries, the construction of roads and the establishment of stations for the collection of revenue at convenient intervals....".¹⁴

The first Indian Forest Act of 1865 empowered the Government to declare any land covered with trees and wasteland as government land by notification provided such notification should not abridge or affect any existing rights of individuals and communities. With this Act, the Indian Forest Service was also started. Sir Henry Maine, while introducing the Bill, however, stated that Government had no intention to affect or abridge petty rights of the people who had been enjoying the forest resource for their personal use.

As the British increasingly realised the commercial value of the forests they further amended the Forest Act. The Forest Act of 1865 was replaced by the Act VIII of 1878. It differentiated forests into reserved, protected and village forests. The main object of this categorisation was to impose restriction on the traditional free access of people to all forests. The Act suggested that Government should have more control over reserve forest than in the case of protected forests.

In a span of 40 years, the British administration could establish control over land and forest wealth. The need for forest conservation was realised much later after well over five decades of British occupation of this area. During this period merciless exploitation of valuable trees was done mainly by industrious Britishers who had access to Government protection through various legislations, financial support and business acumen. The justification extended for such wanton felling was the development of transportation industries and other such activities which would develop the economic environment of the region.

Besides timber trade, intensification of commercial cultivation viz. tea, fruits, potato etc. required by Europeans was another reason which led to the heavy denudation of forests. Special facilities were given to non-residents for encouraging and popularising potato cultivation. 'Large areas were set apart for this purpose in the neighbourhood of Bingayab and Dhura and other peaks so that potato supplies might be easily maintained at Nainital. These potato lands were managed in what is known as the 'khām system' under which the planters were liable to pay rent on land actually cropped during the year. The cultivation however was of a spasmodic nature and fresh tracts were cleared for the purpose after short intervals, but under this said system the potato planter was relieved of any liability to rent on account of land previously cleared up but not actually under cultivation, during the year of demand.'¹⁵

The earliest record in regard to the reservation of forests for government use is found in 1826. "The whole of the forests had always been recognised as belonging to government, and any part of them could therefore, be appropriated to the exclusive use of government without the slightest infringement of the right or claims of a single individual".¹⁶ A proclamation was issued in 1826 prohibiting the cutting of sal within the reserves which was at once excluded from the lease of forest produce, and thus the system of government forest

commenced. "Thus the British whose sole aim was to exploit the forests of this region got free hand. They were given contracts at a nominal rate. The fallacy of the system was that though mass felling was permitted but no attempt was made to enforce any system of conservancy. The leasing out of the forests to the contractors continued".¹⁷

Development of transportation in the country added a new dimension to the denudation of forests. Trees were found highly suitable for railway sleepers. The administration liberalised norms for the contractors because railways were meant for their own benefit. Fuel for smelting ores was another aspect which required large quantities of fire-wood. Ironmongers and iron companies depended heavily on the forests. Most of these companies were organised by Europeans to maintain the fuel supply. Besides, the major denudation was done due to establishment of large tea plantations which was not known to local people prior to British occupation. "The destruction of trees of all species appears to have continued steadily and reached its climax between 1855 and 1861, when the demands of the railway authorities induced numerous speculators in this area....".¹⁸

From 1870 to 1893 boundaries of several forest tracts in Almora, Nainital and Garhwal were demarcated. During this period, sales of several villages which included large forests took place. These sales were confirmed by British courts. Even Sir Henry Ramsay advised the prospective tea planters to purchase small villages with large jungle lands attached to them. This shows that British exercised all manner of proprietary rights over forests till 1893.¹⁹

In October 1893 Government issued a controversial notification through which it was declared that all the forests and wastelands of Almora, Nainital and Garhwal came under the category of protected forests. Prior to this notification no enquiry was undertaken to ascertain people's

rights over forest and wasteland. This step violated Government's earlier admission that the right of the people and of Government over wasteland were co-mingled. Consequent upon such developments people became restive and challenged the promulgation but Government did not pay any attention.

A year later on 24th October 1894 the Government issued a Resolution which later became the basis of Indian National Forest Policy of 1952. The village people were prohibited from cutting trees within 100 feet on either side of the road and boundary of the village. Breaking of wasteland for cultivation was strictly prohibited. In addition to this further legislation was provided for preservation of deodar, cypress, chir, sal, sisam, tur and khair trees, which were declared as 'protected trees'.

The effect of such legislations was far reaching. As administration started enforcing these rules, people's hardships began to increase. Between 1893 to 1911 working plans were formulated for reservation and closing of forests for regeneration where the exclusion of cattle for afforestation was needed.

In 1903 the British Government issued fresh instructions dividing the protected or civil forests into two categories : (a) closed civil forests in which people's rights and concessions would be looked after by the Deputy Commissioner; (b) open-civil forest in which village people would have all the rights quarrying of stones, grazing cattle, sheep and goat etc. will be exercisable in the open civil forests without any restrictions. The Deputy Commissioner's permission will be necessary for the cutting of deodar trees, the patwaris and pradhans will be authorised to give permission for cutting other varieties of reserved trees in open civil forest".²⁰

In a span of 90 years since the British occupation of this area, the policies for land settlement and forest management disrupted the life and socio-economic relations among the people. In 1907 a mass meeting was organised at Almora in protest against Government policies. In order to pacify the agitated people, Sir John Hewett, Lt. Governor of Uttar Pradesh, declared in Bareilly in 1908, that "the Government had no desire to make money out of the forests in Kumaon; and intended to spend for the benefit of the people of Kumaon, the amount by which the receipt exceed the expenses".²¹ However, he was firm that in order to check the "reckless destruction of the forests" it was imperative to bring wasteland within the purview of the Forest Act.

In 1910 a meeting was held at the behest of Hewett to evolve new methods of forest management in Kumaon and Garhwal. It was resolved in the meeting that two forest settlement officers, Stiff and Nelson would take over charge of the district of Almora and Garhwal respectively and the district of Nainital would be divided between them. These forest officials arbitrarily brought more than 3000 sq. miles within reserves and raised the total area of reserved forests from 4175 sq. miles in 1912 to about 7500 sq. miles in 1915.²²

The exercises by the administration from 1911-1917 brought a new set of instructions for forest management. Under the new measures, now Reserve Forests were classified into A, B and C classes. Class A forests were primarily for the fulfilment of the requirements of the local people (sic) and for the sale of forest produce to them. These forests were placed under the control of Forest Department for the protection of forest and forest produce. Forests of B class were meant for the preservation of fuel and this class was also under the Forest Department, but here the rigour of control was not so severe. The forests of the C class stood on the remaining forest lands which were not under the control of Forest Department, and were left out for the use of village people.²³

According to 1911-17 settlement 969 sq. miles of Almora, 2125 sq. miles of Garhwal and 217 sq. miles of Nainital forests were declared as reserved forests. These large areas of forests were divided into six divisions - (a) North Garhwal Division, (b) South Garhwal Divisions, (c) Ranikhet Division, (d) Almora Division, (e) East Almora Division and (f) Nainital Division.

With the process of government control over forest from 1865, began the process of alienation of the forest dwellers from the forests and developed into antagonistic relationship between the forest officials and the people. The adverse effect of these policies were felt by the people in every sphere of life. Areas situated at the vicinity of these reserves were the worst affected. Agriculture being the mainstay of the economy, suffered immensely. Livestock, which supports the rural economy in many ways, especially in the hill areas suffered heavily. Restrictions on grazing, lopping and number of cattle to be maintained by an individual were imposed without investigating the requirements of the people. In the hill areas people keep large number of animals primarily to get manure. Forests are the main source of fodder since the area is devoid of valuable grass. Another reason for discontent against the Forest Department was the much hated 'utar' system (forced labour) mentioned earlier.

The New Reserve Policy of 1911-17 left no hope for people. These development coincided with the anti-colonial 'Khilafat' and Non Cooperation movements which were spreading in different corners of this region and sparked off agitations against forest administration.

Kumaon Association was formed in 1916 to highlight people's grievances and protest against the misdeeds of Forest Department.²⁴ People agitated vehemently against the 'utar system', and eventually got rid of it. There were violent agitations and large scale protest, against the infamous 1911-17 settlement and declaration of reserve and protected forests. The Government had to set up a Committee to look into the grievances of the people in 1921.

The Forest Grievance Committee (1921) examined 3430 witnesses in Garhwal; 1042 in Almora and 568 in Nainital and submitted its report after six months resulting in some revision of the policy laid down in the settlement of 1911-17. The Grievance Committee recommended that people should be involved in forest management to counter growing alienation of the people from forest management which resulted in developing suspicion and hatred. While the policies were not understood by the people, the administration never thought of explaining its merits to them, resulting in open confrontation. The recommendations,²⁹ however, were mainly rhetorical.

1. There should be no revolutionary change of policy and any change which is necessary should as far as possible be introduced gradually.
2. There should be as little interference as possible with the tradition of the people.
3. The good will of the majority of the local population should be invited and any change which involves compulsion should be restricted to what is absolutely essential in the interest of the people themselves.
4. The vital interest of the future generation to meet non-essential demands of the present, and those of the majority (the province) to meet excessive demands of the minority (Kumaon) should be sacrificed.
5. Any change in the forest policy of Kumaon must fall within the orbit of Government's general forest policy.

Although the recommendations suggested by the Grievance Committee brought some favourable changes, people were not satisfied because the Committee's terms of reference were very limited and there was hardly any provision which could benefit people.

In 1927, a new Indian Forest Act was passed which had all the major provision of the previous Act but had no reference to communities rights over forests. The forests of commercial importance (Chir, deodar, sarai, tun, akhrot, sal, kil, spruce & silver & fir) and those required

for the supply of fuel & charcoal were classified as class II reserves while the non-commercial — oak forests at high altitude and mixed miscellaneous forests were classified as class I. The former continued to be under the management of the Forest Department. The latter were transferred to the Revenue Department. Forest guards were withdrawn from class I forests. Restrictions on lopping of other species not declared as 'reserved' were removed and the right holders were permitted to fell any tree except the area mentioned above, in the area where rights were recorded.²⁶

National Forest Policy 1952

After independence the Government of India realised the need for a re-orientation of the forest policy. The country has passed through two world wars which disclosed unsuspected dependence of defence and communication on forests. Enormous quantities of timber from almost every wood species were extracted causing extensive fellings and advance working in almost all forests divisions. There were also extensive over fellings in private forests and forests in the princely states. Besides, the reconstruction schemes such as river valley projects, development of industries and communications have shown a heavy dependence of forests. Keeping these vital national needs in view the Government of India formulated the National Forest Policy which recommended²⁷

- a) the classification of forests on a functional basis into protection forests, national forests, village forests and tree lands;
- b) the need for evolving a system of balance and complementary land use;
- c) to establish tree lands wherever possible for the amelioration of physical and climatic conditions and for promoting general well being of the people;

- d) provision for ensuring progressively increasing supplies of grazing, timber for agricultural implements and firewoods to release cattle-dung for use as manure;
- e) discourage indiscriminate extension of arable land by the excision of forests;
- f) management on the principle of progressively increasing sustained yield to meet the requirements of defence communications and industry;
- g) need for protecting wild life through proper management for scientific study and for recreational purposes.

The policy emphasised on :

- a) weaning the tribal people away from the baneful practice of shifting cultivation;
- b) increasing the efficiency of forest administration by having adequate forest laws;
- c) giving requisite training to the staff of all ranks;
- d) providing adequate facilities for the management of the forests and for conducting research in forestry and forest products utilisation;
- e) controlling grazing in the forests; and
- f) promoting welfare of the people.

The New Forest Policy was for all practical purposes an extension of the policy laid down by the British. No attempt was made to evolve a new system of forest management in view of the changes taking place in different areas. Ironically most of the forest officers including British who were trained in colonial set-up continued their jobs for a long period. The Uttar Pradesh Government received a number of representations regarding alleged difficulties of forest dwellers in enjoying the rights and concessions in forests. As a result, a

Committee was set-up by the State Government on April 7, 1959 known as 'Kumaon Forests Fact Finding Committee' to investigate into the grievances and make recommendation to the Government. The main subject for investigation were :²⁸

- 1) The Forest Policy in Kumaon in relation to the needs of the local people vis-a-vis the developmental activities of the Forest Department;
- 2) Examination of the grievances of the residents of hill areas in Kumaon in regard to their rights and concessions in forests;
- 3) The question of supply of fuel and rise in the prices of timber, fire-wood and charcoal in the hill towns;
- 4) General question of grazing facilities in forests;
- 5) The question of collection and removal of fallen firewoods from the forests;
- 6) The question of **deforestation for habitation of landless people;**
- 7) Grant of timber, etc. for public utility in Tehri;
- 8) Any other matter connected with rights of the people in the forests.

The Committee during its eight months tenure held 79 meetings and toured extensively in rural and urban areas. The Committee submitted its report in December 1959. Main recommendations were :

- 1) In the management of the Kumaon forests, priority should be given to preservation, development and extension of the forests. The genuine needs of local people, specially of the village people should be met;
- 2) In order to remove the present atmosphere of apprehension and discontent against the Forest Department, the Government should declare that all rights and concessions granted to the people would be respected;

- 3) An officer on special duty should be appointed at the district headquarters who would look into the matter of villages demand for increase in rights and concessions over forests proportionate to the population increase. The officer would be responsible for making such grants and concessions as per the requirements of the villagers;
- 4) Timber should be made available for personal use at concessional rate for those villagers who do not have any privilege over forests;
- 5) The Forest Department should frame uniform policy for supply of charcoal to all the hill towns. Necessary rules should be enforced to check the smuggling of such items for the hills;
- 6) Lopping should be permitted in all those areas where it would not cause injury to the forests. Grazing concessions prevailing in the area should be extended to Tehri Garhwal. Levy on grazing should also be abolished in Tehri Garhwal;
- 7) In Kumaon and Tehri circles all dry trees except Sal, Sheesham, Khair, Tun and Deodar should be given to the people according to the recommendation made by the Timber Distributing Committee. Arrangements should be made for meeting local demands for fire-wood in Western Circle prior to sale of fire-wood lots by the Forest Department;
- 8) Priority should be given to landless in distribution of land. Provisions should be made to clear land safeguarding the interests of the forests;
- 9) Building timber should be provided free for works of public utility in Tehri Garhwal district as was done in the Kumaon Forest Circle.

Needless to say that the above recommendations remained on paper. On the contrary, after the India-China war in 1962 many changes took place in the border areas, greatly affecting the rights of the people and the relations between the local people and the forest department.

The Forest Conservation Ordinance 1960, converted into an Act in 1981, took away any authority of the state government to convert any forest level into non-forest level.

In 1982 it was announced in the Parliament that the Forest Act of 1927 will be replaced by a comprehensive legislation to meet the challenges of the present situation arising from the extensive depletion of forests. The proposed Indian Forest Bill of 1980 has been the subject of heated debates and due to strong reaction of the people to some of its clauses, the Government has shelved its introduction in the Parliament.

PROFILE OF WOMEN IN THE
UTTARAKHAND REGION

The economy of Uttarakhand area is basically agricultural and pastoral. More than 93 per cent of the population living in the rural areas sustains itself on agriculture. With the rapid development of communication in the region, the small household sector is now getting linked up with the tourist's demands. Traditional crafts are dying and the social base of production is gradually eroding. About 70 per cent of the land holdings in Uttar Pradesh Himalayas are below 1 hectare and cultivate 29 per cent of the total area, 19 per cent are between 1-2 hectares and cultivate 25 per cent of the total area. 11 per cent of holdings are above 2 hectares and cultivate 45.3 per cent of the total cultivable area. The land base is highly fragmented and terraced cultivation is done. The Himalayan landscape has changed due to large scale defence and development activities. Very steeply aligned roads made for transportation of limestone usually slide down and develop into gullies causing damage to land. Such damages are severe as compared to routine damages through faulty agricultural practices, over-grazing of hill slopes in the catchment areas, cutting and lopping of natural forests for fuel, fodder and timber for house building and agricultural implements. Shifting cultivation was practiced not long ago and is still practiced in far away regions.²⁹

Agriculture and forests are complimentary to each other. Women in the Uttar Pradesh hills are the backbone of the economy. According to the 1981 census, the first five districts in Uttar Pradesh having maximum percentage of workers to total population by sex were in Uttarakhand region - Uttarkashi (48.7 per cent), Chamoli (43.54 per cent), Tehri (39.85 per cent), Pithoragah (32.73 per cent) and Garhwal (32.03 per cent) as against the State average of 6.02 per cent. More than 95 per cent of the female workers in the following hill districts are cultivators who do all the work in the field except ploughing.

<u>First Five Districts in U.P. having highest proportion of female cultivators</u>	<u>Percentage Distribution</u>	<u>State Average</u>
1. Tehri	98.11	46.23
2. Garhwal	97.29	
3. Uttarkashi	97.25	
4. Chamoli	97.23	
5. Pithorgarh	95.76	

Women in the rural areas of Uttar Pradesh hills outnumber men while in the urban areas the sex ratio is the lowest in the hill districts as compared to the State. It is 555 in Tehri, 568 in Uttarkashi, 615 in Chamoli, 654 in Almora, 671 in Garhwal and 717 in Pithorgarh. In the rural areas the sex ratio is 1204 in Garhwal and Tehri, (1088) in Chamoli, in Pithoragarh (1079), (1136) in Almora. Excluding Nainital and Dehradun, the two more urbanised districts, the sex ratio in the rest 6 districts is favourable to women. (Table I)

The number of literate women per thousand men is the lowest in Uttarkashi (147) and highest in Garhwal (335).³⁰

The literacy gap between the rural and urban women is very wide in this region as reflected in the percentages in the table given below :

<u>District</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Rural</u>	<u>Urban</u>
1. Uttarkashi	9.37 (45.69)	6.97 (42.93)	51.67 (75.96)
2. Chamoli	18.63 (57.34)	16.89 (56.27)	46.42 (76.01)
3. Tehri	9.47 (47.07)	8.21 (45.35)	52.37 (75.99)
4. Dehradun	41.41 (60.69)	26.28 (48.36)	57.83 (72.91)
5. Garhwal	27.12 (58.65)	25.01 (56.19)	51.94 (78.60)
6. Pithoragarh	20.41 (56.44)	18.73 (54.84)	55.94 (78.60)
7. Almora	21.14 (58.43)	19.02 (56.34)	65.87 (83.77)
8. Nainital	26.27 (46.94)	20.39 (42.92)	41.46 (57.23)

Source : Census of India - 1981 series - 22 Uttar Pradesh

Figures indicated within brackets pertaining to men, show that the literacy gap between women and men is very wide.

TABLE I
Sex Ratio (Female Per 1000 Male) of Population, Literature and
 Work Force in Uttarakhand (Rural)

		Population			Literature			Worker			Cultivators			Agricultural Labourer			Non-Agricultural Labourer			Non-Workers		
		1961	1971	1981	1961	1971	1981	1961	1971	1981	1961	1971	1981	1961	1971	1981	1961	1971	1981	1961	1971	1981
1. Uttar Kashi	R	977	915	910	54	107	147	962	875	843	1170	1087	1070	684	314	326	136	71	61	1013	992	1011
2. Chamoli	R	1108	1087	1088	108	197	332	1257	1215	1246	1490	1559	1496	1005	1092	351	285	78	72	875	928	947
3. Tehri Garhwal	R	1222	1212	1135	52	143	205	1430	1202	1192	1609	1397	1402	824	769	355	150	47	59	917	1223	1087
4. Garhwal	R	1220	1161	1203	149	372	535	1480	1118	1285	1900	1705	1594	688	770	319	105	39	49	921	1197	1145
5. Pithoragarh	R	1055	1043	1079	148	292	368	1202	706	1105	1496	961	1083	905	446	367	187	63	118	868	1372	1056
6. Almora	R	1109	1110	1135	123	251	383	1239	710	1118	1521	881	1044	883	438	605	88	44	62	885	1477	1152
7. Nainital	R	714	805	853	217	327	409	353	129	372	572	162	202	161	140	150	135	48	77	1406	1648	1555
8. Dehradun	R	810	811	354	272	383	464	313	169	250	412	217	284	244	117	114	199	130	270	1670	1700	1558

Note : The marginal worker category of 1981 Census is added with the main workers to make it comparable with 1961 Census.

Source : Census of India 1981 - Series 22 Uttar Pradesh Paper I - Provisional Population Totals.

The heavy male migration to the plains for seeking gainful employment puts heavy burden on women of running the home, looking after the children, bearing the drudgery of agriculture work, cattle care and bringing fuel, fodder and water from long distances. Women are practically the beasts of burden and the most oppressed section of an exploitative social and economic order. There is considerable evidence of declining agriculture productivity and abandoning of plots in this area. Even landholdings are fragmented and at various distances and elevations thereby increasing women's work load. The proverbial 'money-order economy' of Uttarakhand has hardly made much difference in the lives of the majority of these families.

Male migration from Garhwal started after the Nepalese invasion in 1803 because of their tyrannical rule and increased considerably during the two World Wars which opened another door of migration through recruitment of men in the army. This was the time which the 'money-order economy' was introduced leaving women to face the entire burden of running the household economy. In the post-independence period the Government policies did nothing to check this drain of manpower from the hills. With a heavy drain of able-bodied young men from the hills, the struggle of sheer subsistence has fallen on women. Proverb in Garhwal says that "the youth and the water of Garhwal could never serve it".

Forests constitute an important rural resource and have lots of potential to provide goods and services. Over the years the imbalance created by the commercial needs and over-exploitation of forest produce has resulted in the progressive degradation of forest. Women who generally have the responsibility of collecting the fuel, fodder and other minor forest produce, are the worst sufferers.

For many women fodder and fuel collection is becoming a full day's job in addition to their domestic responsibilities and work in the fields. One generation ago, the same would have required no more

than two to three hours job. The hard back-breaking labour has driven several women to commit suicide. Several such cases of group suicides were reported from the Uttarakhand region during the course of our field work. Sometimes women have to climb steep slopes with loads on their back and there have been several accidents. Garhwali folk songs are so eloquent on the hardships and miseries of the daily-life of women. A daughter-in-law curses her father-in-law who has kept two buffaloes, as she has to bring fodder for them.

The majority of the poor depend on firewood as their chief source of domestic energy. In the past, they were able to collect free wood from farmland trees or village wood-lots. With the alarming increase in the price of wood in the towns and the commercialisation of firewood, the entrepreneurs poach in the protected forests. The firewood scarcity not only places tremendous economic burden on the poor but has another serious implication as people are forced to burn cow dung robbing farmland of badly needed manure and nutrients and resulting in declining fertility of the soil.

Firewood is obviously biggest challenge in the absence of alternative energy sources of yet new energy technologies i.e. community bio-gas, improved wood-stoves etc. have not made headway because women are seldom involved in these exercises. In one of the eco-development camps which are being organised by the Dashouli Gram Swarajaya Sangh since 1977 at Chamoli, this issue came up sharply as the men did not show much interest in the plantation of fuel and fodder.³¹ The daily toil for women for the fuel requirements has considerably increased and they have to walk long distances. In Bhyundar Valley (Chamoli district) the enraged women stole the tools of the men from a co-operative in the neighbouring village, who were given the contract to fell trees to meet the fuel needs of the pilgrims of the famous Badrinath Temple.

It is against this background that approaches to women's development have to be understood. The present crisis in the Himalayas warrants that the 'Women's dimension' needs to be understood **and** articulated. The process of learning by development practitioners has been very slow and only piecemeal palliatives are offered to women by the very structures which tend to increase the inequalities.

III

THE GENESIS AND GROWTH OF THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT

In 1973, a non-violent agitation took shape in the Uttar Pradesh Himalayas in the form of 'Chipko Movement' to protect the forests from exploitative commercial policies. The word 'Chipko' means to 'hug' or to 'cling'. This grass-root movement, deploying a novel method of protest against the forest policies of the government, has drawn world-wide attention of environmentalists, scholars and the women's movement. Describing Chipko as a civil disobedience movement, a forestry economist thinks that its 'modus operandi' is somewhat histrionic and involves physical interference with felling operations by embracing each marked, condemned tree in a desperate bid to rescue it from the lethal strokes of the axemen. Despite its turbulent political genesis and boisterous mode of regimentation, its ideals are patriotically motivated and help in focussing attention to the crisis in Indian Forestry.³²

It is said that in its essence, the 'Chipko Movement' is very much a women's movement, since women are the real strength behind it.

"Notwithstanding the divergent opinion of the leaders (of the movement) the real strength of the movement are the women of the region. Except for a few organised events as at Rampur Phata or Honwalghati, the Chipko Movement essentially consists of a string of spontaneous confrontations in which none of the so-called leaders were present. Women, acting entirely on their own rose up on the spur of the moment. While in Reni (Chamoli district) the protest was against a timber contractor, in all other cases the protest was against their own cash hungry men, who could not care less if the forest was destroyed while their women had to walk for many more miles to collect their daily load of fuel and fodder."³³

The area with its heavy male migration to plains places the entire burden of subsistence on women in this region. The official view point on the genesis of 'Chipko Movement' has a very different explanation to offer.

"Notwithstanding the significance of the name and the fact that initially the movement manifested itself in the form of protest against felling of trees by forest contractors in government forests, its roots lay in the intense feeling amongst the local people that they are not getting sufficient advantage out of the benefits flowing from the forest resources, the only worthwhile resource in the area, and even the contracts for its exploitation are secured mostly by the outsiders and they have been victim of neglect and exploitation."³⁴

Since 1977 the voluntary agencies in this area pressed for total moratorium on felling of trees as the policy practiced by the Forest Department was exploitative and commercial. They disagreed with the claims of the Forest Department that fellings are done on the basis of regular and scientific principles.

Ten years after its inception, while the struggle for the rights of the people in this region continues, several questions emerge. Is it an ecological movement? Is it a women's movement? Is it a movement for the rights of the hill people which have been abridged, abbreviated and eliminated through a forest management system which has evolved over a century?

The incident that sparked off the action in 1972-73 was the allotment of Ash trees to the Simon Company - a large sports goods manufacturers located in Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh. While a local organisation known as Dashauli Gram Swarajya Sangh (DGSS) in the Chamoli district was refused permission to cut a few ash trees for making agricultural implements for the village people.

This organisation started as a co-operative known as Malla Nagpur Co-operative Labour Society Committee, which took up labour contracts from the Government. Later with the help of Khadi and Village Industries Commission, the Committee set up a Workshop to manufacture agriculture

implements. To take the contract from the Forest Department in 1964, the DGSS was set up to carry on small scale industries (furniture, sports goods and tilling equipment). This experiment to start forest-based industries was threatened by the denial of access to the raw material from the forest. The Sangh people also started collecting medicinal herbs as they found that the contractors were paying village people less money than the prescribed rate. These activities helped the organisation to interact with local people and gain their confidence. The organisation also set up a resin factory for which the raw material came from the pine trees. The government had monopoly over the sale of resin and followed a dual pricing policy, giving this factory resin on slightly higher rates than to India Turpentine and Resin (ITR) Factory at Bareilly. The quota allotted to the local factory was hardly sufficient to run this unit for more than 4 months. Besides this in September 1972 the Hill Development Board decided to set up a grant resin factory in Nainital with the co-operation of the ITR. By this time the patience of this organisation reached the end of its tether. In the meantime the devastating floods of Alaknanda in 1970 exposed the deteriorating conditions of the region due to over exploitation of the forests for commercial purposes, construction of roads in the catchment areas and other developmental activities in the 60s.

The growing discontent with the government's forest policy on the one hand and denial of a rightful share of raw material to the local forest-based industries resulted in a showdown in 1972 when the Forest Department refused to give permission to DGSS for cutting a few ash trees from the Mandal forest about 14 km. from Gopeshwar, the district headquarter of Chamoli.

After heated discussions within the organisation, a strategy was chalked out to 'hug' the trees when the Simon Company started cutting the trees. In April 1973 the 'Chipko' movement was born which later spread to other parts of the Uttarakhand region. On 24th April 1973, the village folk marched in a procession to the Mandal Forest allotted to the Simon Company and succeeded in saving the forest.³⁵ The permit was cancelled and the Company was allotted trees in the forest of Phata Rampur in the Kedarnath Valley. The scene of activities shifted to Phata where another organised protest succeeded in saving the forest. Women from Trijuginarain village took an active part in demonstrations, mobilising women from the nearby villages. The women organisers from Gopeshwar who had earlier participated in the Mandal incident, also went to mobilise women in the vicinity of Rampur Phata.

The basic issue behind the first agitation was a protest against the monopoly of forest contractors and an assertion of local people's rightful share in the resources. The success gave a fillip to the movement. Questioning the entire system of forest management and the contractor system prevailing in this region created an awareness about the environmental degradation which was forcefully brought home by the devastating floods in river Alaknanda at Belakuchi and problems of land-slides and soil erosion in the catchment areas. This added a new dimension to the movement and gave it a broader perspective. C.P. Bhatt, a prominent Chipko leader, asserts that "saving the trees is only the first step in the 'chipko' movement. Saving ourselves is the real goal as our future is tied up with them".

The incident which added a new leaf in the chapter of the 'Chipko' movement as far as women's role is concerned, was at Reni village (in Niti Valley) in March 1974. The inhabitants of this village are mainly Bhotias of Marcha Clan which is a scheduled tribe. This tribe used to trade with Tibet before the Indo-Chinese conflict. Reni is one of the villages which suffered in the 1970 Alaknanda floods. In 1973 when the trees were marked in the village forest for felling,

the chipko activists from DGSS had started foot marches in the village in the catchment areas to mobilise and awaken the local people. Since the DGSS people could not stop the auctioning of the Reni forest they organised a series of meetings to warn people of the impending disaster. A report states that, "the village women sitting at the back kept laughing at the word 'chipko'. Little did they know that one day this responsibility is going to be theirs alone."³⁶

On March 15th 1974 a big demonstration was held at Gopeshwar where students and village people from Niti valley participated. A memorandum was submitted to the District Magistrate demanding abolition of contractual system of exploiting forest wealth, promotion of local forest based small scale industries and provision of financial and technical assistance; involvement of people in the management of forest and abolition of present system of resin extraction.

By now the Government was already familiar with the strategies of the movement, therefore the bureaucracy announced that all the menfolk in Reni and other villages in the vicinity should collect compensation for their lands taken over by the government in the 60s for defence purposes. All the men rushed to the district headquarter of Chamoli on 26th March 1974. In the absence of men, a handful of 27 women defended their forests under the leadership of Gauradevi who was the president of the local women's organisation. They kept the vigil all night and when the men returned next day, Gauradevi told them that they have saved their 'mait' (mait in Garhwali language means parental home) from destruction. The dependence of women on their forests was very symbolically expressed by them. The ding-dong battle continued between the government and the chipko activists for months together and a 'Reni Action Committee' was formed.

The Reni struggle resulted in setting up of the Reni Investigation Committee by the Uttar Pradesh Government under the Chairmanship of a botanist Dr. Virendra Kumar. The Committee submitted its report in 1976. On the recommendations of the said Committee, Government banned the felling of trees in the catchment areas of Alaknanda and its tributories over an area of 1200 sq. km. The Reni episode not only created a heightened awareness about the crucial role of women in the movement but also made impact at the policy level. In the Garhwal region the Government now consults the DGSS before marking trees for auctioning in order to avoid any direct action. The government is also seeking DGSS's help in their afforestation programmes and rural development programmes. The Planning Commission has approved a project for afforestation in the 27 villages in the catchment areas of Alaknanda which the DGSS is implementing.

As the movement spread to other areas of Uttarakhand in Tehri, Uttarkashi in Garhwal and Nainital and Almora in Kumaon, the Uttar Pradesh Government constituted another Committee for a comprehensive study of the State of Affairs in the entire region.

In the Tehri region, Sunderlal Bahuguna, another Sarvodaya leader was demanding the ban of resin-tapping by the contractors. The forest movement in the Tehri district emerged in the late 70s in Henwalghati valley with the protest against the auctioning of the 'Adwani forest'. Women took a very active part in demonstrations. In May 1977 people celebrated 30th May as 'Forest day' and women put mud plaster on deep and illegal cuts in pine trees for the extraction of resin (Lisa). This was a symbolic protest against the profiteering by private contractors. In June, a 'Henwalghati Forest Protection Committee' was formed and it was decided to launch the movement for saving the pine-trees from wanton destruction (for details see Appendix I).

The Tehri district in Garhwal, an erstwhile princely state, has a long history of popular movements against the royal family. Beginning from 1880 there were many agitations against the extortions, forced labour, taxation system and rights and concessions of people in the

forests. Khas Patti rebellion in 1907, Telari movement against delimitation of forest boundaries and grazing tax in (1930), movement against octroi duty in (1940), peasant movement in Dangchaura against land tenure and taxation system in (1946) and famous Saklana movement (1947) against forced labour, taxation system and land system which considerably weakened the Tehri state and finally in 1948 when an attempt was made to form a parallel government (Panchayati Rajya). This was an open rebellion against the king's authority and finally in 1948 the army surrendered and the treasury was looted. In 1949 the state was merged in the Indian Union. The left movement has a long history in this region. The famous Tehri movement (1930) against the king of Tehri was the first organised protest of forest dwellers against the forest policies and the rebellion was cruelly suppressed.

Some of the Gandhian agencies also became active and in 1956 Sunderlal Bahuguna established Nav Jivan Ashram Silyar in Tehri district. Tehri also took a lead in the prohibition movement. In the meantime people were agitating against the Tehri Dam and women participated in the demonstration at the district headquarter.

To begin with, in the Tehri district, Sunderlal Bahuguna also demanded employment for local labour in these forest operations and protested against the employment of Nepalese and Himachali labour by forest contractors. In October 1973, Sunderlal Bahuguna embarked on a 120 day journey on foot in the villages of Uttarakhand and several students accompanied him. The 'Padyatra' (foot-march) was undertaken to tell people about the importance of saving forests and also inspiring the students of both Kumaon and Garhwal regions to unite. Chipko activists encouraged students to organize educational marches and help in spreading the message. Between 1973-75 Sunderlal Bahuguna's padyatra made him conservation conscious "it is in the course of these

distant travels that my attitude changed and I was led from emphasising the demand for setting up local industry to predominantly ecological considerations - managing forests primarily for the soil and water conservation provided by them rather than for their timber and resin". In one of his book titled "Forest As the Basis of Hill life", he emphasises "soil, water and air as the three bases of life".

The 'save forest' movement in Chamoli, Tehri and Uttarkashi districts (in the Alaknanda, Mandakini and Bhagirathi valley) which emerged in the 70s initially took up different issues and ideological stances depending on the local leadership, although later all of them converged on environmental issues. While movements in Chamoli and Tehri was influenced more by the Sarvodaya ideology, in the Uttarkashi district the local CPI (Communist Party of India) group took up demands relating to the problems of forest labourers. Their slogan was "save forest and save forest labourer". The district of Uttarkashi which was earlier part of the Princely State of Tehri had witnessed prolonged struggles against the autocratic rule of the king. In 1947, when the country became independent the people of this state were still fighting their war of independence which they finally won in January 1948. In 1960 the CPI in this area actively organised protests on the issues of peasants' and workers' rights. In 1974 the famous Bayali forest movement in this area saw a massive protest by the forest labourers. In 1976, an agitation was started to protect the 'Tyasa' forest.

The 'save forest' agitation in Kumaon region was predominantly students' agitation and the movement was suppressed ruthlessly by the law and order machinery of the government. In 1977 agitation, the students of Kumaon university resisted the auction of forests at Nainital and disrupted the proceedings. Following the student-police confrontation, the Nainital club where auction was organised was set ablaze. Many student leaders were arrested. There were many confrontations between the students and the police and for the first time an Uttarakhand Bandh was observed. The students formed the 'Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini' to combat the repression and intensify the movement.

In Garhwal while the movement was dominated by Sarvodaya workers and remained peaceful in the Kumaon region the movement took a violent turn when attempts were made to suppress the movement by force. The government followed different strategies to deal with the activists in the two regions which also affected the ideology and strategies within the movement in the two regions. The mobilisation of women was almost negligible in the Kumaon region.

One of the prominent leaders of the movement in Kumaon during the interview said that while the chipko movement in Garhwal started against the felling of trees in Kumaon region, the agitation was on some of the local issues (growing educated unemployment, corrupt administrative system). He was the key figure in organising a massive protest against forest contractors in 'Chacheridhar'. The local labour was getting restive as they were deprived from the only employment which was locally available to them. The contractors were bringing labour from outside.

In 1974 an 'Action Committee' was formed to demand cancellation of the contract to big monopolists like Star Paper Mills^{of} Bareilly and Wimco Match Factory, and promotion of forest based small scale industries to open avenues for local employment. The Action Committee in 1974 also presented a memorandum to the Chief Ministry (CM) at Almora.

In the absence of any assurance from the CM, they tried to obstruct an auction in Nainital and 18 activists courted arrest. A massive strike followed and eventually the agitators were released. During the period of national emergency there was^a lull in the agitational activities. However, after the Nainital episode there was a big confrontation between the students and the law and order machinery. The second protest was organised in 1978 at Chacheridhar in Dwarahat Block of Almora district. On 15th December 1978, 2000 people - majority of them student marched to the Chacheridhar forest where 6000 trees were

marked for felling. These trees were in the catchment area of the river Ganges and the Government had given a 20 year contract to the Star Paper Mills, Bareilly to fell only twisted and crooked trees. The agitators demanded the cancellation of the contract as the company was felling the healthy trees also. The Government did not concede this demand and agreed to appoint an enquiry committee to go into the issue of illegal felling of trees.

In one of the personal interviews with the forest officials another aspect of the movement came to light. According to him the Reni event in 1974 changed the localised character of the movement and now everywhere protests were organised against the felling of the trees. The contractors used these developments for their own benefits. They quickly stopped selling the wood and piled up their stock which pushed up the prices during the peak days of the 'Chipko' movement. This view was also endorsed by an ex-minister based at Nainital.

A miniscule section among student leaders, interestingly, also believed that the 'Chipko' movement was aimed to counter the rising influence of left forces in the Uttar Pradesh Hills.

The chipko movement originated from local issues but soon acquired a political clout with increasing participation of the local people and growing consciousness of the social and economic costs of development. to change their positions. Induction of youth in the movement Over the years events have caused leaders in the movement has raised fresh debates on issues, methods and approaches. "In addition to facing an increasing hostile administration the chipko movement is also unfortunately experiencing increasing divisions within its own ranks - on issues such as the importance to be given to the demand for local industries and ecological objectives and also over the divergent ideologies of the activists. Vested interests have tried to exploit

these differences as they benefit from the present forestry system". One of the leading journal, 'Himalaya' in its recent editorical issues appealed to social workers, "to abandon the spirit of mutual antagonism, rivalry and mud-slinging and join their forces for a united movement. This unhappy development obstructs the expansion and deepening of the movement for the protection of the forest, preservation of the eco-system and the struggle for the right of the people of the region".

Currently a big debate is going on within this region that the conservationist aspect of 'save forest' movement is obstructing developmental activities of this region. Within Dashauli Gram Swarajya Mandal, there is a feeling that agitations against the commercial felling alone, cannot serve the purpose of the forest dwellers. They have to also undertake tree plantation to generate forests near the periphery of the villages. Since 1977, the DGSS has been organising eco-development camps three times a year. The eco-development camps besides generating environmental awareness also include other activities such as soil conservation, regulating grazing and planting trees have been initiated. In 1976 and 1977, the DGSS along with other voluntary agencies organised a plantation camp at Joshimath and more than 10,000 broad-leaved trees were planted. In 1978, the organisation launched a massive programme of afforestation in 27 villages along with the catchment areas of Alaknanda and its tributories. In the beginning the involvement of women was negligible but later the volunteers of DGSS made special effort to involve women.

'Chipko' is now a household word and has shown an irresistible idea for the protection and conservation of forests which are vitally linked with the life of forest dwellers.

The movement which originated from economic issues developed into an ecological movement. It has since moved beyond its original intentions and has added another dimension through its afforestation programme. It has developed into a social movement.

WOMEN IN THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT

Looking Back to the Sixties:
Prohibition Movement

Women's participation in the prohibition movement in Garhwal in the sixties was significant in bringing out the leadership potential among them. Prohibition was always part of the Gandhian philosophy and peaceful picketing of liquor shops was part of the constructive work of many Gandhian organisations. Many of the Sarvodaya leaders worked in this direction. In the 60s a Sarvodaya leader Sunderlal Bahuguna and his wife initiated action against the growing menace of alcoholism at Ghansali in the Tehri district. Sarla Behn, a Gandhian worker who was trying to activise women-power in Uttarakhand through her organisation in Kausani in Almora district, saw the possibilities of mobilising women against alcoholism. Many other organisations joined hands and at many places where the government had decided to give licences to liquor shops, women and men put up stiff resistance. Taradevi at Choma and Shyamadevi at Gopeshwar led women demonstrators. The latter was also a woman member of the Gopeshwar Civic Committee. Two women from Chamba (Gouri Jadevi and Sureshidevi) went to the state capital to meet the Chief Minister along with Sarla Behn and subsequently the licences of the three liquor shops were cancelled.

This gave tremendous confidence to women. In 1967 they took a delegation to the District Magistrate, Almora to close the liquor shop at Garud which was selling liquor for the last 35 years. The District Magistrate threatened to arrest the women. He was told by the delegation that in that case he would have to arrest not only 4 or 5 but thousands of women demonstrators. He had to bow down before their collective strength.

The prohibition movement brought out the hidden rebellion within these women who were the worst victims of the exploitative social and economic system and had also to suffer their husbands' drunkenness.

The mobilisers found a ready response in women's sensitivity to this whole issue. One of the leaders felt that in most of these picketing and demonstrations the attempt was usually to keep women in the front which prevented the action taking a violent turn.

In April 1971 the State High Court declared the sections on prohibition under the Uttar Pradesh Excise Act as null and void. A big demonstration was organised in Tehri against this judgement. The police force terrorised people against taking part in the demonstration. Men threatened women that if they participated in the demonstration they should not return to their homes.

In spite of this, in November 1971, women from Tehri, Uttarkashi and Chamoli participated in the demonstration. 80 persons including 30 women and children were arrested. Two women had also brought their 8 and 2 months old children.

In 1972 the State Legislative Assembly unanimously passed a Bill for total prohibition in the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand. According to a leader in Tehri the most significant outcome of the prohibition movement in Uttarakhand was bringing women into public life.

Mahatma Gandhi always believed that woman does not know her own power and strength and what a tremendous advantage she has over man. For this, they have only to realise the strength of non-violence. He believed that if woman is weak in striking, she is strong in suffering, endurance and moral courage. The reason why hundreds of women joined the freedom movement was because by shifting from violence to non-violence he made participation in the struggle accessible to women. The concept of suffering and self-sacrifice gave them strength.

Women in the Chipko
Movement in the 70s

Forest movement in this region has a long history but practically no documentation is available about women's role in the earlier movements except stray references here and there that women also took part in demonstrations. Women's active participation in the prohibition movement did create an awareness among them and prepared them for other organised protests.

Women's active participation in the 'Chipko' movement has been acknowledged and written about (the 'chipko' leaders and activists) by bureaucrats and scholars concerned with popular movements. Many of these narratives of a series of incidents that took place between 1973-83 are anecdotal and give an impression that women's participation in the movement was sporadic and spasmodic, in response to the immediate crisis (saving their village forests), whether they were mobilised by the Chipko activists or it was a spontaneous act to save their forest from which they drew their sustenance. Looking from women's perspective, we are compelled to observe that most of these narratives do not provide much insight into the role and contribution of women in the genesis, growth and later developments within the movement.

Historical research is gradually digging up evidence that women have played important roles in peasant and workers movement although they have themselves not benefitted much as women. Evidence from Tebhaga, Telangana, and other peasants' rebellions suggest that women were more militant and contributed towards the radicalisation of the movement. Even in peasant societies where women's status is subordinate, the loss of their traditional privileges has often brought women into open confrontation, if there is a rallying point for action.

In the Chipko movement women are nowhere in the leadership or decision-making position in any of the organisations which mobilised women. It is also interesting to note that during the peak of the Chipko movement in 1977 women's participation in the State Assembly

elections was abysmally low which suggests that participation in a movement does not necessarily lead to wider participation in the political process. Political pundits have not been able to explain such significant departures. Does it mean women's disenchantment with the political system or slow response of the political system itself to women's concern.

The two regions of Uttarakhand i.e. Kumaon and Garhwal provide an interesting contrast in terms of women's participation in the movement. The Kumaon region where the general and educational development and politicisation among the people has been much greater than in Garhwal, women's mobilisation has been negligible. This region played a very crucial role in the history of Uttarakhand, first by aiding the Nepalese invasion and later negotiating with the East India Company to overthrow the Nepalese regime. Many political leaders came from this region. It has also received more attention for developmental activities from the Uttar Pradesh Government. By and large, however, political parties have failed to mobilise women.

In Garhwal region, Sarvodaya organisations made a deliberate attempt to involve women both in their mobilisation efforts and later in their afforestation programmes. The difference in women's participation in the two regions are linked not only to organisations and leadership but also to methods and approaches. The support from local organisations on a sustained basis is very useful in tapping the potential of women which is overlooked by political activists. The low level of women's participation in Kumaon is paradoxical as the two regions have common problems. This polarisation suggests that organisations working in the Garhwal region were more broad based than in the Kumaon region.

The Reni incident in 1974 in the earlier stages of the 'chipko' movement led to an emphasis on women's participation and developed a strong awareness in the leadership concerning women's role within the movement. In fact the Reni incident and Gaura Devi's role in mobilising women for action received wide publicity national and international.

The wide publicity given to Gaura Devi later created a rift within the local women's organisation. In one of our recent visits to this place she commented, "many people come here, and make me realise the importance of women's action but no one thinks over our problems, my problems and problems in the village". It seems her concern is not shared by other women in the village who participated in the protest at Reni.

Before 1974 the 'Chipko' movement was male dominated and women played only a supportive role by participating in demonstrations organised by the DGSS. The Reni action came as a surprise to the Chipko leader C.P. Bhatt and his associates also. It is reported that on the third day of the incident when Bhatt reached the village he congratulated Gaura Devi for the achievement. She was facing hostility from men within the village and the forest bureaucracy which threatened her with arrest. The 'Maldar' (contractor) offered her a bribe of 2000 rupees. She refused to change her stand and replied that a few thousand rupees would be spent in no time but the jungle would give them so many valuable things besides some cash income. Bhatt reassured her that he would face the consequences and the step taken by the Reni women was a unique step not only in the history of the 'chipko' movement but also in the history of the region..... Overnight she climbed the ladder of fame.

We were also told by women that later DGSS distributed commendation certificates to the women who took part in the action. Till then women were never thought of as initiators but only in supportive roles. This incident was, however, blown out of proportion by journalists, media and chipko activists who published chipko as a women's movement. Similar incidences in late seventies and in 1980 did not get that much publicity. The other two places (Bhyuder Valley and Dungri-Paitoli) are not as easily

accessible as Reni. In the Alaknanda valley and Bhagirathi valley, Bhatt and Bahuguna made a sustained effort to mobilise people and create awareness. In the Pinder valley (Dungri-Paitoli) and the Kedarnath valley (Rampur Phata) there was no such organisational base to provide continuous support.

During our interviews with women and issues raised in the context of the movement, sharp contrasts appeared. One woman remarked, "we decided to resort to direct action because our 'purukh' (men) were away at that time and the immediate crisis forced us to take direct action", meaning that the action did not bring any transformation in their thinking. They still feel that women have to play only a supportive role. A few women activists who were interviewed at Gopeshwar, the base of the Dashauli Gram Swarajaya Sangh, narrated their participation in various demonstrations but there was a general agreement that "women are not educated and have not seen the world around. How can they take the leadership role"?

Two Faces of Chipko

Within the Chipko movement two alternative patterns of women's protests emerged. In a series of incidents that took place in different pockets of Garhwal and Kumaon region during the 70s in many areas, they were shaped by the local organisation and leadership. However, incidents even six years after the genesis of the Chipko movement at Dungri-Paitoli (1980) and at Bhynder Valley (1978), the famous valley of flowers, indicate that women's attitude to the issues of deforestation and commercial use of forest wealth are clear even without any mobilisation or even knowledge of the chipko movement.

In the hills, problem of communication is extremely difficult in the distant villages which are inaccessible and not even touched by roads. However, the importance of saving the forests need not be communicated to the women in this region. Women may not understand the "economics of scientific management and exploitation of the forests" but they know that most of the problems of their daily living are tied up with the destruction of forests. They are already conservation conscious as they know that with

the receding forests have disappeared fuel, fodder and fruit trees. It has also meant drying up of perennial hill springs and water resources and a life of increasing drudgery and hardships for meeting the daily necessities of life for which they carry the sole burden.

In a remote Himalayan village of Dungri-Paitoli in Narain-Bagar block of district Chamoli, women who had never heard of the Chipko Movement, fought not only the State Horticulture Department but also their cash hungry men who wanted to sell the nearby forest to the State Government to be converted into a potato farm. Men were very sore with women because they believed that the State Government's potato farm would have brought additional benefits to them i.e. motorable road, a bus connection, a school, health centre and employment in the farm.

The village is not easily accessible as it is a steep climb of about 9 km. In 1978 the State Horticulture Department negotiated the sale with the male dominated village Panchayat, with promises of additional benefits that would accrue to the local village people. The only forest in the vicinity of this village was mainly an oak forest. Women, totally unaware of the Chipko activities in other parts of the district, decided to resort to direct action. They were also unaware that oak is a protected species and the Department of Horticulture was flouting the law with impunity. By the time negotiations went, women were harrassed and pressurised by their men and threatened with arrests by the bureaucracy. Warrants were also issued against some village women activists.

The Chipko leader, C.P. Bhatt, later held talks with the local officials and a settlement was reached that the forest which had already, been cleared plus two more acres may be given to the Horticulture Department but the rest of the forest should not be touched. In recent years there has been evidence of increasing conflict between Mahila Mandal Dal (Women's grassroot organisations) and local Panchayats (Village Councils). In one of the villages, the local women's organisation passed a resolution condemning the non-cooperative attitude of the local Panchayat. The Chipko leader, C.P. Bhatt in one of the recent seminar, also confirmed that when it comes to women's issues, the Panchayats are as bad as the bureaucracy.

Similar incidences in other parts of the region have raised some very pertinent issues. The conflict between women and men surfaced poignantly. Women of the village asked that since it is they who collect the forest produce, why are they not consulted before a decision is taken to dispose off forests. The decision makers concept of developmental activities and women's concept of development are very different. There is now enough evidence from the developing world about this perception gap.

The sharp differences between men and women's interests also surfaced in the eco-development camps organised by DGSS. The Chipko activists have encouraged local villagers through these camps to plant over one million trees, making it the country's largest afforestation programme by a voluntary agency. In one of these camps men wanted to plant 'fruit trees' while the women wanted 'fuel and fodder' trees. Women argued that "what we will get out of fruit trees. The men will sell the fruits and purchase liquor or tobacco". The Forest Department was approached for saplings and they had only fruit trees and trees of commercial variety.

Fuel, fodder and firewood are women's issues. With the steady decline in the availability of fuel and fodder, energy issues have become very critical for women who have to keep the home fires burning.

Construction of roads, buildings and the need for fuel for the army, civilian and increasing influx of tourists to the places of pilgrimage has created acute scarcity of fuel wood in this region.

Development, urbanisation and deforestation have aggravated the problems of the local people. In the Gopeshwar town, some women from Mahila Mangal Dal were interviewed. After the formation of the district of Chamoli, Gopeshwar (the present district headquarter) was declared a town area. The developmental activities here have created many problems for local women. The agricultural land has been taken over by the government to develop the new district headquarters. With deforestation the problem of fodder for the cattles has become acute. Milk is now sold to buy essential consumer items. This has also affected the nutritional level of the families. The only oak forest in the vicinity of the village (was saved in 1973) is now guarded by women and even local people **are not** allowed to exploit it. The disappearance of the dense forests **have** created sanitation problem in the village as there is no place for defecating, the problem which particularly hits women. All the pleas of women have fallen on deaf ears as far as bureaucracy and local representative bodies are concerned.

Several cases of illegal fellings were also reported by women from various places. Women have been very vigilant and have not hesitated in contacting the Forest Officials to report about these irregularities. At Dhaluwala, women intercepted a loaded truck and got the wood unloaded and reported the matter to the Forest Officials. Another incidence was reported from Muni Ki Reti (a village about 5 km. from Rishikesh in Dehradun district). When women learnt about the illegal felling in the nearby forest in the night, they hired a taxi from Rishikesh and brought the forest official with them.

There is an increasing awareness among women of the continuing degradation of the natural environment. If we look at the decade long development in this region, is there a cause for optimism? A decade back the initiators of the movement would have found it a laughable idea to call 'Chipko' a women's movement. Today chipko is known nationally and internationally for the crucial role women have played in the movement and in fact enriched it in qualitative terms. Were the demographic and economic circumstances responsible for women emerging as a new interest group in this region as they were the worst victims of the changing environment? Why then were they by-passed in organisation building efforts? Why women's network did not make any successful bid to local power structure? Women began mobilisation at local levels on issues of alcoholism but they did not form networks of coalitions of women's groups to turn it to their advantage. Understanding many of these issues would need a deeper investigation into the nature of the production process, women's subsistence activities and social and economic options within the patriarchal family framework.

C O N C L U S I O N S

An analysis of events that took place in different parts of Garhwal region suggests that areas which were inaccessible or relatively isolated and where there was no organisational base for mobilisation of women, the action was spontaneous. In such cases the action resulted in a sharp conflict between women and men and between women and the local Panchayats. During our interviews with Chipko activists from Garhwal, it was reported that whenever women take initiative in such matters, 'male ego' is hurt and they become hostile. From Henwalghati and Muni Ki Reti (a village near Rishikesh) several such incidences were reported.

The movement has not only sharpened conflicts between women and men but also between different economic strata. In the Reni village when men returned to the village and heard of the heroic struggle of women, some of them who had hoped that the contract will bring them jobs and some cash inflow totally disapproved women's action. Their wrath fell on Gaura Devi who is now isolated. Only a small group of women support her. The success of their action has divided the women coming from different strata. On our visit to Reni we could sense the tension among the members of the Mahila Mangal Dal. In many cases the unity among women was fragile as the priorities of women from different sections were different. In her own style she told us about the large number of people who interviewed her and how this made women jealous of her. Some women queried why others were not given the same recognition for their contribution as Gaura Devi. Gaura Devi is a widow with very little land and is living with her son and a daughter-in-law. She also told us that people studying the 'chipko' movement put extra burden on her meagre resources as she had to feed and house them. She asked us that if we plan to come next time we should bring some stainless steel utensils for her visitors from urban areas. She felt very bad that she could not provide us with proper beddings and food. The price of becoming famous indeed!

Some of the very pertinent issues that were raised by women without prompting about their representation in village Panchayats and that they should be consulted before any decision is taken either for deforestation or for afforestation or for development activities have not been taken up either by the government or by any voluntary agencies who are leading this ecological conservation movement. As far as local Panchayats are concerned, they continue to function without women's representation in total defiance of the provision in the Uttar Pradesh Panchayat Act which requires that if women are not elected then at least one/two woman should be co-opted/nominated as full member. One aspect that needs to be probed further is whether there exists a close relationship between women's activism and the process of politicisation. Women who begin activism under the general banner of movements, begin to develop some consciousness regarding women's issues.

Studies of women's role in the struggle led by men have revealed that in the most critical period when the overall struggle reaches a high tide, women break through their traditional role patterns and take active part in protests. However, in the peaceful and normal situations, women in most cases are hardly 'visible'. Women's participation in male led movements does not automatically result in raising specific women's issues, unless they have a distinct forum within and outside the larger organisation to articulate their view point. Women's demand about share in power and decision-making has not been articulated through the movement.

If one looks at the profiles of few of these women who have taken active part earlier in the prohibition movement and later in the 'Chipko' movement on a more sustained basis, they were older women or widows or single woman. (both at Gopeshwar and at Reni) On the basis of such scanty evidence it is difficult to suggest any links but the structure of families and the age and sex specific nature of family responsibilities

could be a worthwhile dimension for an analysis of women's roles in the movements. Young married women are more constrained by their family responsibilities and kin-based authority patterns. Most of the analyses of the role of women in movements have tended to neglect the family and work dimensions. The strengthening of the patriarchal family through legal and economic policies has implications for women moving into conventional policies.

There is also a sharp difference in women and men's participation in the popular movements. The social control mechanisms in a society which places a heavy premium on conformity to sex more by girls makes it difficult for young unmarried girls in the rural areas to participate actively. The fear of rejection and conflict within the families is much greater in the case of young women than in the case of older women who wield more authority and less work responsibility at home. Conversely the participation of young men in the movement has radicalised the movement. These asymmetrical response patterns in women's and men's participation in the popular movements and the nature of constraints needs to be probed further.

The 'Chipko' movement has given women a strong forum to articulate what obviously are women's concerns. However, their participation has not helped them in their own struggle against oppression although claims have been made that it is a 'feminist movement'.

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APPENDIX - I

Chipko Movement - A ChronologyThe Beginning

Nov.-Dec. 1972 at Gopeshwar district headquarter of Chamoli :

Protest demonstrations against non-allotment of raw material (ash trees) to the Dashauli Gram Swarajya Mandal (DGSM) for their woodcraft unit and allotment of ash trees from the Mandal forest to a company manufacturing sports goods.

March 1973 - The Mandal forest was saved : the strategy for direct action was chalked out at DGSM and it was decided to protest the trees by hugging and clinging to them (Angwaltha in Garhwali language). On April 1973, a public meeting was held and a resolution was drafted explaining 'Chipko' and its objectives - a novel method of non-violent protest. A padyatra team (multi-party) started from Oonkimath on May 3 to save the forest. In the meantime the government cancelled the contract to the company and allotted them ash trees in another block in the Phata forest. The incident got wide publicity in the media. The then Union Minister of Communication Mr. H.N. Bahuguna however criticised chipko as a movement motivated by narrow parochial interest as forests are nation's wealth.

June-Dec. 1973 - Chipko activists organised a demonstration and an action committee was formed : the company was advised by the government to wait for few months and to cut trees at an opportune moment.

Dec. 1973 - Action at Rampur Phata : in Dec. women from Trijuginarain (last village on Indo-Tibet border) took an active part in mobilising women at Rampur. Women activists from Gopeshwar, Shoyamadevi, Indiradevi, Jayantidevi, Parvatidevi also went to Rampur Phata to join these women in mobilisation and also kept vigil in the forest alongwith men. The company's permit expired without their succeeding in cutting a single tree.

1974 - Action at Reni Village : While men were tricked away from the village to receive compensation for the land that was acquired by the government, women of Reni village under the leadership of Gaura Devi saved the oak forest of Reni by openly confronting the labourers and keeping the vigil the whole night and demolishing the link road to the forest.

The battle of wits continued till the government was persuaded to appoint a committee and subsequently in 1976 the committee recommended that Reni and the Kunari Khol region was extremely sensitive and tree-felling in the vast catchment area of Alaknanda and its tributaries should be totally banned for next ten years. Ban was imposed over an area of 1200 sq. km.

1977 - Nainital episode : With the expansion of the movement in other parts of the Uttarakhand the repressing of the movement also started. In 1977 the police tried to suppress the agitation of students of Kumaon University protesting against the auctioning of the Nainital forest. The students formed Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini (Youth wing of the movement).

May 1977 - Movement takes root in Henwalghati in Tehri District : 30th May 1977 is celebrated as forest day. In a public meeting on this day village people organised a public meeting in the forests at Gotras in Saklana range and put mud plaster on deep and illegal cuts in pine trees made for extraction of Lisa

(Resin). This was a symbolic protest against profiteering by private contractors. On 27th June a public meeting was held at Jajal where "Henwalghati Forest Protection Committee" was formed and it was decided to launch the movement for saving pine trees in Bharari and Jodidena forests. On 25th July men, women and children marched in a procession to Bharari forest and removed tin plates from the pine trees which were used for extraction of Lisa. In the Jodidenda forest there was scuffle between the Nepalese forest labourers and the village people. The Contractor filed a case against main activists which could not be substantiated. They also started a news bulletin called "Chipko Samachar" (news). On 9th August the forest conservator of Tehri Circle came to inspect the pine forest in Gotars and found that the cuts made on pine trees were much deeper and more in numbers than what was permitted. Extraction of resin was stopped in all the three forests. On 13 October 1977, at Narendranagar, the district headquarters of Tehri where the auction of forests was to take place, people gave a memorandum to the District Magistrate and demanded banning the felling of trees on steep slopes of Henwalghati as this will cause floods and soil erosion and acute scarcity of fuel and fodder. However the forests of Adwani and Salet were auctioned. On 18th Oct. the forest protection committee decided to write to the Chief Minister and the Forest Minister to cancel the auction. Nothing happened and after 40 days when the auction was confirmed by the Government, the Contractor came to cut the jungle. The forest officials told the people that if they participate in agitation they will not be allowed free fuel and fodder from the forest and will also not get timber for their houses under free grant. The contractor also threatened the local men and women. Women tied sacred thread (Rakhi which the sister ties on her brother's wrist) around the trees. A camp was organised in the jungle

and Bachni Devi from Adwani and other women attended the camp to express their solidarity and said "without trees women have no existence". 15 km. from Adwani was the second front at Sajat forest. The contractor reported the matter to the police on 2nd January. The Forest Officer reached Adwani. Bachni Devi presided the meeting. She told the forest official the problem they were facing. After this when people slackened the contractor again quietly brought his labourers in the forest. As soon as people came to know, women decided to keep a vigil in the forest. On 12 Jan. a huge women's rally was organised in Jajal where some women social workers from Dehradun also participated. On 31st January the contractor came with police force. On 1st February, when the caravan of labourers, contractors and forest official reached the Adwani forest, women and children were standing near each tree marked for felling. On the 9th February an enquiry committee was formed and simultaneously under police protection arrangements were made to auction the forests. On 9th February women from Henwalghati reached the place where auction was taking place and they insisted for getting the auction postponed for an indefinite period. 9 women and 14 men were arrested and sent to Tehri jail. By the time they were released on 23 February 1978, the forests were auctioned.

1978 - The Movement spreads from Garhwal to Kumaon region : February 1978 -
 the movement was started in Chachridhar near Dwarchat in Almora district which is the catchment area of Ganges. The government gave a 20 year contract to the Star Paper Mill of Bareilly to cut twisted and crooked trees. The local people were agitated about contractors cutting healthy trees with the convenience of the Forest Department.

Jan. 1978 - The Women of Bhyuder Valley (near the valley of flowars) reported to direct action to save their forest which was being cut to meet the fuel needs of the Badrinath Temple—a famous place of pilgrimage. These women snatched away the tools of the labourers who were employed to cut the trees.

1980 - The Women of Dungri-Paitoli : successfully resisted an attempt to clear the oak forest near their village for developing a potato farm by the Government Horticulture Department. They fought not only the bureaucracy but also their cash hungry men who were not bothered about the daily travails of these women.

5,6 & 7 March 1983 - A Women's Camp was organised at Jajal in Henwalghati : Three basic issues i.e. fuel, fodder and water were discussed. Deforestation has not only created scarcity of fuel, fodder and drinking water but has also affected agriculture and animal husbandry. Women from 8 villages participated in this camp.

APPENDIX - II
Central Forest Acts

Forest Department was established in 1861

Indian Forest Act 1878 : which for the first time classified forests into Reserved, Protected and Village Forests defining degrees of control over them. With this Act government for the first time acquired power to take over forests, lay down rules and impose levy on timber. Certain practices were listed as offences and forest officials were given magisterial powers.

Amendments to 1878 Act in 1890 and 1891 : Government acquired further powers through forest settlement.

Comprehensive Forest Policy in 1894 : The essential features of this policy document have governed the forest policies even till today. It laid down that government should undertake "regulation of rights and restriction of privileges". Forests were classified into Protection forest whose preservation was necessary for climatic conditions; National forests which provided valuable timber for commercial purpose; Minor forests including village forests with inferior variety of wood and pasture land.

Indian Forest Act 1927 : maintained the classification of forests as reserved, protected and village forests. Reserved forests were virtually government forests with an absolute rights to settle, transfer or commute the rights of the communities. In protected forests the rights of the people were recorded and regulated and in village forests no control was exercised.

This Act is now being sought to be replaced by the new Indian Forest Bill.* The 1927 Act gave more powers to government not only in classified reserved forests but also in other forests produce. The number of listed offences increased and were made cognizable. The practice of shifting cultivation also came under government purview and control. The most significant change was the deletion of reference to rights of communities.

1935 - Government of India Act : brought the subject of forest under the jurisdiction of province; but private forests under the jurisdiction of princely states and zamindars were exempted from them.

1952 - National Forest Policy : All forests including those under princely states and zamindars came under the purview of the Government. The following needs were emphasised :

- (i) a system of balanced and complimentary land use to be evolved;
- (ii) checking denudation of forests as these regions are the source of perennial water supply;
- (iii) checking of floods and soil erosion;
- (iv) establishment of tree lands to improve climatic and physical conditions;
- (v) ensuring supplies of timber and other forest produce for defence communication and industry needed at a high level both in quantity and quality and supplies of grazing facilities and small wood for agricultural implements and firewood;
- (vi) realisation of maximum revenue on a continuing basis.

* Agitations by concerned voluntary agencies, tribal groups and forest dwellers resulted in stalling its introduction in the Parliament in 1982.

It maintained the classification of forests as protected forests, national forests, village forests and tree lands. As a result of new policy, several state governments amended their Acts which were primarily concerned with the regulation of the rights of forest dwellers. The decades that followed the National Forest Policy resulted in many administrative changes like arbitrary decisions about classification of forests, system of licences and which led to conception and misuse of power by forest officials. Contract system resulted in growing monopolistic tendencies and over-exploitation of forest wealth. In some areas, contractors are controlling the entire Minor Forest Produce. Development of road links in remote hills have literally become roads to destruction.

With growing restlessness among forest dwellers with increasing hardships the Government brought in the 42nd amendment of the Constitution and shifted forests from the state list to the concurrent list.

1980 - The Forest Conservation Act : controlled the powers of the State Governments. While the government holds the forest dwellers responsible for deforestation, the people blame the Government for its role in increasing commercialisation of forests.

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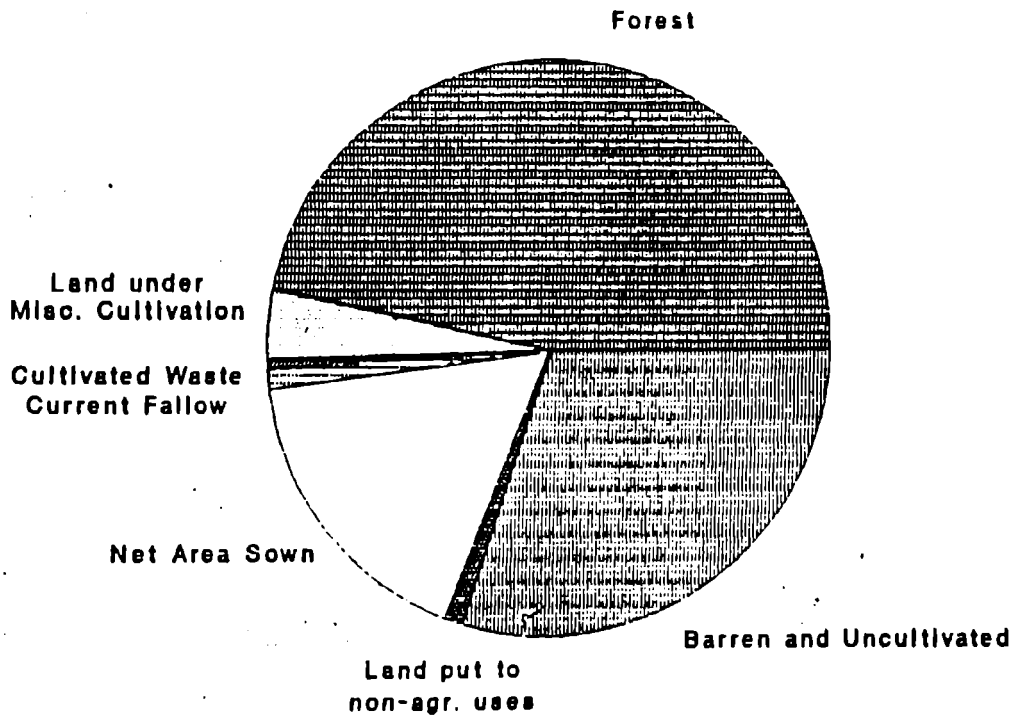
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LAND USE PATTERN IN UTTAR PRADESH HILLS



Source - R.K Gupta, The Living Himalayas vol-I



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