

VOICES FROM THE MOUNTAIN

“Does the government want development of people in the highlands? Or development of people outside, based on what they can get out of the highlands?” Himalayan farmer

As the pace of development accelerates in mountain regions, more often driven by the needs of urban, lowland populations and industry than by highland communities, so the social and physical environment is changing. The implications for the wider world are likely to be significant.

Panos has been working with community-based environmental, cultural and development organisations to record the oral testimony of local people, and to communicate their experiences and their understanding of the challenges ahead.

The project has involved local people as both interviewers and narrators. Ten collections have been gathered: in the Himalaya (**India and Nepal**); the Karakorum (**Pakistan**); the central Andes (**Peru**); the Sierra Norte (**Mexico**); Mount Elgon (**Kenya**); the highlands of **Ethiopia** and **Lesotho**; southwest and northeast **China**; and the Sudety mountains (**Poland**). Each booklet contains a selection of the interviews gathered in that locality. The full international archive holds the views and experiences of some 350 individuals, and represents a wealth of material – vivid, challenging, full of human detail and variety – to complement and illustrate other forms of research into sustainable mountain development. For more information on the themes, projects, participants, and the unedited but translated transcripts, visit www.mountainvoices.org.

Each collection is a snapshot, and does not claim to represent an entire mountain community. But the range of individual voices provides a remarkably comprehensive picture of highland societies, their changing environments, and their concerns for the future. The challenge is to meet national development needs without further marginalising mountain peoples. They are the custodians of diverse – sometimes unique – environments, essential to the survival of the global ecosystem. Further erosion of mountain people’s ability to care for those assets will be the world’s loss, not just theirs.

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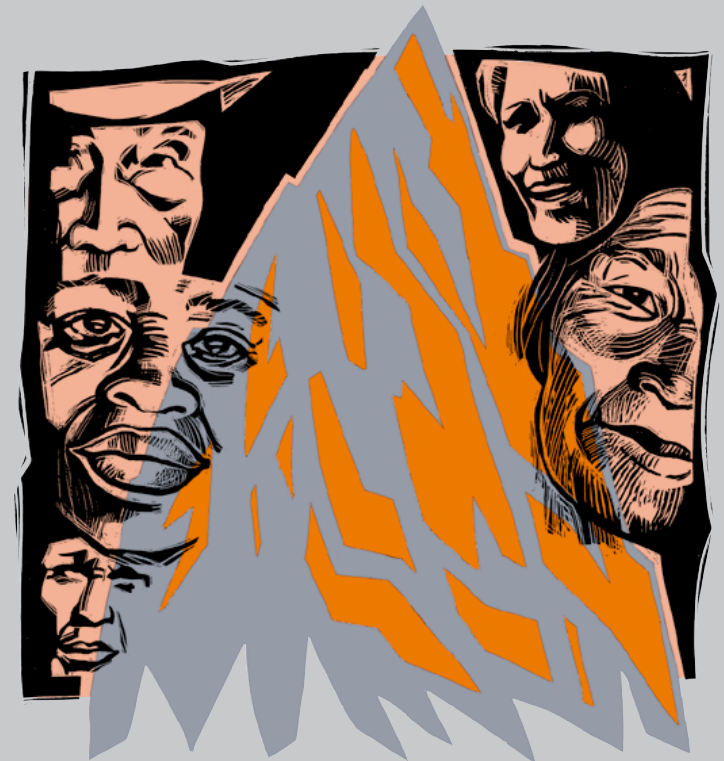
ORAL TESTIMONY



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VOICES FROM THE MOUNTAIN

ORAL TESTIMONIES FROM
UTTARANCHAL AND HIMACHAL PRADESH, INDIA



— VOICES —
FROM THE MOUNTAIN

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The Panos Institute exists to stimulate debate on global environment and development issues. Panos' main offices are in Dakar, Kampala, Kathmandu, London, Lusaka, Paris, Washington.

Voices from the Mountain is a series of booklets published by Panos London's Oral Testimony Programme (OTP) as part of its international Mountains project. The OTP has been working through partners with a variety of highland communities for several years, involving local people both as narrators and interviewers. The aim is to explore the changing environment and culture of these regions through the direct testimony of those who live there; to raise awareness and understanding of the accelerating impact of development; and to communicate people's experiences and perceptions of the changes—social, economic and environmental—taking place as a result.

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Booklets are free to the media and resource-poor non-governmental organisations in developing countries. Copies otherwise are £5.00; bulk discounts available. For copies or further details, please contact oraltestimony@panoslondon.org.uk.

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EDITORIAL NOTE

The interviews are only a selection from those originally gathered. Extracts have been chosen for interest and to represent, as far as possible, the range of concerns, views and experiences found within the overall India collection. They have been edited, primarily to remove repetition or confusion (and questions). Similarly, some re-ordering has taken place. Square brackets indicate “inserted” text for clarification; round brackets are translations/interpretations; and three dots indicate gaps in the text. Words that are glossed appear in **bold** the first time in an interview; botanical terms are italicised and glossed where possible. All interviews have been translated, with varying levels of professional experience and in some cases from a local into a national language and then into English, so some misinterpretations may have occurred.

The numbering of the testimonies (eg INDIA 8) relates to the full collection: to view the rest of the material, unedited transcripts, more background information and any new developments in this project, please see www.mountainvoices.org.

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INTRODUCTION

“This is the age of transition,” says Mohan—a view echoed by many narrators, who speak of significant changes in these once self-sufficient villages of Garhwal and Kinnaur in the western Himalaya. In the past, villagers grew or made most of what they needed for food, shelter and livelihoods, and bartered or exchanged to acquire other items. There were many people with specialist skills and roles—from musicians to masons, priests to potters, doctors to drummers. They lived a hard-working life but one rich in culture and religion. Now, warns Mohan, “people are losing many of their old skills, [yet] they are not being sufficiently trained or educated in modern ones.” Roads and other developments have brought access to consumer goods, agricultural and other innovations and ideas, better health facilities—and education, another powerful force for social and economic change.

It is “the era of the educated”, state several narrators, including Vimla, 58, of Dargi village in Tehri Garhwal. Herself illiterate like many women of her age, she approves of the new opportunities education should bring. Yet, as most narrators do, she feels that in practice this often means young people go to the cities for further study or training and then fail to return, leaving mountain farming to the less educated, the elderly or the truly committed. The irony is, she points out, that better-off people from the plains can come up and enjoy the mountains, while many mountain people are forced to leave for the plains to find work.

This picture may seem somewhat bleak, but the interviews are exceptionally lively and interesting. They are not only rich in culture, knowledge and history but also in positive ideas on development and ways forward. Many people accept that past practices have to change as communities open up to wider social and economic influences, but they stress it is essential to take some of the strengths from the past and build on these too. In particular, people advocate a return to some farming practices of the past, including cultivating traditional crops—many of which were more suited to the environment and had a multitude of applications. The switch to modern hybrids often locks farmers into buying other expensive inputs, and processing can rarely be done locally. Few people are anti-education either, but argue that it should also provide vocational skills, which can maximise the resources of the hills and generate jobs, income and marketable items.

Control over local resources and making the best use of them is a key issue. The collection is full of stories of how big business and new roads have opened up forests, for example, to outsiders—and how poor policies have compounded the devastating effects of

deforestation. A number of narrators are working on their own to turn unproductive pine plantations back to the mixed forests of old, and several women have defied social norms to lead successful local anti-logging movements. Indeed, activism takes many forms in these interviews, and women initiate much of it.

People's knowledge of the region's rich biodiversity is extensive, and the botanical detail in the collection bears witness to this. Sadly, many older people feel that their knowledge, based on accumulated experience rather than formal schooling, is gradually being undervalued as "bookish" knowledge predominates: "Today's generation...talks of science in books while the earlier generation practised it on the ground," says Jagat. Moreover, environmental changes mean that the variety of wild and cultivated plants, as well as wildlife, is diminishing and there is a real sense of urgency in the call for more environmentally aware development policies.

Many factors, but notably education and the need for cash incomes, have greatly accelerated migration. The effects are wide-ranging, not least a decline in the old collective activities, in which everyone contributed to major works from house-building to maintenance of irrigation systems. Too many men are working away; others have waged work and can't afford the time off. People today have to pay for labour, so again it is the poorest who suffer now that, according to Jagat, "all that talk of community is over... [and] each person...wants to depend on his own resources".

Overall, though, the energy, wisdom and resourcefulness of these narrators, with their varied backgrounds, shines through these accounts. United in their connection with the mountains, they are full of ideas for the future—this selection cannot do justice to the richness of these interviews (see mountainvoices.org.uk for the full collection). Since the interviews were gathered, the wish of many narrators for a separate state was realised—Uttaranchal became India's 27th state in November 2000.

Partner and project

These interviews were collected from the mid-1990s over a wide area by a dedicated team of local interviewers drawn from different NGOs and professions and coordinated by Indira Ramesh. The Himalaya Trust has acted as a focal support point, and as publisher of *Eternal Wisdom*, three Hindi booklets drawn from the interviews and edited by Indira Ramesh. These cover biodiversity, gender and traditional farming practices, and are an invaluable record of "a culture that celebrated the interdependency of man and nature". The team has also worked together to take the oral testimony approach a stage further and develop community radio programmes.

THE TESTIMONIES

Lakhupati

INDIA 18

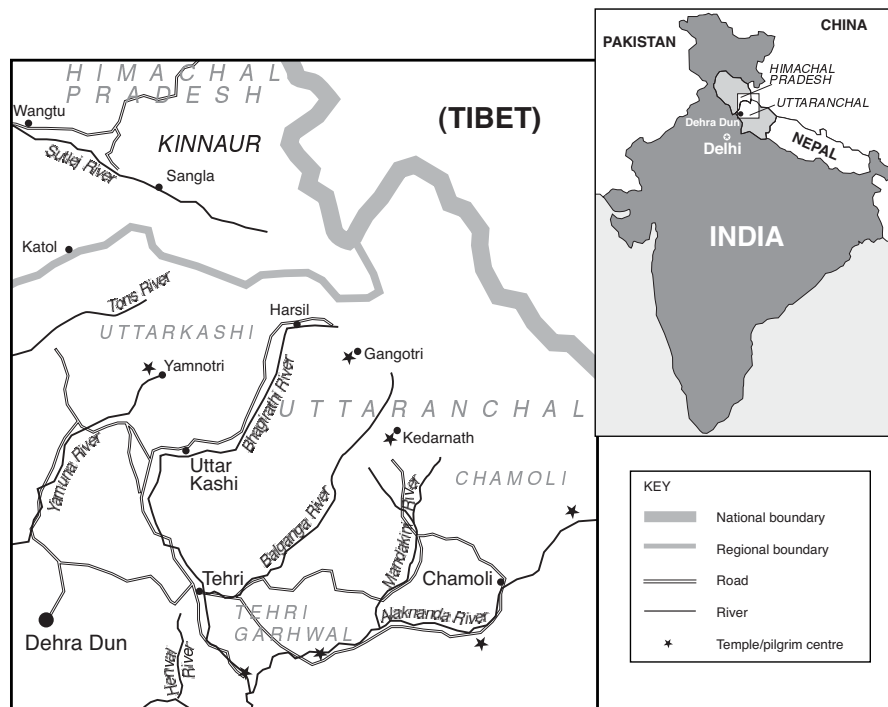
*Lakhupati, 80, belongs to a **scheduled tribe** and lives in the remote village of Chaura in Kinnaur, close to the Indo-Tibetan border. Modern facilities are limited, but, she says, "these distant areas are good in many ways"; the environment is free of pollution and people have "amiable relations". Yet even here society is changing fast, customs such as polyandry and living in joint families are disappearing and young people are moving away. She is proud of her mountain community and explains the relationships of the different groups within it.*

I was born in the hills, and like living here, though it's very cold. It snows and rains heavily. We have avalanches and floods and we often get cut off from the "mainland". The roads are bad and so are the means of transportation. We have power shortages and shortages of food grain, vegetables and grocery items. We do not get proper communication facilities, health facilities, and other development projects, as the people of the plains do. But these distant areas are good in many ways. We hardly ever have burglaries, robbery, and the people live simply, by and large. People are very attached to nature, where the gods reside... We have amiable relations...[and] respect each other. We respect the elders. Since we have fresh and unpolluted air, the hill people are of pure character and strongly built. The population is small, so there is no pollution... The water is pure and clean. We get sufficient firewood. We store food grain for difficult days.

Our main business is agriculture and livestock... We have been following the method of our ancestors. But these days the officials from the agriculture department visit us and demonstrate new methods... Now, times have changed and people have apple orchards... The government has taken a lot of interest and helped us plant a better quality of apples, pears, apricots, grapes and plums. We get good quality fruit, which brings in a good income.

Caste and work

Rajputs [like myself] are basically farmers and rear sheep and goats. Those who have a prosperous standing try to sort out village disputes. They are also moneylenders. We marry within our caste and share the happy and unhappy times. Then there are blacksmiths. They make things of iron for villagers and are given money, food grain or other things... Their living standard is much lower [than] the higher castes. They hardly ever rear goats or sheep. There are also goldsmiths. They make things of silver and gold for the people of their area, regardless of caste...[and] in return



are given either cash or food grain or sheep and goats. They also till the land.

Harijans have their own place in society. They do farming and also work on the farms of Rajput. They also engage in cattle rearing. For their labour they are either paid in cash or given food grain or other items that they need. They also carry messages from one village to the other.

The weavers mainly weave woollen cloth on looms or do farming. They weave woollen articles for the entire village. The people of **Chanalu** caste make baskets for the people who need them. They are also involved in other business and farming.

In our area each Rajput has dealings with people of these professions. They get all the things they require for their daily needs made by these people and pay according to the set standard either in cash, food grain or wool. This is how the [artisans] respect the Rajput. The Rajputs in turn maintain good relations with them... During all festivals [other castes] are invited to share a meal and are entertained.

Festivals and recreation

It snows heavily during December, January and February normally. Inside the house we burn logs and stay indoors and weave and spin wool. Even the old men and women enjoy wool spinning. And as it has become a sort of tradition we crack jokes, tell stories... This way the winter days go by. We [have festivals], mostly during winter. That is how people of one village get an opportunity to meet the people of another village...

In Kinnaur area [our recreation] is basically singing at home and in the temples, organising fairs, dancing and doing **nati**. This kind of entertainment takes place at least 10 or 12 times a year. We have fairs that are like festivals. Young men and women sing together, organise meals... There are many festivals when people sit at home, sing and narrate interesting episodes... The older people offer liquor to the deities and enjoy drinking. But nowadays this practice is getting lost. All this has been replaced by TV, radio, cinema, transistors, sports, wrestling... People are getting more inclined towards the modern kinds of entertainment. This is all due to education. Today they can watch the best of competitions, games, sports—not only national but international—on TV.

Changing tastes

After 1947 the government set up health and irrigation departments, which have started several drinking-water projects. Under this scheme each house in our village is provided with a water connection but this water is not as good as the spring water. Every day some treatment is used which spoils the taste of the water. The pipes get rusted and all this goes into the human body. But life is easier now. People do not have to walk long distances. Water is available either inside or outside the houses.

[In our homes] a big container full of water is kept for boiling, and wild tea leaves, salt, milk, butter, walnut, almond and spices are grown and added to this water... This quenches the thirst and is also good for general health. But the local tribal Kinnaur dwellers are also beginning to drink sweet tea like the people of the plains. This causes many stomach ailments and spoils the general health of the local people. Traditional food habits are being replaced by modern tastes. Earlier we cooked vegetables and **dal** without any condiments or spices but not any longer. Some people are also using

Attar (F, 60 years)

INDIA 11

We peasants get no leisure. So for entertainment we have fairs—for socialising. Then we are fresh to start our tough routine again.

We marry within our caste colouring, which is very harmful...and a lot of attention is being paid to showing off and decoration of food.

The shift to smaller families

In rural, tribal areas polyandry is practised... But in modern times people do not like to live together. Society is changing very rapidly and people are adopting the common practice of living in smaller families. Polyandry and joint family systems are gradually disappearing. People call [polyandry] a social evil but I feel that this system was very good for controlling population growth, and simpler for property distribution. The entire family income was centrally controlled...

I am 80 years old. I have no knowledge of the modern methods [of delivering babies] but I can tell you about the old ways. The pregnant women used to be taken to the ground floor of the building for delivery since it was easier, and also she did not fall ill, since she was safe from the evil eye. For seven days one woman used to attend on her day and night on the ground floor. She was kept away from the rest of the family also. She was given very ordinary food. But now the women go to dispensaries and hospitals...where the deliveries are conducted with ease and comfort. The mother and child do not face any problem and are well looked after by doctors, nurses and orderlies. They are given medicines free of charge. This is very attractive for the poor...

I feel that [family planning] should not be forced upon people. People should be convinced that it is good for them so that they take it up voluntarily. Programmes should be shown through audio-visual means. People's thinking will gradually change and they will willingly opt for it.

What the forests give

Our entire life depends on forests. We get firewood from forests, wood for house construction and fodder for our cattle. This is spread in the bedding of cattle, which gives us wonderful manure too. We also get grass, leaves, precious herbs and minerals for our animals. In addition, forests give us tea leaves, humus, fertiliser... In the forests there is no soil erosion. It rains there and the atmosphere also remains clean and fresh, the air pressure is also just right. This

Prabha (F, 54 years)

INDIA 36

In a joint family women have less work. But in separate families their workload has increased. The only change is that now women do not want to marry three men—they refuse. This is the trend in the younger generation and it is the major change. Earlier it used to be different.



Our life depends on forests

"I have not seen anywhere the kind of freedom we have in the hills, no other place has such good water or food... Whenever there is rain, it is drawn to the forests"

keeps the birds and wild animals healthy and...saves them from extinction. The water level of springs and ponds is maintained...

I feel that life in the hills is much better than in the plains. But it's a matter of concern that the young people of our areas, who are either educated or are getting higher education, are becoming attracted by the cities and the plains. They do not want to visit their homes any more... [But] the forests will keep giving employment opportunities to human beings, a source of livelihood too, helping the standard of living to rise.

Bihari

INDIA 12

Bihari, who is in his 60s, is a veteran Ghandian worker and social activist based in the village of Budakedar, Balganga valley. He believes fervently that self-sufficiency can be regained with the revival of the old crafts and occupations and the introduction of small-scale industry. Like other narrators he opposes the Tehri dam project.

It is believed that Lord **Shiva** considered this place to be of great importance... It is believed that every stone of these rivers is a **Shiva linga**... The temples over here are a means of livelihood... People visit this place with the aim of paying homage... Many different kinds of herbs and roots are also to be found here. However, these are also becoming rare now, as outsiders have been randomly

Mohan (M, 60 years)

INDIA 8

Today people go there not as pilgrims but as tourists. They sit in the vehicle and get down at the shrine. No communication and interaction takes place...no mutual understanding between local people and outsiders. It used to take months for the completion of a single visit to a shrine. Pilgrims used to stay in the charitable inns...set up on the paths to the shrines.

Mahesha (M, 67 years)

INDIA 3

There used to be rest houses at various places. There was one near our village... Pilgrims would come and there would be arrangements for their stay and we would benefit from them as they bought provisions, milk, *ghee* and wood.

collecting them. The roots and herbs that used to grow here naturally are giving way to thorny bushes and grass...

The main occupation of the people here is agriculture and looking after cattle. From the cattle we get milk, curds and *ghee*, which also gives us business. People here are also labourers, and the hotel business is another means of livelihood. Earlier, people used to do all kinds of jobs... Pilgrims used to come through the villages, but now with the road people are losing their means of earning money.

Loss of self-sufficiency

At first, people here were self-sufficient because the means of transport was not there, so they felt that wheat, rice, pulses, etc, should be grown only...for themselves... They also kept sheep. Even cloth was produced by each household for its own use. [Everything] from the spinning to the stitching of the garment was undertaken in each household... When it snowed on the peaks we used to shear the wool from the sheep and goats. We used to do carving, too, in our homes. But all this has disappeared with the passage of time...

Slowly, looking after sheep, which was our main occupation, has stopped, because there are not enough facilities for **carding**. We are now trying [to get] more facilities and technical expertise through a Technical Institution in Ranichauri... We sent one of our friends abroad to get training in operating carding machines. He is now back. Now our main problem is obtaining card leather.

Carpenters cannot start their own businesses now either. This is because they cannot run a business on stolen wood... The government also does not give them wood. So we are not self-reliant any more in making our own houses.

Today, it is as if houses are made overnight. Earlier, carvings would take years. The carving was done from *thuner*. Today, wood is not available, and even if we have wood lying on our own land the forest officer comes to arrest us and asks us...where we have

obtained it... Moreover, things made by hand have become very costly, so carving is an expensive art and slowly disappearing...

Fields are lying fallow

We have to think of self-sufficiency by keeping supply and demand in mind. Like earlier on, people would grow ramdana, potatoes; they would have cattle and sheep and thus obtain *ghee*, they would make baskets out of *ringal* and then take all their produce to the plains. They would sell this stuff and trade it for rice, *dal*, whatever was not available here. This way, in a reciprocal manner, self-sufficiency can be developed.

"We need development at the village level"

Education should not be bookish, but such that [people] are able to earn a living... However, today people have no work... People used to join the armed forces from the hill regions but now their numbers are reduced. Now the ratio has increased in the hotels and instead of protecting our frontiers people are busy making money. Women used to pay more attention to farms and livestock but now this is not so. People have broken their connection with farms and livestock and settled in the plains. Their farms are going to waste and their fields are lying fallow... There is a change in basic values. Earlier, women were looked upon with respect and reverence but now even they have to do manual labour.

India is a country of villages, and for a country of villages there has to be...a system of development at the village level, which alone will be powerful development... That we should uproot the people from the villages and settle them in the towns is not a very good policy... All the mountains that you see around you have huge cracks in them due to the earthquake. In this situation is it wise to build a dam here?...

People believe that if there are roads in the village development has taken place, if a school has opened then development has taken place. What is the direct benefit of having a road in our village, and how does it affect development?... The grass will go, the trees will go, the stone will go from our village. On the other hand, we can grow good vegetables, fruit, and make baskets and so on from *ringal*, make various things and also use colourful stone in handicraft and sell it to other places. But if we don't do anything [like this], then having roads here will be of no significance.

Avatar (M, 75 years)

INDIA 5

[Now] there are no trees... we have to buy timber even for making a doorframe... But the needy person remains without timber because he does not possess [money for] bribes or the right connections.

Sudesha

INDIA 1

*Sudesha is a leading environmental activist in the Henval valley (she lives in the village of Rampur). She has spearheaded **Chipko** and other protest movements locally, believing that “people are not thinking of the future” and that natural resources must be protected. She has also tried to help women to “think for themselves” and is scornful of well-off men who do nothing to reduce their wives’ work burden. She is in her 50s.*



We are part of the Chipko movement for saving the forests... [We learnt] about the importance of the forests, how they affect our lives... All we knew [before] was about our grass, our fuelwood.

In the old days the grass and fuelwood were available nearby, now we have to go very far away... My husband has strongly opposed me, and so have the villagers, but I have carried on... My whole life...has been spent with the movement... Not just Chipko, but wherever there was a protest movement, for instance against a mining project in our area or [when] they used to kill male buffaloes or [when] people used to exploit young girls for money, or they didn't want to educate girls. Our **Mahila Mangal Dal** used to work for these causes...

We first went into the forests and clung to the trees where the contractors were tapping for resin... At that time everyone got together—men, children, everyone. So many people that the police got frightened. Five women clung to every tree...

We did a lot of this kind of thing. When we went to the auction of logging contracts at Narendra Nagar, that was the day we went to jail... Our Chipko brothers were with us...we pushed our way inside...[and said]: “We will sit here for three days.”... The policemen came back in the night... [They] started to lay their hands on us, ordered the men to step aside, saying, “We are taking away these women.” One of our brothers...was picked up and taken outside. Then...all the women began to get angry...

[Later they took us to jail]... At home we are always working...but in jail we were able to sit and rest. There was no disrespect shown to us... We did a protest there also, insisting that

*All the
blows fall
on the poor*

they give us good food, good beds...

The day we were taken to jail, my husband had warned me that I would be imprisoned. I answered: “So what? Many important people have gone to jail.”

“This river is ours”

The [anti-Tehri dam] movement...was a completely different type of protest... First of all, we believe that the Bhagirathi River is ours, that it should keep flowing as it always has; when our people die...we take our dead to Tehri. Now this will stop, then where will we go?... I have seen that whatever happens all the blows fall on the poor. Rich people get away with anything, they can get employed doing dam work, they can make the dam theirs, but when the poor die, there will be no place even to float them down the river. Apart from that, this dam is dangerous...

The government wants [those displaced by the dam] to have good land, but even if they get better land, it is no substitute for losing a home...however poor it is... One's home is one's home. I have travelled up to Bombay, but I have not seen anywhere the kind of freedom we have in the hills; no other place has such good water or food as we have in the hills.

If we can get facilities for irrigation, and if we get good grain harvests in our hills, then we have no need to go anywhere else. These are the reasons why I oppose the Tehri dam... They are transporting [our water] to Delhi. The people of Delhi are rich, they can do whatever they like. We are poor people...

Our children migrate to the plains to wash dishes for other people... I have been to Delhi. Our boys from Rampur live in houses that look like lavatories. They undergo so much hardship in their work and the landlord says all sorts of things to them... But we poor people are free. We have our own houses in our village and breath free air... I wept when I saw their houses...

So some employment should be started in the hills instead of [building] a dam, which is uprooting us from our homes... What will the souls of these people say, the ones who have been uprooted? There is great sadness among those who have gone away from Tehri, our brethren...

Attar (F, 60 years)

INDIA 11

[Foresters] plant trees and go away, never to come back... These people take good pay from the government. But they do not work properly... As a small baby has to be fed milk, bathed and looked after in other ways, in exactly the same manner a small sapling needs looking after... These people don't even enclose the trees that they plant, let alone take care of them.

*Our children
migrate to
the plains*

Jubli (F, 55 years)

INDIA 14

Our fields have been taken away for the road, but we got no compensation. The place where we used to have trees and grass once upon a time has been completely ruined... There is no benefit when we have lost our land... Whatever jewellery our women have cannot be worn any more... How is it that [thieves] are so common now? It has to be related to the arrival of so many vehicles.

Mohan (M, 60 years)

INDIA 8

There is a great problem in remote areas. The farmers cannot get full profit out of their cash crops because the fruits rot by the time they carry them to the roads, which are at a great distance. The areas that are beside roads are able to promptly rush their products to the market.

Looking to the future

[As for the road], in my opinion there has been only one benefit—people don't have to climb up and down... In my native village there are two roads, one on either side of the village. They cut the hillsides so badly that even the houses were ruined...the forest was cut down... It is my feeling that the small stream in my native village, which used to have a lot of water, has dried up ever since the roads were built.

The problem is these days people are not thinking about the future of their children, that there will be descendents... We must leave something behind for them... When a road is to be built, the labourer thinks he will get money, the contractor thinks he will get the contract and will become important. That is all. No one is thinking ahead.

"Trees pull the water towards them"

The climate has changed a great deal... People used to call the month of **Savan** the season of darkness. Sometimes we could not see the sun throughout [the rainy season].

I think our forests are affecting the situation. I have noticed that whenever there is rain, it is drawn to the place where there are forests. We have forests on the other side, and the rains come there first. So the trees must possess some powerful divine nature that they can pull the water towards them.

The hillside is a very degraded one, so very few trees could be planted. But we put in as much effort as possible and also did guard duty. Someone said that women cannot do a watchman's work, so I did it! For this reforestation project we were given 200 rupees... The next year when the grass sprouted, I made the women do guard duty over it themselves. So the men of the village have got very angry with me that I manage everything by myself.

"Our land was harmed"

The first year I applied [fertiliser]...I thought it was really wonderful. But in the second year the yield began to fall, and in the third year it fell even lower. In the fourth year it was exactly where it was before I started using fertiliser. The money that I spent on buying the fertiliser is a separate matter. Our land was harmed in exactly the same way that a man's body is harmed when he drinks liquor... [Fertiliser] is very strong. When it was put on the crops, if a little extra was put in, the crop got burnt immediately...

We make everyone understand that they must sow their own local seed. We maintain this [practice] exactly as we used to earlier. We have collected at least 200 to 300 species of rice. Those seeds that had disappeared from our area have been rediscovered and brought back from Ranai and other places.

"Older people think women should only cook"

I keep trying to make other women understand that they must burn fuelwood sensibly. I keep telling the men that since they keep boasting that they have lots of money, can they not get their wives gas connections? They have all travelled so much, and those men who have been in the army think no end of themselves and boast that they have a lot of money. But I keep telling them, "As long as your wives have to go so far to collect firewood, you are nothing!"...

The older people think that women should only cook. She should only tend the home fires. If she steps out of the house she loses her honour. So in a sense I have shown great disrespect to the people of Rampur. But now they are gradually beginning to admit that I do know something, that I have done something worthy of respect...

Even now the women want to come with me, but their husbands will not let them. There are people who say that the country has become free, but the women are not yet free. Unless the girls begin to think of these things themselves, and feel that they are as good as the boys, there is no one who will give them that freedom.

Attar (F, 60 years)

INDIA 11

I do not like the taste of things if the government fertiliser is used. The food grain is tasteless. The government fertiliser ruins the land after two or three harvests... The soil becomes as hard as stone... If a sufficient quantity of cow dung is used then the quality of the soil remains good... A better manure is obtained from oak and rhododendron leaves... These days only pine leaves are available.

Women are not yet free

Bachani

INDIA 4

*Bachani, who lives with her co-wife in Adwani village in the Henva valley, led the **Chipko** movement in her area. Now 72, she is despondent that people are still “stealing” wood, especially since the road has opened up access to people from afar. She warns of the consequences: “Daughter, the rain is lessening because the forests are being cut down.”*



I have five sons and three daughters... One [son] is an editor, one is a lawyer, one is a **patwari**, one is an inspector... All are doing well... [and] are settled in other places. I got all three of my daughters married to educated boys, and all three are now living in towns. All my granddaughters are studying.

We older people have remained illiterate... We do our work ourselves, we two old women... [Our husband] has died. We take cow dung to the fields and bring back paddy. My condition is getting worse each day with the strain of climbing. But we have to fill our stomachs...

[When the grain is not sufficient] we ask our sons for money. Then we buy our grain from the shops... [We grow] paddy, wheat, finger millet, barnyard millet, fox-tail millet, different kinds of **dal**, **kauni**, pigeon pea... We always keep a pair of bulls and two buffaloes... If I don't keep livestock, what will I eat? My sons are busy with their work. Their work is far away in the towns; they are busy with their families...

[With the road] the availability of grass and firewood has dwindled. Now people come from far distant places. They cut grass and firewood, put it on the buses and take it away. So there is a crisis for us... We like the thought that we can go here and there in automobiles. But the grass and firewood have been cleaned out.

Vimla (F, 58 years)

INDIA 6

People are resorting to education more as there will be development only through education. But instead of development taking place [here], once people are educated they run away... They have built houses in Delhi or Dehra Dun after leaving our Garhwal... but those [in the plains] who have intelligence are coming up [here] because they have money. And our people are running down for money! ... Then what happens is that when we are sad we can't see [our children], and when we are happy about something we can't share it.

Chatra (F, 50 years)

INDIA 13

If forests are cut down it leads to scarcity of grass, which affects women. It also causes water shortage. Men don't bother at all as they get jobs cutting or chopping and keep getting daily wages.

“We women clung to the trees”

A lot of us women tried to do some work through the **Mahila Mangal Dal**. We bore a lot of hardship. All our village people came with us. We had a big struggle with the police. We experienced beating at the hands of the police because we would not let the trees be cut down...we flung our arms around the trees... Even my husband was a forest contractor...he cut down forest after forest... He was the major contractor and I was his enemy in this struggle. I acted against my husband and so saved the forest...

The policemen came, so we clung to the trees, all of us women. The police...stood and watched us, but they never laid hands on us. There was a big crowd from the village. The whole village backed me. [In all there were] 60 to 80 women... Then we read the **Bhagavat Gita** for seven days. The musicians also came...

[Nowadays] people take away wood by stealth, hiding it from me. Day by day I have become old. Now I am just sitting at home, so people are stealing from the forests. What can I do? But over the last 12 years, no one has cut down a tree in front of me...

We protected the forests because we knew it would make our lives easier. We could get firewood, grass, we could keep livestock in peace... When rain comes we get plentiful harvests. Daughter, the rain is lessening because the forests are being cut down. If there were plenty of trees, the rainfall would increase... We must save the forests. There used to be plenty of rain in earlier days. Now it is much less and there is more drought, less grain.

Jagat

INDIA 10

Jagat is a 44-year-old resident of Kot Malla village in the Alaknanda valley, Chamoli district. For over 20 years he has opposed monoculture (the widespread planting of pine trees) and has been turning his land back into a mixed forest of over 56 species. He calls for development of natural resources that benefit the “people of the hills” rather than outsiders.

There are people as old as 100 years in our village...whenever I listen to them I am filled with amazement at how there is such an enormous difference between now and then... Community spirit...existed in people naturally earlier... If the canal had to be

Today each person is isolated repaired then the entire village went for that [work]...[or] if a new vegetable was cooked in someone's house then the entire neighbourhood would taste it; whoever lit the fire first would [provide it] for the whole neighbourhood.

Today it is just the opposite, every house has matchboxes, every household cooks its own vegetables, and although [in the past] it must have made people self-sufficient, all that talk of community is over... My grandfather would produce a spark using an iron *agela*, cotton and flint stone, whereas I have a matchbox in my pocket...

Today's generation wants returns immediately. It talks of science in books while the earlier generation practised it on the ground... Today each person is isolated and wants to depend on his own resources. It was not like this earlier.

"People had a deep feeling for the forests"

As far as I know, our great grandfather...was a great lover of trees... The mango tree he planted is there in the village today. After him was my grandfather...who was so close to nature that he acquired divine grace.

What the elders tell us is that earlier there were dense forests and there were many species in them... People had a deep feeling for the forests...they got their vegetables...as well as grass, fuel etc. There were few forest fires, but if there was one then everybody went in a group to put it out. Today it is just the opposite. If there is a fire, people today are indifferent because nothing that belongs to them is burning, it is the forest department's...

There is a very big change [in the environment]. We had soil earlier, where is the soil today? It has all been eroded. Now you think about it, earlier there were dozens of types of leaves with which manure was made but now the diversity is lost... Earlier there was moisture in the soil, now there is a lack of moisture... Fodder trees have been replaced by pine...the entire forest is pine... The forest has become commercial and the availability of fodder has vanished.

"The hills will be transformed"

Mixed forests should be developed in our mountains... There should be every kind of tree in the forest...fodder trees, fuelwood trees and those that keep the soil moist... There should also be fruit trees, and trees that will supply wood for building purposes, and the most important trees are those that will keep the environment clean—broad-leafed ones. The rest are for [the craft] industries—*raambans*, *bans*, *ringal* and grass and other creepers... When trees that prevent landslides and fruit trees are planted together, [and] if

Savitri (F, 50 years)

INDIA 29

There is much more dryness in a pine forest. And other trees and plants won't grow there. But where you find oak and rhododendron, you will find dampness, moisture... I believe we should uproot the young pine plants...and we should propagate the useful plants so that they can give seeds. My experience is that naturally grown plants are better for forests than the plantation species.

fodder, grass, medicinal herbs are available in one place, then the face of the hills will be transformed...

In 15 to 20 years I will make that forest into a mixed forest. But I know that no one from the forest department or the administration will say this... [Their] thinking was bookish, that at this height this species will not grow with that species... The government has actually put restrictions on these medicinal herbs. They have a clear point of view that below a certain height these cannot grow. [But I have planted them]...You have seen them...

I haven't been...reading any books, nor have I been trained anywhere or had anybody's guidance... What I have done is on the ground and I have experimented and seen that *banj*, *deodar*, *bans*, *surai*, *angu*, *chir*, *bhimal*, *timla* and *sisam*, etc, will all grow at the same place, if a person is determined...

[I got the inspiration] from my father—before he died he said to me, "Son, make our infertile land of some use." ... Initially there were a lot of problems, which I had to bear. The villagers cooperated to the extent that they did not spoil anything... Today the family is happy, but 20 years ago when my age was right my mother and wife wanted me to take up a job and not get involved in this madness. Whatever little money I had, I put into this and continued to do this with body, heart and whatever resources I had.

All this talk of organic diversity in large-scale programmes...we hear about it on the radio and in the newspapers... What diversity is there on the ground? ... We only have pine needles... On paper, so many trees have been planted in the hills that there should be no fields and houses here!

Until we link the environment with development we cannot talk of the right kind of development... You should certainly plant trees because they are one of the main factors in the environment, but also focus your attention on trees that will provide earnings. For

Bhagat (M, 67 years)

INDIA 15

[The forest] was destroyed for the construction of the road [and] of houses, by people who came with cutting machines. They cut down the trees ruthlessly for making packing cases for apples. Some people made brisk business from *deodar* wood. This is how the beautiful forest was destroyed.

Diversity is lost

Tourists will make fun of us example there is *bhimal*—the leaves are useful as fodder, its fibres can be used to make ropes, bags, etc, shampoo can be made... Trees can lead to economic prosperity, cottage industries can be developed...

Does the government of today want the development of people in the hills? Or does it want the development of people outside, based on what they can get from the hills? I ask you, what direct benefit will we get from these big dams [such as Tehri]?... The people of the hills have their own concept of development... It would be far more beneficial for us to have small hydroelectric projects. On the one hand the government is making dams and on the other it talks of [protecting] the environment.

Contemplating tourism

People [say] that if tourism develops in the hills then it will bring employment to the people here and it will bring money, and they have limited their understanding of tourism to this...

Now there are four types of tourists who come here. The first are those who are tired of their busy and crowded life in the big metropolis...and want to spend a quiet month or two in the hills. The second are those who come on a religious pilgrimage... The third type of tourists is our students and youth who spend their summer vacation here. Sports people who are also tourists are fine. But then there are those who under the cover of their business are conducting shady transactions...

[So] the tourism that is being talked about, is it going to benefit us or not? [Will it] not shake up our cultural...our spiritual heritage? Before promoting tourism we must think about these things so that tomorrow there is no body blow to the culture of the hills, so that we do not have to start a new movement—"Stop such tourism."

We will have to be very vigilant... If tourism is developed properly then there can be economic development here, but if it continues like this we will get nothing more than carrying the luggage of these tourists. They will give us some money and make fun of us.

Satye (M, 45 years)

INDIA 9

At present holy shrines are being looked at as the best spots for tourism... With the increasing road facilities a greater number of tourists visit these places...and defile their sanctity... We should protect their religious value...meat shops and wine drinking should be strictly prohibited in the areas of religious importance because this had a bad effect on the dignity of the shrines and on the peaceful atmosphere around them.

Ramchandri

INDIA 35

*Among the changes witnessed by Ramchandri, aged 55, are the decline of polygamy, the disappearance of some of the traditional Hindu festivals and the destruction of the forest, partly because of road-building. She is a **Rajput** and lives in Pata village, Bhagirathi valley, Uttarkashi district.*

My husband's first wife...did not have any children... It was only after he talked with her that the second marriage was finalised with me. She said, "I am unable to have children, so you [should] remarry; my house should not remain without children." The marriage was solemnised with her permission... Family succession must continue, every woman desires it. In contemporary times things have reversed. Today's girls do not permit their husbands to go for a second marriage even if they are unable to have children...

When a son is born in a house, people go to congratulate all the elderly members of that house and offer them *doob* grass, which [the men] put on their caps and women on the scarves tied round their head.

[Why?] A son continues the dynasty of the family. The root of *doob* grass never dies. It grows anywhere and can survive in any condition. Therefore, people consider it a symbol of family succession and offer it with good wishes on the birth of a son...

A child is born in the *obara* because during delivery only the midwife or any one member of the family looks after [the woman]. We consider a pregnant woman impure, so we do not let the whole house become impure. Therefore, after a five-day period, which we



Ramchandri and her grandson

Shanti (F, 55 years)

INDIA 25

At the time of the birth of the first child parents wish to have a son... But experience says that daughters are better since they look after the ageing parents even after they are married [whereas] a son demands a share in the property soon after marriage. If it is not given to him he starts fighting... Times have really changed. The waters of the river Ganga still flow through this land...but sons have become ruthless and selfish. Earlier they used to bow before us with folded hands.

call *panchola*, we distribute *til* and rice and bring the newborn and the mother into the sunlight.

Festivals and religious customs

The festival of Dufari happened in **Chaitra**... All the children...who took the cattle for grazing in the forest...got together and collected rice from the village. Then they went to the forest and cooked whatever they liked. People used to give them other things to eat. Dufari means the festival of children in the forest. Now it does not take place; people do not graze their cattle together any more. Livestock has also decreased. And during **Baisakh** there used to be the children's festival at the time of harvesting wheat. Children used to go to every field and ask the mistress of the field for wheat. Then all the children took their wheat together to the banks of the Ganga. There they cleaned and roasted the wheat for eating and brought some home for the others... Now this festival has also come to an end... It used to be good fun before.

[Worshipping the fields?] We do this on the day of **Vasant Panchami**. It is during Chaitra. On that day, sickle, pickaxe, spade, plough are taken to the field, cow dung is taken in cane baskets, a little bit of grain is put in a *patha*, and leaves of the *panya* tree are also taken along. All these are worshipped in the field; the earth [and the tools] are also worshipped... A lamp is lit in the *patha*. On this day the **Brahmin** priest looks up the astrological calendar and gives the forecast for the weather and produce for the coming year. We worship the fields so as to have a good yield.

Collective work

Here the land is divided equally among all brothers. Some people give more land to their elder brothers, but they are very few. If the people are nice, they divide the land between themselves on their own and if they have any conflict they call the *panchs* to divide the land. If good fields are few a lottery...is carried out by the *panch* or the elder of the house... In this way land is fairly divided...

The *panchs* used to settle conflicts earlier, but not any more. They now settle small disputes or the partition of fields. Some people go to the court. People have changed now, so they do not trust the *panchs*.

The *panchs* allot turns for people to protect the fields from monkeys... Most of our agricultural work is done collectively... We go in turns to each other's house for transplanting, hoeing and weeding. Earlier, everyone used to help, even with the construction of houses, but now they don't. Now people have jobs, so they bring mules and Nepalese labourers—these do everything. The poor, that

is those who do not have jobs today, are all alone; they have to bear all the pain. Earlier, both rich and poor had their houses constructed easily. But today money has eradicated mutual love.

The poor are all alone

"Trees were cut down for the road"

We have to go far inside [the forest] to get fodder... Earlier the forest was very dense... A road has been built up to there, so many trees were cut down for the road. Now the forest has really thinned... We used to eat a lot of its fruits while cutting grass in the forest. When we sow paddy seeds, we put manure made of oak leaves in the fields... Now there are very few oak trees left. Oak leaf manure is the best for paddy. Wild fruits have also diminished...

Trees were cut down in one go at the time of the construction of the road, but even now trees fall. This is because of the deep cuts made in the pine trees...to extract resin... The trunk becomes weak as a result...and breaks during a storm...

From one point of view, the earlier time was better because women were free from the fear of crime. We used to go far into the forest, but we did not have any fear. But times have changed now. Roads have been constructed so there is fear of thugs and thieves...

Earlier we used to get abundant fodder from the forest and we had lots of animals, so there was enough milk and *ghee*. Now we have little milk, which we sell...because the financial requirements of the house cannot be sustained through agriculture alone... Expenses were less before... Family size has also increased.

Climate change and natural disasters

Earlier the snowfall used to be heavy, it would stay put for many days and the weather was very cold. Now sometimes snowfall does not occur at all. If the snow falls here it stays only for one day. The weather has now changed a lot; it has become very hot. We never knew what mosquitoes were before, now there are so many mosquitoes, they bite us a lot...

[In 1978] there was a terrible flood in Uttarkashi. We received the information in advance, so all people of the valley and Uttarkashi came to our village [or] to the villages across the river situated above, in the mountains. They even brought their animals along. We were weeding in fields which were to be cultivated. Around 3 o'clock in the evening there was a terrible roar and the

Savitri (F, 50 years)

INDIA 29

Earlier, we lived in peace... Women used to walk without fear, there were no bad characters. These seem to have come in because of the road.

Fertiliser is being misused Ganga River came with flooding waters. There were trees coming down before the river. We had never seen a flood like that in our entire life. All the villages and fields near the river were badly damaged.

The second incident was the earthquake [in October 1991]... The tremors were so strong that we could not even walk; the trees were also shaking. It was 3 o'clock [in the morning]; we ran outside because the houses started collapsing...

From each family seven or eight members perished, some families were wiped out entirely. We shivered in the cold for many days. People from outside sent us help, sent us food... The government gave us financial aid... In some places only the old people survived, the rest all perished. We cannot forget these incidents.

Mahesha

INDIA 3

Mahesha, 67, is a farmer and shopkeeper whose family has lived in Khumera village in the Mandakini valley, Chamoli district, for 10 generations. He recalls how the village grain store provided both food security and a type of banking system, and how much more influential the panchayat used to be.

The old system was better... The dairy animals and the sheep and goats were kept together. The sheep would provide wool, people spun their own cloth and needed to buy less from the market... We reared cows, buffaloes and goats and worked hard on their upkeep to get sufficient milk and *ghee*. Now that there are no cows, oxen or buffaloes, there is no dung to be found. Without any dung how does one grow grain? Now they are bringing chemical fertilisers and...because there is no training in how to use it...it is being misused. No soil tests are carried out... Earlier there were savings after consumption but bad times are upon us now...

In earlier times the...commons would be left for grazing cows, and parts of the forest were restricted. There would be a monthly meeting about the forest and there was no problem... Now the land has been somewhat eroded because of the road, and some of it has been destroyed by landslides...

Bhagat (M, 67 years)

INDIA 15

Years ago when there was a famine these [animal] horns came in very handy. They were ground and made into coarse powder, boiled, and the juice was drunk. We got food grain from the temples' reserve store but it was usually not enough. So during famines people depended on animal horns.

There have been some improvements, too. Now people live more hygienically and diseases are fewer. Medicines are also effective, even though one has to buy them from the market.

"We never needed to buy grain"

Earlier, the *panchs* of the village would appoint one man as *bhandari* of the village *bhandar*. He was given the keys to the store and much respect... People had to give grain at the store... They gave wheat, barley and mustard at the time of the *rabi*; and *mandua*, rice, pulses, beans, salt and chilli were collected at the time of the *kharif*...

You could then borrow from the grain bank as and when you needed anything and give it back at the time of harvest. You had to return one and a half times what you took... Grain from the *bhandar* of our village went to the entire *naujula* and also to [other] villages... It was an excellent system. There would be so much grain that we never needed to buy any from the market... If there was a drought there would be some pressure on the *bhandar*.

The work of the panchayat

We had a thriving *panchayat* system in our area. In each village a *panchayati* square would be identified and everybody would gather there. Then people would put aside their spindles and cane baskets and be quiet, and one or two *panchs* would speak while the rest listened attentively. Say, for example, some road needed to be repaired and community effort was required, or a *pandava dance* had to be organised or a deity worshipped, then a decision would be taken in the community *panchayat*. On any big occasion all the connecting roads of the village would be repaired... Everyone abided by the *panchayat's* decision. Now there are no *panchayats*; if ever there is one then each person tries to put pressure to get his own way and there is no decision...

All the forest-related work was also done by the *panchayat*... Roads and water springs were repaired by collective labour... If a *panchayati* house had to be constructed then there would be a roster of 10 families... One person from each family would hew the stone,

Beena (F, 25 years)

INDIA 33

Today the *panchayats* are unable to do anything on their own. The plans are passed down to us and we are unable to make any programmes according to our requirements. There was a flood in the village once; we needed to build roads...but [the officials] said that we do not give money for linking roads, we give money for building schools... They do not want power given to the *panchayat*. They want that people should go to them so they can keep their hold on people.

You could borrow from the grain bank

The world belongs to the well-read another 10 would cut the wood... Similarly, the duties of the artisans would be allocated and the carpenter and the stonemason would do their work and the building would be ready... The main reason being that there are people of different castes in our village and they all contributed to finish the work very fast...

Bachandei

INDIA 34

Aged 70, Bachandei, who lives in Dharwal village, Bhagirathi valley, mourns the breakdown of agriculture, observing that nowadays “the illiterates or those who do not have any jobs are the only ones who do farming”. Everyone now wants a job and money, yet in her view, “there is no wealth greater than one’s own land”. She is glad that girls are now receiving education but regrets that they are leaving the mountains.

We have spent all our life in these mountains, in our village. We like it here. We like neither the language nor the food of the cities... We all have good family ties and don't feel lonely. As long as I have the strength to live alone, I will stay here in the village. The day I become weak I will go to my sons... But I would like to live independently for now...

This is the era of education; the world belongs to the well-read people. No one thinks about agriculture. Everyone thinks about jobs. People think more about staying outside [in cities or where they work] and less about the village... The illiterates or those who do not have any jobs are the only ones who do farming. Those who got jobs have left... [But] the condition of girls is better now. People are teaching their daughters to read and write.

Marriage and family life

We do not say our husband's name. Speaking the husband's name is being disrespectful. When I had children, I used to call him by their name, such as “Pratap's father”. But earlier we never even talked to each other in front of others...we used to call or talk about some work indirectly, through the medium of a child. Later, when [the children] grew up, we talked a little...but [only] in private, not in front of others. I still will not say my husband's name...

Prabha (F, 54 years)

INDIA 36

My mother never thought of educating me because I was the oldest among all the sisters. If I had gone to school, who would have helped our mother with the household work? My younger sister studied and my five brothers also studied. Now they are all in service but my share of study went away in farming!

Vimla (F, 58 years)

INDIA 6

If we were educated we could put [our thoughts] on paper. But we are not. What if we make a noise in the village? Our voice does not go beyond it.

Lakhupati (F, 80 years)

INDIA 18

An illiterate person is like an animal. An illiterate person can be duped, cheated. If such a person goes to fetch something, people cheat him by giving him expensive things and not weighing the goods properly... An illiterate labourer is never paid his full labour charges. On the contrary, he is treated shabbily... It becomes very difficult for him to survive with dignity.

My marriage was that of **daan**; that is, my father did not take any money for my marriage, he gave me in marriage...[but] many...fathers of the girl took money [from the groom's family]... It is not so now....

The girl whose father had taken money to give her in marriage to his son-in-law—such a girl's in-laws often used to taunt her, saying that they had paid money to her father for her... Sometimes her husband also used to say the same. Such girls used to sing out the pain in their hearts while cutting grass in the forest or when working alone in the fields. In this way they used to reduce their burden by addressing their father in the song, saying, “You are happy but I am suffering a lot of pain...” These songs used to fly away in the thick forests, with the wild breeze, and only their friends could hear them. Later this custom of taking money for marriage died...

When sons get married they take their wives along with them where they are working, even if they are working in a hotel. Earlier, even if a person had a good position he never took his family with him... We prefer the old arrangement even today. Sons and daughter-in-laws used to take care [of the elders]. You can see I have four sons. Had it been the old days, the house would have had milk, curd, **ghee**, buttermilk and fresh grain. Now the daughter-in-laws and children are in different places. I am an old lady alone in the house.

“Agriculture has broken down”

Last year... Some people came from Delhi... They gave a sack of mustard seed along with a sack of fertiliser and said that it was good mustard and we must sow it...and we also had to put in this fertiliser... That mustard produced very tall plants... That entire crop failed—perhaps it could not carry its own weight—and it ripened very late, because of which we could not sow the next crop... So we earned no profit; instead we went into loss...

Girls used to sing out their pain

*A person
with fields
is not poor*

Attar (F, 60 years)

INDIA 11

Money comes and is spent fast. Land for agriculture stays. The road may come at anytime but we always need our land and fields, which look after us.

Therefore this year we have destroyed that mustard seed. Now we have sown our own mustard, harvested it on time and sown the seeds for the next harvest...

[But] agriculture has broken down because of this road. Is there any loss greater than the loss of agriculture? Money is spent easily but fields and houses are permanent properties. Money is not permanent... If one is thrown out of a job or for some reason the job is lost, then what is the source of income for a person who has no agricultural land? ... A person who has his own fields will work hard in them, grow crops and eat and stay in his home. He is not poor or dependent... Only hard work is needed in the fields. There is no wealth greater than one's own land.

Hira

INDIA 22

Hira, a Buddhist woman aged 53, lives in Chamoli district. With the rest of her Bhotiya community she migrates between higher summer pastures in Ghamsali and a winter home in Vauna. Like many Bhotiya, she is a skilled weaver and carries her loom strapped to her back during the journey. She looks back on the days when the Bhotiya bartered crops for wool and salt with Tibetans, and describes all the processes involved in "wool work".

Though we faced many hardships in life earlier, we were independent. We were not distressed or agitated about anything, unlike today's youth. We were happy. We were never in a hurry over anything. Today there is a lot of competition amongst people, a feeling of wanting to outdo the other...

We used to barter different commodities with Tibetan people. They gave us wool and salt and we—being Bhotiya people—gave them barley, *uva* and *chemi*. We bought wool from the Tibetans in large quantities. We used to spin wool and make carpets, blankets, etc. We deal in the business of wool only... Earlier, we used to make [the loom] ourselves as we could get the wood. But now we

Attar (F, 60 years)

INDIA 11

We gave a set amount of the harvest to these weavers... in addition to the food grain that was given them when they brought the woollen cloth home... Giving money was not a practice... Now, everything is different. All our traditional tools... are made for payment only.

purchase [food grain and] all types of goods...

We used to [breed animals], but now much less so. At first we used to have many animals because everyone lived together in the house, but now there are fewer members of the family, which results in problems of getting fodder from the forests.

Fetching the grass takes a long time and our wool work suffers. That is why we keep fewer animals now...[and] because all the children are working [or at school] these days, so there is no one to look after the goats... Goats provided a useful means of carrying goods to high altitudes... There are two families who have mules for transporting goods... Everyone in the village is working now, so most people have sold off their mules.



"We were never in a hurry." Bhotiya weavers in Simgarhi village, Uttarakhand

"No one makes fun of wool work here"

In our times we did the wool work at our own pace. We washed it, disentangled it, spun it and then wove it... We dye [the wool] ourselves. These days we buy the dyes from outside but earlier we used to make our own natural colours and dye the wool... *Tatari*, *surang* and *dholu* are some of our own natural dyes that we used to get from the forest. Sometimes the colours bought from outside faded, but our natural colours remained as good as new... The [plant] is boiled in the water till it releases its colour. Then we put wool in the water until it absorbs all of it... [Nowadays] people buy dyes from the market. These new colours are bright whereas our natural colours are a little dull. That is why people have stopped using them...

We call others to help out when making carpets. Two people sit at one loom. We divide the design into two parts and weave the carpets. Today we take designs from anything. But earlier we had to use our own imagination...

When our daughters get married and go to the cities, they carry a spinning wheel with them and spin wool to make balls. They do not mind weaving a small mat or so in front of other people in the city, but they spin wool secretly because people laugh at them... No one makes fun of this work here. All the women do this work.

The journey to Ghamsali

We stay here for six months and at Ghamsali for the next six. It is situated on the border of India [with China]. It takes seven days, sometimes 10, to reach there on foot but if we take a bus at five in the morning, we get there around five in the evening of the same day. Those who have cattle walk with their animals, and other members of their family come by bus...

There are different problems that come our way, but we like [going there]. We start walking early in the morning and continue till night... We stop walking at 10 o'clock at night and on average walk 13 km per day. Whenever we stop we collect fodder for the animals. Sometimes pregnant women start their labour pains on the way and when that happens the women folk inform each other and gather together to help the woman. We wait a few hours after the baby is born. Then it is put into a basket and carried further. The woman is given clothes and sometimes we stay back for a day and move on the next day... The child is bathed on the way. The mother is given salt tea with *ghee* and barley flour to eat. This is the food we carry with us...

We used to carry all our things before but now we have some things that remain here and some up there. Utensils stay at Ghamsali and we have strong houses made of cedar wood with roofs of slate...

I like staying at Ghamsali [even better than here]. It is like heaven. There is not a trace of a mosquito or a fly there. There is no illness, not even rashes. Even if we don't bathe for years we do not feel any revulsion because the climate there is cold and free of pollution and we don't perspire. The air there is absolutely clean. Even food three days old does not rot. The land is clean. We don't feel like coming down from Ghamsali.

"Women are coming up in every area"

When we [women] went to the forest for wood we used to speak to each other regarding how we would give our decision had we been in the *panchayat*. We used to play a game and have fun and every woman would announce her decision in the game. There is a **Yuvak Mangal Dal** and a **Mahila Mangal Dal** in the village now. When they take a decision, the women are also consulted, and our say also has weight. There are meetings to resolve various conflicts and we are able to reduce the tension... Women are coming up in every area... We feel happy that they have the courage to take their own decisions independently...

[In the past] when one walked slowly, loaded with all these

Sudasha (F, 50 years)

INDIA 1

Ever since I became aware I have begun to believe that the jewellery that is made for us [women] is like the decoration made for cows and buffaloes. In one sense it is meant for the same purpose, to make us bow down. There is pain here and there, and then we are constantly worried that it will get lost. If nothing else, it was a kind of bondage.

jewels, with a basket full of goods on the back, sometimes also with a baby above the goods, the ornaments tinkled [*laughs*]. The newly wed women could not even handle so much jewellery because if the nose ring was pulled by a child by mistake, or got caught in the clothes it was very painful, and tears used to come to our eyes... It was not possible to take them off for fear of losing them...

Now the girls wear different clothes... We feel cold in those outfits so we still wear our traditional clothes... We tie a 20-yard cloth around the waist, which helps to keep the waist straight, and the woollen shawl also does not slide downwards. There is a turban on the head... We used to wear shoes made of wool and leather. A cobbler [from outside] used to come to sell the shoes... The shoes were very beautiful. They were decorated in a special way. Only they knew how to make such shoes. Though in the beginning one got blisters on the feet because the leather was hard. No one had socks at that time. We did not know what these were...

Today we don't send our daughters-in-law to the forest. They are all well educated and they don't even know this work... In our days we could not sit in front of our mothers-in-law, or even raise our heads in their presence. We left for the forest in the morning without tea or breakfast and remained hungry till noon. Sometimes we did not have a complete meal for six or seven days.

At times we used to eat on the quiet in some friend's house... We used to eat stale food also... We did not have the courage to tell [our husbands that we were hungry]. We did not have the courage even to laugh. We used to keep working quietly. We used to get blisters on our hands while crushing paddy, and if we were late we were scolded. Who can scold anyone now? Now we are scared of the daughters-in-law! People threaten us by saying that the daughter-in-law is coming!

Bachandei (F, 70 years)

INDIA 34

As soon as the mothers felt the scarcity, they used to control the food limit of the daughters-in-law. They did not starve them but they could not eat to their heart's content. We used to eat barley and millet *chapattis* whereas the elders of the house and the sons used to eat wheat *chapattis*.

Champal

INDIA 24

*Aged 90, Champal has witnessed many changes, which have particularly affected his **Bhotiya** community's traditional livelihoods as weavers and traders. He still moves with family and livestock between Harsil and Virpur in the Bhagirathi valley: the conflict with China has ended the trade with Tibet and the government has failed to provide all the promised compensation money for loss of land and pasture.*

I am not educated. Nobody was earlier. Tehri was a [princely] state and education did not spread in the valley... Our main occupation was connected with wool... Women used to spin wool but gave it to the weavers for weaving. The women made **dumkhar** and **pattoo** at home. Now our people can weave on the hand-loom. We buy the hand-loom from the government... [But young people] are busy studying. The wool-related jobs are now performed only by the old women...

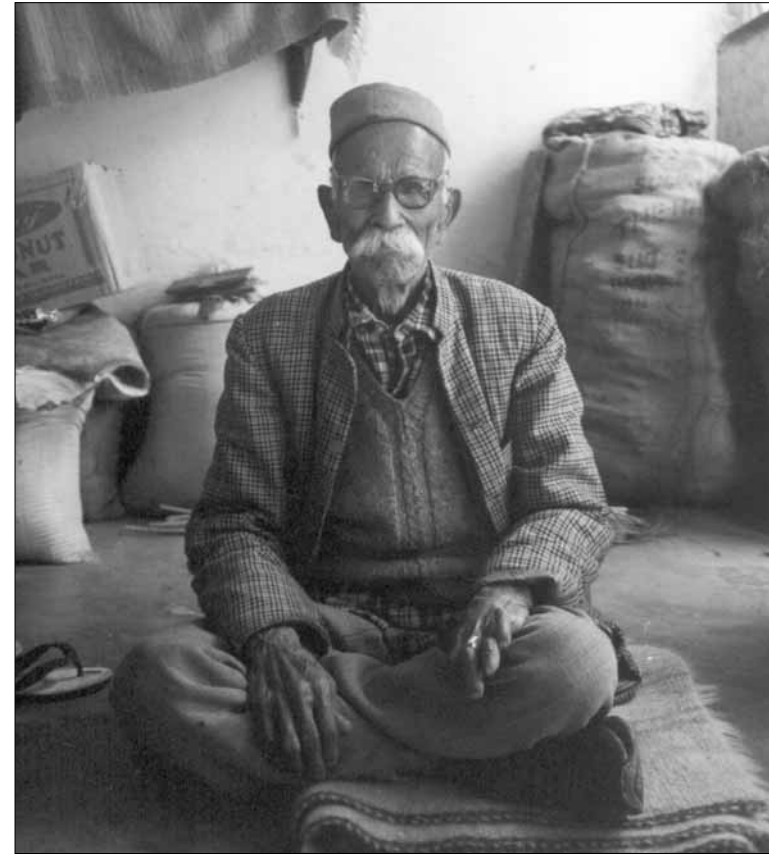
Gradually motor vehicles came into this region...now they go all the way to Gangotri... We used to walk up to Rishikesh earlier... Those who had horses used to carry the luggage on horses. Otherwise the poor used to carry their loads on their backs... An astrologer was consulted and an auspicious day fixed to start the upward journey. We carried rice, barley, wheat, *uva*, *jhangora* and *fafra*. We brought back salt...

Spinning wool and trading it was the main skill. Secondly we used to get horses, goats, **khadu** and salt from Tibet. Now this is not permitted... We also used to bring **ghee**, butter, horses and salt and sold them... The materials were carried on the backs of goats and sheep in saddlebags... Later on we started keeping she-goats and sheep [for breeding]... We also rear cows for milk... Earlier, when the livestock had diseases...many animals died. We had no treatment for these diseases. Now the government has provided doctors both for human beings and animals.

"The war has finished this trade"

The major impact [of the conflict with China] has been that now we do not get wool and salt from Tibet to sell... The war has finished this trade. But now there are fair price shops in each village and we do not have to go anywhere. There are lots of facilities... Every family has a salaried member. The old parents are living in comfort.

Government has provided doctors We have stopped going to Gelang for the last seven to eight years. The government, because of the threat from communist China, has turned it into a military outpost and taken over the entire area. We have all been given a little compensation for our



land and the matter is still under consideration.

The government forces occupied that area and we did not think it right to continue living there with our families. So we vacated it. Almost half the compensation has not yet been given to us. We have been corresponding with the government but to no avail.

Traditional ways

Our original religion is Buddhism but we follow both Hinduism and Buddhism. We worship Lord **Rama** and **Shiva**, as we do the **Dalai Lama**... Our language is more like the Tibetan language, not like other languages...

There are two major annual fairs. One is celebrated in **Magh**. During this month Lord Buddha is remembered and people gather and drink **chang**, dance and play... The second one is celebrated in

Harsil in the month of **Bhadan**. During this time two or three goats are sacrificed... We make *chang* for marriages, especially for the marriage procession. Each family makes *chang* for its own consumption and not for sale. But now people are also selling it...

If people fought at night after drinking *chang*, they would gather together again in the morning and start drinking again to establish a friendly atmosphere. Then they would strike a compromise. There was no ill-will left. If the dispute ever took a serious turn, both parties were called and counselled. The party found more guilty offered a bottle or a kettle of *chang* with due respect, across a carpet, along with other senior persons. The matter used to end there...

Earlier, we had to give **begar**, such as milk, rations, rice, pulses, *ghee*, grass for the horses... Whenever the rangers or foresters came we were forced to carry their luggage to the forest. If the village **patwari** came, we had to look after his living arrangements, arrange grass for his horse and supply girls... We also had to carry the food supplies for the forest department people. Now it is no longer so... The present times are better.

Talib

INDIA 26

Talib and his family are Gujjars, traditionally nomadic people, but now that his community can no longer survive as pastoralists they have decided to "settle down once and for all" in the Tons valley, Dehra Dun district. They are Muslims but, as he describes, have good relations with Hindus. Talib is 55.

The only difference between Hindus and us is that we read **Namaz** but they do not... We do not slaughter goats, even for **Bakrid**, because we are poor and can't spare 2,500 or 3,000 rupees to buy a goat. So we make less expensive delicacies like **halwa** and **kheer**. So we celebrate Bakrid, as we do **Meethi Id**...

One [of our festivals] is Shaberat. Many different things are cooked. Our sisters are given clothes, money and pulses. The second one is **Roza**. We fast for the whole day, eat early in the morning at 3am and then again in the evening by 6 or 7pm... This is followed by the festival of Id. We buy new clothes for our children. All sorts of delicacies are cooked and those who can afford it bring a goat...

We attend [the Hindus'] weddings and they attend ours. They invite us for **Diwali** and other religious festivals. We eat food cooked by them, but they take raw rations from us and cook them themselves. We do not eat mutton there since they eat **jhatka** mutton and we take **halal** meat...

We decided to settle

If we borrow from or lend to our own people then no interest is

to be paid. We do deposit money in the bank but accept no interest on it. Interest is considered to be **haram** because no hard work has been done to earn it. If we are forced to accept the interest then we distribute it among lepers or blind people. Our religion prohibits us from taking this money.

"Now the old forests are not there"

We used to have to wander about in the forests. It was very difficult for the children and for us... When cattle rearing started getting tough we thought of cultivating the land so that our children could be educated and our lives could be happy and profitable... We felt it was high time we...started living in one place. The forests were getting thinner day by day. So we decided to settle down, exchange the old life in favour of farming our own land. We thought we would have a comfortable and happier life and there would be no shortage of grass or green fodder for our livestock.

Now the old forests are not there. The evergreen trees are drying up and they are not enough to feed our animals...and these do not give as much milk as they did before. Neither is the quality of milk the same... When the forests themselves have disappeared, how can we rear the animals? ... Earlier, people had lots of livestock, sometimes 40 or 50 [and] at least 10 buffaloes. Now the number has come down to two or, at the most, five...

We have always had such a special relationship with the forests and animals that we cannot think of doing anything else...[but now] we can't make a living if we go up into the forests, since we have only one or two animals. Here we can do some farming or even some labour jobs and make both ends meet. That's why we have settled down in the hills.

Government promises

[The government] promised to provide water, electricity—but nothing has been provided... We were given 8,000 rupees [to build these homes]. We had to bring stone and buy wood. People here do not give wood free [and]...if anyone is found cutting wood the forest wardens arrest him. So we are scared of getting wood from the forest. We do not know [how to do] masonry so we get it done by others... The government promised to give us free land and full

Mohan (M, 60 years)

INDIA 8

With the thinning and stripping of the forests...many kinds of animals are vanishing gradually...tigers have become endangered species. Stags and deer are also disappearing slowly. The elephants in the valleys are also decreasing in number. Birds like the Himalayan pheasant, partridges and quail are also disappearing.

Now we want access to education

Ram (F, 67 years)

INDIA 17

Earlier we had to fetch water from a distance of 2 km but now there are water connections in every house... These days things are much better... The government has started various development programmes in each village. School buildings...roads...forest development, electrification, agricultural projects...are generating job opportunities as well as providing basic necessities.

Thirty to 40 years ago people lived in a room full of smoke... For lighting we burnt strips of *chir* wood and we used to work in that light... Now we get kerosene oil, and electricity has also reached our village... Our health does not suffer and our hands and faces do not get black. We are not inhaling carbon any longer. Electricity generation...does have some disadvantages, mainly because our lands have been taken away for this project...and the compensation is not sufficient.

facilities if we led a settled life; they also promised that we would have full rights, as others have...[but] I am not the owner of this land... We want the ownership to be handed over to us so that we can pay revenue to the government and get the same rights over the forest as others have...

We have settled down once and for all... It's very tough to travel up and down. Either it is raining or snowing or there is a hailstorm. The animals die. It is very hard on our children. Even the forest officials troubled us because we kept moving... Very few families [still] follow the practice of going up and down. Everyone else is permanently settled... We like living here. We can plant trees and do farming if we are settled in one place.

Both [the past and the present] are all right. The old people always think that their times were better. Now we want access to good education and every possible thing available.

Savitri

INDIA 29

Savitri, 50, is a Buddhist and former president of the Mahila Mangal Dal in Sabli village, Henval valley. In her role as president, Savitri encouraged women to conserve the forest and, she says, it is "the illiterates [who] understand better than the educated ones". Nevertheless, she feels education is essential for girls today.

Like the slaves of an earlier era, illiterate girls are slaves of their in-laws. If they are married into the right home then it is all right. Otherwise, girls should be able to work for a living. If a girl is unfortunate enough to be married to a drunkard, gambler or someone with bad habits, then an educated girl can at least eat, by doing a job. An illiterate girl would only cry over her fate.

Earlier, it used to be said that a stream of water, a girl and a cow

Jubli (F, 55 years)

INDIA 14

Now they see the outside world and have learnt a lot. Both girls and boys are getting educated and developing independent thinking... Girls are becoming more aware that they should not marry early... In my youth, child, we [young brides] never opened our mouths. We never asked for more food... We felt shy, afraid. Now the educated lot say straightaway whatever they want to.

only go where they are sent. My father got me married at the age of 19 and I was an absolute illiterate. But now times have changed. It used to be said earlier that a respectable daughter would never be sent to school, but now look! ... Everyone is going to school, even college... Those who are educated get jobs...

If we give birth to a daughter, then at the time of her leaving home we should give her her share of the family wealth. But to the boy who asks for a dowry—let alone the dowry, even the girl should not be given to him... For [change to happen] a lot of people have to take steps collectively... They should boycott...the person who asks for such a thing... In my opinion, if the girls can stand on their own feet after getting an education, then definitely it is possible that people's attitudes towards their daughters will change.

Women making changes

[We have had a Mahila Mangal Dal] for 10 or 12 years. I was the head until some time ago... We sat with the women, talked, and made them understand a little. We told them about the uses of forests. The uneducated women have to be made to understand a little. One has to sit with them. But ultimately the illiterates understand better than the educated ones.

We told the sub-divisional magistrate about the [anti-alcohol movement], took his help and got those people arrested. We protested and staged sit-ins etc... We told [the liquor sellers] to apologise and not to do this in future... If they did, they were made to stay in jail for a couple of days, and after their release they started vegetable shops in place of liquor.

[I want us to make changes] as we did for **Chipko**. When the contractors came to cut down the trees...we all went with **rakhis** and tied them to the trees. We told them the trees were our brothers and they could use their axes on us in place of our brothers.

Chatra (F, 50 years)

INDIA 13

Giving and accepting dowry, both are bad. Just imagine a father who has seven daughters—he will be miserable and spend all his life arranging dowries. It's a curse for a poor father. In [our] meetings we try to instruct that dowry giving and accepting, both are bad practices [and] should be abolished.

The trees were our brothers

They told “Our own methods are more profitable”

us to grow Nobody pays attention to farming now. Everyone wants to avoid
soya beans hard work. They want comfort, convenience. But if they do just a little bit of farming, they do not need to buy too many things from the market. And if one keeps a buffalo one need not pay for milk...

In the beginning [when soya bean cultivation was introduced] we thought it was simple—cutting, threshing and then selling it... Now we are realising our mistake. Everybody told us to grow soya beans as many things can be made out of it... But later we realised that from the *koda* and *jhangora* that we used to grow, we got food for ourselves and our animals... Our own methods are more profitable for us. For instance, when we sow paddy, then we eat rice, and our bullocks eat the straw... *Koda* and *jhangora* also give us the same benefits... We cannot take milk nor do we know how to make snacks and other things from soya beans. So what do we do with it? We prefer our old methods.

Maheshwari

INDIA 32

Maheshwari, 45, is a Brahmin from Netala village, Bhagirathi valley. With the “full support” of her husband, she has played leading roles in the local community, as the village head, the director of adult education and a member of the district panchayat, to which she was the first woman in her village to be elected.

Women are the backbone of agriculture. Men sit on the roadside in the hills, play cards, gamble and drink. Women do everything. They take part in community movements too. They work, look after the household; everything is done by women...

In today's society more and more girls are being educated. But since the government has created [job] reservations for women...upper caste girls are given preference. If there were [a genuine] reservation system, it would be for all... For example, someone has done a BA [or] an MA, but they are still not getting jobs. They are carrying wood and fodder in the village. It makes them feel frustrated as well. Some people even torture them by saying, “You are well educated and still you are cutting grass with us.”



Attar (F, 60 years)

INDIA 11

I feel that girls should not be educated. If they have to slog, cut grass, till the earth, then what use is education? Moreover, they earn a bad name—so why educate them?

When I got married I realised that there was a lack of sufficient struggle [among women] here. I gathered all the women. I was the secretary of the **Mahila Mangal Dal** [and] I did everything to get a water supply and sent applications on behalf of the women to the district magistrate. We held **chakka-jams**, saying, “In this age of new technology development we are not even getting water. We are ages back. We cannot produce vegetables, we cannot cultivate land, and we cannot clean our homes. Water is our life.”... Thus, people had faith in me, that I could work [hard], and that is how they elected me to the post of village head even though there was no reservation system for women.

I had done social work for five to seven years. As long as I was the secretary, I took up various little matters such as arranging for the performance of **Ramlila** in the village, organising fairs or—when some officials came to the village—welcoming them, talking to them... I was also the director for adult education here. The village women...are busy in the fields, so I used to run classes for them at night, [so] I was able to educate them to some extent, so they learnt to write their name, or write short letters...

My husband gave me full support. When I got married I had not even completed high school. Then he made me complete [it]... And for a couple of years I tried doing a BA also... When I became [village] head, all the women gave me full support, so much so that they were even ready to do my farming.

Chatra

INDIA 13

Chatra, 50, lives in Bhelgandi village, Mandakini valley, where she works as a village supervisor with the Mahila Samakhya, a government programme for women's empowerment. She mentions some environmental changes, and how the new hybrid seeds have brought their own problems.

Ever since my association with Mahila Samakhya I have changed a great deal... [It] has taught me that even women have rights. I have given equal rights to all three of my children. I am working as a **sanyogini**. I have 10 villages under my jurisdiction. In some villages people understand the value of this organisation but in...places where there is a lot of politics and a lot of drinking, we find it tough

*Water is
our life*

Even the locals sell wood to bring home to them its aim, [which is] to provide equal rights...and also give women equal education... Many times the villagers ask us what we are going to offer them. Some of them feel that we, the Mahila Samakhya workers, bother them unnecessarily. They feel that the *sanyogini* is getting 1,000-1,200 rupees whereas the assistant is getting 500-900 rupees as a bribe. They want those types of programmes that offer them some financial assistance. At times, out of frustration, we stop working...

If an enlightened woman is selected as head of the *panchayat* she can fight for women's rights. She can work for their betterment. Presently what's happening is...invariably in favour of men...

[People here] are mainly **Rajputs**. Rajputs are very helpful to each other. We do have **Harijans**, but these days only one family of Harijans is left. They could not make both ends meet here. Sometimes, instead of our paying them for stitching our clothes, they were given [a basket of] rice or wheat in return, if we had a good crop... This was the payment for the full year. Sometimes, if the stitching charges were 10 rupees, they were paid only 5 rupees... Otherwise they were not paid at all.

Deteriorating resources

In earlier days the rainfall was much more... This is because the forests were very dense—we were afraid of going into the forest. But now they are disappearing completely. There were only 16 families [before], which have now grown into 24 families. Therefore the number of livestock—cows and buffaloes—has increased. The families need 24 houses as well and the wood required for construction is brought from the forests... Even the locals also fell trees and sell the wood. During the monsoon we used to chop the branches and the leaves acted as a good mattress. Since our association with Samakhya we have been told to pluck only the leaves and not to chop the branches. Nowadays tree-felling is

Mohan (M, 60 years)

INDIA 8

People have friendly relations here, indifferent to one another's caste and creed. But it is not so in the urban areas. People have become more selfish over there. This evil is gradually creeping into the rural areas.

Satye (M, 45 years)

INDIA 9

[Untouchability] still persists among the villagers. It is observed only against lower caste people. We keep aloof from them in matters such as eating at the same table. This system prevails only in the villages... [People] feel it is their duty—a religious one... This practice has become rare in the urban area because there the people belonging to many classes and sects have to live together.

Satye (M, 45 years)

INDIA 9

In the village, minor disputes and criminal acts are settled by the intervention of some elderly wise men. The decision taken by such a group of men has to be accepted by all. The traditional ways of punishment are still observed. Social boycott is still practised in the village and it has to be accepted.

comparatively controlled, but people do it on the quiet...

Earlier we used to collect one load [of fodder] in only a minute whereas these days it takes us the whole day. The quantity of water has reduced and the quality of water has deteriorated since the pipeline has been fitted. We used to have a little **choke**—this made **gaderes** and these *gaderes* made a large gully—the source of irrigating our fields...

We have revolted against [the hybrid seeds]. Our seeds used to be very good...they were properly cleaned and kept aside. But the seeds from outside—we know nothing about them, whether they are fresh or old, where they have been purchased. On many occasions it is seen that the seeds of *tripatya* grass—a weed—have come with other seeds from outside... The seeds of *tripatya* are like garlic and no other grass grows near it. It grows wild and stops the growth of other grains.

Vijay

INDIA 28

Aged 41, Vijay is one of the founders of Beej Bachao Andolan (the Save Traditional Seeds movement). Whereas "modern seeds bring with them all the diseases as part of the dowry", traditional varieties are well suited to the environment, nutritious and more resistant to pests and diseases. From his home in Jardhargoan in the Henval valley, Vijay and his colleagues have collected and cultivated rare seeds from all over the region: "Today the demand is so great...that we can't meet it easily."

In the olden days there was a saying, "*zanami jatt, andheri raat*" (comparing women to a dark night). But there is a lot of awakening among the Uttarakhand women in the hills and the saying has been proved wrong... First, they were very active in the anti-alcohol movement. Then came the **Chipko** movement. In short, women have come out in great numbers to participate in all the movements in the hill region. Not only do they take part, they have also led several of them...

These days the men from the hills go to the plains and cities in search of a livelihood. Hence women have to bear the entire burden. They go out early in the morning in search of firewood as

Jubli (F, 55 years)

INDIA 14

Every house has a water connection and we are paying the tax... [They] assure us that soon water will be supplied. But there is not a drop of water. They fool us and take the money... We have stopped cattle rearing as it requires lot of water...

well as looking after the children. They have to travel long distances to fetch water... When it comes to working in the fields, the men only plough them, and after that all the agricultural tasks fall to the women, like turning the soil, weeding, watering, reaping, harvesting... In addition to the household duties they have to take on social responsibilities. There are many functions and festivals where they play a greater role.

“Now I have to engage labour”

In earlier days we used to have an exchange or barter system for **dal**, rice or other things for household consumption... When I had no oxen to plough the fields, I worked with a person for two days and got the oxen for my job. But now this is not possible. I have to pay for the oxen... [and] engage labour on a daily wage basis. Thus one spends more paying for labour than what one gets out of the agricultural produce...

Farmers were self-reliant [then]... They never needed to spend anything on agriculture... When it rained, the farmers immediately took out the seeds from the **bijundes** and ploughed the fields, but today they are dependent on others, even for seeds... [Planting] used to be done collectively by men, women and children... Similarly...house construction and a host of other jobs...

Now all the help rendered during marriages, festivals or house construction is being done by paid labour. But in the far-flung interior villages, which so far have not been spoilt by so-called modern culture, a lot of jobs still get done through mutual assistance... In my village we still have some spirit of mutual help. For example, when a brick and cement house is under construction, a lot of steel has to be brought from Nagni. So 20 to 30 people go together, make their bundles and bring the steel to the village...

In earlier days people boasted that in a particular field so many **dhons** of food grain grew, but these days it's not even half of that... We had two methods [of farming]—irrigated, and unirrigated or **ukhadi**. For **ukhadi** agriculture the farmers, during the monsoon, sowed **barahanaja**—12 types of food grains together—along with **mandua**... [Then] the field was left uncultivated for one winter season and afterwards it was used for growing **jhangora**. Next year the cycle changed and wheat was sown...

Farmers were
self-reliant



Women of Gangi village, Tehri Garhwal, twisting grass to be stored and used as cattle fodder over the long winter months.

We now have
to buy seeds

These days we have to invest in agriculture. This is something that was never heard of before. We now have to buy the seeds and chemical fertilisers. Therefore people who sell these things earn a handsome amount of money. You see, because farming now involves so much expenditure, people have started migrating. They cannot get secure jobs here, therefore the jobs in the plains and cities are attracting most men.

“Seeds are the rarest gift”

Today the safety and preservation of seeds has become a cause of serious concern. Seeds are the rarest gifts of the earth. Once the seeds die away they can't be artificially created again. The farmer used to say that they grew **rikhwa**, **dhyasu**, **jhumakia**, but these are not grown here any more... We had a great variety of paddy in the hills, of wheat, pulses, but they are slowly disappearing. So we thought that these types must still be found somewhere and that is how we planned this Beej Bachao Andolan in Nagni.

We collected small quantities of these rare seeds from all over and sowed them in our fields... Today the demand is so great...that we can't meet it easily. Therefore we are giving a little to everyone who asks. So far we have collected 124 old varieties of paddy, eight to 10 types of wheat, eight types of **bhatt**, eight types of **gahat** or **kulath** and 70 to 75 types of **rajma**. This way we plan to give back to the farmers the seeds that were lost a long time ago... [and] will try

Farms should become gene banks to ensure...that their farms become future gene banks. The farmer today is totally dependent on the government machinery...he has become a slave to multinational seeds and fertiliser... He gets neither the seeds nor any other agricultural accessories on time. Earlier, seeds were never eaten by insects, so no insecticide was used... But modern seeds bring with them all kinds of diseases as part of the dowry...

Khastpatwar tripatya, for example, was never found in the hills earlier, but today the fields are full of it. The scientists in the agricultural universities are busy doing intensive research on how to destroy it but so far they have not succeeded. Instead, they are motivating people to buy multinational products—chemicals, insecticides...

In the old farming system people grew *mandua*, *jhangora*, *gahat*, *bhatt*, *marsa*, which suited our environment. A man who worked in the hills needed high-energy food... *Mandua* was the main grain to make the bones strong and sturdy.

Now the government and the scientists are telling us not to grow *mandua* and *jhangora* but to grow soya beans, as oil and milk can be produced from them and they are rich in proteins. But who can extract oil and milk out of them? It is not possible for local people to do this. It can only be done in factories costing millions of rupees... Earlier, when people cultivated *mandua* and *jhangora*, they had enough food grain for their consumption and plenty of fodder for the cattle. Soya bean is useless for fodder but good only for big factories...

In the Chamba-Mussoorie fruit belt, large forests of *banj*, *burans* were cleared for apple orchards on the assumption that apple growing would improve the economy of this area. But actually there are many diseases that afflict apples, and their cultivation is so technical that the farmer is unable to look after it. As a result, all the apple orchards are fast disappearing.

“Our culture is becoming extinct”

If our hill men go out to the cities, they find the glamour too tempting to resist, particularly the young men... They are ashamed to do their own work—for example, jobs like picking up cowdung,

Ramchandri (F, 55 years)

INDIA 35

Even today some people store seeds after drying them in the sun and cleaning them, without using any chemicals. Paddy seeds are winnowed, dried and kept separately in the store. We used to put ash or walnut leaves in them earlier. Tobacco was put in wheat storage; we also used to put chilli [with wheat] so as to keep pests away.

cutting grass or carrying loads etc. There are many young men these days who are working in the cities and when they come back for a break in the village, their mothers or sisters carry their holdalls or suitcases and the men walk ahead, unashamed, empty-handed...

Earlier a man used to send the money home through a simple money order as the families stayed back. But the latest trend is that the entire family migrates... Thus our rural village culture is becoming extinct. At this rate very soon our mother tongue, the Garhwali language, will disappear. The children of the migrant families either do not know their language or do not like to speak it.

Mohan

INDIA 8

Mohan, aged 60, from Chamba in the Henval valley, is one of the few ayurvedic physicians left in the area. He makes a strong appeal for the revival and protection of local knowledge and skills—craft, agriculture, medicine—without which, he feels, migration to the city and economic decline will continue.

We belong to the **Brahmin** caste. My ancestral occupation is medical service. Astrology and teaching jobs are the second and third ancestral occupations... These were the chief means of our livelihood. We also possess a little farmland and we do work in the farm. But that was a sideline business for us. Now we have adopted other jobs, too, such as government and private service...

The Himalaya are the storehouse of medicinal plants and roots... In [the old] days people had knowledge of wild, medicinal plants and roots... I have acquired this knowledge. I know more than 200 wild roots and plants of medicinal value...

If research work is conducted we can make such medicines known, that are unknown to medical science even today... There are many medicinal plants that can cure blood diseases... They even cure leprosy. These should be collected and preserved. It will give employment to local people and thus can check migration... Some old women...recognise many medicinal plants... There are hundreds of medicines that they know about...

Satye (M, 45 years)

INDIA 9

The old generation has faith in traditional methods and the modern generation believes in modern treatment because allopathic medicines give prompt relief. Their action begins in no time, even if the effect is generally momentary. On the other hand, traditional ayurvedic medicines work slowly but they root out the disease.

Modern seeds bring diseases

Traditional work should be revived *The future is in fruit trees*

The main source of income is agriculture. Cattle rearing and small cottage industries are run as part-time jobs... Our traditional seeds and agricultural methods have become extinct because of the new chemical fertilisers and crossbred seeds. This shouldn't be so. It causes us great loss...

Rice, wheat, coarse grains such as *kauni*, *mandua* and *jhangora* millet, pulses, black beans, *lobiya* and almost all the vegetables are produced here. People also have orchards and grow such fruits as apple, peach, apricot and mangoes. Guavas are also grown in the valleys... Very good varieties of potatoes are produced in this area. Research work should be done to improve these further. There are potato development officers but they are not doing adequate work. The farmers should be trained for this. They should be taught the means of preservation. This is the best way of earning a living...

In my opinion the highlands are not useful for growing crops. They are far better for fruit trees. We can establish industries for making jams and jellies. This can give employment and improve the economic status of local people. So more attention should be paid to agro-forestry [and] horticulture than to agriculture.

“Many professions could flourish”

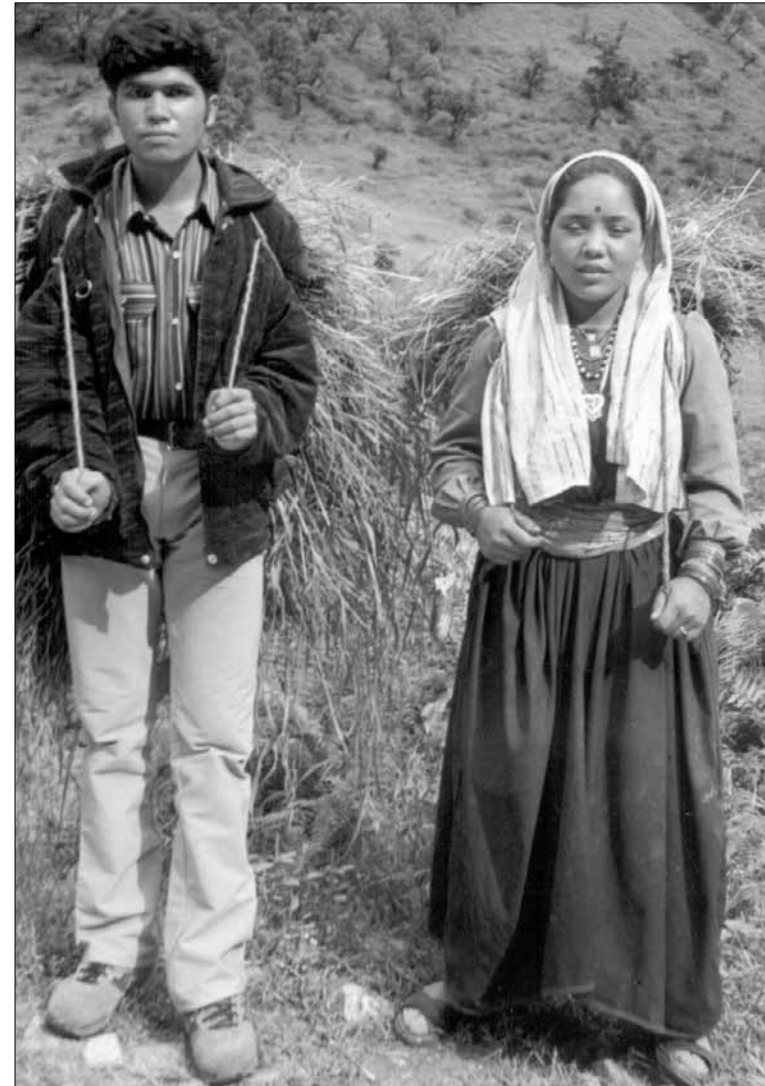
The ancient system of goods exchange was excellent. If one needed *ghee* one could have it by giving rice in exchange to the person who needed it. As I am a physician, I could have worked for free or might have got something in exchange for my medical services.

In the old days there were...water-run flour mills. Now the power-run mills have taken their place [and] we have become totally dependent on electricity. If there is no supply we remain without flour. All the traditional work like pottery, carpentry and [the work of] blacksmiths and goldsmiths [has diminished]... All the work that used to be done in the village in the past should be revived... Now we depend on those who come from outside for a short period and live in temporary sheds beside the roads... Almost all the necessary items were made here in the past. As for the things made of metal, even silver ornaments were made... There were braziers who made brass pots. Pots were also made of copper...

Chatra (F, 50 years)

INDIA 13

Some of the villagers migrated to Delhi, earned some money, [came back] and started a diesel mill here. They are getting good business. If some jobs related to water are established close to this mill, there can be more job opportunities for people. Villagers want jobs in the village itself so that they can also plough their fields and earn as well.



A young couple in Garhwal. They have been to check the family crops in fields at a lower altitude, and are gathering grass for their cattle on the way back to higher pastures.

Blacksmiths were well experienced in making almost all the necessary tools used in agricultural work: plough-heads, spades and shovels, and wheels for bullock carts... [With] more technical knowledge, they could have made more things. Many things of

Radhakrishnan (M, 75 years)

INDIA 19

People are boycotting elections as they feel there is no point in electing a representative to parliament when their demands and needs are not looked after... So we want a separate state [of Uttaranchal]... where our local problems and needs can be looked after with appropriate planning. We would also be able to protect our forests and plan our development according to our needs [as a mountain area].

wood and stone were also made, like slates, turbines used in water mills, and grinding stones. Beautiful stones were carved for use in buildings... Ropes and matting were made from *bhimal* fibre... *Raambans* was also used for fibre... Many tools were made of strong wood like *sandan* and oak... Most clothes used to be made of sheep's wool... People have left their occupations. Some have migrated and the new generation doesn't know how to make them.

Traditional education should be imparted along with vocational education after the senior or high-school stage... Training centres should be opened... Many professions could flourish here such as carpentry, masonry, weaving and other handicraft based on local materials... These can thrive as part-time work alongside farming and gardening...

The people here must attain prosperity within this very area. They must remain in their villages—not migrate to the plains or the cities... For this, industries need to be established. The forests should be protected. The natural beauty should be maintained. Local culture, customs and traditions should be saved. It can be done if the government and social organisations work for it.

This is the transition period. On the one hand people are losing their traditional knowledge and means; on the other they are not getting adequate training in modern scientific techniques...

I would like to say that there should be development, but it should be based on the culture and traditions of this area. If you import a song from outside, and the people here don't know the tune, the results will not be good.

GLOSSARY

Every attempt has been made to gloss all the terms in the testimonies but finding the meaning for all the words has not proved possible.

agela	iron implement for lighting a fire, probably used like a flint stone
ayurvedic	following classical Indian medical teaching
Baisakh	second month in Hindu calendar, April/May
Bakrid	Muslim festival of sacrifice
barahanaja	(literally, 12 seeds); traditional system of intercropping 12 kinds of seed in one field
begar	forced labour or revenue
Bhadan	sixth month in Hindu calendar, August/September
Bhagavat Gita	important Hindu scripture, part of the Mahabharata
bhandar	village grain store (<i>bhandari</i> : storekeeper)
Bhotiya	scheduled tribe of Tibetan origin
bijundes	seed containers
Brahmin	the highest-ranking of the four main social castes, from which priests are drawn
carding	process of preparing wool fibres for spinning, using a perforated plate (card) as a guide
chakka-jams	stoppage of all transportation
Chaitra	first month in Hindu calendar, March/April
Chanalu	one of the hundreds of occupational caste groups
chang	homemade wine
Chipko	(literally, stick together/embrace); spontaneous village movement to protect forests, which became influential at the national level
choke	small stream
daan	(literally, gift); refers to the ordinary marriage system, in which no money is given for the bride
dal	lentils (generic term); staple dish
Dalai Lama	chief lama (Buddhist priest/monk) of Tibet
dhon	local measure of weight, equivalent to 32 kg
Diwali	Hindu festival of lights (October-November)
dumkhar; pattoo	types of coarse blanket
gadere	small gully
ghee	clarified butter
halal; jhatka	different ways of slaughtering animals, followed by Muslims and Hindus respectively
halwa	sweet dish
haram	forbidden in Islam

Harijan	(literally, child of God); Gandhi's term for "untouchable"
khadu	large male sheep
kharif	autumn harvest
kheer	dish of sweetened milk and rice
Magh	11th month in the Hindu calendar, January/February
Mahila Mangal Dal	rural women's council
Meethi Id	(literally, sweet Id); Id is a major Muslim festival to mark the end of Ramadan
Namaz	Muslim prayers
nati	traditional dramas/plays
naujula	administrative area consisting of 18 villages
obara	room in the lower storey, often used for livestock
panchayat	village council
panchs	five men who lead the <i>panchayat</i>
pandava dance	celebration of the <i>pandavas</i> , the five warrior princes of the Mahabharata
patha	brass utensil for measuring grain (approx 2 kg)
patwari	functionary in the Revenue Office
rabi	spring harvest
Rajput	originally a warrior caste, part of the group ranked second among social castes
rakhis	special threads
Rama	legendary Hindu figure
Ramlila	enactment of <i>Ramayana</i> , important Hindu epic
Roza	(literally, to fast); Muslim period of fasting, also known as Ramadan
sanyogini	field coordinator
Savan	fifth month in Hindu calendar, July/August
scheduled tribe	tribe mentioned in the Indian constitution for special consideration under the law
Shiva	major Hindu god
Shiva linga	stone symbol of the god Shiva
Vasant	Spring festival
Panchami	
Yuvak Mangal Dal	youth organisation

BOTANICAL GLOSSARY

angu	variety of ficus, used for timber
banj	variety of oak (<i>quercus incana</i>)
bans	bamboo
bhatt	variety of soya
burans	rhododendron
chemi	variety of legume
chir	variety of pine (<i>pinus roxburghii</i>)
deodar	Himalayan cedar
dholu	rhubarb; root yields a golden dye
dhyasu	local crop
fafra	buckwheat
gahat	variety of lentil
jhangora	barnyard millet (particularly tall)
jhumakia	local crop
kauni	variety of millet
khastpatwar	invasive variety of grass with three leaves
tripatya	
koda	finger millet (particularly nutritious)
lobiya	variety of legume
mandua	another name for <i>koda</i>
marsa	<i>amaranthus</i> ; fabled never-fading flower, edible and used for food colouring
raambans	sisal, its fibre has many uses
rajma	another name for <i>chemi</i>
ramdana	another name for <i>marsa</i>
rikhwa	local crop
ringal	mountain cane, used for making baskets
sandan	deciduous hardwood tree (<i>ougeinia oojeinensis</i>)
surai	cyprus tree
tatari, surang	dye-yielding forest plants
thuner	yew (<i>taxus baccata</i>)
til	sesame seed
timla	wild fig
uva	variety of barley, traditionally grown for trading with Tibet

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