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Geographies that Make Resistance”: Remapping the Politics of Gender and Place in Uttarakhand, India

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“Geographies that Make Resistance”:¹ Remapping the Politics of Gender and Place in Uttarakhand, India

Shubhra Gururani

By examining women’s active participation in a range of social movements over many decades in the Uttarakhand Himalayas, this paper first explores what it is about the place that has produced such vibrant interventions from rural women and produced a gendered geography of resistance. The paper then focuses on the regional autonomy movement that shook the region in the nineties. It argues that the demand for a separate state and assertion of a regional identity, despite being enmeshed in the messy electoral and reservation politics of caste, was also due to women’s large-scale participation and shifting support. Women protestors were critical in connecting the dots of their marginalization and helped broaden the scope of the movement by incorporating a wide range of issues that were fueled, not by any traditional values, but by aspirations and political claims to modernity and regional identity. In moving away from a stagnant and narrow reading of women’s

participation in social movements, the paper argues that it is important to recognize that women’s actions, like all actions, are not pre-constituted or fixed but that they are contingent upon, and guided by, a range of impulses, sometimes contradictory and conservative, but nonetheless historically and spatially constituted.

Keywords: India, Uttarakhand, gender, place, resistance, social movements.

Introduction

In 1994, thousands of women from towns and villages all over the Kumaon and Garhwal Himalayas in North India took to the streets to demand a regionally autonomous hill state of Uttarakhand. For four months, from July to October, widespread strikes, curfews, meetings, and marches rocked the hills of Uttarakhand.² Along with students, women enraged by the government's decision to further reserve quotas for 'other backward classes' (OBCs) in government jobs and educational institutions staged protests in different parts of the region.³ Barely two decades after the Chipko movement that spanned the seventies, in which women and men from several parts of Kumaon and Garhwal resisted commercial felling of timber and powerfully raised questions of access to forests, development, and social justice,⁴ Uttarakhand was once again in flames.⁵ Even in villages where people had not heard of the famous Chipko movement before, animated discussions about the future of Uttarakhand took place in front of kitchen fires, in courtyards, and in tea stalls by the roadsides. Situating their opposition to the reservation policy in the historical context of exploitation and marginalization, the protesters sang loud songs and shouted slogans condemning the state and expressed another historical reality: that of despair, poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment. They sang:

You sold my pebbles and rocks, my soil, my forests
of green oak,
The resin you extracted for profit, was the skin of
my body,
'Nyoli,' 'Chanchari,' 'Jhore,' 'Chapeli,'⁶ you sold all
my melodies
You sold everything, my cool water, my cool breeze
Today the Himalayas have awakened.⁷

The wave of protests that engulfed Uttarakhand in the nineties and mobilized large numbers of residents from diverse social and economic contexts was not unfamiliar. For several decades, especially since the sixties but certainly earlier as well, Uttarakhand had been home to several movements around anti-alcohol, Chipko, anti-mining and quarrying, regional autonomy, and other regionally specific lesser-known movements. Interestingly, one enduring feature of all these movements is the prominent presence of women,⁸ who, as critical social actors and leaders, have raised a wide range of questions about development, employment, access to forests, alcoholism, and more recently regional autonomy. While women's movements in India have a long history (see Gandhi and Shah 1991; Omvedt 1993; Kumar 1994; Ray 1999), Uttarakhand stands out as one of the few places that has witnessed a strong presence

of women in spaces of political action.⁹ This has not escaped the attention of journalists, academics, and activists; and indeed movements like Chipko have gained global recognition,¹⁰ but the highly visible and persistent presence of women in public spaces begs further analyses. Even though women actively mobilize, their concerns remain undermined. This paper, in an effort to offer a historically sedimented, that is materially and symbolically grounded, reading of women's participation, focuses on the Uttarakhand movement and raises two distinct but related questions. First, in Steve Pile's words, the paper explores "the ways in which geography makes possible or impossible certain forms of resistance and [...] which resistance makes other spaces—other geographies—possible or impossible?" (1997: 2). In this spirit, I will explore what it is about *this* place that has produced such vibrant interventions from rural women and produced a gendered geography of resistance. I wish to situate recent political actions within the historical and political realities that have over time constituted gendered landscapes and subjectivities, and argue that even though women simultaneously raise questions of livelihood, household, rights, political/regional identity, equity, and social justice, the tendency has been to resist a gendered analysis and rely on persistent dichotomies that either essentialize women's participation or limit their role to the domain of tradition, domesticity, and community. It is precisely this stagnant and narrow reading of women's participation in social movements that overlooks the complex and sedimented terrain in which women come to participate. In addition, this urges us to acknowledge that women's actions, like all actions, are not pre-constituted or fixed but are contingent upon and guided by a range of impulses, sometimes contradictory and conservative, but nonetheless historically and spatially constituted.

To make sense of women's political agency, I situate women's participation in the long history of gendered subjectivation and resistance at the intersection of local and global networks of power and hope to present a rereading of gendered resistance in this region. I treat gender as a performative and relational process,¹¹ a historically constituted and culturally contingent set of relations which are configured by overlapping relations of patriarchy, economy, family, community, and state. I also describe how sedimented histories produce not only gendered subjects but also gendered landscapes of work, mobility, livelihood, and gendered resistance. In pursuing this line of argument, I highlight the centrality of place in feminist analysis and show how historically constituted identities of (gendered) subjects and places are doubly and simultaneously articulated (Massey 1993, 1994a, 1994b). In a place like Uttarakhand that is overwhelmed by its iconic

remoteness and marginality, this historically embedded line of inquiry has important analytical and political stakes as it describes how places, even remote and distant places, are constituted at the nexus of local and global networks of power and capital, and in turn constitute social relations of difference, like gender, caste, and ethnicity. Such an emplaced account contests the static and normative accounts of 'remote places' and 'natural feminists' and forces us to take into account the mutual coproduction of place, politics, and subjectivities, neither of which are fixed or pre-constituted, but historically contingent and mutually constituted.

Second, in order to understand how a movement for regional autonomy came to be articulated in the late twentieth century, I document its shifting contours over the decades in post-independent India. Even though a sense of regional difference and cultural identity—marked by geography, language, and ethnicity—has long prevailed in Uttarakhand and there were even calls for separate statehood in 1952, the issue of a distinct regional political identity was never categorically voiced earlier. I argue that the demand for a separate state and the assertion of a regional identity in the nineties and its large-scale and shifting support are located in the messy electoral and reservation politics of caste and that these must incorporate a gendered perspective as the protestors connected the dots of their marginalization and guided the movement towards separate statehood. To a large extent, it was the participation of women that broadened the scope of the movement by incorporating a wide range of issues fueled not by any traditional values, but by aspirations and political claims to modernity and regional identity. Yet, and perhaps unsurprisingly, even though women participated in the movement, their voices and concerns were once again drowned in the chorus of political change that was guided by narrow sectarian logic. As a result, women's concerns and demands were once again overlooked.¹²

I draw most of my analysis from over a decade long engagement with Uttarakhand. I first conducted eighteen months of fieldwork in 1992-1993, and subsequently during shorter trips in 1995, 1997, 1999 and 2008. For this paper, I rely on my extensive field notes, oral histories, interviews, jottings, taped conversations with women and men in villages and towns of Uttarakhand, local and national newspaper dailies, and scholarly and activist writings. I also tap into my conversations and recollections with activists, journalists, scholars, and administrators whom I met during my travel and research in Uttarakhand, and draw on historical details from secondary sources. In the next section, I briefly discuss recent scholarship in

cultural and feminist geography that provides key analytical frameworks to rethink gendered subaltern resistance and understand how gendered 'cartographies of struggles' are mapped. In the subsequent section, I present a brief historical snapshot of how the global political economy of capitalism and colonialism significantly transformed the landscape of Uttarakhand and inscribed a terrain of gendered subaltern resistance. In presenting a history of Uttarakhand, I am cognizant of not viewing this history just as a sequence of events that mark the essence of a particular place (Massey 1994: 111) but as a complex set of sedimented processes through which a 'remote' place like Uttarakhand came to be constituted at the nexus of global capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, and developmentalism and produced a gendered geography of work, relationships, struggles, and political identity. The final section focuses on the Uttarakhand movement and shows how amidst competing political impulses like the anti-reservation sentiments, the women did not draw on any traditional tropes but came forward as political agents to question the priorities of the state. Through this mobilization, these women signaled a modern regional identity that was consolidated in the terrain of a new political space and identity.

"Geographies that Make Resistance"

Doreen Massey suggests that we, "think of space, not as some absolute independent dimension, but as constructed out of social relations: that what is at issue is not social phenomena in space but both social phenomena and space as constituted out of social relations, that the spatial is social relations "stretched out" (Massey 1994a: 66). She argues that since social relations are always in flux, space too has to be thought of as "inherently dynamic simultaneity" and hence space, according to her, "is an ever-shifting social geometry of power and signification" (Massey 1994a: 3). Moore, in his analysis of 'resistance as a spatial practice,' invokes a similar approach to place and argues that a textured and deeply historical understanding of resistance is possible only if attention is paid to the "cultural politics of place, the historically sedimented practices that weave contested meanings into the fabric of locality." He writes, "Instead of viewing geographically specific sites as the stage-already fully-formed constructions that serve as settings for action—for the performance of identities that are malleable (if also shaped and constrained by the multiple fields of power)," it is important to join "the cultural politics of place to those of identity" (1998: 347). From this perspective, in Uttarakhand, the mountainous landscape, its location at the borders of Nepal and China, resource rich ecology, long history of despotic rule, and later the

modernist technopolitics of development and politics of reservation all contributed in configuring contingent spaces of resistance which were not only gendered but also mapped a sense of place as well as a cultural/political/regional identity, producing, what Steve Pile has aptly called, “geographies [that] make resistance” (1997).

Critical to Massey’s conceptualization of space/place is the notion of ‘double articulation.’ In her thinking, “if places are conceptualized [to] take account of the construction of the subjects within them, which help in turn to produce the place, then the identity of place is a double articulation” (1994b: 118). The notion of double articulation describes how the identity of a place is shaped by social interrelations, some of which are necessarily stretched beyond the confines of that place itself and yet also attends to the co-production of place and identity. Massey takes the case of London’s Docklands and maps the competing class-based constructions that characterize the Docklands and highlight the politics of race, ethnicity, empire, and immigration that resist attempts to stabilize any nostalgic or static constructions of place. This spatial approach to politics is important as it counters the dominant tendency to view places, and some places more than others—like the rural third world—as sites of nostalgia, tradition, or authenticity. In looking at places through a more dynamic lens, Uttarakhand and the women of Uttarakhand do not appear as mere embodiments of some traditional, place-bound attributes, but as active subjects enmeshed in multiple relations of power at different scales that constitute both places and subjects who inhabit those (local and not-so local) places. For example, extractive colonial regimes of forestry, mining, and practices of forced labor describe how the micro and macro political economies of global capital and colonialism not only transformed the meanings and practices of work, mobility, and livelihoods but also produced the new political and spatial subjectivities to which I turn to next.

Histories of Subjectivation: Gendered Cartographies of Labor, Liquor, and Resources

I believe that three social fields—labor mobility, resources, and revenue through liquor—were critical in configuring gendered histories of work, struggle and contestation. Even though the colonial histories of labor and resource extraction have been extensively documented and there is some acknowledgement of how it affected women, the dominant tendency has been to either treat gender as a static entity that is already produced and is in place or offer essentialized evaluations of gendered relations (see Guha 1989; Bhatt and Pahari 1994). Instead, I argue that it

is critical to consider how the multi-layered histories of resource and labor extraction simultaneously constituted gendered subjects, regional identity, and regional geographies of resistance.

Very briefly then, let me attend first to the practice of coolie *begar* (unpaid, forced, or corvee labor) that marked a critical turning point in the history of Uttarakhand as it set in motion the practice of extracting cheap male labor and inscribing a persistent pattern of male outmigration and rigid gendered divisions of labor. Initiated by the short-lived but despotic Gorkha regime in 1790, *begar* continued well into the British colonial period and left behind an indelible legacy of exploitation and oppression (see Tucker 1983; Pathak 1997). Interestingly, when the British took over from the Gorkhas, they abolished slavery but conveniently retained the practices of *begar* until widespread resistance in the twentieth century led to its abolition. Gradually, practices of slavery, taxation, and *begar*¹³ became standard forms of augmenting revenue from taxes and fines, and those who were unable to pay taxes had no alternative but to hand themselves to the rulers. As men were extricated *en masse* from their fields and forests, the pattern of family farming in which women and men worked together was transformed. Women were forced to undertake the prime responsibility for producing livelihoods, tending cattle, fields, and hearths, initiating a long-lasting gendered practice of labor, mobility, and work, in which women continue to produce domestic livelihoods while men work to earn wages (see Boserup 1970; Omvedt 1993; Mies 1998). Like many other regional scenarios, in Uttarakhand too, the processes of colonialism and capitalist accumulation motivated by a preference for markets produced a division between men’s work and women’s work. However, it is important to note that women’s contributions and labor in sustaining the economies of home as well as the market were slowly but surely undermined and even made invisible (see Boserup 1970; Beneria and Sen 1981; Mies 1998) and gradually came to inscribe gendered social relations, meanings of work, and subjects that were to endure.

Historically, this was a critical transformation as it not only changed the practices of work but it also changed the meaning(s) of work. Work, as Gidwani argues, “is a material and symbolic activity. Work is not only the way each of us makes a living but also the way we create ourselves in relation to others through the meanings invested in forms of work” (2000: 231). While *pahari* (hill) men came to be identified as a staple source of cheap labor in the Indian plains, in the absence of men, women came to bear the responsibility of managing their fields and homes back in the hills. Not only

did women work long hours to collect fuel wood, water, and take care of the seasonal crops, but it was through the idiom of work that women's subject positions and their sense of self came to be constituted. During my fieldwork, women often talked of their hard lives and the amount of hard work they have to do. They compared their lives to that of their cattle: "we live like cattle, we work like cattle." As they uncovered their bruised arms and legs and talked of their injured backs and shoulders, women commonly said it was a curse to be born a woman in the hills, yet it was this backbreaking work that presented the critical matrix of gendered identity and at once indexed what it meant to be a *pahari* woman.

This spatialization of gendered labor was, however, neither clear-cut nor complete and produced unintended outcomes (see Beneria and Sen 1981; Strathern 1988). In the absence of men, women came to question the exploitative regimes of labor and resource exploitation and, with comparatively more autonomy than women from other parts of India, *pahari* women began to participate in anti-*begar* and forest-related movements as early as late nineteenth century.¹⁴ In short, the historical experience of *begar* was critical in not only transforming Uttarakhand into a source of cheap labor and leaving an indelible legacy of highly gendered relations of work and mobility, but importantly it also began to craft the terrain of subaltern resistance which over the years came to witness increasing participation of women along with men.

Second, alongside coolie *begar*, colonial control over local sources of livelihoods, namely forests, and growing systematic restrictions on customary practices of access and the withdrawal of forest products came as a big blow to the residents of Uttarakhand, particularly women who had now come to bear the primary responsibility, with only limited support from men, to sustain livelihoods.¹⁵ Given the fundamental contradiction in priorities, the growing control over the forests from the beginning of the late nineteenth century, and the destruction of forests due to the construction of roads, railways, mines, plantations, and orchards severely disrupted the lives of local people, resulting in what the environmental historian Ramachandra Guha (1989) has described as a long twentieth century of subaltern resistance which witnessed the large-scale participation of women.

In the post-independence period, the imperatives of industrialization and development also guided forest policy and resulted in rapid deforestation immediately following independence. The growing hardships and inability of local people to access forests, while commercial felling continued unabated, resulted in increasing disaffection among the villagers. Tensions began to simmer in the sixties and

ultimately saw the birth of the famous Chipko movement.¹⁶ While the issue of forest rights was central to Chipko, it is important to note that Chipko was not only an environmental movement, nor was it a women's movement strictly defined as a movement about household and livelihoods. It was a political movement that raised a wide range of concerns regarding the misplaced priorities of the state, development policies and their detrimental outcomes, and diminishing control over their sources of livelihood, namely forests. In many ways, Chipko powerfully located the traditional questions of the domestic—household, family, community, and livelihood—in the domain of the political, and critically engaged with and expanded the modern liberal notions of social justice, democracy, and politics. While women may not have articulated these demands in the language of citizenship or participatory democracy, they nonetheless positioned themselves as active political agents questioning the politics and practices that had repeatedly marginalized them.

Third, a complex issue that highlighted the contours of a gendered geography in Uttarakhand and brought women to the center of political action was liquor. On the one hand, it speaks most emphatically to the domestic strife and despair faced by women and presents a highly essentialized context of women's movements. On the other, liquor consolidates a range of issues that are simultaneously domestic and non-domestic, and illustrates a history of gendered subjectivation.¹⁷ Introduced by the British, alcohol was a way to augment revenue, particularly after 1857. Even though the revenue from liquor sales in Kumaon increased dramatically, liquor was not part of everyday village life.¹⁸ By the 1890s, however, liquor had penetrated the valleys and villages of Kumaon and radically transformed the social and political landscape of Uttarakhand.

The greed for revenue resulted in the opening of liquor shops all over the countryside, a development that was met with great resistance. Debates on prohibition of alcohol raged in the national arena, with prominent national leaders urging the government to enforce prohibition in 1912. Importantly, as early as 1925, women's growing agony and consciousness resulted in 30,000 women in Uttarakhand signing a petition to the Viceroy in favor of prohibition. The sale and consumption of liquor reached its height during the Second World War and the politics of liquor sale and prohibition became even murkier in the post-independence period. In many respects the anti-alcohol movement was another turning point as it drew women from across the social spectrum. Women from upper and lower castes, urban and rural, rich and poor all found themselves marching together against alcohol.

After independence in 1947, the lure of high revenue from liquor stopped the government from seriously addressing the issue of liquor prohibition. In *Nasha ek Shadyantra* (Intoxication is a Scam)¹⁹ Pathak argues that the politics of liquor, guided by the greed of revenue, overlooked the impact of liquor on local populations.²⁰ Since no sustained policy on prohibition was formulated, liquor sale and trade continued to expand unchecked. The sixties were marked by a series of protests against liquor shops and contractors, and in 1969 one old woman was bestowed the title of “Tincturi Ma” for her active involvement against the sale of tincture (Pathak 1985: 1382). Frustrated with the state’s duplicity and a growing alcoholism among local men, large-scale protests were organized under the leadership of Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini. Women came out in unprecedented numbers and mobilized against a common enemy: the liquor mafia. They organized rallies, road blockades, and strikes. They collectively confronted administrators and politicians and often attacked and stoned liquor shops. With the Chipko movement gaining momentum in the seventies, the movement against liquor not only churned the body politic of the region but also produced women as political agents who made connections between their marginalization, poverty, underdevelopment, and the apathy and greed of the state.

Changes in the local political economy through the institutionalization of corvee labor, the introduction of liquor for revenue, and growing restrictions on access to forests, characteristically reconfigured the social and political geography of Uttarakhand. The historically embedded practices of labor and outmigration revamped gender roles, relationships, meanings, and identities. Significantly, this history produced a place that was on the one hand located in the periphery, yet enmeshed in the global circuits of power and capital. On the other, it unleashed forces that configured new political identities and subjectivities which eventually resulted in the making of a separate hill state called Uttarakhand at the turn of the twenty-first century.

The Making of Uttarakhand: The Gender of Resistance

Beginning in the 1980s and gaining strength in the 1990s, the demand for Uttarakhand began to take concrete shape. As early as 1952, a prominent member of the Communist Party of India, P.C. Joshi, raised the demand for a separate state for the first time. However, even though a sense of cultural and geographical difference from the plains of India has long persisted in Uttarakhand, the movement never gained mass support. Following the turbulent decades of the 1970s and 1980s, the demand for a separate state gained ground by the 1990s in the context of the politics

of reservation: a complex issue that is deeply intertwined with the thorny and vicious politics of caste. While a full discussion is beyond the scope of the paper, I will examine its reverberations within Uttarakhand. Very briefly, in August 1990, it was announced that the recommendations of the Mandal Commission would be implemented all over the country. According to the recommendations, in addition to a 22.5% reservation for castes and tribes accorded in the constitutional schedule, and hence referred to as Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, that were already in place, the Commission recommended a further reservation of 27% for those who were not in the Schedule and known as Other Backward Classes (OBCs). This triggered widespread protests by upper castes all over the country. In Uttarakhand, too, reverberations of this recommendation were felt, and upper caste youth and their family members came out in large numbers to protest. Given that the initial sparks were lit in the context of anti-reservation mobilization, it should be noted that there was a great deal of skepticism about the Uttarakhand movement.

With hardly any electoral presence earlier, as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) gained ground in Uttarakhand, it extended its support for a separate state in order to make further electoral gains. At this juncture, there was an entrenchment of the Hindu right and a consolidation of upper caste Hindus and middle classes. Even though there were strong resonances of Hindutva politics and elements of Hindu right tried to steer the movement in that direction, the mobilization in Uttarakhand should not only be viewed through the lens of caste or Hindutva politics. The Uttarakhand movement was not simply a reflection of the crisis of the middle classes who had mobilized in defense of caste privilege, although some elements of such sentiments may have been present.²¹ Even though the mobilization was triggered by anti-reservation sentiments, due to the region’s unique demography, it went beyond the question of caste. Since the OBCs in Uttarakhand constitute only 2% of the total population of the state, it was widely felt that if the recommendations of the Mandal Commission were to be implemented, given that quotas for scheduled castes and tribes were already in place, just under half of all government jobs and slots in educational institutions would be reserved for Scheduled Castes, Tribes, and OBCs. To fill those reserved spots, OBCs from the plains of Uttar Pradesh would migrate to the hill region to take scarce jobs. It was in this context, faced with chronic unemployment,²² that angry students from several college campuses came out in large numbers and organized their first strike on 31 July 1994 in the hill cities of Nainital, Ranikhet, Beringinag, and Haldwani (see *Uttara* 1994). Through the months of August and September, widespread protest, violence,

curfews, and strikes marked the region and by the end of two months the women of Uttarakhand jumped into the fray, along with government employees, teachers, ex-army men, and other public servants (see Dabral 1994; Mawdsley 2000). In the autumn of 1994, women from all caste backgrounds, young and old, rural and urban, mothers and widows joined the students in large numbers and organized protest marches, road blockades, and curfews in different parts of Uttarakhand and sang,

[You] flooded the *pahar* with poison [alcohol], made it a pleasure [tourist] site,
Listen cruel government, we will take our rights.²³

As the mobilization continued, it got caught up in the political jockeying and electoral negotiations of different political parties. In order to block the other two major national parties—Congress and Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) as well as the close regional contender Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP)—the then Chief Minister, Mulayam Singh Yadav of the Samajwadi Party (SP), made deft electoral calculations and supported the demand for separate statehood and also pushed for reservation policies to secure support from the OBCs. Amidst all this, in the initial stages of the movement, the question of reservation was indeed central and the general sentiment was very much against the Mandal recommendations. The question remains whether the mobilization was aimed at lower castes. The answer to this question is ambiguous. On the one hand, the mobilization was certainly casteist, but at the same time, it was not directed against the lower castes. Given the demographic profile of the region as outlined above, most of the participants in the rallies were upper caste but at this phase, the movement was neither against the *dalit* nor was it a clearly articulated demand for separate statehood. In the context of failed promises of development, meager infrastructure, and precarious livelihoods, the mobilization must be seen as an enunciation of deeply felt frustration, marginalization, and exploitation that describes how ‘new geographies’ and identities come to be mapped over time under competing and contradictory political pressures and sensibilities.

Pradhan Singh, a politically active upper caste male in an interview in Nainital in 1997 said, “The people were first fearful what Mandal would mean to their lives, then they were outraged, especially the women, they were not thinking of caste or religion. *Dalit* also joined in, they too want their own people to get jobs.” (personal communication 1997). According to Singh, the small percentage of OBCs and Uttarakhand’s unique demography were central to the movement. Both *dalit* families and upper caste families saw reservation for OBCs as a threat to jobs for

their sons, enabling a shift from a politics of caste (upper against lower) to a politics of region (mountain against plains). As the movement progressed, the tenor and the direction of the movement shifted, and I would argue that the participation of women was central to this critical shift. Women’s prior histories of marginalization and mobilization informed this articulation of *pahar* vs. plains that ultimately consolidated the demand for a new state. As in previous movements, women from rural and urban settings and from different caste backgrounds participated, although in an interview, a local journalist noted that the numbers of lower caste and *shilpkar*²⁴ women were quite low.

Drawing from their long histories and experiences of mobilization and marginalization, women provided a historical context for the movement and drew attention to the gendered implications of recommendations made by the Mandal Commission. For instance, they incorporated the question of liquor prohibition, and all over Uttarakhand from August to October of 1994, women opposed the sale of liquor. They picketed, burnt, and stoned several liquor shops and forced their closure in many places.²⁵ In one instance, on 23 September 1994, the women in the town of Haldwani blocked the main highway and stopped the Divisional Magistrate and Police Chief of the District from passing through for over six hours. They took possession of the government jeep and demanded the release of anti-alcohol protestors who had been taken into custody. The women also opposed lottery ticket stalls, organized curfews, and apprehended senior government officers to demand their closure. They directly challenged the development priorities of the state and raised questions of employment, health, education, transportation, and access to forests. In other words, women— some of whom even planted their crops early in order to protest, and not party leaders, broadened the scope of the movement and critically transformed it from one about reservation to a movement that eventually came to demand separate statehood. Clearly, the history of past movements “crystallized in the present structuring of a field, for past winners and losers, past events and their memory, [and] played a part in fashioning its contours and circumscribing its possibilities” (Ray 1999: 12). Women raised a range of issues that affected their lives and powerfully drew attention to the gendered politics of everyday life in Uttarakhand. By flagging questions of alcoholism, development, poverty, and exploitation, the women provided a historically grounded approach to massive mobilization and located anti-reservation politics in the wider nexus of regional deprivation and disparities.

The participation of women was largely welcomed and gained support from diverse political quarters. Even though there was a great deal of support and sympathy for the 'poor' and 'hardworking' women of the hills, both supporters and critics tended to cast their participation as an enunciation of their traditional roles as wives, mothers, and domestic(ated) beings. Women's political interventions were largely located in the context of conjugal duties, familial pressures, and maternal love, silencing and misreading the voices of the women who claimed the political stage to express their hardships and frustrations (see Airi in an interview in Amar Ujala 1994; Dabral 1994). One former member of the Uttarakhand Kranti Dal, a local political party that was set up to demand for a separate state, said in an interview, "There were a lot of women in the movement. They came from towns and villages, young and old, mostly older women, they protested and marched, they were strong but they did not really know the issues. The women here are not political, they are too busy in their fuel, fodder, and water" (interview in Almora, August 1997). Similar sentiments were repeated when I interviewed local leaders, activists, and academics. Even though they all acknowledged women's participation, their role was not considered to be critical or constitutive of the direction of the movement. In once again re-inscribing the woman within the sphere of the domestic space, Uttarakhandi women's agency was contained by the dominant trope that sees women only as apolitical subjects or as ventriloquists, speaking on behalf of the family, children, or husbands.

The Uttarakhandi women no doubt deployed the traditional lexicon of conjugal responsibilities and filial pressures but they did not draw political or emotional sustenance from any essentialized sense of maternal love or conjugal duties. The women brought together the concerns facing Uttarakhand and collectively pushed the politics of reservation, entitlement, access, and livelihood beyond its narrow confines of traditional morality and asserted their political rights and identities.²⁶ In the context of development, they powerfully challenged "the exclusions of modernity itself" and struggled to carve a space for the politics of the possible (Tharu and Niranjana 1997: 259). The assertion of a distinct *pahari* identity and separate state by women, along with students and public servants, was, "a positioning which draws upon historically sedimented practices, landscapes, and repertoires of meaning, and emerges through particular patterns of engagement and struggle" (Li 2000: 151). In this sense, the gendering of the Uttarakhand movement was informed by their collective and disparate experiences of exploitation and marginalization that had brought them together in the past, which

propelled them to once again join the movement and to configure the terrain of their lives and livelihood. But it was certainly not an enunciation of any traditional identity: it was an assertion of a modern development identity that was consolidated at specific historical and political conjunctures of hill development and a new reservation policy that shaped the contours of Uttarakhand, determining how gendered landscapes, subjects, and resistance are co-produced.

Conclusion

As I bring this paper to conclusion, stories of loss and destruction caused by the devastating floods in Uttarakhand fill the news media. After a heavy rainfall along with a cloud burst in June 2013, the pilgrim routes to Badrinath and Kedarnath were washed away and many lives were lost. Many are still missing and the magnitude of the loss of local livelihoods is yet to be realized (*Economic and Political Weekly* 2013). In an unprecedented show of support and sympathy, funds are pouring in and US-style fundraisers are pledging support to rebuild the temple and put Uttarakhand back on the map. As Uttarakhand struggles once again to find its ground, literally and metaphorically, it is faced with obvious questions: how should Uttarakhand be rebuilt, in whose terms, and for whom? Whose priorities and privileges will be accommodated? Who will negotiate the rights to livelihoods, water, health, education, and transport for the hardworking women and men who toil to access the goods of modernity and development?

In a sense, the recent floods and the devastation are a wakeup call. They force us to revisit and reflect on what has happened to the state of Uttarakhand that was carved out as a separate state on 9 November 2000. The new state, which was then renamed Uttaranchal, first ushered in a sense of hope and excitement, but many commentators have noted that a dominant sense of betrayal and despair prevailed. Jayal (2000: 4311) noted that, "many of the current anxieties of the *pahari* are directly and explicitly attributable to the fear that the *raison d'être* of the new state has been lost in the very moment of its birth." When I returned to Kumaon in the summer of 2008, after almost a decade, the general sense was that recognition has come not in the terms and conditions put forth by the Uttarakhandis.²⁷ There is despondency among the rural residents and almost everyone I spoke to argued that not much has much changed since a new state was carved out. As Janaki Devi, one of women who had gone to Delhi with the rallies for statehood succinctly stated in an interview I conducted with her in Majhera village on 27 May, 2008, "We do have a state, we should be happy that we got what we wanted.

Some things have changed too, there are better roads, maybe, but it is clear to us that in our lives not much has changed, we are where we were. There are no jobs for our sons in the plains or here, we are actually worse, still sitting with our hands spread out for water, for fuel, for medicines, for hospitals, for everything ... Now we don't matter to the politicians, we lost out". There is now widespread recognition that the creation of Uttarakhand is mired in electoral politics in which the Central and Uttar Pradesh governments have once again heeded the demands of the rich non-Uttarakhandi farmers of the foothills, political elites, and increasingly addressed market-driven concerns. While there is a growing sense that the movement failed to accomplish what it wanted, there is also a feeling that this may be the beginning of yet another round of struggles in Uttarakhand.

In considering the gendered terrain of the movement, this paper has argued that even though the women of Uttarakhand forcefully contextualized the demand for a separate state and transformed its scope from its anti-reservation beginnings into a movement that captured the gendered politics of everyday life, they are once again relegated to the margins and their contributions undermined. The lack of acknowledgement of women's political role in Uttarakhand and the movements preceding it when women have time and again pushed the familiar boundaries of home and the world, is symptomatic of the general trend in scholarship as well as popular media to contain women's political actions in public spaces within the narrow confines of the home, family, or community. In contrast, by presenting a multi-layered history of the extraction of labor, resources, and revenue, I have centered the gendered dynamics of work and mobility and offered a corrective to the dominant analysis of social movements in Uttarakhand. But equally importantly, in order to take gendered subjectivities seriously and explore how they are constitutive of the politics of a place, I have argued for a double articulation of place and gendered relations and addressed the everyday practices that mutually constitute places and subjectivities. It is my belief that only through such a gendered and spatialized understanding of regional politics can we come to acknowledge the political agency of women and also begin to craft trajectories of the future that are inclusive, equal, and socially just.

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Endnotes

1. This phrase is borrowed from Pile (1997).
2. See Neelam Gupta (1994) and the Special Issue of *Uttara* (1994) for a detailed discussion of the rallies and protests in 1994.
3. 'Reservation' refers to guarantees of constitutional safeguards and protection in employment and education for castes and tribes that are listed under the schedule of the Indian Constitution.
4. For a full account see Guha (1989); Rangan (2000); Sinha et al. (1997).
5. Uttarakhand and Uttaranchal are the names of mountainous provinces of Uttar Pradesh. Even though they are interchangeably used, they reflect the contentious electoral politics in which Uttarakhand was mired. The name Uttarakhand is long established and locally used, but the right-wing Bhartiya Janata Party, in order to gain support and establish their presence in an otherwise Congress dominated area, promoted the term Uttaranchal. At the time of its formation, there was a great deal of frustration and anger in choosing Uttaranchal over Uttarakhand. I use Uttarakhand instead of Uttaranchal in this paper.
6. Names of local folksongs sung at different occasions in Uttarakhand.
7. Girda in *Uttara* (1994: 29), my translation from Hindi.

8. Bhatt and Pahari (1994) argue that women's participation in social movements in Uttarakhand was not as prominent in pre-independence India but, since the sixties women constitute a critical force in all social protests. See Bhatt and Pahari (1994); Dabral (1994); Pathak (1994); *Uttara* (1994); Jayal (2000).

9. It is important to note that none of these movements were exclusively women's movements and men were always involved in different capacities. Nonetheless, women's active participation in large numbers is remarkable.

10. For a discussion of the Chipko movement see Guha (1989, 2001); Sinha et al. (1997); Rangan (2000).

11. Butler writes, "the performativity of gender revolves around ... the way in which the anticipation of a gendered essence produces that which it posits as outside itself. Second, performativity is not a singular act, but a representation and a ritual which achieves its effect through naturalization in the context of a body, understood, in part, as a cultural sustained temporal duration" (1991: xiv).

12. While I use the term 'women' in the general discussion of the paper, I do not assume an automatic uniform category, such as the 'women of Uttarakhand,' nor do I assume that all the movements share a unified and an explicitly 'women's' goal.

13. Pathak notes that *begar* meant, "forcible extraction of labour and/or produce without any payment, or with nominal wages" (1991: 261).

14. Although there are no clear accounts from the nineteenth century that describe women's participation in anti-*begar* movements, folklore and poems make reference to women's vocal threats regarding the new system of labor extraction. See Pathak (1991, 1997).

15. For a rich history of colonial forestry and confrontations in Uttarakhand, see Guha (1989); Pathak (1997).

16. For a discussion of the Chipko movement see Guha (1989, 2001); Sinha et al. (1997); Rangan (2000).

17. See Jackson (2003) on anti-liquor movements.

18. By 1982, the revenue from liquor rose to 60,000 times that of 1822, corresponding with an only 15 times increase in population (Pathak 1985).

19. An abridged version of the manuscript was re-published in *Economic and Political Weekly*, under the title, "Intoxication as a Social Evil," 10 August 1985.

20. Pathak notes that "between 1948 and 1960, several districts were declared dry in UP. But before the hill districts could be declared dry, the policy was abruptly reversed" (1985: 1362).

21. Tharu and Niranjana have critically assessed tensions between the middle and upper caste women and lower caste men and women. In an interesting turn of events, they suggest, the upper and middle classes came to represent the secular image of the "Indian nation" and were deployed in the "consolidation of the middle class and in the othering of [lower] caste." The women who opposed reservation and gained significant media attention were strategically constituted as "citizens" and not as gendered beings, whose "claiming of citizenship rather than sisterhood now not only set them against *dalit* [lower caste] men but also against lower caste/ class women," but not against middle class men.

22. Jayal notes that approximately "70,000 young people register themselves with the Employment Exchange in this region every year, but the annual employment generation capacity amounts to only 3,000 jobs in the organised sector [Planning Commission]" (2000: 4313).

23. My translation from Hindi / Pahari.

24. *Shilpkar* is more commonly used to refer to scheduled castes although the term *dalit* is also being increasingly becoming popular.

25. See *Uttara* (1994) for a detailed chronology of anti-alcohol events that were organized in the months of August, September, and October of 1994.

26. Ray and Korteweg (1999) explore the "extent to which collective action undertaken in defense of traditional identities spills over into feminist consciousness or consciousness of gender subordination." Other feminists, cited in Ray and Korteweg, argue that "even traditional mobilizations can result in transformed identities" (51), as in the case of Uttarakhand.

27. Also see Ramakrishnan (2000).

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