

**Birkbeck ePrints: an open access repository of the  
research output of Birkbeck College**

<http://eprints.bbk.ac.uk>

---

Mawdsley, Emma (1998)  
After Chipko: from environment to region in  
Uttaranchal.  
*Journal of Peasant Studies* 25 (4) pp 36-54

---

This is an author-produced version of an article published in the *Journal of Peasant Studies*. This version has been peer-reviewed but does not include the final publisher proof corrections, journal layout or journal pagination.

All articles available through Birkbeck ePrints are protected by intellectual property law, including copyright law. Any use made of the contents should comply with the relevant law.

Citation for this version:

Mawdsley, Emma (1998). After Chipko: from environment to region in Uttaranchal. London: Birkbeck ePrints. Available at:  
<http://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/archive/00000218>

Citation for the publisher's version:

Mawdsley, Emma (1998). After Chipko: from environment to region in Uttaranchal. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 25 (4) pp 36-54.

---

# AFTER CHIPKO: FROM ENVIRONMENT TO REGION IN UTTARANCHAL <sup>1</sup>

Emma Mawdsley

*Although the Chipko movement is practically non-existent in its region of origin it remains one of the most frequently deployed examples of an environmental and/or a women's movement in the South. A small but growing number of commentators are now critiquing much neopopulist theorising on Chipko, and this paper provides an overview of these critiques. It then takes the debate further with reference to a more recent regional movement in the hills. By doing so, the author argues that it is possible to develop a more plausible account of gender, environment and the state in the Uttaranchal region, and illustrate common weaknesses in neopopulist understandings of Chipko and other social movements in the South.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Chipko movement of the Uttaranchal region<sup>2</sup> in India is one of the most frequently cited movements in the contemporary literature on social and/or environmental mobilisations in the South. Rangan and Garb [1996] suggest that it has taken on iconic status, and it is certainly seen by many as an inspiring example of local action against the alienating and destructive incursions of the modern developmental state [Redclift, 1987; Weber, 1987; Ekins, 1992; Bandyopadhyay, 1992; Escobar, 1995]. However, over the last five years a small but growing number of authors have started to critique the highly popular and widely 'traded' neopopulist interpretations of the Chipko movement(s). These criticisms centre on theoretical and empirical objections to certain ecofeminist and ecocentric portrayals of the mobilisations [Jackson, 1993a], and the insufficient attention paid to the political and/or economic context of the Chipko protests [Mitra, 1993; Aryal, 1994; Rangan, 1996]. Moreover, very little is left of the Chipko movement(s) in its region of origin save for its memory - a decline that is rarely analysed in these neopopulist accounts, and is sometimes not even evident when 'the Chipko movement' is glibly deployed as an example of an environmental and/or women's movement in the South.

This paper will provide an overview of these critiques, but will also take the arguments further through an analysis of a more recent social movement in the hill region, namely the (very recently acceded to) demand for a separate Uttaranchal State within the federal Union of India. It is my contention that, by examining the continuities and differences between the Chipko protests of the 1970s/80s (and their heavily manufactured image) and the regional mobilisation of the 1990s, it is possible to illustrate certain weaknesses in much neopopulist theorising about Chipko, and thus develop a more plausible and sensitive account of gender, environment and the state in the Uttaranchal Himalaya.

The paper will start with a brief narrative overview of the Chipko protests and the regional movement before turning to one of the most prolific and widely read neopopulist writer on the Chipko movement, Vandana Shiva. Shiva's ecofeminist and 'anti-development' account of the movement will be reappraised in the light of the Uttaranchal regional movement with particular reference to the changing relationship

between state and society, gender interests and environmental issues. The paper will also draw on Ramachandra Guha's analysis of the Chipko movement(s), and explore whether his vision of 'peasant versus the state' can still be said to have contemporary salience in the hills. The paper reflects a broader unease with certain aspects of neopopulist theorising about social movements in the South, issues that will be taken up in more detail in the conclusions.

## THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT(S)

The forests of the Uttarakhand Himalaya have long been central to the livelihood strategies of the mountain people who live there.<sup>3</sup> In the past most households depended on a diverse bundle of economic activities, but traditionally the two most important elements were migration and agroforestry. This pattern is still found today, although the balance of importance appears to be shifting towards migration and other sources of paid employment [Whittaker, 1984; Bora, 1987, 1996]. The steep slopes of the middle Himalaya do not offer rich agricultural pickings, and the forests provide essential inputs of fertiliser (in the form of leaf mulch), grazing, fodder, fuel and a host of other non-timber forest products, such as medicinal herbs, fibres and foodstuffs [Nand and Kumar, 1989]. Given this situation, the alienating and often deeply insensitive encroachments of colonial forestry in the region were profoundly felt, and provoked significant resistance [Pant, 1922; Guha, 1989].

After Independence little appeared to change, as the State-managed Forest Department continued largely to neglect the interests and needs of the local people, despite the latter's heavy dependence on the forests. Much has been written about the ongoing erosion of villagers' rights in relation to the forests [Guha, 1989], the Forest Department's concentration on Chir Pine (*Pinus roxburghii*) at the expense of far more productive trees for the local agroforestry [Singh, 1993], and other post-colonial continuities in both forest policy and praxis [Rawat, 1993]. But as well as these 'subsistence issues' there are another set of complaints which relate to the Uttarakhandis' place in the *commercial* exploitation of the forests, and which tend to be less well analysed. For example, the Forest Department, and the private contractors who won the forest auctions from the Department, preferred to employ more 'biddable' Nepalis and other migrants than local men [Tucker, 1993]. The Forest Department also charged small local units higher prices for raw materials than it charged large industries down on the plains [Das and Negi, 1983], and little effort was made to set up processing stages in the hills for the timber or timber products, which would otherwise have created employment and added value to the region's 'exports' [Rangan, 1996]. Closely related, indeed central, to these livelihood issues, were the growing concerns over the environmental impacts of the Forest Department's increasing penetration into the hills (which was greatly expanded and accelerated after the huge strategic road building programme that followed the Indo-Chinese War of 1962), and its working practices, many of which were argued to be ecologically degrading [Mishra and Tripathi, 1978; Guha, 1989]. These perceptions were strongly reinforced by a series of disastrous floods in the region in the early 1970s [Pathak, 1994].

This then was the situation in which the Dasholi Gram Swarajya Sangh (DGSS), a small industrial corporation with strong Gandhian overtones, based in Gopeshwar,

was operating. Its members, under the leadership of Chandi Prasad Bhatt, ran a turpentine unit, manufactured agricultural implements, and organised demonstrations against liquor sales, Untouchability and the forest contractor system [Guha, 1989]. In 1973 the DGSS clashed with the Forest Department over the provision of hundreds of trees to a large sports company from the plains, Symonds, after they had just been refused a few trees from the same forest. The DGSS decided to stop the Symonds's contractors by intervening between the axemen and the trees if they had to, thus giving rise to the movement's famous name - Chipko is Hindi for 'adhere' or 'stick to', although it is usually translated in a more 'feel-good' way as 'hug'. After successfully preventing felling in Mandal forest, Chandi Prasad Bhatt and the others made the critical decision to alert the villagers around Phata-Rampur, some 80 km away, to the fact that the forests around them were now under threat from the same company, and offered to help them defend them. Thus, by moving beyond their immediate local needs to embrace a wider spatial and temporal perspective, Chipko was born as a meaningful social movement with regional implications.

Over the next decade a whole series of Chipko protests took place, although it should be noted that the task of establishing even a simple history of the movement(s) is complicated by the differing and sometimes contradictory accounts written by major figures involved in Chipko, as well as the host of 'outside' commentators. Some postmodernists might argue that there is room for all of these accounts of the Chipko movement(s), and I would certainly concur with the idea that the recovery of an 'objective history' of Chipko is neither possible nor desirable. That said, I do believe we can privilege certain stories over others, and that such a commitment can and should be made on the basis of an ethical responsibility to our research subjects.<sup>4</sup> I will not go into (another) detailed account of the Chipko protests here, although more will emerge below. What I will argue is that we need to develop a more complex view of the Chipko protests than has popularly been recognised in which, at different times and in different places, both commercial and 'subsistence' issues were at stake. The Chipko protests differed according to the particular times, places and circumstances of communities and individuals in the hills. Thus, the struggle described above, in Mandal village, clearly centred on access to raw materials for small scale industrial use. Mandal is on the road, and is only a few kilometres from Gopeshwar, with the larger town of Chamoli also relatively near by, facilitating the transport and sale of goods. However, in Reni village, the site of a widely celebrated incident in 1974 in which women were especially prominent in protecting their forests from the contractors, such industrial opportunities were much more limited. Reni is a remote village close to the Indo-Tibet border and some distance off a poor quality road. Here the villagers, and particularly the women, given a gendered division of labour in which women are responsible for the vast majority of work relating the forests, were protecting a major subsistence resource. Few analysts of the Chipko movement seem willing to recognise this grassroots diversity in the movement, or the fact that as well as being spatially diverse, such interests can shift over time, as we will see below in the discussion of events at Doongri-Paintoli.

It is clear from Chipko's origins in the DGSS, and the widespread support the movement(s) received in the early/mid-1970s, that these protests spoke to a serious concern of many hill women and men; namely that the state's management of the forests offered few dividends for the local people in this already economically

marginalised area, and further, that it was degrading the ecological base upon which local people depended. These dual issues add up to a single concern with winning a livelihood through a bundle of activities, including village-based agroforestry, paid work within the hills and paid work outside of the hills in the plains. For different individuals, families and villages, the relative importance and possible combinations of these strategies varied and continue to vary according to a range of circumstances over which they have more or less control. However, in a number of the more populist accounts of 'Chipko', the economic demands of the movement(s) are downplayed (or even refuted) in favour of the movement's ecological consciousness. These accounts were highly influential, and over the late 1970s and 1980s national and international perceptions of Chipko came to be increasingly dominated by this strictly environmental perspective (see below). Shamsar Singh Bist, a local activist in the hills, felt that:

the final act of betrayal came when a potentially radical movement for self-determination and self-management of our resources turned into a purely conservationist one [quoted in Mitra, 1993:36].

Saxena [1992] suggests that Chipko died with the imposition of the moratorium in 1981, a 15 year ban on felling above 1000 metres in the region that was introduced directly as a result of the Chipko agitations.<sup>5</sup> But the legislation was deeply resented by many hill people because, they argued, Forest Department felling continued while local people were further excluded from the forest. Opposition to the legislation in Uttaranchal even resulted in a '*Ped Katao Andolan*' in 1988-89 - a movement to *cut trees down* - because it was argued that it was stalling some 4,500 development projects all over Garhwal and Kumaon. Significantly, many of the leaders associated with this movement were involved with a nascent regional political party seeking a separate hill state, and it is this much less well known movement to which we turn next.

## THE UTTARANCHAL MOVEMENT

Throughout India's independent history there have been demands that the Uttaranchal region should be recognised as a separate State within the federal Union of India. These demands were primarily based on the region's geographical difference from the rest of Uttar Pradesh (between the hills and the plains); its historical separation during the pre-colonial and much of the colonial period; and a post-Independence discourse of internal colonialism, primarily in relation to the forests. For most of this time these demands were largely confined to elite-urban groups, and received little support from the majority of the hill people [Bhatkoti, 1987], although by the early 1980s there is evidence that the idea was starting to receive wider support, even if it still could not be said that the issue commanded committed popular support [Mawdsley, 1997]. Then, in July 1994, the separate hill State issue suddenly and unexpectedly exploded into a mass movement. Huge confrontations with the State apparatus ensued, sometimes peaceful, sometimes violent, and there followed a period of intense upheaval. The immediate cause of the agitation was the passing of a piece of Uttar Pradesh State legislation concerned with reservation (or positive discrimination) in government employment and education for what are called the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). These are the vast mass of 'middling' agricultural and artisanal castes who are estimated to make up some 52% of India's population. The legislation followed the

Centre's implementation the Mandal Commission's proposals in 1989,<sup>6</sup> something which has had enormous ramifications for India's political landscape. In addition to the long-standing 15% reservation for the Scheduled Castes (the former Untouchables) and the 7.5% reservation for the Scheduled Tribes was added 27% reservation for the OBCs. This brought the total reservation quota up to just under 50%, the (much abused) ceiling the Supreme Court has set, leaving 50% (theoretically) for open competition and the high castes.<sup>7</sup>

But while the all-India percentage of Brahmins and Rajputs is estimated at around 11%, in Uttaranchal, for various historical reasons, these high castes make up close to 85% of the population.<sup>8</sup> Thus because of the unusual caste composition of the Uttaranchal hills, the OBC reservation policy would have excluded a considerable percentage of the hill population from two important routes to economic and social mobility (education and Government posts) in an already highly constrained economic environment. The State Government of Uttar Pradesh took no account of this, and the legislation was widely seen as the 'final straw' in what was perceived to be decades of neglect and exploitation. In the opening weeks of the mass agitation two critical themes emerged which saw it shift from an anti-reservation struggle to the demand for a separate State [Mawdsley, 1996]. These centred on the closely related issues of development and politics. While there are still claims that the region is being subjected to internal colonialism by the State of Uttar Pradesh (voiced in newspapers, at meetings and in discussions), it is generally conceded that the region has started to receive more 'development' funds from both the State and Central Governments over the last couple of decades. The main grievance now being articulated is that the economic and developmental marginalisation of the hill area is due to the fact that *plains*-based planners in the distant State capital of Lucknow are unable (as well as unwilling) to understand the development needs of the *hill* population, environment and economy. In other words, the region's 'backwardness' is being increasingly interpreted not simply as the result of straight-forward exploitation and/or neglect, but as a more profound inability of the plains-based planners to 'properly' develop the hills.

The political dimension of this argument rests on the fact that the region only accounts for 4% of the State's population, and is thus of negligible importance to State politics. For many, a separate hill State is the solution to this lack of a political voice - vital in a political economy which continues to be heavily dominated by a 'developmental state'. It is widely felt that a smaller, separate State would be more accountable and more responsive to the needs and demands of local people, and that it would have greater representation at the (new) State and national level. Above all, hill development would be planned and administered by people from the hills.<sup>9</sup>

Despite their many differences, the Chipko protests and the regional movement clearly had/have their origins in similar or overlapping issues. These include a lack of control over local resources (both in terms of 'traditional' rights of access to forest resources and in terms of modern commercial opportunities); competition over national versus local need; environmental concerns; and local critiques of development planning and administration. However, these contiguities are *not* apparent from a reading of many neopopulist accounts of the Chipko protest(s), which offer a very different set of understandings about the environment, development and

often gender relations in the hills. The next section will explore this discrepancy through an analysis of Vandana Shiva's account the Chipko protests.

## FROM ENVIRONMENT TO REGION

### *Women versus men?*

Vandana Shiva has written about the Chipko movement in a number of books and articles [including *Shiva*, 1988 and 1992; *Mies and Shiva*, 1993; and *Shiva and Bandyopadhyay*, 1986 and 1987]. Her analysis can be firmly located within the neopopulist paradigm, but it derives its theoretical force primarily from ecofeminism. A variety of perspectives can be identified within ecofeminism [WGSG, 1997], but most proponents argue that it provides a radical development alternative which centres on diversity, nurturing, holism, and social and environmental justice [*Mies and Shiva*, 1993]. Most ecofeminists argue that there is an essential congruity between women and nature because of women's biological capacity to bear life, and because of their shared objectification and domination by patriarchal systems of exploitation and control. Rather than resist the nature/culture, woman/man dichotomy, as 'traditional' feminists have sought to do, ecofeminists celebrate the supposed congruence. Shiva argues that:

Women and nature are intimately related, and their domination and liberation are similarly linked. The women's and ecology movements are therefore one, and are primarily counter-trends to a patriarchal maldevelopment [*Shiva*, 1988:47].

Shiva argues that in Uttaranchal, as elsewhere in India, indigenous forest management has traditionally been the realm of women, both in the division of labour and in the domain of knowledge. Women, she says, embody *prakriti*, or the feminine principle, which seeks to nurture and maintain the harmony and diversity of the natural forests as a life source, and which stands in sharp opposition to the masculinist sciences that dominate modern development discourses [*Shiva*, 1988].<sup>10</sup> Commercial forestry, introduced by colonialists and perpetuated by the Indian state, is analysed as a prominent example of such reductionism and violence. Local men, she argues, have also been colonised by this system - cognitively, economically and politically. It is peasant *women* who have deeply and concretely experienced forest destruction and who have, therefore, risen up to challenge the reductionist values of the factory and the market by reviving the 'ancient Indian conception of forest culture'. Here, self-sustaining forest communities are viewed as the highest expression of societal and civilisational evolution, a vision which conflicts vividly with the picture of a tainted, violent and profligate 'modern world' [*Nanda*, 1991]. Shiva argues that:

the women of Garhwal [the western half of Uttaranchal] started to protect their forests from commercial exploitation even at the cost of their lives, by starting the famous Chipko movement, embracing the living trees as their protectors [*Shiva*, 1988:67].

She suggests that women not only fought outside contractors and the Forest Department in their struggle to reclaim the feminine principle in forest use and management, but also resisted the commercial instincts of their own menfolk. Chipko is thus represented as an explicitly ecological *and* feminist movement through which the women of the hills sought to re-establish a 'traditional' harmonious relationship

with nature. The link with the DGSS and other co-operatives, which Shiva derides as meeting largely male concerns, is described as a temporary merger early on in the movement. Soon afterwards, she suggests:

a new separation took place between local male interests for commercial activity based on forest products, and local women's interests for sustenance activity based on forest protection [Shiva, 1988:71].

But there are a number of empirical objections to this account. First, although women played an absolutely central part in the Chipko protests, Sunderlal Bahuguna, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Dhum Singh Negi and the many other men who were involved were not always or only their 'students and followers', as Shiva maintains [1988:67]. Men were genuinely committed to the various strands of the Chipko movement, and contributed significantly to their organisational and ideological force. Although the desire to redress the balance and bring to the public eye many of the otherwise un-named women who were involved in the movement is thoroughly laudable, the way Shiva does this is to mirror the technique of those whom she criticises, and so to exclude men. Shiva also undermines the roles others played in the Chipko movement, including leftists and students, who did not fit into the picture of ecofeminist protest. For example, like many others minded to celebrate the romantic image of the Chipko movement as women hugging trees high in the Himalayan forests, she rarely mentions the town-based demonstrations, such as the critical protests disrupting the forest auctions.

Shiva's use of Hinduism in relation to gender and the environment might also be questioned. Shiva employs the concepts of *shakti* (feminine primordial energy) and *prakriti* (its manifestation in nature) as one of the principal means by which she explains specifically 'Indian' (which she surprisingly often elides with Hindu) definitions of nature and culture, and thus environmental understanding. She suggests that in 'traditional India' power and fertility at the cosmological and everyday level were attributed to women, who were venerated accordingly [Shiva, 1988], but that this was then displaced by the patriarchy of colonialism, development and science. But in Hindu tradition (especially the high Brahminical texts that Shiva draws upon) women's *shakti* is a major 'reason' for their *subordination* by men, not their veneration, and certainly not their liberation. Shakti does have a positive side, especially in its 'latent' form, but it is not context-free, and it is erroneous to see *shakti* or *prakriti* as unambiguously empowering, and then to build upon it an ideology of nature-culture/woman-man relations in the Himalayas. It is men's *fear* of *shakti* (which often translates into women's sexual energy),<sup>11</sup> that underlies Manu's famous dictum that:

In childhood a woman should be under her father's control, in youth under her husband's, and when her husband is dead, under her sons' [The Laws of Manu: 5.147, Doniger and Smith, 1991].

Clearly a critique of Shiva's interpretation of the Chipko movement also crosscuts with the wider debates over ecofeminism. To differing extents, the various ecofeminist perspectives have been criticised on several fronts, notably for their essentialisation of women as a universal and biologically-determined category, and their tendency to romanticise the past [Nanda, 1991; Eckersley, 1992; Jackson, 1993b; Levin, 1994] - two criticisms which are applicable to Shiva's analysis of the Chipko movement.



There is very little historical evidence for the idealised picture of 'traditional' environmental *or* gender relations that Shiva draws in her call to return to a more harmonious past [Greenberg *et al*, 1997]. Indeed, as Kelkar and Nathan [1991] point out, mainstream Indian civilisation (which Shiva celebrates) was established precisely by clearing forests for settled cultivation, while at the same time women became increasingly subordinated to men through the development of caste society.

Shiva makes the valid observation that it is women who often bear disproportionately the personal, economic and social costs of environmental deterioration, and this is certainly the case in Uttaranchal. But as Agarwal [1992] notes, this by no means *necessarily* translates into an essentialist reading of women's environmental interests, knowledge or agency, in which the primal mutuality of women and nature is an automatically privileged relationship. If 'sound ecological practice' clashes with a hill woman's needs and responsibilities, such as in the case of a fuelwood shortage, then she is likely to prioritise the latter, particularly given the heavy burden placed upon many women by the out-migration of men. Even this argument pre-supposes the idea that, if they were in a position to, women always and everywhere have both the knowledge and the desire to preserve the environment. While this has been demonstrated to be true of particular women and communities all over the world, women's ecological knowledge and 'affinity' is not automatic but is historically and culturally-dependent. In the Jharkhand, for example, Jewitt [1996] found that men were often the principal bearers of environmental knowledge, despite the fact that this is an *adivasi* (tribal) society where, if anything, ecofeminists would argue that women have an even more pristine relationship with the environment.

Women's decisions are constrained and enabled by a series of over-lapping and sometimes competing gendered and social relations, and by the limitations and opportunities provided by the local environment as it is shaped by local factors *and* regional/national structures and events. They must make decisions and take actions on the basis of a host of conditions which differ for each woman in space and time. These can include their age, health, marital status, education, their fears and aspirations, whether they are in their natal or marital village, whether they and/or their household has access to other income sources, and endlessly on. Reducing women's decisions to a set of biologically-determined characteristics devalues their agency, fails to recognise that they may also 'align' with other identities (caste and class, to name just two), and undermines the fact that they are situated in certain locales which impose and offer a specific set of constraints and opportunities, as with the differences between Mandal and Reni villages. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in Doongri-Paintoli, the site of a very famous Chipko incident in 1980, in which women defied their own menfolk as well as the Forest Department contractors in order to protect their forests. Here there was indeed a conflict of interests between the men and women of the village, as the women wanted to preserve the nearby forest (the loss of which would have spelt considerable hardship for them) while the men were more willing to accept the Forest Department's compensation (over which they would have had more control). But the women fought to prevent the complete clearance of their forest as a *functional livelihood strategy*, not because of a desire to retain or return to some pristine 'traditional' village life. This is made abundantly clear in the comments of Gayatri Devi, who had taken part in the original struggle and who is now deeply disappointed with the lack of development in the village. She said:

We could have sacrificed more [forest] if we were assured a road to the village, a school, a proper water supply and a primary health centre [Mitra, 1993:50].

Mitra asked "What did you get out of Chipko", and I will quote Gayatri Devi's full reply:

I don't know. We acted to save our trees. We never clung to any tree but when I went to Delhi, I was told that ours was a very big *andolan* [movement]. Maybe it was, but we never got anything out of it. The road to our village is yet to be constructed and water is still a problem. Our children cannot study beyond high school unless they can afford to go and stay in a town. The girls simply cannot do that. Now they tell me that because of Chipko the road cannot be built because everything has become *pariyavaran* [environment] oriented nowadays. Chipko has given us nothing. We cannot even get wood to build a house because the forest guards keep us out. Our rights have been snatched away [Mitra, 1993:51].

This issue of gender interests in the hills can be explored further with reference to the role played by women in the Uttarakhand movement. Women as a 'political community' are firmly positioned within its ideological and organisational mainstream,<sup>12</sup> and there are a number of women politicians and leaders who are strongly involved in the movement. Thus we might ask whether women are pursuing specifically gender-related demands through the agitation for a separate hill State *as well as or in opposition to* the main goals of the movement? The brief answer is that there is indeed one dimension of the mobilisation that, although by no means exclusively a women's issue, has been particularly important in mobilising the support of some women, and that is the anti-liquor protests that have accompanied the agitation. Many women in the hills suffer from the economic and personal effects of their male relatives drinking, and there is a long history of protest against selling liquor in Uttarakhand [Pathak, 1985]. Within some parts of the movement this theme is an important one, and primarily a women's issue. For example, in one anti-liquor rally in Pithoragarh, a prominent *sarvodaya* worker drew on an explicitly Gandhian vision of a liquor-less Uttarakhand. 'Otherwise', she asked, 'what is the point of the separate State for women?'<sup>13</sup>

But the vast majority of women with whom I spoke saw the *principal* benefit of a separate State as being the creation of more jobs (or the freeing up of present ones) for their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons (and occasionally, some said, for themselves). A secure income, preferably from a government job, was perceived by both men and women to be increasingly essential to survive in the hills. A woman from Mandal village - the site of that first famous confrontation - told me that:

Nowadays it's like this: if you have jobs you can eat. If you don't have a job you can get nothing. The wild pigs are destroying the crops in the fields; women are working hard in the fields but getting nothing.<sup>14</sup>

Hyperbole aside, there is a real message here, and in many of the other statements and discussions I heard. There is evidence of growing aspirations amongst some women which centre not on the village or traditional agricultural obligations (and therefore also on forests), but on towns and employment (for themselves and, more frequently, their husbands and sons) within and outside of the region. The following statement is taken from an interview in September 1994 with Gangotri Devi, an elderly woman from Mandal village:

She [her younger companion] is BA passed, and doesn't know how to work in the fields because she is always with her books and pens. But we are always in the fields. After the creation of a separate State some boys and girls will get jobs ... All the people are coming onto the streets [protesting] to get jobs - like this girl and that boy [*points*] - then they will be able to feed us as well as their children. There is nothing good in this Garhwal - little agricultural production and no job opportunities. All the educated boys are hanging out on the streets.

This is not to deny that many women *are* deeply concerned by agro-environmental issues in the hills, but they allied this with a concern about other ways of winning a livelihood in Uttaranchal, including the commercial exploitation of the forests - something that Shiva tends not to acknowledge. Gender issues *are* central to any analysis of forests and resistance in Uttaranchal, but many women recognise that the arena of their struggles and potential opportunities extends far beyond the village and nearby forest to the region, State and even nation. In the final section, this question of scale, and of the relationship between 'peasants and the state', is picked up in a discussion of Ramachandra Guha's [1989] analysis of Chipko.

#### *Peasant versus the state?*

In 'The Unquiet Woods', Ramachandra Guha presents a sophisticated sociological analysis of continuity and change in popular movements against the pre- and post-colonial states in Uttaranchal. As well as placing Chipko in its cultural and historical context, Guha is one of the few authors who analyses the varying space-time geographies of the Chipko protests. He explores the different environmental philosophies present in the movement, the various types of protest deployed, gender relations within the hills, and Chipko's goals and outcomes. Reminiscent of E.P. Thompson, Guha approaches the relationship between peasants and the state in Uttaranchal through the lens of the moral economy, and suggests that villagers saw Chipko as a fight for basic subsistence denied them by the institutions and policies of the state. Although Guha's faith in peasant moral economies as a basis for contemporary forest regeneration and management is open to qualification [see *Corbridge and Jewitt*, 1997], he does perhaps provide the most definitive historical study of social movements in Uttaranchal to date. But, I would suggest that the model of resistance that Guha presents, that of peasant *versus* the state, does not entirely hold outside of the struggle over forests and, by the 1990s, is no longer sufficient to conceptualise even forest tensions between hill people and the state.<sup>15</sup> This too has a bearing on the declining mobilising power of Chipko and the increasing interest in the idea of a separate hill State.

The mountains of Uttaranchal are a daunting environment in which to enforce the writ of law, and it was only following the expansion of the road system after 1962 that the penetration of the state and its adjuncts (administrative, developmental and disciplinary) could significantly accelerate in the hills. Accompanying this 'space-time compression' were immense and complex socio-cultural and economic changes. By the 1970s/1980s, the state had, in some form or other, penetrated many aspects of daily life, albeit highly unevenly in depth and spread. One effect has been that it has become more difficult and more risky for villagers to oppose the state outright, for

example, by ignoring forest laws. Guha argues that peasant movements like Chipko are:

defensive, seeking to escape the tentacles of the commercial economy, and the centralising state [Guha, 1989:196].

But while this may have been true to an extent in the 1970s, I believe that it is too one-dimensional to encompass the full variety and depth of the relationship(s) between 'peasants' and the developmental state *or* the commercial economy in the 1990s. The Uttaranchal regional movement demonstrates that the capture and manipulation of state power, state patronage and state resources are now very much part of the interplay between domination and resistance in Uttaranchal. While the state may be presented as an agent of oppression in terms of the forests, it is also a source of opportunities. These are not limited to jobs and education, although both are increasingly important in a marginal area with a growing population in an increasingly competitive economy. Rather, as hill people have become more informed and more politicised, they have sought more power and a bigger voice in the processes of development planning and development administration, and more access to development funds - the main controller of which is of course, the state. The object of the Uttaranchal regional struggle was the *capture*, not the *rejection*, of the state and thus state power.

The growing politicisation of the state and civil society in India since the mid-1960s has been recently intensified by, amongst other things, the expansion of the reservation system in 1989, and post-1991, the push towards the liberalisation of the economy. Kohli [1990] argues that a highly interventionist state, in attempting to deal with a poor economy, has in the process become the object of intense political competition. These changes are reflected in a contemporary relationship between state and society in Uttaranchal that is more complex than 'peasant versus the state'. The regional movement demonstrates the growing volatility of the electorate, and an increasing willingness and capacity to organise around particular identities in order to further their demands at the State and national level. Confrontation with the state hasn't disappeared, as the events of 1994/5 demonstrate, nor covert resistance, but it is now increasingly directed towards appropriating political and administrative power rather than directly opposing it. This suggests that, as many Uttaranchalis know, but which many 'post-developers' are less willing to admit, that the politics of the local continue to be reflexively engaged with, and must be understood in relation to, regional, national and other supra-local political, economic and cultural influences.

## CONCLUSIONS

'Chipko' has taken on the functions of a metaphor for subaltern environmental resistance in that it has acquired meanings and associations that extend far beyond, or even have little resemblance to, the specific times, places and circumstances of its mobilisation. There is much to be said for the argument that more important than 'accuracy' is the fact that 'Chipko' has served as a inspiration for activists both in India and elsewhere against social and environmental injustice.<sup>16</sup> But as I have argued in this paper, the ecocentric/ecofeminist representations of Chipko that came to dominate popular images of the movement played a small but not insignificant part in the movement's failure to achieve the changes that were desired by many in the hills.

Chipko developed primarily as an economic struggle, with male and female activists recognising that the survival of the forests had become an *a priori* condition for the possibilities of development that they sought to realise, within the geographical constraints of the mountains. Environmental concern was not lacking, but a sound environment was seen as a *functional requirement for a sound local economy*. Within this, different 'subsistence strategies' were articulated at different times, in different places, and by different people, as we saw in the protests in Mandal, Reni and Doongri-Paintoli. Ironically (given their relativist sympathies), many neopopulist writers have constructed rather universalist accounts of the movement (ecological, ecofeminist and/or anti-development) which undermine or ignore Chipko's complexity, and which depend on a cultural, economic and political localism which simply does not reflect the reality of men and women's lives in Uttaranchal. We do an injustice to the vast majority of the women and men of Uttaranchal if we understand them to want to return to some idealised traditional past that is unlikely ever to have existed. This was not the message that was being articulated in the 1970s through the Chipko protests, and is certainly not true of today's regional demands.

Some of these criticisms point to a more general set of concerns about a number of common features and tendencies within much neopopulist writing on social mobilisations in the South. One such is the tendency to view 'local' communities as rather static and inward-looking [Collins, 1997]. This image underpins notions of 'traditional villagers', whose livelihoods are intimately dependent on the local environment, and whose lifeworlds are constructed and given meaning only through their immediate surroundings. But this offers a very partial understanding of people's lives in the hills, and does not reflect their familiarity and engagement with a whole series of supra-local influences. The transition from the Chipko protests to the regional mobilisation underlines the fact that it is misguided to rely on the sparse and reductionist accounts of 'the local' as set forward in much neopopulist theory in understanding the diverse livelihood strategies, identity formations and outlooks of the vast majority of hill men and women.

## NOTES

---

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Emma Mawdsley, Department of Geography, University of Durham, DH1 3LE. My thanks to the Economic and Social Research Council for funding this work, and to Professor Ian Simmons for reading the first draft.

<sup>2</sup>The Himalayan part of the State of Uttar Pradesh (see map). The region is also known as the Uttarakhand. There are small semantic differences, but the important distinction is that the Bharatiya Janata Party (recently elected to Central Government in India) use Uttaranchal. I prefer the less politically appropriated name of Uttarakhand, but now that the BJP have declared that a new State of Uttaranchal will be created (see note 9), it seems sensible to change.

<sup>3</sup>With the exception of some small Tibeto-Mongloid tribal groups, the vast majority of the Uttaranchal population belongs to the Hindu and Aryan majority of Northern India. The Pahari language group is closely related to Hindi, which is also widely spoken in this region (Berreman, 1963).

<sup>4</sup>This brief sketch is based on fifteen months of fieldwork in Uttaranchal, and interviews with some of the key proponents of the movement, including Chandni Prasad Bhatt, Sunderlal Bahuguna, Dhum Singh Negi, Shamsher Singh Bist, women from Mandal village, and many other villagers who had (and had not) taken part in Chipko protests of the 1970s and 1980s. I also had access to local Hindi newspaper archives and other Hindi documents, as well as a large number of English accounts.

<sup>5</sup>It also tied in with the reactionary and hotly contested ideas being mooted in the Draft Forest Act of 1981 (Fernandes and Kulkarni, 1983; Pathak, 1994).

---

<sup>6</sup>The States adopted the legislation at different times. In Uttar Pradesh this followed the election of a 'middle/low caste' Government in 1993.

<sup>7</sup>Reservation is an enormously complex issue, and this is a extremely simplified outline. For details, see Galanter (1978, 1984) and Beteille (1992).

<sup>8</sup>Various suggestions have been put forward for this highly unusual caste pattern, including Berreman (1963), MC Joshi (1990), MP Joshi (1990) and Quigley (1993).

<sup>9</sup>The Central Government has just, in April 1998, announced that the State of Uttaranchal will be created, along with Vananchal and Chhatisgarh.

<sup>10</sup>By referring to a 'feminine principle', as Jackson (1993b) notes, Shiva rightly tries to avoid the pitfall of biological determinism. This way she can include certain men, such as Sunderlal Bahuguna who, she says, through listening to the quiet voices of women, has retained an ability to articulate the feminine-ecological principles of Chipko. But having made the distinction between the categories of 'woman' and 'feminine principle', she goes on to collapse them repeatedly.

<sup>11</sup>For a psychoanalytical account of male fear of the sexualised woman in India, see Kakar (1978). Digressing slightly, for a fascinating critique of Kakar, see Kurtz (1992).

<sup>12</sup>This was more than evident when watching the marches, rallies and meetings in villages and towns, talking to men and women, reading newspaper reports, and simply observing and participating in the movement.

<sup>13</sup>Interview, 22.12.94.

<sup>14</sup>Interview, 21.9.94.

<sup>15</sup>An important issue which there simply isn't the space to go into in this paper, is the question of how these arguments play out in relation to the federal division, in other words between State (of Uttar Pradesh) and state (central) power.

<sup>16</sup>My thanks to Paul Routledge for pointing this out.

## REFERENCES

- Agarwal, B. (1992) 'The Gender and Environment Debate: Lessons From India', *Feminist Studies*, 18 (1), pp. 119-58.
- Aryal, M., 1994, 'Axing Chipko,' *Himal*, Vol.7 No.1, pp. 8-23.
- Atkinson, E.T., 1882-1884, *The Himalayan Gazetteer*. 3 Volumes. Reprinted 1989. New Delhi: Cosmo Publications.
- Bandyopadhyay, J., 1992, 'From environmental conflicts to sustainable mountain transformation: ecological action in the Garhwal Himalaya,' in D.P. Ghai and J.M. Vivian (eds.) *Grassroots Environmental Action: People's Participation in Sustainable Development*. London: Routledge, pp. 259-280.
- Berreman, G.D., 1963, *Hindus of the Himalayas: Ethnography and Change*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Beteille, A., 1992, *The Backward Classes in Contemporary India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Bhatkoti, D.N., 1987, *Elites and Political Change in Tehri: A Study in the Politics of Mass Movement and Regional Development*. Unpublished Ph.D., Garhwal University.
- Bhatt, C.P. and Kunwar, S.S., 1982, *Hugging the Himalaya: The Chipko Experience*. Gopeshwar: DGSS.
- Bora, R. S., 1987, 'Extent and causes of migration from the hill regions of Uttar Pradesh,' in V. Joshi (ed.) *Migrant Labour and Related Issues*. New Delhi: Oxford, pp. 187-210.
- Bora, R.S., 1996, *Himalayan Migration: A Study of the Hill Region of Uttar Pradesh*. New Delhi: Sage.

- 
- Collins, J.L., 1997, 'Development Theory and the Politics of Location: An Example from North Eastern Brazil', in V. Tucker (ed.) *Cultural Perspectives on Development*. London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass.
- Das, J.C. and Negi, R.S., 1983 'The Chipko movement,' in K.S. Singh (ed.) *Tribal Movements in India, Volume 2*. New Delhi: Manohar, pp. 383-392.
- Doniger, W. and Smith, B.K., 1991, *The Laws of Manu*. New Delhi: Penguin.
- Eckersley, R., 1992, *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Towards an Ecocentric Approach*. London: University College London Press.
- Ekins, P., 1992, *A New World Order: Grassroots Movements for Global Change*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Escobar, A., 1995, *Encountering development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Galanter, M., 1978, 'Who are the OBCs? An introduction to a constitutional puzzle,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28 October 1978, pp. 1812-28.
- Galanter, M., 1984, *Competing Equalities: Law and the Backward Classes in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Ghai, D.P. and Vivian, J.M., (eds.), 1992, *Grassroots Environmental Action: People's Participation in Sustainable Development*. London: Routledge.
- Government of Uttar Pradesh, 1991, Draft Eighth Five Year Plan (1992-97) and Annual Sub-Plan (1992-93). Lucknow: Uttaranchal Vikas Vibhag.
- Greenberg, B., Sinha, S. and Gururani, S., 1997, 'The 'New Traditionalist' Discourse of Indian Environmentalism'. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 24 No.3, pp. 65-99.
- Guha, R., 1989, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalayas*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Jackson, C., 1993a, 'Environmentalisms and gender interests in the Third World,' *Development and Change*, Vol.24 No.4, pp. 649-677.
- Jackson, C., 1993b, 'Women/nature or gender/history: a critique of ecofeminist development,' *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol.20 No.3, pp. 389-419.
- Jewitt, S., 1996, *Agro-Ecological Knowledges and Forest Management in the Jharkhand, India: Tribal Development or Populist Impasse?* Unpublished Ph.D., Cambridge University.
- Jewitt, S. and Corbridge, S.E., 1997, 'From Forest Struggles to Forest Citizens? Joint Forest Management in the Unquiet Woods of India's Jharkhand'. *Environment and Planning A*, Vol.29 No.12, pp. 2145-2164.
- Joshi, M.C., 1990, 'The Khasas in the history of the Uttarakhand,' in M.P. Joshi, A.C. Fanger and C.W. Brown (eds.) *Himalaya: Past and Present, Volume 3*. Almora: Shri Almora Book Depot, pp. 193-200.
- Joshi, M.P., 1990, *Uttaranchal Himalaya: An Essay in Historical Anthropology*. Almora: Shri Almora Book Depot.
- Kakar, S., 1978, *The Inner World: A Psychoanalytic Study of Childhood and Society in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Kelkar, G. and Nathan, D., 1991, *Gender and Tribe: Women, Land and Forests*. London: Sage.
- Kohli, A., 1990, *Democracy and Discontent: India's Growing Crisis of Governability*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kurtz, S.N., 1992, *All the Mothers Are One: Hindu India and the Cultural Reshaping of Psychoanalysis*. New York: Colombia University Press.

- 
- Levin, M.G., 1994, 'A critique of ecofeminism,' in L.P. Pojman (ed.) *Environmental Ethics: Readings in Theory and Application*. London: Jons and Bartlett Publishers.
- Mawdsley, E.E. (1996) 'The Uttarakhand Agitation and the Other Backward Classes,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27 January 1996, pp. 205-210.
- Mawdsley, E.E., 1997, 'Nonsecessionist Regionalism in India: the Uttarakhand Separate State Movement.' *Environment and Planning A*, Vol.29 No.12, pp. 2217-2235.
- Mies, M. and Shiva, V., 1993, *Ecofeminism*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.
- Mishra, A. and Tripathi, S., 1978, *Chipko Movement: Uttarakhand Women's Bid to Save Forest Wealth*. New Delhi: People's Action for Development with Justice.
- Mitra, A., 1993, 'Chipko today,' *Down To Earth*, 30 April 1993.
- Nand, N. and Kumar, K., 1989, *The Holy Himalaya: A Geographical Interpretation of Garhwal*. New Delhi: Daya Publishing House.
- Nanda, M., 1991, 'Is modern science a western patriarchal myth: a critique of populist orthodoxy,' *South Asian Bulletin*, Vol.11 Nos.1 and 2, pp. 32-61.
- Pant, G.B., 1922, *The Forest Problem in Kumaun*. Allahabad.
- Pathak, A., 1994, *Contested Domains: The State, Peasants and Forestry in Contemporary India*. New Delhi: Sage.
- Pathak, S., 1985, 'Intoxication as a social evil: anti-alcohol movement in Uttarakhand,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 10 August 1985, pp. 1360-1365.
- Quigley, D., 1993, *The Interpretation of Caste*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Rangan, H., 1996, 'From Chipko to Uttaranchal: development, environment and social protest in the Garhwal Himalayas, India,' in R. Peet and M.J. Watts (eds.) *Liberation Ecologies: Environment, Development, Social Movements*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 205-226.
- Rangan, H. and Garb, Y., 1996, 'Conflicting histories: negotiating reality and myth around the Chipko movement'. Mimeo.
- Rawat, A.S., 1993, (ed.) *Indian Forestry: A Perspective*. New Delhi: Indian Publishing Company.
- Redclift, M., 1987, *Sustainable Development: Exploring the Contradictions*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Sachs, W., 1992, (ed.) *The Development Dictionary*. London: Zed.
- Saxena, N.C., 1992, 'Why did it fail?' *The Hindu Survey of the Environment*. pp. 35-38.
- Shiva, V., 1988, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*. New Delhi: Kali for Women.
- Shiva, V., 1992, 'Women's indigenous knowledge and biodiversity conservation,' in G. Sen (ed.) *Indigenous Vision: People of India's Attitude to the Environment*. New Delhi and London: Sage, pp. 205-214.
- Shiva, V. and Bandyopadhyay, J., 1986, *Chipko: India's Civilizational Response to the Forest Crisis*. New Delhi: INTACH.
- Shiva, V. and Bandyopadhyay, J., 1987, 'Chipko: rekindling India's forest culture,' *The Ecologist*, Vol.17 No.1, pp. 26-34.
- Singh, S.P., 1993, 'Controversies of Chir Pine Expansion in the Central Himalaya' in A.S. Rawat (ed.) *Indian Forestry: A Perspective*. New Delhi: Indian Publishing Company, pp. 307-314.



- 
- Tolia, R.S., 1994, *British Kumaun-Garhwal: An Administrative History of a Non-Regulation Hill Province. The Gardner and Traill Years (1815 A.D.-1935 A.D)*. Almora: Shri Almora Book Depot.
- Tucker, R.P., 1993, 'Forests of the Western Himalaya and the British Colonial System (1815-1914)' in A.S. Rawat (ed.) *Indian Forestry: A Perspective*. New Delhi: Indian Publishing Company, pp. 163-192.
- Weber, T., 1987, *Hugging the Trees*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Whittaker, W., 1984, 'Migration and agrarian change in Garhwal District, Uttar Pradesh,' in T.P. Bayliss-Smith and S. Wanmali (eds.) *Understanding Green Revolutions: Agrarian Change and Development Planning in South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 109-135.
- Women and Geography Study Group, 1997, *Feminist Geographies: Explorations in Difference and Diversity*. Harlow: Longman.