





Community Rights and Livelihoods in the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve, India



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Community Rights and Livelihoods in the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve

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with

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International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD)

Kathmandu, Nepal

August 2006

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Published by the

International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development
G.P.O. Box 3226
Kathmandu, Nepal

ISBN-10 92-9115-012-6

ISBN-13 978-92-9115-012-0

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Printed and bound in Nepal by

Hill Side Press (P) Ltd. ???
Kathmandu

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The affiliation and professional positions of the authors were those current at the time the study was conducted.

preface

Conflicts over natural resources in the western Himalayas of India are not a recent phenomenon. While earlier conflicts often resulted from contention over natural resources, for example when the state in its bid to exploit timber was resisted by communities as illustrated by the Chipko movement, a more recent source of conflict is linked ironically with the laudable motive of conservation. What remains common is the continuing challenge of maintaining sources of livelihood for local communities while preserving the environment.

This publication describes the problems faced by and reactions of the communities of the Niti Valley in the Nanda Devi protected area, as an example of this type of conservation-related conflict. The aim is to provide a basis for discussion and to understand better the impacts of and reactions to conservation activities. The publication was developed from one of a series of case studies prepared under the 'Participatory Action Research Programme on Equity and Policy in the Management of Common Property Resources in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan Region' project which was funded by the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC).

The Niti Valley came into international limelight as a result of the Chipko movement – when local communities resisted organised timber felling by the state – and became an exemplary story of a local initiative for conservation. Paradoxically, when the Nanda Devi area was notified as protected in 1982 to support conservation, these same communities lost much of their usage rights in their traditional commons. The price of conservation was mainly borne by the local communities, the same people who had raised awareness of the need for conservation, and this was mainly because of their inability to have their voices heard and valued in the proper quarters and to negotiate an equitable deal. Recent developments indicate a promising increase in awareness of the needs and role of the 'local guardians' of these natural resources, and the development of activities to redress the issues.

ICIMOD recognises equitable management of common property resources as a key in working towards sustainable development. Especially in mountain areas, where local communities depend intrinsically on natural resources, loss of usage rights can have dire consequences for a community and lead to structural changes in the traditional livelihood systems. It can also be self-defeating, as community management systems designed to ensure sustainable rather than destructive use of natural resources are destroyed, and uncontrolled 'illegal' use – as a matter of survival – becomes the norm. ICIMOD believes that a continuing dialogue amongst stakeholders is needed to address issues of equity and poverty for sustaining and conserving the natural resources of the Himalayan region. We hope that this publication will contribute to this dialogue.

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acknowledgements

We would like to thank ICIMOD and its Director General, Dr. J. Gabriel Campbell, for providing us with this unique opportunity to do a case study on the communities of the Niti Valley in the Nanda Devi protected area, and for enabling us to interact with people and organisations working on similar issues in the HKH region.

Special thanks to Dr. Anupam Bhatia, then Programme Manager of the Culture, Equity, Gender and Governance (CEGG) Programme of ICIMOD, for being such a perfect host making us comfortable in these multilingual gatherings. Thanks also to Mr. Suman Rai, Coordinator of Equity and Poverty at CEGG, for visiting Lata village and offering us this privilege to undertake an action research project on the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve. The study has allowed us to understand better the importance of equity in the development process.

We also gratefully acknowledge the financial support provided by the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC), which has allowed us to look into the impact of conservation and its restrictions on the communities around the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve and the communities' instinctive reactions to defend their own right to survival.

The authors also gratefully acknowledge Dr. R. K. Maikhuri for his kind permission to use tables and data from his various research undertakings; and Khila Bisht, Biju Negi, Rajiv Rawat, and Dr. Keith Bosak, for their valuable inputs in analysing and presenting the study's findings. We would also like to thank Ms. Radhika Gupta and Dr. Michael Kollmair of the present CEGG, for acknowledging the study's value and pushing for the publication of its findings; and the ICIMOD Information, Management Communication and Outreach Division (IMCO): Joyce M. Mendez and Dr. A. Beatrice Murray (Editors), Dharma R. Maharjan (layout design) and Asha Kaji Thaku (cover and other illustrations) for making this possible. Special thanks also to the people behind the Nanda Devi Campaign for giving us permission to use some of the photos of their recent activities from the Nanda Devi website. The other photos are ours.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the full support and cooperation of the local people in the communities of the Niti Valley, without which this study would not have been completed. Their case is a case in point of the practical realities and effects of conservation on people, communities, and livelihoods, and the need to rethink some conservation actions and provide mitigating measures to address the social and economic dislocation they bring on marginal mountain communities. This publication is a tribute to their heroism and dedication and a statement of support for mitigating the effects of conservation.

The Authors

executive summary

This discussion paper is about a unique physical and cultural landscape nestled in the northern part of the western Himalayas. The paper attempts to present the inside story of the people who inhabit this area and the complex web of issues they are entangled in. Their struggle is decades old and so are their vows. They are the people who live in the buffer zone of the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve (NDBR), located in the State of Uttarakhand in India.

As in many other protected areas, this region has witnessed severe and prolonged protests by the local community. Recently the protests in the NDBR have attracted wide attention. A number of national and international agencies have been observing keenly the recent sequence of events in the region. This Talking Points volume is being presented at a crucial phase in this struggle. The recently formed State of Uttarakhand has issued an order for the partial opening of the core zone of Nanda Devi for regulated tourism activities along the lines of community-based tourism. Though the demand charter of the local community is comprehensive, the opening of the core zone has changed the entire scenario. Now for the first time there are concrete opportunities for the local community to rejuvenate its economy. However, there are several strings attached to this package of opportunities. Skills, responsibilities, sustainability, management, and equity are some of the keywords that the community has to now understand and learn to deal with. This will be more challenging than the struggle itself.

This report is based on fieldwork and a review of the relevant literature. It discusses the history of the local community and browses through some of the salient features of the area, and focuses on the crux of the problem and the ways to resolve it. This analysis, it is hoped, will facilitate the campaign for the sustainable development of the region and may help in the promulgation of similar campaigns elsewhere.

acronyms and abbreviations

CPR	common property resource
IMF	Indian Mountaineering Foundation
IRs	Indian rupee
masl	metres above sea level
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
NDBR	Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve
NDNP	Nanda Devi National Park
NTFP	non-timber forest product

glossary

baisakhi	the harvest season, observed on the 13th of April each year
bari system	rotational duty of a family to take the lead on collective issues. The patterns of operation vary from village to village, and villages improvise on details according to their needs or the requirements of existing conditions
basant panchami	fifth day of spring in the lunar calendar
Bhotiya	a tribal community, mostly living in the highlands (Bhotiya communities are dominant in the Niti Valley)
gram pradhan	chairperson or head of the village common assembly
gram sabha	meeting of the elected village council
guchhi	mushroom (<i>Morchella esculenta</i>) belonging to the family <i>Helvellaceae</i>
jhapto cheeno	take by force
kharif	summer cropping season, usually during the rainy months from June to October
rabi	winter cropping season, usually during the dry season from November to May
ringal	thin cane used for making baskets, mats, and other household goods
Katyuri	Katyuri was the first historical dynasty during the 11th century AD; it ruled over unified Uttarakhand and left important records in the form of inscriptions and temples. In later periods, after the downfall of Katyuri, it is believed that Garhwal region was fragmented into more than 64 principalities.
maanis	unit of weight equivalent to two pounds
mahila mangal dals	village women's groups
Pandava	protagonists of the Mahabharata's war – they are five virtuous brothers fighting the evil Kaurava in the war between good and evil

pramukh	headman
scheduled caste	caste at the bottom of the social hierarchy and regarded as untouchable; the Indian Constitution allows the President to draw up the list of groups that constitute the scheduled castes; the government maintains these lists to protect and promote the interests of the scheduled castes.
Vanaadhikar	'Forest Rights' – an NGO in Uttarakhand advocating for people's rights over forest commons
van panchayat	community-based forest management legalised by the Kumaon Van Panchayat Rule 1931 following grievances by communities over their loss of usufruct, their legal right to use and derive profit from the forest provided that the forest itself is not injured in any way.
yuvak mangal dals	village youth groups

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Introduction

The ability to access and gain rights over the use of common property resources like pastures, forests, and water sources, is fundamental to sustaining livelihoods in most parts of the greater Himalayan region. Common property resource management regimes have existed over long periods with well-defined rules governing rights of access within and among communities. However, in most cases not all sections of a community or particular communities had equitable access and entitlements. Furthermore, the poorest and most powerless groups tend to depend disproportionately on local common property resources for their livelihoods, but are often in the weakest position in terms of securing access and benefit rights.

In 2001, ICIMOD initiated a 'Participatory Action Research Programme on Equity and Poverty in the Management of Common Property Resources in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas' in line with its mandate of pursuing the larger goal of equity and rights for marginalised peoples in the greater Himalayan region. Several case studies were undertaken focusing on access to different types of common property resources. The objective was to identify those groups that are most marginalised among users of common property resources in the region, and to make recommendations on policy aspects to enhance equity in the access to and management of common property resources. This publication is based on one of these case studies. It has been prepared in order to raise awareness for and stimulate discussion on a particular aspect of equity and access to common property resources: the impact of conservation measures on local communities.

Forests are a vital resource for the livelihoods of many communities living in the greater Himalayan region. Contention over access to forest resources has emerged historically in the form of powerful vested interests exploiting forests for their needs, but also in the approaches of the state to conservation – particularly in the reconciliation of people's needs with protected areas. This paper narrates and explores the struggle by the people of the Niti Valley in the state of Uttaranchal in India when they experienced losing their livelihoods following the notification of the Nanda Devi area in 1982 as a national park, and later as a biosphere reserve. It brings to light the complex web of issues that the communities living around the Nanda Devi National Park have had to grapple with in negotiating their rights with the state. Of particular interest is the impact of opening the core zone to restricted tourism activities in 2003 in response to protests over many years. What effect will this have in the long-term on traditional livelihoods, issues of equity and management, and finally sustainability and conservation itself? The passing of the Nanda Devi Declaration by the local people asserting their rights vis-à-vis external tour operators and affirming their own commitment to community-based management and equity symbolises the extent to which this community has found how to voice their needs and take control over their lives. The case study on which this publication is based was undertaken in a participatory process which allowed for the creation of a space in the advocacy campaign of the people of the Niti Valley to ensure analysis and monitoring of equity issues as an ongoing process. The Nanda Devi advocacy campaign has gradually matured to raise some fundamental issues by defining wilderness as a common property resource.

Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve timeline

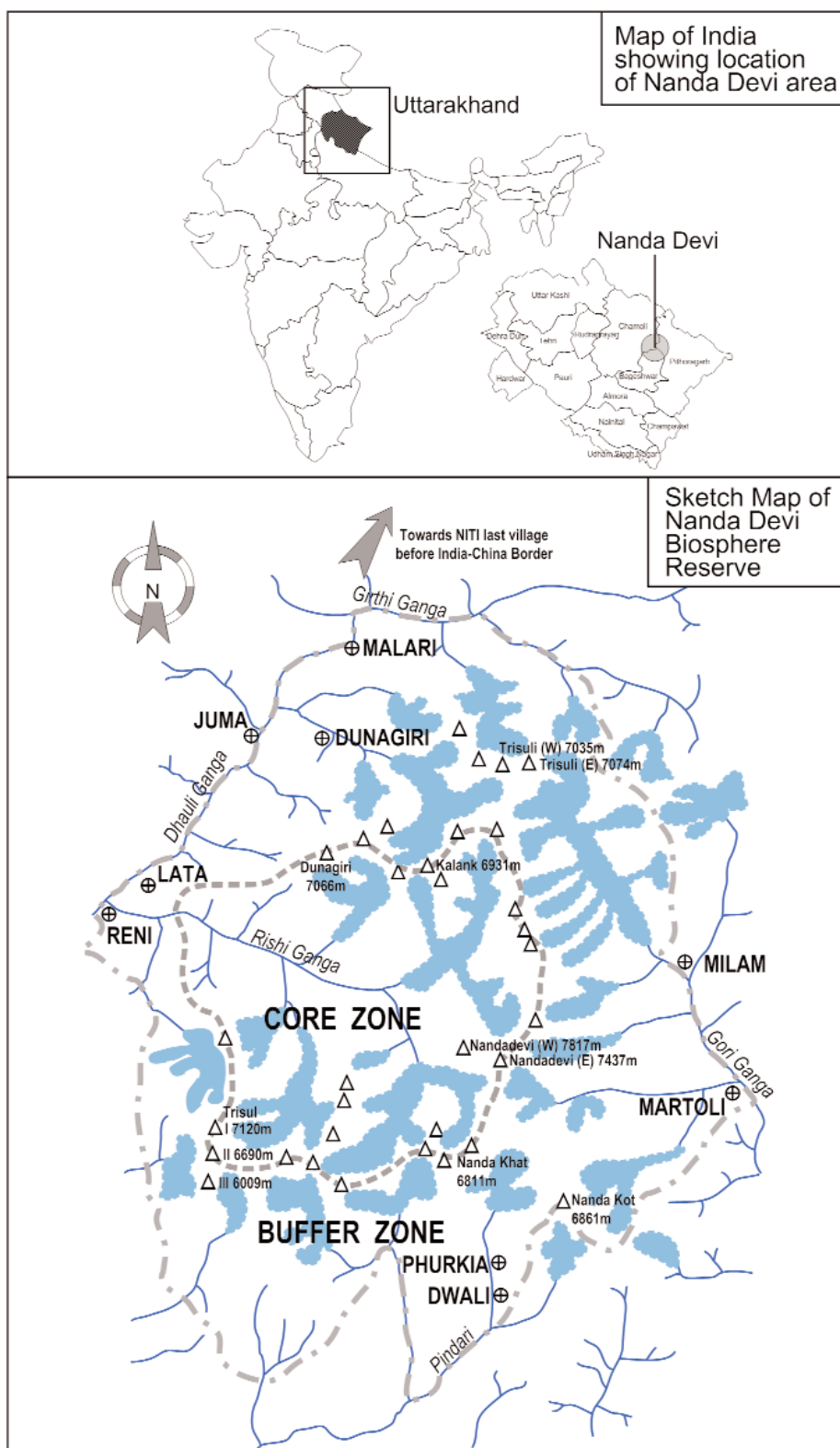
Since time immemorial, Nanda Devi has presided over the Uttarakhand Himalayas as its patron goddess and highest peak; the Nanda Devi Raj Jat pilgrimage is conducted in her honour every 12 years. Although Nanda Devi remains off limits to travellers and climbers, the local Bhotiya inhabitants graze their goats and sheep throughout the region while carrying on centuries old trade relations with Tibet.

1883	The first recorded attempt to enter the Rishi Ganga Valley at the base of the Nanda Devi peaks, the mountaineers are turned back by the precipitous gorge at the basin's entrance.
1934	Eric Shipton and H.W. Tilman discover a passage into the 'inner sanctuary' of the Rishi Basin.
1936	H.W. Tilman and N.E. Odell scale Nanda Devi for the first time.
1939	The entire Rishi Basin is declared a game sanctuary.
1962	The India-China border is closed indefinitely, affecting the trade and migration routes of the Bhotiya people. Locals turn to trekking and tourism for their livelihoods.
1974	Protests against commercial clearing of the forest and tree felling in Reni village launches the famous Chipko (tree hugging) movement. Fifty-year old Gaura Devi emerges as a feminist heroine by leading village women to defend their forest. Subsequently, women participate in overwhelming numbers in Chipko actions across Uttarakhand.
	Nanda Devi is opened to Western mountaineering, providing a short boom to the local economy. It becomes the second most popular destination in the Himalayas next to Everest. Lata village becomes a major departure point for expeditions.
1977	First reports of ecological damage due to the tourist trade prompt concern in environmental circles.
1982	The Nanda Devi sanctuary is upgraded to a national park. All treks, expeditions, and grazing are banned in the core area.
1988	The Nanda Devi National Park becomes the core area of the newly designated Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve, Man and the Biosphere Programme activities are launched to mitigate losses of surrounding communities from the closure of the core zone.
1992	UNESCO declares NDBR a world heritage site.
1993	An army-led team removes 1,000 tonnes of rubbish from the Reserve left behind by mountaineering expeditions.

Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve timeline (cont'd)

1998	Growing resentment over forest restrictions leads to a massive entry into the core area in protest against the government's indifference. This 'jhapto cheeno' (swoop and grab) movement emerges from the same villages that gave birth to the Chipko movement.
2000	NDBR is included in the new state of Uttaranchal, placing hope in ecotourism's potential as an economic pillar.
2001	The Indian Mountaineering Foundation is allowed to survey NDBR's potential for high-end tourism. Local villagers make the government consider community rights first.
	The Lata Village Council convenes a workshop in concert with its citizens, the village leadership, and allied grassroots organisations, and issues a declaration for community-based ecotourism and biocultural diversity conservation.
2002	A new state government is elected in Uttaranchal. The local MLA and tourism minister is defeated on account of dissidence in his own party on the Nanda Devi issue.
2003	New pro-people NDBR director, in consultation with community groups and activists, sets a new policy allowing regulated tourism with guaranteed community participation.
2004	Initiation of the first Annual Nanda Devi Women's Festival. Locals celebrate the 30 th anniversary of the Chipko movement The Nanda Devi campaign receives runner-up Conde Nast Ecotourism Award. Bali Devi attends UNEP 'Women as the Voice of the Environment' conference in Nairobi, the first Chipko woman activist to attend an overseas conference.
2005	Land is procured in Lata village for building a museum on biocultural diversity under the proposed Nanda Devi Education Trust.
2006	On 8 March 2006 the Nanda Devi Campaign launched its website www.mountainshepherds.com A US-based charity organisation, Winterline Foundation, comes forward to support training in basic mountaineering for 40 unemployed young people from NDBR and the setting up of a company for trained young people. Training in basic mountaineering at Nehru Institute of Mountaineering, Uttarkashi, is scheduled from 20 August 2006. The Nanda Devi Campaign will also select 17 women from all around the world to participate in the inaugural Nanda Devi Women's Trek, celebrating the partial opening of NDBR to community-based tourism.

Source: Adapted from the Nanda Devi Campaign, <http://nandadevi.prayaga.org>



Land and People of the Niti Valley

Topography

The Niti Valley lies in the Joshimath subdivision of Chamoli district in the state of Uttarakhand (formerly Uttar Pradesh), India, at an altitude of between 2,100 and 7,817 masl. The valley's major river is the Dhauliganga which flows south-southwest and has two main tributaries – the west-southwest flowing Rishiganga and the west flowing Girthiganga – with a confluence near the villages of Reni and Kailashpur. Upstream of Reni, the area is inhabited by a substantial tribal population, the Bhotiyas, with two main sub-tribes, the Marchha and Tolchha. The area falls within the buffer zone of the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve (NDBR). The core of the reserve is adjacent to the villages of Lata, Reni, Paing, and Tolma (see map opposite).

The entire valley falls in the Higher Great Himalayan physiographic domain. Near Lata, the river Dhauliganga meanders on a relatively flat plain; the stretch has good deposits of sand and gravel. Promising reserves of barite and copper have been traced about 16 km north-east of Malari near Barmatiya along the right bank of the Girthiganga. This mineralisation is also associated with lead, zinc, and antimony. There are several hot water sulphur springs in the valley near Bhavishyabadri, Tapovan, Saldhar, and Bhapkund.

The soils are of glacial and fluvio-glacial origin. The area remains under snow six months of the year, which influences the soil characteristics: rich in organic matter, but are only moderately productive because of the moderate depth of the soil column; the potassium content is relatively high. The soils are ideal for the cultivation of tuber crops like potatoes, as well as peas, legumes (rajmah), and staple cereal crops.

Villages

There are 24 villages in the Niti Valley upstream of Reni. With the exception of Bhalgaon, the villages are inhabited by members of the Bhotiya scheduled tribe. There are also a few scheduled caste families in some of the villages. In spite of its lost glory as a major trading centre, Malari village is still the largest summer settlement because of niche contractual and business opportunities available with security and development agencies. Most of the villages still carry out transhumance. While some of the winter villages are not far from the main villages and are located within the boundaries of the biosphere reserve, the villagers upstream of Juma migrate out of the reserve in the winter. This study was conducted with the communities that live throughout the year within the buffer zone of the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve.

Livelihoods

The centuries-old occupation of the Bhotiya community was trade with Tibet. Using pack goats as the means of transport they ferried goods from the plains to Tibet. The main occupation in the villages above Juma was trade, while the villages downstream assisted in trade. Villagers often worked as small businessmen or retailers. The villages above Juma (revenue area Malari) only grew summer crops, mostly cereals and pulses. In winter they migrated to lower areas. Villages downstream depended mainly on agriculture and animal husbandry, growing mainly cereals and pulses in summer, and wheat in winter. For many villages, sheep herding and woollen enterprises were the main occupation while the residents of Reni, Paing, and Jugju managed pack goats for the transportation of goods. The main exports were barley, jaggery (unrefined brown sugar made from palm sap), rice, and cloth. Imports included sheep, goats, salt, and wool. While trade continued, Malari village was a hub of activity. Some of the families from Malari settled in the lower altitude areas around Lata; they were welcomed while the resources were abundant, but the situation has changed considerably over the last decade. Similarly, the people of Bhalgaon, the only village of Gangadis (residents from the lower catchments), were invited to settle in the valley to perform religious ceremonies for the Bhotiyas. When the art of priesthood was gradually lost owing to the lack of patrons, these people also found themselves the victims of changed circumstances. Being non-tribals, they were not able to enjoy the benefits extended to the tribal communities.

With the closure of trade with Tibet after the Indo-China conflict of 1962, the Bhotiya community opted for other sources of livelihood. The pack goats were sold and the



One of 24 villages nestled in the Niti Valley

focus became sheep, woollen products, and agriculture. The growing popularity of the Nanda Devi Sanctuary as a mountaineering destination provided ample alternative employment opportunities for the villagers. This continued until 1982 when the area was notified as a national park with a complete ban on mountaineering and grazing in the core zone, which includes the Nanda Devi peak.

Cultural heritage and rituals of the Bhotiyas

The entire population in the Niti Valley is Hindu and the Hindu festivals are celebrated with great joy and ceremony. The main festivals are Basant Panchami, Baisakhi (Bikhoti), Nag Panchami (Fela Panchnag), Nanda Astami, and Dussehra (Durga Astami). The community has a strong belief in the importance of forefathers or ancestors ('pitra'). One important ritual is 'dharma', essentially welfare work conducted as a remembrance to departed souls. A primary form of dharma is the construction of resting places along the village route.

The main deity of devotion is the goddess Nanda Devi, with the Nanda Devi peak revered as a goddess by the entire Garhwal and Kumaon region. She is looked upon as Gaura, the wife of Lord Shiva, and is the chief patron of the local communities. The temple of Nanda Devi at Lata is the only major temple in the valley, believed to have been constructed during the Katyuri period. Folk tales suggest that the name Lata comes from Latu, the brother of Nanda Devi, and it is believed that the presence of the temple at Lata gives added blessings to the residents.

Table 1: Villages with winter migratory locations within the buffer zone of NDBR (Revenue area – Tapovan)

Village	Winter migration to
Reni	Same area
Murunda	Reni, Paing, Jua, Gwar
Paing	Same area
Lata	Lamtala, Bancheegaon, and Chiva
Jua Gwar	Same area
Jugju	Same area
Tolma	Gurmagwar, Suraithota
Bhalgaon	Same area; a few families go to Kurawa during 'Choumasa' (rainy season)
Suki	Talla Suki
Phagti	Pangrasu
Long	Markura (Sept.-Oct./March-April), Segari (Dec.-Feb.)

Table 2: Villages with winter migratory locations outside the NDBR (Revenue area – Malari)

Village	Winter migration to
Jumma	Kaleshwar
Kaga	Maithana
Garpak	Birhai, Pakhi
Dronagiri	Maithana, Pursari
Jelum	Nandprayag, Nengoli, Dedoli, Thirpak
Kosa	Tefna, Punkila
Malari	Dyuli, Balkhila
Kailashpur	Bajpur
Farkiya	Bejaar, Thirpak
Bampa	Chinka
Gamshali	Chinka
Niti	Bhimtala, Koudia

A special celebration, Lapsu or Lapsa, takes place at the beginning of the winter migration when the communities prepare to leave their dwellings in the higher areas. Idols, called 'murti', of village deities are taken in a procession from the village temple and settled in a house in the village. The headman and other senior members of the community host at least three *baris* or feasts for the entire village. The community bids adieu to the deity and vows to perform their rituals on their return to the land. The festival takes place at Malari, witnessed by the deity Dharma Danu (a 'pitra devta'), who makes a voyage from Jelum to Malari and back to Jelum. The ceremonial nature of the transhumance is more prominent among villagers who have migrated to the area. Other important festivals include the Pandava dance – a 15-day festival in August – and occasional performances of the hero of the land, Jitu Bagdwal. The village of Lata performs a ritualistic mask dance during the Baisakhi season, the period from mid-April to mid-May. Folklore, song, drama, and dance are an integral part of the festivals and lifestyle of the Bhotiya society, which are also marked by the consumption of traditional drinks (Purohit et al. 2002).



An all women festival dance

The indigenous management system

An indigenous system for the regulation and distribution of natural resources is still practiced in the Niti Valley. Embedded in the rituals of the goddess Nanda Devi, this system works through a socio-religious institution, ensuring participation of all stakeholders under an authority that everyone in the area respects. It works through the selection of a family made responsible for a fixed duration of time to call meetings on collective issues including distribution of resources. The term coined for this purpose is 'bari', meaning rotational duty of a family to take the lead on collective issues. The patterns of operation differ from village to village and villages

have further improvised on the system according to their needs and resource profile, but the institutional set-up and overall activities remain the same throughout the valley. The overall activities of the bari are:

- decisions related to religious ceremonies and collection of funds for these ceremonies;
- call for voluntary work such as construction of pathways and bridges, and cleanliness drives; and
- initiation and supervision of the distribution of hay collection areas for the winter.

In every village the selection of a family for the bari is done before the summer harvest during the occasion of Bhumyal Puja, a ceremony to offer prayers and offerings to Bhumyal Devta, the God of Earth. Harvesting starts after the Bhumyal Puja. The outgoing bari calls a meeting to select a new family to take on the responsibility. The selection is mostly done through a system of lottery among families who have not yet served their bari. Eligibility for participation is based on the payment of 'puja kar-dar' (tax for religious offerings) and involvement in the collective rituals dedicated to the goddess Nanda Devi and other gods.

There is a strong relationship between the location of villages and rights over the use of adjoining forests and rangelands. The settlement history of the villages and the rights of later immigrants also play an important role in defining their status. The sharing strategy in the bari system is village-specific. For example, in Paing the grazing areas have been categorised into accessible areas and areas forbidden to animals. The inaccessible areas are distributed equally among families for a period of five years for guarding or stewardship. The accessible areas are open for grazing. In Paing, the bari also calls for collective action in cases of suspicious activities observed as being carried out in their forests areas. Under such circumstances at least one person from each family is expected to join in the collective action, failing which a monetary punishment is meted on the family. It was through these collective actions that the villagers of Paing caught 14 armed poachers from Dharchula (Pithoragarh district) three decades ago. Again in 1992, collective village vigilance led to the spotting and arrest by the Forest Department of three poachers in the reserve forest. In 1999, village action helped to control a forest fire.

The collective nature of social work is also reflected on various occasions in the village of Paing. For example, during a marriage or any other major ceremony it is the duty of every family in the village to offer assistance in carrying supplies for the ceremony to the village. This also happens during the harvest season and in other matters of community interest.

In Pangrasu village, which was once a winter settlement and now functions as a permanent settlement because of close proximity to the road, grazing areas were traditionally distributed among families. Grazing is strictly prohibited in certain areas between May and November,



Chipko movement 30th anniversary logo

and allowed after hay has been harvested until March or April. During summer, the villagers of Pangrasu send their herds to the 'bugyals' (alpine meadows) of Long and Jelum where they have to pay grazing tax to the bari of the village. Families that have migrated but have paid the kar-dar tax are considered stakeholders, and one has to ask permission or buy rights for making hay in their allotted areas.

As in Pangrasu, some villagers from Long have settled in the winter settlements of Tamak and Segari. In Tamak, the hay-making areas are traditionally owned, but in the hamlet of Segari the areas are allotted every year. Prior to allocation, the hay-making areas are divided equally into the required number of shares and the allocation is done through lottery. The boundaries are redefined if the number of shareholders changes due to non-payment of kar-dar by some families, migration, or families having no animals. During the rainy season, most of the villages downstream send their animals to graze in the meadows of Long. At present, animals from Lata, Reni, Suki, and Bhalgaon use the meadows of Long for grazing during the rainy season. This is an opportunity for the village to charge grazing tax. The revenue earned goes to religious ceremonies devoted to the goddess Nanda Devi.

In the village of Lata, the bari system is more elaborate owing to the presence of the Nanda Devi temple and a long history of settlement and clan groupings. The village is settled along caste lines. There are four 'mohallas' or sectors belonging to the four castes in the village, with a clear division of responsibilities and stakeholder status in the bari system among castes. The names of the four mohallas reflect the original place or duty of the caste grouping. The first, Saina Patti, is the residence



The Nanda Devi temple in Lata village

of the Rawat caste. These were the 'malgujar' (rich and powerful families) of the village and presided over ritual ceremonies. The second is 'Paswa Patti' and belongs to the Butola caste – the custodians of the heritage of the goddess Nanda Devi. The third, 'Raifuria Patti', belongs to the Rana caste and bears the name of their original village. The Rana caste provides the pujari (priests) of the goddess. The areas of the scheduled caste lie some distance



Bhotiya woman and child

away from the main village. This caste also performs duties in the bari system. Previously a person was nominated from the scheduled caste families to act as 'paswan' or messenger of the goddess. His responsibilities included cleaning around the temple and announcing the various decisions of the village 'panch' (jury). He was entitled to two 'maanis' (about two pounds) of grain from each family every harvest season. The scheduled caste families are exempt from paying the kar-dar, but they are entitled to a share in the proceeds from the various village rituals. Under the strict caste system they are not allowed to enter the courtyard of the Nanda Devi temple.

One family from each of the upper caste mohallas is selected to function as bari. Thus, three families are routinely selected during the Bhumyal Pujan on a full moon ('purnima') day in May or June. The earlier practice was to select two panch from each of the three mohalla, decision making was done jointly and decisions were communicated and executed through the respective bari of the particular mohallas. The bari system is still functioning but the place of the panch has been replaced by collective decision making. The sphere of activities under the bari system is similar to that in other Bhotiya villages in the Niti Valley. In Lata, the areas for winter hay-making are allotted for three years. Plots of equal sizes are demarcated under two categories: accessible plots, and faraway plots, with each family getting two plots. However, there is subtle resentment among the 18 or 19 late settler families in Lata. Although they also pay the kar-dar and are included in the bari system, they have been allotted a separate area for distribution of grass. Families of the scheduled castes have also been provided with a separate area for 'ghas maang' (grass/fodder), and they also resent this because of the low productivity and quality of grass in the area. In fact, the entire summer settlement of the scheduled caste population in Lata is located on a landslide prone zone. In 1998, a severe landslide demolished a few houses and caused one death. Landholdings among this section of society are generally meagre and produce less compared to the landholdings of the upper castes.

The bari system is still the dominant institutional mode of management and conflict resolution in the villages of the Niti Valley. It ensures collective action on a wide range of issues. The seasonal construction of temporary bridges across the Dhauliganga to access hay-making areas, cleanliness drives, management of



Dorji

ceremonies, distribution of resources, and the rhythms of seasonal migration are all governed by ritualistic traditions and the built-in institution of the bari which manage them.

Trade with Tibet and transhumance were also based on sound community management strategies. Basant Panchami (spring) used to be the start of the community movement towards the summer villages. Basant Panchami is widely celebrated in Uttaranchal as the children's festival of 'Phuldei'. Children gather flowers from the forest early in the morning and lay them before every family's doorstep. After the spring festival of Phuldei, the villages between Lata and Long start preparations for moving to the summer villages. At the same time, traders belonging to the villages

upstream of Juma who migrate to lower areas in winter would embark on their first journey of the season. They would store their goods in the now vacant winter dwellings of the villages between Lata and Long and return to bring their families to their respective summer villages. Thus, the winter villages between Lata and Long were transformed into trade facilities during the summer. This synchronisation of movement also helped avoid direct contact between native livestock and other herds being brought up from further downstream. This proved to be a reliable method of stopping the spread of livestock disease.

The Chipko Movement and the Bhotiya Community



Some of the remaining living Chipko warriors, 2003

The Bhotiya woman enjoys far more equal status to the men than in any other part of Garhwal. This is evident in the participation of Bhotiya women in collective issues, both in action as well as in decision-making. Perhaps this is the result of the historical experience of the Bhotiya women in managing their households during the long absence of the men. The spontaneous action by Gaura Devi and her colleagues is one such story in the recent memory of the Bhotiya society. In fact, women are the most vocal contingent of the Bhotiya community in the recent phase of the struggle. Their concerns mostly focused around access to NTFPs from the core zone.

During the 1970s when the Forest Department supplied timber at subsidised rates to industry, a movement to save the forests started in the Garhwal (Guha 1989). The movement, called Chipko, was the collective response of the Garhwal mountain communities against the violation of their customary rights over natural resources by large-scale commercial interests. Resistance against commercial felling was organised under the leadership of Govind Singh Rawat, who at that time was the pramukh of the Joshimath Block. In the Niti Valley, issues of equity were raised with an emphasis on technological skills development for efficient resource use. Gadgil and Guha (1995) consider this a Marxist trend in the Chipko movement. Although,



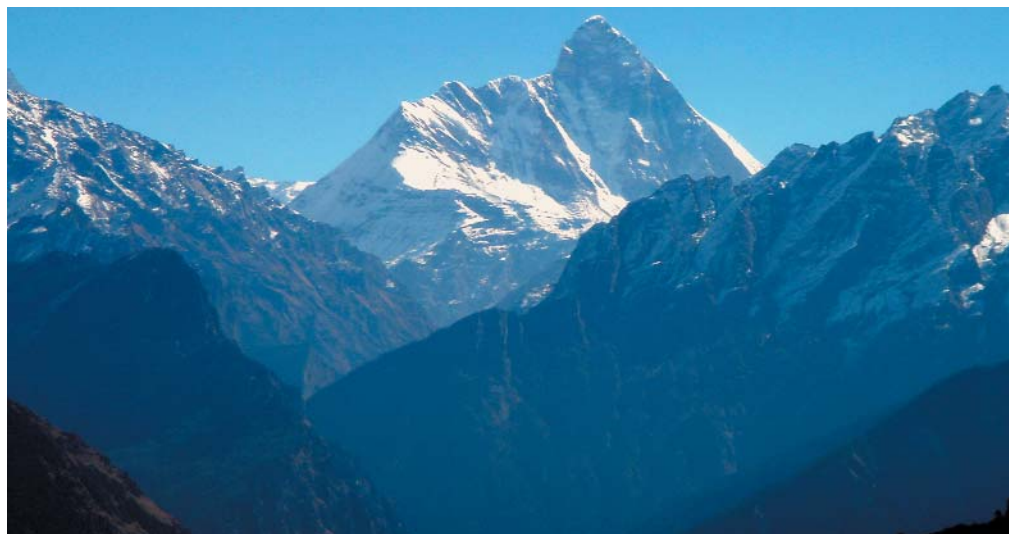
The Lata congregation at the Reni bridge, during the anniversary celebration of the Chipko movement.

the movement successfully stalled the large-scale felling of trees, it failed to consolidate and spread this Marxist line of thought. Chipko provided a new lease on life to the Gandhian movement, but it gradually degenerated into camps and personality cults. In the history of the Chipko movement, the Bhotiya community is best remembered for the courage of Gaura Devi and her associates who took spontaneous action and

refused to allow the labour force of forest contractors to enter the forests.

A somewhat utopian version of the Chipko movement was presented to the world. Both scholars and the local community have criticised this mystification of the movement. Bandyopadhyay (1999) emphasised the need to re-establish the realities of the movement and honour the selfless work of numerous lesser-known activists. The villagers of Lata are now calling for redefining Chipko from the community's perspective. In a certain sense, the movement also rebounded on its promulgators. The state became convinced that preservation and conservation were important, but the same people who successfully prevented tree felling for commercial purposes now found their own usage rights rescinded.

The Nanda Devi National Park



Nanda Devi, India's second highest peak, is also revered as a goddess and sanctuary by the Bhotiya people

Nanda Devi was declared a game sanctuary in 1939 on the recommendation of the British-American expedition of 1936, the first to reach the summit of Nanda Devi. The area became popular, especially post-independence, becoming a favourite destination for mountaineers. The inner area of the sanctuary is bowl-shaped, with only one access route from the village of Lata. The rim of the bowl is studded with peaks, making the area one of the richest in terms of wilderness. Relentless assaults on these peaks severely damaged the flora and fauna. As a result, the area was declared a national park from 6 November 1982. With the notification came a complete ban on tourism and grazing in the area. In 1988, the Nanda Devi National Park (NDNP) became the core zone of the newly designated Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve (NDBR) under the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme. The area was also declared a world heritage site for natural biodiversity in 1992.

The total area of NDBR is 5,861 sq km, with a core zone of 625 sq km. Twenty sq km of the core area is pasture and 65 sq km is forested; the remaining areas are rocky or snow-covered. During the notification process, a special meeting was held chaired by the then Chief Secretary of State for Uttar Pradesh. The impact of the restrictions came up for discussion during the meeting. Provisions for alternative grazing sites were suggested along with recommendations for an in-depth study to understand traditional grazing rights and concessions. The loss of employment opportunities in Lata and other adjoining villages were to be compensated for by generating employment opportunities in plantation and other forestry activities. The plantations were intended to fulfil the fuel and fodder requirements of the local communities. As a follow-up to the meeting, orders were issued for an immediate



Women descending the core zone

ban on tourism and grazing within the core zone.

Severe protests were staged against the notification and the seizure of traditional rights (Himachal Times 1983). Promises made during the notification to the communities affected were not fulfilled and resentment started

brewing among them. In the absence of impact assessment studies and clear rehabilitation guidelines, designing rehabilitation measures became the domain of divisional forest officers. Also as a result of the restrictions on tourism, expeditions began to focus on lesser peaks situated around the rim of the sanctuary. This provided a small income to the villages along the new routes, but the economies of the villages of Lata, Reni, Paing, and Tolma were severely affected. The villages not affected by grazing restrictions started collecting taxes to allow the cattle from affected villages to graze in their territories during the summer.

Impact of Restrictions on the Local Communities



Old woman adorned with silver and gold jewelry

The traditional indicators of prosperity in the Bhotiya community were size of herd, landholdings, and amount of jewellery owned. Ownership of pack goats indicated a family's strength in terms of revenue output from transportation of goods, while jewellery provided a measure of accumulated wealth. Bhotiya women wore jewellery made of silver coins and gold. With the closure of trade with Tibet, pack goats became redundant and were sold or slaughtered for food. Some herds were employed seasonally to transport expedition equipment and they managed to survive until the notification of the Park in 1982. After this, the large population of indigenous pack goats – a key component of domesticated livestock biodiversity – almost disappeared. The pack goat transport system consisted not only of goats, but also of special packing bags made of goat wool. Production, management knowledge, and skills associated with the making of these bags were an integral part of the system and have also been lost. With the loss of livelihoods, jewellery also found its way to the markets and today most gold and silver jewellery has been replaced by cheap imitations. According to data available at the Joshimath Development Block (2003), 820 families live below the poverty line in the villages of NDBR, defined as having an annual household income below IRs. 20,000 (below US\$ 500).

Some researchers have studied the implications of the ban and restrictions on the Bhotiya community in economic terms (Rao et al. 2000). Loss of revenues from NTFPs to village cooperatives was estimated at IRs 665,000 (US\$ 643.76 at IRs 10.33 = US\$ 1 in 1981). Damage to crops by wildlife was placed at US\$ 13,500 (at \$1 = IRs

In 1982, Sher Singh Rana of Lata village managed a family herd of more than 700 head of sheep in which his individual share was 125 heads. By 1988 he had only 80. He sold his stock and deposited the money from the sale in a local bank. Part of it was spent on the marriage of a younger brother, and part was used to pay off his loans. Between 1990 and 1993 Rana unsuccessfully ran a hotel at Surraithota. His next venture, a flour mill, also failed. He returned to his native village and in 1999 bought six head of sheep, which increased to 15 by 2003. He now manages his livelihood through agriculture, labour services, and the collection of 'guchhi' (Morchella mushrooms) from the forest.

Bharat Singh Rana of Reni had a similar story. He owned 60 head of sheep in a joint herd of 600; the herd provided employment for five people of the village. The core zone of the park was the traditional grazing area, and with the expansion of tourism in the sanctuary the people found occasional opportunity to earn as expedition porters. At the time the Park area was closed, Bharat Singh owned 150 head of sheep and goats. He opted to send them to the Malari-Lapthal rangelands adjacent to the Tibet border for summer grazing. This required applying for a special identification permit from the government and paying grazing taxes to the villages en route to Malari. Adjusting to the new rhythms as a result of the restrictions created problems. In 1995 more than 250 of the herd died of disease and he decided sell his stock. He then bought three mules and worked for two years ferrying goods to nearby villages. He has opened a shop in his village and calls it a 'passing time' activity.

40 in 1996). Maikhuri et al. (2001) estimated the impact of the restrictions on a wide range of activities. Based on a study sample of 419 households in 10 villages, the mean annual loss for each household was estimated as IRs 1285*, IRs 1195, and IRs 156, from damage by wildlife to food crops, fruit trees, and beehives, respectively. Estimated loss from restrictions on collection of medicinal plants for marketing was placed at IRs 1,587, and from the ban on tourism in the core zone area as worth IRs 7,904 in lost income opportunities. Dhan Singh Rana, a leader of the indigenous struggle against NDBR management, claims the damage to be much more comprehensive. Rana (2001) states that the 'padaos' (special resting places en route to foothill markets) have been used by the Bhotiya community for centuries. With the closure of trade with Tibet and the policy of discouraging sheep rearing, the community had also lost its 'haquo', its rights and stakes over these locations.

The impact of the closure of the national park to livelihood and grazing activities can be considered on the basis of the dependency of various stakeholders on the common resources of the area. Other consequences brought about by the formation of the park are summarised in the following section.

* In 2000, US\$ 1 = IRs 47 approx.

Impact on livestock economy

One after-effect of the Chipko movement was that herds of sheep and goats were seen as a threat to conservation. In earlier times, villagers downstream would welcome approaching herds and offer them food in return for recharging their fields with manure. This tradition has declined and it is more common for herders to be harassed along the route. The problem arose when the villages around the periphery of the core zone lost their traditional summer grazing lands in the zone and had to send their animals to areas belonging to other villages for grazing. They had to pay both grazing rights and rights en route. Of the 12,000 head of sheep and goats that families of 10 villages owned in 1970, only 2,000 remained in 1995 (Maikhuri et al. 2001).

Several case studies carried out in the area tell the same story: reduction of sheep and goat herds due to loss of grazing land has led to loss of traditional livelihoods and an increase in poverty.

In Paing, another village situated along the periphery of the core zone, the population of sheep and goats has declined from 6,000 to 200. An important aspect of traditional herd management was that it provided opportunities for boys and young men from poor families to work and even manage, after some years, to own their own herds. The responsibility demanded moving with the herds year round. In return they were provided food, bedding, pocket money, and annual leave of 30 to 45 days. Each year they were given 10 animals in return for the services they rendered. After working for a couple of years, their herds would increase along with their status.

With the collapse of the trade, these opportunities to accumulate a herd, increase livelihood opportunities, and elevate their status, have disappeared. Moving with the herds also required an in-depth knowledge of various grasses, grazing patterns, herd diseases, and good herd management. The Bhotiya community is gradually losing this indigenous knowledge. According to the villagers of Pangrasu, herding is no longer a desirable occupation in the villages.

Impact on agriculture

Agricultural practices in the NDBR are associated with transhumance, of which there are two predominant patterns. Villages like Lata migrate to nearby settlements within the biosphere reserve, where they own agricultural land and can harvest both summer and winter crops. Only one crop is grown in the higher altitude villages. A major impact on agriculture of the core zone's closure was a marked increase in crop damage from an increase in the zone's wildlife populations. Maikhuri et al. (2001) details crop damage in the villages after the national park was formed. The crops most affected were buckwheat, potato, and wheat, followed by amaranth and beans. Apple and apricot trees also became easy targets of wildlife animals, and beehives in the villages attracted bears that also attacked livestock. Each household used to own 15 to 20 beehives; now there are hardly any left. Average annual monetary loss per household from damage to crops, fruits, and livelihoods by wildlife was estimated to be more than IRs 2600 (Markhuri et al 2001). It was the

damage to homes and the attack on livestock in Lata that triggered the jhapto cheeno movement in 1998. The Lata villagers had asked to be compensated for the damage caused by wildlife animals of the Reserve. The Forest Department responded that the Reserve had no provision for damage caused by wild bears, to which the angered villagers responded by agitating for the restoration of their traditional rights.

Loss of the ethno-medicinal system

Centuries of dependence on nature led the Bhotiya community to evolve its own ethno-medicinal system. The Bhotiyas had a reputation for being able to cure a wide range of health-related complications using herbs exclusively from nearby areas. In a study of medicinal plant resources of the area, Nautiyal et al. (2001) observed that the local population of NDBR knew the medicinal properties of more than 100 plant species. Treatment for wounds, boils, muscular and rheumatic pains, headaches, gastric and liver disorders, eye problems, coughs, colds, and urinary problems were available within their ethno-medicinal system. The villagers of Lata, Reni, Paing, and Tolma collected these herbs from what is now the core zone of the NDBR.

A systematic approach was used in herb collection. Collectors collected in groups but not until after the celebration of Nanda Astami in August. Mostly, women did the collecting, staying for two or three days in the core zone, offering prayers to the goddess and fairies of the high meadows before starting their herb harvesting activities. The traditional ethno-medical knowledge was restricted to a few people who enjoyed high standing in the community. Sometimes they were specialists, for example, Gunchhi Devi (82) of Lata is considered the only person who can treat 'ghamjwar', a fever caused by excessive exposure to the sun at the onset of summer.

The traditional health care system had developed and grown with the collective survival strategies of the communities. The practitioners followed a strict welfare code. They did not charge fees for their services and always gave clear preference for emergencies over their own personal work. Since there were no monetary gains associated with the traditional health care service, the damage and loss cannot be quantified in economic terms. The impact needs to be understood in terms of the loss of indigenous medicinal knowledge and practice in the community.

Herbs and plants also constituted a significant part of the dietary habits of the Bhotiya community. Nautiyal et al (2001) found 16 plant species considered an integral part of the Bhotiya household consumption patterns. Herbs as NTFPs also contributed to the economy of the Bhotiyas. *Morchellae esculenta* and *Aconitum heterophyllum* were the most expensive NTFP items they traded. Collection of *Morchellae* has continued after notification of the core zone, but the trade is now conducted illegally – with middlemen making the most profit out of it.

Cultural loss

The core zone contained places of ritual importance for the community and these became inaccessible even to them when the restrictions were imposed. For the residents of Lata, two places in the core zone had particular religious significance

Sureshi Devi, 62, a woman of a scheduled caste from Lata is a traditional health practitioner with a large client base in the Niti Valley. Most of the herbs she uses in her medications were collected from the Dubbal Ghati area in the NDBR core zone. With the ban on collection of herbs, Sureshi Devi has been considerably restricted in preparing the wide range of medications she used to prepare. She now works only with herbs available in the Lata Van Panchayat area. When asked, Sureshi Devi describes with pride her being a traditional health practitioner. The scheduled castes have very limited opportunities to interact on an equal basis with the upper castes, yet the knowledge of traditional health care which she has learned from her mother has enabled her to build a client base from the Niti Valley to Nanda Prayag, some 100 km from Lata. She is understandably critical of the restrictions and could not understand the logic behind them. After the restrictions were implemented, there had been an increase in dependence on allopathic medication.

Khem Singh Rana of Reni, 65, started his career in 1965 as a high altitude porter earning a daily wage of IRs 7. At the time of closure of the NDBR he was earning well through a number of tourism-related activities. Apart from being a partner, he was one of the 'mates' in the area employing porters for expeditions, using his herd to transport goods in the core zone, and earning handsome commissions. The closure of the Reserve came as a shock for hundreds of people like Khem Singh Rana who were solely dependent on the tourism business. Within two years of the ban, he was forced to sell some of the family's jewellery to be able to continue to send his children to school.

Kundan Singh, 48, of Paing tried to explore opportunities in other areas where mountaineering was open. He worked in Uttarkashi and went to Kashmir in search of work but finally decided to return to his native place. Around 80% of families are estimated to have suffered severe economic hardships with the ban on tourism.

for rituals dedicated to the puja of Nanda Devi during Nanda Astami, which takes place in August. The villagers of the area offer Brahma Kamal (*Saussurea obvallata*) flowers to Nanda Devi. The practise in Lata was to offer puja to Dubri Devi (goddess of grass) at Dubbal Ghati. Next, puja was offered to the swords of the god Latu, which were placed at Donidhar near Dharansi. Only after these prayers were performed were the flowers collected for the Nanda Astami celebrations. Closure of the core zone meant these rituals could no longer be performed, and since then the swords of Latu have been missing. The concerns raised by the Chief Secretary of Uttar Pradesh regarding the impact on local communities were not given consideration.

Loss of income from tourism

The closure of Nanda Devi for tourism was the severest blow to the economy of the region. Tourism used to be the main occupation of the villagers of Lata, Reni, Paing, and Tolma from early May to November. Tales like the box stories on the previous page are common. The estimated loss of annual income to the local people of NDBR is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Annual income from tourism before the establishment of the NDBR		
Employment	1962-1971	1972-1981
Employment (days per household per year)	1,156	1,264
% of people engaged as porters	78	85
% of people engaged as guides	22	15
Annual income to villages located at trek points* (IRs per household per year)	10,829	22,342
Average annual income to buffer zone village communities** (IRs per household per year)	7,823	7,904
Source: Maikhuri et al (2001)		
*Mean of four villages, Lata, Reni, Paing, and Tolma		**Mean for all ten villages studied
IRs 7.50, IRs 8.50 = US\$1 in 1971 and 1981, respectively		

All of the stakeholders interviewed including the local community and NDBR management and staff believed that the local people had suffered a loss of benefits after the restrictions. NDBR officials, however, consider the loss adequately compensated for through various eco-development schemes and the distribution of improved stoves and cookers (Rao et al. 2000). When interviewed, the men and women of the community cited different aspects of benefit loss suffered as a result of the restrictions. The men cited the loss of economic opportunities as the most severe loss while the women were more concerned about the loss of subsistence. The results correlate with the findings of Rao, as a majority of the women interviewed stressed the importance of various NTFPs in their daily lives. The scheduled caste families had another concern. According to one villager, there was sufficient cash flow within the community when the area was open for tourism and it was easy for a poor family to borrow money for a short time. This source of cash dried up with the notification of the Park.

The scheduled caste community was the main service provider under the traditional set up. They worked as tailors, produced agricultural implements as blacksmiths, made baskets from ringal, and occasionally worked as farm labourers. Lata village had traditional rights to cut wood from the forest of Nilori-Paing, and scheduled caste families used to cut wood there for the production of agricultural implements. This source of livelihood came to an end with the notification of the Park. The right to cut ringal for basket-making was revoked after the jhapto cheeno movement of 1998. For agricultural implements, the villagers now had to go to Dhak Tapovan or Bargaon where the particular wood they require is available and where there are not very many restrictions.

Conservation Policy and Livelihoods

Uttarakhand, now Uttaranchal, has a long history of forestry-related conflicts. Most of the mass movements in the region in the 20th century have been related, one way or the other, to forestry issues. Government control over the forests of the region began in the last two decades of the 19th century. From 1911-1917, settlement in the hills was quite extensive and all land except that which was cultivated was brought under the control of the Forest Department. This resulted in large scale protests by the mountain community and forced the government to set up a forest grievances committee to mitigate the situation. The reclassification of forests and the establishment of van panchayats in 1931 followed as a result of these movements (Ballabh 1993). Prior to colonial intervention, each village had its own defined territories of forest and an indigenous system to regulate resource use. In the post-independence period, the community institutions had been weakened and, as elsewhere, indigenous practices of conservation and the need of communities for common property resources tended to be undervalued. In the case of Nanda Devi, the area was notified as a sanctuary in 1939. It was declared a national park in 1982.

The traditional alpine meadows of Lata and Paing villages became part of the Park. For Lata, the worst blow was the inclusion of the Dharansi area in the Park's core zone. This changed the resource-rich profile of these villages to resource-poor. In 2004, Jayal who was instrumental in the formation of the Nanda Devi National Park in 1983, had suggested safeguarding traditional rights by shifting the core area further beyond the Dibrugheta area. The Forest Department launched a series of compensatory schemes, but inherent problems in the design of the compensation package, according to the ex-gram pradhan of Lata, created a new vested interest group in the form of petty contractors, who collaborated with the department in siphoning off funds for other uses, fragmenting the society. The first Biosphere Management Plan for NDBR was formulated in 1993. Of the annual planned budget of US\$ 190,000, 58% was allocated for salaries and facilities for the staff, compared to 21% for eco-development, and 11.8% for research and education (Mohan 1993). Maikhuri et al (2000) have indicated the legal emphasis of the NDBR management plan, which paid little attention to the livelihoods of the local communities. There was resentment against the national park as early as 1987, when representatives from the villages of the Niti Valley conducted a large meeting at Reni. The agenda of the meeting was the function of the Forest Department, the increasing wildlife menace, rural unemployment, and the collection of NTFPs. This was followed by a series of meetings in the villages.

The compensation package provided uniform relief to the villages in the buffer zone, regardless of the impact on their livelihoods as a result of NDBR's notification as a national park. This infuriated the villagers of Lata who were the worst hit. They attempted repeatedly to convince the biosphere reserve management of their conditions and the need to reassess their particular situation. But the management gave no indication that they understood. This led to the refusal of the village to accept the limited compensation provided by the department. The non-cooperation

movement started by the people of Lata in 1995/96 further prompted the department to divert funds to the less affected and more cooperative villages.

In 1998, Lata started a 'jhapto chheeno' movement and sought cooperation from the entire Niti Valley. A minor issue triggered the movement. The Forest Department refused to pay compensation for livestock killed by wild bears, stating that there was no provision for killings by herbivorous animals and indirectly suggesting that the killings were caused by a leopard rather than a bear. This angered the villagers who actually experienced the bear menace.

The post-Chipko phase had led to a deep sense of frustration amongst local activists who had played an important role in the earlier movement. They realised that issues of equity and community involvement and the demands of the movement had taken a back seat, while a eulogised image of Chipko had taken over, which served the interests of an emerging group of environmental conservationists.

Chipko veterans like Govind Singh Rawat had, since 1987, been criticising both the conservation policy of the government and the failure of the Chipko movement to consolidate the stakes of the community in natural resource management. Matters came to a head and hundreds of villagers entered the restricted core zone of the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve on 15 July 1998. This forced entry was a symbolic assertion and reclamation of their traditional rights. The state government deployed armed police at Lata Kharak, but they were later withdrawn. Jhapto cheeno served as a major landmark in the conflict between NDBR and the local communities and was, in a way, a natural progression or rather completion of what had been left unfinished by the Chipko movement. The wider coverage of the jhapto cheeno movement helped in polarising the pro-people activists and groups, which eventually emerged as more organised under a unified advocacy campaign.

From Confrontation to Conflict Resolution

The period 1998-99 witnessed resentment and protests in most of the protected areas in Uttarakhand. There were rumblings in Govind Pashu Vihar, Rajaji National Park, Binsar Sanctuary, and the Askot Musk Deer Sanctuary. Although the communities in each area were protesting, there was no linkage or cohesion among the various groups. A meeting was organised in 1999 at Dehradun to understand the issues of protected areas as part of a case study being conducted by social activist Hem Gairola. Gram pradhans, block pramukhs, and social activists from some of the protected areas in Uttarakhand attended the meeting. The community representatives sought to establish a common platform for addressing their problems; it was decided not to rush into institution building but to continue with interactive meetings and let the institutional structure evolve from the grassroots.

In June 2000, an extended meeting of representatives from all the protected areas in what would become Uttaranchal was organised at Mussoorie. The meeting culminated in the formation of Vanaadhikar, an organisation of the representatives of protected areas in Uttarakhand. The NGO, Janadhar, took on the responsibility of running the secretariat of Vanaadhikar. On behalf of the NGO Network, 'Alliance for Development', consensus emerged on the following issues.

- The Alliance for Development agreed to support and empower the grassroots leadership in addressing the forestry issue rather than the Alliance taking the lead in the process.
- Greater interaction and experience sharing was needed among activists and social workers of the protected areas.
- Vanaadhikar agreed to strive for community rights over natural resources while creating a pro-active space for local communities in the conservation of biodiversity.
- Conservation and community rights would be included in the gram panchayats' agenda.

The gram sabha of Lata acted on the recommendations and passed a set of rules for the conservation of biodiversity in the area within its jurisdiction.

On 9 November 2000 the new state of Uttaranchal was formed from the hill districts of Uttar Pradesh (the Kumaon and Garhwal divisions or Uttarakhand). The creation of Uttaranchal was a major political development in the region; people began thinking of working towards fulfilling their local aspirations. Nanda Devi became a priority issue for the new state government, which in 2001 assigned a team from the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) to enter the core zone to explore and assess the potential of reopening the park for tourism. This team refused to agree to or accept the rules of the gram panchayat of Lata, which led to a confrontation. This was not just a confrontation between a committee of the Ministry of

Environment and Forests, State Government of India, and the gram sabha of Lata, but also between some of the renowned mountaineers of India and their former porters. In the ensuing debate, the gram sabha of Lata emerged as a legitimate institution for biodiversity conservation.

Prior to the IMF controversy, the local people had focused their efforts on the restoration of their traditional rights and opening the core zone for tourism. However, they realised that in the new initiative travel agents from outside had intended to bypass them. They realised they needed an impact assessment of the restrictions and a definition of the equity and rights of the local communities in relation to the emerging tourism business. This led to the Nanda Devi Declaration of 14th October 2001 (see Annex) and publication of the 'Sangarshnama', detailing the local history of the post-Chipko events. The gram sabha of Lata, in collaboration with the Alliance for Development, organised a national workshop on community-based conservation and ecotourism and formulated a plan for community-based tourism.

In 2002, a new state government was elected in Uttaranchal. Various factors, including the Nanda Devi controversy, prompted some changes in the elected representatives, and a new 'pro people' director was appointed to head the NDBR.

In 2003, the state government issued orders for the partial opening of the Nanda Devi National Park core zone for limited ecotourism activities. The government order specifically stressed ecotourism and involvement of the local communities. With this, the demand of the local communities was met at least partially, although a large part of the community's agenda remains unanswered. The level of economic damage as a result of the creation of the protected area is becoming clearer from the various impact assessment studies and is likely to become a contentious issue. The Forest Department believes that the demands of the local communities have been adequately addressed and that they will benefit from the planned ecotourism activities of the department. However, the gram sabha of Lata, along with activists disenchanted with the post-opening process, have decided to carry on their struggle and advocacy efforts.

The major factors leading to the opening of the park were:

- establishment of the issue through a sustained struggle by the people of the Niti Valley;
- formation of a separate mountain state of Uttaranchal, which was also a result of a long struggle by the mountain communities;
- presence of a comparatively more sensitive state bureaucracy with the deputation of sincere forest officers to the posts of director and deputy director of the NDBR;
- role of advocacy groups in providing backstage support to the local leadership and acting as interface during the crucial phase of the negotiations; and
- publication of impact assessment studies by the scientists of GB Pant Institute of Himalayan Research & Development.

Among other activities the gram sabha of Lata organised and celebrated the 'Republic Day of India' as a women's festival. On the occasion, the gram sabha of Lata honoured traditional medicine practitioners, folk musicians, and famous guides and mountaineers of the area. The emphasis was on conserving traditional knowledge and skills of the community (Gusain 2004). Another development was the people's collective decision to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the decisive action by Gaura Devi and 26 other women of Reni on the 26th of March 2004.

In 2002, the Alliance for Development participated in ICIMOD's workshop on 'Equity and Poverty in the Management of Common Property Resources in the Hindu Kush Himalayas'. The study on which this publication is based was conducted as part of ICIMOD's research initiative. The study provided a clearer understanding of the traditional management systems and the nature of the inherent inequities in the traditional system. While the issue of equity was present in the people's agenda prior to the ICIMOD research programme, it was not well defined. The present study, conducted in association with some of the local activists, allowed for the creation of space in the advocacy campaign to ensure analysis and monitoring of equity aspects as an ongoing process. The crucial factor that remains is institutionalising equity within its community-based institutions.

The Nanda Devi advocacy campaign has gradually matured to raise some of the fundamental issues by defining 'wilderness' as a common property resource. Rana et al. (2003) argue that wilderness is the combined impact of natural resources and unique geographical location. Mountain communities own the forests in the form of van panchayats or village commons, and the wilderness of the area should also be considered from a tourism perspective as a common property resource. The argument stresses the need to consider mountain communities as stakeholders and not mere beneficiaries in mountain tourism.

After 2001, the Nanda Devi process was publicised through various media and platforms and began attracting worldwide attention, particularly after the initial postings on the 'Mountain Forum' website the same year (www.mtnforum.org). As a result of this, a number of researchers and volunteers have become associated with the Nanda Devi movement and have helped in raising the concerns of the Bhotiya community at various national and international fora. The Association of the Alliance for Development, helped by ICIMOD's 'Equity and Poverty' Programme, added a valuable dimension to the movement in 2003 by establishing a permanent presence on the Internet with the creation of the web site <www.nandadevi.prayaga.org>. The website has become a platform for the convergence of community-based conservation campaigns in Uttaranchal.

Miles to Go



A recent women's gathering

With the opening of the Park to ecotourism, the Forest Department has taken the lead role in the Nanda Devi area. Although laudable, the approach fails to build upon the gains achieved from the struggle of the local people. During the course of the advocacy campaigns, a conscious effort was made to steer the debate on pro-conservation lines, but the post-opening phase has upset the momentum a little. The Bhotiya community, with its rich socio-cultural heritage, and the glorious history of the Chipko movement still needs to gain recognition as the prime stakeholders in an exemplary participatory ecotourism model.

The Nanda Devi people's campaign proposed an extended basic mountaineering training for the local youth at the Nehru Institute of Mountaineering, Uttarkashi, to enable the youngsters to become effective trekking and mountaineering guides and other service providers. There are dissenting voices, however. Griesbaum (2003) observed that promising young people a prosperous future and giving them minimal training will not improve their chances for a better life unless they are entitled to share the control of resources and the necessary human capital. Similarly, Bosak (2004) considers the success of community-based tourism to be crucial in both the conservation efforts and in safeguarding the livelihood rights of local communities.

A number of factors favour the Nanda Devi campaign, which indicates its potential to emerge as a role model for the Himalayas. Prominent among them is that there is local support for the sustainable management of natural resources. All the ingredients for making an amiable solution are available at the regional level. What is missing is the convergence of efforts. This can only be achieved by understanding

rural communities as intelligent living systems, and providing space for a level playing arena.

Postscript

The Nanda Devi campaign has made considerable progress in 2005/2006. As part of partially opening the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve to ecotourism and celebrating International Women's Day in March 2006, the campaign launched a five-years-in-the-making inaugural women's trek with a special invitation to the world's women to join this historic journey. The Devi Trail, as the trek is referred to, will take the inaugural women trekkers not only to breath-taking vistas, landscapes, and biological diversity near the Nanda Devi area, it will also involve them in visits to the villages and acquaint them with the stories and social movements of the region's unique trans-Himalayan peoples.

This is an example of the sort of path-breaking ecotourism model that the campaign has, over the years, worked towards. Starting from a simple email advertisement on the Mountain Forum, and later an invitation announced at the Nanda Devi campaign website, www.nandadeviprayaga.org, the invitation has received applications to participate from women across the globe. The selection process has been completed and seventeen applicants from students to doctors, journalists, and tour operators from places as diverse as Taiwan and India, Canada, USA, and Nepal, will participate. The women on this inaugural trek will also form part of the product development team which will help Mountain Shepherds, a company organised to promote community-based tourism in the Nanda Devi area, put together a commercial version of the Devi Trail. The women's trek also commemorates the 30th anniversary of Devi Unsoeld's untimely passing near the summit of Nanda Devi as part of an Indo-American expedition that ascended the difficult Northwest Face-North Buttress of the area for the first time in 1976. The daughter of legendary mountaineer Willi Unsoeld, 22-year-old Devi had harboured ambitions to climb her namesake, but she was struck by a fatal stomach ailment before the final ascent. Five years later, Rekha Sharma, Chandra Prabha Aitwal, and Harshwanti Bisht became the first women to successfully reach the mountain's summit.

Several other packages and interventions are in the pipeline. With support from the Winterline Foundation, a USA-based nonprofit organisation, the campaign is also organising a month-long training course in basic mountaineering for 40 unemployed young people of the area, to be selected in consultation with the gram sabhas of the villages around Nanda Devi. Training will commence in mid-August 2006 and will include, in addition to basic mountaineering, additional inputs on bio-cultural diversity conservation and catering to the special needs of senior citizens and the physically challenged. It will be conducted by the prestigious Nehru Institute of Mountaineering, in Uttarkashi. The trained young people will first work on probation with Mountain Shepherds, but on successful completion of their probationary period, will be offered partnership in the company. They will manage the inaugural Nanda Devi Women's Trek.

With these interventions the Nanda Devi campaign is poised to evolve into a operation that will test the boundaries of genuine community-based participatory ecotourism.

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The Nanda Devi Biodiversity Conservation and Ecotourism Declaration

Gram Sabha Lata, Chamoli, Uttaranchal
October 14, 2001

Today on the 14th of October, 2001 in the courtyard of the temple of our revered Nanda Devi, we the people's representatives, social workers and citizens of the Niti Valley, after profound deliberations on biodiversity conservation and tourism, while confirming our commitment to community based management processes, dedicate ourselves to the following:

1. That we, in accordance with the resolutions adopted by the World Tourism Organisation's Manila Declaration 1997 on the Social Impact of Tourism will lay the foundation for community based tourism development in our region.
2. That in our region we will develop a tourism industry free from monopolies and will ensure equity in the tourism business.
3. With the cessation of all forms of exploitation like the exploitation of porters and child labour in the tourism industry, we will ensure a positive impact of tourism on the biodiversity of our region and the enhancement of the quality of life of the local community.
4. That in any tourism related enterprise we will give preference to our unemployed youth and underprivileged families; we will also ensure equal opportunities for disabled persons with special provisions to avail such opportunities.
5. That we will ensure the involvement and consent of the women of our region at all levels of decision making while developing and implementing conservation and tourism plans.
6. While developing appropriate institutions for the management of community based conservation and eco tourism in our area we will ensure that tourism will have no negative impact on the biodiversity and culture of our region, and that any anti-social or anti-national activities will have no scope to operate in our region.
7. We will regulate and ensure quality services and safety for tourists and by developing our own marketing network will eliminate the middlemen and endeavour to reduce the travel costs of the tourist
8. While developing the tourism infrastructure in our region we will take care of the special needs of senior citizens and disabled persons.

9. As proud citizens of the land of the Chipko Movement we in the name of Gaura Devi will establish a centre for socio-culture and biodiversity, for the conservation and propagation of our unique culture.
10. We will ensure the exchange and sharing of experiences with communities of other regions to develop eco tourism in accordance with the Manila Declaration of 1997 in those regions.
11. Acknowledging the spirit of Agenda 21 of the Earth Summit, Rio 1992, the Manila Declaration on the Social Impact of Tourism 1997 and the International Year of the Mountains and Eco Tourism, 2002, we will strive for biodiversity conservation and an equitable economic development within the framework of the Constitution of the Republic of India.
12. Today on October 14, 2001, in front of our revered Nanda Devi, and drawing inspiration from Chipko's radiant history we dedicate ourselves to the transformation of our region into a global centre for peace, prosperity and biodiversity conservation.

About the author

Dr. Sunil Dutt Kainthola has a Ph.D. in experimental psychology. He worked for some years as a senior research officer with the National Institute for the Visually Handicapped in India, developing psychometric assessment tools and intervention programmes for visually handicapped preschool children. His college associations with the youth movement in India resurfaced in 1994 and led him to joining the Uttarakhand Separate Statehood movement. He was also closely associated with the Uttarakhand Sanskritic Morcha, a confederation of cultural and literary organisations. In 1995, together with some comrades, he established Janadhar, an umbrella organisation working for the development of remote mountain communities, and in 1998 he helped form the Alliance for Development, a research and advocacy network to address some of the critical development issues in the mountain areas of Uttarakhand. At present, Kainthola is the Secretary of Janadhar and convener of the Alliance. His areas of interest are research and activism on issues like conservation and development-induced displacement in mountain areas, community-based conservation, equity in the upcoming ecotourism business in the NBDR, gender specifically intervention against trafficking, disability management, entrepreneurship, and networking.

The picture of village women hugging forest trees to prevent felling by state-organised timber concessionaires captured the world's imagination in the early 1970s, and etched a permanent place in the history of the conservation movement. A decade later, the very communities where this conservation activism – the 'Chipko movement' – had its roots lost much of their access rights to their traditional commons in the name of conservation.

This Talking Points document revisits these communities three decades after their successful struggle – and describes in concrete figures and terms some of the realities and impacts of conservation on their lives and livelihoods. What the authors describe echoes the situation in many conservation areas around the world: well-meaning conservation measures have failed the very communities that have preserved the landscape down the centuries. In Nanda Devi there are signs that the plight of the local communities has been recognised, and changes are being introduced to redress the balance – but much remains to be done. This book hopes to contribute to the discussions on the special needs and moral rights of communities in conservation areas, and help governments and policymakers to realise the need to integrate communities and local needs into conservation plans.

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ISBN-10 92 9115 012 6
ISBN-13 978 92 9115 012 0