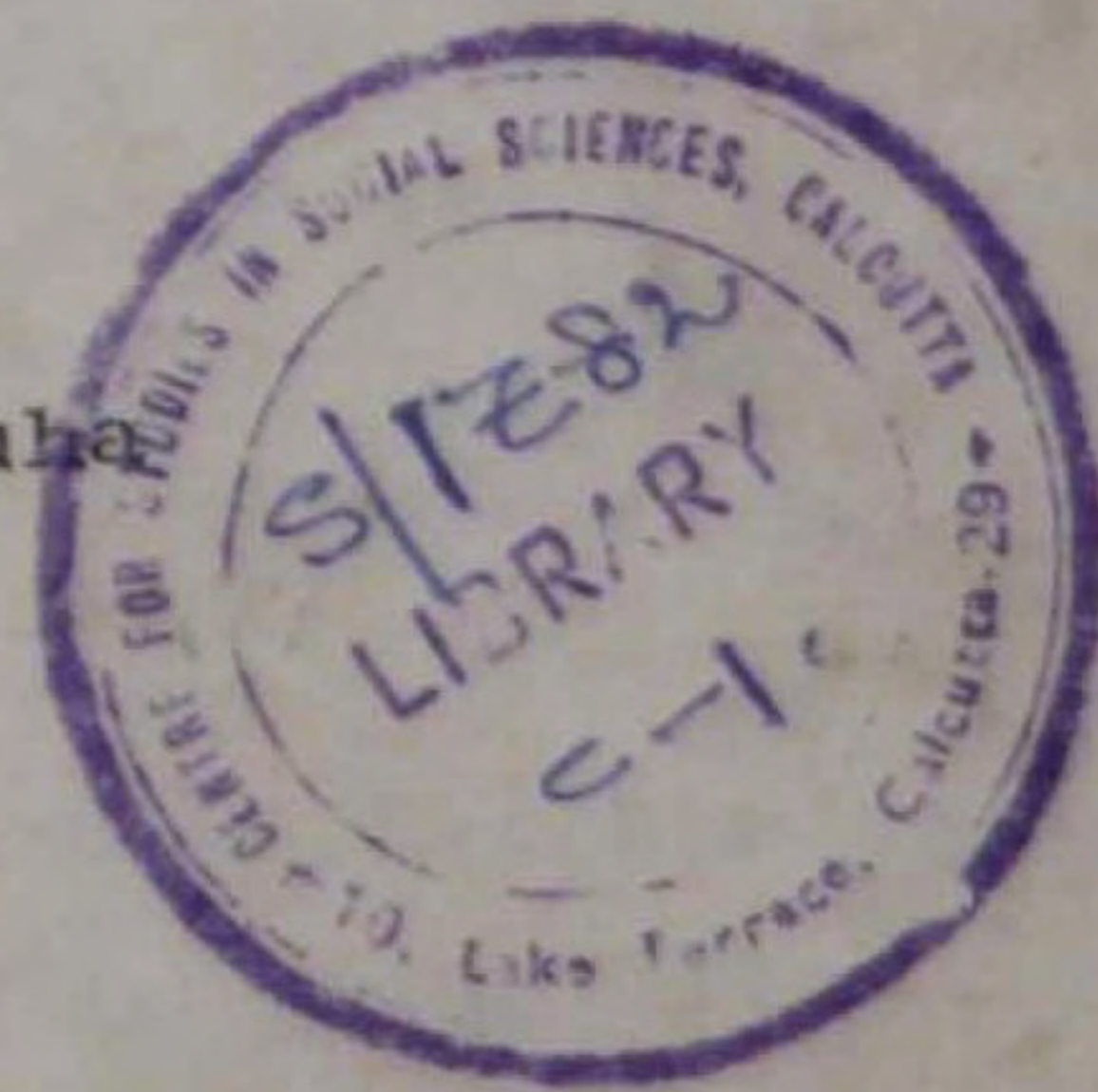


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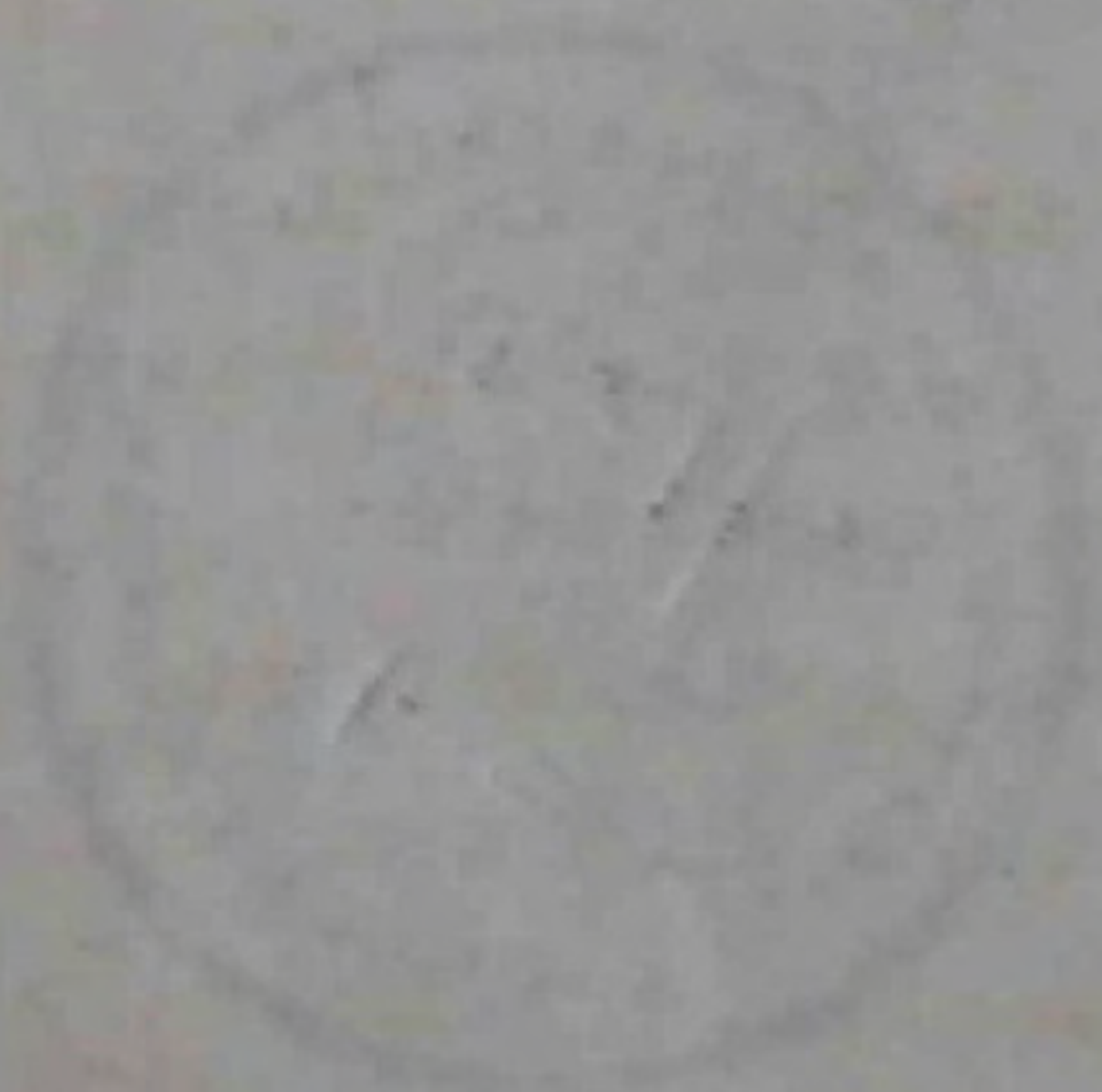
FORESTRY AND SOCIAL PROTEST IN BRITISH KUMAUN,  
c. 1893-1921

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INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the trajectory of social protest in British Kumaun during the early decades of this century. Since 1973, Kumaun and the adjoining area of Garhwal has been the epicentre of the Chipko Andolan, possibly the best known of contemporary movements against the commercial exploitation of the forests. Yet Chipko is only one - though undoubtedly the most organized - in a series of protest movements against forest management dating from the earliest days of state intervention.

While the absence of popular protest in the first century of British rule had given rise to the stereotype of the 'simple and law abiding hillman',<sup>1</sup> the reservation of the Kumaun forests between 1911-17 'met with violent and sustained opposition',<sup>2</sup> culminating in 1921 when within the space of a few months, the administration was paralysed, first by a strike

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1. P. Mason, A Matter of Honour (London 1975), 451; cft also T.W. Webber, The Forests of Upper India and their inhabitants (London 1902), 39.

2. E.P. Stebbing, The Forests of India, in 3 volumes (London 1922-26), III, 258. In this article, Kumaun refers to the British civil division comprising the districts of British Garhwal, Almora, and Naini Tal. Historically the latter two districts constituted Kumaun. We shall however use Kumaun to include Garhwal as did the official sources from which we have largely drawn.

against utar (statutory labour) and then through a systematic campaign in which the Himalayan pine forests 'were swept by incendiary fires almost from end to end'.<sup>3</sup>

This transformation in peasant consciousness and peasant revolt was closely related to the more subtle but equally enduring changes in the structure of colonial administration. As we shall argue, in view of the strategic location of Kumaun, the demands of the state on the peasantry were extraordinarily light - moreover, the style of rule was a typically paternalist one, exemplified in the person of Henry Ramsay, Commissioner from 1856-84. It was the advent of forest management - with the hill conifers being arguably the most valuable forest "property" in India - that initiated a growing intervention of the state in the day to day life of the peasantry. The workings of scientific forestry in particular, by curtailing customary rights, drastically affected the mode of peasant social and economic organization. At the same time, the imperatives of exercising effective control led to a more general bureaucratization of state authority. This transition was succinctly expressed by a district officer in Almora in the late 1930's, who recalled Ramsay's rule 'as a benevolent despot who could do as he liked and [which] would always remain an envious example to the present generation of civilians who are so much bound by red-tape and the bulky Manual of Government Order'.<sup>4</sup>

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4. MS Randhawa, The Kumaun Himalayas (Delhi 1970), 12.

The central argument of this paper is that structures of power and authority play an important if not determining role in influencing the incidence and form of peasant protest. In this article, we shall present an analysis of the development of social protest in British Kumaun. We shall show how the early period of resistance to forest management and the begar system lay in a direct path of continuity with traditional methods of peasant resistance. As peasant resistance crystallized into a more widespread movement, it began to use new mechanisms of protest - chiefly in response to forest management - in addition to those traditionally used. These changes in the method of protest were matched by concomitant changes in peasant consciousness, both reflecting the rapidly fading legitimacy of the colonial state. The transition in peasant ideology and forms of protest, and its interrelationship with changing structures of power and authority, will be elucidated by the historical evidence presented in this paper.

II

KUMAUN<sup>5</sup>: ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

Although ruled by different dynasties during the medieval period, the social structures of Kumaun and Garhwal share marked similarities.<sup>6</sup> The largest ethnic stratum is made up of the Khasa or Khasiya who comprise the traditional peasantry, while the next largest stratum consists of the Doms serving the cultivating body as artisans and as farm servants. Numerically the smallest but ritually the highest group are the Thuljat - Brahmins and Rajputs claiming to be descendants of later immigrants from the plains. It has been conjectured that the Doms are the original inhabitants of the hills, who were conquered and enslaved by the Khasas. While the Khasas were a widespread race in prehistoric Asia, the origins of the hill Khasas are obscure. They have, however, adhered to a Vedantic form of Hinduism at least since the 8th century A.D. With caste restrictions and other rules of orthodox

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5. The boundaries of the Kumaun division (hereafter KD) coincided with well defined physical features. The river Kali separated it from Nepal in the east; the Himalayas separated it from Tibet in the north; in the west, it was divided from the state of Tehri Garhwal by the Alakananda and Mandakini rivers; and in the south, the outer hills demarcated it from the adjoining division of Rohilkhand.
  6. This and the next paragraph are based on R.D. Sanwal, Social Stratification in the rural Kumaun (Delhi 1976); E.T. Atkinson, The Himalayan districts of the North-Western Provinces of India, 3 volumes (Allahabad 1882-6), (rprt Delhi 1981); E.S. Oakley and TD Gairola, Himalayan Folklore (Allahabad 1935); T. Hardwicke, "Narrative of a Journey to Shrinagar", Asiatic Researches 6:309-381 (1809 : rprt Delhi 1979); LD Joshi, The Khasa Family Law (Allahabad 1929).

Hinduism being singularly lax in the hills, over time the Khasas have merged with the Thul-Jat.<sup>7</sup>

The independent chiefdoms of Garhwal were first subjugated by Ajayapal in the 13th century, while the unification of Kumaun took place under Som Chand around 960 A.D. Largely autonomous of the Muslim dynasties of Northern India, these isolated hill traits were conquered by adjoining Nepal between 1793 and 1804. Gurkha rule introduced certain changes in the agrarian structure - built around strong village communities, with most members enjoying a hereditary interest in land - via the system of military assignments. The Anglo-Gurkha wars culminated in the treaty of 1815, by which the East India Company annexed both Kumaun and Garhwal. Retaining Kumaun and eastern Garhwal, the British restored the western portion known as Tehri Garhwal, after the king's new capital, to the son of the last Garhwali ruler.

The boundaries of the treaty of 1815 were fixed with a view to controlling the route to Tibet and the passes used for trade. It was the prospect of commercial intercourse with Tibet and not considerations of revenue, that had induced Lord Hastings to embark on the hill campaign.<sup>8</sup> Its location, strategic from the

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7. Contact with plains Hinduism was maintained through the pilgrims who came annually to visit the famous temples in the hills.

8. J. Pemble, The invasion of Nepal (Oxford 1971), Ch.III, "The matter of Himalayan trade".

viewpoint of both defensive security and trade, played an important part in the evolution of British land policy in Kumaun.

The Central Himalayas are composed of two distinct ecological zones : the monsoon affected middle and low altitude areas and the high valleys of the north, inhabited until 1962 by the Bhotiya herdsmen who had carried on the centuries-old trade with Tibet. Along the river valleys, cultivation was carried out, limited only by the steepness of land and more frequently by the difficulty of irrigation. Two and sometimes three harvests were possible throughout the last century, wheat, rice, and millets being the chief cereals grown. The system of tillage and methods of crop rotation bore the mark of the hillmen's natural environment. With production oriented towards subsistence needs, which were comfortably met, there remained a surplus of grain for export to Tibet and southwards to the plains. Usually having six months stock of grain at hand, and with their diet supplemented by fish, fruit, vegetable, and animal flesh, the hill cultivators were described by Henry Ramsay, Commissioner from 1856-84, as "probably better off than any peasantry in India."

The absence of sharp inequalities in land ownership within the body of cultivating proprietors who formed the bulk of the population, was the basis for the sense of solidarity amongst the village community. With single-caste villages not being uncommon, the village panchayat - an institution quite different from the caste panchayat of the plains - dealt with social

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9. H.G. Walton, Almora: a gazetteer (Allahabad 1911), 57-59; S.D. Pant, The Social economy of the Himalayans (London 1935), 137 ff; "Correspondence relating to the scarcity in Kumaun and Garhwal in 1890", in British Parliamentary Papers, Vol. 59 (1890-92). The quote is taken from the last mentioned source (Chief Secy. NWP &), to Secy. GOI, dated 25-4-1890).



disputes, arrangements for festivals, etc. with every adult member having a voice in its affairs. The establishment of British rule notwithstanding, panchayats frequently continued to deal internally with matters technically under the jurisdiction of civil and criminal courts.<sup>10</sup>

The hill land tenure system inherited by the British different no less strikingly from that in the plains. The first Commissioner, G.W. Traill, observed that at least three-fourths of the villages were hissedari i.e. wholly cultivated by the actual proprietors of the land, from whom the revenue demand was perforce restricted to their respective shares of the village assessment. The remaining villages were divided into (i) those in which the right of property was recognized in earlier recipients of land grants (many dating only from the period of Gurkha rule) while the hereditary right of cultivation remained with the original occupants called khaikhar, (ii) A handful of villages owned by a single individual - here too, individual tenants (called Khurnee), were able to wrest easy terms owing to the favourable land-man ratio.<sup>11</sup> As even the most important

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10. Joshi, 'Khasa family Law', 194-99; E.A. Blunt, The Caste System of Northern India (1931: rpt. Delhi 1969), 145; "Mountaineer", A Summer Ramble in the Himalayas (London 1860), 165-66. The (attenuated) presence of caste, absence of sharp class divisions, and strong community solidarity make of this society a fascinating exception which one is unable to fit into existing conceptualizations of social hierarchy in India.
11. G.W. Traill, "Statistical Sketch of Kumaun", in Asiatic Researches 16: 137-234 (1828: rpt. Delhi 1980). Grants of land to temples were also recognized by the British.

landowners depended not on any legal right but on the actual influence they exercised over village communities, there was not one estate which could be termed 'pure zamindari'. Government revenue and certain customary fees were collected by the elected village pradhan (headman), who reported in turn to a higher revenue official (called the patwari, incharge of a 'patti' or group of villages) entrusted with police duties and the responsibility of collecting statutory labour for public works.<sup>12</sup> While over time much of the class of khurnee merged

12. J.H. Batten, "Report on the Settlement of the district of Garhwal", (1842); Idem "Final report on the settlement of Kumaun" (1848), both in Batten, ed. Official reports on the province of Kumaun (1851: rpt. Calcutta 1878). The extent of land cultivated and share of gross produce retained by different classes of cultivators, as estimated by Batten were as under:

<u>C l a s s</u>	<u>% share of gross produce</u>	<u>% of land cultivated by</u>
Cultivating proprietors ( <u>hissedar</u> )	80	60
Original occupants reduced to occupancy tenants ( <u>Khaikhar</u> )	70 - 75	20
Tenants settled by proprietor ( <u>Khurnee</u> )	66	
Non resident tenants	N.A.	

Under the earlier rulers, "the agricultural assessment originally fixed was extremely light, and its rate and amount would appear to have been very rarely revised". (Traill, quoted in E.K. Pauw, Report on the tenth settlement of the Garhwal district (Allahabad 1896), 53.

with that of khaikhar, the latter differed from the hissedar only in that he could not transfer land and had to pay a fixed sum as malikhana to the proprietor - this sum representing the conversion into a cash payment of various cesses and perquisites earlier levied. But by the end of the century, fully nine-tenths of all hillmen were estimated to be hissedars, cultivating proprietors with full ownership rights.<sup>13</sup>

Some evidence from Census Returns is given in Table I. Not strictly comparable with the other mountainous districts, Naini Tal comprised a few hill pattis and a large area of Terai which had begun to be settled by the end of the 19th century.<sup>14</sup> Within the hill districts proper, one observes that around 60% of the agrarian population were owner-cultivators. Having already noted the position of khaikhari tenures (Category II (B)) we can conclude that around 80% of the total population farmed largely with the help of family labour. The extraordinarily low proportion of agricultural labour confirms the picture of an egalitarian peasant community - a picture used more often as an analytical construct than believed to exist in reality.<sup>15</sup>

13. B.H. Baden-Powell, The land systems of British India (1892: rpt., Delhi 1974), Vol. II, 308-15; V.A. Stowell, A Manual of the land tenures of the Kumaun Division (1907: rpt. Allahabad 1937). The latter statement, attributed to Pauw, is obviously an overestimate, but is significant in so far it reflects an officially perceived contrast with the land systems in the plains.

14. See B.K. Joshi, Underdevelopment of Hill Areas of UP, Giri Institute of Development Studies, Lucknow, (Mimeo), for some contemporary evidence.

15. cf D. Thorner, "peasant economy as a category in economic history", in T. Shanin, ed. Peasants and peasant societies (Harmondsworth 1972).

Compare Table I with the agricultural situation in the rest of UP portrayed by Gyanendra Pandey in The Ascendancy of the Congress in Uttar Pradesh, 1929-34 (Delhi 1978), 12-23, Pandey recognizes that Kumaun was "exceptional". cf. also Asuja Siddiqi, Agrarian change in a Northern India State (Oxford 1973), Ch. I and II.



Category	D	I	S	T	R	I	C	T
	Naini 1911	Tal 1921		Almora 1911	1921	British 1911	Garhwal 1921	
VI. Agriculture and Pasture (Total)	235028	206698	485507	496517	439395	452692		
VII. Total population	323519	276875	525104	530338	480167	485186		
VIII. VI as % of VII	72.65	74.65	92.46	93.62	91.51	93.30		

Source: Census of India, 1911 and 1921.

- Note :
- i) A simpler classification was adopted in 1921 owing to the non-cooperation movement.
  - ii) Figures in parentheses denote percentage of agricultural population (VI)

The best class of cultivation was to be found in villages between three and five thousand feet above sea level, having access on the one hand to good forest and grazing ground, and on the other to riparian fields in the depths of the valley. Village sites were usually chosen halfway up the spur, below oak forests and the perennial springs associated with them, and above the cultivated fields along the river bed. In such a situation, all crops could be 'raised to perfection', a healthy elevated site was available for houses, and herds of cattle could be comfortably maintained. Until 1910, most villages came close to this ideal.<sup>16</sup>

16. Walton, "Almora", 47-8; idem, 'British Garhwal : A Gazetteer' (Allahabad 1911), 167.

With animal husbandry being as important to their economy as grain cultivation, the hillmen and their cattle migrated annually to the grass rich areas of the forest. Temporary cattle sheds (kharaks) were constructed and the cultivation of small patches carried out. In the permanent hamlets, oak forests provided both fodder and fertilizer. Green and dry leaves, which served the cattle as litter, were mixed with the excreta of the animals and fermented to give manure to the fields. Thus the forest augmented the nutritive value of the fields, directly through its foliage and indirectly through the excreta of the cattle fed with fodder leaves and forest grass. Broad leaved trees also provided the villagers with fuel and agricultural implements.<sup>17</sup>

In the lower hills, the extensive chir forests served for pasture. Every year, the dry grass and pine needle litter in the chir forest was burnt to make room for a fresh crop of luxuriant grass. Simultaneously, the needle litter, whose soapy surface endangered the otherwise sure footed hill cattle, was destroyed. Very resistant to fire, chir was used for building houses and as torchwood. In certain parts, where pasture was scarce, trees were grown and preserved for fodder.<sup>18</sup>

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17. This paragraph is drawn from Franz Heske, "Problem der Walderhaltung in Himalaya" (Problems of forest conservation in the Himalaya), Tharandter Forstlichien Jahrbuch 82(8); 545-594 (1931). I am grateful to Professor S.R.D. Guha for translating from the German.

18. *ibid.*, 555, 564-5; Pauw, Garhwal SR, 23, 47. In addition, "the hillman is indeed especially blessed by the presence in almost every jungle of fruit, vegetables, or roots to help him over a period of moderate scarcity" (Walton, "Almora 59").

Its isolated position and status as a recruiting ground for army personnel were reflected in the administrative policies followed in Kumaun. Recruitment had started by the mid 19th century, with both Kumauni and Garhwali soldiers being drafted into Gurkha units. The Garhwali Regiment, with headquarters at Landsdowne in the outer hills, was formed in 1890, becoming the 39th Garhwal Rifles in 1901. Essentially peasant farmers who returned to cultivate their holdings on retirement, hill soldiers enjoyed an enviable record for their bravery.<sup>19</sup> In these circumstances, British land revenue assessment was extraordinarily light - around Rs.3/- per family - and its revision barely kept up with the increase in population. A rapid expansion of cultivated area was watched over by a highly personalized administration exemplified in the person of Henry Ramsay, whom fellow Englishmen hailed as the uncrowned King of Kumaun.<sup>21</sup>

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19. A.L. Mumm, Five Months in the Himalayas (London 1909), 13-15; J.C.G. Lewer, The Sowar and the Jawan (Ilfracombe, Devon 1981), 46-50; Mason, "A Matter Of Honour", 384, 418-22. Garhwalis won 3 out of the VC's awarded to Indians during World War I and were to win undying fame when they refused to fire at a crowd of Khudai Khidmatgars at Peshawar in 1930.
20. H. Ramsay, Comm., K.D. to Secy, Sudder Board of Revenue, NWP & O, No.147, dated 14.7.1856 in File No.2, Pre - Mutiny Records, Regional Archives, Dehradun (RAD); S.D. Pant, "Social Economy", 88.
21. See Jim Corbett, My India (Bombay 1952), Ch.IV, "Pre-Red. - Tape days".

At one stage, the hills had afforded distinct possibilities for tea cultivation. In 1862-63, over 35 thousand pounds of tea was produced in Dehradun and Kumaun, and an estimate of waste land fitted for tea cultivation revealed that it was feasible to match the entire export trade of China from this region alone. The refusal of the hill peasant to shed his subsistence orientation, and the opposition anticipated at the introduction of white settlers, led to these plans being shelved.<sup>22</sup> In later years, state intervention in the form of induced commercialization of agriculture was conspicuously absent. In the odd year when the monsoon failed, grain was imported by the authorities and sold at remunerative prices - a measure, it was stressed, necessitated not by the poverty of the population (who could well afford to buy grain) but by the inaccessibility of many villages and the lack of markets in an economy characterized by an absence of traders in food grains. Such measures may help explain the absence of any revenue based agitations in either the 19th or 20th centuries.<sup>23</sup>

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22. "Reports on tea plantations", in Selections from the records of the Government of the North-western Provinces (hereafter Selections), Vol.V (Allahabad 1869), 401-443; Atkinson, III, 317; Walton "British Garhwal", 37-39.
23. Census of India, 1891, Vol.16, Pt.1, NWP & O (General report), 148-54; AS Rawat, "Administration of Land Revenue in British Garhwal (1856-1900)", in Quarterly Review of Historical Studies, 21 (2 and 3): 36-40 (1981-82).



III

THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIZED FORESTRY IN KUMAUN

Stable forest cover on any terrain is established through the process of ecological succession.<sup>24</sup> This succession can generally be divided into three stages: (i) the initial stage, in which certain species of trees, usually with small or light seeds, take possession of newly exposed ground (ii) the transitional stages, in which changes take place on ground already clothed with some vegetative cover, (iii) the climax stage, which represents the farthest advance towards a hygrophilous (i.e. adapted to plentiful water supply) type of vegetation which the locality is capable of supporting. While it could be said that in the Himalayas, the oaks and other broad leaved species represent stage (iii) and the conifers state (ii), in the days before forest management mixed forests were the norm. In general, the more favourable the locality is for vegetation, the greater the number of species struggling for existence in it.

Two points may be noted. While the oaks (and other broad leaved species), are more valuable for hill agriculture, on both ecological and economic grounds, the conifers have

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24. The nature and composition of the Himalayan forests are important for what follows. This brief description is taken from R.S. Troup, Silviculture of Indian Trees (Oxford 1921), Intro., and Passim.

Early white travellers were impressed by the density and extent of the Himalayan forests, e.g. Hardwicke ("Narrative", 327) who proclaimed that "the forests of oak, fir, and boorans are here more extensive, and the trees of greater magnitude, than any I have ever seen".

had, since the inception of 'scientific' management, a variety of commercial uses. Secondly, while 'progressive' succession - from stage (i) to (ii) to (iii) - occurs in nature; 'retrogressive' succession - from stage (iii) to (ii) to (i) - can be caused by the hand of man, either accidentally or deliberately. Foresters are cautioned that in many cases, 'the natural trends of this succession may be diametrically opposed to what is desirable from an economic point of view.'<sup>25</sup>

The importance of forests in hill life had given rise to a 'natural system of conservancy' that took different forms. Through religion, folklore, and tradition, the Khasa communities had drawn a protective ring around the forests. Often hill tops were dedicated to local deities and the trees around the summit and on the slopes preserved. Many wooded areas were not of spontaneous growth and bore marks of both plantation and preservation.<sup>26</sup> Particularly in Eastern Kumaun, and around temples, deodar plantations had become naturalized some way east of the tree's natural habitat. Temple groves of deodar varied in extent from a few trees to woods of several hundred acres.<sup>27</sup> As late as 1953, it was reported that the finest stands of deodar were found near temples, venerated and protected from

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25. Troup, 'Silviculture', iv-v. "Economic" is a euphemism for "commercially valuable". Within this division between coniferous and broad-leaved trees, the most important (and common) species, especially in the attitudes inhabited by human population, are the banj oak (*Quercus in Cana*) and the chir pine (*Pinus rox-burghii*).

26. G.B. Pant, The forest problem of Kumaun (Allahabad 1922), 30-31.

27. S.B. Bhatia, Working Plan (WP) for the East Almora Forest Division, 1924-25 to 1933-34 (Allahabad 1926), 13, 22.

injury.<sup>28</sup> An officer newly posted to the hills in the nineteen twenties was struck by the way communal action continued to survive in the considerable areas serving as village grazing ground and fuel and fodder reserves, walled in and well looked after.<sup>29</sup> Traditionally, many villages had fuel reserves even on gaon sanjait (common) land measured by the Government, which the villagers cut over in regular rotation by common consent. Chaundkot Pargana in Garhwal was singled out for its forests within village boundaries, called 'banis', where branches and trees were only cut at specified times and with permission of the entire village community.<sup>30</sup> Cooperation of a high order was also manifest in the fixed boundaries adhered to by every village - boundaries existing from the time of Indian rulers and recognized by Traill in the settlement of 1823. Within these boundaries, the inhabitants of each village exercised various proprietary and other rights of user. In some areas, a group of villages had joint rights of grazing and fuel, secured by long usage and custom.<sup>31</sup>

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28. N.L. Bor, Manual of Indian Forest Botany (Oxford 1953), 13. Dietrich Brandis, the first Inspector General of Forests, had reported the existence of numerous sacred groves, the 'traditional method of forest preservation', in almost all the provinces of India. See his Indian Forestry (Working 1897), 12.
29. J.K. Pearson, "Note on history of proposals for management of village waste lands", dated Dec. 1926, in Forest Department (FD) file 83 of 1909, Uttar Pradesh State Archives (UPSA), Lucknow.
30. Note by VA Stowell, D.C. Garhwal, on "Nayabad grants for reafforestation purposes", n.d., prob. 1907; Note dated 13.8.1910, by Dharmanand Joshi, late Depy. Collector, Garhwal, both in ibid.
31. T.D. Gairola, Selected revenue divisions of Kumaun (Allahabad 1938), 209, ff; A.E. Osmeston, U.P. for the North Garhwal For Div., 1921-22 to 1930-31 (Allahabad 1921), 8; Note by D. Joshi cited in fn. 30.

With an analagous situation existing in many other forest areas, the inception of commercial forestry disrupted existing patterns of resource utilization.<sup>32</sup> It was the large scale destruction of accessible forests in the early years of railway expansion that led to the hasty creation of a forest department, set up with the help of German experts in 1864. The first task before the new department was to identify the sources of supply of strong and durable timbers - such as sal, teak, and deodar - which could be used as railway sleepers. With sal and teak being very heavily worked out,<sup>33</sup> search parties were sent to explore the deodar forests of the Sutlej and Jamuna valleys.<sup>34</sup> Intensive felling in these forests - 1.3 million deodar sleepers were exported from the Jamuna valley between 1865 and 1878 - forced the government to rely on the import of wood from Europe. But with emphasis placed on substituting indigenous sleepers for imported ones, particularly in the inland districts of Northern India, the

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32. These two paragraphs are a necessarily brief and somewhat vulgar statement of a complex historical process. For details, see my "Forestry in British and post British India", EPW, 29/10 and 5-12 11/1983.

33. Thus, by 1869, the Sal forests of the outer hills were all "felled in even to desolation". See G.F. Pearson, "Sub Himalayan forests of Kumaun and Garhwal", in Selections, 2nd series, Vol.2 (Allahabad 1869), 132.

34. G.P. Paul, Felling timber in the Himalayas (Lanore 1871); Col.R. Strachey, Secy. GOI, to Secy. PWD, NWP, dated 29.3.1864, No.10, Revenue B. Progs, May, 1864, Foreign Dept., National Archives of India (NAI).

department considered the utilization of the Himalayan pines if they responded adequately to antiseptic treatment.<sup>35</sup>

Successful forest administration required checking the deforestation of the past decades,<sup>36</sup> and for this, the assertion of state monopoly right was considered essential. A prolonged debate within the colonial bureaucracy on whether to treat the customary use of forest as based on 'right' or on 'privilege' was settled by the selective use of precedent and the principle that 'the right of conquest is the strongest of all rights - it is a right against which there is no appeal.'<sup>37</sup> An initial attempt at asserting state monopoly through the Forest Act of 1865 having been found wanting, a comprehensive all India Act was drafted thirteen years later. This Act provided for the constitution of 'reserved' (i.e. closed) forests, divested of existing rights of user to enable sustained timber production. The 1878 Act provided for an elaborate procedure of forest settlement to deal with all claims of user, which if upheld, could be transferred to a second class of

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35. D. Brandis, "Memorandum on the supply of railway sleepers of the Himalayan pines impregnated in India", Indian Forester 4:365-85 (April 1879). While every mile of broad gauge railway required 1800 sleepers, each sleeper lasted 12 years. The railway network had expanded from 843 to 9215 miles in 1860-80, levelling of at around 32,300 miles by 1910. (See GOI, History of Indian Railways (Delhi 1964), 214). Thus, at the time Brandis was writing, well over a million sleepers were required annually.
36. A vivid account of the official measures that induced this deforestation can be found in Stebbing, I, 36-62, 288-9, 505-9, 523-30. By "successful" forest administration we mean successful from the viewpoint of strategic imperial needs.
37. C.F. Amery, 'On Forest rights in India' in D. Brandis and A. Smythies, eds. Report of the proceedings of the forest conference held at Simla, October 1875 (Calcutta 1876), 27.

forest designated as 'protected'.<sup>38</sup> While the burden of proof to establish 'legally established rights' was on the people, the state could grant both 'non-established rights' and 'terminable concessions' at its discretion.<sup>39</sup>

~~The~~ systematic management of the Kumaun hill forests commenced with the constitution of small blocks of reserved forests to furnish a permanent supply of fuel and timber to the administrative centres of Naini Tal and Almora and the cantonment town of Ranikhet.<sup>40</sup> A survey was commissioned to report on the detailed composition of the hill forests, particularly those within 'reasonable distance' of land and water, and select sites for roads and saw mills.<sup>41</sup> This was followed in 1893 by the declaration of all unmeasured land in the Kumaun division as 'district protected forest' (DPF). What was thought 'of primary importance was to assert the proprietary right of Government in these forests and lay down certain limits

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38. For the 1878 Act which apart from minor modifications continues to be in operation, the basic documents are B H Baden - Powell, 'On the defects of the existing forest Law (Act VII of 1865) and proposals for a new forest act' in B H Baden - Powell and J S Gamble, eds., Report of the proceedings of the forest conference, 1874-74 (Calcutta 1874), 3 - 30; D. Brandis, Memorandum on the forest legislation proposed for British India (Other than the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay) (Simla 1875).

39. 'Instructions for forest settlement officers in the NWP & C', No. 682/XIV, 328-63' dated 29.5.1897, in File No. 279, Dept. IVA, List No. 2, Post-Mutiny Records, RAD. Such flexibility equipped the Act to deal with the diverse socio-political situations in which state monopoly was asserted.

40. See D. Brandis, Suggestions regarding forest administration in the NWP (Calcutta 1882).

41. Webber, 'Forests of Upper India', esp. 38-43.

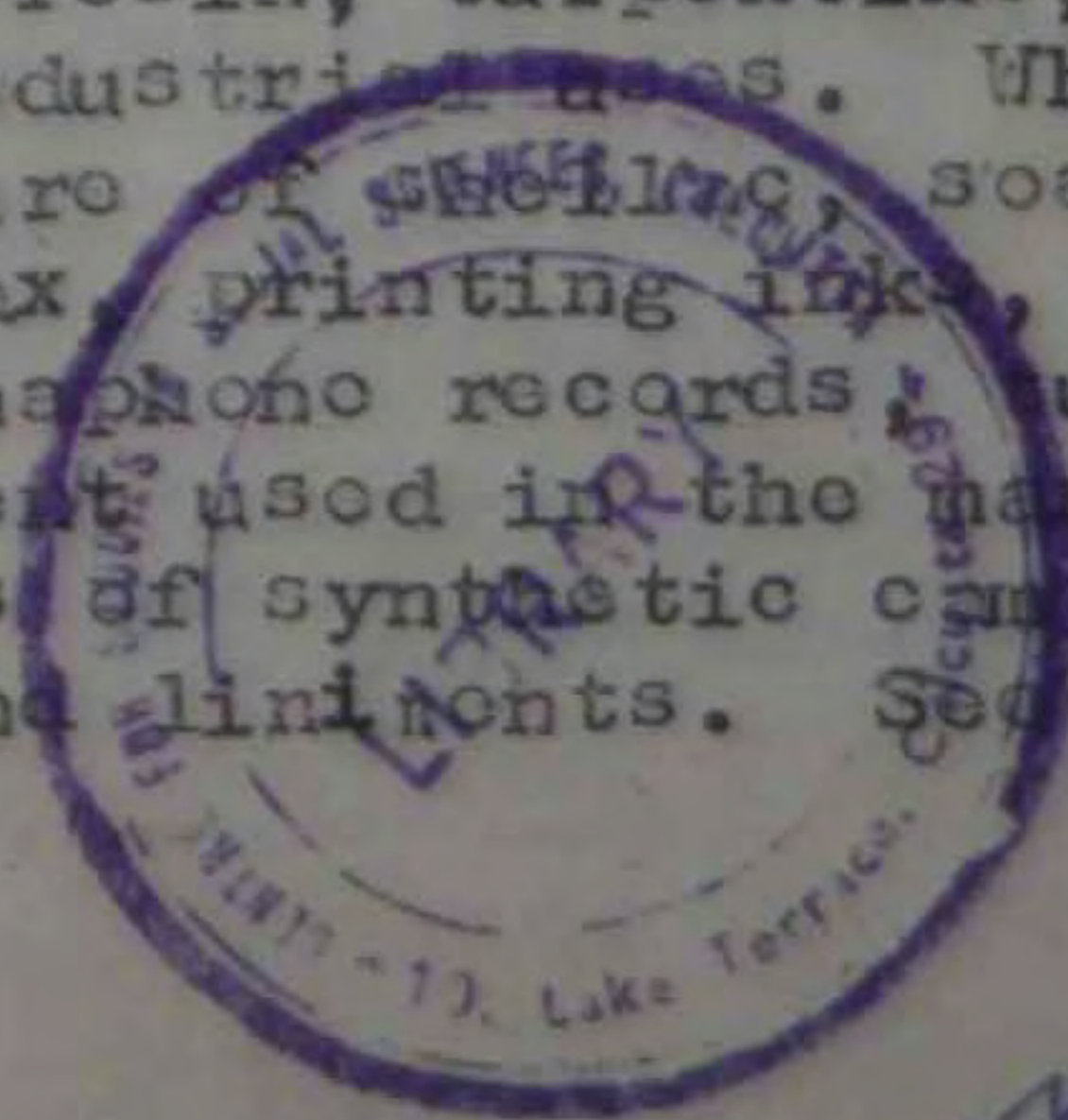
to the hitherto unregulated action of rightholders'.<sup>42</sup> Official interest in these forests - dominated by the longleaved or chir pine - quickened further when two important scientific developments were reported by Indian forest officials. The tapping of chir pine for oleo-resin had been started on an experimental basis in the 1890's - by 1912 methods of distillation had been evolved which would enable the products to compete with the American and French varieties that had hitherto ruled the market. At the same time, fifty years of experimentation on a process to prolong the life of certain Indian woods for use as railway sleepers through chemical treatment finally bore fruition. Of the timbers successfully treated, the chir and blue pines were both found suitable and available in substantial quantities, and could be marketed at a sufficiently low price.<sup>43</sup>

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42. Note by J S Campbell, Comm K.D., dated 6.7.1910, in FD File 83/1909.

43. Puran Singh, 'Note on the distillation and composition of turpentine oil from the chir resin and the clarification of Indian resin', Indian Forest Records, Vol.IV, Part I (Calcutta 1912); R.S. Pearson, 'Note on the antiseptic treatment of timber in India, with special reference to railway sleepers', IFR, Vol.VIII, Pt.1 (Calcutta 1912). Also idem, 'A further note on the antiseptic treatment of timber, with results obtaining from past experiments', IFR, Vol.6, part 9 (Calcutta 1918). These two sets of findings finally led to the constitution of the Kumaun circle on 2.10.1912 and forest settlements being undertaken in the three districts.

The two chief products of oleo-resin, turpentine, and resin, had a wide variety of industrial uses. While resin was used in the manufacture of shellac, soap, paper, oil-cloth, linoleum, sealing wax, printing ink, electric installation, and gramophone records, turpentine was the chief thinner and solvent used in the manufacture of paint and varnish, the basis of synthetic camphor, and an ingredient of boot-polish and liniments. See Smythies, 'India's forest wealth', 80.



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c-1.

Four distinct phases<sup>44</sup>, representing the progressive diminution of villagers' rights in the forests of Kumaun, can be distinguished :

- i) Between 1815 - 1878, the state concentrated on the submontane sal forests of the Bhabhar, while the forests of Kumaun proper were left untouched. However, the forests around Naini Tal were demarcated in the 1850's and those around Ranikhet and Almora in 1873 and 1875 respectively;
- ii) Between 1878 - 1893, the above forests were notified as reserved, under the 1878 Act, while grants of forest made to Iron Companies and several other tracts in Almora and Garhwal districts were declared reserved or protected forests;
- iii) On 17.10.1893, all waste land not forming part of the measured area of villages or of the forests earlier reserved was declared to be protected forest under the Act, although the necessary enquiry (vide section 23) had not been made. Thus DPF comprised, apart from tree covered lands, snow clad peaks, ridges and cliffs, river beds, lakes, buildings, temple lands, camping and pasture

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44. Following Pant, 'Forest Problem', 6-26.



grounds, and roads and shps.<sup>45</sup> A skeletal forest staff was constituted, and on 24.10.1894, 8 trees - including deodar, chir, and sal - were reserved. Rules were framed for regulating the lopping of trees for fuel and fodder, claims for timber, and trade by villagers in any form of forest produce prohibited. On 5.4.1903, the Kumaun DFF were divided into two classes;

(a) Closed Civil forests, which the State considered necessary for reproduction or protection, and (b) Open Civil forests, where villagers could exercise their rights subject to the rules prescribed in 1894;

- iv) All these cumulative incursions culminated in 1911 with the decision to carve extensive reserves out of the DPF. Forest settlements carried out in the three districts between 1911 and 1917 resulted in the constitution of almost 3000 square miles of reserved forest in the Kumaun Division. Elaborate rules were framed for the exercise of rights, specifying the number of cattle to be grazed and amount of timber and fuelwood allotted to each rightholder. Villagers had to indent in advance for timber for construction of houses and for agricultural implements, which would

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45. As we have noted, this proclamation was made with a view to asserting proprietary right in these lands.

be supplied by the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) from a notified list of species. The annual practice of burning the forest floor for a fresh crop of grass was banned within one mile of reserved forests - as this excluded few habitations in these heavily forested hills, the prohibition virtually made the practice illegal.<sup>46</sup>

Within a few years of commercial working, the Kumaun forests had become a paying proposition. When one full fifteen year cycle (1896-1911) had revealed that resin tapping did not permanently harm trees, attempts were made 'to develop the resin industry as completely and rapidly as possible'.<sup>47</sup> Between 1910 and 1920, the timber of resign channels tapped rose from 260,000 to 2,135,000,<sup>48</sup> a rate of increase matched by the production of rosin and turpentine (Table II). When the construction of a new factory at Bareilly was completed in 1920 - with a rated capacity of 64,000 cwts of rosin and 240,000 gallons of turpentine, a capacity that could be easily expanded fourfold - production was outstripping Indian demand. This put under active consideration proposals for the export of rosin and turpentine to the United Kingdom and the Far East.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the only impediment to increased production was the lack

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46. Details of these rules can be found in Osmaston, 'North Garhwal WP', Appendix.
47. E A Smythies, 'The resin industry in Kumaun', Forest Bulletin No.26 (Calcutta 1914), 3.
48. Stebbing, III, 660. The work was done by small contractors (Practically all from outside Kumaun), under the supervision of the department.
49. Imperial Institute, Indian Trade Enquiry, Report on lac, turpentine and resin (London 1922), esp.29-51. India was the only source of oleo-resin within the British dominions

of adequate means of communications. The extensive pine forests in the interior had to remain untapped, with extraction restricted to areas well served by mule tracks and sufficiently close to railheads.<sup>50</sup>

TABLE II

Imports into, and Production in India, of  
rosin and Turpentine, 1907-1923.

Year April to March	R o s i n			T u r p e n t i n e		
	Imports	Indian produc- tion	Total (cwts)	Imports	Indian produc- tion	Total (gallons)
1907-08	76,200	4,845	81,045	225,560	16,086	241,646
1910-11	41,600	6,625	48,225	197,720	17,051	214,771
1913-14	45,769	20,100	65,869	193,937	58,803	252,740
1916-17	18,760	43,500	62,260	80,000	125,663	205,663
1919-20	13,855	46,700	60,555	113,638	148,680	262,318
1921-22	10,602	57,200	67,802	70,369	163,151	233,520
1922-23*	18,037	82,000	100,037	90,364	279,100	369,404

Source: Smythies, 'India's Forest Wealth', 83.

\* : Calendar Year 1922.

Note : Until 1920, two factories accounted for total production - Bhowali (U.P.) accounted for roughly 60% and Jalloo (Punjab) for the rest.

50. The available technology of transportation crucially affected the working of these forests. Coniferous timber could be floated out to railheads by water. The oaks though durable, were too heavy and consequently did not merit commercial exploitation. All attempts to float resin in cans having remained unsuccessful, the pine forests of Almora and Naini Tal, at a lesser distance from the plains, were tapped earlier than those in Garhwal. While proposals for building a railway line through the Alakananda valley upto Karanprayag were mooted at various times, in the latter forests resin-tapping on a large scale had to await the construction of motor roads after 1947. See R.N. Brahmawar, W P for the Grahwal For. Div., 1930-31 to 1939-40 (Allahabad 1952), 138 and Passim.

The war provided a fillip, as well, to the production of chir sleepers. The cessation of antiseptic imports proved a 'blessing in disguise' when the Munitions Board requisitioned untreated sleepers.<sup>51</sup> Almost 4 lakh sleepers were supplied during 1916-18, and the Kumaun circle began to show a financial surplus for the first time with all stocks being cleared. The Government saw mill was unable to deal with all the indents it received - nevertheless, over 5,000 chir trees were felled and sawn annually. For the forest department, its activities during the war were adequate justification for the recent and controversial forest settlement in the hills.<sup>52</sup>

#### Begar in Kumaun:

The system of forced labour in Kumaun, known by various names during the colonial period (coolie utar/bardaish/begar/godam) has been the subject of a fine recent study.<sup>53</sup> The British in fact operated the system, a legacy of the petty hill chiefs who preceded them from Darjeeling to Simla, on grounds of administrative convenience in tracts whose physical situation made both commercial transport and boarding houses economically

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51. Stebbing, III, 658-9.

52. Annual progress report of forest administration in the United Provinces for the forest year 1916-17 (hereafter APFD) (Allahabad 1918), 20, 38, 45; APFD 1917-18, 22-23. We have estimated the number of trees felled from figures (pertaining to recorded fellings only) given in different working plans.

53. Shekhar Pathak, Uttarakhand mein coolie begar pratha: 1815-1949 unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Dept. of History, Kumaun University, 1980. Also his 'Kumaun Mein begar annulan andolan', paper presented at Seminar on Peasant Movements in U.P., JNU, 19-20/10/1982 (I am grateful to Shahid Amin for giving me this reference). These are hereafter referred to as Pathak (1) and (2) respectively.

unattractive. As embodied in their settlement agreements<sup>54</sup> landholders were required to provide for all government officials on tour and for white travellers (e.g. shikaris and mountaineers), several distinct sets of services. The most common of these involved carrying loads and building chappars (temporary rest huts), and the supply of provisions (bardaish) such as milk, food, grass, wood, and cooking vessels. The actual operations, governed by custom, were far more complex than those sanctioned by custom. Although only hissedars and khaikhars were technically liable to be called upon to provide coolie-bardaish, sirtans were also held liable 'as a matter of custom and convenience'. Other forms of statutory labour included the collection of material and levelling of sites for buildings, roads, and other public works, transporting the luggage of regiments moving from Landsdowne, and the carrying of iron and wood for the building of bridges in the interior. Old men and widows were exempt from these burdens at the discretion of the DC - otherwise, remissions were rarely granted. According to the settlement, villagers were to be reimbursed for these services, but in actual fact they were often rendered free.<sup>55</sup> While convinced of the 'inequity of the practice' as early as 1850, the government had concluded after an enquiry that there existed no available substitute.<sup>56</sup>

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54. As Taradutt Gairola argued, the Allahabad High Court had passed judgements that the practice was in fact illegal. See his speech in the Legislative Council of UP, dtd. 16-12-1918 in File No.21 of 1918-19, Dept.XV, Regional Archives, Naini Tal (RAN).

55. Note by D A Barker on quli-bardaish, dtd. 13.4.1915, in General Administration Department (GAD) file 398/1913, UPSA ('Begar system in the Kumaun division'), Also Pathak (2), 1-2.

56. NWP, Board of Revenue Proceedings, Vol.491, Cons. 97, Pro.286, 'Forced labour in Kumaun and Garhwal', India Office Library, London (Notes collected by Shri Dharampal).

The incidence of utar was comparatively slight in the first century of British rule. Nevertheless, its impressment was resisted in various ways. The village pradhan (himself exempt) occasionally concealed some of the hissedars in his village<sup>57</sup> - alternately, travellers who indented for coolies found the headman being 'openly defied' by his villagers, who refused to supply labour or provisions.<sup>58</sup> When Census returns from Garhwal reported a large excess of males over females in the 10 - 14 age group, this discrepancy was traced to the age (16 years) at which men were called upon to carry loads or furnish bardaish. Thus all those whose age could possibly be understated were reported to be under 16.<sup>59</sup> Officials commented too that the hillman's aversion to being made to work under compulsion had led to his earning an undeserved reputation for indolence - while he worked hard enough in his fields, coolie labour especially during the agricultural season, was performed in a manner that made his resentment apparent.<sup>60</sup> Travellers and soldiers thus often found themselves stranded when villagers failed to oblige in carrying their luggage. Ramsay had to levy a fine of Rs.500/- on a village near Someshwar in Almora district which struck against utar. Another strike in 1903 led to the imprisonment of 14 villagers of Khatyadi. Concurrently, opposition to the bear system

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57. Batten, Kumaun SR, 270.

58. 'Mountaineer', 'Summer ramble', 167.

59. Census of India, 1891, Vol.16, pt.1 (NWP & ), General Report), 29-30.

60. Stowell, 'Manual of land tenures', 150-56; Walton, 'British Garhwal', 68-9.

was expressed in newspapers edited by nationalists from Almora, Naini Tal, and Dehradun.<sup>61</sup> The Kumaun Parishad, based in Almora, took up both the begar and forest issues, asking the forest department to hire its own coolies and build more roads.<sup>62</sup>

With the advent of the forest department, the burden of these services on the Kumaun villager dramatically increased. The reservation of the forests and its future supervision involved extensive touring by forest officials, who took utar and bardaish as a matter of course. Coming close on the heels of the demarcation of the forests, the additional burdens which the new department had created evoked a predictable response. Forest Officers touring in the interior of Garhwal were unable to obtain grain, as villagers, even where they had surplus stock, refused to supply to a department they regarded 'as disagreeable interlopers to be thwarted if possible'.<sup>63</sup> Utar, was in the words of the Kumaun Forest Grievances Committee, 'one of the greatest grievances which the residents of Kumaun had against the forest settlement';<sup>64</sup> when coupled with the abbreviation of community control over forests, it represented an imposition unprecedented in its scope and swiftness. Villagers looked back, not altogether without justification, to a 'golden age' when they had full freedom to roam over their forest habitat and state interference

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61. Pathak (2), 4-14.

62. See Letter from Comm.KD, to Chief Secretary, UP, dt. 13.9.1916, in FD File 164/1916, UPSA.

63. Do. No. 10X, dt. 6.2.1917, from DFO, North Garhwal to Conservator of Forests (CF) Kumaun Circle, GAO file 198/1913.

64. Report of the Kumaun Forest Grievances Committee (hereafter KFGC), in Progs. A, June 1922, Nos, 19-24, File No. 522/1922, Dept. of Rev. & Agl. (Forests), NAI, 2.

was as its minimum. These emotions were beautifully expressed by a government clerk who applied for exemption from bogar and bardaish:

In days gone by every necessities of life were in abundance to villagers than to others (and) there were no such Government laws and regulations prohibiting the free use of unsurveyed land and forest by them as they have now. The time itself has now become very hard and it has been made still harder by the imposition of different laws, regulations, and taxes on them and by increasing the land revenue. Now the village life has been shadowed by all the miseries and inconveniences of the present day laws and regulations. They are not allowed to fell down a tree to get fuels from it for their daily use and they cannot cut leaves of trees beyond certain portion of them for fodder to their animals. But the touring officials, still view the present situation with an eye of the past and press them to supply good grass for their horses, fuels for their kitchens, and milk for themselves and their (retinue) without even thinking of making any payment for these things to them who after spending their time, money and labour can hardly procure them for their own use. In short, all the privileges of village life, as they were twenty years ago, are nowhere to be found now, still the officials hanker after the system of yore when there were everything in abundance and within the reach of villagers.<sup>65</sup>

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65. Petition to Sir James Meston, L-G, UP, by Pandit Madan Narayan Bist (Village Ulaingad, patti Wallawigad, Almora), clerk on duty at the office of the Director-General of Archaeology at Ootacamund, dt. 17.5.1913, GAD file 398/1913. Grammar and punctuation as in original.



As one can discern from this petition, the new laws and regulations were already beginning to threaten the considerable autonomy enjoyed by the Khasa village community. Here, as elsewhere in colonial societies of South and South East Asia, unusual exactions and other forms of state encroachment upon the privileges of individuals or communities were regarded as a transgressing the traditional relationship between ruler and ruled. By clashing with his notions of economic justice, increased state intervention breached the 'moral economy' of the peasant.<sup>66</sup> Anticipating that the hillman would react by 'throwing his Forest loads down the khud and some day an unfortunate Forest Officer may go after them', Percy Wyndham, Commissioner of Kumaun, believed that the only way to prolong the life of the Utar system would be for forest officials to use pack ponies. Government could hardly defend the use of utar by a money making department - which, if it continued to avail of begar, would hasten the end of the system.<sup>67</sup> Echoing the Commissioner's sentiments, the Garhwal lawyer and Legislative Council member Taradutt Gairola pleaded for a 'vigorous policy of reform', failing which 'trouble (would) arise' at the revision of the revenue settlement.<sup>68</sup>

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66. J.C. Scott, The moral economy of the peasant (New Haven 1976).

67. 'Note on transport of Forest officials by Utar and packponies', by Comm. KD, dtd. 17.3.1919, in source cited in fn.72.

68. 'Report of the Kumaun Sub-committee of the board of communications on coolie utar and bardaish in Kumaun; Sd/- P.Wyndham, Chairman, dtd. 9.10.1919; note on above report by T D Gairola, dtd. 17.10.1919, GAD file 739/1920, UPSA.

These warnings were to prove prophetic, but in the meantime, the state hoped to rely on a series of ameliorative measures. The Lieutenant Governor had in 1916 rejected the possibility of the utar system itself being scrapped - while it had caused 'hardship' in certain areas, the government he emphasized was concerned merely 'with checking any abuses of the system'.<sup>69</sup> In a move initiated by Gairela, coolie agencies were started in parts of Garhwal - by paying money into a common fund from which transport and supplies were arranged, villagers were not required to perform these tasks themselves.<sup>70</sup> In other parts, registers were introduced to ensure that the utar burden did not fall disproportionately on any individual or village. Officers were advised camp only at fixed places and procure grain from merchants subsidized by the government. Rules were framed prescribing what kinds of supplies could be indented for, and loads restricted to 25 per coolie.<sup>71</sup> In a bid to 'raise the status of the soldier', retired and serving members' of the Garhwal regiments were granted personal exemption from utar in 1900, although they were

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69. Speech by Sir James Meston at Darbar held in Naini Tal on 30.9.1916, in GAD file 108/1918, UPSA.

70. See, for example, 'annual report of the coolie agencies in Garhwal district for 1911-12', in GAD file 398/1913.

71. No.6544/XV/50, dtd. 10.9.1916, from Comm, KD to Chief Secretary UP; 'Rules for touring officials in the hill patts of the Kumaun division', Sd/- Comm., KD, 18-10-1916 both in ibid.

required to provide a substitute.<sup>72</sup> This was extended during World War I into an unconditional exemption for all combatant members of the 39th Garhwalis and for the direct heirs of soldiers killed in battle.<sup>73</sup> The introduction of these 'palliatives which afford a considerable measure of relief', it was hoped, would ensure the continuance of the system itself.<sup>74</sup>

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72. No.6056/XVI-19' dtd. 19.7.1900, from Comm. KD to Chief Secretary, NWP & O; No.2503/1-303B' dtd. 4.8.1900, from Chief Secretary NWP & O, to Deputy Adjutant-General, Bengal, both in File No.19 of 1899-1900, Dept. XVI, RAN.
73. No.1165/III/398, dtd. 5/6/1916, from Chief Secretary, UP to Officers Commanding 1st and 2nd Cos, 39th Garhwal Rifles, GAD File 398/1913.
74. See note by Under Secretary to Chief Secretary, UP, dated 17.8.1913, in ibid.

IV

EARLY RESISTANCE TO FOREST MANAGEMENT

It is important to understand the dislocations in agrarian practices consequent on the imposition of forest management. The working of a forest for commercial purposes necessitates its division into blocks or coupes, which are completely closed after the trees are felled to allow regeneration to take place. Closure to men and cattle is regarded as integral to successful reproduction, and grazing and lopping, if allowed, are regulated in the interests of the reproduction of favoured species of trees.<sup>75</sup> Further, protection from fire is necessary to ensure the regeneration and growth to maturity of young saplings. Thus the practice of firing the forests had to be regulated or stopped in the interests of sustained production of chir pine. While the exercise of rights, where allowed, was specified in elaborate detail, rightholders had the onerous responsibility, under Section 78 of the Act, of furnishing knowledge of forest offences to the nearest authority and of extinguishing fires, however, caused, in the state forests.<sup>76</sup> In general, as endorsed by the stringent provisions of the forest act, considerations of control were paramount.

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75. These implications have been elaborated in Ramachandra Guha, 'The nature of forestry 'Science'', PPST Bulletin (Madras), 3(1), May 1983.

76. When cases were reported of villagers being burnt to death while helping to extinguish forest fires, there were bitter speculation whether 'it is an advantage to have any right in the reserved forest so long as Sect. 78 finds a place in the Forest Act' (Pant, 'Forest Problem', 23-24).

We find evidence of protest at the contravention of traditionally held and exercised rights well before the introduction of forest management. Charcoal required for smelting iron in the mines of Kumaun was brought from neighbouring forests - where these lay within the boundaries of villages, villagers prevented wood being cut without the payment of 'malikhana'<sup>77</sup>. And in the years following the constitution of the DFF in 1893, the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Garhwal reported that 'forest administration consists for most part in a running fight with the villagers'.<sup>78</sup>

Even where discontent did not manifest itself in overt protest, the loss of control over forests was acutely felt. The Forest Settlement Officer of British Garhwal, at the time of the constitution of the reserved forests, commented:

... (The) notion obstinately persists in the minds of all, from the highest to the lowest, that Government is taking away their forests from them and is robbing them of their own property. The notion seems to have grown up from the complete lack of restriction or control over the use by the people of waste land and forest during the first 30 years after

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77. J O.'B. Beckett, 'Iron and copper mines in the Kumaun division', report dated 31.1.1850, in Selections, Vol.III (Allahabad 1867), 31-38. 'There is not a single malgoozar of any of the villages in the neighbourhood of the iron mines, who has not at one time or other endeavoured to levy a tax on all the charcoal burners ...' (ibid., 36, emphasis added).

78. 'Note on forest administration for my Successor', by McNair, DC Garhwal, dated Feb. 1907, in FD file 11/1908, UPSA.

the British occupation. The oldest inhabitant therefore, and he naturally is regarded as the greatest authority, is the most assured of the antiquity of the people's right to uncontrolled use of the forest; and to a rural community there appears no difference between uncontrolled use and proprietary right. Subsequent regulations - and these regulations are all very recent - only appear to them as a gradual encroachment on their rights, culminating now in a final act of confiscation.... (My) best efforts however have, I fear, failed to get the people generally to grasp the change in conditions or to believe in the historical fact of government ownership.<sup>79</sup>

As this lengthy extract brings out quite clearly, at the root of the conflict between the state and hill villagers over forest rights lay alternate conceptions of property and ownership. There did not exist a developed notion of private property among these peasant communities, a notion particularly inapplicable to communally owned and managed woods and pasture land. In contrast, the state's assertion of monopoly over forests was undertaken at the expense of what British officials insisted were individually claimed rights of user. With the 'waste and forest lands never having attracted the attention of former governments'<sup>80</sup> there existed strong historical justification for the popular belief that all forests within village boundaries were 'the property of the villagers'.<sup>81</sup>

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79. J C Nelson, Forest Settlement report of the Garhwal district (Lucknow 1916), 10-11.

80. Pauw, Garhwal SR, 52.

81. Gairola, 'Selected revenue decisions', 211, emphasis added. Gairola's account (ibid., 209-13) brings out the changed conditions in which the state deemed it necessary to usurp a previously non-existent 'right' of government to forests and waste land.

This dichotomy between colonial and indigenous notions of property right was at the root of much of the discontent in tribal areas over forest regulations. See, for example, G V de Silva, N. Mehta, MA Rahman and P Wignaraja, 'Bhoomi Sena: struggle for people's power', Development Dialogue, No.2 of 1979, 4-11.

The affirmation of state control - and its obverse, the diminution of customary rights - had an unfortunate effect, with the loss of control contributing to a growing alienation of man from forest. The demarcation of reserved forests having given rise to the speculation that the state would take away other wooded areas from their control, villagers were in certain cases deforesting woodland. But where ownership was still vested in the community, forests continued to be well looked after - such as the twenty mile stretch between Rudraprayag and Karanprayag in the Alakananda valley, where the Government had explicitly made over these forests to the neighbouring villages.<sup>82</sup> As later developments indicated, the small extent of forests under the control of village panchayats were invariably well managed.<sup>83</sup>

Discontent with the new forest regulations manifested itself in various other ways. The option of flight was considered by a group of villagers belonging to Tindarpur patti in Garhwal, who approached an English planter for land, 'as the new forest regulations and restrictions were pressing on them so severely that they wished to migrate into another district and climate rather than put up with them any longer'.<sup>84</sup> Another form of protest - non-compliance with imposed regulations - was evident when villagers gave misleading information at the time of

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82. T D Gairola to Secretary, Govt. UP, dated 8.1.1918; Note by D. Joshi cited in fn.30, both in FD file 83/1909.

83. See C.M. Johri, WP for the Garhwal for Div., 1940-41 to 1954-55 (Allahabad 1940), 20; D.N. Lohani, WP for the North and South Garhwal Divisions, 1958-59 to 1972-73 (Allahabad 1962), 35.

84. District and Sessions Judge, Moradabad, to Pvt. Secretary to L-G, UP, dtd. 2.3.1916, in FD file 163/1916 (Forest Settlement Grievances in the KD'), UPSA.

the fixation of rights.<sup>85</sup> As villagers were 'not in a frame of mind to give much voluntary assistance', one DFO predicted, accurately, 'active resentment' at the fire protection of large areas and their closure to grazing and other rights.<sup>86</sup>

1916 witnessed a number of 'malicious' fires in the newly constituted reserved forests. In May, the forests in the Gaula range of Naini Tal division were set ablaze. The damage reported was exclusively in chir forests - and 28,000 trees which were burnt had to be prematurely felled. For the circle as a whole it was estimated that at least 64% of the 441 fires which burnt 388 square miles (as against 188 fires that had burnt 35 square miles in the preceding year) were 'intentional'.<sup>87</sup>

The 'deliberate and organized incendiarism' of the summer of 1916 brought home to the state the unpopularity of the forest settlement and the virtual impossibility of tracing those who were responsible for the fires. Numerous fires broke out simultaneously over large areas and often the occurrence of a fire was the signal for general firing in the whole neighbourhood.

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85. According to the settlement officer, 'much was omitted and much exaggerated, much extenuated and much set down in malice', while quarrels over rights' were unfortunately always very bitter', Nelson 'Forest Settlement Report', 2-4, 13, 25.

86. Osmaston, 'North Garhwal WP', 67.

87. APFD, 1916-17, 7; Report on the administration of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, 1915-16 (Allahabad 1916) viii.



44 fires occurred in North Garhwal division, almost all in order to obtain a fresh crop of grass. In Naini Tal and in the old reserves of Airadeo and Bin Sar of Almora district - areas which had been fire protected for many years - an established crop of seedlings was wiped out. The areas chosen for attack had been under both felling and resin tapping operations.<sup>88</sup> In Airadeo, the fire continued for three days and two nights with 'new fires being started time after time directly a counterfiring line was successfully completed'.<sup>89</sup> As a result of such 'incendiarism', several thousand acres of forest were closed to all rights for a period of ten years.<sup>90</sup>

The protests against the forest settlement were viewed with apprehension in Lucknow, where the Lieutenant Governor, anticipating the conclusion of world war I, observed that 'it would be a pity for the 39th Garhwalis to come home and find their villages seething with discontent'. Reporting on the situation, the DC of Garhwal concluded, somewhat self-evidently that Government could not but affect village life in every patti by taking over the forests. The people's 'dislike of the Forest department and the horde of new underlings let loose on the district' was shared by the soldiers, one of whom stated that if the war had ended before they left Europe, they could have petitioned the King to rescind the settlement. The soldiers' discontent was evidently disturbing - for, as the district officer

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88. AFFD, 1915-16, 7f.

89. H.G. Champion, "Observations on some effects of fires in the chir (*pinus longifolia*) forests of the West Almora Division", Indian Forester 45 [1919], 353-63.

90. H.G. Champion, WP for the Central Almora for DW (1922), 13-14.

put it, 'if we can get them on our side it will be a great thing ..... They are already a power in the land and will be still more a power after the war'.<sup>91</sup> The forest department continued to be complacent about the possibilities of such discontent blowing over when the villagers had 'greater familiarity with the true aims of the department'.<sup>91</sup> Alternately, they pointed to the strategic and financial results obtained in a few years of commercial working.<sup>93</sup> Percy Wyndham, as the

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91. J.C. Meston (Lieutenant Governor) to Comm. K.D., dated 5.3.1916; D.C. Garhwal to L-G, dtd. 27.3.1916; 'Note on the forest settlement and the Garhwali officers of the regiment', by D.C. Garhwal, dated 20.3.1916, all in FD file 163/1916.

The soldier's comment indicates that (as in other pre-industrial societies) in the eyes of the peasantry the King remained an abstract entity far removed from his exploitative officials, and could thus be called upon to dispense justice, Cf. G. Rude, The Crowd in History (New York 1964).

92. G.O. No.197/XIV/163, dated 14.2.1918, appended to APFD, 1916-17.
93. See G.O. No.114/XIV/172 of 1918 dtd. 4.2.1919, appended to APFD 1917-18 ('...if any justification were required of the recent forest settlement in the Kumaun hills it could be found in the help which the Forest department has rendered in meeting the demand for essential for essential commodities like resin and turpentine').

Such rationalizations were echoed by the Forest Settlement officer of Almora, who pointed to the relative prosperity of the hillman - 'he lives in a far better house, he wears better clothes, he is far more adequately fed, and he does one quarter of the work' - as compared to his counterpart in the plains. And as the hill forests were 'a valuable asset, looked at from the financial side alone' it would be 'generally wasteful' and 'a distinct injustice to the dwellers in the plains', if they were 'not developed and exploited to the uttermost, out of any mistaken feeling of sympathy for the already pampered Kumauni' see Nelson, 'Forest Settlement Report', Appendix B ('excerpts from Forest settlement report of Almora', by N.C. Stiffe), 31-32. A mere fifteen years later, following the forest movement of 1930, British officials were arguing that the major contribution of forest management in Kumaun was the employment of the poverty stricken hillman as forest labour. Thus, 'thousands of hillmen would literally starve....but for this supplementary source of employment'. See F.C. Ford Robertson, Our Forests (Allahabad 1936), 30-31, etc. This dramatic shift testifies to the hypocrisy inherent in the posturings of the colonial state, which, like other governments, had at all times to pose (in Marx's phrase) as 'the patriarchal benefactor of all classes'.

Commissioner of Kumaun the senior official entrusted with law and order, was considerably less sanguine. He preferred that the hills continue to provide 'excellent men for sepoy, police and all such jobs' - a situation jeopardized by the forest department which had demarcated the 39th Garhwali villages as if 'the world were made for growing trees and men were vermin to be shut in'. In a situation where the 'Revenue Department holds the whole country by bluff', without the help of regular police, Wyndham was clearly not prepared to enforce new rules on a 'dissatisfied people', preferring to do away with forest rules and staff altogether.<sup>94</sup>

Contravention of the new regulations concerning lopping, grazing, and the duties of rightholders was, as Table III indicates, perhaps the most tangible evidence of the continuing friction. Figures from other forest circles are given by way of comparison. While the number of yearly convictions in the Kumaun circle far exceeded those obtained elsewhere, a comparison with 'Criminal Justice' in Kumaun itself is no less revealing. Over a ten year period (1898 - 1908), an average of only 416 persons were convicted annually in Almora district, on account of cognizable crime of all kinds, ranging from non-payment of excise to murder.<sup>95</sup> Indeed, with the absence of an adequate patrolling staff, many breaches of the forest law went undetected.<sup>96</sup> Underlying the stiff resistance to the regulations of the forest department was a tradition of hundreds of years of unrestricted use.<sup>97</sup>

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94. Wyndham to Meston, dtd. 26.6.1916; same to same, dtd. 3.7.1916; 'Subjects for discussion at the conference of selected officers to be held at Government House Naini Tal at 10.30 a.m. on the 28th August 1916; Sd/- P. Wyndham, dtd. 14.8.1916, all in FD file 163/1916.

95. Figures calculated from Walton, (Almora', Appendix Table V ('Criminal Justice')).

96. See, for example, G.O. No. 1237-XIV-209, dated 2.11.1922, appended to APFD, 1921-22.

97. See APFD, 1919-20, 8; Osmaston, 'North Garhwal WP', 89.

Table III

Breaches of Forest Law in U.P., 1911 - 1922.

Circle	Western Circle		Eastern Circle		Kumaun Circle <sup>(1)</sup>	
	A <sup>(2)</sup>	B <sup>(2)</sup>	A	B	A	B
1911-12	786	1798	1167	2306	958	2159
1912-13	881	2182	1230	2424	1203	3374
1913-14	1006	2091	1365	2905	1309	3864
1914-15	1248	2681	1646	3293	1671	5857
1915-16	1401	2662	1514	3029	1610	5796
1916-17	1368	2517	1636	2944	2023	10264
1917-18	1242	2364	1530	2777	2197	11046
1918-19	1153	2058	1723	3167	2167	11024
1919-20	1162	2120	1378	2773	2136	13457
1920-21	926	1618	901	2154	1723	10328
1921-22	1248	2437	1622	839	2070	3799 <sup>(3)</sup>

Source: APFD, relevant years.

Note: (1) The total area of reserved forest in U.P. equalled 4.32 million acres, of which 1.91 million acres lay in the Kumaun Circle.

(2) A = Cases; B = Convictions (persons)

(3) Cases dropped due to the recommendation of the Kumaun Forest Grievances Committee.

FORESTRY AND TRADITIONAL FORMS OF PROTEST

The continuing opposition to forest administration bore a strong similarity to traditional methods of social protest in Kumaun and Garhwal. Known as 'dhandak',<sup>98</sup> peasant movements had typically encompassed two major forms of protest. First of all, peasants refused to comply with imposed rules and the officials who enforced these rules. Occasionally, when the demands grew excessive and were backed by force, villagers fled to the jungles, or across political frontiers into British territory. Alternately, peasants would catch hold of an offending official, shave off his head and moustache, put him on a donkey with his face towards the tail and drive him out of the state. Such non-cooperation at a local level often culminated in a gathering of men drawn from neighbouring villages. Having decided not to cultivate their fields or pay revenue, peasants marched to the capital, accompanied by the beating of drums. Here they demanded an audience with the king and a repeal of the new laws.<sup>99</sup>

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98. From "dand kuye gi", the admonition used by Garhwali mothers to hush troublesome children (personal communication from Shool Beer Singh Panwar).

This account of the dhandak is based on my archival and field research on peasant movements in the princely state of Tehri Garhwal. For reports on dhandaks, see inter alia, Foreign Dept., Internal B Progs, October 1907, Nos. 37-39, NAI; T.D. Gairole, "The disturbance in Rawain (Tehri), Leader, 3.8.1930.

99. Widely prevalent all over the hills, in the trans-Jamuna hill chiefdoms an identical form of protest movement was called the "dum". See "Mass demonstrations in the hills", Indian States Reformer (Dehra Dun), 22.5.1932; Foreign Dept. Internal-A Progs, March 1908, Nos. 42-43, NAI.

In the dhandak, the absence of physical violence, barring isolated attacks on officials, was marked. The socio-cultural idiom of the dhandak was predicated firstly on the traditional relationship between raja and praja, and secondly, on the democratic character of these peasant communities. By protesting in such a manner, peasants actually believed that they were helping the king - to whom they accorded a quasi-divine status - restore justice. With punishments being inflicted on erring officials, the dhandak invariably subsided - only to flare up again when fresh cases of tyranny occurred.

The dhandak essentially represents a right to revolt sanctioned by custom. Hindu scriptures urged obedience to the sovereign, subject however to the right to revolt when the king failed to protect his people.<sup>100</sup> A form of rebellion sanctioned by customary law has existed in many pre-capitalist societies, from mediaeval Europe to twentieth century African kingdoms.<sup>101</sup> In the words of Max Weber, 'opposition is never directed against the system as such - it is a case of 'traditionalist' revolution' - the accusation against the ruler being that he failed to observe the traditional limits to his power.<sup>102</sup> In the area covered by our study, the dhandak embodied, however, a distinctive form of social protest which continued to be used, albeit with variations, during the colonial period. Vestiges of this form of collective resistance can be found in contemporary peasant movements as well.<sup>103</sup>

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100. K.M. Panikkar, "The Ideas of Sovereignty and State in Indian Political thought" (Bombay 1963), 22.

101. Fritz Kern, Kingship and the law in the middle ages, translated by S.B. Chrimes (Oxford 1956); Max Gluckman, Order and Rebellion in tribal Africa (London 1963).

102. Max Weber, Economy and Society, edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley 1978), I, 227.

103. Cf. Ramachandra Guha, "Sociology of Chipko : a study of the Badyargarh Andolan, 1979", in M.K. Raha ed. Himalaya : from East to West (Allied Publishers, Delhi, in press).

THE UTAR AND FOREST MOVEMENTS, 1921

Meanwhile, village opposition to the begar system was matched organizationally by the establishment of the Kumaun Parishad in 1916. This association of local journalists, lawyers and intellectuals, chaired in its initial years by Rai Bahadurs professing loyalty to the King Emperor, underwent a rapid transformation with the onset of the Forest Department and the enhancement of the customary services in Kumaun. The impact of village-level protest and, indirectly, the upsurges elsewhere in India, contributed to a growing radicalization of the parishad, best exemplified in the person of Badridutt Pande of Almora, who as Shekhar Patnak has compellingly shown, pande, far more than other Kumaun nationalists (such as Govind Ballabh Pant) was acutely aware of the growing discontent among the peasantry. (However, most parishad leaders were small landholders like the majority of their kinsmen, and perhaps less alienated from the villages than urban nationalists in many other parts of India.<sup>104</sup> Convinced of the futility of memoranda presented to government by a few individuals based in Almora, Pande and his associates sought to establish branches of the parishad in the village of Kumaun. Simultaneously, his weekly Shakti, published from Almora, became an important forum in which the begar system and forest rules were made the butt of strident criticism.<sup>105</sup>

104. See Pant's evidence to the Royal Commission on Agriculture in India (London 1927), Vol.VII, 360.

105. Shekhar Pathak, Badridutt Pande aur unka yug (Lucknow 1982), 12-24, Hereafter Pathak (3).

In 1920, Shakti reported a strike against utar by villages in patti Kairarao, with villagers refusing to pay the fine levied on them. At the annual session of the Kumaun parishad, held at Kashipur in December 1920, a major conflict arose between those who still heaped to negotiate with the state and village representatives who pressed for direct action. After the reformists had walked out, the latter urged Badridutt Pande and other parishad leaders to come to the Uttaraini fair.<sup>106</sup> Held in mid-January at Bageshwar, (a temple town at the confluence of the Saryu and Gomati rivers) this fair annually attracted 15 - 20,000 pilgrims from all over the hills.

Here, matters came to a head. In early January, the Conservator of Forests was refused coolies at Dwarahat and Ganai, and anticipating a strike, the DC of Almora, W.C. Dible, urgently asked government for a declaration of its future policy (a request summarily dismissed).<sup>107</sup> At Bageshwar, a crowd of over ten thousand heard Badridutt pass on a message from Mahatma Gandhi that 'he would come and save them from oppression as he did in Champaran'. When almost all responded to a call to raise their hands to show that they would refuse utar, Pande continued: 'After abolishing coolie utar they would agitate for the forests. He would ask them not to extract resin, or saw sleepers, or take forest contracts. They should give up service as forest guard which involves insulting their sisters and snatching their sickles'.

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106. Pathak (2), 22-4. Prominent among the village activists was Mohan Singh Mehta of Katyur.

107. DC No.C.3, dated Bageshwar, 17.1.1921, from DC, Almora to Comm., KD; Extract from confidential fortnightly report of Comm., KD, dated 10.1.1921, both in Police Department (PD) file 1151/1921, UPSA.



Sloganas in praise of Mahatma Gandhi and 'Swatantra Bharat' and cries that the government was 'anniyayi' (unjust) rent the air.<sup>108</sup> In a dramatic gesture, village headmen flung their coolie registers into the Saryu.<sup>109</sup>

In the weeks following the fair, several officials were stranded when the villages neighbouring Bageshwar declined to supply coolies. Elsewhere, only khushkharid (i.e. on payment) coolies were available, at extraordinarily high rates. With school-masters and other government functionaries extending their support to the movement, Dible hastily summoned regular police.<sup>110</sup> Pathak has uncovered evidence of at least 146 anti-begar meetings in different villages of Garhwal and Kumaun, between 1st January and 30th April 1921.<sup>111</sup> When the DFO of Almora complained of the continuing difficulties faced by touring officials, he was tersely told that the district administration was not in a position to 'give you or your department one utar coolie'.<sup>112</sup> Requests for utar were not made in tracts where they were likely to be refused.<sup>113</sup> In a matter of weeks, the state's determination not to dispense with the system itself had broken down, and its abolition followed. In the following year, over

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108. Summary of Badridutt Pande's speech at Bageshwar, by S. Ijaz Ali, Deputy Collector, Almora, in ibid.

109. Pathak (2), 29.

110. DC. Almora, to Comm., KD, No.C.3, dated 17.1.1921; same to same, No.C.4, dated 20.1.1921; No.43 CT, 21, dated 29.1.1921, from Comm., KD, to Chief Secretary, UP all in PD file 1151/1921.

111. Pathak (1), Appendix III.

112. No.42, C.I.21, dated 28.1.1921, from Comm., KD, to DFO, Almora, in PD file 1151/1921.

113. Comm., KD, to Secretary to Government, UP, dated 4.3.1921, in GAD file 739/1920.

1.6 lakh rupees were spent by the exchequer on the transport and stores of touring officials in the hills.<sup>114</sup>

As the press communique issued by the UP government emphasized, the growth of the Forest Department, with all that this implied for the social and economic life of the hill peasant, was at the root of the anti-bogar movement.<sup>115</sup> Peasant opposition to utar was conducted at a different level, and for quite different reasons, from the periodic memoranda, appealing to the instincts of a benign and civilized government, that liberal nationalists continued to submit to the state.<sup>116</sup> An English planter based in Kausani reported that while Hargovind Pant, an Almorah lawyer, was asking that coolies not be supplied for utar, village leaders were prepared to go even further. Thus local activists insisted that no coolies should be applied at all, i.e., they were against khushkharid coolies as well.<sup>117</sup> After

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114. Resolution passed by UP Legislative Council on 5.3.1921; Table on transport of Officers in camp, 1921-22, enclosed with D.O. No.215, dated 17.6.1922, from Comm., KD, to Deputy Secretary, GAD, UP, both in ibid.
115. 'In recent years, mainly owing to the rapid expansion of the Forest Department, the demands for utar have greatly increased and the obligations of furnishing utar has caused growing resentment'. Press Communique, dated 1.2.1921, Sd/- HS Crosthwaite, Secretary to Government, UP, in ibid.
116. See Memorandum on Coolie utar submitted by Kumaon Association (Ranikhet branch) to L-G, UP, dated 16.10.1920, in ibid.; Speech by T.D. Gairola cited in fn.54.
117. Letter from R.G. Bellaire, Colonization Officer on Soldier settlement estates, Kausani, to D.C. Almorah, dated 1.2.1921, in PD file 1151/1921.

Bageshwar, the DC of Almora was tersely informed by a group of padhans that they had refused to supply coolies in order to compel attention to their grievances, chief among which was the taking away of their forests. Dible reported that proposals for closure to grazing had much to do with this intense feeling. A fund had been created by the villagers - anticipating punitive action - for defending anyone against whom the state had initiated proceedings, and for paying fines where they were inflicted.<sup>118</sup> While this unity and sense of purpose necessarily made their actions political, the politics of the peasantry was clearly not derivative of the politics of urban nationalism. Apart from a hazy perception of Gandhi as a saint whose qualities of heroic sacrifice were invoked against the inimical powers of government,<sup>119</sup> the utar movements had little in the nature of an identification with the Congress as such.

#### THE FOREST MOVEMENT OF 1921

Following Uttaraini, Pande and his colleagues toured the different pattis of Almora, establishing local Sabhas of the Parishad. Inspired by the success of the anti-utar campaign, Pande in his speeches urged the need for direct action in order to recover lost rights over forests. For the 'Government that sells the forest produce is not liable to be called a real Government' - indeed, it was precisely these mercenary motives which had made God send Gandhi 'as an incarnation in the form of

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118. D.C. Almora to Comm. KD, dtd. 17.1.1921; same to same, No.C. 15, dtd. 24.1.1921, both in ibid., Wyndham was clear that "the root of the whole evil and discontent is our d - d forest policy" (No.2. C.II, 21, dtd. 1.2.1921, from Comm., K.D. to Chief Secy., U.P. in ibid.).

119. Cf. Govind Chatak, Garhwali lok geet (Dehradun 1956), 261-62.

Bania to conquer Bania Government'.<sup>120</sup> As the reference to Gandhi's caste indicates, the term 'bania' evoked images of power as well as deception - by selling forest produce, the state was hastening the erosion of the legitimacy it had earlier enjoyed in the eyes of the peasantry. At Bageshwar, Badridutt had depicted this transition in tellingly effective symbols. When forest resources and grass were plentiful and easily available, villagers had an abundance of food and drink - but now he said, 'in place of tins of ghee the Forest Department gives them tins of resin'.<sup>121</sup> Sensing the peasantry's mood after the utar strike, Dible had, with uncanny prescience, predicted the shape of the impending agitation'. (The) next move will be against the Forest Department. Agitators will make a dead set for resin coolies and contractors' coolies engaged in sleeper work, and try to drive them from this work. The people will be incited to commit Forest offences and we shall have serious trouble with fires'. In the coming months, breaches of the forest law increased daily - these included not merely the firing of forests for grass but also 'wholesale cutting of trees'.<sup>122</sup> In Garhwal, too, the

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120. 'Report of Pandit Badridutt Editor's speeches to Villagers in Almora district', in PD file 1151/1921.

121. See Criminal Case No.7 of 1921, King Emperor Vs. Motiram, Buchanand and Badridutt of Totashiling, at Police Station Palla Boraran, in the court of WC Dible, District Magistrate, Almora, dated 7.7.1921, in FD file 157/1921 ('Forest fires in Kumaun'), UPSA.

The implication, if it needs to be spelled out, was that while the forests had earlier supplied products like ghee and thus contributed to the local economy, they were used now to produce resin which was of no use to villagers. The use of such a metaphor, it may be added, reiterates the strong emphasis placed on village autonomy.

122. DC, Almora to Comm., KD, No.C.15, dated 24.1.1921; same to same, No.C. 63, dated 2.3.1921, both in PD file 1151/1921.

popular feeling against the forest policy continued to be 'very bitter'.<sup>123</sup>

The summer of 1921 was one of the driest on record. The failure of the winter rains had contributed to a poor rabi crop and money was sanctioned as subsistence taccavi in the hill districts.<sup>124</sup> In Potashiling, where the campaign was to be at its most intense, the local branch of the Kumaun parishad passed a resolution that the people were themselves to decide whether or not to set fire to forest land falling within San assi boundaries.<sup>125</sup> From the last week of April, a systematic campaign, especially in Almora district, had been launched for firing the forest. When called upon (under Section 78 of the Forest Act) to assist in extinguishing these blazes, villagers instead directed their energies towards helping the fire to spread. As a consequence, the attempted fire protection by the Forest Department of commercially worked areas was a major failure. Of 4 lakh acres of forest in which fire protection was attempted, 2.46 lakh acres were burnt over.<sup>126</sup> The machinery for control

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123. Extract from fortnightly D.O. from Comm., KD for second half of March 1921, FD file 157/1921.
124. See File No. 56 of 1921, A Progs., Nos. 1-2, May 1921, Dept. of Revenue and Agriculture (Famine), NAI.
125. 'Parja ke civil jungalon ko yane assi sal ke nisanon ke andar parja aag lagawe ya na lagawe, parja ki khushi'. This resolution was printed in the Shakti of 12.4.1921 (extract found in FD file 157/1921: all archival sources in the rest of this section, unless mentioned otherwise, are from this source). The san (or sal) assi boundaries were the traditional village boundaries recognized by Traill in the year 1823 (corresponding to Samvat 1880).
126. Fortnightly DO No. 13.CY.21, dated 23.5.1921, from Comm., KD to Chief Secretary, UP; DO. No. 348, dated 28.5.1921, from Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF), UP to Governor, UP; No. 53-CC/XIV-1, dated 2.6.1921, from Cffg CF, Kumaun Circle to CCF, UP.

of forest offences 'more or less broke down', and an estimated total of 819 offences occurred of which 395 were definitely known to be 'incendiary'.<sup>127</sup>

Several features of a form of social protest summarily labelled 'incondiarism' by the state merit comment. On the one hand, it represented an assertion of traditionally exercised rights - the annual firing of the forest floor - circumscribed by the state in the interests of commercial forestry. On the other, the areas burnt over were almost exclusively chir pine forests being worked for both timber and resin - this wholesale burning of the chir reserves, representing, as Wyndham acknowledged, a 'direct challenge to Government to relax their control over forests'.<sup>128</sup> The intensification of the campaign in Almora and Naini Tal was confined to those areas well served by a network of roads, areas that had been under commercial working for some time. When fires swept through nearly all the areas being logged, young regeneration was wiped out. Covering nearly 320 square miles of forest, these fires destroyed 114 lakh resin channels and 65,000 maunds of resin.<sup>129</sup> At the same time, there is no evidence that the vast extent of broad-leaved forests, also under the control of the state, were at all affected. As in other societies in different historically epochs, this destruction by arson was not simply a nihilistic release but carefully selective in the targets attacked. As Eric Hobsbawm has

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127. APFD, 1921-22, 7-8.

128. D.O. No. 31.C.VI.21, dated 9.6.1921, from Comm., KD, to Home Member, UP.

129. Bhatia, 'E Almora WP', 41; Ford Robertson, 'Our Forests', 30-31.

argued, such destruction is never indiscriminate, for 'what is useful for poor men' - in this instance broad leaved species far more than chir - is spared.<sup>130</sup>

But, as the analysis of court cases by the Collector of Almora indicates, the act of burning the chir forests represented a direct confrontation with the colonial authorities. The decision to burn the commercially worked areas was predicated, not merely on their containing the locally almost useless (i.e. in comparison with oak) chir pine. For, as Badridutt Pande well understood, the export of forest produce by the state clashed strongly with the subsistence orientation of the hill peasant. In the Collector's classification, typical in its detail of the concern of the colonial state to understand - with a view to suppressing - any sign of protest, the fire cases were broken down into the following heads:<sup>131</sup>

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130. See his Primitive Rebels (3rd edn., Manchester 1974), 25-6.

131. This extremely revealing classification and the following paragraph are taken from the two 'Statements on fire cases in Almora', Sd/- WC Dible, dtd. 23.7.1921 and 3.11.1921 respectively. Unfortunately, similar details could not be traced for Naini Tal and Garhwal.

FIRE CASES IN ALMORA, 1921

H e a d	No. of cases	No. of persons involved
<b>I. <u>INTENTIONAL</u></b>		
A) To paralyse FD by destroying valuable areas	8	21
B) To cause loss to FD by way of revenge due to hatred	26	45
C) To have good grass for cattle	11	17
D) To cause loss to resin mates out of enmity	2	3
E) Out of enmity to spite another	3	5
F) Whose agitation was direct cause of fire	NA	13
Total	50	104

**II. ACCIDENTAL**

(This includes smoking or carrying fire within the reserves, the spread of fire from cultivated fields or waste land not under government, etc.)

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Further details which may reveal more about the nature of protest, can be gleaned from summary accounts of the court cases. Gangua, aged 16, was one of several youths 'put up by non-cooperators' to destroy 'valuable regeneration areas' by fire. Nor was participation restricted to men. Thus Durga was sentenced to one month in jail when she 'deliberately set fire to Thaklori forest'. In at least four different instances, witnesses set up by the prosecution were 'won over' by non-cooperators and the cases had to be dropped. Chanar Singh and four others of the Tagnia clan of Doba Talla Katyur, were 'affected by lectures' by 'Non-cooperators and a Jogi', and set fire to regeneration areas. This tantalizingly brief reference to the yogi (who was latter prosecuted), leads one to speculate that the peasantry sought (as in the Uttaraini mela) a moral-religious sanction for their acts. No such sanction was required by Padam Singh and Dharem Singh of Katyur, awarded the maximum sentence of seven years RI, who expressed their opposition to state, monopoly in no uncertain terms. In the words of the Magistrate: 'The compartment fired was near the village and used by them. They resented the work of the Department in this compartment since it interfered with their use of the compartment. Therefore they set fire to it deliberately'.<sup>132</sup>

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132. Cf. Eric Hobsbawm on the Luddites: 'In some cases, indeed, resistance to the machine was quite consciously resistance to the machine in the hands of the capitalist'. "The Machine Breakers". In his Labouring Men (London 1964), 10.

The firing of pine needles for grass occurred in Garhwal as well. With commercial forestry and the protection of regeneration areas from grazing and fire as yet restricted in its operations, the damage to state - controlled forests was not as widespread as in Almora. Yet the DC had convicted 549 persons, 45 for 'direct or indirect incendiarism', and 504 for refusing to extinguish fires, before the recommendations of the Grievances Committee led to all pending cases being dropped. Fires were reported to be most acute in the areas bordering Almora, and in the southern parts of Lansdowne subdivision in the outer hills. With resin - tapping in its infancy, fires were most often started with a view to obtaining fresh grass.<sup>133</sup>

While all social groups participated, the involvement of soldiers in the forest movement of 1921 - in the same way as the participation of village headmen in the utar campaign - bore witness to the failure of the attempt by the colonial state to create an indigenous collaborating elite. In Garhwal, the fires were most often started by soldiers on leave, but as '99 per cent of the population sympathized with them', their apprehension by the authorities became an impossible task. <sup>4</sup> soldiers of the 39th Garhwalis were arrested for threatening or assaulting forest officials.<sup>134</sup> After the Uttaraini mela, ex-soldiers were active among those who helped the Kumaun parishad form Sabhas in the villages, of the Kosi valley. One soldier said in his speeches that 'Government was not a Raja, but a Bania and Rakshasi Raj and the King Emperor was Ravan'. Recounting his

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133. 'Fire cases in Garhwal district' Sd/- P. Mason, DC Garhwal, dated 9.9.1921; DC, Garhwal to Secretary, Government of UP, dated 29.12.1921; D.O. No.31.C.V.21, dated 9.6.1921, from Comm., KD to Home Member, UP.

134. DC Garhwal, to Secretary to Government, UP, dated 7.9.1921.

experiences in Europe, where he was wounded, the pensioner described the visit of the King Emperor to his hospital bedside. Asked to state his grievances, 'he complained against patwaris all that has been given is the Rowlatt Act and Martial Law'.<sup>135</sup> No longer was the king perceived as being bestowed with the quasi-divine powers of intervening to restore justice and a harmonious relationship between the state and the peasant. As expressed through the symbolism of the epics, the Government now embodied not merely the rapacious bania but the evil-intentioned demons of Hindu mythology. Ravan, the very personification of evil, was equated with the King Emperor, whose failure (or inability) to stem the expansive growth of the Forest Department and its minions and led to a rapid fall from grace.

Startingly different conclusions from those presented above are to be found in the writings of an American scholar who has recently studied the history of deforestation in Kumaun. According to Richard Tucker, the first non-cooperation movement under Mahatma Gandhi's leadership 'brought modern political conflict to the hills for the first time'. Thus in Kumaun, 'previously untouched by nationalist politics, several towns witnessed protest meetings between January and March' of 1921' and 'young Congress leaders were urging the population to resist what they called the abrupt the arbitrary new regulations'. In 'this incendiary atmosphere, the hills were suddenly in flames'. and 'the Sal (sic) forests were ablaze across the sivalik hills even into Punjab'. As Congressmen were 'appalled' at the damage,

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135. Source cited in fn.121.

'the blazes were evidently a tragic example of 'spontaneous peasant protest' in which 'thirty years' Forest Department Work was destroyed almost overnight'.<sup>136</sup>

The extracts quoted above are representative of the ideological approach that runs through Tucker's writings - one depressingly familiar to students of Indian historiography, it has usually been labelled 'elitist'. His account bristles with historical inaccuracies, and one may be mentioned as being particularly relevant here. Completely unaware of the popular movements against begar and the historic meeting at Bageshwar, he predictably traces opposition to 'young nationalist leaders of the Kumaun hill towns (who) found it a worthy issue'. Thus the people of Kumaun, 'represented by townsmen of the region', had 'forced the issue by 1919 into full discussion in the provincial legislature'. In the same year, which the participation of Congressmen like Govind Ballabh Pant, 'There was a clear threat of labour strikes - fortunately, the District (sic) Commissioner, Mr. Wyndham was highly respected on all sides, through his work a system was devised which introduced regular wages for the workers in the early 1920'.<sup>137</sup>

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136. Richard Tucker, 'The historical context of social forestry in India's Western Himalayas' (Mimeo - also published in Social Forestry in Africa and Asia (Washington 1982), 12; idem, 'The forests of the western Himalayas: the legacy of British colonial administration' (mimeo - also published in Journal of Forest History, 1982), 16-17 (emphasis in all cases added). Hereafter referred to as Tucker (1) and (2) respectively.

137. Tucker (1), 9-10, Tucker (2), 16-17 (emphasis in all cases ours). Nationalist historians have shared this bias. Thus the latest biographer of GB Pant confidently talks of the 'forest satyagraha (of 1921) organized by Pant and others'. See M. Chalapathi Rau, Govind Ballabh Pant (Delhi 1981), 16. We have however been unable to find any evidence of Pant's actual involvement in either the begar or forest movements.

The stereotypes that fall into place replicate those found at the upper echelons of colonial administration - viz. of illiterate villagers egged on by self-seeking politicians performing destructive acts in a fit of mindless fury. Not only is the possibility of any independent initiative on the part of the peasant denied, but his actions are depoliticized and rendered free of any underlying rationale. A blinkered vision if ever there was one, it consistently refuses to acknowledge both the logic of peasant resistance and its impact on the processes of colonial rule.<sup>138</sup> Thus Tucker makes the patently false assertion that Wyndham's judgement, and not the strikes before and after the Uttaraini fair, led to the end of coolie utar. He also subscribes to the colonial ex post facto viewpoint - not substantiated by historical precedent - of the state having a prior proprietary right in the forests. By insisting that it was the 'Forest Department's work' which was 'destroyed almost overnight' by the fires of 1921, he obscures the customary and consensual use of the forests by the village communities before 1911.

Interestingly, where village grievances are acknowledged as legitimate in elite discourse, they are unerringly traced to **oppression** by subordinate officials - in this case to collusion between petty forest officials and timber contractors. Thus, 'although senior British foresters were well aware that many of their employees were corruptible, ...within the authoritarian framework they were not able to do much about it'; and 'like their counterparts in other agencies of the colonial regime, were never

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138. See Ranajit Guha, 'The prose of counter insurgency'.  
op.cit.

fully able to monitor or control their chronically underpaid subordinates'.<sup>139</sup> Shared by many pillars of the Raj,<sup>140</sup> this arrogantly paternalist attitude was to find its fictional representation in Philip Mason's account of the begar abolition movement. In the following extract the DC of Garhwal, in response to a query by his wife, is interpreting the call for a strike against utar by the Allahabad educated Jodh Singh:

'You know the villagers carry our tents on tour'. 'They always seem cheerful about it. Don't they get paid?' She asked.

'They get paid all right, at least they do in my camp, and I don't think they mind doing it for me very much, because I always say in advance where I am going and when, and I stick to it. But the tahsildars made a plan

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139. Tucker (2), 18, 19, Tucker (1), 4-5. As we have argued elsewhere, to attribute popular movements to oppression by officials is to mistake appearance for reality. See 'Forestry in British and Post-British India', Section IV.

140. Thus the Home Member of UP, M.A.M Khan (The Raja of Mahmudabad), interpreting the 1921 movement for the benefit of the Governor, Harcourt Butler, said that 'above all the forest subordinate staff took advantage of the ignorance of these hill tribes (sic) by inflicting self-created penalties on them', and that these grievances laid the ground for the entury of 'non-Kumaun (sic) political agencies'. See note to Governor UP, by Home Member, UP enclosing KFGC report and file on incendiary fires, in FD file 109/1921, UPSA. Khan's ignorance typified the refusal by the state to acknowledge the threat to its own authority, enough evidence of which had been provided by its officers in Kumaun, and fashion instead a 'conspiracy' theory involving minor officials and outside agitators.

and then change their minds - sometimes they can't help it, something else crops up. Anyhow, the patwaris collect the villagers and keep them hanging about, sometimes for two or three days, and of course they don't get paid for that, and they hate it. And in the lower hills, they're beginning to think it's beneath their dignity to carry a load at all. I've tried to make the tahsildars more considerate, but it doesn't work. It's no use trying to make water run up hill, or a tiger go, the way he doesn't want to'.

'And what do exactly do you mean by that, you old cynic ? Have you got a cigarette ?'.

'I mean, its, the way of the country and it's no use trying to tell junior officials to be thoughtful for peasants. They won't, **unless** you're there to make them'.<sup>141</sup>

Local officials like Dible and Wyndham, cognizant of the situation, were able to more accurately trace the roots of the conflict that led to the radicalization of an organization originally set up to mediate between the state and the peasantry. Established in the afterglow of the coronation Durbar of 1911 the Kumaun Parishad initially swore undying loyalty to 'George Pancham'. But the pressure from below, as it were, egged them (and most noticeably Badridutt Pande) to adopt a more directly confrontationalist position.<sup>142</sup> And in July 1921, their philosophy

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141. Philip Mason (Pseud Woodruff), The Wild Sweet Witch (London 1947), 80-1. In the novel, Jodh Singh appears as the archetypal 'professional' agitator who after making contact with the political developments in the cities, comes back to awaken the previously slumbering hillfolk.

142. This process of radicalization has been delineated at great length by Shekhar Pathak in his writings.

was being described as 'the anarchist doctrine of direct action, which has been attempted in England by Bolshevist Labour Revolutionaries'.<sup>143</sup> Clearly, such a situation had been brought about by the 'inherent' elements of folk or popular ideology impinging upon, and transforming in the process, the 'derived' elements originating in the sphere of organized politics.<sup>144</sup> In this instance, at least, 'primitive rebellion' proved to be several steps ahead of 'modern nationalism', the rationale of its acts and the success which attended them being attested by the rapidity with which the state capitulated on both the begar and forest issues.<sup>145</sup>

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143. Dible to Wyndham, D.O. No.C.355, dated 24.7.1921.

144. The distinction between 'inherent' and 'derived' elements of popular ideology, has been made by George Rude, following Gramsci, in his Ideology and Popular Protest (London 1980). Rude, like some other historians, is rather more conscious of instances where so-called 'modern' ideologies have helped the process of political self/awareness on the part of the peasantry.

145. As a result of the forest movements, the State took away large areas from the forest department and placed them under the control of the civil authorities who allowed villagers comparative freedom.



VI

KUMAUN AND THE SOCIOLOGY OF PEASANT PROTEST

In this paper, we have tried to understand the form social protest took in Kumaun in the early decades of this century. We have shown that prior to the reservation of forests, hill society could be described as a conglomeration of village communities with control over the means of production and over the resources needed to reproduce itself. Commercial forestry and the changes it brought in its wake, initiated a process whereby the Kumaun peasantry began to lose control over these resources. The response of the peasantry to these profound dislocations ranged from incipient, 'unorganized' forms of protest - such as flight, breach of forest rules, etc. - to an open confrontation with the state as witnessed by the begar and forest campaigns of 1921.

One striking fact about these movements is the absence, comparatively speaking, of violence (certainly physical violence). The methods of protest characteristically used by the hill peasant were strikes and the burning of the forest floor. In this context, one may refer to the unusual political and economic structure of Kumaun, where the state dealt directly with the relatively egalitarian village communities without the help of an intermediary class enjoying a vested interest in land. The dreaded triad of 'Sarkar, Sahukar and Zamindar (which) was a political fact rooted in the very nature of British power in the subcontinent', was here conspicuous by its absence, as indeed was the 'total and integrated violence' of rebellion observed elsewhere.<sup>146</sup>

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146. Ranajit Guha, Elementary aspects of peasant insurgency in colonial India (Delhi 1983), 27, 157. These two aspects are repeatedly stressed by Guha - See *ibid.* 6-8, 84-5, 92, 112-13, 158, 160, 226, etc.

Although 'impatient of control',<sup>147</sup> the hill man enjoyed an autonomy rarely found elsewhere in India, as this description of the 'Garhwal village paharoo' by a British health officer testifies: 'I suppose it would be difficult to find any peasantry in the world more free from the res anguste domi (ie. straitened circumstances at home): he is the owner of a well built stone house, has as much land as he wants at a easy rental, keeps his flocks and herds, and is in every sense of the word, an independent man'.<sup>148</sup>

The absence of a culturally distinct buffer class (as the Hindu zamindars were to the tribals) between the body of cultivating proprietors and the state, and the comparative autonomy the former continued to enjoy, are germane to the particular forms taken by conflict between the peasantry and the constituted authority of the state, and the manner in which these conflicts were represented in popular consciousness. Undoubtedly, the first century of British rule and the paternalist style of Ramsay and Co. may have seen a partial transference of an allegiance earlier owed to the King. Traditionally, peasant protest in the pre-British period had taken the form of collective resistance to tyranny by officials, and concomitantly, a call to the monarch to restore justice. This form of protest, known as the dhandak,<sup>149</sup> continued to be

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147. KFGC, 2.

148. Dr. F. Pearson, "Report on Manamurree and small pox in Garhwal", in Selections, Vol.II (Allahabad 1866), 300.

149. Cf. Section IV above.

used - simultaneously, newer forms of peasant resistance emerged with the onset of forest management. One can however discern a continuity between the dhandak and these newer forms, in terms of the moral idiom in which subaltern classes protested elite domination. Forest administration introduced a notion of property - one integral to colonial rule but previously foreign to Kumaun - which ran contrary to the experience of the Khasa village communities in which different jatis shared a 'remarkable amity', symbolized by their sharing of the common hookah.<sup>150</sup> The affirmation of State monopoly and its corollary, the sharp diminution of community rights over forests, breached the notions of economic and social justice which scholars have called the 'moral economy' of the peasant. These notions, by no means primitive, of morality and of justice permeated peasant resistance to state encroachment on customary rights.

While representing, as we have argued, a direct challenge to state authority, the actions of the Kumaun peasant do not conform to the picture of militant violence drawn by scholars reporting various tribal and peasant revolts in peninsular India. Thus David Arnold, for example, has in several articles challenged the 'Gandhi-dominated saga'<sup>151</sup> of Indian nationalism. As rural and industrial protest in the colonial period often took a violent form, Arnold believes that 'for most Indians non-violence would appear to have been no more than a tactic, abandoned in favour of violent action once it had proved

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150. G.R. Kala, Memoirs of the Raj: Kumaun (Delhi 1974), 20.

151. David Arnold, "Rebellious Hillmen, the Gudem Rampa Risings, 1839-1924" in Ranajit Guha, ed, Subaltern Studies I (Delhi 1982), 88.

ineffective'.<sup>152</sup> A strikingly similar hypothesis has been put forward by Michael Adas in his review of peasant resistance in South East Asia. The pre-colonial situation, Adas argues, was characterized by different forms of 'avoidance protest' - strikes, flight, petitions, and other 'legal' or quasi-legal channels of protest', which were often preferred to not or rebellion. The latter form of protest became more common with the advent of colonialism, when a centralized and bureaucratic state apparatus increasingly impinged on village life. Traditional forms of protest were now rendered impotent, according to Adas, and violent rebellion was a logical consequence of this depersonalization of relations between officials and villagers.<sup>153</sup>

The Arnold-Adas position has important implications for the study of the social idiom in which protest was expressed in the colonial period. However, both authors occasionally seem to fall prey to a tendency to view the peasant as one who rationally chooses his means of protest in order to maximize future outcomes.<sup>154</sup> We venture to suggest that the dichotomy between violence and non-violence is, in certain respects, a

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152. Idem, "Industrial violence in colonial India", Comparative Studies in Society and History (CSSH), 23(2) [1980\_7, 236, emphasis added.

153. Michael Adas, "From avoidance to confrontation: Peasant protest in precolonial and colonial southeast Asia, CSSH, 23(2), 1981. See also the classic study by Sartono Kartodiraj, The Peasant's Revolt of Banten in 1888 (The Hague 1966).

154. This instrumentalist perspective is more markedly present in sociological studies of modern social movements - see J. Graig Jenkins, "Resource Mobilization Theory and the study of social movements", Annual Review of Sociology, No.9, 1983.

misleading one.<sup>155</sup> It obscures both variations in the structure of domination, and the manner in which such variations can help explain the socio-cultural idiom in which protest is expressed in different societies. Thus in Kumaun, the relative absence of violent means of protest may be related to the structure of domination in hill society - one that did not quite correspond to the forms of domination encountered elsewhere in India - and the distinctive history of peasant protest exemplified by the dhandak. At a very general level, it can be posited that the extent of violence will vary with different forms of domination.<sup>156</sup>

Central to a deeper enquiry, then, of why and how the peasant revolts are the socio-political structure in which protest manifests itself, its social and cultural (including religious idiom), and the links between any particular upsurge and those that have preceded it in point of time. One needs to examine more closely the relations between social superiors and inferiors, as well as the ideology of these relationships. For even where the dominance of one social group over another can be explained by reference to control over land and resources, one still needs to examine its institutionalization in social and psychological terms.<sup>157</sup>

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155. In Arnold's writings, the polemical use of these categories often comes dangerously close to the "non-violence equals reactionary" and "violence equals revolutionary" hypothesis once favoured by Marxist historians such as R.P. Dutt, who viewed Gandhi's espousal of non-violence as a diversionary tactic designed to stem the militancy of the masses. For a different reading of Gandhian methods, which tries instead to trace its roots to an indigenous tradition of non-violent resistance, see Dharampal, Civil Disobedience and Indian tradition (Varanasi 1971).

156. This argument owes a lot to discussions with Gyan Pandey and Partha Chatterjee. Cf also Eric Hobsbaum, Bandits (1969; rpt. Harmondsworth 1972), 18-21.

157. M.O. Gately, A. Lloyd Morte, and J.B. Wills, Jr., "Seventeenth Century peasant 'furies': some problems of comparative history", Past and Present, No. 51, 1971; PM, Gardner, "Dominance in India: a reappraisal", Contributions to Indian Sociology, N.S., No. 2, Dec. 1968.

One would then be able to relate specific aspects of rebellion with specific aspects of domination and subordination.

For the Kumaun peasant, the cohesion and collective spirit of the village community provided the mainspring of political action. The wideranging campaign of 1921, though differing from a modern social movement in its aims and methods, was far from being a spontaneous outburst of an illiterate peasantry representing a blind reaction to the expropriation of a resource crucial to their subsistence. It expressed, albeit in a far more heightened way, the motivations which underlay the sporadic and localized protests in the early years of forest administration. Expressed through the medium of popular protest were conflicting theories of social relationships that virtually amounted to two worldviews. One can meaningfully contrast state monopoly right with the free use of forest by members of the village community as sanctioned by custom - a pattern of use, moreover, regulated by the community as a whole. The exploitation of the pine forests on grounds of commercial, profitability and strategic imperial needs was at variance, too, with the use of natural resources in an economy wholly oriented towards subsistence. The invocation of the symbols of Bania and Rakshas, with all that they stood for, were a natural consequence of this discrepancy. As the paternalist state transformed itself into an agency intruding more and more into the daily life of its subject population, so its claim to legitimacy floundered. Peasant opposition to this encroachment took the form of consciously determined actions - actions incomprehensible to an observer unfamiliar with the social and cultural heritage of the Kumaun peasant. But set in their socio-historical context, these actions become intelligible, and are seen to represent a frontal challenge to state authority something which the seemingly docile peasantry had been thought incapable of.

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