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## CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN IN ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION IN CENTRAL HIMALAYAS: IN THE CONTEXT OF UTTARAKHAND

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The people of Uttarakhand have always been conscious about environmental protection. This land has always contributed in making the ecology favorable, and the geographical conditions here have always kept humans conscious of making them their allies. The geographical environment of the hilly areas of Uttarakhand has made human livelihood even more difficult, as a result of which the people here have always been cooperative towards nature to make their livelihood easier. Due to agriculture and animal husbandry being the main means of livelihood, human closeness with nature was naturally reflected. While on one hand the geographical environment here has always inspired the human society to carry on the tradition of planned exploitation of natural resources, on the other hand the women here have played an important role in making the life of the people of Uttarakhand an ally of nature. The necessity of fodder and fuel has played an important role in making nature and human society inclusive, but from time to time, external interference has always tried to spoil the harmony between the people's life and environment of Uttarakhand. As a result of this, situations of conflict have been arising between two systems, traditions and needs.

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The expansion of Europe into the rest of the world after the fifteenth century not only proved to be an attempt to change the stable structure of traditional societies, but also led to the defeats and enslavement of traditional societies, and these circumstances made societies lose their direct relationship with nature. Played a role in reflecting the importance of. When the colonial intrusion started directly attacking agriculture, cottage industries, and natural forest rights, the role of forest movements like Van and Begar and Dhandhak in Uttarakhand started getting ready. Amidst the social fabric, the scope of thinking of the mountain women of Uttarakhand was limited. Due to the social conservatism of the women's society, although in the beginning the opposition to the interference of the colonial rule on the forest rights kept emerging only in the form of a simple conflict between the Ghasiyari and the Patrol, but with the participation of women in the movements at the national level and the forest rights, Satyagraha also started affecting the women of Uttarakhand region and gradually national consciousness started developing among the women and they indirectly started getting involved in the struggle for their rights. This was the initial consciousness among the women of Uttarakhand about their rights. Gradually this consciousness was developing in a concrete form and the women power of this region started becoming aware of participating in social awakenings, movements and meetings. Women, the flower of social and national consciousness processions, indirectly ensured their participation in these movements.

Since the arrival of Gandhiji in Uttarakhand in 1929, immense enthusiasm for national awakening increased in the women's society and they started participating directly in national consciousness programs and actively participating in Satyagraha movements. Shobhamati from Haldwani, Yashodhara from Kashipur, and Vishni Devi from Almod were arrested. In protest against this, Satyagrahi women started organizing and women like Kunti Verma, Bhagirathi, Chandra Verma, Bhavani Joshi, Saraswati Pandey, Parvati, Channi Devi, Dhanni Devi etc. tried to set fire to the offices of Jangalat. ***Pahad Part 4 Page 220-221,***

In 1940, for the first time, a woman candidate from Nandprayag became the main candidate in the Panchayat elections. Apart from this, there were many such women like Satyabhama , Shyama Bachidevi, etc. who were working from village to village to organize the women. Yogesh Dhasmana, women in the public awakening of Uttarakhand, the villagers were taking a militant form as a form of resistance to the government. As a result, incidents of damage to forests started increasing. These events directly connected the quiet valleys of Uttarakhand with the events taking place in the rest of India and the women community of Uttarakhand became conscious of their natural rights and became active in the struggle and continuously participated in social consciousness movements. Started participating because these forest related problems were affecting women the most.

Even after independence, there was not much change in the attitude of the governments towards the natural resources of the mountains. Even after independence, rural communities have been continuously fighting against encroachment on their land, forests, language and culture as well as identity. Rural society and indigenous communities have been fighting to protect forests and land, rising above caste, religion and politics. As a result of the unplanned development policies of the governments that have increased the pace of exploitation of the traditional forests and lands of the villagers, a situation of conflict has often arisen between the rights of the hill people and the policies of the governments. The love of the hill people towards forests has been challenging the unplanned exploitation of the governments. While on the one hand the rural environment remains concerned about its forests and lands, on the other hand the attitudes of the governments have villainized the communities living around the forests. They have been branded as destroyers of forests, encroachers, living on wild resources and destroying the green environment.

On one hand, unplanned exploitation by the governments had created a situation of excessive rainfall and drought, while on the other hand, rural life was getting disrupted due to landslides, floods etc. The life of women in rural areas started becoming more difficult, as a result

of which poignant songs like Paali Ghas Paani Tab Holi and Dhaani started being heard in the mountain valleys. Due to disruption of forest-based life, incidents like suicide among women started becoming common. The proof of which was the incident of seven women of Mansoor village tying their bodies together and jumping into the river. Chandi Prasad Bhatt Chipko The Movement Page 251 The result of all these things was that even after independence, there was a movement for the protection of environment in Uttarakhand. Women have played a decisive role in this and have worked to make the civilized society of the world aware of the protection of the environment. The women's society of Uttarakhand has actively participated in all the social and national consciousness programs but on the subject In view of the inevitability of women's role in some forest movements, the role is being described.

### **Chipko Movement**

This movement started from Raini village of Chamoli district of Uttarakhand. In 1974, bidding was to be held in Dehradun for the auction of 2451 trees in the forest of Raini village. Strong opposition to this started in the hilly areas. And on March 23, a demonstration to protest against this started in Gopeshwar. On March 24, protests also took place in Joshimath, but regardless of these protests, the contractors reached the forests of Raini village. On the morning of 26 March, in the absence of men in the entire area, when the contractors started sending laborers to the forests and tried to cut trees, the courageous women of Raini village, Gaura Devi, Batti Devi, Mahadevi, Bhusi Devi, etc., 21 women along with some children, She took along with her and started walking towards the forest. Under the leadership of Gaura Devi, the women requested the laborers to do the felling work only when men come to the village, but the contractors and forest men considered the women innocent and started intimidating them. And started threatening to arrest him on charges of obstructing government work. But under the leadership of Gaura Devi, courageous women clung to the trees.

The contractors and laborers had no answer to this non-violent resistance of the women. When in anger one of the contractor's men took out a gun and pointed it towards the women in order to scare them, the fierceness of these simple women of the hills was revealed. Seeing the situation worsening, there was a stampede among the workers and gradually the workers started running away from the forest. It was the result of the courage of these women under the leadership of Gaura Devi that the mixed forest of Pangrani spread over an area of about 5 km was saved from being cut. By clinging to the trees, these women not only saved their forest from being cut but also saved it from being cut by the contractors who came to cut it. Were also driven out of the forests. After escaping from the forests of contractors, these women expressed their happiness by singing Pahari Jhumailo , Chanchadi. This unprecedented incident of courage of the women of Uttarakhand marked the beginning of a new awakening of environmental consciousness in the entire world. The slogans of this movement - ' Himputri ki lakar' , 'Government should change the forest policy' , 'Van jaage , vanvasi jaage ' became very popular.

#### **Dungi Pantoli Movement**

In 1980, the oak forests in Dungi and Pantoli villages of Chamoli were transferred by the government to the Horticulture Department, in protest against which the women of the village protested under the leadership of Mathura Devi and the government had to withdraw its decision.

#### **Songghati Forest Movement**

In 1974, a movement was started in protest against mining and exploitation of forests in the Hanwal valley of Song river spread in Dehradun and Tehri. This movement ended with talks in Lucknow on 5 June 1974 and Henwalghati Forest Protection Committee was formed on 27 June 1977.

#### **Khirakot Forest Movement**

In 1978, under the leadership of Malti Devi, the women of Khirakot village situated between Almora and Kausani started a movement against the Khadia mine owners because their fields and

barns were continuously decreasing due to the Khadia mine. Katiyar Minerals Company of Kanpur was mining Khadia here. This movement became more intense when in 1981, due to torrential rains, the fields looked like a sheet of snow. Which was actually not ice but had turned white due to the taking out of chalk after the mine. In protest against this, the women of the village started gathering and demanding closure of the mine. But the company was not ready to stop the mine. On this, Malti Devi reached to meet Radha sister of Lakshmi Ashram and with her support, the company had to stop the mining work due to the opposition of the villagers.

### **Maiti Movement**

Although the founder of this movement is Kalyan Rawat, the women power of Uttarakhand region has played an important role in making this movement successful. This is an emotional movement. In this, trees are planted by the bride and groom in their maternal home. The responsibility of taking care of the tree is handed over to the parents. Only unmarried girls participate in this movement. The groom plants the sapling while reciting Vedic mantras. This movement is very popular in the rural areas of Uttarakhand. There are organizations of sisters in many villages. The most vocal and conscious girl of the village becomes the president of Maiti organization and is addressed with the respectful address Didi. Other members of the organization are maternal sisters. These Maiti sisters protect the plant planted by the groom. Today this movement is becoming popular in foreign countries also.

In conclusion, it can be said that the women of Uttarakhand have made an important contribution in the protection and improvement of the environment. The main reason for this was that due to the traditional knowledge of the women power of this area, they were aware of how important it is for human life to keep the environment healthy and safe. Trees are the biggest source of converting solar energy into fuel. Oxygen, which is the basis of life, is also obtained from plants. Apart from this, forests are also the basis of animal husbandry necessary for livelihood. The weather had to be controlled and there is no source of water. That is why the main slogan of the forest movements

of Uttarakhand has been – What are the blessings of the forest, soil, water and wind?

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