

## REPORT

# Women and Development in the Garhwal Himalayas

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### Keywords

Garhwal Himalayas; women's empowerment; *panchayats*; *gram pradhan*,  
women's groups; India

### Introduction

A close look at the social, economic and political aspects of development in the Garhwal Himalayas<sup>1</sup> clearly indicates that women remain a neglected lot. This is partly because they have not been considered an important component in development, because of their poor social status. If we examine social attitudes towards women in general we find that not only is their work in society overlooked, but their basic needs and aspirations are also ignored. Traditional norms also devalue women and exclude them from decision-making and place them in a secondary position (Seth, 2001). As a result, development has failed to bring about significant changes in the quality of life of women in most of the remote areas of this hilly region. Actually, there is very little understanding about the basic needs of hill women and there

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is no appropriate strategy to give them an equitable share in the fruits of development. Despite a number of schemes for women's welfare, education, economic development, and political participation, poor hill women still find themselves at the receiving end. They are not only deprived of facilities necessary for a good quality of life, but they often remain uninvolved in the development process as well.

This report provides a broad description of the region and issues relating to women's development. Some of the information used here is based on other studies and secondary sources of data. In addition, a field survey was conducted in six villages in Chamoli and Tehri districts of the Garhwal Himalayas, and its findings are presented here as well.

The Indian Constitution provides for equal rights and prohibits any kind of discrimination on the basis of gender, race, religion, caste, region, etc. More recently, in order to empower women at the grassroots level, one-third seats have been reserved for them in village *panchayats* (village-level governing bodies) and other local governing bodies in urban areas such as *nagar-palikas* and *nagar-nigams*. These measures have enabled educated women, particularly in the urban areas, to make steady strides in the public sphere. In rural areas, however, women lag behind because of their poor status and ignorance. In some instances, uneducated women have assumed roles of political leadership in their villages, but it has been seen that they tend to remain excessively dependent on their husbands and are quite ignorant about their own rights. Furthermore, they are also discouraged from performing their duties and so do not show much interest in their leadership positions (*Hindustan Times*, August 8, 2003: 3). In India, even after 56 years of independence, women's representation in parliament is only a minuscule 7.2 percent. The legislation to provide 33 percent reservation for women in Parliament and state legislatures has been mired in controversy ever since it was proposed almost a decade back as none of the male-dominated political parties was serious or willing to provide more representation to women. Politics and policy making have been considered the sole preserves of men and unsuitable for women,

who are supposed to be soft, peaceful and submissive. With the current criminalisation of politics and growing violence, particularly against women, the majority of them have not shown any interest in politics (Chenoy and Vanaik, 2001). In the Ninth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) it was emphasized by the Government of India that a national policy for empowerment of women and development would be formulated (Seth, 2001). However, when we examine the entire gamut of policy formulation and planning for women's development in India, we find that the contributions and knowledge of women have often been overlooked and their involvement in various schemes has not been considered necessary. This is so despite the fact that women understand the needs of human development very well due to their close association with nature (Merchant, 1996). Apart from performing their roles of nurturing in the family, women in the hill regions are also responsible for all domestic and agricultural activities, but these are not measured in terms of the monetary benefits that may accrue to their families and are instead considered part of their feminine role of reproduction (Purusothaman, 1998).

### **Gender Disparity in the Garhwal Himalayas: Ground Realities**

In terms of form and degree, gender disparity in the Garhwal Himalayas is more or less the same as in other parts of India. This is visible not only in women's education, workload, health status, and so on, but also in the social structure and religious traditions. In fact, traditions only perpetuate their inequality. Migration to the plains by the able-bodied male population in search of jobs has had two consequences for hill women. On the one hand, it has increased their workload many times over, a situation that has been exacerbated by the lack of development of basic facilities particularly in the remote areas. On the other hand, migration by men, has led to a demographic imbalance in society, because only the aged people, women and children are left behind to look after the agricultural work, cattle and so on. Due to these factors, the population and sex ratio of women (per 1000 males) in some of the districts of the Garhwal

Himalayas is higher, as can be seen from the data given in Table 1.

Table 1. District-wise Population of Garhwal Himalayas (2001)

District	Females	Males	Total Population	Density of Population
Uttarkashi	142,580	151,599	294,179	37
Chamoli	186,165	183,033	369,198	48
Rudraprayag	120,036	107,425	227,461	120
Tehri Garhwal	309,768	194,842	504,610	148
Dehradun	603,534	675,549	1,279,083	414
Pauri Garhwal	365,713	331,138	696,851	129
Haridwar	671,040	773,173	1,444,213	612
Uttaranchal	4,163,161	4,316,401	8,479,562	159

Source: Government of Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal (2002)

As Table 1 shows, in Chamoli, Rudraprayag, Tehri and Pauri districts, women outnumber men and the sex ratio, since 1901 corroborates this reality (Table 2).

Table 2. District-wise Decadal Variation in Sex Ratio (1901-2001)  
(Females per 1000 males)

District	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941	1951	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Uttarkashi	1015	1026	1035	1017	976	993	964	899	881	918	941
Chamoli	1028	1033	1080	1066	1073	1092	1103	1035	1020	982	1017
Rudraprayag	1061	1067	1105	1092	1084	1144	1169	1169	1121	1094	1117
Tehri Garhwal	1006	1016	1025	1007	967	1122	1196	1179	1081	1048	1051
Dehradun	733	696	656	673	644	715	766	770	811	843	893
Pauri Garhwal	1031	1035	1083	1069	1076	1137	1163	1119	1091	1058	1104
Haridwar	864	823	818	820	802	806	796	803	817	846	863
Uttaranchal	831	907	916	913	907	940	947	940	936	936	964

Source: Government of Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal (2002)

As seen in Table 2, the female sex ratio was higher in Chamoli,

Rudraprayag, Tehri and Pauri Garhwal districts. Actually, it has always been higher in these districts, right from 1901. It has shown an increase during the last decade, from 982 in 1991 to 1017 in 2001 in Chamoli and from 1094 in 1991 to 1117 in 2001 in Rudraprayag. Similarly, in Tehri and Pauri Garhwal it increased from 1048 and 1058 in 1991 to 1051 and 1104 in 2001, respectively. These figures indicate the incidence of male migration because agriculture, which was the mainstay of 80 percent of the population in the region, has become rather unproductive.

Agriculture is generally undertaken in marginal and small farms, fragmented and scattered land holdings, with limited irrigation facilities. Traditional methods and practices of cultivation continue to be prevalent. It was estimated that about 68 percent of the total number of operational land holdings in the region were less than one hectare in size, which could not provide subsistence for cultivating households. Therefore, despite working throughout their lives, the average peasant family became unable to feed itself on produce from the land.

Studies (Bora, 1996; Mathur, 1983; Swarup, 1993) have shown that when men migrate to cities, apart from the domestic chores of cooking; fetching fuel fodder and water; childcare; the tasks of caring for livestock and agricultural work also fall on women's shoulders. In the hill areas, the women were estimated to contribute between 55 and 60 percent of the total labor, except for ploughing of the land and transporting the final produce to markets, as these jobs were primarily considered male tasks. However, women performed almost all other agricultural work (Mathur, 1983). Moreover, employment in the villages has become scarce, therefore, out-migration by the male population is inevitable, which in turn has added to women's workload. This is because whenever a man from a household migrates, his responsibilities and tasks are automatically transferred to his wife or to other women, especially when there are no other men to substitute for him.

Migration by the male population has given rise to a 'money-order' economy in the Uttaranchal hills, implying that the families are sustained by remittances sent by migrants. But in most cases, the

remittances are not received regularly and remain insufficient to meet all the needs of the households. Thus, ultimately, the responsibility of generating additional income falls on the shoulders of women, which makes things quite difficult for them because they do not have any rights of ownership over the land or other assets. For example, they cannot mortgage the land on their own, in the absence of their husbands, to resolve their financial problems. This situation is yet another example of the women being considered inferior to men, with little or no right over economic resources and property.

Apart from converting the hill economy into a money-order economy, migration by the male population has also given rise to various social and psychological problems amongst the hill women. It makes them vulnerable to mistreatment by relatives, which at times gets so serious that it has led to cases of women committing suicide. This situation largely stems from social customs and traditions, which do not allow women to leave their marital homes even if their lives become miserable. Since mistreated women do not get any support from their parents, they find themselves unable to cope with the problems, hardships and responsibilities associated with the migration of their husbands, they sometimes been known to resort to suicide.

Since the agricultural fields are located on terraces in the hilly region and are generally very small, modern agricultural tools cannot be used. As a result, agricultural work becomes highly time-consuming, thus increasing women's workload tremendously. Men usually prefer to do less time-consuming work, which requires less labor and generates more and quick money. They do not show much interest in routine agricultural work, because it requires hard labor and is less productive. Therefore, instead of sharing the work with women, they prefer to migrate to urban areas.

In some areas of Uttarakhand, people have switched over to cultivation of commercial crops such as vegetables, which have become a main source of income and livelihood for the villagers. While the cultivation of such cash crops has produced employment opportunities for men in the villages, and to some extent has contained migration, it has increased women's workload as well. For instance, Badhani (1998) reported in his study that the cultivation of commer-

cial crops has increased male employment in villages by 6.22 times, but women's employment has increased only by 1.78 times. Although virtually all farm activities were performed by men and women jointly, the annual workload of a male worker was found to be 824 hours in these villages, while the corresponding figure for female workers was 949 hours, which means that a woman had to work 1.15 times more than a man. The per capita income has also increased with the cultivation of vegetable crops by 2.77 times, to Rupees 3,301 presently (under the conventional cropping system it was only Rupees 1,413), but since men control the money earned, no significant change is visible in women's condition. This shows that commercialization has increased the workload of women, not only in farm activities, but also in off-farm activities, while the benefit of the new economic opportunities has accrued largely to men.

An analysis of literacy levels in Uttaranchal, as shown in Table 3, indicates that in Districts Uttarakashi and Tehri around 50 percent of the women have remained illiterate and in other districts of Uttaranchal, literacy among women was also lower than that of men. The total literacy rate has, however, shown improvement in the state, moving from 59.58 percent to 72.28 percent, between the years 1991 and 2001. The literacy rate of men increased from 75.51 to 91.47 percent; among women it improved from 42.87 to 68.14 percent in the period between 1991 and 2001.

Table 3 clearly shows that the literacy levels of the population, particularly the women, have improved in the last decade in the Garhwal Himalayas and, except for the two districts of Uttarakshi and Tehri, more than 50 percent women have become literate. Although this is a good sign, a lot more has yet to be done to assure a 100 percent literacy level that would go some way towards reducing gender discrimination. Actually, despite the government schemes and programs like Sarva-Siksha Abhiyan (Education for All Campaign) and free primary education for girls, the situation of literacy and education among women in rural and remote hill areas is still not very good because of the pathetic condition of the schools.

Table 3. Literacy Rate in Garhwal Division of Uttaranchal

District	1991			2001		
	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total
Uttarkashi	23.57	68.74	47.23	47.48	84.52	66.58
Chamoli	40.37	82.01	61.08	63.00	89.89	76.23
Rudrapur	-	-	-	59.98	90.73	74.23
Tehri Garhwal	26.41	72.10	48.38	49.76	85.62	67.04
Dehradun	59.26	77.95	69.50	71.22	85.87	78.96
Pauri Garhwal	49.44	82.46	63.35	68.14	91.47	77.99
Uttaranchal	42.87	75.51	59.58	60.26	84.01	72.28
India	32.41	52.63	52.11	54.16	75.85	65.38

Source: National Information Science Centre (2001)

### The Field Survey

The study area is located in the region of the Central Himalayas and the information was collected via observation, interviews and personal interaction with respondents in six villages and a total number of 309 families. These were the villages of Bajwar, Chepdo, Kera, Malari, Tyalni and Tyuna, which were selected on the basis of random sampling from the Chamoli and Tehri districts of Uttaranchal. Our questions related to women's workload, education, occupation, caste, family structure, migration, perception about themselves, problems, awareness about empowerment, functioning of local bodies (*panchayati raj* institutions), participation in socio-political and community affairs.

Samples were selected randomly and while choosing the villages for the survey, their location and the number of households in each were also considered. Some of the chosen villages were situated near the road head while others were almost 5 to 10 kilometers from the road. One high altitude village, Malari, was situated nearly 71 kilometers from Joshimath in Chamoli and practiced transhumance (migrating between summer and winter settlements).

Among the 309 families surveyed there were 878 males and

839 females (51.14 percent and 48.86 percent respectively); 68.78 percent of the men had occupations in their villages and 13.28 percent were in service outside. Among women, 85 percent of the respondents were found to be engaged in agriculture, 2.24 percent were in semi-government and government services such as teaching in primary schools, 1.12 percent were in private jobs and nearly 11 percent were studying; 87.68 were married and only 12.32 percent were unmarried. In these villages, almost 99 percent of the population was Hindu and 85 percent belonged to the higher castes, while only 15 percent were from the Scheduled Castes or Tribes. In one village, Malari, most of the people belonged to the Scheduled Tribes.

The uneven division of labor was based on gender differences, which gave women the secondary or subordinate place. This also reflected discrimination and disparity between the genders in hill society, because, while women were seen working, the men were largely seen loitering, gossiping, playing cards and smoking. The workload of women who comprised our study sample, actually came to around 17 hours per day as seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Workload of Women in the Study Sample

Work	Hour	Place	Distance	Frequency
Water	1/2	Home	20 m	Everyday
Fodder	4	Forest	6 km	Alternate day
Fuel	4	Forest	4-6 km	Alternate day
Pasture	2	Forest	2 km	Everyday
Agriculture	4	Field	1 km	Everyday
Marketing	Done mainly by men			
Childcare	1	Home	-	Everyday
Community Work	-	-	-	Seldom
Cooking	1	Home	-	Everyday
Washing	1	Home	-	Everyday
Rearing Animals	2	Home	-	Everyday

In village Malari, apart from agriculture and rearing animals, the wo-

men also worked on looms and prepared wool fabric and clothes from the wool they extracted from the sheep and goats. Some of these items were prepared for sale in the markets, the responsibility for which was taken over by the men who generally garnered the income generated thereby. The cultivation of cash crops like potato, kidney-bean, soya-bean, green vegetables, etc. was found to be popular among the villagers because this was an additional source of income. Since the villagers largely used organic manure for a better yield, the quality of the produce was very good, but in the absence of proper storage and transportation facilities, they had to sell it, especially the perishable products, at very low prices to the traders from the plains. While the production of these crops was useful, the income earned thereby was not sufficient in itself to meet their needs.

The survey revealed that the nuclear family was common in all the villages, as 54.62 percent of the families were found to be nuclear, while only 45.38 percent were found to be living in joint or extended units. The growth of small agricultural landholdings was associated with the increasing number of nuclear families and the division and sub-division of land. In these villages, 34.71 percent people had migrated temporarily in search of jobs and only 4.89 percent had migrated permanently. About 81.23 percent of the women respondents were of the view that migration of males to urban areas was due to the scarcity of jobs in the villages; 5.60 percent believed backwardness to be the cause for this; and 3.64 percent women felt it was prompted by the desire for a comfortable life style. Over 9.52 percent of the women had no opinion on this subject. In the village Malari the rate of temporary migration was found to be very high (93.61 percent) because most people practiced transhumance, that is, moved between high and low altitude regions during the summers and winters respectively.

The female population was fairly high in some of these villages, for example in Tyuna, Bazwar and Kera, it was found to be 54.32 percent, 56.70 percent and 52.63 percent respectively, whereas their corresponding male populations were 45.68 percent, 43.30 percent and 47.37 percent respectively. As discussed above, male migration

has produced an imbalance in the demographic profile and so in some of the villages of the Garhwal Himalayas, the sex ratio favors women. However, migration from these three villages was generally less and temporary because of the large number of low caste inhabitants who were poorly educated.

During our survey we discovered that most of the schools in these villages were understaffed and housed in one or two small rooms with meager facilities. We also found that the women respondents were in favor of educating their daughters, but hesitated to do so if schools were situated at a distance of more than 2 kilometers from their villages, as the young girls were responsible for looking after their younger siblings and helped their mothers in domestic and agricultural work as well.

A total number of 739 males and 499 females were found to be literate. The number of illiterate women (59.02 percent) and men (29.8 percent) was highest in village Malari. In Tyalni 44.86 percent women and 21.32 percent men were illiterate, while in Tyuna 48.6 percent women and 13.33 percent men were illiterate. In villages Bazwar, Chepdo and Kera more than 70 percent of the people were literate, which had an effect on the educational level of the women, most of whom (37.06 percent) had been educated up to the primary level. Only 12.27 percent women were educated up to high school, 5.12 percent up to senior secondary school and 5.01 percent were found to have graduate and post-graduate degrees. However, the highly educated women were not using their education in a productive manner because there were no opportunities for them to do so. Instead, they were involved in the traditionally given duties of sharing the workload of their mothers, cutting grass for fodder, fetching wood, water and so on. As a result, they not only found themselves unable to use their education for their families' benefit, but also lacked self-confidence and self-esteem. So it was seen that despite their education, the mindset and attitude of society, including its women, had not changed much. The women, too, were not in favor of participating in any activity without the permission of the men of their families.

The women who lived in villages that were closer to the road

head and in the suburbs of nearby towns were more knowledgeable and aware of social problems in general and sought to use their education in better ways, compared to their counterparts who lived in relatively inaccessible areas. In fact, women in the remote villages still tended to face greater oppression and deprivation. They were not allowed to take any decisions independently because of their limited education and opportunities. Further, they were unable to use their education in a fruitful manner or participate in the development process, as the concern for their developmental needs and requirements was still lacking at a social level. This clearly indicates that much has to be done to improve the status of women in these villages. Their situation also calls for improvement in self-confidence and the need to better appreciate the capacities of the women, socialized as they are to uphold male power, privileges and prestige.

Due to their low educational status and considerable work burden very few women in these villages were active in social, political and community affairs. Only 13.33 percent women in Bazwar village were found to be interested in the activities of the *gram panchayat*. In Chepdo and Kera villages, only 11.36 percent and 12.5 percent women were active in the *gram panchayats*, respectively. The rest did not take any interest in the activities related to the Mahila Mangal Dal, *gram panchayats*, environmental protection, etc. In villages Tyalni and Tyuna, women did not exhibit any interest in social, political and community affairs and were reluctant to respond to our questions regarding such matters. Most of the women questioned during the survey, told us that it was not possible for them to become involved in such activities due to the lack of time. Some women said their husbands or other men in their families did not allow them to go to the relevant meetings, which usually the male heads of their households attended. Some women were found to be quite ignorant about such matters, but almost all of them expressed anger about the opening of liquor shops in their villages and wanted to take action collectively for their closure. Although the women were not involved directly in activities for environmental protection, they had considerable awareness about planting

trees. The custom of planting trees in some of these villages by newly wed couples symbolised such concern for the environment. This practice was popularly known as *Maiti Andolan*, which literally translates as Maternal Movement, and the responsibility of looking after these plants lay with the maternal family of the bride.

The survey also examined the functioning of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (institutions of local self-government), which indicated a lack of interest among women members towards their rights and duties. Most of them said they were working under the direction of their husbands or the other men of their families and so did not show much interest in working independently. Although 72.70 percent of the women respondents knew about these local bodies, 25.28 percent were ignorant about them. Over 39.65 percent women, however, did not know what the age of eligibility was for contesting elections to these bodies.

Ninety-five percent women had no knowledge about the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, which provide for 33 percent reservation of seats for women candidates for elections to *panchayats*. In view of this, it is not difficult to understand why women were unable to obtain any benefit from these provisions and despite their presence in these institutions why their status had not improved. The respondents mentioned that their decisions about voting for a particular party depended on the choices made by the men of their families. This implied that women still found it difficult to form their independent opinions because they had to follow their men. Social and cultural norms demand that women should work under the guidance of males, therefore, most of the work in these bodies was done by their husbands, who were referred to as *pradhan patis* (head husbands).

Our field survey and other similar case studies from Uttar Pradesh highlight the fact that nearly 80 percent of the women *pradhans* (heads) did not know the functions of the village *panchayat* and some of them had not attended a single *panchayat* meeting (Leitien, 1996; Parveen, 2000). Their duty was limited to putting their signatures on the papers that were usually

prepared by their husbands or the other male *panchayat* members. Such women *pradhans* made it clear that the work of the *panchayat* was being looked after by their husbands and they did not have the time for it, being preoccupied with household duties. During our survey in village Bazwar, in Chamoli District in Garhwal, the *gram-pradhan* (village head) did not even bother to come out of her house and instead her husband spoke on her behalf. The villagers were also found to be appreciative of the work being done by the husband on her behalf and for providing facilities of drinking water in the village. Further, he was referred to as *gram-pradhan* by some of the respondents, which indicated that often women functioned as proxies for their husbands. The male *panchayat* members did not encourage women's participation in these institutions, and saw them as a threat to their domination. Therefore, the women's voices remained largely unheeded, which in turn affected the capacities of women adversely.

It is also interesting to note that the election process preceding the first assembly of Uttaranchal had been unable to enthuse the women, who had contributed immensely to the creation of the new state,<sup>2</sup> because they were neither interested in the election as such, nor were they interested in the election of women candidates. About 77 percent women did not have a good opinion about politicians who, they believed, had deceived them as the government of the new state of Uttaranchal was doing little to generate employment or to stop migration. Some women respondents felt the politicians of Uttaranchal were not really interested in the development of the hill areas, because they did not have any concrete plan or vision. Therefore, they did not consider it necessary to cast their vote. Some of them also felt their lives were not going to change through their vote for a particular party, be it the Bharatiya Janata Party or the Congress.

Most women felt the solution to their problems lay in their empowerment. In fact, 92 percent of the respondents said that the spread of education, provision of equal opportunities for jobs and equal pay for equal work would act as means of empowerment. Women also believed that obtaining a steady source of income was

key in changing gender relations at home and outside. As Purusothaman (1998) has stressed, the economic independence of women leads to sharing of the workload by both the genders equally, because the lack of economic independence impedes a woman's capacity to change her material condition as an individual. Further, the women felt that village-based NGOs and other institutions should work towards this goal and through training, education and dissemination of information should help and enable them to recognize their rights and improve their social and economic status.

### **Role and Contribution**

Interestingly, despite the problems of disparity, gender bias and low status, the women of Uttaranchal have always played a very constructive role in the resolution of social problems and promoting harmony and peace. Although their position in society has been weak, their participation in the various movements in the Garhwal Himalayas, explains their concern and role as nurturers, not only within their families, but also in wider society. The anti-liquor agitations, which have been underway in the hills, are an example of their attitude as they have joined these to save their families and children from the curse of alcoholism. Due to the efforts made by women's organizations like Mahila Mangal Dal, the liquor mafia has been forced to close down their shops in many villages. Recently, in Thalain Block of district Pauri Garhwal, nearly four hundred women forced the closure of a liquor shop in their neighborhood. Such incidents illustrate the women's capacity to integrate for collective action and their eagerness to be associated with activities for the welfare of wider society.

Women participated extensively in the Chipko Movement during the 1970s in the remote areas of Garhwal Himalayas, protesting against the government's forest policy. This was a spontaneous outburst that demanded change. Such activities clearly exhibited the women's interest, concern and capacity for working in the interests of society. It shows clearly that in the hill regions the success of any scheme or development program would be in doubt if carried out

without the support and participation of women.

Women's extensive participation and role in various mobilizations such as the Chipko movement, the anti-liquor movement and the recent movement for statehood, clearly indicate that they were quite knowledgeable, intelligent and aware of issues and needs. They may be tolerant and timid, but if required they can collectively voice their concerns boldly. If given a chance, women of this area can also show the way to others, for instance, the role of Radha Devi of Meethiberi village and Maina Devi of Dhoolkut village of Sahaspur block in district Dehradun (Garhwal Division) as gram pradhans (village heads) has been lauded in the media (Dogara, 2003). These women have not only shown their caliber, capacity and efficiency but also set an example for others. They have shown that despite living in a male dominated society, they can provide leadership to their community as elected representatives.

Interestingly, it was not only Radha Devi who won an election from a non-reserved seat for the second time, but women of her village also occupied six of the seven seats in the village *panchayat*. As *gram pradhan*, Radha Devi has been working for the development of her village, by taking up issues such as the construction of roads, adequate supply of school books, and so on; she also ensured that the development funds allocated to her village were used properly and were not transferred to other village councils. She has always taken a strong stand for the welfare of her village and thus earned the trust and respect of both men and women.

The other woman, Maina Devi, belongs to the Buxa tribe, which is considered a very poor and deprived community in Uttaranchal. Her election as *gram pradhan* can also be seen as an achievement of Indian democracy, because women like her have done well to take advantage of the reservation quotas and utilize their potential and position for village development. Her commendable work in building rooms for the school, installing hand pumps, allocating sewing machines, empowering women through the activities of Mahila Mangal Dal, participating in the anti-

liquor movement, and so on have not only earned her respect in the region, but has also enabled her to retain her seat through two elections.

These women leaders felt strongly that during their tenures in office, women found it easier to come forward to talk about their problems, which they were otherwise reluctant to discuss with the male members of the *gram panchayats*. Since both of these elected representatives paid serious attention to their problems, the women felt relaxed and confident and discussed their problems freely. In view of their success, it can be said that the election of women in local governing bodies leads towards women-oriented development and the eradication of social evils such as drug addiction and liquor consumption. In time, this should also ensure inclusion of better priorities and participation by people.

### **Conclusion**

The above account clearly shows that the onus of domestic and agricultural activities largely falls on the shoulders of women in the Garhwal Himalayas, because they not only run their households but also serve as the major workforce. It is quite clear that while women have low status in the social structure and they are victims of prevailing societal norms, they assume a very different character in socio-political activism and take a keen interest in finding solutions to their pressing problems and their contribution is commendable. However, it is also paradoxical that women who are responsible for sustaining their families do not have any control over the required economic resources as they are marginalized in this male-dominated milieu.

Clearly, the women of Uttaranchal make a significant contribution towards the agricultural sector, but their access to information, communication, technology and production techniques still remains inadequate, therefore, they find themselves neglected and left behind. Since the key to social development lies in good education, it is necessary to promote it.

Undoubtedly, the gains of economic activity do accrue to the family, but there is still a great need to involve women in sharing

benefits equally and reducing their workload. In view of this, their empowerment and assuming a respectable place in society will become a reality only if the provisions intended to address women's concerns are enforced effectively.

Some findings of this study may be helpful for policy makers and researchers. The contributions of women leaders such as Radha Devi and Maina Devi as *gram pradhans* are exemplary. These demonstrate that women are becoming aware of their rights and duties and are taking interest in the administration of local bodies. There is, however, an urgent need to provide more encouragement and support to them. Women's role in social welfare activities shows that they have the good of society at heart and aspire for peaceful existence and a society free of violence and corruption. Their role in the Uttarakhand movement and the anti-liquor agitations shows that they have the capacity to be quickly mobilized around such causes and to succeed. However, their potential, eagerness to participate in different movements, and levels of coordination and cooperation need to be utilized properly.

The need of the hour is to encourage women and give them more representation in local bodies and other such institutions, because without it real development cannot take place. Society and state can play an effective role in implementing and enforcing various instruments and laws, which have been made for the protection of women's rights. As Batliwala (1997) notes, the moral duty of civil society is to provide a conducive environment for creating women's organizations, enhancing awareness, providing training, implementing gender sensitization schemes, serving the underprivileged and monitoring the violation of women's rights. Since individual women find it difficult to assert themselves and change the gender equation, ensuring their active participation in development, and their collective mobilization are necessary steps. When they participate in any such group activity they not only enthuse each other but also command respect. The Chipko movement and the anti-liquor agitation undertaken by the women in Thalain block are relevant examples that show that if women are organized and determined, desired results can

be obtained.

In the absence of productive economic activities and awareness, women's rights to economic resources are still minimal, as they do not benefit equally from economic activities and development. The need of the hour is to develop women-oriented village-based industries, which can provide incomes and enhance women's skills and bring about desirable changes in the social environment or their homes. To acquire a better position in society, it is necessary to evolve ways and means of reducing the work-load and drudgery undertaken by women, which hamper their equal participation in development.

In fact, women's participation can be enhanced only in a women-friendly and positive environment where they are able to explore and find the information they require to serve their own interests and needs. It is also equally true that women will continue to be treated in an inferior manner until the mind-set of society, and of the women as well, changes. Furthermore, the goals of universal access to basic as well as higher education for girl children and women need to be fulfilled. So, if development concerns are to be taken seriously in the Garhwal Himalayas, the policy makers of Uttaranchal should aim at full participation and co-operation by women in all development schemes.

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### Notes

1. Garhwal Himalayas constitute one division of Uttaranchal, the 27th state of the Indian Union, the other division is Kumaun. There are 13 districts in Uttaranchal with Uttarkashi, Chamoli, Rudraprayag, Tehri, Dehradun, Pauri Garhwal and Haridwar districts constituting the Garhwal division, while Pithoragarh, Champawat, Almora, Bageshwar, Nainital, Udham Singh Nagar are in Kumaun division. Tibet, lies to the North, Nepal to the East and Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh to its West. Most of the region is made up of valleys and mountains that range from 1,200 to 3,000 meters in altitude and form a landscape of steep and often terraced hillsides, snow clad mountains, forests and fast running rivers in the valleys. Due to this mountainous terrain only 13 percent of the land is suitable for agriculture, also because forests cover almost 66 percent of the land area. Over 80 percent of the population of the Uttaranchal region is rural and most of the area is not only economically backward, but also quite different from the plains, in terms of culture, language, and so on. This region is famous for its four holy shrines; Gangotri, Yamunotri, Badrinath and Kedarnath. It is also an area that is often beset by landslides, earthquakes and other environmental problems. According to the census data of 2001 the total population of Uttaranchal is 8,479,562, (4,316,401 males and 4,163,161 females). The rural population is 6,309,317 (males 3,143,380 and females 3,165,937), the urban population is 2,170,245 (males 1,173,021 and females 9,972,24) (Government of India, 2002).

2. The state of Uttaranchal was formed in November 2000, when it was split from the state of Uttar Pradesh.

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