

FORESTRY AND SOCIAL PROTEST MOVEMENTS IN UTTARAKHAND

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ABSTRACT

The point of entry for this thesis is the popular initiative to stem deforestation in the Uttarakhand Himalaya, the Chipko Andolan. Chipko is only one in a series of protest movements against commercial forestry dating from the earliest days of state intervention. In the context of the evolution of commercial forestry and its impact on a subsistence oriented peasant economy, this thesis attempts an analysis and documentation of the different protest movements in the colonial period as well as Chipko.

The central hypothesis of this work is that structures of power and authority play an important if not determining role in influencing the nature and incidence of social protest. This is explicated by a comparative analysis of protest in two distinct socio-political structures. In the princely state of Tehri Garhwal, the socio-cultural idiom of protest is predicated on a continuity between the state and the peasantry embodied in the personage of the quasi - divine monarch. In the colonial territory of Kumaun Division, on the other hand, while social protest started from similar expectations of the state's obligations to the peasantry, it quickly developed into an open confrontation, reflecting a rupture between the state and the people, as these obligations were not met.

The thesis closes with an analysis of a contemporary movement, viz. Chipko. The social idiom of Chipko is related to a distinctive history of protest over access to forests. Finally the study interprets the schisms within Chipko both historically and with respect to alternate positions within the environment debate.