

CHIPKO

A Novel Movement for
Establishment of Cordial Relationship
between Man and Nature

Sunderlal Bahuguna

The Global Perspective*

Essential ecological processes are those processes that are governed, supported or strongly moderated by ecosystems and are essential for food production, health and other aspects of human survival and sustainable development, "Life-support systems" is shorthand for the main ecosystems involved—for example, watershed forests or coastal wetlands. The maintenance of such processes and systems is vital for all societies regardless of their stage of development.

Agricultural Systems

Only about 11% of the world's land area (excluding Antarctica) offers no serious limitation to agriculture; the rest suffers from drought, mineral stress (nutritional deficiencies or toxicities), shallow depth, excess water, or permafrost. Unfortunately large areas of prime quality land are being permanently taken out of agricultural use by being built on. In addition, close to one-third of the world's arable land will be destroyed in the next 20 years if current rates of land degradation continues.

Soil is a crucial life-support system, since the bulk of all food production depends on it. Soil erosion is a natural and continuous process, but in undisturbed ecosystems with a protective cover of plants the soil is usually regenerated at the same rate it is removed. If soil and vegetation are not in balance, as often they are not when influenced by poorly managed human activities, erosion is accelerated with disastrous consequences. Even under natural conditions of vegetation cover, nature takes from 100 to 400 years or more to generate 10 millimetres of top soil. So once the soil has gone, for all practical purposes it has gone for good.

Soil loss has accelerated sharply throughout the food-hungry tropics, which are generally more susceptible to erosion than the temperate zone, due to the land and the nature of the soils and rainfall. More than half of India, for example, suffers from some form of soil degradation; out of her total of 3.3 million km², 1.4 million km² are subject to increased soil

(continued on cover 3)

Chipko

Destruction of the forests is the murder of our future generations and prosperity. Wanton, barbarous, disgraceful vandalism

—BRUND H. SCHUBERT

The much talked about Chipko movement which was born in Uttarakhand and is successfully surging forward is not merely a symbolic movement against the felling of trees in the Himalayan region, but in the words of the renowned scientist Dr M. S. Swaminathan: "It is a practical philosophy as much as a live issue." It rebels against the existing materialistic civilization, which, in order to satisfy its ever-increasing artificial needs has provoked man to conquer nature and rape the earth. Paradoxically, this very civilization is also fighting hard for its survival after being engulfed and threatened by various environmental problems.

This rebellion was clearly manifested on 27 March 1973 in Mandal village of Chamoli District, when the villagers did not allow a sports goods manufacturing firm of Allahabad to fell the ash trees auctioned to them by the U. P. Government. Interestingly, just before this incident the villagers were not allowed to fell the trees for making yokes, on the ground that it was not feasible from the silvicultural point of view. Naturally, the villagers protested against the fact that the tree which they nurtured are not made available to them for tools of production but are sold to contractors for the manufacture of sports goods for the sake of entertainment, and that too, in far away places. They challenged this commercial science and protested that in case the contractor should come with the intention of felling the trees, they would save them by clinging to the trees. The sports company had to pack off from here and turn towards the Mandakini Valley of Kedarnath region. But there too they met similar resistance.

Uttarakhand, which is the source of the two major rivers, Ganga and Yamuna — the blessings of Northern India—is fast becoming a pathetic sight of landslides and of erosions and drying up of the water sources. The capacity of this land to provide food and shelter to the people of this region is exhausted. The principle of ecology that man follows the soil is fully rendered true here. The inhabitants of this region, mainly the youth power, have run away to every nook and corner of this country in search of employment by selling their skill and labour. Thousands have settled in Bombay and Delhi alone. Alaknanda, the main tributary of the Ganges, was in spate during July 1970 which washed away almost everything people had. The stability of the Himalaya, which Lord Krishna had described as himself personified, started giving way in many parts of its villages. Many lost their lives owing to severe landslides at many places. This phenomenon gave a new perspective to the Chipko movement. The forests should not be considered merely as the means to earn commercial benefits but also as a strong defence against erosions and landslides. This prompted the villagers of Reni in the upper catchment area of the Alaknanda to save the trees earmarked for felling according to the so-called scientific working plan of the Forest Department, which had sold the trees to a contractor. But the womenfolk of that area chased away the labourers by protesting that this forest belongs to them, they are attached to it and under no circumstances would they allow its destruction.

Past history

For a woman, the mother's home is a place which she could rely upon in hard times. Since time immemorial, forests have been providing its inhabitants, food, fruits, fodder and other dire necessities of life. They had a very affectionate relationship with the forests. We can have the glimpse of this truth in the remote Adivasi areas which have remained cut off due to the absence of modern transport and communication facilities. They are inaccessible. In the last century when the

British driven by colonial policy were planting a firm foot in India, they were quite impressed by our forests, which were just a commercial commodity for them. So the Government took over the management of the forests in its own hands, for the sake of exploitation. The peasants revolted against it. The monuments erected in memory of Birsa Munda, leader of revolt in Ranchi (Bihar) and other martyrs on the banks of the Yamuna in Tilari (UP), stand as proofs of such revolts. In Uttarakhand, this century began with a mass revolt against the Commercial Forest Policy, which became a part of the Swarajya Movement in 1920-21.

With this background the Chipko movement gave a new meaning to the long-suppressed grievances of the forest dwellers. In the beginning this movement was limited to economic wellbeing of the local people, and demanded the end of the vicious contract system of forest exploitation by establishing cooperative societies, settlement of minimum wages, protection of villager's rights, new forest settlement and supply of raw material to small local industries on subsidised basis. This movement was started on the 30th May 1969 during the Ziladaan of Uttarkashi in the wake of Acharya Vinoba Bhave's Gramdaan-Gram-Swaraj Movement. On this occasion of forest day a charter of forest-rights was read in front of martyrs' memorial at Tilari. The formulation of the charter emphasized the need for creating an affectionate relationship of the people with the forests by using the forest resources for their wellbeing. It soon advanced from the earlier approach.

Protection of environment

The Stockholm Conference created a favourable atmosphere for accepting oxygen and water as the main products of forests. Thus the Chipko movement had an opportunity to shed its local and economical features and emerge as a full-fledged movement for the protection of the environment. After the Reni incident, the Sarvodaya Brotherhood demanded complete ban on green felling for at least five years in the

hilly catchments of the Himalayan rivers. Thus they gave prime importance to the ecological aspect and shifted the focus from economic benefits. In the meantime, attention of the Chipko workers was drawn towards the deep cuts on chir pine trees for the extraction of resin to produce rosin and turpentine. They compelled the Government to reconsider the matter of protection of forests, in all its aspects, by starting (picketing) in September-October 1974, on the occasion of auction of the forests, thus creating obstructions in its proceedings. Fasts were also observed to attract the attention of the authorities.

But the ecological aspect of this movement came into light when 5 intellectuals of Uttarakhand made an appeal: 'The Swan Song of Chir Pine Trees' to draw public sympathy on the issue of protection of trees. On the 30th May 1977, the people of Hernal Valley of Tehri-Garhwal responded to this appeal by applying bandages of mud to the wounds of the pine trees and removing the blades fixed on them to extract resin.

In the meanwhile, Lok Nayak Jayaprakash Narayan, Kaka Kalelkar, Acharya Dada Dharmadhikari and other intellectuals issued an appeal for the protection of the Himalayas. In this appeal they had given their full support to the aims of the Chipko movement and demanded a change in the present commercial forest policy into a policy of conservation. Although the capital cities of Delhi and Lucknow and the towns of the Himalayan region turned a deaf ear to this appeal, the womenfolk of Hernal valley pledged to protect the trees earmarked for felling in the Advani village, by tying *Rakhi* (the symbol of protection) around them. They challenged the existing slogans which were in favour of forest auction and temporary economic benefits from the industries depending on forests and presented a new slogan of permanent economy. "What do the forests bear? Soil, water and pure air. Soil, water and pure air, are the basis of Life."

The Agony of the women

Due to washing away of fertile soil, the men folk were compelled to leave their families and wander in search of employment thus making the women bear all the responsibilities, collecting fodder, firewood and carrying water, which form their main chores besides farming. They have a direct contact with these forests. The policy of commercial exploitation is mainly responsible for the disappearance of broad-leaved trees and flourishing of coniferous species, which have made the soil dry and infertile. After the extension of motor roads, even the remnants of the felled trees are not spared, but become the prey of machines. Hence the scarcity of firewood in the forests.

Because of the low conservation capacity of the coniferous species, the water springs have dried up. Earth is skinned off when logs of woods are dragged down the hills. Gullies are formed which wash away the topsoil of the forest, grazing and agricultural lands. Who else could feel the necessity of stopping this destruction other than the women directly attached to the soil? They are aware of the fact that the loss of fertile top soil has compelled their husbands to leave their homes and they have to lead a widow's life. If only the soil is not disturbed, agriculture could be carried on smoothly, and thus they could make their husbands stay back in their homes. The only remedy for this is the protection of forests because trees are, in a way, factories of soil production and water reservoirs,

On the other hand, the government, which in the name of scientific management carries out the job of felling trees, deputed a forest officer to lend a piece of advice on forestry to those illiterate and innocent women. He was greeted with lit lanterns in broad daylight! They argued that landslides occurred wherever the felling took place and there was no new growth as claimed. They had with them instances of disasters due to felling of trees, as a challenge to principles of forestry quoted in books.

When efforts of the interested parties to lure the

labourers to fell the trees in the Advani forest failed, the forest officers and contractors resorted to call an unit of 50 armed policemen on the 1st February 1978, to defend the hired axemen and terrorize the tree-protectors. But the women clung to the trees by protesting that they would rather get themselves hacked, but under no circumstances would they allow them to fell the trees. The police force was helpless before this peaceful resistance. After this incident, people were successful in preventing the fellings in Chanchridhar in Almora District and Bhyundar in Chamoli.

On 6th August 1978, the people in Uttarkashi, to their dismay, saw that the flow of the Bhagirathi river had almost stopped. This was because of a landslide forming a vast lake above the Bhagirathi and her tributary Kanodia. When the lakes bursted it created devastating floods. This again proved that every green tree is a sentry against landslides.

After this nation-wide havoc, the Chipko movement hoped for a fundamental change in the Government's attitude towards the management of forests; but on the contrary, even before the people could forget the impact of this disaster, the pine forests were auctioned under the strict guard of armed police. Peaceful demonstrations and all-Party meetings were held to express resentment against this brutal action. Among the trees auctioned, about ten thousand oak trees were to be felled for the hill campus of Pantnagar Agricultural University. The population of 50 villages in the vicinity, which was dependent on these jungles for their requirements of fodder, firewood and water held demonstrations. Ultimately the Government was compelled to cancel its order.

But Chipko faced a big challenge in the Amarshar forest of Balganga valley when in Dec. 1978 the Forest Corporation, an Uttar Pradesh Government Undertaking, engaged local labourers to fell the trees. Sri Dhumsingh Negi, a Sarvodaya worker, observed fast for five days in protest, which brought an instant awakening in the rural population and ultimately the labourers threw away their axes and decided to take up shovels to protect their fields from erosion.

Malgaddi area of the Badiyar Gad, a tributary of Alaknanda was the second front for the movement. Approximately two thousand trees were earmarked for felling. Only the previous year, people had witnessed tremendous damage to public life and property and also to the agricultural land due to landslides and floods. Here the mass movement started on December 25, 1978 in which several women took part and foiled the attempts of the Forest Corporation to fell the trees with the help of the police.

My prayerful fast of 24 days, which began on 9 January 1979 in the forest continued after my arrest in Tehri and Dehra Dun jails upto 1 February. An immediate stay order was issued by the Government on felling of the trees in three places and thus it opened the doors for discussion for declaring the Himalayan forests as protection forests and pending any verdict in this regard, the felling and auction was discontinued in Garhwal and Kumaon Divisions. At the same time, the youth started a mass movement in Dhyadi (Almora) and as a result of it the felling of trees was stopped.

Demands of the Chipko Movement

During the period of six years, Chipko movement has developed into a powerful mass-based ecological movement for permanent economy against the traditional shortsighted and destructive economy. The main contention of this movement is that the main gift of the Himalayas to the nation is water and its function is to produce, maintain and improve soil structure. Hence felling of green trees for commercial purposes should be stopped forth with at least for 10 to 15 years, until green coverage of at least 60% area is restored as professed in the National Forest Policy of 1952. Mass plantation of trees with capability of holding soil and water conservation should be taken up on war footing to enable the villagers to be self-reliant for their inevitable basic needs of food and clothings. Five 'F' trees, i.e., trees providing Food (nuts, fruits oilseeds, honey, etc.), Fodder, Fuel, Fertilizers, and

Fibre, should be planted. Such trees should be planted all over the sloppy agricultural land and forest areas. The local population would automatically take interest in the plantation of these trees and would protect them too. The main reason for the forest devastation is the destruction of natural forests by planting of such species which would be profit-making. Naturally local people had no interest in this. Another thing responsible for the crisis is the plantation of pine, deodar and other coniferous varieties in the hills and eucalyptus, etc., in the foothills. All this has robbed the land of its fertility. India is an agricultural country and here forestry should be in support of agriculture. We have the example of China which faced the problem of floods due to the most terrible forest devastation and yet emerged out of this catastrophe by making forestry the basis of agriculture. Forest management and protection requires people's active participation.

Chipko is not only the answer to the problems of Himalayan people, but of the whole mankind. Our population is increasing whereas crop-land is diminishing. In 1950 there was 0.241 hectare per capita agricultural land available to grow food for a population of 250 millions. The world population was 3910 million in 1975 and in spite of extension of arable land area, only 0.181 hectare per capita agricultural land was available. But the population in 2000 will be 6290 millions and per capita agricultural land will come down to 0.124 hectares. The production of foodgrains increased from 276 kg. to 360 kg. per hectare from 1950 to 1971, but it has decreased to 354 kg. between 1971 and 1977. So most of the countries will have to face land-hunger, increase in food prices and widespread social unrest. Therefore, the only solution of this global problem is tre-farming. Growing wheat and rice takes up to 20 times more land area than fruits and nuts, to feed the same number of people.

Public awakening

The Chipko movement has succeeded in enforcing stoppage of felling of trees for 10 years in 1300 sq. kms. of the

upper catchment area of river Alaknanda. Felling of green trees has been suspended in some other parts which were adversely affected by the so-called scientific management. To wit, remedial engineering works are being carried out in some areas. A separate Department has been set up for carrying out the task of replantation of the most depleted forests. The practice of making deep cuts on the pine trees to extract resin has been stopped. These are some of the minor changes. The question of the fundamental change in forest policy declaring the hill forests as protection forests is yet to be solved.

However, the biggest achievement of this movement, which even its worst critics admit, is the enlightenment of the layman regarding the importance of the protection of trees, recognition of the scientific basis behind the conservation of forests and their efforts in this direction. This fact is evident in the melodious folk-songs and powerful slogans of the local cow-herds and grass-cutter women. Sri Ghanshyam Sailani, the folk singer and poet is the main inspirer of this movement. His songs awakened the people and he visited the actual sites of the movement. One of his poems 'The Call of Trees', expresses these sentiments in the following words.

"I wish to live for you, that is why I am here on this earth; since ages I flourish for your sake and I bow before you with all the sweetness in my flowers and fruits. I provide air, water and shade to you. I am food, I am milk, please do not cut me. I feel pain (*Peeda*), that is why I am known as a tree (*Ped*). Please save me, please plant me and decorate this earth. I am standing on the fence of the farms and on the hill slopes. I make and preserve the soil, do not destroy me, there is a village underneath."

Another poet Sri Jeevanand Shriyal has adopted the idea from the celebrated author Eric Eckholm's book *Losing Ground*, that people follow the soil. It means that everything including the soil have been washed away from these mountains, and no means of livelihood are left. Soil—the flesh and

blood of the hills—is washed away, and in addition, roads have been laid to facilitate people to run away to the plains. Similarly, there is one more pathetic song depicting a woman lamenting over felling of a tree, her true friend.

A unique sense of responsibility towards the Mother Earth has developed among the children, who have been the active participants in the Chipko movement. When Dharmendra, a ten-year-old schoolboy of village Silyara was asked why he had gone to Amarshar forest to cling to a tree, he promptly replied that he did so because last year all their farms were washed away due to a landslide and his widowed mother had wept bitterly that she had no other means of livelihood to support her 3 children, and that he felt that if trees of other villages too are felled, landslides would come and the farms would be destroyed and other mothers would also suffer like his mother. That was the reason he was taking part in the movement in order to wipe the tears of other mothers.

There are various slogans expressing the gratitude of man towards the nature. Besides the slogan that the trees provide soil, water and air, slogans such as, "Murderers of Trees—Think; Do not skin off the Mother Earth". "Himalaya has Awakened Today; The Cruel Axe will Flee Away."

This movement is not confined merely to protect the trees but it is a collective move against man's atrocities against nature, whether it may be in the form of indiscriminate blasting for laying motor roads or mining.

The Himalayan region is a rough, uneven and sparsely populated area. Himalaya has expressed its wrath during the 2/3 years in the form of landslides in Tawaghat and interior of Nepal, earthquakes of Lahul-Spiti, Bhagirathi blockade, the devastating floods in Himachal Pradesh and Laddakh and the recent avalanches in Lahul-Spiti in Himachal Pradesh. All these are clear indications of the impending danger to mankind. The Himalayas have been providing livelihood to the highlanders through its forests and rivers, but now its endurance is exhausted owing to man's provocations and it has

started hurtling rocks. The Himalayas which was known as the safeguard against any peril owing to its unpenetrable wall, has become the origin of floods and has shaken the economic structure of Northern India. It has declared war against mankind. Man has no power and wits to face this calamity, other than change his style of living from A to Z. Instead of presuming himself the conqueror of nature he should try and live in harmony with it. Our materialistic civilization has made us the butchers of nature. In order to satisfy his passion, man wants to plunder everything at one stretch. He wants to slaughter the earth.

The constructive work organisations and dedicated workers of the Uttarakhand, under the guidance of Sarla Devi a disciple of Mahatma Gandhi who is serving the hills for the last 40 years have presented a plan for hill development, which they call "Blueprint for Survival in the Hills".

Obstacles before Chipko

As is usual, every revolutionary change in any existing set up generally faces oppositions from the forces of the *status quo*. The Chipko movement too had to face the same lot at the hands of forest contractors, industrialists and the political and the administrative machinery behind them. In order to prove their argument commercial exploitation of forests, they have in their repertory an attractive slogan of instant monetary benefits as also the powerful weapon of law behind them to suppress the voice of the activists. As far as ecology is concerned it has become a fashion now-a-days to attract the attention of the public by means of articles and lectures. The intellectuals and the scientists have reached the conclusion that the political era is over and the ecological era has begun! Politics has miserably failed to solve the various problems facing mankind. Ecology presents a clear and firm basis to save the mankind from the crisis. Hence it could be the source of inspiration for the future mass movements. Its collusion with the existing set up is inevitable. In the



Himalayas, our small group is trying hard to cope with adverse circumstances. We appeal to all nature lovers to start similar movements in their areas to save the fast-polluting environment.

We should never forget that our earth is one and any sort of pollution, may it be air pollution, water pollution or land slides and desert formation, these have posed a danger to mankind. The main reason behind this is that we are shirking away from nature. It is as if God himself has manifested in the form of trees to oblige us. Thus Chipko is serving the earth as a sign of gratitude. That is why the message of this movement has crossed the borders of this country and reached many parts of the world. Richard Barbe Banker, the famous Man of Trees, Dr Hans Cristoph Reiger of Heidelberg University, an authority on Himalayan Ecology are some of its staunch supporters. Gandhiji's British disciple Mira Behn who during her last days in India, lived in the Himalayas, has been expressing profound concern over the issue of the preservation of Himalayan forests even at the age of 88. Himalaya has been a source of manifold inspirations for mankind.

I sincerely hope that our present efforts to make this movement the prime instrument for protection of nature, would receive the physical, moral and intellectual support of all nature lovers.

* This article was presented in a Seminar held at the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay on June 5, 1979, on the occasion of the World Environment Day.

Women Against the Axe

“Bhago! Bhago! (Go away! Go away!)”. I could hear the shrill voices of women in the distance as I sat in my hut. I had been camping there since the previous evening, about 30 kms. from Tehri town in Bhilangana valley.

The neighbouring hut that morning, last November, was occupied by the manager and workers of a millionaire forest contractor from Dehra Dun. He had purchased 2,700 pine trees from this forest in an auction held two months ago by the U.P. Forest Department. He knew full well we would have to face opposition from the Chipko activists, because we had earlier informed the state government that felling trees in this vulnerable catchment area would bring disaster. But the government, the contractor and the forest officials, who make money when the trees are felled, had turned a deaf ear to all this.

So some days ago a group of hired axemen from Nepal reached Ghonti—a roadside village—and within days their number had gone up to 200. The local people declared their non-cooperation with them. The first to do so were the students. They formed a group and marched up to Ghonti, shouting slogans all the way: “The Himalayas will awaken today. Cruel axe will be chased away” (“Aaj Hamalaya jagega, Krur Kulhara Bhagega”). Fellers of trees—think; do not skin mother earth. (“Ped gerane walon, socho. Dharti Ma ki Khal na nocho”). The muleteers also refused to transport the rations to their camp.

Women's participation

But it was the village women who were most vociferous in their protest. Their fuel and fodder comes from the trees. They formed a procession and chased away the hired axemen by shouting “Bhago! Bhago! we won't allow you to chop these trees. We have been rearing them for years. We will shed

our blood to save them." The men are forced to leave their homes now and go to the plains to earn their livelihood. So the whole burden of family life—looking after the children and cattle and work in the fields has fallen on the women. Sometimes they have to walk more than 20 kms. a day to bring a head-load of leaf fodder for fuel. The drying up of drinking water resources has further increased their difficulties, hence their struggle to save the forests as a source of fuel, fodder and drinking water sources, which are fast being depleted as a result of 'scientific management'.

Chipko's solution

The Chipko movement has therefore put forward a practical solution by demanding a new policy. The forests should be protected. All commercial green fellings should be banned for 25 years till a 60 per cent green coverage is restored in the hills, as enunciated in the National Forest Policy of 1952. Existing conifer forests should be turned into mixed forests by planting broad leaf species. In fact what is needed is a massive planting of trees to give us the 'five Fs'—food, fodder, fuel, fertilizer, and fibre.

With these needs in mind the Chipko activists had gone from village to village asking the people to be prepared for the crusade against tree-felling. A number of enthusiastic local youths joined them, ready for direct action—Chipko (hug the trees).

Now the Divisional Forest Officer had come himself to force the axemen into the forest with the help of the revenue police. "What has happened to our protests?" Asked the villagers. "We have looked into it" was his haughty reply. "The marking has been done according to the rules and the trees will be felled. Those who object will be arrested." He further admonished them not to listen to the Chipko activists who, he said, would run away when trouble came leaving them to the police locker. He even tried threats and allurements to win the people over, but they did not yield.

So, as planned, 200 axemen marched through the village and were unanimously welcomed by women and children alike, with slogans of "Cruel axe will be chased away."

"Why do you provoke these children to take part in the movement at the cost of their studies? "I was asked by the Forest Officer. "They are the true sons of the Earth," I replied, "and they know that we are leaving a desert behind for them." He was staying in the village to boost the spirits of the axemen and the contractor's workers.

Some time later, there was beating of drums from the hill top and a big procession was on the march. I could hear their slogans. They were Chipko men. They joined the group of women below who were also shouting and together they formed a cordon to stop the axemen, who were led by the manager of the contractor, a cunning man. "We won't cut trees till you allow us to", he said to win the people over. But instantly voices rose from all sides, "Turn him out. He is the queen bee." He was forced to lead the procession back.

Villagers triumph

However the Divisional Forest Officer had assured them that he would meet the District Magistrate and come back with armed police to teach the marchers a lesson. So the axemen camped in the fields for the armed police. The villagers triumphantly declared: "Tomorrow people from all other villages will come." Sure enough next day the hills again echoed to the slogan. "Himalaya has awakened to day. Cruel axe will be chased away." The axemen marched back to Ghonti. The women forced the contractor's men to vacate the hut and they had to remain under the open sky for two and a half weeks.

After some days the Conservator of Forests came to enquire into the objections of the villagers. The young village leaders showed him the steep slopes on which the trees had been marked for felling. Hanging over the slopes were big boulders which would roll down if the trees were removed. A

few years back a big boulder had rolled down crushing a house. The housewife, who was cooking, luckily escaped, but everything was damaged. After that the villagers planted and conserved oak trees and did not even chop pines to meet their urgent needs.

But according to forestry working plans, prepared on the basis of century-old principles of commercial forestry, 2,700 trees were to be felled in this area. The Conservator of Forests said in a defensive tone: "There were safeguards in the working plan. It said that difficult zones should be left out at the discretion of the marking officer. "Now", he added, "the government will have to compensate the contractor. So you should let him cut the trees on the less steep slopes."

"But who will compensate our losses?", asked the villagers, "after the landslides, the loss of irrigation channels, and the drying up of water springs. If we allow the contractor to chop the trees from the less steep slopes, from where shall we meet our needs?"

To our surprise the Magistrate along with the police party, which had come at the instance of the Forest Officer, was now waiting for us in the Chipko Camp. There was a meeting. The women said boldly: "We have no faith in your so-called scientific felling. We have seen how Tonkhand (a village in Bhilangana valley) was devastated after last year's tree felling by the U.P. State Forest Corporation. It is we who have saved these trees, these are natural forests. You have no right to cut these for timber and profits."

This was followed by the popular slogan of the hill women: "What are the benefits of the forests? Soil, water and oxygen. Soil, water and oxygen, are the basis of sustenance." And we could hear from the distant hills the melodious Chipko tunes: "these oaks and pine trees, do not cut, do not cut. Protect them. They give us sweet cold water and fodder for the cows. These are the pillows of Ganges and Yamuna. These are the soul and heart of men and animals. Do not cut. Do not cut."

The officers tried to justify the Government's policy but they had no reply to the questions raised by the illiterate village women struggling for their survival. The officers returned with the clear understanding that under no circumstances would the villagers allow them to chop the trees.

But the village leaders did not sit idle. They knew the danger could return at any time. They organised 'Bhagwad Katha' on the spot. This is the story of Lord Krishna, depicting the relationship of man with his inner self, society and nature. And this also provided an opportunity for education in ecology and the techniques of Satyagraha. At the end of the Katha hundreds took a pledge to protect their forest.

'There is a conspiracy of silence between...the UP Government itself...the UP administration and the forest contractors to continue this criminal and traitorous looting of precious natural resources, and deprive future generations of any hope of survival on a sustainable level of existence.'

—Sarala Devi

22 September 1978

MINIMUM BASIC DEMANDS FOR STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN THE EXISTING FOREST POLICY AND PRACTICES, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE HIMALAYAN ENVIRONMENT

The Chipko movement, which began in May 1969 as people's forest rights movement, with the basic demands to reorient the forest policy towards a clear "forests for the people" position, has progressed in a dynamic manner. The main thrust of its demands has undergone radical changes in view of the advances in research and new thinking in the international environmental movement and the frightening manifestations of environmental degradation in the Himalayan region. It was hoped that the mounting evidence of traumatic floods, massive soil erosion, depletion of glacial formation, and a host of other warnings in the past few years will force governmental attention to the need of urgent and radical changes in the forest policy and practices: but the hope has been belied excepting on the plane of verbal gestures, and minor tinkering here and there. Most unfortunately, this is being done in the name of 'scientific management', although eminent world forestry experts have recognised that the status of scientific research in tropical forests is very nebulous and that the only 'science' actually applied in forest management in India, in reality represents a 'tradition' established by the colonial administration roughly about a century ago.

In this background, we iterate our basic demands as given below:

1. Recognising the very basic fact that water and soil are the most important resources of the Himalayan region for the country as a whole besides the local peasant communities, and that timber is indeed the dead product of the forests, the status of the entire Himalayan forests should be declared as *protected forests*, i. e. *conservation must solely become the aim of forest management.*

2. Recognising the proven fact that Himalayan forests have been denuded far beyond the limits suggested by the National Forest Policy and National Land Use Policy resolutions, there should be a total ban on green felling so long as the minimum 60% forest cover recommended by the above policy resolutions is *actually* restored.
3. With a view to creating an economy of permanence and self-reliance, the forest regeneration programmes should give priority to trees bearing food, fodder, fuel, fertilizer, and fibre (in the same order) and in conversion of the existing coniferous into mixed forests.
4. The plantation schemes should be planned and implemented by the local communities and they should have real hand in forest management and control of the community forests.
5. The much-propagated 'social forestry' programme is a complete misnomer, indeed an eyewash if it is not under social control, i.e. of the local communities. Moreover, ecology cannot be fragmented according to the levels of bureaucratic control. Any integrated forest policy worth the name has to base itself on natural regions.
6. Contrary to the false propaganda unleashed against the Chipko movement with a view to undermining its popular base, we maintain that local people's needs of building timber, etc. should be met on high priority basis but we assert that such demands can be met from the dead trees and a *minimum* of green felling.

loss, while an additional 270,000 km² are being degraded by floods, salinity and alkalinity. An estimated 6000 million tonnes of soil are lost every year from 800,000 km² alone; with them go more than 6 million tonnes of nutrients—more than the amount of that is applied in the form of fertilizers.

Forests

Besides supplying timber and other products, forests, have a vital effect on processes of great significance for people. They influence local and regional climates, generally by making them milder, and they help to ensure a continuous flow of clean water. Some forests, notably tropical cloud forests, even increase the availability of water by intercepting moisture from clouds. Watershed forests are particularly important because they protect soil cover on site and protect areas downstream from excessive floods and other harmful fluctuations in streamflow. By thus reducing the silt load of rivers, watershed forests also help prevent the clogging of reservoirs, irrigation systems, canals and docks, and the smothering by sediment of coral reefs.

Yet watershed forests are being widely devastated—by clearance for agriculture, by logging and cutting for fuel by overgrazing and by badly managed road building. The results can be extremely expensive.

Sedimentation as a result of careless use of watershed forests can cut drastically the economic life of reservoirs, hydroelectric facilities and irrigation systems. The capacity of India's Nizamsagar reservoir has been more than halved (from almost 900 million m³ to fewer than 340 million m³). Although they have not been calculated (indeed, probably cannot be), the global costs of sediment removal, river dredging reconstruction of irrigation systems and loss of investment in expensive structures like dams must be huge. Only 10% of the world's population live in mountainous areas, but another 40% live in the adjacent plains; so the lives and livelihoods of half the world directly depend on the way in which watershed ecosystems are managed.

* Courtesy *World Conservation Strategy*.

Prayer For The Trees

We thank thee oh God!

For thy trees.

Thou com'st very near to us

Through thy trees.

From them we have

Beauty, wisdom, love.

The air we breath,

The water we drink,

The food we eat,

And the strength.

Help us oh God!

To give our best to life

And leave the world a little more beautiful

And worthy for having lived in it.

Prosper thou our planting

And establish thy Kingdom of Love

And understanding on Earth.

Amen.

Richard St. Barbe Baker

(Man of the Trees)

Price : One Rupee

April 1980

*Published by Chipko Information Centre, Parvatiya Navjeevan
Mandal, P.O. Silyara, Tehri-Garhwal, U.P., and printed at Shanti
Printers, Laxmi Nagar, Delhi-110092*