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**The Chipko Movement:
A Pragmatic, Material & Spiritual Reinterpretation**

by

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A Pragmatic, Material & Spiritual Reinterpretation

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Historical Perspectives, Recent Debates and Dilemmas

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Introduction

Although much has been written about the Chipko movement, there is still ambiguity concerning its actual origin. The general narrative is well known: in the 1970s women hugged¹ trees on numerous occasions to prevent them from being felled, people protested and went on *padayatras*² (marches) to inform other villagers about the movement. Due to the movement's interpretation as an ecofeminist movement (Shiva, 1988, p. 67) and as a "fusion" (Guha, 1989, p. 196) of a peasant movement (whereby peasants defend their lifestyle and values, following a historical trajectory of protests) and an 'ecological movement' (based on a material and spiritual relationship with the forest), the historical events have achieved a "legendary status" (Rangan, 1996, p. 214). The 'myth'³ (Rangan, 2000) of Chipko is fascinating because the historical events are instrumentalised for two main debates: 1. Were the villagers motivated by economic reasons or due to 'deep ecology'? 2. Can the Chipko movement be interpreted as a feminist movement? In this paper, I would like to discuss these debates, in addition to proposing a new question: Can the concepts of '*ecologically noble savages*' (Redford, 1991) and '*environmentality*' (Agrawal, 2005) explain this movement? Is it possible that historians have neglected the 'critical consciousness' (Cepek, 2011) and pragmatism (Randy Borman, personal communication, August 19, 2015) of people who live in forested areas?

Long-Term Causes

When looking at the events that led to the birth of the Chipko movement, it is important to note that some authors focus on the *histoire événementielle* (event history), while others on the *longue durée* (long term). Some authors (Heaslip, 2005; Saidullah, 1993; Weber, 1987; Jain, 1984) focus primarily on the short-term causes, whereas others (Gosling, 2001; Guha, 1989; Shiva, 1988) highlight the long-term causes. While Shiva and Gosling make a direct link between the Bishnoi movement of 1730, in which the Maharaja of Jodhpur sent axe-men to chop down a forest to fire the lime kilns of

¹ Chipko means to hug/embrace/stick in Hindi.

² These marches included the Askot-Arakot Foot March (1974) and the Kashmir-Kohima Foot March (1981-83). The marches were fundamental for networking with students, politicians, peasants and government officials, in addition to compiling environmental reports for the local government (Ishizaka, 2013, p. 23).

³ The Chipko movement has been retold in schoolbooks, music and drama. Interpretations of the original events abound and use the events to support feminist or environmental rhetoric (Gosling, 2001, p. 51).

Mehrangarh Fort (Kedzior, 2006, p. 10) and 363 villagers led by Amrita Devi lost their lives by hugging the *khejari* (acacia) trees, Ramachandra Guha states that “[t]he analogy with the incident involving the Bishnoi community obscures Chipko’s origins, which are specific to the conditions of Uttarakhand” (Guha, 1989, p. 174). I think it is important to take a macro as well as a micro perspective of history, but agree with Guha that it is necessary to contextualise the Chipko case in 1970s Uttarakhand, since its similarities with the Bishnoi movement may only be coincidental given the large gap in both space and time.

Guha prefers to draw a historical link between the Chipko movement and the changing relationship between *praja* (citizenry) and *raja* (king) in Tehri Garhwal (Guha, 1989, p. 62). Everyday resistance (Scott, 1985) has been a long-term dissent strategy of peasants in the region, mainly manifested through grazing animals or collecting fuelwood in prohibited areas, burning down forests that were being tapped for resin, evading taxes or refusing to supply labour (*bara* and *begar*) to the forest department (Guha, 1989, p. 82). There is a definite trajectory from pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial forms of resistance, especially since the forestry department (and techno-scientific foresters) acted more as a force of hegemonic government control than out of interest for conservation. The tradition of resistance used in the region involved protest marches called *dhandaks*. A *dhandak* was a form of customary rebellion in which peasants would ridicule the problematic forest officer, refuse to obey him, and march to the capital in order to draw the attention of the *raja* and have him restore social order. Especially due to the *raja*’s supposedly sacred lineage connected to the Bolanda Badrinath temple (Guha, 1988, p. 65), his rule went unquestioned and the people believed that by punishing the forest officer they were just upholding the justice that the *raja* would have intended.

Over time, this *raja-praja* relationship deteriorated and became more violent because of the *raja*’s harsh oppression of villagers. During colonial times, great restrictions on fuel, fodder, grazing, shifting cultivation and cattle raising were implemented, leading to escalating violence. For instance, during the 1904 Khujjni *dhandak*, forestry staff entered people’s houses and peasants responded by beating them up. In the 1906 Khas *dhandak*, the conservator was beaten and branded in response to the fact that towns surrounding Tehri were being inspected. Finally, during the 1930 Raiwan *dhandak* new restrictions were imposed on the number of cattle and sheep, and although the villagers responded peacefully an escalation of violence ensued until

between 200 and 400 unarmed peasants were shot (Guha, 1989, p. 76). The Chipko movement, like the traditional *dhandak* of Tehri Garhwal, was primarily non-violent, although Guha does not explain⁴ why the *dhandaks* got progressively more violent and the Chipko movement remained non-violent. In other areas, such as Kumaon (Appendix II), resistance was more “confrontational, violent and sustained” (Hannam, 1998, p. 58). The answer potentially lies in the fact that India has a tradition of nonviolent resistance: “the *gherao* (surrounding an official en masse to prevent his movement), the *dharna* (a sit-in), the *bandh* and the *hartal* (each a form of strike)” (Crist, 1994, p. 545).

The Chipko Movement⁵

Forest loss in India was estimated to be about 1.3 million hectares per year, as noted in a 1984 study (Saidullah, 1993, p. 85). This is primarily due to both public and private exploitation of forests that traditionally belonged to the villages living off of them. In 1964, Chandi Prasad Bhatt created a cooperative organisation, the Dasholi Gram Swarajya Mandal (DGSM), which espoused the use of local resources and established small-scale industries (such as resin, turpentine and herb production) that gave villagers employment. The DGSM also educated people about the negative effects of deforestation and aimed to undermine the privatisation of forests. Ideologically, this was inspired by Gandhi’s ideas of *sarvodaya* (welfare of all) and *swaraj* (self rule).

In 1972, the DGSM requested communal access to ten ash trees in Chamoli for their local industry, and the government denied this request while giving the Symonds Company⁶ permission to fell 300 trees for the production of tennis rackets (Jain, 1984, p. 1791). In 1973, the company officials arrived in Gopeshwar to chop down the trees, but were confronted by DGSM protesters, who beat drums and sang traditional songs, much like in the earlier *dhandaks*. The company retreated, but the Forest Department gave them access to the Phata Forest in another district. The local leaders joined forces with the protesters of Gopeshwar and protected the forests by keeping watch on the trees until the company’s contract expired in December 1973 (Jain, 1984, p. 1791).

Against this background, the Chipko movement started on March 26, 1974. Bhatt was visiting a Forest Department official in Gopeshwar and the men of Reni

⁴ Guha also claimed that villagers became alienated from nature (Guha, 1989, p. 56), but this would be a problematic interpretation since it wouldn’t explain why the Reni villagers decided to protect their trees.

⁵ For a useful timeline of events, please see Appendix II.

⁶ Shobhita Jain (Jain, 1984, p. 1791) and Thomas Weber (Weber, 1987, p. 8) refer to the company as ‘Simon Company,’ although all other scholars refer to it as ‘Symonds.’

village⁷ were sent to Chamoli to receive compensation for the 1962 war with China. While they were lured away, the lumberjacks arrived at Reni forest but were witnessed by a small girl, who informed Gaura Devi (Jain, 1984, p. 1792). She organised thirty women to hug the trees and prevent them from being felled. Despite the fact that the women were shouted at and pushed around by the armed labourers, the female protesters still did not allow the trees to be chopped down. Two years later, in 1976, a ten-year ban on tree-felling was passed for the area of Reni. At a time when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi sought support for her agenda of nationalisation and expansion of the public sector, she used Bahuguna's rhetoric against forest contractors and supported the Chipko initiative (Rangan, 1996, p. 217). Thus, in 1980 the National Forest Conservation Act was passed, prohibiting forests above 1,000 metres from being felled for the next 15 years, and this was renewed in 1987. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, there were many Chipko-inspired movements throughout India, the most famous being in Gopeshwar (1975), Bhynder valley (1978), Parsari (1979), and Dongri Paintoli (1980) (Jain 1984, p. 1792). Additionally, leaders such as Sunderlal Bahuguna went on numerous *padayatras* to promote Chipko's message.

The Ideology of Chipko

According to Guha & Gadgil's categorisation of environmental movements, Chipko activists could be considered 'crusading Gandhians' due to their harsh criticisms of 'development,' their desire to propagate an alternative grounded in Indian traditions, their inspiration drawn from the Hindu scriptures, and their wish to "return to pre-colonial (and pre-capitalist) village society" (Gadgil & Guha, 1995, p. 354). However, an ideology is not equally shared⁸ by all of its members and changes over time,⁹ leading historians to focus mainly on the ideologies of the leaders of the Chipko movement.

⁷ It is surprising how factually divergent these accounts of the Chipko movement are. Saidullah argues that "[t]he villagers of Mandal and Gopeshwar successfully hugged the trees" (Saidullah, 1993, p. 84), whereas Weber refers to the "Mandal Forest" (Weber, 1987, p. 618) and ambiguously mentions "the villages near the forest" (Weber, 1987, p. 619), Jain ascribes the hugging initiative to "the women of Lata" (Jain, 1984, p. 1792), and Heaslip claims it was the "villagers of Mandal" (Heaslip, 2005, p. 32). Finally, Ramachandra Guha makes it clear that although there were "early mobilizations at Mandal and Phata" (Guha, 1989, p. 175), it was at Reni village, near the Reni forest (Guha, 1989, p. 159) that women hugged the trees to prevent them from being felled. Without access to primary source data, it is difficult to ascertain which scholar is correct, although for the sake of this essay we shall assume that Guha is correct because he is a renowned scholar on the topic. Fortunately, scholars do agree that the date of the tree hugging was March 26, 1974 (Jain, 1984, p. 1792; Weber, 1987, p. 619; Guha, 1989, p. 159).

⁸ A Marxist group called 'Sanharsh Vahini,' which emerged from the Chipko movement, focused on redistributing natural resources to undermine the powerful (Gosling, 2001, p. 61).

⁹ Apparently Sunderlal Bahuguna claimed in 1976 that the original form of Chipko activism had come to a close (Weber, 1987, p. 619).

There is a difficulty in “disentangling Bahuguna, as the embodiment of the movement, from the movement itself” (Weber, 1987, p. 625). Although both Bahuguna and Bhatt evidently were inspired by Gandhian thought (Bhatt, 1990, p. 8), Gadgil and Guha’s differentiation between "crusading Gandhians," "ecological Marxists" and "appropriate technologists" is fluid, as suggested by the fact that Guha places the DGSM in the category of "appropriate technologists" (Gadgil & Guha, 1995, p. 355). It is certain that both leaders were aware of the class dimensions of environmental struggle.

While both Bahuguna and Bhatt were concerned with coming up with new models of development that included both economy and ecology, Bahuguna was more interested in exporting the idea to other parts of India by giving speeches and going on *padayatras* (Khator, 1989, p. 60). Bahuguna promotes the three As: austerity, alternatives and afforestation, highlighting that people should find local ways of sustenance through a relationship with the forest (smooneyJan70, 2010c), and is suspicious of forest-based industries (Weber, 1987, p. 622), while Bhatt focuses more on alternatives to development and the relationships between finance, government control and local governance: “The money allocated for village forests should not be given to government departments but to village councils and voluntary agencies situated in villages” (Bhatt, 1990, p. 17).

Consequences

Sunderlal Bahuguna was effective at promoting the Chipko movement among the media, politicians and villagers across the Himalayas. The Appiko (‘hug’ in Kannada) movement emerged in Karnataka in 1983, as an emulation of the Chipko movement (Khator, 1989, p. 60). Local environmental centres called ‘Parisara Samrakshna Kendras’ were also established to prevent any infringements of rules and keep an eye on the Forest Department (Gosling, 2001, p. 60). Moreover, Chipko-like protests sprang up all over India, as well as in countries such as Switzerland, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand (Kedizor, 2006, p. 10; see Appendix I). A whole new generation of environmental activists emerged because of the ideology and the networks created by the Chipko movement (Ishizaka, 2013, p. 24). Organisations such as Beej Bachao Abhiyan (Save the Seeds Campaign) were created by members of the Chipko movement to reintroduce biodiversity into the region (Brown, 2014, p. 646).

Unfortunately, not all of the consequences of the Chipko movement were positive. Although in theory the National Forest Conservation Act of 1980 allowed forests to be conserved, this ‘fence-and-fine’ tactic prevented villagers in the Himalayas from reaping profit from their forest resources or using them for local development (Ishizaka, 2013, p. 13). This is primarily due to the myopic vision of the government that ecology and economy cannot go together and that material relationships with forests must necessarily be highly destructive and not somewhat symbiotic.¹⁰ Many families, restricted by the National Forest Conservation Act Law, found themselves in dire economic situations, and villagers migrated in search of work (Rangan, 1996, p. 213). When she was interviewed in 1993, one of the original Chipko activists named Gayatri Devi criticised the Chipko movement for not having addressed educational deficiencies, gender inequality, inadequate infrastructure, and water problems. She stated: “Chipko has given us nothing. We cannot even get wood to build a house because the forest guards keep us out. Our rights have been snatched away” (Devi, as cited by Mawdsley, 1998, p. 47). Moreover, Barton asserts that “authorities empowered by the Chipko movement now engage in forest clearance along the very lines of profit that it originally opposed” (Barton, 2002, p. 152). Additionally, the Tehri Dam¹¹ is being constructed despite opposition from Chipko leaders such as Sunderlal Bahuguna. There are countless ecological refugees and widespread alcoholism (Heaslip, 2005, pp. 36-7).

The consequences of Chipko can also be examined through the lens of separatism. Resentment over the lack of development has fuelled protests in Uttarakhand. People demanded the creation of Uttaranchal, a new Himalayan state which would have greater control over its economic development. There has also been an escalation of violence amongst separatist youth who are disillusioned by their leaders and desire development (Rangan, 1996, p. 221). The new state was created in 2000 and changed its name to Uttarakhand in 2006.

¹⁰ By stating that the local relationship with the forest was somewhat symbiotic, I do not mean to fall into the ‘ecologically noble savage’ trap. Rather, I would argue that the community developed a pragmatic set of rules concerning forest utilisation, including the amount of branches/grass that could be cut by each family (Gosling, 2001, p. 53). Internal community rules on forest use are not uncommon, as I witnessed during my ethnographic fieldwork in the Ecuadorian Amazon in the summer of 2015. The Cofán people of Ecuador apply hunting restrictions not only for themselves but in order to ensure sufficient abundance of species of interest to ecotourists.

¹¹ Construction of the Tehri Dam began in 1978, Phase 1 was completed in 2006, and it is still under construction despite local opposition.

Ecologically Noble Savages, Environmentality and Pragmatism

In Redford's famous essay (1991) on the 'ecologically noble savage,' he claims that paleobiologists, archaeologists and botanists have found sufficient evidence from the Amazon forests to demonstrate that people had a damaging effect in the area prior to the arrival of Europeans, which goes against the mass-produced stereotype of indigenous people living in harmony with nature. He concludes that "[t]hese people behaved as humans do now: they did whatever they had to feed themselves and their families" (Redford, 1991, p. 46). This view was confirmed by Randy Borman, a Cofán leader of the Ecuadorian Amazon, who stated:

"One of the prime fallacies in a lot of the revisionist indigenous philosophical mainstream right now is the failure to recognise the pragmatism of human beings in general. I mean, human beings are always going to be pragmatic. They're always going to take the most practical route to whatever they can get, given their technology and their population. And so something like conservation and 'love for Mother Earth' and all of this sort of stuff, while it existed in pretty much all cultures of the world in some sense, it was a very pragmatic relationship. It was not a theoretic or an esoteric relation" (R. Borman, interview in Zábalo, Ecuador, August 19, 2015).

Applying this assumption that the 'ecologically noble savage' does not exist to the villagers of forests in Uttarakhand is appropriate because they had a close material relationship to the forests for fuel and fodder and it was primarily for this reason that Chipko activists did not want outsiders to chop down their trees: in addition to violating their customary land rights, this deforestation would threaten their forest-dependent livelihood (Mawdsley, 1998, p. 50). As Chipko activist Hima Devi said, "What will we eat? The firewood is disappearing: how will we cook?" (Devi, as cited by Shiva, 1988, p. 70). However, as highlighted by Borman, this does not invalidate the fact that people do have a strong connection to 'Mother Earth.'

Contrary to academics who have created the dichotomy of economics and ecology (Khator, 1989, p. 63; Bandyopadhyay, 1999, p. 3; Heaslip, 2005, p. 30), it is possible to view ecology and economy as complementary and therefore also as having a pragmatic relationship. According to Sunderlal Bahuguna, one of the principal leaders of the Chipko movement, "[a] standing tree should perform an ecological function and also economic in the sense that people may get its products. Because a question arose between economy and ecology, I said that ecology is permanent economy" (smooneyJan70, 2010b). In other words, economy and ecology are not opposite sides of a dichotomy, and the Chipko movement is not "tactically decorated by some 'deep ecological' terms" (Bandyopadhyay, 1999, p. 3). The Chipko activists were protecting

their land rights and the possibility of reaping the profits from the forests in a more localised ‘permanent economy.’

If we approach the ‘environmental mentality’ of villagers from the opposite direction of the ‘ecologically noble savage,’ we are confronted with Arjun Agrawal’s (2005) concept of *environmentality*. According to Foucault, *governmentality* is when ideology becomes hegemonic and people become agents of the government, unwittingly imposing the latter’s rules upon themselves and others. Similarly, Agrawal’s *environmentality* suggests that individuals gain environmental consciousness through governmental brainwashing. Michael Cepek’s brilliant article ‘Foucault in the Forest’ (2011) criticises Agrawal by showing that the Cofán people of the Ecuadorean Amazon gained an environmental consciousness through evaluating their relationship with the forest and its limitations. He highlights that people have “critical consciousness” (Cepek, 2011, p. 501), which reiterates Randy Borman’s point that human beings everywhere creatively and pragmatically come up with solutions while engaging with their surroundings.

These concepts raise the question of whether the Chipko village activists were naturally prone to protecting nature (ecologically noble savages), or were brainwashed by the government to do so (*environmentality*), or were pragmatic and critically conscious about their decisions. The last option seems the most plausible one. I believe that neither the concept of the ‘environmentally noble savage’ nor *environmentality* explains the motivations for their actions, but that their relationship to the forest was pragmatic, economic, ecological and also spiritual, none of which are mutually exclusive.

Deep Ecology and Spirituality

The slogan of the Chipko movement was “What do the forests bear? Land, water and fresh air,” contrary to the mainstream slogan of “What do the forests bear? Resins, timber and business” (Ishizaka, 2013, p. 12). This simple act of verbal resistance demonstrates that the villagers did engage in environmental awareness (or ‘deep ecological thought’) and were not only interested in the forests for fuel and fodder, but also for their ecological services. Furthermore, the Chipko movement was also a response to massive flooding of the Alaknanda River in 1970 (Jain, 1984, p. 1791; Weber, 1987, p. 616), which destroyed many houses and was due to the soil erosion produced by the felling of trees.

Although I generally disagree with Vandana Shiva's ecofeminist interpretation of the Chipko movement, I agree with her that Hindu spiritual thought, in addition to material dependence, was one of the ways villagers related to their forests. *Shakti*, which is female primordial energy, manifests itself in nature as *prakriti* (Mawdsley, 1998, p. 45). While this is used by Shiva to demonstrate that women are closer to nature, which is reductionist, it seems clear that the spiritual connection to nature was one of the people's motivating factors for protecting the trees. This intimate connection¹² with the forest is evidenced by Chipko activist Sateshwari Devi, who maintained that "[t]rees are like my children" (Devi, as cited by Saidullah, 1993, p. 86). The movement is also inspired deeply by Hindu and Buddhist beliefs that emphasise living in harmony with nature (Gosling, 2001, p. 52). According to Saidullah, different incarnations of 'Mother Earth' are worshipped across the Himalayan range in the forms of "Aranyani, Vana Durga...Parvati, Prakriti, Shakti, Dharti" (Saidullah, 1993, p. 84). In Tehri, for instance, people offered leaves "to Patna Devi, the goddess of leaves" (Gosling, 2001, p. 53). However, this is not to say that the villagers' relationship was purely spiritual.

In fact, one of the reasons women were willing to protect the trees was that they had the most at stake,¹³ since women were "the gatherers of firewood and fodder leaves as well as the carriers of water" (Weber, 1987, p. 619) and would therefore suffer more from deforestation (Saidullah, 1993, p. 85). The combination of the spiritual and material relationship is ratified by Itwari Devi, one of the leading Chipko activists:

"We drink fresh milk, we eat ghee, we eat food from our own fields - all this gives us not just nutrition for the body, but a moral strength, that we are our own masters, we control and produce our own wealth. That is why 'primitive,' 'backward' women who do not buy their needs from the market but produce them themselves are leading Chipko. Our power is nature's power, our shakti comes from prakriti" (Itwari Devi, as cited by Shiva, 1988, p. 198).

Was it a Feminist Movement?

In her book *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, Vandana Shiva argues that it is only the "male Chipko activists who have been projected into visibility" (Shiva, 1988, p. 62) and that historians have neglected the involvement of

¹² Women also tied *rakhi* bands around wounded trees in emulation of the Hindu tradition of tying threads around the wrists of their brothers once a year. There were also readings from the Bhagavadgita (Gosling, 2001, p. 59).

¹³ Vimla Bahuguna (Sunderlal Bahuguna's wife) describes the work done by women and how felling trees would make women's lives more difficult: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kX3mYHza6og>

women, despite their prominent role in hugging trees. Moreover, she claims that they were the “real pillars of the movement” (Shiva, 1988, p. 64), that male leaders were “students and followers” (Shiva, 1988, p. 65) of female leaders, and that women had a horizontally-structured, decentralised leadership. Shiva also argues that leaders like Sunderlal Bahuguna inherited ecological knowledge from Mira Behn, one of Gandhi’s disciples, and that Bahuguna himself stated: “We are the runners and messengers – the real leaders are the women” (Shiva, 1988, p. 67). She also wrote that because women have an intimate relationship with the forest for fuel and fodder (Shiva, 1988, p. 70), they therefore took the initiative to protect Mother Nature. All of these arguments have been generally branded as ‘ecofeminist.’

I agree with Shiva’s critics, who see her argument as both reductionist and essentialising (Bandyopadhyay, 1999, p. 4; Agarwal, 1992, p. 125; Guha, 1989, p. 175; Mawdsley, 1998, p. 44). Guha claims that although women hugged trees because the men of Reni had been tricked into going to Chamoli to receive compensation for the 1962 Indo-China War (Heaslip, 2005, p. 33), men and women both contributed to Chipko and so it “can hardly be said to constitute a women’s movement” (Guha, 1989, p. 175). Furthermore, in other future conflicts “such as Badyargarh, men, women and children have all participated equally” (Guha, 1989, p. 175). Only in Dungri-Paintoli did women disagree with men about resource management (Guha, 1989, p. 175). Bandyopadhyay asserts that none of the women who participated in the Chipko movement claim that it was a women’s movement (Bandyopadhyay, 1999, p. 4). This is supported by the comments of Chipko leaders, both male and female. Chandi Prasad Bhatt, one of the central male leaders, stated: “The contributions of women...are invaluable but that does not make it a women’s movement” (Bhatt, as cited by Saidullah, 1993, p. 86). Gaura Devi, the woman who led the initial group of women to hug trees, affirmed that “it happened quite spontaneously. Our men were out of the village, so we had to come forward and protect the trees” (Devi, as cited by Bandyopadhyay, 1999, p. 4).

Women from the movement who discuss their role do not claim the exclusivity of the female role, but are proud of their importance. For instance, Manshree Devi said “[i]t is us common people, specially us women who have made this movement successful” (Devi, as cited by Saidullah, 1993, p. 86). Therefore, the movement definitely helped women gain empowerment. Sateshwari Tiwari asserted, “Earlier I thought that I could not do so many things...that I was a nobody because I was a

woman...[Now] I am self-confident” (Tiwari, as cited by Saidullah, 1993, p. 86). Additionally, women used their newly gained confidence to demand “a share in [the] decision-making process at the community level” (Jain, 1984, p. 1789). For instance, when in 1980 women stood up for the forest in Dongri Paintoli despite the men’s desire to have it felled, this demonstrated the increased confidence of women in the region. Unfortunately, women’s daily reality remained defined by patriarchal norms and they were not only ignored in decision-making at village councils, but were also regularly beaten in household situations (Jain, 1984, p. 1790).

Although Shiva claims that women and nature are linked, Bina Agarwal criticises her for not taking into account the activists’ class, caste, race or gender. In fact, by stating that Third World women are closer to nature,¹⁴ Shiva is reinforcing ideological constructions concerning gender and fortifying colonial rhetoric. Instead of Shiva’s “ecofeminism,” Agarwal proposes a “feminist environmentalism” which takes into account issues of gender, class, power, division of labour, etc. Also, this term allows scholars to debate the relationship between feminism and environmentalism without conflating the two terms. Although I agree with Agarwal, I do not think the original Chipko movement can even be called a ‘feminist environmental’ movement. She argues that it has the “potential for becoming a wider movement against gender-related inequalities” (Agarwal, 1992, p. 148), and it may have even changed ideologically up until the present day, but this does not necessarily make the Chipko movement either ‘feminist’ or ‘environmental’ in its 1974 original form. As discussed previously, the movement was primarily a pragmatic solution to the violation of customary land ownership and the villagers’ threatened subsistence.

Conclusion

Although the events preceding and following the Chipko movement in 1974 are straightforward, the multiple interpretations about activists’ motivations have led some academics (Khator, 1989, p. 63; Bandyopadhyay, 1999, p. 3; Heaslip, 2005, p. 30) to conclude that the movement was primarily driven by economic interests, while others (Guha, 1989, pp. 214-15) maintain that it was an example of ‘environmentalism of the poor’ (deep ecology), and feminists such as Vandana Shiva and Bina Agarwal discuss whether it constitutes an example of ecofeminism or environmental feminism. I think

¹⁴ Anthropologist Sherry Ortner originally stated that men were closer to culture and women closer to nature.

Sya Kedzior's conclusion that "the Chipko movement, like many other environmental and social movements found in the majority (sic) world, is multifaceted, often joining a large and diverse membership with appeals for both ecological health and social justice" (Kedzior, 2006, p. 73) is the most reasonable. As Sunderlal Bahuguna states, Gandhian beliefs, spirituality and ecological thought were all intertwined: "[t]hese three are one thing" (smooneyJan70, 2010a) and "ecology is permanent economy" (smooneyJan70, 2010b). Moreover, I would personally like to highlight the pragmatism (Borman, personal communication, August 19, 2015) and critical consciousness (Cepek, 2011) of people who live in forest environments.

Emma Mawdsley contended that "the recovery of an 'objective history' of Chipko is neither possible nor desirable" (Mawdsley, 1998, p. 40) and I concur because to some extent all history is historicised, since objectivity is clouded by present interpretations and personal scholarly agendas. Moreover, we should take into consideration the way in which information flows through info-scapes and media-scapes (Appadurai, 1996) and thereby shapes our perceptions of the past. For instance, with the advent of the Internet, access to primary and secondary sources has increased considerably.¹⁵ What is surprising about researching the Chipko movement is that in addition to secondary source data, primary sources were found in an unexpected place: Youtube. Interviews of Sunderlal and Vimla Bahuguna (Appendix III) were quite important for bringing the subject matter to life, in addition to providing insights into the leaders' interpretations¹⁶ of past events.

Nevertheless, the scarcity of primary sources has made this paper depend almost exclusively on secondary accounts, whose reliability cannot be established, and which mainly use the Chipko movement as a case study to exemplify ecofeminism and environmentalism of the poor. Although I believe there is evidence that the movement was not feminist and that the primary intention of the Chipko activists was to retain control over their means of survival, it is apparent that there has been a high degree of speculation about what actually motivated the people to act, along with some disparity in the perceptions of the shared ideology within the movement. However, scholars like Vandana Shiva and Ramachandra Guha have actually reified their interpretations of the

¹⁵ Obviously, some forms of manual archival research are in decline, which is also a major drawback in contemporary academic research.

¹⁶ Apart from a short news video featuring Ramachandra Guha, it was not possible to find an interview of Chandi Prasad Bhatt that was translated into English. Please follow this link to the news video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tcwY04s_mIM

events. Regardless of what actually happened in 1974, women and environmentalists within India and internationally have been inspired by and emulated Chipko's actions, albeit often based on academic interpretations (Mawdsley, 1998, p. 50).

Appendix I: Timeline of Main Events

TIMELINE OF THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT

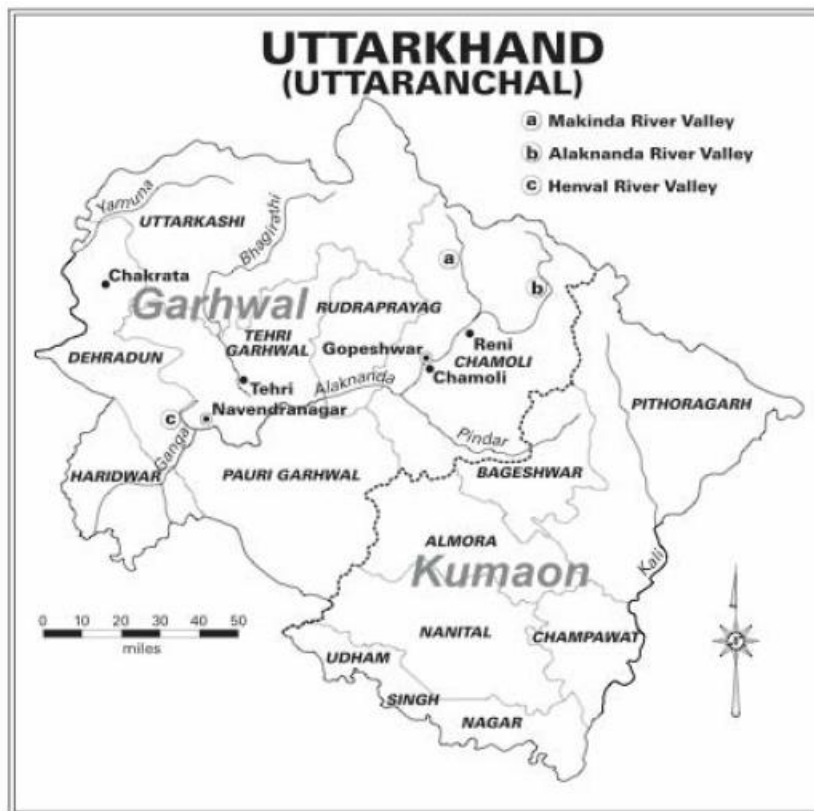
DATE	EVENT	LOCATION
1988 - 2005	Chipko forest protests intermittent; some members involved in struggles against dams, mines, etc., Chipko movement and message continue to inspire activists around India and internationally.	
1988	Draft of New Forest Policy approved by the Indian Parliament.	
1987	Indian government enforces a second 15-year ban on the commercial felling of green trees	Uttar Pradesh
	New York, NY celebrates 'Chipko Day' on the 29 th of April	New York, NY, USA
	Chipko movement members awarded 'Right Livelihood Award'	Sweden
	Chipko-style movement occupies forest to stop the construction of a motorway	Bohuslän, Sweden
1985	Chipko protest against Uttar Pradesh Forest Corporation	Chakrata, Dehra Dun
1984	Chipko protest against limestone quarrying	Hemval Valley, Tehri
	Chipko-style protest held against forest destruction caused by acid rain	Switzerland
1983	Chipko movement begins to spread nationally as Appiko movement	Himchal Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Karnataka
1981	Sunderlal Bahuguna begins famed 'Kashmir to Kohima' 4870km march	Kashmir to Kohima, Nagaland
1980	National Forest Conservation Act enforced; 15-year ban against forest felling in Himalayas	Delhi
1979	Publication by Swedish couple brings international attention to Chipko movement	Sweden
1978	Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini (USV) organizes demonstrations against forest auctions	Kumaon

(Kedzior, 2006, p. 17)

1977	Bahuguna begins fast after government auctions trees of Advani and Salet forests; In October, women from 15 villages control of Adwani forest for 7 days	Narendranagar, Tehri
	In celebration of 'Forest Day' on May 30, activists enter local forests and apply mud and sack plasters to chir pines damaged by overtapping	Hemval Ghati, Tehri Garhwal
1976	Reni Investigation Committee report identifies deforestation as cause of environmental disasters in Himalayas—leads to 10-year limited ban on commercial felling	Kumaon
	Successful Chipko protest	Hemval Ghati, Tehri Garhwal
1975	Uttar Pradesh Van Nigam formed, taking over forest administration and declaring a ban on forest felling	
1974	Reni Protest in March	Reni, Chamoli
1973	Reni forests auctioned at annual government forest auctions in November	Reni, Chamoli
	Second DGSS protest against Symonds' reallocation in June	Phata, Makinda Valley, Chamoli
	DGSS protest against Symonds loggers in March	Gopeshwar, Chamoli
1972	Government denies tree allotment to DGSS, grants to Symonds—sparks widespread protest	Gopeshwar, Chamoli
1971	DGSS members protest a governmental forestry meeting in October	Gopeshwar, Chamoli
1970	Widespread and destructive flooding	Alaknanda Valley, Chamoli
1968	Protests on Tilarī Martyr's Day, May 30	Gopeshwar, Chamoli
1964	DGSS receives contract from Forest Department and sets up small industry to produce furniture and agricultural equipment	
1821	British Tribal Forest Settlements	
1815	British occupation of the Northern Hills District	Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh
1730	363 Bisnoi villagers die while using Chipko methods to protest the felling of local trees	Khejadli, Jodhpur, Rajasthan

(Kedzior, 2006, p. 18)

Appendix II: Map of Uttarakhand

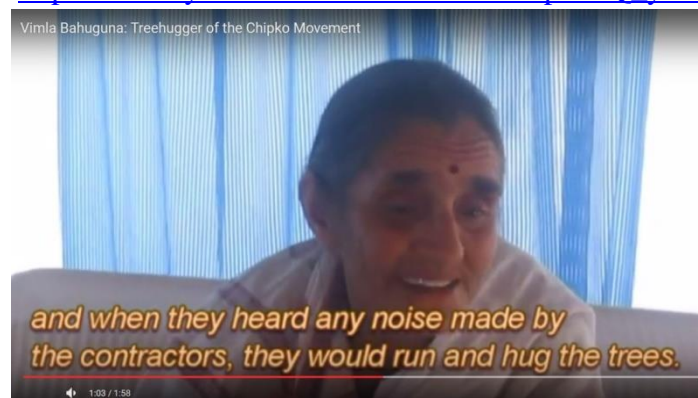


(Kedzior, 2006, p. 20)

Appendix III: Video Screenshots of Sunderlal & Vimla Bahuguna



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h2MpmKQ_ynY



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kX3mYHza6og>

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