Forestry and Social Protest in British Kumaun, c. 1893–1921

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I. Introduction
The growing debate on twentieth-century Indian nationalism has brought to light sharp cleavages, notably with regard to the political role of the peasantry in the non-co-operation campaigns of 1920–2 and 1930–2. In the eyes of the so-called ‘nationalist’ school, the peasant was drawn into the orbit of modern politics by the Indian National Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi; thus, ‘Nationalism helped to arouse the peasant and awaken him to his own needs, demands and above all the possibility of any active role in social and political development’.¹ Other scholars have stressed on the one hand the numerous peasant and tribal revolts in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, well before ‘modern’ nationalism had penetrated into the countryside,² and on the other the relative autonomy of peasant participation in later movements bearing the imprimatur of Congress. It has been shown that the relations between the peasantry and the urban nationalists who directed these campaigns were far more complex than has hitherto been supposed, and on several occasions peasants on their own initiative adopted forms of struggle that broke the narrow confines of Congress-directed non-co-operation. It has further been argued that the rural masses in different regions joined these upsurges for reasons of their own—reasons which often did not coincide with

¹ Bipan Chandra, Nationalism and Colonialism in Modern India (Delhi, 1979), p. 345.
² See, for example, A.R. Desai, ed., Peasant Struggles in India (Delhi, 1979).
the charter of demands laid down by the Congress Working Committee.³

Nevertheless, the Congress remains the defining point for most students of the political history of this period, and much research has gone (and continues) into examining the specific interactions between the peasantry and the Congress in their regional variations. This preoccupation is reflected in the burgeoning literature which deals with movements around the issue of lost rights over forest land. Sumit Sarkar has made a preliminary survey of forest movements which coincided with the two Non-Co-operation Movements, Biswamoy Pati has written about the widespread violation of forest laws by peasants and tribals in Orissa in the years following World War I, while D.A. Low and David Baker have seen similar movements in the Central Provinces and Bombay Presidency as being, in part, the outcome of attempts by Congress to link regional upsurges based on local grievances with the mainstream of nationalist politics. More recently, Baker has argued that 'forest satyagrahas' in the Central Provinces did in fact enjoy a certain degree of autonomy from urban influences.⁴ As evidenced by the use of the term 'forest satyagraha',⁵ common to all these writers, the historical reconstruction of these movements can be understood only in the context of their relevance to 'the current debate among students of Indian nationalism about the significance and the degree of autonomy [of] peasant and lower class movements in Gandhian upsurges'.⁶

³ Pioneering studies in this regard are those by Gyan Pandey on UP and David Hardiman on Gujarat. The evidence and 'state of the art' have been summarized in Sumit Sarkar, Modern India (Delhi, 1983), ch. 1 and passim.


⁵ Although a highly misleading term, which obscures more than it reveals, it is symptomatic of the continuing obsession of historians of different schools with the Congress. It is only fair to mention that in his Deuskar lectures, Sarkar does not use the term (or the primitive/modern dichotomy) in describing these movements, emphasizing instead their nature and form. See his Popular Movements and 'Middle Class' Leadership in Late Colonial India (Calcutta, 1983), pp. 10–16.

Shaking off this obsession with the role of the Congress as such, scholars of a Marxist persuasion have studied agrarian movements in colonial India with a view to ascertaining the impact of land policies and the role played by different classes in peasant revolts. These studies have undoubtedly helped to challenge the thesis that the Congress exercised a near-total hegemony over the different movements loosely conducted under its umbrella, and the related myth of a ‘unified’ Indian nationalism. But in restricting themselves to aggregate economic phenomena these studies have adhered to a tradition of Marxism which, in the words of one writer, attempts to assimilate the history of the peasant to that of the people as a whole—i.e. it substitutes an ideal abstraction called ‘Worker-and-Peasant’ for the ‘real historical personality of the insurgent’. Thus the social idiom in which peasant protest has been expressed—the ‘internal’ face of Indian Nationalism—gets left out in an examination of surface economic phenomena.

This essay examines the trajectory of social protest in Kumaun during the early decades of this century. Since 1973, Kumaun has been the epicentre of the Chipko Andolan, possibly the best known contemporary movement against the exploitation of forests by outside agency. Nonetheless, Chipko is only one—though undoubtedly the most organized—in a series of protests against commercial forestry dating from the earliest days of state intervention. While the absence of popular protest in the first century of British rule had given rise to the stereotype of the ‘simple and law abiding

Arnold tries to move away from this problematic, with some success, in his richly detailed study on a series of movements, some of which were forest-based, in Gudem-Rampa (‘Rebellious Hillmen: the Gudem-Rampa risings, 1839–1924’ in Ranajit Guha, ed., Subaltern Studies I (Delhi, 1982)). What is lacking in Arnold’s account is the concept of the forest as an ecosystem of which man is an integral part. To my mind he is unable to adequately relate social change with the ecological change that accompanied it.

7 Works representative of this genre are D.N. Dhanagare, Peasant Movements in India: 1920–1950 (Delhi, 1983); Kathleen Gough, ‘Indian Peasant Uprisings’, in Desai, ed., Peasant Struggles.


10 See A. Mishra and S. Tripathi, Chipko Andolan (Delhi, 1978); B. Dogra, Forests and People (Rishikesh, 1980).
hillman', the reservation of the Kumaun forests in 1911–17 'met with violent and sustained opposition', culminating in 1921 when within the space of a few months the administration was paralysed, first by a strike against utar (statutory labour) and then through a systematic campaign in which the Himalayan pine forests 'were swept by incendiary fires almost from end to end'.

The study of peasant movements in Kumaun stands at the intersection of two distinct perspectives: the sociology of peasant protest under colonialism and an ecologically-oriented study of history. Having sketched the outlines of the current debate among Indian historians on peasant 'nationalism' I shall briefly indicate the importance of environmental factors and their impact on social relations.

Recent research has shown that world ecology was profoundly altered by Western capitalism, in whose dynamic expansion, from the fifteenth century onwards, other ecosystems were disrupted, first by European trade and later by colonialism. Such interventions virtually reshaped the societies into whose habitat they intruded. In India, too, the exogenously induced changes engendered by colonialism and the usurpation of natural resources by the state undermined the traditional social fabric in a variety of ways. In her pioneering study, Elizabeth Whitcombe shows how the reorientation of agricultural production towards the export market and the construction of large irrigation works which increased soil salinity by obstructing natural drainage led to an unprecedented strain in the rural economy of the Doab. The adaptation of farming techniques to cope with these rapid changes was further hampered by the deforestation caused by the use of wood-fuel by railway companies. In South Bihar, the deterioration of the system of social management of irrigation—which, it is argued, was one factor

13 E.A. Smythies, India's Forest Wealth (London, 1925), p. 84.
behind the rise of the Kisan Sabha in the 1930s—could be traced to the commercialization of agriculture and the affirmation of state control over water resources. As Sengupta points out, ownership and land control, though undoubtedly very significant, are only one aspect of social relations within the agrarian population.\(^\text{16}\)

These works notwithstanding, the neglect of the study of the ecological dimensions of social conflict in India is almost embarrassingly complete. This is especially true of the history of Indian forestry, as witness a lengthy essay on the impact of colonial law on agrarian society which is clearly unaware of the existence of both forest-based communities and state intervention in this sphere.\(^\text{17}\) It is time to amend this neglect, first because a study of forest policy and law may help to modify the theories based on the ideological presuppositions of colonial policy, and second because the transformation of social relations brought about by commercial forestry was one whose repercussions continue to be felt today. The history of deforestation\(^\text{18}\) has assumed an additional importance in view of the continuing struggles of tribals and other forest dwellers, and can help illuminate the forms such conflicts have previously taken in different parts of the country.

Conflicts over forest and grazing rights were a recurrent feature in pre-capitalist and early-capitalist Europe as well. The enclosure of common woodland, for hunting reserves and later for rationalized timber production, was an imposition keenly resented by the peasantry.\(^\text{19}\) However, the nature of social conflict in the transition to industrial capitalism in Europe inevitably differed from that of the endemic conflict over forest rights which was germane to the artificially induced capitalism under colonial rule. B.H. Baden-Powell, one of the architects of Indian forest policy, pointed to this distinction when he observed that in Europe, 'in a more advanced state of social life and occupation it has become more and more easy


\(^{18}\) For a preliminary analysis, see my 'Forestry in British and Post-British India: A Historical Analysis', \textit{Economic and Political Weekly,} 29 October 1983 and 12 November 1983.

to alter an occupation that could not be continued if a forest right was taken away'.

II. Kumaun: Economy and Society

Although ruled by different dynasties during the medieval period, the social structures of Kumaun and Garhwal share marked similarities. The largest ethnic stratum is made up of the Khasa or Khasiya who comprise the traditional peasantry, while the next largest stratum consists of the Doms serving the cultivating body as artisans and farm servants. Numerically the smallest but ritually the highest group are the Thuljat—Brahmins and Rajputs claiming to be descendants of later immigrants from the plains. It has been conjectured that the Doms are the original inhabitants of the hills who were conquered and enslaved by the Khasas. While the Khasas were a widespread race in prehistoric Asia, the origins of the hill Khasas are obscure. They have, however, adhered to a Vedantic form of Hinduism at least since the eighth century AD. With caste restrictions and other rules of orthodox Hinduism being singularly lax in the hills, over time the Khasas have merged with the Thul-Jat.

The independent chiefdoms of Garhwal were first subjugated by Ajayapal in the thirteenth century, while the unification of Kumaun

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20 B.H. Baden-Powell, Memorandum on forest settlements in India (Calcutta, 1892), p. 5.

21 In this article, Kumaun refers to the British civil division comprising the districts of British Garhwal, Almora, and Naini Tal. Historically the latter two districts constituted Kumaun. I shall however use Kumaun to include Garhwal as did the official sources from which I have largely drawn. The Kumaun Division (hereafter KD) was separated from Nepal in the east by the river Kali; from Tibet in the north by the Himalaya; from the state of Tehri Garhwal in the west by the Alakananda and Mandakini rivers, and from the adjoining division of Rohilkhand in the south by the outer hills.


23 Contact with plains Hinduism was maintained through the pilgrims who came annually to visit the famous temples in the hills. As a result one finds little evidence here of an 'almost universal antipathy which hillmen feel towards the inhabitants of the plains'. See Arnold, 'Rebellious Hillmen', p. 89.
took place under Som Chand around 960 AD. Exempt from the payment of tribute to the Muslim dynasties of North India, these isolated hill tracts were conquered by adjoining Nepal between 1793 and 1804. The system of military assignments under Gurkha rule introduced certain changes in the agrarian structure built around strong village communities, with most members enjoying a hereditary interest in land. The Anglo-Gurkha wars culminated in the treaty of 1815, by which the East India Company annexed both Kumaun and Garhwal. Retaining Kumaun and eastern Garhwal, the British restored the western portion (known as Tehri Garhwal, after the king's new capital) to the son of the last Garhwal ruler.

The boundaries of the treaty of 1815 were fixed with a view to controlling the route to Tibet and the passes used for trade. It was the prospect of commercial intercourse with Tibet and not considerations of revenue that induced Warren Hastings to embark on the hill campaign. Its location, strategic from the viewpoint of both defensive security and trade, played an important part in the evolution of British land policy in Kumaun.

The Central Himalaya is composed of two distinct ecological zones: the monsoon-affected areas at middle and low altitudes, and the high valleys of the north, inhabited until 1962 by the Bhotiya herdsmen who had been engaged in trade with Tibet for centuries. Along the river valleys cultivation was carried out, limited only by the steepness of land and more frequently by the difficulty of irrigation. Two and sometimes three harvests were possible throughout the last century, wheat, rice, and millets being the chief cereals grown. The system of tillage and methods of crop rotation bore the mark of the hillmen's natural environment. With production oriented towards subsistence needs, which were comfortably met, there remained a surplus of grain for export to Tibet and southwards to the plains. Usually having six months stock of grain at hand, and with their diet supplemented by fish, fruit, vegetable, and animal flesh, the hill cultivators were described by Henry Ramsay, commissioner from 1856–84, as 'probably better off than any peasantry in India'.

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The absence of sharp inequalities in land ownership among the cultivating proprietors who formed the bulk of the population was the basis of solidarity within the village community. Single-caste villages were not uncommon, and in these the village panchayat—an institution quite different from the caste panchayat of the plains—dealt with social disputes, arrangements for festivals, etc., with every adult member having a voice in its affairs. The establishment of British rule notwithstanding, panchayats frequently continued to deal internally with matters technically under the jurisdiction of civil and criminal courts.\(^{26}\)

The hill land-tenure system inherited by the British differed no less strikingly from that in the plains. The first commissioner, G.W. Traill, observed that at least three-fourths of the villages were hisse-dari, i.e. wholly cultivated by the actual proprietors of the land; the revenue demand on them was restricted to their respective shares of the village assessment. The remaining villages were divided into (i) those in which the right of property was vested in earlier recipients of land grants (many dating only from the period of Gurkha rule) while the hereditary right of cultivation remained with the original occupants (called khaikhar), and (ii) a handful of villages owned by a single individual, where again individual tenants (called kburnee), were able to wrest easy terms owing to the favourable land-man ratio.\(^{27}\) As even the most important landowners depended not on any legal right but on the actual influence they exercised over village communities, there was not one estate which could be termed ‘pure zamindari’. Government revenue and certain customary fees were collected by the elected village padhan (headman), who reported in turn to a higher revenue official (called the patwari, in charge of a patti or group of villages) entrusted with police duties and the responsibility of collecting statutory labour for public works.\(^{28}\) While


\(^{27}\) G.W. Traill, ‘Statistical Sketch of Kumaun’, in *Asiatic Researches* 16: 137–234 (1828: rpt. Delhi, 1980). Grants of land to temples were also recognized by the British.

over time much of the class of khurnee merged with that of khaikhar, the latter differed from the hissedar only in that he could not transfer land and had to pay a fixed sum as malikhana to the proprietor—this sum representing the conversion into cash of all previously-levied cesses and perquisites. But by the end of the century, fully nine-tenths of all hillmen were estimated to be hissedars, cultivating proprietors with full ownership rights.29

Some evidence from census returns is given in Table 1. Not strictly comparable with the other mountainous districts, Naini Tal comprised a few hill patts and a large area of Terai which had begun to be settled by the end of the nineteenth century.30 Within the hill districts proper, one observes that around 60 per cent of the agrarian population were owner-cultivators. Having already noted the position of khaikhari tenures (Category IIb), we can conclude that around 80 per cent of the total population farmed largely with the help of family labour. The extraordinarily low proportion of agricultural labour confirms the picture of an egalitarian peasant community—a picture used more often as an analytical construct than believed to exist in reality.31

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>% share of gross produce</th>
<th>% of land cultivated by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultivating proprietors (hissedar)</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Original occupants reduced to occupancy tenants (khaikhar)</td>
<td>70–75</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenants settled by proprietor (khurnee)</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-resident tenants (sirtans) (not available)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Under the earlier rulers, 'the agricultural assessment originally fixed was extremely light, and its rate and amount would appear to have been very rarely revised'. Traill, quoted in E.K. Pauw, Report on the tenth settlement of the Garhwal district (Allahabad, 1896), p. 53.

29 B.H. Baden-Powell, The Land Systems of British India (1892: rpt. Delhi, 1974), vol. ii, pp. 308–15; V.A. Stowell, A Manual of the Land Tenures of the Kumaun Division (1907: rpt. Allahabad, 1937). The latter statement, attributed to Pauw, is obviously an overestimate, but is significant in so far as it reflects an officially perceived contrast with the land systems in the plains.


The best class of cultivation was to be found in villages between three and five thousand feet above sea level, having access on the one hand to good forest and grazing ground, and on the other to riparian fields in the depths of the valley. Village sites were usually chosen halfway up the spur, below oak forests and the perennial springs associated with them, and above the cultivated fields along the river bed. In such a situation all crops could be ‘raised to perfection’, a healthy elevated site was available for houses, and herds of cattle could be comfortably maintained. Until 1910 most villages came close to this ideal.\(^{32}\)

With animal husbandry being as important to their economy as grain cultivation, the hillmen and their cattle migrated annually to the grass-rich areas of the forest. Temporary cattle sheds (kharaks) were constructed and the cultivation of small patches carried out. In the permanent hamlets, oak forests provided both fodder and fertilizer. Green and dry leaves, which served the cattle as litter, were mixed with the excreta of the animals and fermented to give manure to the fields. Thus the forest augmented the nutritive value of the fields, directly through its foliage and indirectly through the excreta of the cattle fed with fodder leaves and forest grass. Broad-leaved trees also provided the villagers with fuel and agricultural implements.\(^{33}\)

In the lower hills the extensive chir forests served for pasture. Every year the dry grass and pine-needle litter in the chir forest was burnt to make room for a fresh crop of luxuriant grass. Simultaneously the needle litter, whose soapy surface endangered the otherwise sure-footed hill cattle, was destroyed. Very resistant to fire, chir was used for building houses and as torchwood. In certain parts where pasture was scarce, trees were grown and preserved for fodder.\(^{34}\)


\(^{33}\) This paragraph is based on Franz Heske, ‘Problem der Walderhaltung in Himalaya’ (Problems of forest conservation in the Himalaya), Tharandter Forstlichen Jahrbuch 82(8): pp. 545–94 (1931). I am grateful to Professor S.R.D. Guha for help with translation from the German.

\(^{34}\) Ibid., pp. 555, 564–5; Pauw, Garhwal SR, pp. 23, 47. In addition, ‘the hillman is indeed especially blessed by the presence in almost every jungle of fruit, vegetables, or roots to help him over a period of moderate scarcity’. (Walton, ‘Almora’, p. 59).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>District</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Naini Tal</td>
<td>Almora</td>
<td>British Garhwal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>1911</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Primarily from rent:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Landlords</td>
<td>3023</td>
<td>681</td>
<td>102</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Occupancy tenants</td>
<td>5025</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Ordinary tenants</td>
<td>15199</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Class I</td>
<td>23247</td>
<td>722</td>
<td>724</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9.98)</td>
<td>(0.35)</td>
<td>(0.15)</td>
<td>(0.11)</td>
<td>(0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. From cultivation of their holdings:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a) Landlords</td>
<td>48887</td>
<td>287952</td>
<td>292649</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(20.80)</td>
<td>(59.31)</td>
<td>(66.60)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Occupancy tenants</td>
<td>22449</td>
<td>107519</td>
<td>104793</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9.55)</td>
<td>(22.15)</td>
<td>(23.85)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Ordinary tenants</td>
<td>118411</td>
<td>88337</td>
<td>34799</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(50.38)</td>
<td>(17.16)</td>
<td>(7.92)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Class II</td>
<td>189747</td>
<td>184276</td>
<td>478808</td>
<td>486776</td>
<td>432241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(80.73)</td>
<td>(89.15)</td>
<td>(98.62)</td>
<td>(98.04)</td>
<td>(98.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Farm servants and field labourers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14212</td>
<td>15261</td>
<td>1771</td>
<td>2411</td>
<td>3917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6.05)</td>
<td>(7.38)</td>
<td>(0.36)</td>
<td>(0.49)</td>
<td>(0.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Goatherds, shepherds and herdsmen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4886</td>
<td>3741</td>
<td>3151</td>
<td>6035</td>
<td>1507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.07)</td>
<td>(1.81)</td>
<td>(0.65)</td>
<td>(1.21)</td>
<td>(0.34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Others (including forestry)</td>
<td>2956</td>
<td>2698</td>
<td>1053</td>
<td>763</td>
<td>1609</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.26)</td>
<td>(1.31)</td>
<td>(0.22)</td>
<td>(0.15)</td>
<td>(0.37)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI. Agriculture and pasture (Total)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>235028</td>
<td>206698</td>
<td>485507</td>
<td>496517</td>
<td>439395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII. Total population</td>
<td>323519</td>
<td>276875</td>
<td>525104</td>
<td>530338</td>
<td>480167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VIII. VI as % of VII</td>
<td>72.65</td>
<td>74.65</td>
<td>92.46</td>
<td>93.62</td>
<td>91.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census of India, 1911 and 1921

Note: i) A simpler classification was adopted in 1921 owing to the Non-Cooperation Movement.
ii) Figures in parentheses denote percentage of agricultural population (VI)
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Its isolated position and status as a recruiting ground for army personnel were reflected in the administrative policies followed in Kumaun. Recruitment had started by the mid-nineteenth century, and both Kumauni and Garhwali soldiers were drafted into Gurkha units. The Garhwali Regiment, with headquarters at Lansdowne in the outer hills, was formed in 1890 and became the 39th Garhwal Rifles in 1901. Essentially peasant farmers who returned to cultivate their holdings on retirement, hill soldiers enjoyed an enviable record for their bravery. In these circumstances British land-revenue assessment was extraordinarily light—around Rs 3 per family—and its revision barely kept up with the increase in population. A rapid expansion of the cultivated area was watched over by a highly personalized administration under Henry Ramsay, whom fellow Englishmen hailed as the uncrowned King of Kumaun.

At one stage the hills had afforded distinct possibilities for tea cultivation. In 1862–3 over 35,000 lbs. of tea was produced in Dehradun and Kumaun, and an estimate of waste land fit for tea cultivation revealed that it was feasible to match the entire export trade of China from this region alone. The refusal of the hill peasant to shed his subsistence orientation and the opposition anticipated at the introduction of white settlers led to these plans being shelved. In later years, state intervention in the form of induced commercialization of agriculture was conspicuously absent. In the odd year when the monsoon failed, grain was imported by the authorities and sold at remunerative prices—a measure, it was stressed, necessitated not by the poverty of the population (which could well afford to buy grain) but by the inaccessibility of many villages and the lack of markets in an economy characterized by the absence of traders in foodgrains. Such measures may help to explain why no agitations


related to revenue occurred in either the nineteenth or the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{38}

III. The Development of Organized Forestry in Kumaun

Stable forest cover on any terrain is established through the process of ecological succession.\textsuperscript{39} This succession can generally be divided into three stages: (i) the initial stage, in which certain species of trees, usually with small or light seeds, take possession of newly exposed ground; (ii) the transitional stages, in which changes take place on ground already clothed with some vegetative cover; (iii) the climactic stage, which represents the farthest advance towards a hygrophilous (i.e. adapted to plentiful water supply) type of vegetation which the locality is capable of supporting. While it could be said that in the Himalaya the oaks and other broad-leaved species represent stage (iii) and the conifers stage (ii), in the days before forest management mixed forests were the norm. In general, the more favourable the locality is for vegetation the greater the number of species struggling for existence in it.

Two points may be noted. First, while the oaks (and other broad-leaved species) are more valuable for hill agriculture on both ecological and economic grounds, the conifers have had, since the inception of ‘scientific’ management, a variety of commercial uses. Second, while ‘progressive’ succession—from stage (i) to (ii) to (iii)—occurs in nature, ‘retrogressive’ succession—from stage (iii) to (ii) to (i)—can be caused by man, either accidentally or deliberately. Foresters are cautioned that in many cases ‘the natural trend of this succession may be diametrically opposed to what is desirable from an economic point of view’.\textsuperscript{40}


\textsuperscript{39} This brief description of the nature and composition of the Himalayan forests is taken from R.S. Troup, Silviculture of Indian Trees (Oxford, 1921), intro., and passim. Early white travellers were impressed by the density and extent of the Himalayan forests, e.g. Hardwicke (‘Narrative’, 327) who proclaimed that ‘the forests of oak, fir, and boorans are here more extensive, and the trees of greater magnitude, than any I have ever seen’.

\textsuperscript{40} Troup, ‘Silviculture’, pp. iv–v. ‘Economic’ is a euphemism for ‘commercially valuable’. Within this division between coniferous and broad-leaved trees, the most important (and common) species, especially in the altitudes inhabited by human population, are the banj oak (Quercus incana) and the chir pine (Pinus roxburghii (longifolia)).
The importance of forests in hill life gave rise to a 'natural system of conservancy' that took different forms. Through religion, folklore and tradition the Khasa communities drew a protective ring around the forests. Often, hill tops were dedicated to local deities and the trees around the summit and on the slopes were preserved. Many wooded areas were not of spontaneous growth and bore marks of both plantation and preservation. Particularly in eastern Kumaun, and around temples, deodar plantations had become naturalized. Temple groves of deodar varied in extent from a few trees to woods of several hundred acres. As late as 1953 it was reported that the finest strands of deodar, found near temples, were venerated and protected from injury. An officer newly posted to the hills in the 1920s was struck by the way communal action continued to survive in the considerable areas which served as village grazing ground, and by the fact that fuel and fodder reserves were walled in and well looked after. Traditionally, many villages had fuel reserves even on gaon sanjait (common) land measured by the government, which the villagers cut over in regular rotation by common consent. Chaundkot pargana in Garhwal was singled out for its forests within village boundaries, called 'banis', where branches and trees were only cut at specified times and with the permission of the entire village community. Cooperation of a high order was also manifest in the fixed boundaries adhered to by every village—boundaries existing from the time of Indian rulers and recognized by Traill in the settlement of 1823. Within these boundaries the inhabitants of each village exercised various proprietary and other rights of use. In some areas a group

43 N.L. Bor, Manual of Indian Forest Botany (Oxford, 1953), p. 13. Dietrich Brandis, the first Inspector-General of Forests, had reported the existence of numerous sacred groves, the 'traditional method of forest preservation', in almost all the provinces of India. See his Indian Forestry (Woking, 1897), p. 12.
44 J.K. Pearson, 'Note on history of proposals for management of village waste lands', dated December 1926, in Forest Department (FD) file 83 of 1909, Uttar Pradesh State Archives (UPSA), Lucknow.
45 Note by V.A. Stowell, D.C., Garhwal, on 'Nayabad grants for reforestation purposes', n.d., prob. 1907; note dated 13 August 1910, by Dharmanand Joshi, late Depy. Collector, Garhwal, both in ibid.
of villages had joint rights of grazing and fuel, secured by long usage and custom.\textsuperscript{46}

Since an analogous situation existed in many other forest areas, the inception of commercial forestry disrupted existing patterns of resource utilization.\textsuperscript{47} The landmark in the history of Indian forestry is undoubtedly the building of the railway network. The large-scale destruction of accessible forests in the early years of railway expansion led to the hasty creation of a forest department, set up with the help of German experts in 1864. The first task before the new department was to identify the sources of supply of strong and durable timbers—such as sal, teak and deodar—which could be used as railway sleepers. As sal and teak were very heavily worked out,\textsuperscript{48} search parties were sent to explore the deodar forests of the Sutlej and Jamuna valleys.\textsuperscript{49} Intensive felling in these forests—1.3 million deodar sleepers were exported from the Jamuna valley between 1865 and 1878—forced the government to rely on the import of wood from Europe. But with emphasis placed on substituting indigenous sleepers for imported ones, particularly in the inland districts of North India, the department began to consider the utilization of the Himalayan pines if they responded adequately to antiseptic treatment.\textsuperscript{50}

Successful forest administration required checking the deforestation of the past decades,\textsuperscript{51} and for this the assertion of state


\textsuperscript{47} These two paragraphs are a somewhat simplified summary of a complex historical process described in detail in my \textquote{Forestry in British and post-British India}'.

\textsuperscript{48} Thus, by 1869, the sal forests of the outer hills were all \textquote{felled in even to desolation}. See G.F. Pearson, \textquote{Sub Himalayan forests of Kumaun and Garhwal}, in \textit{Selections}, 2nd series, vol. 2 (Allahabad, 1869), p. 132.

\textsuperscript{49} G.P. Paul, \textit{Felling Timber in the Himalayas} (Lahore, 1871); Col. R. Strachey, Secy., GOI to Secy., PWD, NWP, dated 29 March 1864, no. 10, Revenue B. Progs, May, 1864, Foreign Dept., National Archives of India (NAI).

\textsuperscript{50} D. Brandis, \textquote{Memorandum on the supply of railway sleepers of the Himalayan pines impregnated in India}, \textit{Indian Forester} 4:365–85 (April, 1879). While every mile of broad gauge railway required 1,800, sleepers, each sleeper lasted 12 years. The railway network had expanded from 843 to 9,215 miles in 1860–80, levelling off at around 32,300 miles by 1910. See GOI, \textit{History of Indian Railways} (Delhi, 1964), p. 214. Thus, at the time Brandis was writing, well over a million sleepers were required annually.

\textsuperscript{51} A vivid account of the official measures that induced this deforestation can be
monopoly right was considered essential. A prolonged debate within the colonial bureaucracy on whether to treat the customary use of the forest as based on 'right' or on 'privilege' was settled by the selective use of precedent and the principle that 'the right of conquest is the strongest of all rights—it is a right against which there is no appeal'. Since an initial attempt at asserting state monopoly through the Forest Act of 1865 was found wanting, a comprehensive all-India act was drafted thirteen years later. This act provided for the constitution of 'reserved' (i.e. closed) forests, divested of existing rights of user to enable sustained timber production. The 1878 Act provided for an elaborate procedure of forest settlement to deal with all claims of user, which, if upheld, could be transferred to a second class of forest designated as 'protected'. While the burden of proof to establish 'legally established rights' was on the people, the state could grant both 'non-established rights' and 'terminable concessions' at its discretion.

The systematic management of the Kumaun hill forests commenced with the constitution of small blocks of reserved forests to furnish a permanent supply of fuel and timber to the administrative centres of Naini Tal and Almora and the cantonment town of Ranikhet. A survey was commissioned to report on the detailed composition of the hill forests, particularly those within 'reasonable distance' of land and water, and select sites for roads and saw

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52 C.F. Amery, 'On Forest rights in India', in D. Brandis and A. Smythies, eds., Report of the proceedings of the forest conference held at Simla, October 1875 (Calcutta, 1876), p. 27.

53 For the 1878 Act, which, apart from minor modifications continues to be in operation, the basic documents are: B.H. Baden-Powell, 'On the defects of the existing Forest Law (Act VII of 1865) and proposals for a new Forest Act', in B.H. Baden-Powell and J.S. Gamble, eds., Report of the proceedings of the forest conference, 1873–74 (Calcutta, 1874), pp. 3–30; D. Brandis, Memorandum on the forest legislation proposed for British India (Other than the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay) (Simla, 1875).

54 'Instructions for forest settlement officers in the NWP & O', no. 682 XIV, 328–63, dated 29 May 1897, in file no. 279, dept. IVa, list no. 2, post-Mutiny Records, RAD. Such flexibility equipped the act to deal with the diverse socio-political situations in which state monopoly was asserted.

55 See D. Brandis, Suggestions regarding forest administration in the NWP & O (Calcutta, 1882).
mills. This was followed in 1893 by the declaration of all unmeasured land in the Kumaun division as 'district protected forest' (DPF). What was thought 'of primary importance was to assert the proprietary right of Government in these forests and lay down certain limits to the hitherto unregulated action of right-holders'.

Official interest in these forests—dominated by the long-leaved or chir pine—quickened further when two important scientific developments were reported by Indian forest officials. The tapping of chir pine for oleo-resin had been started on an experimental basis in the 1890s, and by 1912 methods of distillation had been evolved which would enable the products to compete with the American and French varieties that had hitherto ruled the market. At the same time, fifty years of experimentation on a process to prolong the life of certain Indian woods for use as railway sleepers through chemical treatment finally bore fruit. Of the timbers successfully treated, the chir and blue pines were both found suitable and available in substantial quantities, and could be marketed at a sufficiently low price.

Four distinct phases, representing the progressive diminution of villagers' rights in the forests of Kumaun, can be distinguished.

(i) Between 1815 and 1878, when the state concentrated on the submontane sal forests of the Bhabhar, while the forests of Kumaun proper were left untouched. However, the forests around Naini Tal were demarcated in the 1850s and those around Ranikhet and Almora in 1873 and 1875 respectively.

(ii) Between 1878 and 1893, when the above forests were notified as reserved under the 1878 Act, while grants of forest made to Iron Companies and several other tracts in Almora and Garhwal districts were declared reserved or protected forests.

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58 Puran Singh, 'Note on the distillation and composition of turpentine oil from the chir resin and the clarification of Indian resin', Indian Forest Records, vol. iv, part 1 (Calcutta, 1912); R.S. Pearson, 'Note on the antiseptic treatment of timber in India, with special reference to railway sleepers', IFR, vol. iii, pt. 1 (Calcutta, 1912). Also idem, 'A further note on the antiseptic treatment of timber, with results obtaining from past experiments', IFR, vol. 6, part 9 (Calcutta, 1918). These two sets of findings finally led to the constitution of the Kumaun circle on 2 October 1912 and forest settlements in the three districts. The two chief products of oleo-resin, turpentine and resin, had a wide variety of industrial uses. See Smythies, 'India's forest wealth', p. 80.
(iii) On 17 October 1893 all waste land not forming part of the measured area of villages or of the forests earlier reserved was declared to be protected forest under the Act, although the necessary enquiry (vide Section 28) had not been made. Thus DPF comprised tree-covered lands, snow-clad peaks, ridges and cliffs, river beds, lakes, buildings, temple lands, camping and pasture grounds, and roads and shops. A skeletal forest staff was employed, and on 24 October 1894 eight types of trees, including deodar, chir and sal, were reserved. Rules were framed for regulating the lopping of trees for fuel and fodder and claims for timber, and trade by villagers in any form of forest produce was prohibited. On 5 April 1903 the Kumaun DPF were divided into two classes: (a) Closed Civil Forests, which the state considered necessary for reproduction or protection, and (b) Open Civil Forests, where villagers could exercise their rights subject to the rules prescribed in 1894.

(iv) All these cumulative incursions culminated in 1911 with the decision to carve extensive reserves out of the DPF. Forest settlements set up in the three districts between 1911 and 1917 resulted in the constitution of almost 3,000 square miles of reserved forest in the Kumaun division. Elaborate rules were framed for the exercise of rights, specifying the number of cattle to be grazed and amount of timber and fuelwood allotted to each rightholder. Villagers had to indent in advance for timber for construction of houses and for agricultural implements, which would be supplied by the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO) from a notified list of species. The annual practice of burning the forest floor for a fresh crop of grass was banned within one mile of reserved forests; but as this excluded few habitations in these heavily forested hills, the prohibition virtually made the practice illegal.\textsuperscript{59}

Within a few years of commercial working the Kumaun forests had become a paying proposition. When one full fifteen-year cycle (1896–1911) had revealed that resin tapping did not permanently harm trees, attempts were made ‘to develop the resin industry as completely and rapidly as possible’.\textsuperscript{60} Between 1910 and 1920 the timber of resin channels tapped rose from 260,000 to 2,135,000,\textsuperscript{61} a

\textsuperscript{59} Details of these rules can be found in Osmaston, ‘North Garhwal WP’, appendix.

\textsuperscript{60} E.A. Smythies, ‘The resin industry in Kumaun’, Forest Bulletin No. 26 (Calcutta, 1914), p. 3.

\textsuperscript{61} Stebbing, III, p. 660. The work was done by small contractors (practically all from outside Kumaun), under the supervision of the department.
rate of increase matched by the production of resin and turpentine (Table 2). When the construction of a new factory at Bareilly was completed in 1920—with a rated capacity of 64,000 cwts of resin and 240,000 gallons of turpentine, a capacity that could be easily expanded fourfold—production was outstripping Indian demand. This put under active consideration proposals for the export of resin and turpentine to the United Kingdom and the Far East. Indeed, the only impediment to increased production was the inadequacy of means of communication. The extensive pine forests in the interior had to remain untapped, with extraction restricted to areas well served by mule tracks and sufficiently close to railheads.

TABLE 2: Imports into and Production in India of Resin and Turpentine, 1907–23

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Resin</th>
<th>Turpentine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imports</td>
<td>Indian production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April to March</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907–08</td>
<td>76,200</td>
<td>4,845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910–11</td>
<td>41,600</td>
<td>6,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913–14</td>
<td>45,769</td>
<td>20,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916–17</td>
<td>18,760</td>
<td>43,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919–20</td>
<td>13,855</td>
<td>46,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921–22</td>
<td>10,602</td>
<td>57,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922–23*</td>
<td>18,037</td>
<td>82,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Smythies, 'India’s Forest Wealth', p. 83.
* Calendar Year 1922.

The War provided a fillip to the production of chir sleepers. The cessation of antiseptic imports proved a 'blessing in disguise' when the Munitions Board requisitioned untreated sleepers. Almost four lakh sleepers were supplied during 1916–18, and the Kumaun circle began to show a financial surplus for the first time, with all

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62 Imperial Institute, Indian Trade Enquiry, Report on lac, turpentine and resin (London, 1922), esp. pp. 29–51. India was the only source of oleo-resin within the British dominions.

63 Until 1920, two factories accounted for total production—Bhowali (U.P.) accounted for roughly 60 per cent and Jalloo (Punjab) for the rest.

64 Stebbing, iii, pp. 658–9.
stocks cleared. The government saw-mill was unable to deal with all the indents it received. Nevertheless, over 5,000 chir trees were felled and sawn annually. For the Forest Department, its activities during the war were adequate justification of the recent and controversial forest settlement in the hills.65

IV. Begar in Kumaun

The system of forced labour in Kumaun, known by various names during the colonial period (*coolie utar, bardaish, begar, godam*) has been the subject of a fine recent study.66 The British in fact operated the system, a legacy of the petty hill chiefs who preceded them, from Darjeeling to Simla, on grounds of administrative convenience in tracts whose physical situation made both commercial transport and boarding houses economically unattractive. As embodied in their settlement agreements,67 landholders were required to provide several sets of services for all government officials on tour and for white travellers (e.g. shikaris and mountaineers). The most common of these involved carrying loads and building *chappars* (temporary rest huts), and the supply of provisions (bardaish) such as milk, food, grass, wood and cooking vessels. Although only hissedars and khaikhars were technically liable to be called upon to provide coolie-bardaish, sirtans were also held liable 'as a matter of custom and convenience'. Other forms of statutory labour included the collection of material and levelling of sites for buildings, roads, and other public works, transporting the luggage of regiments moving from Lansdowne, and the carrying of iron and wood for the building of bridges in the interior. Old men and widows were exempt

65 Annual progress report of forest administration in the United Provinces for the forest year 1916–17 (hereafter APFD) (Allahabad, 1918), pp. 20, 38, 45; APFD 1917–18, pp. 22–3. I have estimated the number of trees felled from figures (pertaining to recorded fellings only) given in different working plans.

66 Shekhar Pathak, 'Uttarakhand mein coolie begar pratha: 1815–1949', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Dept. of History, Kumaun University, 1980. Also his 'Kumaun mein begar anmulan andolan', paper presented at Seminar on Peasant Movements in UP, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), 19–20/10/1982 (I am grateful to Shahid Amin for giving me this reference). These are hereafter referred to as Pathak (1) and (2) respectively.

67 As Taradutt Gairola argued, the Allahabad High Court had passed judgments that the practice was in fact illegal. See his speech in the Legislative Council of UP, dt.d. 16-12-1918 in file no. 21 of 1918–19, dept. xv, Regional Archives, Naini Tal (RAN).
from these burdens at the discretion of the DC; otherwise, remissions were rarely granted. According to the settlement villagers were to be reimbursed for these services, but in actual practice they were often rendered free.\textsuperscript{68} While convinced of the ‘inequity of the practice’ as early as 1850, the government had concluded after an enquiry that there existed no available substitute.\textsuperscript{69}

The incidence of utar was comparatively slight in the first century of British rule. Nevertheless, its impressment was resisted in various ways. The village padhan (himself exempt) occasionally concealed some of the hissedars in his village; or, as travellers who indent for coolies often found out, the headman was ‘openly defied’ by his villagers, who refused to supply labour or provisions.\textsuperscript{70} When census returns from Garhwal reported a large excess of males over females in the 10–14 age group, this discrepancy was traced to the age (16 years) at which men were called upon to carry loads or furnish bardaish. Thus all those whose age could possibly be understated were reported to be under 16.\textsuperscript{71} Officials commented too that the hillman’s aversion to work under compulsion had led to an undeserved reputation for indolence. While he worked hard enough in his fields, coolie labour, especially during the agricultural season, was performed in a manner that made his resentment apparent.\textsuperscript{72} Travellers and soldiers thus often found themselves stranded when villagers failed to oblige in carrying their luggage. Ramsay had to levy a fine of Rs 500 on a village near Someshwar in Almora district which struck against utar. Another strike in 1903 led to the imprisonment of fourteen villagers of Khatyadi. Concurrently, opposition to the begar system was expressed in newspapers, edited by nationalists of the Gokhale school, from Almora, Naini Tal and Dehradun.\textsuperscript{73} The Kumaun Parishad based in Almora took up both

\textsuperscript{68} Note by D.A. Barker on \textit{quili-bardaish}, dated 13 April 1915, in General Administration Department (GAD) file 398/1913, UPSA (‘Begar system in the Kumaun division’). Also Pathak (2), pp. 1–2.

\textsuperscript{69} NWP, Board of Revenue Proceedings, vol. 491, cons. 97, pro. 286, ‘Forced labour in Kumaun and Garhwal’, India Office Library, London (notes collected by Shri Dharampal).


\textsuperscript{73} Pathak (2), pp. 4–14.
the begar and forest issues, and asked the Forest Department to hire its own coolies and build more roads.\textsuperscript{74}

With the advent of the Forest Department, the burden of these services on the Kumaun villager dramatically increased. The reservation of the forest and its future supervision involved extensive touring by forest officials who took utar and bardaish for granted. Coming close on the heels of the demarcation of the forests, the additional burdens created by the new department evoked a predictable response. Forest officers touring in the interior of Garhwal were unable to obtain grain, as villagers, even where they had surplus stock, refused to supply to a department they regarded ‘as disagreeable interlopers to be thwarted if possible’.\textsuperscript{75} Utar, in the words of the Kumaun Forest Grievances Committee ‘one of the greatest grievances which the residents of Kumaun had against the forest settlement’\textsuperscript{76}—when coupled with the curtailment of community control over forests represented an imposition unprecedented in its scope and swiftness. Villagers looked back, not altogether without justification, to a ‘golden age’ when they had full freedom to roam over their forest habitat, and state interference was at its minimum. These emotions were beautifully expressed by a government clerk who applied for exemption from begar and bardaish thus:

\textit{In days gone by every necessities of life were in abundance to villagers than to others (and) there were no such Government laws and regulations prohibiting the free use of unsurveyed land and forest by them as they have now. The time itself has now become very hard and it has been made still harder by the imposition of different laws, regulations, and taxes on them and by increasing the land revenue. Now the village life has been shadowed by all the miseries and inconveniences of the present day laws and regulations. They are not allowed to fell down a tree to get fuels from its for their daily use and they cannot cut leaves of trees beyond certain portion of them for fodder to their animals. But the touring official, still view the present situation with an eye of the past and press them to supply good grass for their horses, fuels for their kitchens, and milk for themselves and their (retinue) without even}

\textsuperscript{74} See Letter from Comm. KD, to Chief Secretary, UP, dt. 18-9-1916, in FD file 164/1916, UPSA.

\textsuperscript{75} D.O. no. 10x, dt. 6 February 1917, from DFO, North Garhwal to Conservator of Forests (CF) Kumaun Circle, GAD file 398/1913.

\textsuperscript{76} Report of the Kumaun Forest Grievances Committee (hereafter KFGC), in Progs. A, June 1922, nos. 19–24, file no. 522/1922, Dept. of Rev. & Agl. (Forests), p. 2, NAI.
thinking of making any payment for these things to them who after spending their time, money and labour can hardly procure them for their own use. In short, all the privileges of village life, as they were twenty years ago, are nowhere to be found now, still the officials hanker after the system of yore when there were everything in abundance and within the reach of villagers.77

As one can discern from this petition, the new laws and regulations were already beginning to threaten the considerable autonomy enjoyed by the Khasa village community. Here, as elsewhere in colonial South and South East Asia, unusual exactions and other forms of state encroachment upon the privileges of individuals or communities were regarded as transgressing the traditional relationship between ruler and ruled. By clashing with his notions of economic justice, increased state intervention breached the ‘moral economy’ of the peasant.78 Anticipating that the hillman would react by ‘throwing his Forest loads down the khud and some day an unfortunate Forest Officer may go after them’, Wyndham, the commissioner of Kumaun, believed that the only way to prolong the life of the utar system would be for forest officials to use pack ponies. Government could hardly defend the use of utar by a money-making department which, if it continued to avail of begar, would hasten the end of the system.79 Echoing the commissioner’s sentiments, the Garhwal lawyer and Legislative Council member Taradutt Gairola pleaded for a ‘vigorous policy of reform’, failing which ‘trouble (would) arise’ at the revision of the revenue settlement.80

These warnings were to prove prophetic, but in the meantime the state hoped to rely on a series of ameliorative measures. The Lieutenant-Governor had in 1916 rejected the possibility of the utar system itself being scrapped; while it had caused ‘hardship’ in certain areas the government, he emphasized, was concernedmere-
ly 'with checking any abuses of the system'. In a move initiated by Gairola, coolie agencies were started in parts of Garhwal: by paying money into a common fund from which transport and supplies were arranged, villagers were not required to perform these tasks themselves. In other parts, registers were introduced to ensure that the utar burden did not fall disproportionately on any individual or village. Officers were advised to camp only at fixed places and procure grain from merchants subsidized by the government. Rules were framed prescribing what kinds of supplies could be indented for, and loads restricted to twenty-five seers per coolie. In a bid to 'raise the status of the soldier', retired and serving members of the Garhwal regiments were granted personal exemption from utar in 1900, although they were required to provide a substitute. This was extended during World War I into an unconditional exemption for all combatant members of the 39th Garhwalis, and for the direct heirs of soldiers killed in battle. The introduction of these 'palliatives which afford a considerable measure of relief', it was hoped, would ensure the continuance of the system itself.

V. Early Resistance to Forest Management

It is important to understand the dislocations in agrarian practice consequent on the imposition of forest management. The working of a forest for commercial purposes necessitates its division into blocks or coupes, which are completely closed after the trees are

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81 Speech by Sir James Meston at Darbar held in Naini Tal on 30 September 1916, in GAD file 108/1918, UPSA.
82 See, for example, 'Annual report of the coolie agencies in Garhwal district for 1911-12', in GAD file 398/1913.
83 No. 6544/XV/50, dated 10 September 1916, from Comm., KD to Chief Secretary UP; 'Rules for touring officials in the hill patti of the Kumaun division', Sd/-Comm., KD, 18 October 1916, both in ibid.
84 No. 6056 XVI-19' dated 19 July 1900, from Comm. KD to Chief Secretary, NWP & O; No. 2503 dated 4 August 1900, from Chief Secretary, NWP & O, to Deputy General, Bengal, both in file no. 19 of 1899-1900, dept. xvi, RAN.
85 No. 1165/III/398, dated 5 June 1916, from Chief Secretary, UP to Officers Commanding 1st and 2nd Cos, 39th Garhwal Rifles, GAD file 398/1913.
86 See note by Under Secretary to Chief Secretary, UP, dated 17 August 1913, in ibid.
felled to allow regeneration to take place. Closure to men and cattle is regarded as integral to successful reproduction, and grazing and lopping, if allowed, are regulated in the interests of the reproduction of favoured species of trees. Further, protection from fire is necessary to ensure the regeneration and growth to maturity of young saplings. Thus the practice of firing the forests had to be regulated or stopped in the interests of sustained production of chir pine. While the exercise of rights, where allowed, was specified in elaborate detail, rightholders had the onerous responsibility, under Section 78 of the Act, of furnishing knowledge of forest offences to the nearest authority and of extinguishing fires, however caused, in the state forests. In general, as endorsed by the stringent provisions of the Forest Act, considerations of control were paramount.

We find evidence of protest at the contravention of traditional rights well before the introduction of forest management. Charcoal required for smelting iron in the mines of Kumaun was brought from neighbouring forests, and where these lay within the boundaries of villages the inhabitants prevented wood being cut without the payment of malikhana. And in the years following the constitution of the DPF in 1893, the Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Garhwal reported that 'forest administration consists for most part in a running fight with the villagers'.

Even where discontent did not manifest itself in overt protest, the loss of control over forests was acutely felt. The forest settlement officer of British Garhwal, at the time of the constitution of the reserved forests, commented:

[The] notion obstinately persists in the minds of all, from the highest to the lowest, that Government is taking away their forests from them and is robbing them of their own property. The notion seems to have grown up from the complete lack of restriction or control over the use by the people of waste land and forest during the first 80 years after the

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88 J.O.B. Beckett, 'Iron and copper mines in the Kumaun division', report dated 31 January 1850, in *Selections*, vol. 111 (Allahabad, 1867), pp. 31–8. 'There is not a single malgozar of any of the villages in the neighbourhood of the iron mines, who has not at one time or other endeavoured to levy a tax on all the charcoal burners...'. (Ibid., p. 36, emphasis added).
89 'Note on forest administration for my Successor', by McNair, DC Garhwal, dated February 1907, in FD file 11/1908, UPSA.
British occupation. The oldest inhabitant therefore, and he naturally is regarded as the greatest authority, is the most assured of the antiquity of the people's right to uncontrolled use of the forest; and to a rural community there appears no difference between uncontrolled use and proprietary right. Subsequent regulations—and these regulations are all very recent—only appear to them as a gradual encroachment on their rights, culminating now in a final act of confiscation... [My] best efforts however have, I fear, failed to get the people generally to grasp the change in conditions or to believe in the historical fact of government ownership.\footnote{J.C. Nelson, \textit{Forest Settlement report of the Garhwal district} (Lucknow, 1916), pp. 10–11.}

This brings out quite clearly that alternative conceptions of property and ownership lay at the root of the conflict between the state and hill villagers over forest rights. There did not exist a developed notion of private property among these peasant communities, a notion particularly inapplicable to communally-owned and managed woods and pasture land. In contrast, the state’s assertion of monopoly over forests was undertaken at the expense of what British officials insisted were \textit{individually} claimed rights of user. With the ‘waste and forest lands never having attracted the attention of former governments’\footnote{Pauw, \textit{Garhwal SR}, p. 52.} there existed strong historical justification for the popular belief that all forests within village boundaries were ‘the property of the villagers’.\footnote{Gairola, \textit{Selected revenue decisions}, p. 211. Emphasis added. Gairola’s account (ibid., pp. 209–13) brings out the changed conditions in which the state deemed it necessary to usurp a previously non-existent ‘right’ of government to forests and waste land. This dichotomy between colonial and indigenous notions of property right was at the root of much of the discontent in tribal areas over forest regulations. See, for example, G.V.S. de Silva, N. Mehta, M.A. Rahman and P. Wignaraja, ‘Bhoomi Sena: a struggle for people’s power’, \textit{Development dialogue}, no. 2 of 1979, pp. 4–11.} The affirmation of state control—and its obverse, the diminution of customary rights—had an unfortunate effect, with the loss of control contributing to a growing alienation of man from forest. The demarcation of reserved forests having given rise to the speculation that the state would take away other wooded areas from their control, villagers were in certain cases deforesting woodland. But where ownership was still vested in the community, forests continued to be well looked after, such as the twenty-mile stretch between Rudraprayag and Karanprayag in the Alakananda valley,
where the government had explicitly made over these forests to the neighbouring villages.\textsuperscript{93} As later developments indicated, the small extent of forests under the control of village panchayats was invariably well managed.\textsuperscript{94}

Discontent with the new forest regulations manifested itself in various other ways. Desertion was considered by a group of villagers belonging to Tindarpur patti in Garhwal, who approached an English planter for land ‘as the new forest regulations and restrictions were pressing on them so severely that they wished to migrate into another district and climate rather than put up with them any longer’.\textsuperscript{95} Another time-honoured form of protest—non-compliance with imposed regulations—was evident when villagers gave misleading information at the time of the fixation of rights.\textsuperscript{96} As villagers were ‘not in a frame of mind to give much voluntary assistance’, one DFO predicted accurately their ‘active resentment’ at the fire protection of large areas and their closure to grazing and other rights.\textsuperscript{97}

The year 1916 witnessed a number of ‘malicious’ fires in the newly constituted reserved forests. In May the forests in the Gaula range of Naini Tal division were set ablaze. The damage reported was exclusively in chir forests, and 28,000 trees which were burnt had to be prematurely felled. For the circle as a whole it was estimated that at least 64 per cent of the 441 fires which burnt 388 square miles (as against 188 fires that had burnt 35 square miles in the preceding year) were ‘intentional’.\textsuperscript{98}

The ‘deliberate and organized incendiaryism’ of the summer of 1916 brought home to the state the unpopularity of the forest settlement and the virtual impossibility of tracing those who were responsible for the fires. Numerous fires broke out simultaneously

\textsuperscript{93} T.D. Gairola to Secretary, Govt. UP, dated 8 January 1918; note by D. Joshi cited in fn. 45, both in FD file 83/1909.
\textsuperscript{95} District and Sessions Judge, Moradabad, to Pvt. Secretary to L-G, UP, dated 2 March 1916, in FD file 163/1916 (‘Forest Settlement Grievances in the KD’), UPSA.
\textsuperscript{97} Osmaston, \textit{North Garhwal WP}, p. 67.
over large areas, and often the occurrence of a fire was the signal for general ‘firing’ in the whole neighbourhood. Forty-four fires occurred in North Garhwal division, almost all in order to obtain a fresh crop of grass. In Naini Tal and in the old reserves of Airadeo and Binsar of Almora district—areas which had been fire protected for many years—an established crop of seedlings was wiped out. The areas chosen for attack had been under both felling and resin-tapping operations. In Airadeo the fire continued for three days and two nights, with ‘new fires being started time after time directly a counterfiring line was successfully completed’. As a result of such ‘incendiarism’, several thousand acres of forest were closed to all rights for a period of ten years.99

The protests against the forest settlement were viewed with apprehension in Lucknow, where the Lieutenant-Governor, anticipating the conclusion of World War I, observed that ‘it would be a pity for the 39th Garhwalis to come home and find their villages seething with discontent’. Reporting on the situation, the DC of Garhwal concluded somewhat self-evidently that the government could not but affect village life in every patti by taking over the forests. The people’s ‘dislike of the Forest department and the horde of new underlings let loose on the district’ was shared by the soldiers, one of whom stated that if the war had ended before they left Europe, they could have petitioned the King to rescind the settlement. The soldiers’ discontent was evidently disturbing, for, as the district officer put it, ‘if we can get them on our side it will be a great thing. . . They are already a power in the land and will be still more a power after the war’.100 The Forest Department continued to be complacent about the possibilities of such discontent blowing over when the villagers had ‘greater familiarity with the true aims of the department’.101 They pointed, alternatively, to the strategic and financial results obtained in a few years of com-


mercial working. But the commissioner of Kumaun, Percy Wyndham, the senior official entrusted with law and order, was considerably less sanguine. He preferred that the hills should continue to provide ‘excellent men for sepoys, police and all such jobs’—a prospect jeopardized by the Forest Department which had demarcated the 39th Garwhali villages as if ‘the world were made for growing trees and men were vermin to be shut in’. In a situation where the ‘Revenue Department holds the whole country by bluff’ without the help of regular police, Wyndham was clearly not prepared to enforce new rules on a ‘dissatisfied people’ and preferred to do away with forest rules and staff altogether. Contravention of the new regulations concerning lopping, grazing and the duties of rightholders was, as Table 3 indicates, perhaps the most tangible evidence of the continuing friction. Figures from other forest circles are given by way of comparison. While the number of yearly convictions in the Kumaun circle far exceeded those obtained elsewhere, a comparison with ‘Criminal Justice’ in Kumaun itself is no less revealing. Over a ten-year period (1898–1908), an average of only 416 persons was convicted annually in Almora district on account of cognizable crime of all kinds, ranging from non-payment of excise to murder. Indeed, with the absence of an adequate patrolling staff, many breaches of the forest law went undetected. Underlying the stiff resistance to the regulations of the Forest Department was a tradition of hundreds of years of unrestricted use.

The continuing opposition to forest administration bore a strong similarity to traditional methods of social protest in Kumaun and Garhwal. Known as dhandak, peasant movements had typically encompassed two major forms of protest. First of all, peasants refused to comply with imposed rules and the officials who enforced these. Occasionally, when the demands grew excessive and were

102 See GO no. 114/XIV/172 of 1918, dated 4 February 1919, appended to APFD, 1917–18.
103 Wyndham to Meston, dated 26 June 1916 and 3 July 1916; ‘Subjects for discussion at the conference of selected officers to be held at Government House Naini Tal at 10.30 a.m. on the 28th August 1916’; Sd/- P. Wyndham, dated 14 August 1916, all in FD file 163/1916.
104 Figures calculated from Walton, ‘Almora’, appendix, table v (‘Criminal Justice’).
105 See, for example, GO no. 1237-XIV-209, dated 2 November 1922, appended to APFD, 1921–2.
TABLE 3: Breaches of Forest Law in UP, 1911–22

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circle Year</th>
<th>Western A(2)</th>
<th>Circle B(2)</th>
<th>Eastern Circle A</th>
<th>Eastern Circle B</th>
<th>Kumaun A</th>
<th>Kumaun Circle B(3)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1911–12</td>
<td>786</td>
<td>1798</td>
<td>1167</td>
<td>2306</td>
<td>958</td>
<td>2159</td>
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<td>1912–13</td>
<td>881</td>
<td>2182</td>
<td>1230</td>
<td>2424</td>
<td>1203</td>
<td>3374</td>
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<tr>
<td>1913–14</td>
<td>1006</td>
<td>2091</td>
<td>1365</td>
<td>2905</td>
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<td>3864</td>
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<td>1914–15</td>
<td>1248</td>
<td>2681</td>
<td>1646</td>
<td>3293</td>
<td>1671</td>
<td>5857</td>
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<tr>
<td>1915–16</td>
<td>1401</td>
<td>2662</td>
<td>1514</td>
<td>3029</td>
<td>1610</td>
<td>5796</td>
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<td>1916–17</td>
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<td>2517</td>
<td>1636</td>
<td>2944</td>
<td>2023</td>
<td>10264</td>
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<td>1917–18</td>
<td>1242</td>
<td>2364</td>
<td>1530</td>
<td>2777</td>
<td>2197</td>
<td>11046</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918–19</td>
<td>1153</td>
<td>2058</td>
<td>1723</td>
<td>3167</td>
<td>2167</td>
<td>11024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919–20</td>
<td>1162</td>
<td>2120</td>
<td>1378</td>
<td>2773</td>
<td>2136</td>
<td>13457</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920–21</td>
<td>926</td>
<td>1618</td>
<td>901</td>
<td>2154</td>
<td>1723</td>
<td>10328</td>
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<td>1921–22</td>
<td>1248</td>
<td>2437</td>
<td>1622</td>
<td>839</td>
<td>2070</td>
<td>3799</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: APFD, relevant years.
Note: (1) The total area of reserved forest in U.P. equalled 4.32 million acres, of which 1.91 million acres lay in the Kumaun Circle.
(2) A = Cases; B = Convictions (persons).
(3) Cases dropped due to the recommendation of the Kumaun Forest Grievances Committee.

backed by force, villagers fled to the jungles or across political frontiers into British territory. Alternatively, they would catch hold of an offending official, shave his head and moustache, put him on a donkey with his face towards the tail and drive him out of the state. Such non-co-operation at a local level often culminated in a gathering of men drawn from neighbouring villages. Having decided not to cultivate their fields or pay revenue, peasants marched to the capital, accompanied by the beating of drums. Here they demanded an audience with the king and the repeal of the new laws.\footnote{From 'dand kiyr gi', the admonition used by Garhwali mothers to hush troublesome children. (Personal communication from Shoorbeer Singh Panwar). This account of the dhandak is based on my archival and field research on peasant movements in the princely state of Tehri Garhwal. For reports on dhandaks, see inter alia, Foreign Dept., Internal B. Progs, October 1907, nos. 37–9, NAI; T.D. Gairola, 'The disturbance in Rawain (Tehri)', Leader, 3 August 1930. An identical form of protest, called 'dum', was widely prevalent all over the hills, in the trans-Jamuna hill chiefdoms. See 'Mass demonstrations in the hills', Indian States Reformer (Dehra Dun), 22 May 1932; Foreign Dept. Internal-A Progs, March 1908, nos. 42–3, NAI.}
In the dhandak, physical violence (barring isolated attacks on officials) was conspicuous by its absence. Its socio-cultural idiom was predicated firstly on the traditional relationship between raja and praia, and secondly on the democratic character of these peasant communities. By protesting in such a manner, peasants actually believed that they were helping the king—to whom they accorded a quasi-divine status—restore justice. Once punishment was inflicted thus on erring officials, the dhandak invariably subsided—only to flare up again when fresh cases of tyranny occurred.

The dhandak essentially represents a right to revolt which is sanctioned by custom. Hindu scriptures urged obedience to the sovereign as well as the right to revolt when the king failed to protect his people. A form of rebellion sanctioned by customary law has existed in many pre-capitalist societies, from medieval Europe to twentieth-century African kingdoms. In the words of Weber, 'opposition is never directed against the system as such—it is a case of "traditionalist" revolution', the accusation against the ruler being that he failed to observe the traditional limits to his power.107 In the area covered by my study, the dhandak embodied, however, a distinctive form of social protest which continued to be used, albeit with variations, during the colonial period. Vestiges of this form of collective resistance can be found in contemporary peasant movements as well.108

VI. The Utar and Forest Movements, 1921

Meanwhile, village opposition to the begar system was matched organizationally by the establishment of the Kumaun Parishad in 1916. This association of local journalists, lawyers and intellectuals, chaired in its initial years by Rai Bahadurs professing loyalty to the King Emperor, underwent a rapid transformation with the onset of the Forest Department and the enhancement of the cus-


Forestry and Social Protest in Kumaun

The impact of village-level protest and indirectly the upsurges elsewhere in India contributed to a growing radicalization of the Parishad, best exemplified in the person of Badridutt Pande of Almora. As Shekhar Pathak has compellingly shown, Pande, far more than other Kumaun nationalists (such as Govind Ballabh Pant), was acutely aware of the growing discontent among the peasantry. (However, most Parishad leaders were small landholders, like the majority of their kinsmen, and perhaps less alienated from the villages than urban nationalists in many other parts of India).¹⁰⁹ Convinced of the futility of memoranda presented to government by a few individuals based in Almora, Pande and his associates sought to establish branches of the Parishad in the villages of Kumaun. Simultaneously, his weekly Shakti, published from Almora, became an important forum in which the begar system and forest rules were made the butt of strident criticism.¹¹⁰

In 1920 Shakti reported a strike against utar by villages in Patti Kairarao, with villagers refusing to pay the fine levied on them. At the annual session of the Kumaun Parishad, held at Kashipur in December 1920, a major conflict arose between those who still hoped to negotiate with the state and village representatives who pressed for direct action. After the reformists had walked out, the latter urged Badridutt Pande and other Parishad leaders to come to the Uttarakini fair.¹¹¹ Held in mid-January at Bageshwar (a temple town at the confluence of the Saryu and Gomati rivers), this fair annually attracted fifteen to twenty thousand pilgrims from all over the hills.

Here matters came to a head. In early January the Conservator of Forests was refused coolies at Dwarahat and Ganaí, and anticipating a strike the DC of Almora, W.C. Dible, urgently asked the government for a declaration of its future policy (a request summarily dismissed).¹¹² At Bageshwar a crowd of over ten

¹⁰⁹ See Pant’s evidence to the Royal Commission on Agriculture in India (London, 1927), vol. vii, p. 360.
¹¹¹ Pathak (2), pp. 22–4. Prominent among the village activists was Mohan Singh Mehta of Kalyur.
¹¹² DC no. C.3, dated Bageshwar, 17 January 1921, from DC, Almora to Comm., KD; extract from confidential fortnightly report of Comm., KD, dated 10 January 1921, both in Police Department (PD) file 1151/1921, UPSA.
thousand heard Badridutt pass on a message from Mahatma Gandhi that ‘he would come and save them from oppression as he did in Champaran’. When almost everyone responded to a call to raise their hands to show that they would refuse utar, Pande continued: ‘After abolishing coolie utar they would agitate for the forests. He would ask them not to extract resin, or saw sleepers, or take forest contracts. They should give up service as forest guard which involves insulting their sisters and snatching their sickles’. Slogans in praise of Mahatma Gandhi and ‘Swatantra Bharat’ and cries that the government was anniyayi (unjust) rent the air.\textsuperscript{113} In a dramatic gesture, village headmen flung their coolie registers into the Saryu.\textsuperscript{114}

In the weeks following the fair, several officials were stranded when the villages neighbouring Bageshwar declined to supply coolies. Elsewhere, only khushkharid (i.e. on payment) coolies were available at extraordinarily high rates. With school masters and other government functionaries extending their support to the movement, Dible hastily summoned the regular police.\textsuperscript{115} Pathak has uncovered evidence of at least 146 anti-begar meetings in different villages of Garhwal and Kumaun between January and April 1921.\textsuperscript{116} When the DFO of Almora complained of the continuing difficulties faced by touring officials, he was tersely told that the district administration was not in a position to ‘give you or your department one utar coolie’.\textsuperscript{117} Requests for utar were not made in tracts where they were likely to be refused.\textsuperscript{118} In a matter of weeks the state’s determination not to dispense with the system itself had broken down, and its abolition followed. In the following year, over 1.6 lakh rupees were spent by the exchequer on the transport and stores of touring officials in the hills.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{113} Summary of Badridutt Pande’s speech at Bageshwar, by S. Ijaz Ali, Deputy Collector, Almora, in ibid.

\textsuperscript{114} Pathak (2), p. 28.

\textsuperscript{115} DC Almora, to Comm., KD, no. C.3, dated 17 January 1921; same to same, no. C.4, dated 20 January 1921; no. 43, C.I., 21, dated 29 January 1921, from Comm., KD, to Chief Secretary UP, all in PD file 1151/1921.

\textsuperscript{116} Pathak (1), appendix III.

\textsuperscript{117} No. 42, C.I. 21, dated 28 January 1921, from Comm., KD, to DFO, Almora, in PD file 1151/1921.

\textsuperscript{118} Comm., KD, to Secretary to Government, UP, dated 4 March 1921, in GAD file 739/1920.

\textsuperscript{119} Resolution passed by UP Legislative Council on 5 March 1921; table on
As the press communiqué issued by the UP government emphasized, the growth of the Forest Department, with all that this implied for the social and economic life of the hill peasant, was at the root of the anti-utar movement.\textsuperscript{120} Peasant opposition to utar was conducted at a different level, and for reasons quite different from the periodic memoranda that liberal nationalists continued to submit to the state, appealing to the instincts of a benign and civilized government.\textsuperscript{121} An English planter based in Kausani reported that while Hargovind Pant, an Almora lawyer, was asking that coolies should not be supplied for utar, village leaders were prepared to go even further and opposed the use of all coolies, including khushkharid coolies.\textsuperscript{122} After Bageshwar, the DC of Almora was tersely informed by a group of padhans that they had refused to supply coolies in order to draw attention to their grievances, the most important of which was the taking away of their forests. Dible reported that proposals for closure to grazing had much to do with this intense feeling. A fund had been created by the villagers—anticipating punitive action—to defend anyone against whom the state initiated proceedings, and for paying fines where they were inflicted.\textsuperscript{123} While this unity and sense of purpose necessarily made their actions political, the politics of the peasantry was clearly not derivative of the politics of urban nationalism. Apart from a hazy perception of Gandhi as a saint whose qualities of heroic sacrifice were invoked against the powers of government,\textsuperscript{124} the utar movements had little in the nature of an identification with the Congress as such.

Following Uttaraini, Pande and his colleagues toured the different pattis of Almora, establishing local sabhas of the Parishad. Inspired by the success of the anti-utar campaign, Pande in his speeches urged the need for direct action in order to recover lost

\textsuperscript{120} Press Communiqué, dated 1 February 1921, in ibid.

\textsuperscript{121} See memorandum on coolie utar submitted by Kumaun Association (Ranikhet branch) to L-G, UP, dated 16 October 1920, in ibid; speech by T.D. Gairola cited in fn. 67.

\textsuperscript{122} Letter from R.G. Bellaire, Colonization Officer on Soldier Settlement estates, Kausani, to D.C. Almora, dated 1 February 1921, in PD file 1151/1921.

\textsuperscript{123} DC Almora to Comm. KD, dated 17 January 1921 and no. C. 15, dated 24 January 1921, both in ibid.

rights over forests. For the ‘Government that sells the forest produce is not liable to be called a real Government’—indeed it was precisely these mercenary motives which had made God send Gandhi ‘as an incarnation in the form of [a] Bania to conquer Bania Government’. As the reference to Gandhi’s caste indicates, the term ‘bania’ evoked images of power as well as deception: by selling forest produce the state was hastening the erosion of the legitimacy it had once enjoyed in the eyes of the peasantry. At Bageshwar, Badridutt had depicted this transition in tellingly effective symbols. When forest resources and grass were plentiful and easily available, villagers had an abundance of food and drink; but now, he said, ‘in place of tins of ghee the Forest Department gives them tins of resin’. Sensing the peasantry’s mood after the utar strike, Dible had with uncanny prescience predicted the shape of the impending agitation: ‘[The] next move will be against the Forest Department. Agitators will make a dead set for resin coolies and contractor’s coolies engaged in sleeper work, and try to drive them from this work. The people will be incited to commit Forest offences and we shall have serious trouble with fires’. In the coming months breaches of the forest law increased daily, and these included not merely the firing of forests for grass but also ‘wholesale cutting of trees’. In Garhwal, too, the popular feeling against the forest policy continued to be ‘very bitter’.

The summer of 1921 was one of the driest on record. The failure of the winter rains had contributed to a poor rabi crop and money was sanctioned as subsistence taccavi in the hill districts. In Totashiling, where the campaign was to be at its most intense, the local branch of the Kumaon Parishad passed a resolution that the people were themselves to decide whether or not to set fire to

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125 ‘Report of Pandit Badridutt Editor’s speeches to villagers in Almora district’, in PD file 1151/1921.
126 See Criminal Case no. 7 of 1921, King Emperor vs. Motiram, Budhanand and Badridutt of Totashiling, at Police Station Palli Boraraw, in the court of W.C. Dible, District Magistrate, Almora, dated 7 July 1921, in FD file 157/1921 (‘Forest fires in Kumaun’), UPSA.
127 DC, Almora to Comm., KD, no. C.15, dated 24 January 1921; same to same, no. C.63, dated 2 March 1921, both in PD file 1151/1921.
128 Extract from fortnightly D.O. from Comm., KD for second half of March 1921, FD file 157/1921.
129 See file no. 56 of 1921, A. progs., nos. 1–2, May 1921, Dept. of Revenue and Agriculture (Famine), NAI.
forest land falling within san assi boundaries. From the last week of April a systematic campaign, especially in Almora district, was launched for firing the forest. Instead of assisting in extinguishing these blazes, when called upon to do so under Section 78 of the Forest Act, the villagers directed their energy towards helping the fires to spread. As a consequence the attempted fire protection by the Forest Department of commercially worked areas was a major failure. Of 4 lakh acres of forest in which fire protection was attempted, 2.46 lakh acres were burnt over. The machinery for control of forest offences ‘more or less broke down’, and an estimated total of 819 offences occurred, of which 395 were definitely known to be ‘incendiary’.

Several features of a form of social protest, summarily labelled by the state as ‘incendiarism’, merit comment. On the one hand this represented an assertion of traditionally exercised rights—the annual firing of the forest floor—circumscribed by the state in the interests of commercial forestry. On the other the areas burnt over were almost exclusively chir pine forests being worked for both timber and resin. This wholesale burning of the chir reserves represented, according to Wyndham, a ‘direct challenge to Government to relax their control over forests’. The intensification of the campaign in Almora and Naini Tal was confined to areas that had been under commercial working for some time and were well served by a network of roads. When fires swept through nearly all the areas being logged, young regeneration was wiped out. Covering nearly 320 square miles of forest, these fires destroyed 11.5 lakh resin channels and 65,000 maunds of resin. At the same

130 ‘Parja ke civil jungalon ko yane assi sal ke nisanon ke andar parja aag lagawey na lagawe, parja ki khushi’. This resolution was printed in the Shakti of 12 April 1921 (extract found in FD file 157/1921: all archival references in the rest of this section, unless mentioned otherwise, are from this source). The san (or sal) assi boundaries were the traditional village boundaries recognized by Traill in the year 1823.

131 Fortnightly DO no. 13.CY.21, dated 23 May 1921, from Comm., KD to Chief Secretary, UP; DO no. 348, dated 28 May 1921, from Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF), UP to Governor, UP; no. 53-CC/XIV-1, dated 2 June 1921, from Offg CF, Kumaun Circle, to CCF, UP.

132 APFD, 1921–22, pp. 7–8.

133 DO no. 31.C.VI.21, dated 9 June 1921, from Comm., KD, to Home Member, UP.

time, there is no evidence that the vast extent of broad-leaved forests, also under state control, were affected at all. As in other societies in different historical epochs, this destruction by arson was not simply a nihilistic release but carefully selective in the targets attacked. As Hobsbawm has argued, such destruction is never indiscriminate, for ‘what is useful for poor men’—in this instance broad-leaved species, far more than chir—is spared.\textsuperscript{135}

But, as the analysis of court cases by the collector of Almora indicates, the act of burning the chir forests represented a direct confrontation with the colonial authorities. The decision to burn the commercially-worked areas was predicated not merely on their containing the locally almost useless (i.e. in comparison with oak) chir pine. For, as Badridutt Pande well understood, the export of forest produce by the state clashed strongly with the subsistence orientation of the hill peasant. In the collector’s classification, typical in its detail of the concern on the part of the colonial state to understand—with a view to suppressing—any sign of protest, the fire cases were broken down into the categories shown in Table 4.\textsuperscript{136}

Further details which may reveal more about the nature of protest can be gleaned from summary accounts of the court cases. Gangua, aged 16, was one of several youths ‘put up by non-co-operators’ to destroy ‘valuable regeneration areas’ by fire. Nor was participation restricted to men. Thus Durga was sentenced to one month in jail when she ‘deliberately set fire to Thaklori forest’. In at least four different instances, witnesses set up by the prosecution were ‘won over’ by non-co-operators and the cases had to be dropped. Chanar Singh and four others of the Tagnia clan of Doba Talla Katyur were ‘affected by lectures’ by ‘Non-co-operators and a Jogi’ and set fire to regeneration areas. This tantalizingly brief reference to the yogi (who was eventually prosecuted) leads one to speculate that the peasantry sought (as in the Uttaranai mela) a moral-religious sanction for their acts. No such sanction was required by Padam Singh and Dharam Singh of Katyur, awarded the maximum sentence of seven years rigorous imprisonment, who expressed their opposition to state monopoly in no uncertain terms.


\textsuperscript{136} This extremely revealing classification and the following paragraph are taken from the two ‘Statements on fire cases in Almora’, Sd/- W.D. Dible, dated 23 July 1921 and 3 November 1921, respectively. Unfortunately, similar details could not be traced for Naini Tal and Garhwal.
TABLE 4: Fire Cases in Almora, 1921

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>No. of cases</th>
<th>No. of persons involved</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. INTENTIONAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A) To paralyse Forest Department (FD) by destroying valuable areas</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B) To cause loss to FD by way of revenge due to hatred</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C) To have good grass for cattle</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D) To cause loss to resin mates out of enmity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E) To spite another out of enmity</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F) Whose agitation was direct cause of fire (not available)</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
<td><strong>104</strong></td>
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</tbody>
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II. ACCIDENTAL
(This includes smoking or carrying fire within the reserves, the spread of fire from cultivated fields or waste land not under government, etc.)

In the words of the magistrate: ‘The compartment fired was near the village and used by them. They resented the work of the Department in this compartment since it interfered with their use of the compartment. Therefore they set fire to it deliberately’.

The firing of pine needles for grass occurred in Garhwal as well. With commercial forestry and the protection of regeneration areas from grazing and fire as yet restricted in its operations, the damage to state-controlled forests was not as widespread as in Almora. Yet the DC had convicted 549 persons, 45 for ‘direct or indirect incendiaryism’, and 504 for refusing to extinguish fires, before the recommendations of the Grievances Committee led to all pending cases being dropped. Fires were reported to be most acute in the areas bordering Almora, and in the southern pattis of Lansdowne subdivision in the outer hills. With resin-tapping in its infancy, fires were most often started with a view to obtaining fresh grass.


138 ‘Fire cases in Garhwal district’, Sd P. Mason, DC Garhwal, dated 9 September 1921; DC, Garhwal to Secretary, Government of UP, dated 29 December 1921; DO no. 31. C.V.21, dated 9 June 1921, from Comm., KD to Home Member, UP.
While all social groups participated, the involvement of soldiers in the forest movement of 1921—in the same way as the participation of village headmen in the utar campaign—bore witness to the failure of the colonial government’s attempt to assimilate them as a part of the indigenous collaborating élite. In Garhwal the fires were most often started by soldiers on leave, but as ‘99 per cent of the population sympathized with them’, their apprehension by the authorities became an impossible task. Four soldiers of the 39th Garhwalis were arrested for threatening or assaulting forest officials. After the Uttaraini mela, ex-soldiers were active among those who helped the Kumaun Parishad form sabhas in the villages of the Kosi valley. One soldier said in his speeches that ‘Government was not a Raja, but a Bania and Rakshasi Raj and the King Emperor was Ravan’. Recounting his experiences in Europe, where he was wounded, the pensioner described the visit of the King Emperor to his hospital bedside. Asked to state his grievances, ‘he complained against Patwaris and forest guards, but instead of removal of these grievances all that has been given is the Rowlatt Act and Martial Law’. No longer was the king perceived as being bestowed with quasi-divine powers of intervention in order to restore justice and a harmonious relationship between the state and the peasant. As expressed through the symbolism of the epics, the government now embodied not merely the rapacious bania but the evil-intentioned demons of Hindu mythology. Ravan, the very personification of evil, was equated with the King Emperor, whose failure (or inability) to stem the expansive growth of the Forest Department and its minions had led to a rapid fall from grace.

Startlingly different conclusions from those presented above are to be found in the writings of an American scholar who has recently studied the history of deforestation in Kumaun. According to Richard Tucker, the first Non-Co-operation Movement under Mahatma Gandhi’s leadership ‘brought modern political conflict to the hills for the first time’. Thus in Kumaun, ‘previously untouched by nationalist politics, several towns witnessed protest meetings between January and March’ of 1921 and ‘young Congress leaders were urging the population to resist what they called

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139 DC Garhwal, to Secretary to Government, UP, dated 7 September 1921.
140 Source cited in fn. 126.
the abrupt and arbitrary new regulations'. In 'this incendiary atmosphere, the hills were suddenly in flames', and 'the Sal [sic] forests were ablaze across the Sivalik hills even into Punjab'. As Congressmen were 'appalled' at the damage, 'the blazes were evidently a tragic example' of 'spontaneous peasant protest' in which 'thirty years Forest Department Work was destroyed almost overnight'.

The extracts quoted above are representative of the ideological approach that runs through Tucker's writings. Depressingly familiar to students of Indian historiography, it has usually been labelled 'élitist'. His account bristles with historical inaccuracies, of which one may be mentioned, being particularly relevant here. Completely unaware of the movements against begar and the historic meeting at Bageshwar, Tucker predictably traces all popular opposition to 'young nationalist leaders of the Kumaun hill towns [who] found it a worthy issue'. Thus the people of Kumaun, 'represented by townsmen of the region', had 'forced the issue by 1919 into full discussion in the provincial legislature'. In the same year, with the participation of Congressmen like Govind Ballabh Pant, 'There was a clear threat of labour strikes—fortunately, the District [sic] Commissioner, Mr Wyndham was highly respected on all sides: through his work a system was devised which introduced regular wages for the workers in the early 1920s'.

Nationalist historians, too, have shared this bias. Thus the latest biographer of G.B. Pant confidently talks of the 'forest satyagraha [of 1921] organized by Pant and others'. I, however, have been unable to find any evidence of Pant's actual involvement in either the begar or the forest movements.

The stereotypes that fall into place replicate those found in the upper echelons of the colonial administration—namely of illiterate villagers egged on by self-seeking politicians performing destructive acts in a fit of mindless fury. Not only is the possibility of any

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141 Richard Tucker, 'The historical context of social forestry in India's Western Himalayas' (mimeo—also published in Social Forestry in Africa and Asia, Washington, 1983), p. 12; idem, 'The forests of the western Himalayas: the legacy of British colonial administration' (mimeo—also published in Journal of Forest History, 1982), pp. 16–17 (emphasis added). Hereafter referred to as Tucker (1) and (2) respectively.


143 M. Chalapathi Rau, Govind Ballabh Pant (Delhi, 1981), p. 16.
independent initiative on the part of the peasant denied, even his actions are depoliticized and rendered free of any underlying rationale. A blinkered vision if ever there was one, this view consistently refuses to acknowledge both the logic of peasant resistance and its impact on the processes of colonial rule.\textsuperscript{144} Thus Tucker makes the patently false assertion that Wyndham’s judgement, and not the strikes before and after the Uttaraini fair, led to the end of coolie utar. He also subscribes to the historically unsubstantiated colonial viewpoint, fabricated \textit{ex post facto}, of the state having a \textit{prior} proprietary right in the forests. By insisting that it was the ‘Forest Department’s work’ which was ‘destroyed almost overnight’ by the fires of 1921, he obscures the customary and consensual use of the forests by the village communities \textit{before} 1911.

Interestingly, where village grievances are acknowledged as legitimate in élite discourse, they are unerringly traced to oppression by subordinate officials—in this case to collusion between petty forest officials and timber contractors. Thus, ‘although senior British foresters were well aware that many of their employees were corruptible, \ldots within the authoritarian framework they were not able to do much about it’; and ‘like their counterparts in other agencies of the colonial regime, [they] were never fully able to monitor or control their chronically underpaid subordinates’.\textsuperscript{145} Such a view was shared by many pillars of the Raj. Thus the Home Member of UP, M.A.M. Khan (the raja of Mahmudabad), interpreting the 1921 movement for the benefit of the Governor, Harcourt Butler, said that ‘above all the forest subordinate staff took advantage of the ignorance of these hill tribes [sic] by inflicting self-created penalties on them’, and that these grievances laid the ground for the entry of ‘non-Kamaun [sic] political agencies’.\textsuperscript{146} Khan’s ignorance typified the refusal by the state to acknowledge the threat to its own authority, enough evidence of which had been provided by its officers in Kumaun, and fashion instead a ‘conspiracy’ theory involving minor officials and outside agitators.

\textsuperscript{144} See Ranajit Guha, ‘The Prose of Counter-insurgency’.
\textsuperscript{145} Tucker (2), pp. 18, 19, Tucker (1), pp. 4–5. As I have argued elsewhere, to attribute popular movements to oppression by officials is to mistake appearance for reality. See ‘Forestry in British and Post-British India’, section iv.
\textsuperscript{146} See note to Governor UP, by Home Member, UP, enclosing KFGC report and file on incendiary fires, in FD file 109/1921, UPSA.
This arrogantly paternalist attitude was to find its fictional representation in Philip Mason’s account of the begar abolition movement. In the following extract the DC of Garhwal, in response to a query by his wife, is interpreting the call for a strike against utar by the Allahabad-educated Jodh Singh:

‘You know the villagers carry our tents on tour. ‘They always seem cheerful about it. Don’t they get paid?’ She asked.

‘They get paid all right, at least they do in my camp, and I don’t think they mind doing it for me very much, because I always say in advance where I am going and when, and I stick to it. But the tahsildars make a plan and then change their minds—sometimes they can’t help it, something else crops up. Anyhow, the patwaris collect the villagers and keep them hanging about, sometimes for two or three days, and of course they don’t get paid for that, and they hate it. And in the lower hills, they’re beginning to think it’s beneath their dignity to carry a load at all. I’ve tried to make the tahsildars more considerate, but it doesn’t work. It’s no use trying to make water run uphill, or a tiger go the way he doesn’t want to’.

‘And what exactly do you mean by that, you old cynic? Have you got a cigarette?’

‘I mean, it’s the way of the country and it’s no use trying to tell junior officials to be thoughtful for peasants. They won’t, unless you’re there to make them’.147

Local officials like Dible and Wyndham, cognizant of the situation, were able to trace more accurately the roots of the conflict that led to the radicalization of an organization originally set up to mediate between the state and the peasantry. Established in the afterglow of the Coronation Durbar of 1911, the Kumaun Parishad initially swore undying loyalty to ‘George Pancham’. But the pressure from below, as it were, egged them, and most noticeably Badridutt Pande, to adopt a more directly confrontationist position:148 in July 1921 their philosophy was being described as ‘the anarchist doctrine of direct action, which has been attempted in England by Bolshevist Labour Revolutionaries’.149 Clearly, such a situation had been brought about by the ‘inherent’ elements of

147 Philip Mason (pseud. Woodruff), The Wild Sweet Witch (London, 1947), pp. 80–1. In the novel, Jodh Singh appears as the archetypal ‘professional’ agitator, who, after making contact with the political developments in the cities, comes back to awaken the previously slumbering hillfolk.

148 This process of radicalization has been delineated at great length by Shekhar Pathak in his writings.

149 Dible to Wyndham, DO no. C.355, dated 24 July 1921.
folk or popular ideology impinging upon, and transforming in the process, the ‘derived’ elements originating in the sphere of organized politics. In this instance at least, ‘primitive rebellion' proved to be several steps ahead of ‘modern nationalism', the rationale of its acts and the success which attended it being attested by the rapidity with which the state capitulated on both the begar and the forest issues, taking away large areas from the Forest Department and placing them under the control of the civil authorities who allowed villagers comparative freedom.

VII. Kumaun and the Sociology of Peasant Protest

I have tried here to understand the form social protest took in Kumaun in the early decades of this century, and shown that, prior to the reservation of forests, hill society could be described as a conglomeration of village communities with control over the means of production and the resources needed to reproduce itself. Commercial forestry and the changes it brought in its wake initiated a process whereby the Kumaun peasantry began to lose control over these resources. The response of the peasantry to these profound dislocations ranged from incipient, ‘unorganized’ forms of protest—such as flight, breach of forest rules, etc.—to an open confrontation with the state as witnessed by the begar and forest campaigns of 1921.

One striking fact about these movements is the absence, comparatively speaking, of violence, certainly of physical violence. The methods of protest characteristically used by the hill peasant were strikes and the burning of the forest floor. In this context one may refer to the unusual political and economic structure of Kumaun, where the state dealt directly with the relatively egalitarian village communities without the help of an intermediary class enjoying a vested interest in land. The dreaded triad of ‘Sarkar, Sahukar and Zamindar [which] was a political fact rooted in the very nature of British power in the subcontinent’, was here conspicuous by its absence, as indeed was the ‘total and integrated violence’ of rebel-

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150 The distinction between ‘inherent’ and ‘derived’ elements of popular ideology has been made by George Rudé, following Gramsci, in his *Ideology and Popular Protest* (London, 1980). Rudé, like some other historians, is rather more conscious of instances where so-called ‘modern’ ideologies have helped the process of political self-awareness on the part of the peasantry.
lion observed elsewhere.\textsuperscript{151} Although 'impatient of control',\textsuperscript{152} the hillman enjoyed an \textit{autonomy} rarely found elsewhere in India, as this description of the 'Garhwal village paharee' by a British health officer testifies: 'I suppose it would be difficult to find any peasantry in the world more free from the \textit{res anguste domi} [i.e. straitened circumstances at home]: he is the owner of a well-built stone house, has as much land as he wants at an easy rental, keeps his flocks and herds, and is in every sense of the word, an independent man'.\textsuperscript{153}

The absence of a culturally distinct buffer class (as the Hindu zamindars were to the tribals) between the body of cultivating proprietors and the state, and the comparative autonomy the former continued to enjoy, are germane to the particular forms taken by the conflict between the peasantry and the constituted authority of the state, and the manner in which these conflicts were represented in popular consciousness. Undoubtedly, the first century of British rule and the paternalist style of Ramsay and Co. may have seen a partial transference of an allegiance earlier owed to the king. Traditionally, peasant protest in the pre-British period had taken the form of collective resistance to tyranny by officials, and concomitantly, a call to the monarch to restore justice. This form of protest, dhandak, continued to be used (see Section V above), while simultaneously newer forms of peasant resistance emerged with the onset of forest management. One can however discern a continuity between the dhandak and these newer forms in terms of the moral idiom in which subaltern classes protested against élite domination. Forest administration introduced a notion of property—one integral to colonial rule but previously foreign to Kumaun—which ran contrary to the experience of the Khasa village communities where different \textit{jatis} lived together in 'remarkable amity', symbolized by their sharing of the common \textit{hookah}.\textsuperscript{154}

The affirmation of state monopoly and its corollary, the sharp diminution of community rights over forests, breached the notions

\textsuperscript{151} Ranajit Guha, \textit{Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India} (Delhi, 1983), pp. 27, 157. These two aspects are repeatedly stressed by Guha. See ibid, pp. 6–8, 84–5, 92, 112–13, 158, 160, 226, etc.

\textsuperscript{152} KFGC, 2.


of economic and social justice which scholars have called the 'moral economy' of the peasant. These, by no means primitive, notions of morality and justice permeated peasant resistance to state encroachment on customary rights.

While representing, as I have argued, a direct challenge to state authority, the actions of the Kumaun peasant do not conform to the picture of militant violence drawn by scholars reporting various tribal and peasant revolts in peninsular India. David Arnold, for example, has in several articles challenged the 'Gandhi-dominated saga'\textsuperscript{155} of Indian nationalism. As rural and industrial protest in the colonial period often took a violent form, Arnold believes that 'for most Indians non-violence would appear to have been no more than a tactic, abandoned in favour of violent action once it had proved ineffective'.\textsuperscript{156} A strikingly similar hypothesis has been put forward by Michael Adas in his review of peasant resistance in South East Asia. The pre-colonial situation, Adas argues, was characterized by different forms of 'avoidance protest'—strikes, flight, petitions, and other 'legal' or quasi-legal channels of protest' which were often preferred to riot or rebellion. The latter form of protest became more common with the advent of colonialism, when a centralized and bureaucratic state apparatus increasingly impinged on village life. Traditional forms of protest were now rendered impotent, according to Adas, and violent rebellion was a logical consequence of this depersonalization of relations between officials and villagers.\textsuperscript{157}

The Arnold-Adas position has important implications for the study of the social idiom in which protest was expressed in the colonial period. However, both authors occasionally seem to fall prey to a tendency to view the peasant as one who rationally chooses his means of protest in order to maximize future outcomes.\textsuperscript{158} I venture to suggest that the dichotomy betweenvio-

\textsuperscript{155} Arnold, 'Rebellious Hillmen', p. 88.


\textsuperscript{157} Michael Adas, 'From avoidance to confrontation: peasant protest in precolonial and colonial southeast Asia', \textit{CSSH}, 23:2 (1981). See also the classic study by Sartono Kartodirdjo, \textit{The Peasant's Revolt of Banten in 1888} (The Hague, 1966).

\textsuperscript{158} This instrumentalist perspective is more markedly present in sociological studies of modern social movements. See J. Craig Jenkins, 'Resource Mobilization Theory and the Study of Social Movements', \textit{Annual Review of Sociology}, no. 9 (1983).
Forestry and Social Protest in Kumaun

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ience and non-violence is, in certain respects, a misleading one.\footnote{159} It obscures both variations in the structure of domination and the manner in which such variations can help to explain the socio-cultural idiom in which protest is expressed in different societies. Thus, in Kumaun the relative absence of violent means of protest may be related to the structure of domination in hill society—one that did not quite correspond to the forms of domination encountered elsewhere in India—and the distinctive history of peasant protest exemplified by the dhandak. At a very general level it can be posited that the extent of violence will vary with different forms of domination.\footnote{160}

Central to a deeper enquiry, then, of the \emph{why} and \emph{how} of peasant revolts is the socio-political structure in which protest manifests itself, its social and cultural (including religious) idiom, and the links between any particular upsurge and those that preceded it in point of time. One needs to examine more closely the relations between social superiors and inferiors, as well as the ideology of these relationships. For even where the dominance of one social group over another can be explained by reference to control over land and resources, one still needs to examine its institutionalization in social and psychological terms.\footnote{161} One would then be able to relate specific aspects of rebellion with specific aspects of domination and sub-ordination.

For the Kumaun peasant the cohesion and collective spirit of the village community provided the mainspring of political action. The wide-ranging campaign of 1921, though different from a modern social movement in its aims and methods, was far from being a

\footnote{159} In Arnold's writings the polemical use of these categories often comes dangerously close to the 'non-violence equals reactionary' and 'violence equals revolutionary' hypothesis once favoured by Marxist historians such as R.P. Dutt, who viewed Gandhi's espousal of non-violence as a diversionary tactic designed to stem the militancy of the masses. For a different reading of Gandhian methods, which tries instead to trace its roots to an indigenous tradition of non-violent resistance, see Dharampal, \emph{Civil Disobedience and Indian Tradition} (Varanasi, 1971.)

\footnote{160} This argument owes a lot to discussions with Gyan Pandey and Partha Chatterjee. Cf also Eric Hobsbawm, \emph{Bandits} (1969: rpt. Harmondsworth, 1972), pp. 18–21.

\footnote{161} M.O. Gately, A. Lloyd Morte, and J.B. Wills, Jr., 'Seventeenth-century Peasant "Furies": some problems of comparative history', \emph{Past and Present}, no. 51 (1971); P.M. Gardner, 'Dominance in India: a reappraisal', \emph{Contributions to Indian Sociology}, n.s., no. 2 (Dec. 1968).
spontaneous outburst of an illiterate peasantry representing a blind reaction to the expropriation of a resource crucial to its subsistence. It expressed, albeit in a far more heightened way, the motivations which underlay the sporadic and localized protests in the early years of forest administration. Expressed through the medium of popular protest were conflicting theories of social relationships that virtually amounted to two world-views. One can meaningfully contrast state monopoly right with the free use of forest by members of the village community as sanctioned by custom—a pattern of use, moreover, regulated by the community as a whole. The exploitation of the pine forests on grounds of commercial profitability and strategic imperial needs was at variance, too, with the use of natural resources in an economy wholly oriented towards subsistence. The invocation of the symbols of bania and rakshas, with all that they stood for, was a natural consequence of this discrepancy. As the paternalist state transformed itself into an agency intruding more and more into the daily life of its subject population, so its claim to legitimacy floundered. Peasant opposition to this encroachment took the form of consciously determined actions—actions incomprehensible to an observer unfamiliar with the social and cultural heritage of the Kumaun peasant. But set in their socio-historical context, these actions become intelligible and are seen to represent a frontal challenge to state authority, something of which the seemingly docile peasantry had been thought incapable.  

162 This article is part of a longer study to be submitted as a fellowship dissertation at the Indian Institute of Management, Calcutta. I am grateful to my supervisor, Professor Kamini Adhikari, for her help and consistent encouragement. The present article has benefited from critical comments on earlier drafts by Anjan Ghosh, David Hardiman, Dharma Kumar and K. Sivaramakrishnan. Finally, it is a pleasure to acknowledge the considerable debt this paper owes to Shekhar Pathak's pioneering researches on social protest in Kumaun.