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## UNIT 13 FOREST BASED MOVEMENT – CHIPKO

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### Structure

13.0 Objectives

13.1 Introduction

13.2 The Traditional and New Social Movements

13.3 Forest Based Movement-the Chipko

13.4 The Socio-Cultural Fabric Of Uttarkhand: Mapping the Site of Our Movement

13.4.1.1 Garahwali Culture: Cornerstone of the Peaceful *Chipko Andolan*

13.5 Causes of Protest: Tracing the Steps of the Chipko Movement

13.5.1.1 Two Historical Triggers : Building Railways and Sepoy Mutiny

13.6 From Violence to Peaceful Non-Cooperation: the Forest *Satyagraha*

13.7 The Protagonists of the Movement

13.8 Conclusion: the Way Ahead

13.9 Let Us Sum Up

13.10 References.

13.11 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 13.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you should be able to:

- Gather a conceptual idea about environmental movements;
- Learn the different kinds of environmental movements;
- Explain the impact, it generated on the general masses; and
- Argue for the different strategies adopted by the different movements and how it electrified popular mobilisation.

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### 13.1 INTRODUCTION

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Environmental movements, as you can apprehend, are the protests and upsurges against abuse of the natural resources and their harmful impact on the society and state. However, before going straight in to environmental movements, let's go into the concept of social movements. Social movements, as such, are not new in our country and they are various of its kinds, but generally speaking, social movements are collective oppositions

waged against a specific issue disturbing the usual pace of social life to restore back peace and stability. As you know, our society had been facing large numbers of problems and it had not always been possible to check such anomalies in peaceful and just ways. Therefore, it was almost natural to call for a concerted round of action to avert such a long standing lacunae which had shown no signs of dispersal. Let us see what sociologists Turner and Killian, had to say while trying to conceptualize social movements. According to them, social movement can be taken as a "Collectivity acting with some continuity to promote or resist a change in the society or group of which it is a part" (Turner and Killian,1972: 246 quoted in Das , 1981: 129) Roberta Ash Garner considers a social movement as a set of actions of a group of people that is 'self- consciously directed towards changing the social structure and/or ideology of a society, and they either are carried on outside of ideologically legitimated channels of change or use these channels in innovative ways (ibid). Thus it is pretty much evident that social movements are actions initiated by massive participation to protest the current social formations and to bring about necessary changes in the society through persistent resistances and hindrances. Most of such popular mobilisations broach upon a social issue which had been plaguing the society for long. Such social movements are the ways of circumventing long repressed fumes and desperations of the people. Social movements as you will see, are not homogeneous, but had changed their dimensions across time, thus the traditional social movements, as many believed had shown sharp lines of distinctions from the new ones.

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## 13.2 THE TRADITIONAL AND NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

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The older social movements especially those of labour or working class movements are significantly different from the new forms, in that, their goals, organizational structures, and action repertoires are markedly distinct from the traditional ones (see Pichardo 1997 for an overview). The traditional forms of movements are supposed to be centred around the working classes hewing towards economic re-distributions. Marxist theories were extensively used to reason with the movements that gathered momentum especially, till the 1960s, however things took a drastic turn post 1960s. Large scale student protests were being organised and probably the watershed moment came when student movements were consolidated in France and Berlin in 1968 and in Italy in 1969 and similarly in United States in the mid-1960s. As you know, until now, all social movements were explained by the rationale of the Marxist theories, for the first time in the history of the social movements, such theories fell short in explaining the logic behind the new forms of movements. Therefore, Pichardo said,

In Europe, where Marxist theories of social movements dominated, Marxist theorists were unable to provide a convincing explanation for why students

had become the vanguard of protest and why movement demands centred around quality of life rather than redistributive issues (Touraine 1971) (1997:412).

Therefore, time had come to review the deficiencies of the older forms of movements and look for greener pastures elsewhere. Social scientists thus chose to design the new social movement paradigm to legitimatise the varied types visibly noticed by us. The new social movements are indicative of a shift towards the post-industrial economy, and therefore instrumentally very different from the working class movements. Ideologically speaking, these movements claim that instead of being undergirded by utilitarian issues, they are more concerned about qualitative aspects such as the quality of life and ways of augmenting the life chances. These movements show a marked departure from the earlier movements, in that they assert their claims voraciously thus politicising the otherwise apolitical terrains of the movements. The assertion of identity is kept in the vanguard in all such movements. Yet another feature of such movements is the self-reflexive character which presupposes that the participants of the movements are always questioning the goals, strategies and outcomes of the movements. Nothing is taken as final and absolute but all the moments of a movements are reviewed and screened to bring out the best. This mirrors the self-reflexive character of the new social movements, that refuses to yield to the over-arching central temperament that opposes decentralisation and popular choice. As far as the tactics go, these movements remain outside the purview of the institutional garb, thus without taking any refuge to the political bandwagon, they instead want to shoot off public outrage and institutional disruptions to catch the attention of the state and polity. Such movements may include among others, urban social struggles, the environmental or ecology movements, women's and gay liberation, the peace movement, and cultural revolt linked primarily to student and youth activism (Boggs, 1986). Notable amongst these new social movements had been the various environmental movements that had repeatedly caught our attention over demands for environmental conservation and a plea to resume back the ecological symbiosis. Let us now go to one of the most significant environmental movements, viz. the Chipko Movement that unlike the older forms of movement did not concentrate on distribution of wealth but instead focussed on sustainable ecological viability. It is perhaps, one of the most popular form of new social movement. Come, let us study this movement, in detail.

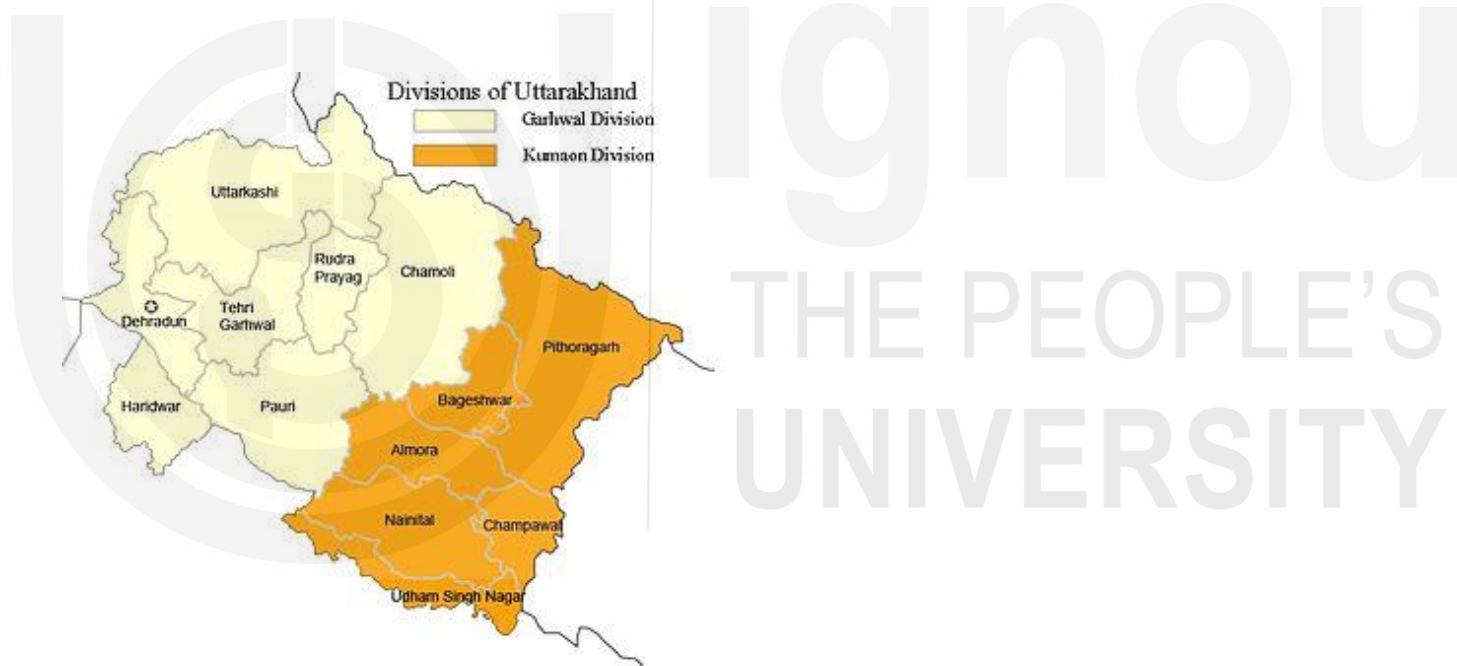
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### **13.3 FOREST BASED MOVEMENT-THE CHIPKO**

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The conflict over control of the natural resources in our country is not new, but the discord became pronounced with the evolution of the state and the autonomy awarded to its people. There has always been a tension between safe-guarding the rights of the marginal people and spearheading the industrial or commercial development in the country. The tension had

continued over ages and people mostly resorted to various strategies to protect themselves from arbitrary encroachments. The marginal people often found themselves at the receiving ends and struggled hard to rescue themselves from such forceful state sponsored intrusion over resources that they believed belonged to them. Forests, orchards and lands were regarded by the villagers as the common property, well-guarded and conserved by careful and delicate methods of public conservation and forested husbandry, till they came to be pounced upon by the aggressive colonial policies. However, from the very beginning, natural resources all belonged to the community which carefully nourished and replenished them over the generations. The sudden usurpation of these resources by the outsiders posed serious threat to the survival chances of the villagers, who responded quickly to stop such encroachment over their verdant lands and forests. Before going to the crux of the movement, let us study in short, the socio-geographical history of the Garhwali society, to better apprehend the source of the conflict and its course of movement. Given below is the map of Uttarakhand, for you to better map the position of Garahwal, the site of our movement.



*Pic 1: The geographical map of Uttarkhand.*

Photocredit

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/2/2b/Kumaon\\_Garhwal.jpg/300px-Kumaon\\_Garhwal.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/2/2b/Kumaon_Garhwal.jpg/300px-Kumaon_Garhwal.jpg)

### **Box 1: Uttarakhand**

Uttarkhand is one of the richest reservoir of natural resources like forests and lakes. It houses the Jim Corbett National Park (the oldest national park of India) at Ramnagar in Nainital District, along with several others like Valley of Flowers National Park and Nanda Devi National Park in Chamoli District. Together they constitute the UNESCO World Heritage Site.

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### 13.1 THE SOCIO-CULTURAL FABRIC OF UTTARKHAND: MAPPING THE SITE OF OUR MOVEMENT

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Do you know Garahwal comprises of how many districts? It is actually made up of eight hill districts of Uttarkhand such as Pauri, Chamoli, Tehri, Uttarkashi, Dehradun, Almora, Pithoragarh, and Nainital. According to D.D Tiwari, “The first five constitute "Garahwal," while the last three form "Kumaon “(Tewari:1995:134). According to him, Uttarkhand was insulated and separated from the rest of the country in the pre-British India. Though it stood alone, its dense forests in *Terai* and Bhabar belt acted as sentinels protecting it from external invasions. It was a state mostly governed by its indigenous royal groups and least mediated by the extraneous power. The kingdom was split up into several chiefdoms to be ruled by various rulers like the Katyuris, Somchand, Ajaypal Pamvar, and Prithvinaryana Sah (ibid). Sah was finally defeated in the hands of the British forces which took over the Garahwali region while the custody of Kumaon was wrested upon the son of the last Garahwali ruler.

Soon the Anglo-Nepalese treaty was signed in 1815 after the Anglo Nepalese war (1814-16), best known as the Gorkha war, in the Indian history, which ceded around a third of Nepal's territory to the [British](#). The British thus occupied the Kumaon region (Almora, Pithoragarh and Nainital) following the Nepalese war. The landscape of the state changed to make way for the colonial masters. The British forces were advancing towards the hills and they readily pounced over the hard-wood forests and fertile lands of Terai. The state sponsored monarchy followed a close exit and the state was literally handed over to an alien group of foreign rulers, who without any knowledge about the culture and ethics of the Garahwali society began to rule these people, who up till now were governed by the rules of common ownership of land and assets. A sudden intrusion by the foreign rulers, armed with their idiosyncratic ideas of extortion and extraction could not befit the collective economy of forest conservation and redistribution which the Garhwalis had followed so intently for ages. Their age old wisdom and ideology could not accept these self-aggrandising and appropriating policies which the imperial rulers exerted on their land, forests and daily living. This eviction from their land and forests, created senses of desperation and pathos, among the Garhwalis which cannot be felt without an understanding of the Garahwali forest economy and the culture undergirding them. Let us have a brief idea of their culture to better understand, what really instigated them to revolt. The Chipko movement actually flourished from the rich cultural legacy that the community wove over the years (ibid:135). The movement was a peaceful one and that it traversed the lines of non-violence to protest the wrongs done on the people of the hills is an exemplary instance of how the culture of a community impacts the forms of public resistance. Thus the culture and the socialisation of the people can influence the way a community repels the state

policies and its draconian programmes to mobilise public opinion. Let us see how this was ingrained in the culture of Garahwal.

### 13.4.1 Garahwali Culture: Cornerstone of the Peaceful *ChipkoAndolan*

The people of this state had learnt to leave peacefully in the lap of the nature. The social structure of the society though showed factions could not wedge contentious differences between them. The higher castes rarely fought against the lower ones and therefore the strains of belonging to the lower castes were never that scalding. People assimilated together to celebrate their religious and social functions and thereby showed strong tendencies for osmosis or interaction. This in turn generated a sense of fellow feeling or togetherness, a strong character of the communal life observed in primary relationships. The region being geographically isolated by tall hills from outside, this kinship ties glued the men together and bound them within the borders of the state. They merely ventured out, for they were contained with the forests bound verdant pocket on the crest of the hills. The compact social life was in tune with the participatory and collective living they had etched out for themselves. The collective spirit was ushered by yet another spirit of naturism that they had exercised over the decades. This naturism, was yet another source of the movement they had exhorted in order to protect the forests.

In India, worshipping the nature and its sacred grooves had continued for long. The forests were personified as gods and goddesses and revered with ostensible elaborations. Not just the Garahwalis, the practise is followed throughout the country. For instance, assigning a turf of forest to deities is a common practice among the *Meitei* community of Manipur who exercise ancestral practice of animism with the focused around the worship of the forests are regarded as sacred abode of *Umanglais* (Sacred deities or sylan-deities) Kumar, n.d). Similarly, the Garahwalis worshipped forests, that were considered the local deity of the village. Each village had such *Gramdevata* or *Ishtadevata* that were worshipped with much fanfare. The trees were supposed to protect them from the spooky spirits and immune them against the external ravages. They did not seek institutional practices to address their grievances, but rather rested on the non-institutional divine measures to settle their disputes. This gave them an innocuous and innocent persona that helped them sort out their own problems without resorting to ponderous procedures. Thus, you can very well bring out the source of their peace-loving and simple temperaments. Given below is a picture where you can see the village women are busy worshipping a tree with great pomp and devotion.



The village women worshipping the trees with enthusiasm.

(Photo credit: <http://goodwiz.weebly.com/religious.html>)

### Box 2 :Tree worshipping in India

There are ample such trees which are worshipped in our country, but the commonly worshipped ones are Neem, Ashok, Peepul, Banayan, Bael, Coconut, Sal and Mango.

Interestingly, amongst these, the Banyan tree is our national tree while the Sal tree is equally worshipped among both the Hindus and the Buddhists.

This amiable and soft heartedness was thus an intrinsic character of the hard working Garhwali people, which time and again had come out in the protest movements organised by them. This was also mirrored in the peaceful movements organized for the demand for a separate Uttarkhand state (Tewari, 1995). Can you tell, what Dhandak is? It is actually the silent forms of protest movements waged by the people of Garhwal (Guha, 1989). It was a way of opposing the unfair policies implemented by the monarch of the state. The acts were meant to punish the corrupt officials who thought of reaping the benefits by accruing upon the mass a harmful policy. The people felt by staging such forms of protest, they were actually helping their monarchs to rule them with able-hands. Therefore, the revolt they triggered was not against the state, but against the officials who colluded with one another to defraud the common men and to rob them of their public assets. The movement was often said to have picked up the Gandhian strategy of *Satyagraha* (Shiva and Bandyopadhyay, 1986), to protest the commercialisation of the much owned forests, which escaped the collective ownership of the community and fell in the private hands of the greedy entrepreneurs.

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## 13.5 CAUSES OF PROTEST: TRACING THE STEPS OF THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT

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The Chipko Movement largely meant embracing the trees to protest their illicit felling. The forests that supported the villages for centuries, were suddenly taken over by the colonial rulers who usurped the forest rights of the common men. The men were obsessed with the forests because they served them as a store house of resources that they could not do without. Besides providing them with a regular supply of fruits, berries, roots, wood and fodder, they indirectly helped in retaining the ground-water level and binding the soil to prevent droughts and famine. The Garahwalis were in praise for the forests and tried hard to conserve them with utmost care and in every sustainable way possible. Not just physically, their ideologies were ingrained with such ecological ethics, that brought conservation to the forefront their communal life. They were wary of the ill effects of deforestation and so strictly forebode tree felling across their landscape. Following the advent of the colonial forces, the changes that followed crunched and smashed this ethics altogether, which the locals had cherished over ages. Let us follow the chronology of the movement, especially the historical entry points that signalled the initiation of the movement.

### 13.5.1 Two Historical Triggers: Building Railways And Sepoy Mutiny

The colonial forces triggered changes in the forest ecology that was solely piling up discontent in the minds of the hills people. Especial mention must be made of the laying of the railways in 1853 and the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857 that sounded the death knell for the men of Garahwal. The colonial intervention ensured massive transportation of goods and cargo that called for the construction of the railways. Once the laying of railway lines started, large logs of wood were needed for which huge trees were brutally slaughtered. The Himalayas were largely affected especially, the Garahwal region that had harboured tall trees, that were very sturdy and durable and were most suited for making railway sleeper (Tewari 1993:143). The felling of the trees took a drastic form once the Sepoy Mutiny had started. This meant that the British forces felt that more railways were needed to transport troops to quell the revolt. This created a pressure on the trees that were blatantly cut down to build not just railway sleepers but also to power feed the railways. To provide adequate fuel for the railways, the woods were cleared to arrange for the energy supply, especially when the coal supplies tripped (Guha, 1983). Not just the Himalayas, but the other extensive parts of the northern Indian forests were adversely impacted by the expansion of the railways, especially from 1869 to 1884 (Das, 2013). The situation in Garahwal was slowly spiralling out of control when the government decided to install a forest department to take control of the situation. Since the British did not probably have any expertise in this area, they thought of taking advice



from the German foresters to help them design a Forest Act that would keep into account the colonial benefits from the forest and therefore safeguard the forests accordingly, but what possibly the Germans did not have in their knowledge, was the indigenous history of the juxtaposition between the forests and the inhabitants. Ignorant of the micro history of the region, an act was passed that destroyed this coexistence. The legalese imposed restrictions on the forest rights of the common men, who could no longer use the forest products without the permission of the Forest Department of the state.

We have already learnt about the Anglo-Nepalese treaty of 1815 after which Garahwal was transferred to its monarch, Tehri Raja's son who in turn leased large tracts of trees to the British empire. This complicity between the state and the imperial forces kept no leaves unturned to deprive its people of the natural forest products which they had grown up with to think of their own. It took time for the shock to sink in, for the people, especially the women were first to become its victim. With the declining forests, gathering timbers, fruits and berries became an ardent job and since most often women were entrusted with these primary tasks, deforestation meant making their life hassle some clubbed with unending drudgery. This also meant double drudgery as it ensured that women not only have to complete their household chores but also have to travel longer roads to collect resources for sustenance, which earlier were readily available outside their thresholds. All these were enabled by the scientific forest management (Shiva, 1988). The legalese ensured that policies for forests be crafted in a way so that the ways to usurp the forest resources by depriving the common masses be ratified in a way that becomes unquestionable. The forest management and its upkeep was slowly being transferred to the newly appointed forest managers who almost were ignorant of the oral history of soil and forest conservation that were transferred from one generation to the other mostly through oral history with little written records to corroborate this age old bonhomie between man and the forests. The smooth and tranquil life being trespassed by an alien law became the cauldron of boiling fumes. The situation was soon going out of control and it turned violent in December 27, 1906, when two hundred villagers attacked forest officials camping in Tehri. The violence refused to pull up and re-appeared once again in 1907 when the erstwhile forest officer of Tehri, Sadanand Gairola, was roughed up in Khandogi. King Kirti Shah immediately rushed to the spot to pacify the angry mob (Bhaktadarshn, 1976: 228). But as you will now see, Chipko movement soon shredded off its violence to go down the path of peaceful resistance.

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### **13.6 FROM VIOLENCE TO PEACEFUL NON-COOPERATION: THE FOREST SATYAGRAHA**

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The Chipko movement soon changed its course to embrace peaceful resistance instead of taking a bloody patch. In 1930, the Garhwalis initiated

their non-cooperation movement centring decisively around the agenda of forest and its riches. Satyagraha movement was championed with utmost ardour against the colonial forest rules in the Rawain region. The King of Tehri who was detouring Europe at that time, asked his Dewan, ChakradharJoyal, to repel the movement with force and armed repression. Several unarmed Satyagrahi workers died while crossing the Yamuna River. The movement gained momentum from the anti-colonial struggles that were promenading the British enslaved India at that point of time. The Chipko movement was at an important junction of Indian independence movement which greatly enthused the democratic demands of the Garhwalis. Satyagraha as you all know is a form of movement popularised by Gandhi, the father of nation, as a strategy connived to play down the treacherous tricks of the imperial forces ruling the country.

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### **13.7 THE PROTAGONISTS OF THE MOVEMENT**

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The Chipko movement evolved gradually as an extension of the Gandhian philosophy of peaceful resistance to combat the evil policies of the British polity. This property of the Satyagraha movement was lent to the ChipkoAndolan by Gandhians, such as Sri Dev Suman, Mira Behn, and SaralaBehn. Sri Dev Suman was inducted into the Gandhian Satyagraha during the Salt Satyagraha. He died a martyr's death championing the rights of the Garhwali people. Both Mira Behn and SaralaBehn worked under the aegis of Gandhiji. Following Gandhi's death they took refuge in the laps of the Himalayas and set up their *ashrams*. Shiva therefore said,

Equipped with the Gandhian world-view of development based upon justice and ecological stability, they contributed silently to the growth of women-power and ecological consciousness in the hill areas of Uttar Pradesh. SunderlalBahuguna is prominent among the new generation of workers deeply inspired by these Gandhians (Shiva and Bhanyopadyay, 1986:137)

SunderlalBahuguna joined nationalist movement at the age of 13. He was elected the General Secretary of the Congress Party in the Tehri sub-division in 1947. It was later in 1956 that he quit politics to work in close association with the rural poor men. That he decided to quit politics to work with commons might have been under the influence of VimalaNautiyal, his wife and a dedicated social worker and a follower of SaralaBehn. Vimala at the same time worked to spread VinobaBhave's message of land grant or Bhoodan, as it was called to empower the rural people. SunderlalBahuguna alongside penned articles in various newspapers and journals, underscoring the ecological damages already done and sensitising the people with the ways of reviving back the lost ecological balance in the Himalayas.



Picture: 3 SunderlalBahuguna, one of the champions of the Chipko Movement along with his wife VimalaNautiyalBahuguna.

(Picture Credit<http://amritfilm.net/2011/09/sunderlal-and-vimla-bahuguna-2/?lang=en>)

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## 13.8 CONCLUSION: THE WAY AHEAD

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Chipko definitely was a powerful movement which championed the assertion of the people and their rights over the environment. The transformation of

### Box 3:Vimala Bahguna

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VimalaBahuguna and Nautiyalwas socialized in TehriGarhwal, in a strictly patriarchal and insulated princely state which never even had a high school for girls. Since her father had heard of Gandhi's disciple Sarala Devi and her Lakshmi Ashram, she was schooled and trained there; subsequently from a timid girl she grew up to be confident and vocal enough to set up her own ashram and a school. She was the major force behind her husband SunderlalBahuguna, in ushering an environmental movement in the hills.Sunderlal is an iconic figure in ecological history but few know about Vimala.

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Chipko from an attempt to control local resource use to a national movement was worth noting. It influenced heavily the growing global environmental crisis enveloping us. However, in transforming itself, Chipko contributed immensely to the national and international ecological movements. It was this movement of Chipko that for the first time, put forests on the political agenda in the country. The Forest Conservation Act of 1980 and the very formation

of the environment ministry are due to the widespread consciousness created by Chipko. Chipko was successful in creating a new wave of understanding among the foresters.

**Check Your Progress:**

1) What is Chipko movement? What is its significance?

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2) Who is Sunderlal Bahuguna? What is his contribution?

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3) How did the Garhwali culture help in the growth of the Chipko movement?

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### **13.9 LET US SUM UP**

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International ecologists consider Chipko as a cultural response of the people's love for their environment. Chipko was later popularised by the feminist movements which pointed out that village women have to walk for long distances to collect fuel and fodder and therefore, they become the first victims of forest destruction. Eco-feminists held that women are closer to mother earth and more ecologically conscious. But undoubtedly, Chipko's biggest contribution probably was the championing the pro-poor environmentalism that it evolved. Chipko movement spoilt the myth that the poor destroy their environment and do not want to shield it. The

Chipkomovement was popular among the activists across the world. Until Chipko happened, people refused to believe the poor could ever live in harmony with their environment. But, it was established that Chipko had a very humane appeal that spread positive vibrations across the society at large (Mitra:1993).

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