

CONSERVING THE KUMAUN FORESTS THROUGH PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION : A CASE STUDY

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Introduction

Kumaun comes in the Uttaranchal region of India. The people of this area are dependent on the forests and they fulfill their fuel and fodder demand from the local forests. The altitude of the area varies from 250 m - 7800 m. The slopes are steep and often bouldery. Since the peaks are snow covered, the rivers are full of water but due to very less percolation in their watersheds and siltation in river beds the floods come. The tree cover mainly consists of *Pinus*, *Quercus incana* and *Acacias*. The annual rainfall varies from 900 mm to 2500 mm.

This area is covered with thick forests. Total geographical area of Kumaun is 21035 km². Out of this 7219 km² is dense forest (density more than 40%) and 1918 km² is open forests. Thus forest area is considerably large. The different forest areas in three districts of Kumaun (as per 1991 notification) is given in Table 1.

The reserve forests are 648203 ha and civil forest are 254187 ha. The Panchayat Forest area which is 223124 ha is controlled by Van Panchayat. Private, Cantt and Civil bodies forests are also present which are maximum in Nainital and form 2247 ha in Kumaun region.

Van Panchayats (Forest Panchayat) were formed in the area in 1931 as a result of an agitation from 1923-31. The concept of Forest Panchayat was to handover all class I and reserved civil forests to the local villagers and let them manage their own forest land. The Forest Panchayat Act came into form in 1972 and it was later modified in 1976.

Now in Kumaun area there are 3039 Forest Panchayats. The total area covered in the Forest Panchayats is 223125.52 ha. The District and Tehsil wise list of Van Panchayats is given in Table 2.

Table 1
Different forest areas in three districts of Kumaun (ha)

District	Reserve Forest	Civil Forest	Soyam Forest	Panchayat Forest	Private, Cantt and Local Bodies Forest	Total
Nainital	360478	17854	-	22113	2195	402640
Almora	149881	147800	-	97099	52	394432
Pithoragarh	137844	88533	-	103912	-	330289
Total	648203	254187	-	223124	2247	1127361

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Table 2*District/Tehsil wise list of Forest Panchayats in Kumaum*

District	Tehsil	No. of Panchayats Forest	Area (ha)
Nainital	1. Koshya Katoli	22	2035.00
	2. Nanital	36	3699.00
	3. Dhari	145	16379.00
	Total	203	22113.00
Almora	1. Bageshwar	451	38058.160
	2. Ranikhet and Bhaikiyasen	757	29417.922
	3. Baramandal	562	29623.230
	Total	1770	97099.312
Pithoragarh	1. Pithoragarh	206	18631.00
	2. Didihat	276	13799.38
	3. Gangolihat	94	11212.00
	4. Munsiyari	134	19641.10
	5. Champawat	271	25811.32
	6. Dharchula	86	14807.15
	Total	1067	103911.95
Grand Total		3040	223125.524

These Forest Panchayats use the Panchayat forest land for the extraction of fuel, fodder and resin. The resin is taken by the Forest Department and 40% of the total revenue earned from resin is given back to the Forest Panchayats. This money is normally used by Forest Panchayats for the developmental works like construction of roads, schools and for the payment of the salary of forest Chaukidar appointed by villagers. In the Forest Panchayats the management of forests, is done through villagers. Thus we can say that this system of management has elements of participative forest management and to that extent concept of JFM in U.P. is not very new. It is only being strengthened now.

Discussion

However, from management point of view, there are both successful and unsuccessful Forest Panchayats.

A very interesting class of successful Forest Panchayats can be named as 'Dev Arpit' (offered to god) Forest Panchayat (e.g. Sangat and Lohthal Forest Panchayat). This Dev-Arpit concept has arisen for the protection of the Panchayat Forests. The Dev-Arpit concept came into existence when the villagers realised that they will not survive if the rate of depletion of their forests is not checked. Villagers went to the nearby temple, offered Puja and surrendered the panchayat land for certain period (5 years) to the God/Goddess. This act stops the entry of local villagers into the forests and thus prevents lopping of the trees. Sangat, and Lohthal Forest Panchayats are amongst two successful Dev-Arpit Panchayats. In Lohthal Panchayat the villagers gave their Panchayat's Forest to the "Devi" for 5 years in 1993. In 1998 they will take the forest back from the Goddess and will protect the area through watch and ward. Till this area is getting

regenerated, they are collecting their fuelwood and fodder from the private land. Since this Forest Panchayat had bad track record they are now only busy in regenerating their own forest. Similar is the case with Sangat Panchayat. But here villagers go to nearby reserve forest for their local needs and affect the reserve forest adversely.

The Lohthal Panchayat is another peculiar type of Forest Panchayat. The older people like, Late Shri Bairag Singh, Late Shri Sher Singh, Late Shri Guman Singh and Late Shri Daulat Singh in 1932 put a unique example in Bhandari village of Berinag Block, Distt. Almora. They announced that if they will find any man cutting illicit wood from the Panchayati Forest, they will beat the offender from 'Lathi' (Stick). This announcement was in form of an order and till now nobody goes into the forest for illicit felling of wood and grass. The Forest Panchayat has protected and regenerated 84.5 ha of Panchayat Forest. Out of this 61.5 ha is *Pinus* forest and 23 ha in *Quercus incana*. They take out dead and fallen wood from reserve forests. The grass which is cut once from the forest is distributed equally (free) amongst the local villagers. For the rest of the period they raise grass along side of their own land.

Problems faced by Panchayats

(a) Each Forest Panchayat is governed by Forest Panchayat Act 1976. Under this Act, the power to manage these Forest Panchayat people lies with the Dy. Commissioner who is normally the District Magistrate of that District. The revenue collected through resin tapping is under the control of the Dy. Commissioner. When a Forest Panchayat

wants to utilise their money, they do not get their share in time as the proposals are not cleared by D.Ms. in time.

(b) People other than members of the Forest Panchayats, when trespass into the Panchayat Forest can be fined upto Rs. 50/- (without prior approval of DM) and Rs. 500/- (with prior approval). Normally this leads to the deterioration of the forests as sanction from DM does not come for imposition of fine of more than Rs. 50/-.

(c) Alternate source of cooking (fuel) is absent so it becomes difficult for the villagers to survive without overdrawing from forests.

(d) It is felt that local revenue inspector, foresters and police also do not co-operate to the desired extent. In many cases the offender could not be punished due to lack of co-ordination between police, Van Panchayat and revenue Inspector.

(e) The local people do not get work for more than 6 months (which includes agriculture and resin tapping). For rest of periods they do not have enough work to survive. Thus they go to the forests and involve themselves in illicit removal.

(f) According to Sarpanch (headman) of Forest Panchayat Ayartoli, from the extraction of resin from the *Pinus* trees royalty of Rs. 34,000/- as Panchayat revenue, was realised. But this revenue can not be used without prior permission of the Distt. Magistrate of that District. Now Rs. 14,000/- is with Distt. Magistrate, who seldom allows them to use their own money. The people are eager to develop their villages but since the Revenue Department does not permit them to utilize their Panchayat money for the development works they are unable to develop their village.

(g) According to the headman of Mawai Athari (Sh. M.S. Panwar), they are suffering from the paucity of funds while their money is actually lying with the Revenue Department.

Other important issues

Some alternate solutions were discussed with the local villagers to improve their living conditions. The following points emerged :

- (a) The pastoral lands should be developed. Now in Kumaun there are 212,950 cow units (coinciding 1 Buffalo = 2 cows, similarly .2, simultaneously). The daily fodder consumption of one cow in hilly region is 21.5 kg fodder/day. To feed 212,950 cow units we need a good amount of dry fodder. So there can be a rotational grazing system for cattle. Each block can be opened for grazing according to the size and amount of grass present in that block.
- (b) People can either be provided with Kerosene chullas or solar cookers. The amount of fuel saving per year against the present use of fuelwood is given in Table 3. If improved Samshan Ghats are used the fuel saved will be much higher.
- (c) For water problem, roof water harvesting can be adopted. In Mirtola Ashram (near

Table 3

Estimated fuelwood savings with alternate cooking means

Item	Amount of fuel saved (Mt/Yr)	Cost of purchase Rs.
Pressure Cooker	1.100	600
Biogas	14.400	25000
Solar Cooker	3.650	2200
Portable Angeethi	0.722	200

Almora) a good demonstration of roof water harvesting has been seen.

(d) Some Agroforestry models, orchards can also be developed in unirrigated areas. This will not only increase the production capacity but will also add to farmers income.

(e) For soil conservation measures the plantation of *Agave sisilana* and developed grasses can be planted along the contour for stabilization of the soil erosion.

Above all people should be motivated to realise that forest belongs to them and not to the Forest Department. By this aim the flora and fauna can be conserved suitably.

SUMMARY

Conserving our forest wealth through peoples participation is the need of the hour. Concept of Van Panchayats in U.P. is very old. These Van Panchayats in U.P. have been managing their forests on sustainable basis. This paper deals with some interesting and successful Van Panchayats in Kumaun hills. It also brings out the problems faced by them and some other important issues that need attention.

जनता की भागीदारी द्वारा कुमाऊँ वनों का संरक्षण

राजीव मिश्र

सारांश

जनता की भागीदारी द्वारा वन संपत्ति का संरक्षण करना सामाजिक आवश्यकता है। उत्तर प्रदेश में वन पंचायतों का विचार बहुत प्राचीन है। उत्तर-प्रदेश में वन पंचायतें बहुत पुरानी हैं और उनके प्रबंध से वहाँ के वन यथावत् चले आ रहे हैं। प्रस्तुत अभिपत्र में कुमाऊँ पहाड़ियों की कुछ रोचक और सफल वन पंचायतों का परिचय दिया गया है। इस अध्ययन से उनकी समस्याओं और अन्य महत्वपूर्ण मसलों का भी पता लग जाता है जिन पर ध्यान दिए जाने की आवश्यकता है।

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