

5

Sustainable Livelihoods and Lifestyles in Uttarakhand

Mountain regions are marked by their diversity, remoteness and fragility. It is this diverse, awesome yet fragile ecology that might have something to share with us about sustainability. The greatest mountain range in the world, Himalayas, is home to diverse traditional communities, many perhaps all, socio-culturally unique. But what is common is their relationship with nature, determined by dependence, reverence and fragility. Of this, have evolved systems of knowledge and practice which ensure sustainability and a culture of conserving nature and all its resources.

This chapter is borne out of an attempt to learn about and from one such culture – that of the Garhwal region of the Hill State of Uttarakhand. While as this chapter looks broadly on the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand, especially the districts of Dehradun, Tehri, Uttarkashi and Chamoli, it focus and many of its deeper and detailed illustrations and examples are primarily from the outer Himalayan ranges of the Dehradun valley, (most so, the cluster of villages around Nahikalan, and Sinsayukhala) and Hemwalghati, the valley of river hemwal and most notably Jardhar gaon and surrounding villages) in Tehri Garhwal. At the same time__ the systems, approaches and situations drawn out and hold broadly true (or have till some time back) for most hilly parts of Garwhal Himalayas and broadly for all of hill Uttarakhand. As with most traditional communities, there are no water tight compartments into which economic, social or cultural aspects of life are fitted. Central to all these is the relationship of the human community with nature. This relationship determines the contours of livelihoods. Livelihoods in this area are directly connected to nature and natural resources. While agriculture and pastoralism/animal husbandry are the mainstay livelihoods, other crafts

and vocations such as architecture, weaving, healing, music and carpentry are secondary. Almost all families do grow at least part of their food and often have cattle heads.

This chapter elaborately explores the mainstay livelihoods & associated lifestyles, the interconnections between the main livelihoods, their relationship with forests and ecosystems. This interconnected wholeness has allowed for centuries of active engagement and experimentation, while sustaining and preserving natural resources and at the same time obtaining all that's required for the community's survival and enrichment. The survival of forests, ecosystems and rivers small and big to this day is testimony to the inherent sustainability of these livelihoods. The result is a fascinating body of knowledge and practice which is extensive, intricate, scientific, creative, non-violent and sustainable. Sustainability or otherwise of livelihoods, lifestyles and practices is regularly examined__ so the bright, nurturing winter daylight of sustainability is the light that constantly shines and probes through this chapter. These are areas that have also seen threats, challenges of different sorts and have responded to them managing to save and sustain their communities, cultures and the environment around to a considerable to great extent. We will certainly look at some of these inspiring movements and initiatives to protect livelihoods and the ecosystems and mountains they are interlinked with.

MAINSTAY LIVELIHOODS AND ASSOCIATED LIFESTYLES

Agriculture and animal husbandry or pastoralism have long been and still are the primary and mainstay livelihoods and occupations of the areas human communities. Closely and symbiotically interlinked, both of them are deeply dependent on the neighbouring forests and ecosystem for sustenance and viability.

As a village elder once told me, "it is impossible to even imagine agriculture in the hills without forests".

This deep dependence on forests implies deep interlinkages and relationships with forests and the entire ecosystem and watersheds. As communities are dependant on forests for diverse needs, forest health and diversity thus becomes critical to the existence of local livelihoods and well being of local communities. There is no way agriculture and pastoralism can thrive with degraded forests.

And so evolved relationships, processes and systems that enabled forests to survive and thrive with remarkable biodiversity and ecosystem services. And thus forms a wonderful sustaining Triad of Forests, Pastoralism and Agriculture...