



Eight Hours A Day For Fuel Collection

Women's Survival Tasks In Garhwal Hills

EVERY time I have been up to the mountains for a holiday, I have encountered the hill people living remote villages nestling among the steep hillsides, along the river valleys with snowcapped peaks risible on the horizon. Amongst them I came across some of the most hardworking people of this country.

Living in the mountains may have its natural charm, but for the poor who have to toil all day on the rough terrain, face the altitude and the cold with the bare minimum, life is just one of mere subsistence achieved with much effort. Having visited the Garhwal area before, as a pilgrim to Badrinath and a trekker, I decided to return on a pilgrimage the villages. So I set out to study problems of this area, concentrating on their energy requirements and the manner in which these were met. The plaintive words of a Garhwali folksong come to my mind, in which a young girl pleads with her father not to marry her to a man in the hills, for she knows it will be a hard life. I hope this study will be of some help in understanding the problems of such hill villages.

Today it is recognised that the world is in the midst of an energy crisis. The energy crisis in rural India is of a very different nature from that of the developed world. This study was

undertaken to learn about the economics of energy use in villages of Garhwal. I wished to identify the kind and quantity of energy resources in use in the villages for domestic purposes, in agriculture and in industry. Further, keeping in mind the resources available in the area, I wished to consider the demands on energy resources in the future, and possible alternative ways of meeting these demands.

Methodology

Two villages, Dwing and Pakhi, were selected in the Chamoli district of Garhwal, Uttar Pradesh. Data was

collected by the household survey method using a questionnaire. Interviews were carried out in the homes and often in the fields. Secondary data was collected from several sources including the forest department, the soil and conservation department and the Dasauli Gram Swarajya Mandal.

Some problems occurred in the estimation of quantities. The villagers speak in terms of rough approximation. Checks were carried out where possible by weighing wood bundles on scales or checking the sale of kerosene in the register of the



Carrying firewood

shopkeeper.

The Chamoli district of Garhwal is one of the five hill districts of Uttar Pradesh. The economy of this area has been popularly called a money order economy because the villages are characterised by a large migrant population whose remittances home are a major source of cash income for the villagers. In Pakhi it was estimated that 50.8 per cent of the adult male population was migrant, that is, did not reside in the village for the greater part of the year. The male female ratio amongst the resident population in Pakhi was 1:2:3.

Women Run The Economy

Out of the resident male population, only 13.3 percent gave agriculture as their main occupation. Thus the predominantly agricultural economy is run mainly on the strength of the women. The cropping pattern involves three crops a year, the major cereals being rice, wheat and *munduwa*. A variety of pulses and vegetables are also grown. The yields are highly dependent on the weather, a good monsoon resulting in a good crop. There was no system of irrigation in either of the villages although a simple canal is now under construction in Pakhi. Fertiliser was barely used but substituted by a plentiful application of animal dung. The villagers said that they covered the fields with a four inch layer of dung.

The cattle population is very high in these hills with an average of 4.7 cattle per family in Pakhi. In addition, 68 percent of the households had at least one pair of oxen. The cattle are very poorly fed and give a very low yield, a maximum of one to two kilos of milk per day.

One of the noticeable features of both the villages studied was the total absence of any form of industrial activity. Local artisan activity was carried out on an individual basis by carpenters, blacksmiths, masons and basket weavers. Weaving and spinning are the most common skills, and are a high income earner for the migratory bhotiya people, who spend six months

tending their sheep in higher pastures. Even in Pakhi where there is a coal market, many of the commodities and services are still exchanged under a simple barter system.

The village community is fairly homogeneous in terms of income disparity, with an income range of only 1:3. There are three main castes in each village, the brahmans, the rajputs and the harijans who are most of the artisans.

Dwing is a very small hamlet comprising only 12 households and situated in a less accessible area. Pakhi or Garurganga had a population of 80 households and was an economically better off village. Dwing is located on the northern hill slopes, which gives it greater sunshine and renders the soil more dry.

Dwing can be reached only by foot, has no market, no electricity and no primary school. Pakhi is on the main thoroughfare, has a small market, a primary and middle school and electricity. Both villages have piped drinking water.

Energy Consumption in Pakhi

Firewood is used for nearly all household purposes and is mostly collected, though also purchased occasionally. Kerosene is used for lighting purposes in many houses and also for cooking in a few exceptional cases. A few streets at, main road have electric lighting but electrification of

homes is only partial. Water energy is used in the village built water mills, Wood charcoal, obtained from burning wood, is placed in clay oven used to warm rooms in winter. Activities in the village, including artisan work, have practically no mechanisation, therefore the techniques are traditional and involve a high degree of labour intensity.

The household survey showed that the two households which purchase wood are those of a single male teacher and a single woman who has sufficient outside income. Amongst households with three six members, only two pure firewood, and both these were relatively better off and upper caste households. None of the bigger households with more than six members purchased wood. One possible reason is that a large family afford at least one member for the task of collection. The use of corresponds to the size of the household, and there is no significant difference between poorer and richer families which have the same number of members.

Daily Drudgery

In 86.3 per cent of the house-holds sampled, only the women went out to collect firewood. In three households, both men and women collected it while one house was that of a widower who had to do all the collection himself. Of the other three, two were bhotiya families, where collection does not take



A little girl carrying fodder

place daily.

On an average, the load of wood carried per trip was found to be 24.5 kilos with a range from 18 to 40 kilos though the majority carry at least 20 kilos. Women begin heavy work 15 to 20 days after childbirth and continue to carry loads even when they grow old.

For the village as a whole, the average distance to be travelled to collect firewood is 3.1 kilometres, which takes an average of four hours. However, the true picture is more diverse because the village is quite spread out and the distance to be traversed depends on how far the house is from the forest. It was found that in 51 percent of the households, collectors had to spend three to four hours in collection and travel a distance of three kilometres; 27.5 percent had to spend five to six hours, travelling a distance of four kilometres.

In more than 50 percent of households, a daily trip is made to collect wood. Each household on an average makes two trips in three days. Seasonal variations are noticeable because more wood is needed in winter. In some of the lean agricultural months like April, wood is collected oftener and is stored for use in monsoon months. Roughly, trips to collect wood are made on 263 days of the year.

The average consumption of kerosene is quite small, being 3.8 litres per household per month. Only four out of the 29 sample households use kerosene in stoves for cooking. The major use of kerosene is for lighting purposes. It was found that 6.8 percent of households use neither kerosene nor electricity for lighting but make ingenious use of the pine pith which burns like a candle and is collected from the forest.

Eight Hours To Collect Fuel

In Dwing, firewood serves as fuel for practically all domestic purposes. Most homes burn wood in an open *chulha*. Kerosene is used in small spirit lamps or petromax lanterns and serves about 90 percent of the lighting needs of the villagers. The traditional water



Women carrying fodder often look like walking trees

mill is used for grinding although roughly 25 per cent of the grinding of cereals is done by hand.

The household survey showed that here too the quantity of wood consumed varies directly with the size of the household. The quantity used in winter is generally double that used in summer. Keeping a fire burning all day and sitting around it provides the only source of warmth in the cold season.

None of the households in this village ever purchased any wood. In 75 percent of the households sampled, only the women went out to collect wood and in the remaining, both men and women undertook this task. Since there is no forest in the vicinity, people have to walk at least five kilometres on a steep uphill climb. It takes them anything from six to 10 hours. On an average 7.2 hours are spent in making one trip to the forest to collect wood. On each trip, an average of 25 kilos of wood is carried as a bundle on the back. For many of the villagers this is a daily chore. On an average, three trips are made every four days. This means that a trip to collect wood is made on 261 days of the year. Pine pith used for lighting purposes is also collected on these trips. A few poor households use only this for lighting their homes after dark.

Kerosene is used only for lighting

and not in cooking stoves. The consumption of kerosene per month per person equals 0.8 litres. The controlled price of kerosene is Rs 2 per litre but the effective cost to the villages is often higher. The kerosene is not always available in the nearest village market which is at Langsi, five kilometres away. Often, one has to go all the way to Joshimath, a distance of 20 kilometres, costing Rs 3 on the bus. An entire day is often spent on this trip. Thus the cost of one labour day is the cost of buying kerosene. These factors lead to a very parsimonious use of this fuel.

As is evident, these villages reflect the poor economic condition of the area, where people eke out an existence with tremendous effort. In many a household women spend eight hours just to collect firewood. When what is considered a normal working day all over the world ends, these women have only accomplished the first of their day's tasks.

The issue for study is how to arrive at a satisfactory balance between the divergent needs of increasing energy demands on the forest leading to denudation, lowering of the drudgery of women and diversifying the income base of the economy.

Possible Alternatives

What alternative fuels can be provided if one desires to curb the use

of firewood so as to reduce women's burden as well as forest denudation? One has to remember that the cash income of these villagers is very low, often nil, and hence an expensive commercial fuel has no place here. The prices of kerosene and cooking gas are rising fast. Electricity could be a viable alternative but generation is from faraway centres which leads to a relatively higher rate.

Gobar gas plant has been a much



talked of alternative. At first glance, the high level of cattle population per family seems to imply that sufficient dung would be available to run such

plants. But cow dung is the only form of manure used in the fields and the villagers are not keen to use it in any other.

In the long run, the most satisfactory measure seems the establishment of energy plantations. Firewood can continue to be a cheap energy resource if forests are managed by planting trees and cutting others in a regulated fashion.

Any improvement in agriculture or allied activities must first attempt to reduce the drudgery of hill women. One of the most back breaking tasks they perform is collection of firewood. Fuel and fodder collection as well as agriculture have traditionally been the province of women and this is likely to continue. Therefore their effectiveness in agriculture and dairying can increase only if these burdens are reduced. Men play a limited role in agriculture and hardly help at all in fuel and fodder collection.

On the other hand, due to few income earning opportunities for men in the villages, there is a large outflow of men to the plains. The men in the villages are underemployed.

Energy plantations will take eight or 10 years to mature, Rural electrification will also take some time. In the meanwhile, either kerosene or charcoal should be provided at reasonable rates under the Minimum Need Programme. There should also be an improved design or model of the *chulha* in

order to improve the efficiency of use of wood. Currently only five to 11 percent of energy is utilised in the *chulha*. The ideal



chulha should be smokeless, should be best suited for cooking, and should provide space heating since this is the only possibility of room heating.

There is no single magic formula, but the participation of the people in development and their own social organisation will be necessary for managing the energy supply system in an ecologically sound manner.

(condensed from an Indian Social Studies Trust paper presented at a seminar on Women's Work And Employment)

March 8 Celebrations Reports Received So Far

Calcutta

Some groups held a programme to celebrate in the central hall of the book fair. Songs, skits, recitations on themes like dowry, bride burning, resistance, were presented. Another group took a demonstration to Esplanade, where they sang songs and staged a street corner play. Several groups had put up a stall called *Aajker Nari* (Today's Woman).

-Dayita Dutta

Patna

A torchlight procession, a cultural programme and meetings were held. A discussion on "Women in the mass media" was held in a women's college.

-Manimala

Bombay

The Forum Against Oppression of Women celebrated March 8 by presenting cultural programmes depicting atrocities on women. Stri Mukti Sanghatana staged a play and

some women spoke on the work their groups were doing. The Forum put forward five demands with regard to atrocities: banning of amniocentesis tests for sex determination, introducing a central legislation against violence, changes in the rape and dowry acts, family courts for women and housing for single women. When women of the Mahila Sangharsh Vahini tried to burn obscene posters and advertisements, the policemen attempted to stop them. However, the women emerged victorious and the posters were set ablaze: In Pune too, women processionists tore up obscene cinema hoardings.

Hyderabad

On March 8, we held a public meeting, at which all those who participated in the Telangana armed struggle were invited to share their experiences with us. We feel that women's participation in such struggles has such a historic significance for those of us who are working to build a women's movement, hence we are taking this occasion to celebrate this participation.

—**Stree Shakti Sanghatan**

Delhi

We held a women's meeting at Qudsia Garden, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. to share experiences, to stage plays and to sing songs around women's issues. We feel that awareness on the women's question is spreading, that many women have struggled to resist oppression and to build new lives of dignity for themselves. Many women have also organised to fight against wife beating, and sexual harassment, and to demand employment rights. On this occasion, we can share our experiences of struggle and resistance.

—**Saheli, Ankur, Sankalp, Sabla Mahila Sangh, Dahej Virodhi Mahila Samiti, Committee for portrayal of women in the media.**

We held a meeting at Talkatora Stadium, which was addressed by women belonging to many leading organisations, and also by the prime minister.

—**Indian committee for international women's decade.**

Chandigarh

An ad hoc committee to celebrate international women's day celebrated the occasion for the fourth consecutive year. Since a procession was not allowed due to disturbed conditions in the region, a street play in Hindi, entitled *Cheekh*, by Kumar Vikal, was staged by women college students in the university.

The play depicts various forms of women's oppression such as child widowhood, rape, commercial exploitation of women's body and dowry deaths. It called for women to unite and struggle.

—**Pritam**

Nepal

Meetings were held at Kathmandu,

Pokhra, Bhairava, Vutwal and other places. The main emphasis was on the demand for political freedom in Nepal since women cannot move ahead in an atmosphere of political repression. We also protested against the police firing on pilgrims at Piskar, and police rape and murder of two women a few months ago.

—**D.Panthi**

Ahmedabad

All the women's organisations—AIWC, SEWA, AWAG, Chingari, Janvadi Mahila Morcha, Vishamta Niimulan

Parishad, Vikas Gruha and Jyoti Sangh, came together and organised a seminar on "Women and family violence." Representatives of the social welfare board, the police and radio and TV were also present. Various suggestions were made for ensuring an objective investigation into cases of wife murder. A street play was performed by Chingari. It was based on a recent case of wife burning in a middle class family. Three more performances of this play have been held so far

—**Sonal Mehta**

Judgement Reserved

Contempt Case Against Women's Organisations in Delhi

When Delhi high court judge R. N. Aggarwal acquitted the three accused in the Sudha Goel murder case, thus reversing the judgement of sessions court judge S.M. Aggarwal, who had found them guilty of murdering Sudha and had sentenced them to death, several women's organisations staged a protest demonstration in the premises of the high court, on November 7, 1983.

S. K. Dutta filed a petition against three of the women's organisations, Janvadi Mahila Samiti, Karmika and Mahila Dakshata Samiti. He accused them of the criminal offence of bringing the court into contempt. The charge was that by their speeches and slogans, the demonstrators had sought to impute motives to the judges, and had undermined the authority and lowered the dignity of the court. The three defendants argued their cases separately. It seemed a pity that the organisations refused to have a joint defence even though the demonstration had been jointly organised.

R.K. Garg, advocate for Manila Dakshata Samit, argued that the organisations were criticising the system, not an individual judge, and that their indignation was justified, since the system has failed to give justice to women: "We have utmost faith in the judges for judging according to their values but these

values fail to render justice to women. New norms have to be evolved." Pointing out that it is the right of every citizen to comment on all matters of public interest, he argued that highly educated people who write articles strongly criticising certain judgements are not normally sued for contempt of court. Does this mean that the uneducated and the illiterate have no right publicly to voice their criticism which may take the form of demonstrations and slogan shouting? To refuse to tolerate injustice is our duty under the Constitution. As far as imputing motives to judges is concerned, he enquired whether judgements are to be ascribed to motiveless malignity? However, towards the end, it was unfortunate that he made a shift in his stand. Instead of emphasising the right of criticism he requested the court to "ignore, by a majestic liberalism, trivial and venial offences. The dogs may bark, the caravan goes on."

Rita Karat, general secretary of Janvadi Mahila Samiti, arguing on behalf of her organisation, said that criticism of courts must be looked at in the social context. She pointed out that Sudha's husband and in-laws were acquitted in a situation when a woman is reported burnt to death every 12 hours, but convictions occur only in three percent of cases. She said that her organisation is different from many

others in that it works among toiling women, and it struggles against dowry as part of a broader movement to eliminate the oppression of women. This stress on the "difference" of her organisation seemed unnecessary and irrelevant to the legal case. Also, this was a moment to display solidarity, not

to stress differences. She pointed out that the demonstration was peaceful and disciplined and that there was no intention to lower the authority of the court. On the other hand, public debate plays a major role in expanding the concept of justice thereby reinforcing the authority of the court.

Justices Sachar and Sen, who heard the case, seemed sympathetic to the women's cause, but constrained by the letter of the law to hold the defendants guilty of contempt of court. However, when passing strictures, they reserved judgement and refrained from awarding any penalty.

A Letter From A Mother

MY only daughter Poonam, aged 25 when she died, was married to Dr Vinod Sharma, son of Dr Devraj Sharma, resident of 22 Warren Ganj, Sipri Bazar, Jhansi, on July 5, 1981. The father of the boy had insisted that we go to Jhansi to perform the marriage, thereby putting financial strain on us. After marriage, they were not happy with what we gave in dowry, and we had to change the furniture to their liking. For two and a half years after this, we were pestered to give them something or other including a scooter. In November 1983, Rs 10,000 was demanded which we could not pay. My son-in-law quarrelled with my daughter often thereafter.

On March 2, 1984, we were informed that our daughter was dead. The news was conveyed to us 12 hours after the discovery of her dead body by her father-in-law. On reaching Jhansi, we discovered that Poonam's body had already been sent for post mortem. When we asked Dr Devraj Sharma how Poonam had died, he said: "As a routine, it was Poonam who used to serve me a cup of bed tea. On March 2, only my son Vinod with his one and a half year old son came to wish me good morning. I enquired why Poonam had not come. My son told me that he had had a fight with Poonam the previous night and he woke her up in the morning but she did not get up. I asked him angrily to tell me what was the matter. To this my son replied that she had gone to heaven as he had killed her by strangling her. I rushed to

Poonam's room and found her body on the bed... To the police, Vinod disclosed that from the day of marriage he was under tension from Poonam, and as on the previous day she had refused to polish his shoes immediately, he had killed her in the night by strangling her with his belt. Prior to the act of strangulation, he had administered to his wife a heavy dose

and civil officials of Jhansi. Although the accused is in the custody of the police, we fear that he may be bailed out shortly. His release is likely to cause tampering with evidence and he may go scot free. As it is, the police doing exactly as they are being told by the family, so much so even the viscera is not being for analysis after the post mortem to ascertain the dose of Calmpose. Thus very valuable evidence is likely to be destroyed.

We want the case to be transferred to a court outside Jhansi and a through



Poonam with her husband Vinod Sharma who is accused of having murdered her

of Calmpose powdered and put into empty capsules, as she was taking anticonception pills every night on the prescription of a doctor."

The family of Vinod Kumar is a very rich and influential one. The boy's father has a practice of over a quarter of a century. They know all the police

investigation to be conducted, preferably by the CBI. We also want the medical licence of the Sharmas to be withdrawn and their clinic to be closed down. The accused should not be released on bail as his release would endanger other lives.

-Devinder Kaur, Delhi