

By RAJSHEKHAR PANT

Indeed, the strict conservation measures undertaken over the decades on the part of the Reserve Management in Nanda Devi area have paid dividends. Introduction of a wide range of modern means and facilities to improve the quality of life undoubtedly has reduced the drudgery on the part of the womenfolk, in particular. They now have enough time for their 'Mahila Mangal Dals' and self-help groups. These organisations under the leadership of local women have been playing vital roles in supplementing the family income and making the community aware of their rights and duties.

Agriculture hasn't traditionally been an important part of economy here. The fields, however, are greener now with the crops of Jambu-Faran, Kala-Jeera, Kut, Hatthajari and Choru. Earlier, these medicinal plants, spices and condiments were collected from alpine areas and the wild alone.

The locals, however, have their own grievances. Their traditional cyclic system of grazing and collecting the herbs within the well-defined limits - in operation till the enforcement of restriction by the reserve authorities - has become a tale of days gone by. The wool based cottage industry was then the mainstay of the economy and each household happened to have a substantial number of

sheep. With the restriction in grazing in the Reserve, the number of sheep has dwindled quite substantially, eroding the very base of the regional economy. Ironically, from the land of Chipko also rose the call of 'Chheeno-Jhapto' or forcing entry into the core zones of the reserve by the villagers with their herds of cattle.

Killing the wild animals as they feed on livestock and the farm produce, or even firing dummy shots to drive them away, is not at all allowed in these buffer zone settlements. A blanket ban is there on all mountaineering activities which really had prospered and enriched this region before 1982. Old-timers, here, still have fond memories of the days when mountaineers from the European countries happened to flock to their villages for camping and hiring porters and guides.

It is heartening that, of late, the managers of the reserve area have started taking note of the problems of the local community. Their grievances are gradually being redressed. Commissioning of a carding center has been a well thought of decision by the authorities to restore the traditional wool based industry in this region. The nearest centre from here, earlier, happened to be over sixty kilometres away at Chamoli. It is a pleasure to see the veteran fingers on carpet looms getting busy once again and passing on

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to the young ones the skills and designs perfected over the generation.

Introduction of micro-plans by the reserve authorities has indeed been a laudable step to instill in the villagers the confidence that the reserve is for their development. The village community now discusses among themselves and also with the authorities problems and issues pertaining to development.

The GB Pant Institute of

Himalayan Environment and development – an autonomous body of Ministry of Environment and Forest has for long been carrying out scientific and action research in the buffer zone villages. The scientists of the institute are of the opinion that because of the vast area, dissected terrain, and the limitations of manpower and resources, the existing institutional setup is not fully competent to strike a desirable balance between exploitation and regeneration. They have also been into people-policy, conflict and possible options of conflict resolution. Such analysis and efforts have gone a long way in influencing the designing of strategies for sustainable development of the villages and the conservation and management of the NDBR.

This institute, with its model setups in the buffer zone villages, has been popularising the cultivation of herbs and value addition in non-timber forest and farm produce of the region. It has also been an articulate votary of developing eco-tourism in the inner reaches of the sanctuary.

Nanda, the Goddess of Bliss and Contentment, has been the anchor sheet of life in these hills. The beliefs of the people here, their values and ways of life, have their roots in this ancient cult that





has taught them to see an essential oneness between themselves and the nature that surrounds them.

The Biosphere Reserve named after the Goddess, cradling this treasure-trove of diversity, does also speak of strengthening the structure of social, economic and cultural development within the periphery of the environment. This unanimity of purpose & approach of the Managers of the Reserve, on the one hand, and the local inhabitants, on the other, is indeed the greatest strength of this Biosphere Reserve.

Institutions ensuring conservation of resources and prosperity of the populace that depends on it always emerge from grassroots, .... People in this land of Nanda, ... of eternal hope, .... definitely know it better than others, ..... because these mountains do not only surround them they also constitute an integral part of their entire being.

*Yea, in my mind these mountains rise*

*Their perils dyed with evening's rose;*

*And still my ghost sits at my eyes*

*And thirsts of their untroubled snows.*

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