CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 SCHEME OF THE THESIS

This is a study of attitude of people towards Women's Education in Chamoli Garhwal. The report is presented in six broad chapters: Introduction, The Problem and Related Issues, Survey of Related Literature, Design of the Study, Organisation and Analysis of Data, Summary and Conclusion. To facilitate presentation, several sections and subsections have been used to suit the needs of the contexts. To save space and simplify typing, a cross reference system of citation from the body of the report to the Bibliography has been used in place of footnotes (Mouli, 1964; Rummel, 1964). In the body of the report, the author's name and the year of publication of the material have been put in parenthesis for reference to sources.

In case of quotations, specific page or pages have been referred to by the page number or numbers preceded by 'p' or 'pp'. When the author's name has already been mentioned, the year of the publication of the material and the specific page or pages, if any, have been put in parenthesis just after the name. The Bibliography has been arranged alphabetically.

The present chapter in particular presents overview on Women's status and education in contemporary India and an introduction to the different aspects of Chamoli Garhwal.

1.2 WOMEN'S STATUS IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

India is a land of diversity; a land of many lands; a people of many peoples; a land of long history, partly documented and mostly shrouded in mystery; and a culture of many cultures of long past. It is very difficult to describe in a nutshell, her women in all their perspectives. Srinivas (1978; p 7) very aptly observed, "It (the changing position of Indian Women) has many facets and generalization is well nigh impossible because of the existence of considerable variation among regions, between rural and urban areas, among classes and finally among different religious, ethnic and caste groups. While in certain contexts, the Indian subcontinent is a single cultural region, in many others it is heuristically more rewarding to look upon it as a congeries of micro-regions, the differences between which are crucial."
According to Thapar (1975; p 6) "Within the Indian subcontinent there have been infinite variations on the status of women, diverging according to cultural milieu, family structure class, caste, property rights and morals". Indian society has in some parts of the country, matrilineal values (e.g. Kerala in the south, Meghalaya in the north-east), in some polyandric, (e.g. Himachal Pradesh & some parts of Garhwal) while in the major part it has the patriarchal values. Further, there are Muslim women, Christian women or the women of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. They live in qualitatively different social settings. Thus, it is very difficult to construct a profile of Indian women.

In 1971, the Government of India appointed the 'Committee on the Status of Women in India' (CSWI) to undertake a "comprehensive examination of all the questions relating to the rights and status of women" in the context of "changing social and economic conditions in the country" and new problems relating to the advancement of women. The Report pointed out, that the hierarchical structure of Indian Society, with its diverse and complex socio economic institutions, organizational patterns and cultural values that sanctify such institutions and patterns makes it difficult for uniform strategies to be equally effective with different groups. Thus, legal reform, education and political rights - the three instruments designed by free India to realize women's rights to equality - had failed to benefit the large masses of women affected by problems of poverty, unemployment, powerlessness, overwork and illiteracy (Women in India, 1985).

In the post independence period (i.e. after 1947) Indian Society has undergone some changes in many of its facets. This change is conspicuous among middle class educated women, particularly in large urban areas. They work and move freely and leave an impressions that Indian Women's status has undergone a substantial improvement. Further they are capable, efficient and powerful and at times are found with political clout.

"But", as pointed out Desai and Krishnaraj (1990, p 39) "in small towns or rural areas or in city slums, women still suffer social and economic oppression. In small towns and villages, upper caste women even today are confined to have home bound activities, and are involved in responsibilities and interests, limited only to their kin and kin. The growing instances of suffering socially and economically by women of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes generate despair, frustration and expose the interturning of caste, class and gender forces. The back-breaking drudgery of house work by women as well as the long hours spent in activities like fetching water and bringing firewood are known to all".
In the post independence period, the Government of India directed social change on three directions: guaranteed formal sex equality in the constitution, planned economic development with emphasis on industrialization and enactment of several laws pertaining to women's welfare like the Hindu Law, the Inheritance Act, the Termination of Pregnancy Act, the Maternity Benefit Act, the Dowry - Prohibition Act, etc., to give relief in some cases, to all women irrespective of caste, creed or religion. Women's cells have been established and Ministry for Women's Affairs have been created. Lastly, in order to involve women, irrespective of religion or region in the political process at the grassroot level, one third of the seats in every Grampanchayat (self government body elected at the village level) has been reserved for women.

India's emphasis on being a social welfare state had salutary impact on women's status and role. In 1953, a Central Social Welfare Board was created with a nationwide programme for promoting welfare and development services for women, children and underprivileged groups. The Board has its State counterparts and all these encouraged the growth of a larger number of women's Organisation and also provided status and position to many active women social workers.

All these measures undoubtedly have gone to raise status of women, recognize their values and consider them as contributory counterpart for the males. There have been more opportunity for middle class and upper class women to go in for higher education as also, remunerative jobs, traditional or non-traditional and sometimes for decision making posts.

These measures, however, failed to generate universal impact. Patriarchal values and normative structure established some two thousand years ago, still persist, in a different form among the majority of the Indians. Motherhood and the ideal of a faithful, self-sacrificing wife are propagated through the media as also the education system. The position of women is, as has been, traditionally that of a dependant, first on parents, then on husband and later on, on sons. Women's subjugation is indicated through adverse sex ratio of girls, (946 women per 1000 males in 1961, 930 in 1971 and 933 in 1981) and the growing domestic violence, alarming number of dowry deaths and rape cases (Women in India, 1985).

There is now a growing awareness that men and women suffer from discrimination and deprivation. The problems of educated urban women become more serious since the discrimination and disabilities operate in a more subtle and covert way. Thus, the duel existence of women holding high positions and yet undergoing various types of suffering continues. One very hopeful development which has occurred during the last ten years, is the emergence of a women's movement wherein women have started raising their voice against inequality, patriarchal values and inequalitarian social structure (Desai & Krishnaraj, 1990).
1.3 WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA

From the beginning of the movement for women's status, education has been defined as the major instrument for this change. With the acceptance of gender equality in the constitution, the principle of 'Equality of Access to Education' for men and women was accepted by national planners. The social reformers working for women's welfare sincerely believed that in the gigantic task of transformation of society, if women are given education, it would not only appreciate the changes taking place in society, but would also collaborate in hastening the process of change.

In spite of fervent pleas made by social reformers and certain measures taken by the Government, there still remains a wide gap between the avowed goal of equality of access to education.

The gender lines in the spread of education are quite evident in 1981, over 45 percent of the girls in the 6 - 11 age group, over 75 percent of the girls in the 12 - 14 age group and over 85 percent of the girls in the 15 - 17 age group were out of school as compared to 20 percent, 57 percent and 71 percent of boys in the respective age groups (Desai, 1990).

In spite of the fact that India's literacy rate increased from 29.5 percent in 1971 to 36.2 percent in 1981 and to 52.11 percent in 1991, the overall figure of literacy is still low. So is the female literacy rate compared to that of males. In 1971, the female literacy rate was 18.7 percent as against 39.82 percent for males. In 1981, it was 24.82 percent as against 46.9 percent for males, and in 1991, 39.42 percent as against 63.86 percent (Census of India, 1981, Census Diary, U.P, 1991).

The problem of female education gets compounded with regional and rural-urban imbalance. In Kerala, for example, female literacy was as high as 72.2 percent in urban areas and 64.3 percent in rural areas, whereas in Rajasthan, the female urban literacy rate was 34.5 percent and female rural literacy rate was only 5.5 percent. The female literacy rate was lower than the All India figure in states like Jammu and Kashmir, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh (Women in India, 1985).

In the rural areas, only 25.8 percent of the girls in the age group 5 to 9 years were enrolled in schools, as against 55.6 percent in urban areas. The corresponding figures in the age group 10 to 14 years were 44.3 percent and 65.6 percent respectively. The inter-state differences are significant. In Kerala, 83.1 percent of the girls in the age group 10 to 14 years were enrolled in rural areas as against only 10.4 percent in Rajasthan. The overall school enrollment ratio for girls was below the All-India level (37.5 percent) in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. Thus, in regard to the overall literacy rate and the female literacy rate in particular, large tracts of India calls for special attention and massive schooling programmes (Desai, 1990).
To add more to the problem, there is the issue of retention. Mere enrolment does not tell the whole truth. Desai and Krishnaraj (1990) think that before primary schooling is over, well over 50 percent of those enrolled, leave the system.

Besides regional and rural urban differences, gender bias is visible in the courses taken, particularly at the higher educational level. Even though the 1991 Census data are not available in all details, the 1981 Census data provide us with some striking facts which seem to persist even today.

These basic obstacles in Women's Education seem to have their roots in the social structure and its values in some of the instruments created for change. For example, early reformists stated that the objectives of Women's Education were confined to developing efficiency in performing their traditional roles. Over the years, due to a variety of factors, education for future economic participation and for the widening of knowledge have been accepted as additional objectives of Women's Education. It may be mentioned that objectives of education are different for different classes. They are also dependent on levels of education. In short, social roles of girls define their educational needs and goals. Education is valued only for its instrumental value. So far as it equips a woman to get a job or helps widen knowledge, it has significance. But it does not enable a girl student to build up a challenging mind which question unfair social practices or defy traditional customs. (Desai and Krishnaraj, 1990).
1.4 A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO CHAMOLI GARHWAL

The name 'Garhwal' is usually explained as the "Country of Forts". This region lies in the north-western tip of the state of Uttar Pradesh in India. From time immemorial the region of Garhwal has been esteemed holy by the Hindus. The ancient Sanskrit classics contain many references to this region. The 'Vishnu Purana', the 'Mahabharat' and the 'Varahsamhita' mention a number of tribes dwelling in the area. Little is known about Garhwal except that it remained unaffected by Muslim invasion.

(Dabral S.C. 1967, Pg. 54)

The royal houses of Garhwal claim to be descended from the famous 'Salivahana' dynasty. In 1597, the reigning ruler of Garhwal, Mahipati Sah established his capital at Srinagar (different from Srinagar in Kashmir) and consolidated his rule over the entire region of Garhwal. His successor Prithi Sah continued the rule over Garhwal till 1664. Descendents of the 'Sah' family continued their rule in Garhwal till 1772. After that, their hold over some areas weakened, as they failed to provide protection to their people from the Gujjar and Sikh marauders. Around 1805, the Nepalis, took control of Garhwal. The next ten years saw a turbulent period of violence, aggression and ruthless suppression of Garhwalis by the Nepalis. In 1815, the Nepali rule in Garhwal came to an end, when the British wrested powers from them and established their resident in Garhwal. The Resident, William Fraser, declared the eastern tract between rivers Mandakini and Alakananda as "Region under British". The region was then divided into two parts: British Garhwal and Tehri Garhwal (Walton, 1910).

Years after independance, in 1961, British Garhwal was divided into two districts, Chamoli and Pauri.

Chamoli Garhwal, like the rest of the region of Garhwal, consists of a succession of steep mountain ridges divided from each other by deep glens. It is confined entirely within the Himalayan mountain system. Chamoli Garhwal lies between Latitude 29° - 2' & 30°-15' and between East Longitude 78°-10' and 79°-10', it covers 9168 square kilometers and its population in 1991 was 442000.

(U.P. Census Diary 1991, Pg. 48)

On the north, the snowy ranges separate Chamoli from Tibet. On the south, Chamoli is bounded by Pauri and Almora districts. On the east, its boundary runs along Almora for some distance and thereafter, along Pithoragarh to the west. To the west it is bounded by Uttarkashi and Tehri districts. Chamoli is one of the three border districts of Uttar Pradesh, the other two being Uttarkashi and Pithoragarh. Together, these three border districts constitute the Uttarkhand division, which is recognised by the Government of India as a backward region.

(State Bank of India, Lead Scheme, 1975, Pg. 1)
Chamoli Garhwal is dotted with rivers and high peaks. The Alakananda, Pinder and Mandakini are the main rivers of Chamoli. The main mountain peaks in the district are Badrinath (7138 metres), Nanda Devi (7817 metres), Kamet (7856 metres), Trishul (7190) metres and Draupadigiri (7060 metres).

For administrative purposes, Chamoli District has been divided into four Tehsils: Joshimath, Karnprayag, Chamoli and Ukhimath. Concrete roads link the main towns—Joshimath, Karnprayag, Chamoli, Gopeswar, Ukhimath and Gauchar, while most of the villages still have bridle paths for communication. There are no railways for communication, and the nearest railhead is at Rishikesh at a distance of 226 Kilometres from Chamoli. At the end of 1972, the district was being served by 651 Kilometres of concrete metalled roads and 1960 Km. of bridle path. None of the rivers is navigable, and only timber is floated down these rivers. There are ninety villages in Joshimath Tehsil. Eight hundred and eight villages in Karnprayag Tehsil, four hundred and thirteen villages in Chamoli Tehsil and three hundred and twenty-five villages in Ukhimath Tehsil (State Bank Lead Scheme, 1975).

Wheat and Rice are the staple foods in the districts. The cultivated area is 23.98% of the total rural area, of which only 6.15% is irrigated. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people in the district. During 1961, 86.3% of the working force was engaged in agriculture and allied activities. The heavy reliance on agriculture is due to other sectors being less developed. Employment opportunities in non-agricultural sector are limited and unremunerative. In 1971, there were 745 literates who were unemployed (State Bank Lead Scheme, 1975).

The main crops of Garhwal are wheat, barley, paddy, maize, "mandua" and "Jhingore" (Warse millets). Livestock plays a vital role in the economic condition of the people of the district.

The population of Chamoli Garhwal consists mainly of Hindus, and just a smattering of Christians, Sikhs and Jains or Muslim. The rural population consists of "Bith" or upper castes and "Dom" or schedule or lower caste. The Biths are subdivided into Brahmins, Khasbrahmin and Rajputs. The Brahmins are further divided into Sarolas and Sangaris. The 'Doms' are the aborigines of the country. They are found living in a state of servitude. The "Baniyas" are found in the various small bazaars throughout the district. Then, there are the Garhwali "Bhotiyes" who inhabit the Niti and Mana passes in the higher altitudes. In 1981, there were 362,193 Hindus of which 62,886 belong to scheduled tribes, 15,61 Muslims, 109 Christians, 301 Sikhs and 182 Buddhists in Chamoli (Ref. UP Census Diary 1991, Pg. 36) Chamoli district has been declared educationally backward by the Supreme Court of India (Galenter Marc, 1984, P 228), on account of lack of educational facilities and inaccessibility of the region. According to the 1971 Census of India, there were just 503 Junior Basic Schools, 44 Senior Basic Schools, 23 Higher Secondary Schools and 2 Colleges in the entire Chamoli district. The literacy rate in Chamoli in 1971 was 28.13 percent. This rose to 37.46 percent in
1981. In 1981, the female literacy rate was 18.34 percent as against 57.40 percent for males (UP Census Diary, 1991).

1.41 WOMEN’S STATUS IN CHAMOLI

Some of the peculiar customs of Garhwal have their origin in the low local status of the women. The Census returns show excess of about 10% of married females over married males. Unlike the plains of India, Wives are "paid" for by the respective grooms. Formerly, the transaction was held to create a transferable right in the person of the women acquired.

In Garhwal, women, except in respect of their possibilities as agricultural labourers, are held in rather low esteem. They do nearly all the field work except the actual ploughage. They sow, weed and reap, and between harvests are fully employed in the carrying of fuel and fodder from the neighbouring hill. Female education can hardly be said to be popular, as the hillman says that girls are too valuable to waste their time over books and learning. They have plenty of work in the way of carrying grass and wood. A Garhwali woman starts her day at 4 a.m. at dawn when she cooks for the entire family, then goes to work at the fields and then in the evening, again performs the household charges, thus leaving no time for herself to have any leisure pursuits, let alone studying. It is important to mention here that the economy of the district is heavily dependent upon female participation. The percentage of female workers to female population (61 percent) is more than that of male workers to male population (56 percent).

1.42 A TYPICAL VILLAGE OF CHAMOLI

Most of the villages of Chamoli are situated on terraced lands occupying the steep surrounding hillsides. The houses are generally scattered for almost half a mile along the south-east contour. Some houses are two storeyed with an outside stone stairway and a narrow shelf like porch extending the length of the house at the second floor level. The rooms are entered by doorways off the verandah and have small barred windows for ventilation and light. Verandahs, doors and windows open on the front, which is almost invariably the downhill side. The backs and often, the ends of the houses are entirely closed. The family occupies the second floor, its animals the first. Every family has the necessary agricultural tools of its trade. In general, high caste houses are larger and better equipped than others. Wealth, to some extent, is reflected in the house and its contents. Household furnishings are low and simple. One or two of the inner rooms contain hearths for cooking. Brass and iron cooking utensils, a wooden churn, wooden vessels for storage of liquids, and large baskets and wooden cupboards for storage of dry goods are also found in these rooms. In poorer houses, light is given by small oil lamps. Some of the villages are now provided with electricity and water (Dharmar R.G. 1963).
The poverty of Garhwalis is proverbial but this reputation is based on their frugality. The simple clothing and equipment they possess, and their inelegant and varied diet, consisting of rice or coarse millets, vegetables grown at home, and Jhinjora. They have sufficient lands, regular rainfall and a tradition of maintaining the productivity of their fields by crop rotation and fertilizers, so that they have a consistently adequate food supply.

Over 80 percent of village marriages take place outside the village, that is, the bride comes or goes to an alien village. This is because girls and boys from the same village are considered brothers and sisters. For example, the village Dimmer in Chamoli consists of people with a common surname "Dimri". All people with this surname are considered to be, in some way or the other, related, and marriage amongst Dimris of Dimmer village is therefore taboo. This practice of marriage in alien villages results in close ties and contacts between people of different villages (Researcher's experience in Dimmer, Chamoli).

The subsistence base of most Indian villages is agriculture closely related to agriculture is animal husbandry. The functional unit in these villages is the joint family. Goods are produced, distributed and consumed primarily by the household unit, and any relevant economic decisions are made by the elders in the household. The household is ideally a patriarchal extended family under the leadership of the eldest active male. Non-agricultural castes and families tend to be divided into more and smaller independent units, than are agriculturists. Since agriculture is the basis of livelihood in villages, land is of utmost importance. The traditional economy of the village is based upon dry land grain, agriculture, and dietary staples are grown on dry lands in amounts exceeding consumption rates.

The supernatural is almost as pervasive in the minds of the villagers as in the natural. Difficulty of any crop failure, ailing animals, economic reversal, loss of properties, persistent family troubles, disease, sterility, stillbirth hysteria and death - is attributed ultimately to fate or machinations of supernatural beings. These supernatural beings who affect humans, range from capricious spirits, malevolent ghosts and ancestral spirits to household, village and regional Gods. On another level, is a general belief in inevitable fate, controlled by a remote, impersonal and ultimate supreme deity called Bhagwan or Narayan. To him is attributed almost any event or circumstance worthy of notice and beyond immediate human control. Disappointments are always rationalized in terms of fate, as determined by misdeeds in previous lives. Low caste status is always attributed to misdeeds in previous lives. After a birth, a Brahmin is called to read the horoscope of the new born. The Brahmin is, with the help of horoscope, supposed to tell with accuracy all that has befallen an individual in his past life and all that will befall him in the present and future lives.
As an economic activity, so in religious worship, the extended family is the most significant element of social organization. Gods indigenous to the village are referred to as "Ghar-ka devta or Kul devta, and are thereby distinguished from Gods of other villages. Any God to whom local people are devoted is called Isht-Devta. The worship of Gods is usually done under the supervision of a local Brahmin Priest.

Three events in the lives of all individuals are reinforced by the family and community with ritual performance. These are: birth, marriage and death.

The birth of a son is announced by distributing sugar lumps to friends and relatives on the day of birth. A girl's birth is not formally proclaimed. On the 10th day after a child's birth, a Brahmin is called to prepare his/her horoscope, and give the child a name.

In Garhwali weddings, the groom's family takes the initiative in arranging the marriage. The traditional form of Garhwali marriage involves a bride price: i.e. the family of the groom pays an agreed upon sum in cash to the family of the bride. Of late of course, even bride's families pay dowries like their counterparts in other parts of India even though dowry is seldom demanded. The gifts given by the bride groom to a bride's family is known as "Bar-dali". Rajputs and Brahmin males are initiated into adulthood with the ceremonies of investiture with the sacred thread called Janehu. They are then said to be twice born. Normally this ceremony takes place in the groom's village as part of the pre-marriage ceremonies.

In the event of a death in a family, the eldest son or an equivalent male relative performs the duties of chief mourner. During the ceremonies, the Brahmin performs Pujas, directs the chief mourner in his duties and receives charity. A widow cannot take an active part in birth or marriage ceremonies. She is also not allowed to wear gold, nose ornaments (which is considered a symbol of marriage) for at least a year after her husband's death. A married woman's death is observed only in the village of her husband and by the family of her husband. A widow is allowed to marry again. The custom of polygamy used to exist in the villages of Garhwal, though in the present times such a custom is rarely practised. According to Atkinson (Gazetteer Garhwal, 1882) the custom of polygamy in earlier times, probably arose from the great difficulty there was in cultivating the large amount of waste land. Wives were procured to help in field work.

Even though Divorce is seldom practised, it does exist in cases of some couples who do not get well together. They go through a procedure called "Chhut" which breaks the marriage bond. In such cases, an adhoc panchayat or council of friends of both parents act as intermediary. A much more common type of divorce and virtually the only type among low castes, occurs when a wife goes to her parents home or to another man, and refuses to return, or a husband sends her home. Causes of divorce are generally failure
to fulfill the formal and informal obligations of marriage, nonpayment of bride price, mental or physical defects in a partner, or failure of a bride to perform household duties or get along with her in-laws (Berraman B.D., 1963).

Having children, especially sons is very important in Garhwali families as it is in the rest of India. The son not only helps with the work, but also inherits the fathers property and performs the necessary rites associated with the death of his parents. If a man has no sons, the land does not revert to others but stays in the lineage of his wife, or passes to his daughter if he designates her so.

Thus, in any village of Garhwal, even though a woman has to heavier load of work and responsibilities to cope with, it is a man who is regarded as the important member of a family.

1.43 INTRA FAMILY RELATIONS

The eldest active male is the household head. This man is in the relationship of father or elder brother to other members in the family. He is responsible for all the decisions in the family, and is the final authority. In most instances the family head acts on family matters after consulting with other males and often his wife as well, but this is not necessary, nor prescribed. When an old man becomes senile, or when he dies, he is replaced by the next in line. Among brothers in a family, age takes precedence. The mother has the honour and respect of sons and daughters. She retains authority over sons as they reach maturity.

The relationship between the patriarchal family and the wives who have joined it from outside is ideally one of a cohesive group taking in a stranger. The bride comes in to critically appraised by the elders. She must prove herself by her good works. The new wife finds herself at the bottom of a well established hierarchy. She often does not know her husband and in any event, his loyalties and responsibilities are first to the family. She is under the direct authority of her mother-in-law and the wives of her husband’s elder brothers. She shows respect by never using the names of the males and elder females in the family, by never talking loudly or laughing to their faces. As time passes and a wife proves her value as a contributory member of the family through her industry and skill and especially by producing children, her position becomes increasingly secure. As younger sisters-in-law come in, her authority increases.

Marriage is an important event in a man’s life too, but it isn’t as traumatic, in terms of adjustment and change of life style, as it is for a woman. A man’s social situation changes little. That his responsibilities are somewhat increased, is recognized in the vows he makes at marriage. The relationship of a wife to husband is ideally one of devotion, service and respect. The husband is referred to by his wife as ‘Malik’, owner or simply ‘man’. He makes the decisions and gives the orders, though in reality a
wife may exercise as much influence as their personalities allow, and the henpecked husband is a familiar concept.

A wife shows her respect for the husband by catering to and anticipating his wishes. She will look after him, hear and care for his children, keep his house and do all the necessary household work in the fields and forest (Berreman GD, 1963).

Widows are not expected to retire from public life as is the ideal among the women in the plains of U.P. Garhwali widows mourn their husbands during the thirteen day mourning period, and many do so for a year. They take off their nose rings and do not wear it again till they have remarried. Sati (burning on husband's pyre) was apparently never practised in the mountain areas, unlike in the plains of India.

Caste system is prevalent in Chamoli as is the case in the rest of the India, with the Brahmins considered the most superior caste.

1.44 TOWNS OF CHAMOLI

All the towns of Chamoli have been treated as urban for the first time in 1971 Census.

All the towns have protected water supply and road lighting arrangements, while most of the villages still remain without electricity.

The main towns of Chamoli district are Chamoli, Chopta, Karanprayag and Gopeswar. The town of Chamoli is a pilgrim shelter and collection of shops situated in Patti Talli Basoii on the left bank of Alakananda river. Since 1889, it has been the headquarters of the Deputy Collector in charge of the northern subdivision. The place is also known as Lalsanga, meaning red bridge, as the wood on the bridge was colored red.

Chopta is a halting place on the route between Chamoli and Ukhimath. It consists merely of a collection of huts in a glade of a forest with a rest-house, and is 18 miles from Chamoli and 11 miles from Ukhimath. From Chopta, there is a perfect view of the line of hills lying above the route to Kedarnath, and of Chaukhamba and Kedarnath peaks.

Karanprayag is one of the five sacred confluences of Alakananda river, where the latter absorbs the river Pinder. The Prayag is situated on the left bank of the Alakananda just where the two rivers meet, while the market is on the left bank of the river Pinder, approached from the other side by a suspension bridge of 221 feet span. The town of Karanprayag is situated 11 miles from Nandprayag and the name is derived from Raja Karna, who according to the epic "Manasa-Khand", worshipped the Sun God here, and received from him whatever he desired. The town's elevation is 2300 feet above sea level.
2300 feet above sea level.

The headquarters of Chamoli district lies in Gopeswar. The town of Gopeswar is 13 miles from Chopta, and is situated on the left bank of the Balasuti stream, a tributary of the Alaknanda. Gopeswar possesses a fairly flourishing Girls' School (District Gazettes, 1910).

It is in these towns that we see a clear conflict between the old values, and the new, among the younger generation. On the one hand, the younger generation asserts that traditions have to be carried on, in order to maintain the stability of society, but on the other hand insist that given a chance they would like to do away with unnecessary restrictions on girls especially widows. Their aspirations and ambitions are centered around getting, somehow, a government job. The biggest problem that Chamoli faces today is, according to the women, the liquor problem. Every one out of five men seems to be a diehard advocate of the bottle. Another problem is that of rising unemployment, as young men leave their farms and fields and come to the towns in the hope of jobs. This frustration, of being unemployed will increase as more and more people get literate and aspire for jobs other than farming (Reference based on Researcher's experience in Chamoli).
The term 'backward' is undescriptive: what criteria may the state use in determining whether a group is backward? Furthermore, 'backwardness' is obviously a relative term: what may the state use as a standard? And where may it establish a cut-off point? What kind of evidence must it have to support its application of its criteria? The Backward Classes Commission, established in 1953 to determine the criteria to be adopted in considering whether any section of the people should be treated as socially backward recommended, that 'backwardness be measured by residential, economic, educational and cultural criteria' (Galanter 1984, p 167). Using the above mentioned criteria, attempts were made by the Uttar Pradesh State Government to deem the 75 million inhabitants of Uttar Pradesh's rural areas (80 percent of state population) a backward class. This attempt was undone by the Supreme Court due to lack of heterogeneity of the class. "They are not of the same kind. Their occupations are different. Their standards are different" (Galanter 1984, p 273). The Supreme Court allowed that lack of educational institutions and educational backwardness of an area are indeed an indication of backwardness but the court put more stress on attitudes towards education than on the absence of facilities - "Traditional apathy for education on account of social and environmental conditions or occupational handicaps - illustrates educational backwardness" (Galanter 1984, p 278). Thus, the Supreme Court accepted the people in the hill and Uttarkhand division of Uttar Pradesh as educationally backward because lack of educational facilities keep them stagnant and they have neither meaning nor value nor awareness for education (Galanter 1984, p 278).

In November 1974, the Supreme Court ruled in the case of State of U.P. versus Pradip Tandon, that it was satisfied that both the population of the hill areas (2.5 million) and Uttarkhand division (0.75 million) - which includes Chamoli district - were indeed socially, educationally and economically backward classes, because these areas displayed traits of economic underdevelopment, isolation and absence of educational facilities. According to the 1991 Census Report on Uttar Pradesh, in 1981 Chamoli did not have even one small scale industry compared to the other districts of Uttar Pradesh like Saharanpur or Muzzaffarnagar which have 345 and 328 small scale industries respectively. Chamoli had just 18.34 percent of female literacy compared to Lucknow district which had a female literacy rate of 29.71 percent in 1981 (Census Diary U.P., 1991).
In terms of educational facilities, literacy rates, and population composition, Chamoli represents the features of any division of Uttarkhand or Garhwal. In fact, it stands midway in respect to literacy rates. The female literacy rates for Uttarkashi, Pauri, and Tehri are 9.17 percent, 27.13 percent, and 9.42 percent respectively whereas in Chamoli it is 18.34 percent. Hence, Chamoli seems to be the ideal locale for collection of data.