Introduction

The present study is an extension of a project initiated during the MPhil programme where I had examined state-society relations as mutually reinforcing and their interactions producing outcomes that could be mapped on a continuum that renders the state strong or weak in relation to the society. At one end of the continuum is a strong state and at the other, a weak one. This continuum results from the engagement of states and social forces with one another wherein they clash with one another, co-operate, transform and even inhibit each other. Clashes between social forces, including the state are mediated through struggles and accommodations in various arenas of society. Such struggles are significant in altering or effecting the disposition of resources, the nature of stratification, the character of gender relations and the content of collective identities. The character of the state society interface can thus range from conflict and co-operation, opposition and coalition, corruption and co-optation (Migdal, 1994: 23). Such interactions result in certain outcomes, which tend to vary at any given point. Law can be both the determinant and a natural outcome of such an interface. In the present study, I seek to examine yet another outcome of state society interaction/s, viz. development as a product of such an interface and to that end I examine the manner in which the nature of such interaction determines development. The present study is also an exposition of the shifts in state policy vis-à-vis development from the single-minded pursuit of economic growth to the advocacy of sustainability in more recent times.

The study does not seek to question the commitment of the state towards development: instead it seeks to provide answers as to why development in the hills if any has been

---

1 Migdal offers four ideal positions: of complete penetration by state into the domain of social forces, state incorporation of social forces, social forces incorporation of the state and finally the state failing in its attempt at penetration.
delayed. It is based on the premise that in the absence of any state initiative towards its avowed commitment to initiate programmes resulting in overall human development, the society reacts in ways that express discontent (protest) or organises itself in a manner such that it can work independently of the state. The Garhwal region of Uttaranchal (as indeed any part of the Indian Himalayas) has been viewed as a resource base for the development of other parts of the country rather than as an area worthy of development in itself. This has led to a decline in the traditional modes of occupation that existed in the state (transit trade and subsistence agriculture) and also to the large-scale migration of youth to the plains, resulting in a skewed demographic profile. Tracing this development from the time of British intervention in the region, this study examines the responses of the society to the changes in their livelihood strategies. The study then shifts to contemporary times when the welfare state made provisions for the benefit of the people by which they would not only be gainfully employed locally, but also be encouraged in setting up industry. However, large-scale industry in the Himalayas is not always profitable (unless it is restricted to the terai) and handicrafts are not lucrative unless they have a ready market or are sponsored by the state. The failure of these industries to establish themselves profitably along with a restriction on extractive industries such as forestry (due to the ban on commercial felling after the Chipko movement) and mining has resulted in the growth of tourism. This work attempts a study (in the Gangotri region) of the growth of tourism as a lead sector and the gaps in policy that exist, preventing the activity from being as profitable as it could. Further, development in the tourist sector has also resulted in direct environmental threats that are particularly worrying given the fact that the Himalayas support a fragile ecosystem that in turn affects the entire subcontinent. Perhaps no other place in the Indian Himalayas is under greater environmental threat than the Gangotri region which is the subject of the study. Situated in the Uttarkashi district of Garhwal, Gangotri township attracts a diverse mix of tourists and pilgrims. The township is also
characterised by a highly intensified feeling of religiosity that regards every being as holy. A popular pilgrim spot and a base camp for many expeditions to the high Himalayas, this region is further mystified by virtue of being the birthplace of the Ganga. GP Chapman (1995) aptly summarises the role of the Ganga river in maintaining biodiversity of the region,

‘the Ganga and the Brahmaputra are not just two of the mightiest rivers on earth, but they drain two basins of extraordinary variation in every sense... Nearly 500 million people live here; 10% of the human race inhabit this river system, the vast majority in the Ganges basin. This 10% includes at least 30% of the world’s poorest 1 billion people – Nepal, Bhutan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal and Bangladesh. Quite obviously, for these people, the key issue is one of development – achieving an adequate material standard of life, and hopefully too a political system that is representative and guarantees civil liberties.’

He goes on to imply that there are great strains on the resources of this region:

‘Since the whole basin is still 80% rural, a small population of farmers will put pressure on land and every imaginable rural resource – and above all demand more water for irrigation. There are over 100 million urban inhabitants and are likely to grow to 450 million in the next forty years, the cities will demand an ever increasing supply of water and power, and they will discharge ever increasing amounts of waste. Since the climate is so seasonal, with nearly all precipitation in a three month monsoon period, and with many tributaries drying up during the winter and summer, the problems storing water to provide a constant year round flow becomes overwhelming. Since the basins are politically divided among five sovereign states, each jealous of their rights, a co-ordinated response to the growing problem of the area is currently impossible to achieve’ (Chapman, 1995: 3-4).

Sharing of water is has been a key issue in most political conflicts across the Indian states. Though the politics of water management is not the main issue under study, it is connected to it simply by virtue of the fact that it involves a study of sustainability in a region that is the birthplace of one of the world’s most dynamic river systems. The study becomes especially pertinent in contemporary times when pressures are placed on the developmental state to make water available to all its people and connect all major water-
bodies of the country. Indeed, this can be seen as a conflict between a political need and an environmental urgency. Is it possible for the state to undertake such projects that will increase the pressure on the Himalayas and the people who dwell there with the barest minimum or can the consequent environmental threats be compromised in favour of ensuring water to the fields?

The first visitors to Gangotri: in search of solace and adventure

Although they are not necessarily interlinked, the strains on the Ganga river and on the Gangotri region have increased tremendously over time: from being a place of pilgrimage for the devout Hindu, the region has now become the threshold of modern day adventure tourism and a potential resource base for clean water and fresh air. Besides, the region provides employment not only to a large number of local enterprises, but also to a significant population from Nepal. Indeed the present scenario is quite different from the past where there were doubts as to the existence of the glacier from where the Ganga arose.

Pilgrimage is a tradition common to several religions. Pristine natural spots are revered for their beauty in many cultures and in several cases also have myths and legends and religious significance attached to them. The Hindu religion recommended visits to such pristine spots for the purpose of ritual cleansing and purification. These spots were often snouts of glaciers, hot water springs, confluence of rivers and so on. Their inaccessibility ensured their cleanliness and to the pilgrim, reaching the spot meant greater reward in life, atonement of sins, even nirvana. The river Ganga, the holiest of all rivers in the Hindu tradition, arises from the snout of the Gangotri glacier and the township of Gangotri is where the glacier would have been several years ago. Needless to say, the area has been visited for several centuries by the devout, although many chroniclers admit that it was
indeed very difficult to get to. The authorities of the East India Company sent an expedition to ascertain the source of the Ganges in 1808. The expedition led by Capt. Webb could not make much headway, and had to be abandoned at a place calculated to be at a ten days' march from Gangotri. However, it did collect some reliable information, and Webb reported:

"Every account agreed that the Source of the River is more remote than the place called Gangoutri, which is merely the point where it issues from the Hymalaia, not, as it is related, through a secret passage or Cavern bearing any similitude to a Cow's mouth... although the access has been so obstructed as to exclude all further research."

Capt. Raper in his narrative of a Survey for the Purpose of Discovering the Source of the Ganges published in Asiatick Researches (vol. XI, 1810) wrote that the

"pilgrims say that the road beyond Gangotri is passable only for a few miles, when the current is entirely concealed under heaps of snow which no traveller has or can surmount. With respect to the Cow's Mouth, we had the most convincing testimony to confirm us in the idea that its existence is entirely fabulous, and that it is only found in the Hindu book of Faith."

It was not until 1815 that the first successful visit could be made to the source of the mighty river that nourishes what is commonly called the breadbasket of India. The first European to reach Gangotri was James Baillie Fraser who in his journal of the tour, published in 1820, gives not only a brief description of the town and its inhabitants and says:

"No one seemed in the least to doubt the fact that the river had its rise in the aforesaid hollow of snow... The old popular idea that the Ganges issues from a rock like a cow's mouth, did not fail to occur to me, and enquiries were made into the origin of this fable. When it was mentioned, the pundit laughed and observed that most of the pilgrims who

2 Fraser's account of the expedition to the Gangotri glacier can be read in Journal of a tour through part of the Snowy Range of the Himala Mountains and to the sources of the rivers Jumna and Ganges, London, 1820 and in An Account of a Journey to the sources of the Jumna and Bhagirathi Rivers (Asiatick Researches, vol. XII, 1820). Perhaps the best view of the scenery around Gangotri can be had in a set of 20 aquatints entitled Views in the Himala Mountains, London 1820, available at the Oriental and India Office Library, British Library, London.
came from the plains put the same question in several shapes... He greatly assured me that no such thing happened, and that the river, in truth, came from the snows as above mentioned."

Fraser also produced a set of 20 aquatints of this tour. The first European traveller to visit Gangotri and travel beyond the area was Capt. Hodgson who gave a thorough description of the temple in his Journal of a Survey to the heads of the Ganges &c. in 1817 (Asiatick Researches, vol. XIV, 1822). He made a survey of the breadth and depth of the river at Gangotri and continued his journey, reaching the glacier commonly called Gaumukh after five days. This he called the “first appearance of the famous and true Ganges”. He goes on to add,

"the Bhagirathi or the Ganges issues from under a very low arch at the foot of a grand snow bed. The river here is bounded to the right and the left by high snow and rocks; but in front over the Debouche, the mass of snow is perfectly perpendicular, and from the bed of the stream to the summit, we estimate the thickness at a little less than 300 feet of solid frozen snow, probably the accumulation of ages; it is in layers of some feet thick, each seemingly the remains of a fall of a separate year. From the brow of this curious wall of snow, and immediately above the outlet of the stream, large and hoary icicles depend; they are formed by the freezing of the melted snow water at the top of the bed, for in the middle of the day, the sun is powerful, and the water produced by its action falls over this place in cascade but is frozen at night."

The fable of the Ganga originating from Shiva’s hair may well have originated from these icicles hanging from the brow of this snow wall and the Gangotri Brahmin, “an illiterate mountaineer” who accompanied Hodgson, did indeed consider these icicles to be a manifestation of the same though the man had never heard of this place as having existed nor had he or anyone of his knowledge ever been there. Hodgson continues that

"Hindus of Research may formerly have been here, and if so, I cannot think of any one place to which they might more aptly give the name of a cow’s mouth, than to this extraordinary Deboaches. The height of the arch of snow is only sufficient to let the stream flow under it. Blocks of snow were falling about us, so there was little time to do
more here, than to measure the size of the stream. Measured by a chain, the main breadth was 27 feet. The greatest depth at that place being knee deep, and rather less just at the edges, say 9 or 10 inches – however, call the mean depth 15 inches.

Lt. GF White, who visited Gangotri in 1830, has giving a remarkable description of the area:

"The grandeur of the scene which opened upon us, as we at length stood upon the threshold of Gangootree (sic.), cannot be described by words. Rocks were piled upon rocks in awful majesty, all shivered into points, which rise one upon another in splendid confusion, enclosing a glen of the wildest nature, where the Ganges, beautiful in every haunt, from its infancy to its final junction with the ocean, pours its shallow waters over a bed of shingle, diversified by jutting rocks, and even here shadowed by the splendid foliage of some fine old trees (c.f. Mahajan 1984: 98)."

Capt. Thomas Skinner\(^3\) who visited the area in 1832, observed that, "the situation of Gangotri is sufficiently provoking. The river rather widens above it, and nothing can be traced by the eye that will justify a conjecture of its distance from the source. There is no road beyond." Describing the journey that he undertook to the shrine, he notes that

"Bhairon Ghati is three hours walk from Mookhba: midway between it and the village we crossed a bridge to the left bank of the river, and by a tolerable path arrived at this ghat from where we descended to another bridge about 30 yards long, and as many in height above the stream. Bhairon Ghati is the a place of great sanctity, from its being the greatest height a pilgrim had to reach, ere he descended to the grand object of adoration, the Cow's Mouth."

Myths and legends abounded as to the origin of the river. Skinner adds

legends say, (so my Brahmin guide informs me) that once there was a road beyond this, and here concluded the toils of the pilgrim. The rock which has a little more remarkable in it than a cavity apparently worn by the water, once joined a neighbour on the other side, and formed an arch, very little above the surface of the stream: then it resembled the

\(^3\) Capt. Skinner wrote two exhaustive volumes on his travels across the Himalayas in 1832 entitled *Excursions in India: Including a walk over the Himalaya Mountains to the Sources of the Jumna and the Ganges*, London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, New Burlington Street.
mouth of a cow, and was worshipped from the opposite shore of the Jahnavi. As nothing could be seen beyond it, the river was supposed to issue from the mouth; and so great a miracle merited suitable devotion: an earthquake probably divided it, if ever it were joined, and, the veil being rent, a more holy spot was discovered.”

Jack Gibson who reached Gangotri in July 1837 remarked,

“I have walked to the Gaumukh, a cave at the snout of the glacier which is covered with silt and stones and looks more like a moraine than a glacier. Round the cave, however, the blue ice shows, and lumps of ice go floating down the river as it issues from the snout. It is thrilling to be at the source of so great a river and at a place famous in mythology and religion to so many millions of people.”

His enthusiasm was however, not shared by Pilgrim (1844) who in his Note of Wanderings in the Himalaya containing description of some of the grandest scenery of the snowy range etc. notes, “Our view from the brink of the mountains overhanging this river was very extensive, but not very picturesque. The hills are bleak and deficient in forest scenery.”

It would not be incorrect therefore to assume that pilgrimage to the area has been the oldest form of tourism. The British sent a fair share of adventurers, artists, cartographers, even spies during the world wars to scale the majestic heights of the Himalayas, but these expeditions were more focussed towards research and did not significantly contribute to the economy of the region. Today, the snout of the glacier lies 18 kilometres ahead of Gangotri and can be accessed quite easily, on foot or with the aid of donkeys. The landscape around the glacier is littered with moraine and can support very little vegetation.

Environmental threats and challenges in Gangotri today: Myth or reality?

Modernisation and the improvement of transport has witnessed the growth of the pleasure seeking tourist who arrives in the hills to take respite from the searing heat of the plains. The tradition of escaping to hill stations in the summer months was started by the British
and even today; Indian families make their way up to the mountains. The concept of
holidaymaking that was earlier alien to the average Indian has become more of a reality
and these hill stations find themselves choked with tourist traffic each season. To meet
growing demands, more hotels need to be constructed, repair work on roads needs to be
conducted with greater frequency and the capacity of the hills is stretched to a maximum.
Due to such pressures, these hill stations no longer remain the idyllic spots they were once
touted to be. They have begun to experience extremes of temperature, and require the use
of fans in the summer4!

Two factors have encouraged tourists to seek the higher reaches of the Himalayas for
tourism and recreation. These are congestion at the lower altitudes and the once popular
resorts or hill stations; and the accessibility of these areas after 1975 when they were
opened for tourism. A direct road to Gangotri makes it one of the most popular shrines
and a focal point for adventure tourism and mountaineering. Indeed the growing
popularity of Gangotri on the tourist map has resulted in several developmental moves
and obvious environmental threats. Two major and interconnected threats are the rapid
recession of the Gangotri glacier and deforestation. The former is due to the latter.
Deforestation in the region has occurred to facilitate the building of roads, hotels and
hydro-electric projects and has been the cause of frequent landslides and earthquakes.
Other environmental problems that enhance these are the clustering of shops, tea stalls,
hotels, restaurants and inns around the temple. The use of firewood and kerosene as fuel
and inadequate sanitation further aggravate the misery of both visitors and locals. What is
perhaps interesting is that time bound explanations justify the recession of the glacier. For

4 Neeru Nanda's work makes an astute note of the effect of deforestation on the environment.
Although the impact of tourism is not specifically noted, she notes that the average temperature of
Tehri in the peak summer months of May June and July went up from approximately 35°C in 1962
to almost 40°C in 1979-80 (Nanda, 1999: 75).
the average pilgrim, it heralds the onset of Kaliyuga\textsuperscript{5} and thus the perversion of humankind; in ecological terms, it demonstrates that the region has been exploited far beyond its regenerative capacity. Interestingly, Capt. Skinner, travelling in 1832, made a similar observation:

"As the world has grown more wicked, so the trials have increased in difficulty. In the golden age, it was a light and easy matter to worship at the source; for it then... rose at Benaras. A more sinful age had to follow it to Haridwar. From the vice of a third, it receded to Barahat, and the fourth is doomed to trace it, through the Cow's Mouth, to the heights of Gungoutri; where I hope it may be content to remain, for the sake of those who propose to suffer in its cause."

The retreat of the Gangotri glacier has been the object of parliamentary discussion\textsuperscript{6} and scientific research. Whereas some scholars associate it with the overall global warming and

\textsuperscript{5}The Age of Kali. According to Hindu Mythology, the cosmic world has been divided into four ages, each signified by a further depravation of man. The last of these ages is the Age of Kali, the prelude to destruction of all creation.

\textsuperscript{6}Repeated discussions have taken place in Parliament on the government's position with regard to the ecological imbalances in the Gangotri region and the recession of the glacier. Responding to a query in 1995 put forth by Dr R Sridharan to the Minister for State for Environment, Kamal Nath, commented that the Geological Survey of India had been monitoring its progress since 1935 and that so far, it had vacated an area of 0.243 sq. km during the last 55 years, i.e. 1935 to 1990, out of which 0.196 sq. km was vacated during the last 13 years i.e. 1977 to 1990. According to the Geological Survey of India, the reason for the glacier's recession could be the ecological imbalance in the area. In a statement attached to the questions asked, he outlined the projects planned for the region:

1. Gangotri National Park is proposed to be set up under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
2. A Special Area Development Authority has been set up by the Government of Uttar Pradesh to check environmental degradation of the Gangotri region.
3. A Master Plan for development of Gangotri region is being prepared which aims at laying special stress on preserving the ecology of the region.
4. Growth of tourism in the region is being discouraged.
5. Mountaineering Expeditions to the Gangotri area by various organisations and individuals are being discouraged.
6. Building activity in the area is being restricted.
7. Ban on commercial felling is being continued.
8. Use of alternate sources of energy is being encouraged in the area to minimise the use of wood as fuel.

The issue of a glacier in retreat has recently been put before Dr Murli Manohar Joshi, Minister HRD, Government of India, in the context of acute water shortage in the country. Replying to Ramrao Jadhav, MP, Minister of Science & Technology (Q 421/Ans. 24.4.2002). In order to combat the results of the natural process of global warming that could eventually result in acute water scarcity; the Minister held that measures were being taken to reduce the effect of human
the melting of polar ice-caps, there are others who have concluded that 'the warming of
the two centuries is most likely totally of natural origin and unrelated to the concomitant
anthropogenic-induced rise in the air's Carbon dioxide content'. This view has been
substantiated on grounds that about 2000 years ago, the climate was cooler than that at
present. Following this, the climate improved; however, about 850 years ago, there was a
significant cooling of temperature, indicative of a transition to Little Ice Age conditions.

About 300 - 200 years ago, the 'long term retreat of the Gangotri glacier ceased, possibly
with some minor advancement' during the last 200 years, however, there has been a steady
warming of the planet and the glacier has retreated by 2 km. This has led the International
Commission for Snow and Ice to conclude that if recession continued at the current rate,
the glacier would completely disappear by the year 2035. The recession of the glacier is
perhaps heightened further by the fact that the tributary glaciers that feed into Gangotri
are also in a state of retreat as compared to the glaciers in the Karakorams that are
witnessing a trend quite the opposite. It is important to bear in mind that glaciers are
dynamic systems. Snowfall contributes to its mass and as the snow slowly turns to ice, the
glacier grows in weight, forcing glacial movement. Further down the glacier is the ablation
area where most of the melting and evaporation occur. Between these two areas a balance
is reached where snowfall equals snowmelt; the glacier is then in equilibrium

interference on glaciers that included conservation activities such as afforestation, removal of
garbage and promotion of sustainable ecotourism.
7 Climate Change at the Source of the Holy Ganga, R Kar, PS Ranhotra, A Bhattacharya & B Sekar
8 If one takes figures into account, the picture thus presented is alarming. Data collected over the
past 61 years (1936-96) reveals that the total recession of the Gangotri glacier is about 1147 m, an
average rate of 19 m per year.
9 The Gangotri glacier has three tributaries: Raktnarn (15.9 km), Chaturangi (22.4km) and Kirti
(11.05km) and more than 18 other tributary glaciers that are transverse to the main trunk. The total
glacierised area of the catchment is 258.56 sq. km, of which the Gangotri system accounts for
109.03 sq km, followed by Chaturangi (72.91 sq. km), Raktvnn (45.34 sq. km) and Kirti (31.28 sq.
km). Subterranean channels below the glacier are also known to feed the Bhagirathi at Gaumukh.
As a result of the retreat of the Gangotri, the Meru glacier, which used to feed the Gangotri just
before the snout, now meets the Bhagirathi downstream of Gaumukh. The Gangotri had in the
past extended up to Sukhi, below Jhala, which is 40.5 km downstream of Gaumukh in the
Bhagirathi valley (R Ramachandran in Frontline, vol. 18, issue 7, March 31, 2001).
(Ramachandran, *ibid*). A glacier advances or retreats whenever this equilibrium is disturbed\(^{10}\). Scientists warn of the immediate short-term impacts of a receding glacier: increase risk of glacial hazards, such as landslips, changes in the courses of rivers and floods. Besides mass-wastings (in the form of land-slips and massive boulders hurtling down) the formation of a glacial lake in the main trunk of the glacier poses a hazard. The instance cited by scientists is that of Dig Tsho Lake, a moraine dammed lake that burst in the Kumbhu-Himal area in 1985\(^{11}\). The lake emptied out into the Lagmoche valley and caused enormous devastation. Greater melt also entails heavier discharge into rivers and reservoirs, a condition that has been evidenced. Instances of flooding in the Ganga basin during drought years is attributed to increased ice melt. In the view of Prof Hasnain increased ‘flow can lead to landslips downstream by triggering unstable flow along the area evacuated by the receding glacier because the soil, rocks and vegetation on them are loose and can give way to surging water easily’. Glacial melt results in higher silt load, affecting reservoirs in river valley projects. The silt in Gangotri contains hard quartz form the rocky

\(^{10}\) That the glacier is receding at an exceedingly rapid rate is evidenced in different ways. In the first place, the moraines formed prior to 1971 are ‘well developed, with sharp crested ridges that have strongly oriented fabrics,’ while those formed after the period are mounded and have weak fabric strength... only when a glacier is stationary for a long period can it produce well-defined moraines with strong fabric’ (Naithani et al. Current Science, January 10 2001). Another feature of rapid recession is the deformation of the snout’s structure with more active breaking of ice in the zone. The degeneration of the glacier further leads to the formation of supraglacial lakes that are formed by the melting of ice and damming by moraines. Quite a number of such lakes are seen at Gangotri, leading one to conclude that the rate of recession is indeed fairly rapid. Apart from this, the formation of ‘almost vertical crevasses both in the longitudinal and transverse directions’ is a feature of extraordinarily rapid retreat. When longitudinal and transverse crevasses intersect, they form huge blocks of ice that gets detached from the main glacier in short periods of time. Many such intersections have been found in the ablation zone of Gangotri, extending up to 400m upstream. It is likely that these points of intersection become suitable spots for the formation of fresh snouts as the glacier retreats (Naithani et al. *ibid*).

\(^{11}\) A recent alert issued by the United Nations Environment Programme held that increasing temperatures due to global warming might cause many Himalayan lakes to fill up so rapidly that they could burst their banks within a decade sending ‘walls of water down into valleys’. The volume of water gushing as a result is so great that it is likely to flood a considerable portion of the valley. A study in Bhutan and Nepal reveals that at least 44 such lakes are filling rapidly with the accelerated melting of glaciers and surrounding snowfields. Although a similar threat exists in Central Asia, Pakistan and the Indian Himalayas, the study could not cover the area due to the strategic importance of the region.
bed of the glaciers that strikes turbine blades and damages them. Increased siltation has reduced the longevity of the Triloth and Maneri hydel projects.

In addition, over the years, the Betula Utilis or the Birch tree has been under great threat from pilgrims who strip the tree of its bark as they consider it holy. It is believed that in the olden days, the bark of the tree was used for writing and some religious scriptures were written on it: a souvenir that most pilgrims covet. This has affected the population of the birch tree in the region and Bhojbas, 12 km away from Gangotri, prided for its Birch is a moraine scrub with very few surviving trees. Ironically, in 1832, Capt. Skinner had noted, "Boji Putta, well known... as the inner covering of hookah snakes... makes a capital substitute for paper. The trees are in great quantity hereabouts; and, as the bark is peeled off in large sheets, it requires no preparation, nor is it necessary to have a peculiar pen to write with, as is the case with leaves that are still used for that purpose in the East."

Since the township operates only in the summer months (from May to November) people come from neighbouring villages to work and earn their livelihood. Little has changed in the township as far as authority and control in the area is concerned. The Brahmins from the neighbouring village of Mukhba 24 kilometres away have traditionally managed the temple. The Maharaja of Tehri accorded this privilege to the community. Since then, the community has the prerogative to allot shops, hotels and determines much of the course of action in the area. No plans or projects for the development of the area can either be sanctioned or implemented without their approval. This community has jealously guarded any attempt at initiating modernisation and has vociferously protested the projection of

---

12 A critique against the construction of the Tehri dam on similar lines is provided by ND Jayal, Director, Natural Resources at the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH). He questions its cost effectiveness. "With any project you have to see what the return will be. In this case, instead of an increase, for every rupee being spent the return is only 0.56 rupees!" In addition, there is the problem of siltation. "When you think that the dam will stop functioning after about 30 years because of siltation, where is the justification for spending so much?" (People and Planets website on Tehri).
the Gangotri region as a tourist spot. This community manages most rest houses and ashrams and is the main beneficiary of increased tourism. Needless to add, this community is responsible for most illegal construction and encroachment all over the township.

Capt. Skinner, travelling in this region in 1832, made an interesting study of the people of the region and the hierarchy that prevailed among them. He notes that,

"the Brahmins, or the pundahs, as they are called in the hills of this river, drive a very profitable trade. Every pilgrim, with the exception of the mendicants, pay them something for their attendance; and the rich, who often send for the water when they need a charm, also send handsome presents."

These Brahmins also wear a ring with the inscription: “The water of the Bhagirathi, Gungoutri (sic.).” This they stamp on the phials that are used for collecting the water of the holy river. Without such a stamp, the “water would not be deemed as holy by the purchasers in the plains.”

Development Alternatives?

It is often argued that developmental programmes fail to integrate environmental and economic development on the one hand, and development of infrastructure and economic activities and among different activities on the other (Mehta, 1997: 3). The constraints of the state have led people in the hills to find alternate modes of employment that would enable them to achieve a decent standard of living. It is in this context that the study undertakes a brief examination of the Tourist industry as the biggest employer in the Gangotri region of the Garhwal Himalayas. The state in this context plays an interventionist role and is ready to reap the benefits of increased tourism while at the same time imposing restrictions. In order to make a specific analysis of the environmental and political crisis in Garhwal Himalayas, the study is limited to the period between the mid 80's and the decade of the 90's. This time scale has been selected for two reasons: in the first place, it marks the coming of age of the new social movements in the aftermath of the
success of the Chipko movement of the early 70’s. Secondly, it witnesses the end of the one-party domination of the Congress and ushers in a new era that is marked by coalition politics: one that involved bargaining and constant lobbying, in addition to the rise of the middle castes, also known as the Other Backward Classes. The entry of this category in the political arena led to the redefinition of benefits and a fresh demand for equity and social justice. The political scenario underwent a radical change, wherein demands were constantly made upon the state and the state was expected to respond to these. In such a scenario, demands for statehood by different communities, linguistic and social groups and geographical identities became prominent. In the Garhwal Himalayas, the failure of the state of Uttar Pradesh to ensure economic development and the unavailability of jobs led to fresh demands of statehood. The study does not dwell on the factors that led to the creation of Uttaranchal. Instead, it views the discontent among the people as merely a factor contributing to such demands. The purpose of this study is limited to the exploration of how the state has not been able to fulfil its developmental ideal and to that end, it examines the manner in which the state has gradually withdrawn from the same. The spaces created by such withdrawal have subsequently been filled by NGOs and individuals, although not always adequately. The state has retained the interventionist role by which it regulates, controls and punishes. Development, on the other hand, that was earlier seen to be the primary objective of the state, is now participatory and aided. The withdrawal of the state is therefore not only in the sphere of commitments to the society, but also in terms of resource utilisation and distribution. This is a clear departure from the earlier position adopted by the state where as the controller and manager of the public agenda, it did not recognise public participation in development issues as legitimate. Ironically, issues where the future livelihoods of minorities is pitted against large-scale development such as the construction of the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada river and the creation of the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve that has brought the economic
activity of the Bhotia community to a virtual standstill are not prioritised (Silori: unpublished). In this case, development takes on the character of raison d'etat, its technocratically determined content is deemed non-negotiable and emphatically not open to public contestation (Jayal, 1999).

An examination of such pendulous policies of the state gives an insight into the interests that are prioritised. In the Gangotri region of the Garhwal Himalayas, there is considerable pressure that the area be designated as a National Park so that entry is restricted and the task of environmental regeneration becomes easier, but the state is reluctant to do so. It is believed that this could lead to discontent among Hindu pilgrims who visit the region regularly and make the area accessible only to adventure tourists and mountaineers. The state has therefore chosen to ignore the threat posed by a retreating glacier and has conceded to a religious sentiment. Such inconsistent policies abound. It becomes essential therefore to elaborate the shifting positions of the state vis-à-vis employment and environment.

The study examines tourism as the chief livelihood among the people for three reasons: in the first place, the shift from traditional occupations such as subsistence agriculture to tourism has been necessitated because of two reasons: the saturation of jobs available for the male population in the plains (partly due to the extension of reservation to the OBCs) and the flexible nature of tourism (though this can also be disadvantageous especially when tourist arrivals diminish due to natural disasters). The role of the state as an agency in development has been minimal in this. Secondly, the growth of tourism is directly responsible for environmental degradation. This has led to state intervention in the region, the allocation of vast tracts of land for replantation of forests. An added problem is the rapid melting of the Gangotri glacier, an issue that has been discussed at length in the
previous section. Here, the state is required to react to an immediate environmental crisis and look for alternatives and interventions in a manner such that the sanctity of the region is maintained and employment generation through tourism and other related activities goes on as before.

A third reason for studying this industry is because the region offers a good example of religion being packaged and marketed for tourism and the secular Indian state encouraging the same since it is a valuable source of revenue. The influence of the market on religion is evident when saints provide shelter to tourists in lieu of a small donation; ashrams can thus be seen as micro-economic units. These ashrams also offer courses in yoga, ayurveda and so on. Such shifts in employment patterns of a hitherto traditional society are significant and worthy of examination. Herein, another dimension of the interface between state and society comes into view in the light of increasing globalisation, income generation and the reproduction of culture and tradition for public consumption. The study is not merely restricted to the examination of tourism but also the ancillary industries that emerge with it: e.g. horticulture and handicrafts, all of which cater to the seasonal tourist population.

Thus the study sets out to examine state-society relationship in the context of state initiated development. Premised on the assumption that development in the hill regions of Uttar Pradesh has been constrained, the study will enquire into how (a) The society produces structures or forms of governance (such as the creation of non-profit employment agencies), that respond to the scarcity of employment; and (b) The society can on its own sustain environmental regeneration in the region (this is reflected in the resurrection of traditional forms of resource management such as pani panchayats and van panchayats).
At the end of each chapter, the study examines the shifts in dynamics between the state and society from that of conflict (as demonstrated in Chapter 2 and 4) to co-operation and negotiation (as examined in Chapter 3 and proposed in Chapter 5). The study also touches upon the issue of Centre-State relations briefly in Chapter 2 when issues of autonomy (that have bearings on the federal polity) are couched in the overall rhetoric of social control over natural resources in post-independent India (as highlighted by the Chipko movement).

What is evident throughout the study is the preponderance of interests and pressures on the state that necessitate the predominance of social forces if development is to be truly effective and far reaching. The study employs the terms Uttaranchal and Uttarakhand interchangeably. They signify the same geographical area (Kumaun and Garhwal) but represent different things: Uttarakhand stands for the movement for autonomy and was also the proposed name for the autonomous hill region within the Uttar Pradesh Himalaya. Uttaranchal was the outcome of the struggle. When autonomy was granted to the region, it was given a different nomenclature: a move that was met with mixed feelings since many feel that their movement has thus been undermined. The study uses the term Uttarakhand for the region prior to 2001.

Setting the theoretical pace for the study, Chapter 1 looks into the interfaces between state and society, and development and democracy. As the discussion proceeds to include the Indian context, one can offer a worthwhile critique of development while at the same time demonstrate that the state has retreated. Also, it becomes evident that developmental projects have only benefited the elite and created enclaves of privilege and deprivation within the country, undermining the ideal of distributive justice. Carrying forward the argument that responses to inequalities from within society take the form of protest, the chapter studies the growth of social movements and finally the move to sustainable development as an offshoot of such movements. However, despite the call for
sustainability, it is worth emphasising that the move to withdraw from welfarist and developmental functions is ongoing and the state is increasingly denying the fulfilment of the commitments it set out to achieve. Even as the policy of disinvestment in the key sectors is being carried forward, there is heightened tension among the citizens as to what they can look to from a present welfare state. This insecurity is not restricted to a certain section of society or to a region: instead it looms large over one and all and is demonstrative of the state succumbing to the forces of globalisation and larger elite politics.

The discussion in the second chapter shifts to the Garhwal (and in parts, Kumaun) Himalayas where a brief history of forest management and livelihood strategies and of British interventions that did away with traditional modes of subsistence, replacing it with a flourishing forest based extractive economy is attempted. This continued well until after independence when the Chipko movement brought about a ban on commercial felling for a period of 15 years. This does not imply that prior to the 1970s, there was blind acceptance of the rules governing the exploitation of forests by locals. Instead, protest among hill dwellers was common and this often took the form of destructive forest fires. Movements that involved larger numbers of people, often found themselves appropriated into the freedom struggle with the idiom of Mahatma Gandhi’s Satyagraha used to mobilise people and frighten the government. Interestingly, the concept of Satyagraha or passive resistance was employed in the Chipko movement when countless women hugged the trees thereby preventing the trees from coming under the contractor’s axe. Given the intensity of environmental awareness in Garhwal, there followed a decline of forest based extractive industries and a shift in the livelihood strategies of the people.
The third chapter examines this shift: agriculture remained one of the most important occupations of the people, but the need for this occupation to become commercially profitable was felt by state planners. Farm based industries such as horticulture, dairying, poultry farming, floriculture, mushroom cultivation, sericulture and so on were therefore introduced (in addition to encouraging the handicraft industry in Garhwal). However, unemployment remains a problem and increasingly among women who form a large part of the workforce. Moreover, Garhwal has a large proportion of educated unemployed. An examination of the employment pattern and livelihood strategies of the population of the Gangotri township is undertaken to show the importance of Tourism as an industry and its potential as the highest income earner in the Himalayas provided it is planned and managed in a manner such that benefits trickle down to the poorest in the region.

However, with increased tourism come the attendant environmental threats that become even more acute if awareness among locals and visitors is negligible. The topic of the fourth chapter is thus a discussion of environmental threats (with special reference to the Gangotri region) and the manner in which environment is becoming an issue of contestation between state and society. One of the conclusions of the chapter is an exposition of how the state through its policies forces its people to indulge in environmental pollution: inflation being one of them. Another facet of the debate on state and environment is an examination of the initiatives made by NGOs and individuals in protecting the forests and initiating afforestation schemes. This chapter especially looks into the conflicts arising from employment and environmental concerns and whether it is possible to bring about a compromise or better, a dialogue between the two so that conflicts are eliminated and not simply minimised. Also discussed is the proposal to convert the Gangotri region into a National Park. Given that the region represents a unique ecosystem in addition to having tremendous cultural significance, this seems a
logical idea except that it might constrain the potential of the local people to earn their livelihood, and so create further cleavages in an already impoverished society.

Perhaps a solution to this problem lies in promoting community-based ecotourism, a subject discussed at length in the final chapter. To this end, a discussion of the role of the state in facilitating tourism that is ecologically sustainable and does not conflict with the need of communities to meet their requirements is undertaken. The object of this chapter is therefore to look into the possibilities of encouraging community-based ecotourism that is initiated at the behest of the locals and takes cognisance of the resource base of the people. It is likely that such an initiative might lead to empowerment of the weakest sections while at the same time generating employment and preserving the environment.

The debate on state-society interactions, however, does not conclude here. It is essential to understand that in the developing world, state initiatives at encouraging development and growth are extremely vital in empowering society. Further, from the discussions in the foregoing chapters, it is obvious that interventions from non-state agencies are looked upon with suspicion and therefore are not always successful. This is not to imply that NGOs everywhere have been unsuccessful, however, the expectations of the people of Garhwal have not been adequately met since the NGO vision did not take into cognisance the basic needs of the people: employment and sustainable livelihood. Instead, they insisted on prioritising environmental concerns over employment needs and were also not able to bring about an interface between the two activities so as to make one seem dependent on the other. Ecotourism can prove to be such an interface.

Methodology
Perhaps the most commonly employed research technique that forms a preliminary to the actual study of a topic that is essentially field-oriented is a survey of literature. Indeed, this can often be extremely time-consuming as there is no end to the amount one can learn from work that has already been researched. A thorough survey of literature enables a researcher to do two things: in the first place, it gives a wider perspective of the topic that needs to be studied and the areas available for further research. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it can throw light on areas that have not been the scope of research thus far, thereby providing an adequate justification of the proposed study. Indeed, finding gaps in existing research is a difficult task and needs to be done at two levels: the theoretical and the empirical. The literature thus reviewed during the course of the present study was of two kinds: one that justified the theoretical stand provided in the study, that of development politics and the role of the Indian state (a broad category that will be discussed in detail shortly) and literature specifically related to development in the Himalayas. Within this category, I also include books on Tourism Development that were extremely useful in framing my hypothesis.

The theoretical approach of the present study is greatly influenced as mentioned earlier by debates on the state-society relationship and studies that have been conducted in this field. Also, development seen as an outcome of this interaction provides an added dimension to the theoretical discourse that has of late been veering in favour of sustainability and of ensuring distributive justice to a vast mosaic of the citizenry that have hitherto been left out of the same. To that end the role of the state as constantly changing vis-à-vis society, is examined. The state has fluctuated in importance over time, yet in the developing world, it assumes a pre-eminent role as it takes on the task of fulfilling the developmental objective. Indeed, the developing world is characterised by the presence of an elite and competing interests that serve not to aid such development but instead, to hinder it. Much
contemporary literature has studied the 'failings' of the models of development and redistribution adopted by the Indian state and demonstrated that social movements arising out of the political (and economic) domination by elites are a manifestation of the discontent among the masses and a plea that the process of development takes into consideration their notions of the same. Seeing these movements as heralding an era of sustainable development, the study examines available literature on this subject. An examination of all the literature enabled this researcher to put forward a few questions: what is the role of the state in a developing country? At which point can the state legitimately withdraw from its avowed objectives? Given the fact that in traditional societies, elite politics dominates every sphere, to what end can the state nuance its policies such that the distribution of benefits does not create pockets of plenty in a sea of deprivation? Further, in the absence of state intervention, who mediates the space/s thus created? On the question of environment and sustainability, the questions that emerged were: is there a justifiable reason for the state to penetrate into society in a manner such that it redefines its notions of property, livelihood and replaces existing institutions with its own? Having thus 'encroached' on a realm that was not within its purview, does the state not have a duty to ensure that the people are guaranteed livelihood within the same environmental conditions? The present study does not claim to answer all these questions; the purpose of stating these is to highlight the ideas that a study of literature has generated.

Material available on the Himalayas and on development in the Garhwal region in particular ranged from historical accounts of protest, the introduction of forest management in the region after British intervention, notes by adventurers about wanderings in the Himalayas that provided interesting reading. They also served to give an account of the notions of the 'public' and the 'private' and how these have continuously been negotiated and redefined with state (both colonial and pre-colonial) intervention.
These accounts also confirmed that the Himalayan region has long been exploited for its minerals and forests and that the people in the region have not benefited in adequate proportion. Development in the Himalayas in the current context has been limited to the study of the Chipko movement and its impact on the environment and livelihood of the people. It is commonly believed (and indeed demonstrated) that development in the Garhwal region post-Chipko stagnated since forest based extractive industries could no longer hope to function given the imposition of a ban on felling. It has also been asserted that infrastructural inputs by way of transport and communication also received a setback. Given this picture, a question that sprang to mind was to understand how people managed to sustain themselves. What livelihood strategies did they adopt? The question became especially pertinent when the agitation for a separate state of Uttarakhand intensified after the adoption of the Mandal Commission Report that proposed giving 27% reservation to Other Backward Classes, which account for only 2% of the population in the hill districts of Uttar Pradesh. Tourism as one of the livelihood strategies was studied because of the reasons expounded earlier. In so doing, state inputs into tourism as an income generating activity become an important topic for discussion. In fact, state policies determine shifts in the livelihood strategies of the people to a large extent, a feature that has been noted from the pre-colonial times. War, peace, the sealing of international borders, construction of roads, government subsidies for growing certain types of crop or flowers and mushrooms, restrictions regarding access to forests all affect the livelihood strategies of the people. State policies and concerned documents also reveal whether the government learns from past experience and whether emulates success stories (policies, forms of governance and so on) from neighbouring hill states and even hill countries. The literature relevant to the region under study included government documents and study reports on developing the region into an economically more productive and employment generating one. Also, a study conducted on developing tourism in Garhwal with special reference to Uttarkashi.
and Chamoli districts by Dr Harshawanti Bisht proved to be of infinite help in organising my ideas with regard to development of tourism. The book also provided me with supplementary data that is currently inaccessible given the chaos that followed in government offices post-Uttaranchal. Dr Bisht’s work, however, confines itself to studying mountaineering and adventure sports and the role of the Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam (GMVN) in promoting the same. There is scant emphasis on the role of pilgrims and the temple in contributing to the economy of the region. Also, the study is restricted to tourism as an economic activity and does not take into consideration the political and social consequences of unemployment and environmental degradation. However, as the only published work on the region, her book provides valuable insights and suggestions (discussed in Chapter 5).

For the empirical aspects of the study, I undertook an extensive field trip in the years 1998 and 2001. The object of the field study was to develop an overview of the socio-economic conditions and to study employment patterns in Gangotri. In addition, I had to assess the environmental threats in the region and the need for sustainable development in the region. A field study aids the research project in gathering relevant facts and data in order to prove the hypothesis. Facts and data can be gathered through different sources and require explanation as to what they entail. Facts encompass physical, mental and emotional occurrences or phenomenon which can be affirmed with certainty and are accepted as true in a given ‘world of discourse’ (Young, 2000: 10). Further, facts expressed in words assume different meanings to different people, depending on their past experience as well as on the many things with which they associate the facts and words. Data on the other hand, are more than “facts, figures”, more than “information”, “events” or “experiences”, more than memories of a teller of life histories. Data are all the relevant material, past and present, serving as basis for study and analysis. They are “the living stuff, with all relevant
emotional (and mental) signs attached” (Dollard and Auld, 1959: 1). Questionnaires and Interview schedules can be used as appropriate tools for gathering facts and data. It is argued however, that questionnaires and interview schedules should not be used as the only source of obtaining data for the following reasons (Young, *ibid:* 212):

(1) the difficulty of ascertaining the representativeness of the data obtained through these means, and therefore, the generalisations may be said to be based on “unknown” samples. Difficulties are also presented by (2) vague phraseology and questions not readily understood by the masses in all walks of life who are expected to supply data; (3) replies which may have been answered in a perfunctory manner. (4) Uniform questions that do not always fit in with the varied groups, varied cultural patterns and the levels of education of the large numbers of people participating in the study. (5) It is often difficult to learn the meaning to the respondent of the data supplied.

Ambiguity, either in wording or in meaning of data is one of the greatest sources of error in surveys. This is especially true in subject matter involving attitudes, estimates and subjective data which, at best, have low reliability. Questionnaires, therefore should be definite and concrete, the questions should be simple and therefore free from the possibilities of subjective evaluation. Also, care should be taken to not put the answers into the respondent’s mouth. Young warns that questions should be constructed in a manner such that they form a logical part of a specific tabulation plan. As compared to personal interview, many scholars feel that the questionnaire schedule have definite advantages in that the respondent can mull over the answers and think clearly and logically (though it has been argued that setting a far too leisurely pace might lead to second thoughts that serve to undermine reliability). Schedules and questionnaires are also able to reach a wide cross-section of people at a ‘fraction of the cost of a personal interview’ (Young, *ibid:* 213). The questionnaires also provide a fair degree of anonymity (especially
when answers are solicited through mail) over personal interviews. Considering that most of their shortcomings are being eliminated, they prove to be fairly accurate research tools.

Keeping the above-mentioned research problems related to questionnaires in mind, these were designed with a view to targeting two categories of respondents: visitors and locals with a limited degree of error. The visitors classified according to the purpose of their travel vary from pilgrims to mountaineers and trekkers. The locals identified by their occupation consist of guides, porters, foresters, priests, restaurant workers and employees in hotels and ashrams. Additionally, local hermits or gurus run ashrams that provide shelter to tourists. These ashrams can also be viewed as micro economic units since they operate on the basis of donation rather than functioning as commercial enterprises and are self-sustaining. It is worth noting that not all people who come to Gangotri for in search for employment belong to the neighbouring villages. Many people migrate from Nepal and surrounding areas in search of jobs.

As far as the locals were concerned, upon determining the type of occupation followed by them, the questionnaires sought to ascertain the following:

- Their dependence on tourism as a livelihood
- The extent to which environmental degradation is a product of their need to earn a livelihood (in this case, tourism).

This objective was reflected in the questions asked: migration pattern (which month of the year do you come to Gangotri, how many people from your village accompany you), diversification of livelihood strategies (what do you do when you go back) income per season, areas from where they procure their supplies, use of fuel, perceptions about decline of forest and retreat of the glacier, pollution and so on. Also, their opinion about
how these problems could best be ameliorated was asked. Their expectations from the
state was also a question put to them as was an assessment of all the developmental
schemes put forward by the government. In addition, they were also asked to assess the
performance of local NGOs working in the area.

To ascertain the accuracy of the data gleaned from the people, the same question was
asked in two different ways, without making it seem repetitive. Thus, as to how much they
earned (net profit), the answers were corroborated by asking the prices of commodities in
the plains where they were purchased and how much they were sold for in Gangotri.

Within the category of local establishments, there came a sub-category of Ashrams that
provide accommodation in lieu of a small donation. Although a questionnaire was not
specifically designed for them, the local establishments’ questionnaire was modified to
establish the following:

- The criteria by which they house their guests: donation, fixed rate, meals included,
  hot water, number of days, foreigners etc.

- Whether they contribute substantially to the economy by employing local people
  or whether they depend on help from neighbouring Nepal.

- Approximate number of guests per season and the income generated therein. The
  allocation of resources in the development of the establishment, temple, wages and
  so on.

- Use of firewood, water, generators and their views on environmental threats in the
  region.

- Control over property, which in theory belongs to the forest department and also
  the allotment of the same to others who come in search of jobs.
While questioning the visitors, it was essential in the first place to determine their familiarity with the mountains. Hence, the first question put before them was their frequency of travel to the mountains and the Himalayas in particular, and the purpose of travel. The purpose of the questionnaire was:

- To ascertain the expenditure patterns of the visitors (asking questions about where they stock themselves, where they book their tickets and so on) and to see how much and what fraction is trickling down to the local economy.
- To gauge environmental awareness and levels of observation among the different categories: pilgrims, mountaineers, trekkers and so on.
- Their expectations from the state: reduce red tape, provide better roads, electricity; and from local society: well-informed guides, better markets etc.
- How they envisage their role as visitors to the environment.

As with the questionnaire administered to the locals, with the visitors, the same questions were put twice to determine the accuracy of the answers. Thus, a break up of how much they spent daily on an average was asked so as to determine the overall expense incurred during the trip.

In addition, government officials, NGOs and voluntary workers in the area were also interviewed. Again, questions put to them were not specific but open-ended. These were administered with the purpose of gaining an overall insight into the problems faced by the administration. In particular, they focused at:

- Gaining an insight into their views on the environment and managerial problems in the region, their experiences with working in the Himalayas in particular.
- Their overview of their plan, projects and the success rate of the same.
Another important research tool employed during the study was content analysis. This was done specifically with regard to pamphlets and documents circulated by the government and tourist agencies in the region. Content Analysis has been defined as a research technique for the systematic, objective and quantitative description of the content of research data produced through interviews, questionnaires, schedules and other linguistic expressions, written or oral (Young *ibid*: 480). During the study, literature was procured from various tourist offices and websites and certain specific details were studied. These were:

- Details on travel and lodging alternatives.
- Suggestions as to what activities (recreational in addition to religious) can be performed, thereby enhancing the value of the tourist destination.
- Precautions, health tips especially with regard to altitude and temperature of the region.
- References to the environment, information about the potential ecological hazards in the region and precautionary measures that should be adopted by visitors in view of the same.
- Mythological significance of the region, references made about the legend of the Ganga, fairs and festivals during various times that could be attended and promoted among visitors.
- Additional aids such as maps indicating trekking routes and roads.
- Information about NGOs and social service schemes in the region that conduct afforestation, community development activities and so on.
The employment of these research tools enabled me to organise the findings of my study in a coherent fashion as also to relate my learning with the theoretical material available from academic studies by scholars. I was also able to ensure that all matter gathered coalesced in the form that I had proposed at the outset of my study.

Perhaps the greatest problem encountered in conducting the research survey was a 'handicap' I had not noticed earlier: being a woman. The Gangotri township consists only of men and single young women are looked upon with tremendous suspicion. If a researcher goes with the purpose of gathering data and learning facts, s/he finds himself/herself hugely constrained if s/he is not introduced by someone of authority or repute in the region. Thus, my contacts with the Director of the Gangotri Conservation Project (GCP), Lt Gen Sushil Kumar helped in getting a foothold into the township. My presence in the township in 1998 with researchers from the University of Salzburg, Austria and the University of Marburg, Germany also benefited me greatly. The GCP incinerator caretaker doubled up as my research assistant something I found very handy in getting responses from the locals who were otherwise reticent to divulge information. It was through the research assistant that most of my findings on the pattern of fuel consumption, views about the role of NGOs in the region, environmental threats and degradation received the shape that they do. It also enabled me to view things differently: that faced with adversity, locals would rather concentrate on short-term survival than consider environmental protection: a harsh truth that has to be swallowed. The presence of a research assistant also gave me the necessary legitimacy and respectability as a scholar. I was not seen as a woman travelling alone and staying in a township that consisted chiefly of men; instead, I was seen as someone they could talk to about their problems. The length of stay (a month and a half) also proved that my purpose was genuine and therefore led to confidence building in conservative Gangotri society. Staying in a tourist/pilgrim spot for a long
period of time is a unique experience: I was able to observe patterns of visitor behaviour, the manner in which different times in the lunar calendar generated increased pilgrimage, the manner in which shopkeepers respond to tourist inflows and the preferred patterns of consumption by the travellers. All in all, through such participant observation, I was able to hone my powers of observation over a period of time. I was thus able to conclude that a place like Gangotri defies any set standards of peak-season or off-season. They simply have good years and bad years (business wise) and these are determined by factors that are completely external to the tourist spot. Thus, international warnings of a possible nuclear holocaust in the South Asia region had greatly affected tourist arrivals, as had the outbreak of a tremendous landslide (that killed pilgrims en route to Kailash Mansarover) in 1998. There is no fixed period as to when there will be more visitors in the town. Pilgrims visit close to Holi, Raksha Bandhan, Diwali and similar festivals in addition to certain auspicious days as determined by the lunar calendar or planetary positions. For mountaineers and trekkers, the best time to visit is post-monsoon. But given the fact that rainfall has greatly diminished in the region, this generalisation is again falsified. Of the two categories of visitors, greater income is unsurprisingly earned from foreign trekkers who employ porters, cooks and guides over a long period of time – till the end of their expedition. Pilgrims do not provide the locals with huge profits; instead, they save their donations for the ashram in which they stay. These findings will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

Approaching government officials for information proved to be extremely difficult. Most people interviewed were from the Department of Tourism and ever since the state was reconstituted after being carved out of Uttar Pradesh as Uttaranchal, most government offices are in a state of appalling mess and very often, the officers do not know which files contain what. It was very difficult to get basic information (such as the number of tourist
arrivals post 1998 and the number of vehicles plying to Gangotri – I was given a rough estimate and assured of its authenticity) and it was also difficult to get the officers to make comments on issues pertaining to the environment and tourism. Contending with the bureaucracy in the region can therefore prove extremely daunting and also serve to demoralise the most enthusiastic researcher. However, one can find ways round it by being extremely stubborn thereby forcing the officials to give whatever data they might have at hand! PC Joshi (1995: 131) notes ‘... backward regions like Uttarakhand are also backward in statistical data and information base on the one hand and scientific research and studies on the other. The two reinforce each other. The deficiency of scientific knowledge in itself is an aspect of backwardness of hill regions.’ He adds, ‘Uttarakhand today symbolises India’s quest for reconciliation between man and nature, between science and culture, between diversity and unity, between man and man and between man and woman through creative approaches and through innovative and imaginative societal interventions’ (Joshi, ibid: 205).