

STATUS OF TAUNGYA SETTLEMENTS IN THE TERAI REGION OF UTTARAKHAND

FOCUSSING ON HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

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PREFACE

The taungya system was devised by the forest department during the colonial rule in the early years of the century along with the policy of reservation of forests by the government, obviously as a means of procuring cheap in fact free labor for laying and protecting new plantations often in place of the newly exploited and clear-felled natural forests. Under this system, patterned somewhat on the Begari system forest labor was brought and put in the middle of the forest in makeshift settlements and permitted short-term lease to cultivate the open space in between rows of the plantation for few years so long as the tree grew to a certain height and then shifted to a new plantation site.

The taungya labourers themselves shouldered the yoke to till the land lest use of the any draught cattle damaged the plantation. The system persisted even after the yoke of colonization was thrown off accepting that in later years tractors could be deployed by the department to furrow the land. This labor intensive system gave way to more mechanized ones and also to short gestation species like eucalyptus for paper pulp and match industry. So the system broke down in recent years so also the promise of shifting/settling the taungyas on new plantation sites. Resultantly, there are numerous groups of them stranded on the forest land or its fringes all denuded at present and living under constant threat of eviction many of them for three generations in row.

The argument simply is that the taungyas constitute a threat to the conservation of the forest environment and they must clear out from the old settlements on which they are now treated as illegal 'squatters' and that the existing forest laws anyway prescribe leasing the land to them on any basis and recognizing any kind of tenancy right on the land. Let this be noted that to a very large extent they are left with the homestead only this point of time.

This is the continuing paradox of the taungya system which was originally devised for the protection of the forests. But it is not something peculiar to their situation. In fact, it is systematic of the paradox that characterizes the growing environmental 'consciousnesses'. Where and what is the place of the poor in the reformed environmental picture? It is another point that it's like being pound foolish and penny wise taking into account the total ground that all the taungya settlements together may be occupying.

Ecology is a popular cry today. Everyone has become an advocate of man's relationship with nature. In spite of this the world ecological situation is deteriorating at an accelerated rate. May be this small case study concerning the taungya settlements on the margin of the highly 'development' of Uttarakhand, will link up somewhere with the search or research for an answer to this paradox or the 'moral discord' characterizing the seemingly growing ecological/environmental consciousness.

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CHAPTER I

THE TAUNGYA SYSTEM: A FACET OF FOREST EXPLOITATION

The genesis of the term taungya at this point of time at least appears to be as obscure as the category of people it describes. The word rarely finds a place even in the standard dictionaries, but in the rare cases it is traced to the French language and its meaning denotes a certain form or method of agro-forestry farming. We however find elaborate references the early phase of the colonial rule in the country for example Baden-Powell's "Laws of Lower Bengal"- What in that period of colonial history included the present states of Bihar and Orissa.

As a method or system of agro-forestry it is reported to have been started and popularized in the early nineteenth century by a Forest officer with the surname taungya and thus it came to be known after him as the "taungya system" of timber plantation with agricultural crops. It in fact worked the other way round that is cultivation of agricultural crops in side timer plantations. At one time the system was extensively practiced in India and Burma. Here "it was first practiced in the hills and its modifies forms are shifting cultivation or humming" etc. This practice is also known as Sweden Agriculture in other parts of the world". The method is being propagated again as a distinctly sub-system of agro-forestry under the broader description agri-silvicultural system. Certainly jhooming or shifting cultivation by the girijan (hill peasant) is different both in its structure and function from the taungya system the agency element apart.

It thus appears that the taungya system has its roots in the colonial history. Whatever, its scientific merit as a system of agro-forestry, here we are mainly concerned with its actual use in history and how the "method" came to be converted into a "structure" that is a system of ordering land relation between the State and the forest labor. Obviously the system was devised by the colonial administrators when their government decided to establish monopoly control over the forest resources of the country and adopted a policy of changing the character of the natural forest through clear-felling and artificial regeneration more precisely raising plantations of commercially valuable tree species. Given the wholly labor intensive technique of forest felling and raising new plantations known in that period large bands of labor had to be placed in the forests not simply to plant trees as a onetime operation but more importantly to nurse and protect the new plantations against animals cattle and no less from members of often the alienated and hostile local communities who had been deprived of their access to forest resources even for sheer survival needs by the policy of government take-over. So the labor had to be made to stay on until the time the plantation grew up to a certain level. Therefore, a system was devised to suit the need for captive labor. The forest labor were permitted to cultivate the land inside a plantation rows for specified period of time usually five years or so. Even otherwise

the space for cultivation of agricultural crops diminished as the trees grew. The labor was then shifted to a new plantation site. This was in no way obligatory but it apparently worked so long as there was demand for such labor.

The taungya system in this way partially became a rather short-term lease form of granting cultivation rights on land in the government reserved forests to the laborers working in the plantations. It was indeed patterned basically on the feudalistic *begar* (forced labor) system as the laborers were granted the temporary lease to cultivate the land all at their own cost in lieu of any wage for the services rendered for protection of plantations. This category of the forest 'farmers' were branded as taungya and the peculiar form the land settlement came to denote the whole system itself. It hardly mattered as a form or method of agro-forestry. The trees to be planted was decided by forest department; so also the crops to be cultivated by the taungyas. The agriculture component was at the most secondary.

As a part of the scheme taungya settlements usually hutments of jungle reed and thatch (or other locally available forest produce) often huddled together for reasons of security were raised deep inside the forest. The taungyas were allotted small parts of the land inside the plantations on individual basis. These settlements functioned virtually as government labor colonies they received no wages though closely regulated by the forest department we find some stray references that the department also provided very rudimentary services in the taungya settlements such as mobile primary school for the children and supply of rations of essential commodities such as food grains kerosene etc. This would suggest that it functioned as a more organized system in some parts of the country apparently in areas where large scale projects of 'scientific' forestry the so-called modern silvicultural system.

It has to be borne in mind that the primary purpose of the taungya system was to ensure protection and growth of the timber plantations not so much raising of agricultural production. So the taungya labor were allowed to cultivate only a very few varieties of short duration crops that did not draw much from the soil and moisture regime. They were not allowed to keep any cattle not even bullocks or any other type of draught cattle lest the animals damaged or destroyed the new plantation. They had to yoke themselves to the plough to till the land to raise a crop under dry farming conditions.

The taungya lore is full of stories of their people being mauled or carried away by wild beasts and their being terrorized and tormented by gangs of outlaws and fugitives. Of course people dying of deadly malaria jungle fever, diarrhea, dysentery and other common occurrences. The shelters were totally inadequate to protect them against torrential rains or chilly winter and above all they had to undergo complete social isolation borne out of separation from their own communities and extended families. The picture of human beings yoked to a dreary and unwieldy burden is difficult to conjure. But to a very large extent the problem of land alienation/dispossession caused by the colonial government's land settlement policy itself had forced a large number of land hungry and pauperized peasants into this wretched taungya system.

The system persisted in its essential characteristics even after the end of the colonial rule. In fact the first national forest policy announced in 1952 gave a new

thrust to commercialization of forestry. The concept of drawing “sustained yield” from the forest was replaced by “progressively increased yield”. This strategy was built on rapid expansion of the forest based industries. This led to large scale clear-felling of the forests and their conversion into monoculture of commercial industrial species. The FRO-assisted Technical Assistance Programme for the Kumaon-Garhwal forest circles alone envisaged; (a) planting 1.5 acres with fast growing species in 10 years and (b) improving access to hill forest to permit better exploitation.

The taungya system still came handy as a cheap method of raising tree plantations. Though mechanized methods had to be used for tree felling, logging and transportation but the plantation part had become more difficult with the worsening crisis over survival needs of the people and increasing alienation from the forest department. Depending on the terrain may be in some places the taungyas were spared the fate of themselves substituting for the draught animal and tractors coming in to clear and furrow the land under a plantation project but not everywhere.

Then the contractor also stepped in with the use of tractors as the lease holder; the intermediaries who were deemed to be the employers of the taungya labor.

The system did undergo some superficial changes in the latter period not because it had come to be regarded as something very obnoxious on some reform value but due mainly to certain changes in the forest policy and the technique of raising forest plantations. Firstly instead of timber trees greater value came to be attached to species of greater industrial use such as chirping eucalyptus semal and so on needed for rosin/terrapin paper pulp, plywood, match-wood, etc. These varieties were relatively fast growing. Anyway these did not yield any fodder and did not need as much protection against cattle or lopping by the local people. Thus the wholly labor-intensive plantation technique became somewhat outdated and uneconomic to the department. So also the taungya system of procurement of forest labor as labor intensive methods of plantation gave way to mechanized ones to simplify management and reduce exploitation costs, specially on short rotation, plantations, suitable for paper-pulp.

The sort of changes in forest ‘production’ we have just mentioned and that made the taungya system somewhat superannuated were largely the outcome of the National government acted in a more pragmatic fashion in this matter than the colonial one because in the later years private contractors were employed by the forest department as intermediaries to cultivate the land in the new plantations lest any right of tenancy on the land or resettlement on alternate site accrued to the taungya peasants. Thus, the onus of employing the labor was passed on to the private contractors. The taungyas were anyway excluded from the scope of the land refer measurers because the forest land were treated as ‘government estates’.

The vestiges of the taungiya system still remain. What is important to remember is that as the system fell in relative disuse a large number of taungya peasants (no precise estimates) were stranded in the forest settlements in Uttarakhand itself. And they continue to languish there, some of them for two to three generations. They are treated no better than illegal squatters on public lands.

We are of course referring to those of them for utter lack of any option decided to dig in and have somehow warded off periodic attempts at forcible eviction by the forest/revenue departments of the state governments. The whole foot hill belt from Dehradun to Gorakhpur has the largest concentration of such settlements which sometimes find mention as Vangram (forest village).

The subject of this study is an outstanding example of rather cynical policy of abandonment. They also exemplify how the taungya system was used as a convenient device almost unrelated to its original intent and purpose literally to hoodwink the mostly oppressed class landless peasants aspiring agitating for land allotments in the newly colonized Tarai Bhabar tract in pursuance with the declared policy of the government of the day. The agitating peasants who had occupied the government land in protest were persuaded to accept allotments of about one acre per household under the taungya arrangement for the 'time being' and call off their agitation. And then they were literally left in the lurch.

Looking from the other end of the spectrum it also becomes clear that the colonial forest policy and its extension much beyond in the years after independence in itself contributed to a large extent to forcing elements of the small and marginal peasantry especially from the adjoining hill areas in this case into the taungya system. The task of properly documenting the process of their alienation from their environment and fragmentation from the stable rural communities and then their marginalization in the make-shift taungya type forest settlements will require a separate study but there is sufficient evidence coming forth even from the life histories of the settlers who respondent to this rather overtly problem-oriented investigation to indicate that they are the direct victims of the uprooting and displacement caused by the government's forest policy that denied the sheer survival needs of the local peasant economies in the first one or two historical observations regarding how the process worked specially how the forest policy and practices impacted on the local peasant economies in the central Himalayan region.

As we have noticed above the taungya system of temporary forest settlement was devised just as the colonial government took to reserving all the good forest of the country so as to satisfy its growing hunger for revenue collection to meet the rising military and administrative expenditure and the greed of the empire-builders the sole objective of introducing the so called scientific forestry and silvicultural practices was to maximize revenue collection through forest 'production' (?) indeed extraction of all commercially valuable timber and wood. The practice of putting up a "working plans" also were no better than being an inventory of the available forest stock and set of instructions for removing the dead or damaged wood. The exalted principle of "controlled and selective felling" which continued to guide the forest department for many years to come right until 1933 or so when large scale forestation schemes were introduced through special plantation circles.

Initially the government reserved forests were released against fixed revenue to individual contractors. The forest department was instituted only in 1855, after about 25 years such reckless exploitation. The department also acted solely as a revenue collecting agency without taking any bother-action about conservation. The forest act of 1878 on reservation of forests was essentially motivated by designs to expand the cultivated area and to make the forest i.e "waste lands" according to their

perception to yield annual revenue equivalent to the cultivated lands. Thus the policy of leasing out large chunks of forest land against fixed revenue became the agency for introduction of the zamindari system destroying the old tenurial patterns and form of communities organization.

The forest act of 1878 had much deeper implications. It implied that land for cultivation had priority over protection of forests and community forest stood converted into property of the colonial state which alone had the power to lease out land for cultivation. The result was the cutting down of huge portions of the perennial forests. The colonial forest policy manifested its consequences both in the socio-economic as well as the ecological spheres within a short period. In the first instance the change in the property relations that is conversion of community forests into private arable and income resources of a major part of the population. The land areas where had up to then stood a healthy mixed forest with various species the five 'Fs' (food, fodder, fuel, fertilizer and fire) providing for the basic survival needs of the people and the resource base of economic production by the local peasant communities were clear-felled and converted into arable lands or monoculture of timber species.

The lands thus 'proclaimed' were leased out for market production specially in the valleys and lower plateau or for that matter for precarious mountain agriculture. Thus the independent agro-pastoral type peasants whose main subsistence resources had been a forest-fed cattle economy coupled with cultivation of a variety of crops for self-provisioning were converted into dependent market farmers or day laborers.

The rich natural forest resources of the relatively accessible central Himalayan region the Shivaliks (the Doon the foot-hills and the lesser Himalayas) obviously became the early targets for reckless exploitation. The accessibility factor that is absence of any roads proved to be the only saving grace. In the doon valley with the European settlement of Mussoorie perched on its crown to encourage rapid colonization the British government offered very liberal land grants of approximately 10 Sq. miles each to the Europeans with the stipulation that every grantee was required to clear the whole grant within a period of 20 years to promote agriculture or plantation crops.

In the Garhwal Himalayas one Mr Wilson a British mercenary slider gone out of business turned his destructive instinct on the valuable Deodar and Chir forests having obtained from the Tehri State the lease to exploit the forests in the bhagrathi valley for mere Rs. 400 per annum. The same Wilson is credited with having invented the method of downstream floating of wooden sleepers. His flourishing timber business motivated the British rulers of the then North Western Province which included the entire hill region of present Uttarakhand to engage Wilson to exploit the forests for them on a 20 year lease grant at one stretch. Wilson's success also inspired the Tehri State to take over the management of forest in 1885. The free felling system allowed uncontrolled extraction of timber in exchange for revenue on the produce and it inevitably led to rapid and serious degradation.

The tale of reckless forest felling is no different for the Kumaon region. It was recorded by E.T. Atkinson (Gazetteers, 1909) "The forests were denuded of good

trees in all places. The destruction of trees of all species appears to have continued steadily and reached the climax between 1855 and 1961 when the demands of the railway authorities induced numerous speculators to enter into contracts for sleepers and these men were allowed unchecked to cut down old trees far in excess of what they could possibly export so that for some years after the regular forest operations commenced the department was chiefly busy cutting up and bringing to the depot the timber left behind by the contractors”.

After the onslaught on the forests of Malabar and Western Ghat for attraction of teak to meet the needs of the British navy the rapid expansion of the railways right through the years of the first World War, was the other major factor in the imperial design to establish its monopoly on the forests and one of the first tasks given to the forest department was to locate timbers such as Sal, teak, deodar etc. suitable for railway sleepers wagons. The other important charge of course was given to the department to make building timber and fuel available to be the civil and military establishments at Nainital, Almora, Ranikhet, Lansdown and most of other urban/administrative centers. So the rich sal forests of the Bhabar (the foot hill) region were recklessly exploited soon after the British entry into the region in 1815, and for the next 50 years or so.

The forest Act, 1878 was a further step in tightening government control over forests after monopoly control had already been acquired through the Act of 1865. Under the new order all traditional rights of the local people were cancelled. It provided for fresh settlement procedures and a new class of forest called government protected forests (different from Government reserved forests), later also called all ‘civil’ forest produce against which may any legally tenable traditional rights to forest produce were to be directed. Though another Act in 1893 all Benap land, largely ‘commons’ were declared as ‘protected’ forests. Thus all non-agricultural and were converted into forests and forest boundaries were drawn close to the village settlements and the villagers virtually sealed off “women inside casements”. The forest department thus became the most immediate agency of the State with the powers of interference in all spheres of life of the autonomous village communities.

The land ownership pattern in the hills was radically different from the plains. Excepting in a few pockets approximate to the seats of feudal power peasant proprietorship pattern with the community frame prevailed most of the cultivation was done with family labor. The agricultural labor class was nearly non-existent. The villager presented the model of equalitarian peasant communities.

The best agriculture was done in village situated between 2500-4000 feet (above sea level) where most of the population was also concentrated. There were good forests and grazing land above and good fertile lands often irrigated. The agro-climatic conditions suited cultivation of large variety of crops. The mixed forest yielded enough fuel, fodder and fertilizer to complement the wood grain production. Animal husbandry had greater contribution in the villages in the upper reaches. In the regions where chir predominated as the forest species, the forest floor was cleaned every summer by setting fire to the dry leaf deposit, thus preparing the ground for regeneration of the fodder grass.

All the forests within the village boundary were regarded as community property and the villagers enjoyed uncontrolled access to the forest produce. Thus there existed a stable agro-pastoral livelihood pattern. The British rulers did not go whole-hog to impose the Zamindari model in this region, though as well have noted before Zamindari were awarded in Dehradun and other selected pockets to the Europeans. They did however introduce new inequalities through the land settlement through the creation category like 'Khaikar' the tiller who had no right to transfer the land. But the forest policy and departmental practices did everything to destroy the moral economy of the peasant societies in this region.

The colonial forest department in fact hugely reinforced the *begar* (forced labor) system prevalent in some parts of the regional society under the feudal lords and proximate to the seats of power as the departmental operations and the tours and inspections by the officers increased and there being no roads and means of transportation in the area the local villagers were forced to render services such as construction of camp temporary food dairy products, vegetable etc. and most importantly free labor to carry the burdens of the big or small Sahibs and their personal luggage from one stage to another. Indeed the Britishers deliberately promoted *begar* and build it into the land settlement system introduced by them. The *malguzars* (village level revenue collection agents) were required to make adequate number of 'collies', available to the government officials and European tourists. The system remained in practice much after slavery in all its forms was formally abolished from the British Empire in 1853. It was only after the militant forest rights and anti-*collie begar* movement of 1921 that coincided with the nation-wide non-cooperation movement, that the people got freedom from this system.

There was further reservation according to the tree species (protected trees). The chir-pine became the darling of the forest department through the First World War years, both as a source of timber and resin for industrial processing. To save the chir fire setting within one mile from the boundaries were drawn practically meant that the practice had to stop. So also the cycle of regeneration of forest fodder. It is significant to note that setting fire to the chir forests became the most frequent form of protests during the forest agitations between 1921 and 1931.

The Kumaon-Dehradun regions were also the first to be selected for tea plantations around 1940, as potential rival to China in the tea trade. The area produced tea worth \$35000 during 1862-63. British interests were promoted through tea plantations. But the scheme received a set back because the local peasantry were not prepared to give up their traditional livelihood pattern. Thus the process of promotion of colonial capitalism in the region halted to some extent. Of course, disturbance in the rainfall pattern and emergence of drought conditions caused by the destruction of the forest ecology must have shot up as another limiting factor.

We find the sort of 'concern' for denudement of the forests, as expressed by Atkinson, coming out from time to time in the official notes/correspondence of one or the other British administrator. But on the whole the uncontrolled destruction of forests in the preceding decades merely provided the logic for establishing State control over the forests. A conflict did develop within the colonial set-up, specifically between the forest department and the civil administration but only when it was forced by the people specially the fear of the setting discontentment caused by the

forest settlement proceedings (demarcation of forest boundaries) and the forced labor (collie begar) system, spreading among the soldiery, which had emerged as a factor to reckon with by the time of the First World War.

The peasant youth of Kumaon were being drafted into the Gorkha regiments from the closing years of the 19th century. A separate Garhwal regiment was raised in 1890. These regiments had served the British Empire very well on the overseas fronts during World War I and made supreme sacrifices. Thus, pursuing the marital races theory, like its virgin forests, the Kumaon-Garhwal region was being used also as a 'mine' for cheap manpower for the British army and the British would not have run the risk of alienating the soldiers and their family folk. The commissioner of Kumaon Wyndham sounded the caution in 1916 that the soldiers wielded a great deal of social influence and it was likely to increase after the war. The factor did weigh in their granting a few concessions with regard to the traditional forests rights of the villagers and the abolition of the Collie-begar system of which the forest department had become the main perpetuator. In between they had even granted exemption from collie begar to the family member of the soldiery, but this proved ineffective in diffusing the tension.

The dilemma that the British rulers faced was, while their substantial contributions of the forest Department to the "war effort". National increased revenue earnings and logistical support had provided enough justification for government take-over of the forest it had also caused deep disaffection against the government which did not leave governments but also had a notable participation in all first agitations in the 1930.

The tightening of government control over village provoked strong resentment which exploded in violent protests from time to time. A severe drought hit the region in 1921 causing widespread famine conditions. This added to the fury of the forest protest movement. The waves of local protest beyond the distant mountains merged with the non-cooperation movement raging in the country. The soldiers who had not felt constrained by the army discipline to voice their resentment against the collie-begar system and the exploitative forest laws, were also playing the leading role in the agitation. The government had to concede the institution of a forest grievance committee with an inquiry committee related to incidents of gross misbehavior with women and children by the employees of the forest department. The resentment was not so much against being deprived of access to forest land as against attacks on the autonomy and integrity of the local peasant communities. The committee concluded that stricter enforcement of the forest laws could cause bloodshed and riotous situations. A few concessions were given in the matter of access to forest produce but there was hardly any change in the basic orientation of the forest policy. The protests did not really stop and extended right up to the time of the Civil Disobedience Movement of 1931. The opposition to the new land settlement which had jacked up revenue rates by 30 percent added to the fury of the movement.

Throughout, the violent forms of protest were directed against the forest establishment, offices, dak bungalows, timber depots, and so on, which were perceived as the symbols of the State power.

The restoration of the forest rights to some extent at least, in 1921, subsided the movement. Simultaneously, massive draft in the army, and the police and the employment of a large number of local people at the lower level of the colonial administration also produced some effect. No less importantly it set-off a stream of migration. Most of those who got into regular services preferred to settle down in the foot-hill towns. The colonization of the tarai in the 1950s opened a vast scope for migration to the “plains” but the men from the hills had preferred the towns to spend a retired life and not gone after farm lands. So, by and large they let the opportunity go by.

But here we are concerned with a different stream of migration to the tarai, those who came at the tail-end and could find only the fringe lands here and there; some through registered transfer, and some government allotment and some others simply ending as squatters on public land.

Large scale clearance of the forest for agricultural use was colonial phenomenon borne out of the belief that agricultural surplus was an important source of revenue at least good for the British. Forcing of cultivations as well as ‘modern’ timber/wood economies led, within a relatively short time, to lasting ecological damages. On the one hand, on these mountainous tracts, the arable land was widely exposed to monsoon rains, causing extensive soil erosion; on the other hand, soil regeneration in the forests was disturbed because vegetable would be building within the pine plantation is hardly possible. Today the entire mountain slopes are on the move during the rains. The ground slips off and only the marked rock is left behind.

Thus, the vicious cycle of deformed social structures through imposition of new inequalities, ecological destruction and pauperization is more obviously exposed in the mountain regions and the ecological truism, “man follows the soil” is easily proved. During the last 100 years the living conditions have become worse and huge proportions of the populations have migrated into the plains and at present “transfer economic” (the so-called “money order economy”) is dominating in the mountains with people getting move had more increasingly alienated from their environment. In 1938, a British Officer who examined the living conditions in the Indian Himalaya regions could deliberately say .The peasants of Garhwal and Kumaon hills have higher standard of living than peasants anywhere else in the world.” Ramsey, who had a long region as the Commissioner of Kumaon from 1856 to 1884, also observed that the general condition of the peasants in this region was better than it was anywhere in the country. Certainly, forests provided the fundamental basis for this relative welfare and the forest policy of the colonial masters changed the picture drastically.

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CHAPTER II

TAUNGYA ALL THE WAY

SETTLEMENT PROFILES

We have noted how the Taungya system was variously used, by successive governments in the state. From some sort of 'scientific' system of agro-forestry, it came to be converted into a system of land settlement specially applied to the tail ends in the stream of migration to tarai-Bhabar. In this case, this was seen as an answer to the ecological refugees (call them victims of natural disasters). This was also seen as an answer to the aspirations or demands for a piece of land by the landless peasants. It was also used as a tool in the craft of creating political patronage. It actually became a substitute for policy, in other words, a convenient tool in the practice of ad-holism as a policy, in itself. This syndrome is best exemplified in the case of the Taungya settlements that form part of this study.

By the time the depressed hill peasant awoke to the reality that a vast agricultural frontier had hereby opened in the tarai he had already lost it, all good lands had been occupied legally, or illegally by the settler farms. What remained were only the fringe lands on the margins of the Tarai plain on which have fallen back the tribal Tharu peasants after being squeezed out from their native land; the former displaced persons from the former East Pakistan (Bangladesh) who could not hold on to their land allotments by the government in a hostile social ecology, the ecological refugees from yonder hills, and the large army of migrant labor inducted into the area beginning with the process of the colonization, the construction projects, then the settler farms or the other categories of outside beneficiaries of land allotments who resorted to all sorts of tenurial practices.

In this way, all the conditions for an unseemly conflict had been created where the depressed class Pahari peasant squeezed out of his environment by the ecological ravages, had to vie with the other 'push outs' on the fringes of the tarai plain.

In the early 1970s the 'excluded' and left-out elements of the depressed hill peasantry, started making demands for land allotments in the tarai. Ecologically also, from the social relations aspect, the people from the neighboring Champavat/Pithoragarh hill area had stronger links with the eastern part of the tarai-bhabar tract, traditionally, they have been seasonally migrating here with their cattle and to work in the forest operations. After the colonization, the place became relatively more advantageous to in and are number of them were tempted to settle on the seasonal staging ground. Many others migrated here more or less permanently as farm or forest labor. This regional affinity naturally provided the major base when these elements decided to organize themselves to make a united demand for land allotments. The initiative as taken by a few dalit leaders from these groups, who

mostly included landless or marginal dalit peasants, ex-soldiers, war-widows and handicapped persons, belonging by and large, to the same communities.

It will be noticed that it was quite a homogeneous grouping, comprising those who had been identified as the intended beneficiaries of the various welfare measures recently announced by the government. It may be recalled that following the split in the Congress Party and the strong re-emergence of Congress-I in the subsequent elections of 1971, on the Garibi-Hatao (banish poverty), the government had announced several welfare measures for the benefit of the poor, and “land to the landless” was one these. It seemed for a while that the “unfinished business” of land reforms had been put on the agenda again. The local leaders were indeed responding to this policy pronouncement.

They organized themselves in area-wise Samaj Kalyan Samiti (Social Welfare Association) and made representation to the government for land in the tarai to the deprived sections of people. Apparently, the initial move was to appeal to the government on welfare consideration. This did not work and the petitioners took to the path of agitation. The leaders mobilized the people to occupy the vacant lands and dig in there and defy any attempt at throwing them out from the land. The forest department, which claimed it owned all the ‘unsettled’ land in the area, decided to use force and there were minor scuffles in some places. The leaders of the movement were arrested, and this provoked more protests. However, after about two year-long agitation in 1974 they were able to secure an assurance from the State Government that their demand would be considered for land allotments in some unsuccessful plantation sites in the area, subsequently, a land allotment committee was formed with the District Magistrate, the SDM, and Tehsildar (Khatima) on the government side and the local MLA, Zila Parishad member, and Block Pramukh as the people’s representatives.

The following failed plantation sites were selected for allotment of land to the eligible candidates among the agitating peasants. It was also decided, and agreed by the leaders of agitating peasants that these families would be settled under the Taungya arrangement in the first instance and would be given alternate sites in the event of any later day decision for revival of the unsuccessful plantations.

Sl.No.	Place	District	Approx. area (in Hac.)
1.	Bagha	Pilibhit (U.P)	150
2.	Melaghat	Udham Singh Nagar	350
3.	Pachauriya	Udham Singh Nagar	80
4.	Budabag (Nai Basti)	Udham Singh Nagar	60
5.	Fagpur (Nai Basti)	Champavat	80
6.	Gahigoth (Nai Basti)	Champavat	80

It appears that the decisions were taken on an ad-hoc basis. The actual availability legal statuses of the identified land areas were fully ascertained. Nor, the fact if some of lands had already been encroached by others, or being used by some others on the basis of traditional occupancy right.

The forest department, however almost immediately started proceedings for eviction of the new allottees taking recourse both to law courts and use of force.

The allottees resisted the drive, and another agitation started. Fortunately, the legal proceedings launched by the department for the eviction of the allottees were stayed by the court. In 1978, the Commissioner of the Kumaon Division intervened in the matter and moved by the plight of the people, gave a public assurance that they shall not be ousted from the lands, allotted to them, unless some alternate sites had been found to resettle them. But the assurance has remained unfulfilled up till now. It does not stand even notices including attempts at forcible eviction have continued, by the whole issue hangs there. In this process it has given rise to a 'protection' system on which even some local politicians, in league with the bureaucratic agents in the connected government departments.

Let us not assume that these are the only Taungya settlements in the Tarai. In fact, being a high migrant labor zone and there being only a series of private farm, farm houses and no village settlements with no specified homestead lands in the usual pattern, squatter settlements have emerged as a major problem in the tarai. We have selected these settlements for this study as a special category because the special circumstances in which these were organized by the government itself. There are others even in this small area which came into being in the previous years, in the normal course. Whatever the antecedents what is important is that all these are treated as illegal squatters they are excluded from the scope of all development/welfare schemes, since to be eligible to receive them you have to belong to some village or locality, must have some sort of a residential status. What is even more distressing is that they are not allowed to build anything by themselves, no house, no means of irrigation, no school, no community facility. In a word, they are not entitled to even dream of building a future, however fragile it might be. "Thou shall not build" is the sort of commandment they have to live under as they pass from one generation to another.

SETTLEMENT PROFILES

Here we present profiles of the Taungya settlements on the eastern margins of the tarai-bhabar tract in the now Udham Singh Nagar adjoining the hill district of Champavat. The profiles, given salient facts about the origin of the settlement, the origin of the settlers and their present status.

PANTHA GOTH

The settlement site was used by some pastoral peasants from the Lohaghat area of Champavat, who moved to the Bhabar area in search of cattle grazing resources during the dreary winter and returned to their mountain village as the summer season approached. They also found some casual work in forest extraction/plantation. With the opening up of the Tarai in the early 1950s, some of them started living there more or less permanently. Some more families arrived in 1958. The forest department allowed these 20 families to settle here and clear about one acre land per family for cultivation, the general norm applied to all Taungya settlers, though they were not Taungyas in the formal sense. But after a few years the forest department started issuing them notices to vacate the land. There were numerous attempts to evict them physically but they resisted it every time. In 1982, they were virtually thrown out.

They marched on to the district H.Q then at Nainital with their cattle to demonstrate before the district Magistrate. The local political leaders also interceded on their behalf with the state government and at the end; the civil authorities directed the forest department that they be allowed to stay on that land, until any alternative site was found for their resettlement. There hangs the story for more than 30 years now.

There were 20 families in the settlement to start with. There are only 14 families remaining now. They occupy in all about 15 acres of land. All of them are from the Pithoragarh hills, 12 Schedule Caste, and one Brahmin and one Thakur who moved in later under some arrangement with those who had left the settlement lies inside a forest and is approachable only through a narrow footpath along the Jagbuda river. Agricultural activity is very nominal and they mainly subsist on wage labor on the larger farms and in forest or rural works. The two high caste households have members in regular employment. Now presently there are 56 families and all are SCs.

BANMAHOLIA

Banmaholia is a part of the sprawling Melaghat settlement complex. This cluster is populated entirely by migrant labor from the Gorakhpur district in eastern U.P. There were 70 families in the cluster all of them are Schedule Castes, excepting a one Thakur family. Most of them were brought to the tarai in their previous generation as farm workers, by farm owners from eastern U.P. mostly freedom fighters, who were regarded as preferential category for land allotment.

The settlement was started by a group of migrant laborers from east U.P in 1968 when some 62 of them occupied a part of vacant land on the canal bank on the eastern fringe of the tarai as a party of the general scramble for land occupation in the whole tarai belt. The land is classified as government land (class-IV) in the revenue records and the settlers claim that their names are already but they have not been granted any Patta (title) to the land as yet. They continuously face the threat of eviction and have to often buy through bribe the security of their tenancy and over the land. There are about 70 families in the cluster, who occupy approximately 500 acres. They certainly are in a better position than the Taungias. Six of them are landless, and 52 have more than one acre. The remaining 12 have an acre. In the more than one acre category, there are a few large farm owners also. The inequality has arisen mainly due to land changing hands in the later years.

CHAURAPANI

The settlement also lies on the canal bank. Around 1969, eight Thakur families from the Pithoragarh district came and occupied a chunk of vacant land and started cultivation. They were certainly not the distressed type, they were looking for better prospects in the Tarai. The forest department stopped them from cultivating the land. But they obtained a stay order from the court. Then the irrigation (Canal) Department advanced its claim on the land and started charging lease rent from the settlers at the rate of Rs.7.06 per acre, what they still do. The lease is renewed every fifth year.

At present, there are 43 living in this settlement majority of them (37) the 'pioneering' thakurs families from Pithoragarh and a few from Nepal. The others include, 2 tribal Thakurs families disposed from land their own village, and a lone scheduled caste family. The land distribution is slightly more uneven than in the other Taungya settlements, 25 families hold more than one acre, the maximum being 5 acres, they are the early settlers, 8 families occupy up to 1 acre and the remaining 10 have less than ½ of an acre.

Excepting about eight households who have small size farms, or have some regular employment in government jobs, all the rest are marginal farmers/agricultural laborers.

Though the settlers here are somewhat more assured about their tenure on the land they occupy, since they have gained reprieve from the court on two occasions. Yet they are still anomalously treated as "illegal squatters" and denied access to any developmental or welfare programs.

PACHAURIA (NAI BASTI)

Pachauria (Nai Basti) is the largest Taungya settlement in the area in which live more than 500 families, nearly 97% of them Scheduled Caste families from Pithoragarh. It occupies approximately 500 acres of what was originally Kham land (Government estate i.e. public land) which almost mechanically passed on to the forest department after the Kham department was abolished though some of the present settlers, all migrant agricultural laborers, claim that they were already occupying some of the land prior to this change.

Around 1972 when the land allotment to the landless 'drive' began, this patch of land was lying vacant, as the earlier plantation had proved unsuccessful. Taking a cue from the government policy announcement that all vacant land shall be allotted to the landless, the already agitating peasants occupied this land. But the forest department moved in and destroyed the jhala(thatches) put up by the squatters. The affected people moved the court and the department agreed to allot them land on three-year lease on the Taungya basis. Again in 1974 the forest department tried to evict the lease holders on the ground that land has been selected for raising a new plantation. This move was resisted by the squatters and the district administration intervened and restrained the forest department from forcibly evicting the squatter peasants until the government found an alternate site to resettle the affected people. The matter hangs there, and the settlers have lived in a state of animated suspension, for 35 years now.

Though some 500 families had occupied the land, in 1975 allotment paper was given to only 151 families at the rate of one acre each. The excluded families went to the court. In 1976 the forest Minister seems to have assured that the squatters shall be settled on the land on Taungya basis provided that they first withdrew the law suit they had filed against the State Government. However, the remaining 325-350 families were allotted land at the rate of an acre or even less.

At present there are more than 500 families occupying about 250 acres of land. All the families have migrated from the Pithoragarh district. As many as 487

households belong to Schedule caste. The remaining 15 are from higher castes. Nearly 15% of the households are totally landless, 65% have half acre or even less 20% have up to 1 acre. Apparently almost the entire population subsists on wage laborers on the local farms, and in construction project or forest operations in the off seasons. Only a few of them have any regular employment out-side the village.

PACHPAKHARIA GOTH

As the suffix 'goth' suggests the site was used by the pastoral peasants from the Champavat area(district Pithoragarh) as a winter camp. They used to move here with their cattle and simultaneously looked for casual employment in forest operations particularly in the Kattha processing or the construction projects like the Sharda barrage. They returned to their villages in the summer season leaving behind only the Jhala (Thatch). Once the Tarai-Bhabar settlement scheme started in the 1950s, some of them started living here permanently. They were joined by others from other areas in due course of time. Pachpakharia was mainly a Tharu village in the past. Most of their land was enclosed by the two big farms the Strong Farm and Painter Farm. Having lost their ground, they sold out the remaining land to the other Pahari settlers. They were thus squeezed out from the village. Some of the Tharus were converted into day laborers even bonded serfs on the two big farms.

As for the 'Nai Basti' settlement around 1960 there were 13 families living in it and the available land was distributed among them, about 1 and ½ bigha (0.2acre) a piece. Some of them have extended their holdings a bit by nabbing at the adjoining forest land.

At present there are 48 families living in the settlement and they all together occupy 45 acres. They are all Schedule Caste families from the Lohaghat area in Champavat. The first batch settlers have a bit more land than others, but only 10 have 1 acre, five have only the homesteads, all the rest have about ½ acre or less. The settlement is bracketed by the Pilibit-Tanakpur Railway track and the Jagbuda River. It receives no irrigation water. Most of the households subsist on farm labor. During off season they weave mats from a locally available variety of reed, or to look for casual labor in the neighboring urban centers like Khatima-Tanakpur etc.

BHAINSAJHALA

The hamlet is situated in the middle of a forest patch with the Sharda River following on the eastern side and forming the boundary with Nepal. The Sharda canal runs on the western side. Two rain water drains mark it off from the other two sides.

The piece of forest clearing had been used for long by the nomadic pastoral Manihar Muslims as a grazing ground for their buffaloes. Hence the nomenclature Bhainsajhala (Manihar goth is another settlement in the vicinity). In the later year 1972-73, lured by the government announcements for land allotments to the landless, some members of the depressed class peasantry from the Pithoragarh hill also started pressing their claims on this was rather scarce, it was divided in 25 feet wide stripes, running parallel to each other between the two water-lines and allotted to the settlers. Unlike the other settlements there has been no addition to the settler families. In fact a few of them left. At present there are 21 families in the

hamlet, 7 Manihhar (Muslim), and 13 other case and one Scheduled Caste families from Pithoragarh hills. The total land area of the village is reported to be about 60 acres including the uncultivable portion; six families have 1-2 acres and all the rest acre or less. Cattle economy is the main stay of the inhabitants especially the Manihars, and the other men mostly work as agricultural labor on the large farms in the vicinity. Now gradually the number of households are increasing day by day.

Insecurity from floods, beasts and even, ghosts and evil spirits and physical and social isolation were mentioned as the major worries of the residents. But still they want to dig in here because “they have nowhere else to go”.

SAUCY MAJRA (MELAGHAT)

Melaghat at the boundary of the Udham Singh Nagar and Pilibhit districts is the largest and by no means a less complex settlement. It is in seven sections.

The circumstances of origin of this settlement tell the story of how the government itself opened the floodgates of illegal land occupation in the area.

Sisaiya used to be a settled village under the Kham system of revenue administration. It was inhabited by Tharu tribals. This village and other six villages in the vicinity were uprooted in 1956 because the entire land was acquired for the Sharda Sagar Dam project. However, the land acquired was far in excess of the actual requirement, and what was finally used for the project. The unutilized lands were not returned to the ousters and the vacant lands became a prized target for invasion by outside settlers, or all sorts land grabbers, migrants farm or construction labor from the Eastern U.P. the displaced persons from East Bengal, who were squeezed out from the lands allotted to them and the depressed class peasants from the hills.

However, the Sisaiya Majra section of the settlement was later officially created by the government to rehabilitate 125 or so flood affected families. The Nanak Sagar Dam a major irrigation project for harnessing the ‘spring line’ on the northern periphery of the tarai, burst open in 1967, which caused extensive damages to the settlements on its southern side and swept away 7 persons. After about 7 years long wait and petitioning to the government some victims of the dam-burst were settled here, in August 1974, again on the Taungya basis, as it was done as part of the understanding reached with the oppressed class peasants agitating for land they had occupied, with the result that only a few among the majority Pahari(hill people) government allottees could gain occupied.

At present there are about 150 families in the settlements, more than one-third of them oppressed class peasants, who had migrated here from the Salempur subdivision of Deoria district in East U.P. Most of them had been brought here by the land allottees, in the freedom fighters category, in the early years of colonization of the tarai as farm labors or share croppers. The other regional groups are about 15 Pahari and 10 Punjabi families and the rest originating from different places.

The settlement occupies approximately 500 acres. Though the government had allotted 3.25 acres to each family, the land distribution has become

quite skewed at this point of time. The land has changed hands quite frequently. Some extended their holdings by occupying additional land. In this way especially the Punjabi settlers have built large size farm of 10-40 acres.

Most of the land occupied by the settlers is under the control of the Irrigation (Canal) Department, but the Forest Department also claims the land. Thus, those who were settled here by the government and those who simply occupied the land continue to be treated alike in the matter of regularization of their occupancy right.

DEVIPURA (MAJHGAWAN)

Devipura's status is somewhere different from the other Taungya squatments. It came into being in 1972. To start with 42 families from Pithoragarh district came here and occupied the vacant land. At present there are more than 80 families in this settlement and they occupied approximately 75 acres of land.

The settlement lies along the Canal Bank, on the fringe of a Forest. Part of the land they occupy is under the control of the Irrigation Department. About 30 families have less than 1 acre and other 51 acre or slightly more. Some settlers have 15 installed hand pumps for drinking water and to irrigate their small plots. But a majority of the families depend on the Canal water both for drinking and domestic uses.

The settlement today has come to reproduce the rather simple caste structure of the villages: Brahmin: 45, Thakur: 20 and SC: 15. The upper Caste families also occupy somewhat larger pieces of land.

Accepting a NFE type primary school run by the help of UDI for the last 3 years or so there is absolutely no social facility in the village.

Majority of the families subsist as marginal farmers or agricultural laborers on the farms nearby. Members of five families have found service occupations.

FAGPUR (NAI BASTI)

The settlement stands at the south-eastern margin of the revenue village of the same description. The main village lies by the side of the national highway between Banbasa and Tankpur.

It was also settled by the government during 1973-74 on the Taungya basis. Most of the 60 original settlers were Scheduled Caste landless/marginal peasants from Pithoragarh who were allotted 1 acre each. However some 20 families (out of them) were recently displaced as the land they held was acquired by the NHPC: Tanakpur project. It is interesting to note in this matter, that though the settlers have not been granted regular tenancy right on the land, the ousters were paid compensation by the project authority.

The remaining settler/families face uncertainty from this source also. Their homesteads fall much below the level of the NHPC feeder canal. A large amount of seepage of water is resulting from the just commissioned feeder canal, which may cause an immense problem of water logging and endanger the very existence of the settlement.

Though there are no social facilities in the settlement, but its location advantage provides relatively much better access to such facilities outside at Tanakpur, Banbasa etc.

For the same reason, we see an element of heterogeneity in social composition and some diversification of the economic pattern. Land has frequently changed hands, and later some ex-soldiers also settled here. Of the now remaining 40 families, 36 are Scheduled Caste. 3 Thakur and 1 Brahmin all from Pithoragarh district. Seven families have less than ½ acres, 29 up to 1 acre and 4 families occupy more than 1 acre land. Members of some 20 families or so also have service occupations. Others subsist as marginal farmers/agricultural labor and off-season casual laborers in construction activities.

Continuing uncertainty over regularization of land allotment the sources of major worry, but somehow the settlers are prepared to face this in comparison to the precarious existence in the hill villages. At the same time they also feel cheated that the dreams they had seen about a new future opening up in the Tarai has turned sour. Incidentally they were in the lead in the land occupation movement.

BUDABAGH

Budabagh also was 'settled' in 1974 on Taungya basis. Originally, there were 60 families, who were allotted 1 acre each. All the settlers were from the Pithoragarh district, most of them landless or marginal peasants who were trying to seek a foothold in the Tarai-Bhabar in search of regular employment. To begin with, there were 50 Shilpkar (Scheduled Caste) and 10 Thakur families in the settlement. But the Thakurs disposed off the land under their occupation and settled elsewhere in the same area. At present there are 75 families in the settlement, all SC excepting one Thakur, and ex-soldier who has acquired the land in the later years.

The settlement is situated adjacent to the main village of same description at the fringe of a forest and across a rain water drain which assume menacing proportions during the rainy season cutting it off completely from the other settlements. A few children who go to school outside the settlement "have to remain absent for weeks". There is no facility of primary school near about and the parents cannot afford to send children to privately managed middle/high schools. A NFE type voluntary school started by UDI is running in the village for the third year now.

Physical isolation is the most nagging problem of the people living in the settlement. The settlement itself is scattered as each home stands on the individual fields. The area in itself is quite insecure and it is not easy for people to come together or call for help whenever any exigency arises.

Almost all the families live at the same level. They are all marginal farmers cultivating one acre or less land and supplementing it through wage labor on

the neighboring farms and seasonal migration. Yet, people seem to like the life here, as compared to what it was in their village in the hills. “There is equality here”. Equality is seen more in the light of caste inequalities.

Of course, insecurity of the tenure of the land on which they sit, is their utmost worry. Some families are on forest land, and some on revenue (class IV) land.

TYOLOGY

It would be difficult to fit in these settlements into a typology. In the first place no settlement remains in the form it started excepting to some extent only, the traditional pastoral peasant type. The original social composition of the settlers groups has changed drastically in most of the cases. Land transfers have taken place, even though on simple sale deeds, which are not registered and are not legally valid. And, those who came in were not the Taungya type but those who had a few thousand rupees per bigha to invest. But going by the “pull” and “push” dichotomy, there could be no doubt that they are generally the “push-outs”.

The settlements covered by this study fall under three different types from the point of their origin. In type ‘A’ are those which were deliberately settled by the district administration on the Taungya settlers basis viz, Fagpur, Pachauria, Budabagh, Garhigoth and Bagha.

In type ‘B’ we may include those which had been traditionally used by the hill peasants practicing transhumance, as the winter camps where they moved in with their sheep, goat or cattle and simultaneously work as seasonal labor either in forest operation, or construction projects in the later phase, but subsequently, stayed on these sites as the Tarai became habitable and offered better means of employment. But even in this case, they were also treated as Taungya settlers. This type is exemplified by Pantha Goth, Pachapakharia Goth and Bhainsajhala.

In type ‘C’ we may put the more mixed and heterogeneous settlements, where migrant labor from other regions notably East U.P. displaced persons from former East Pakistan (their second generation), and some regions of the state have a larger presence. They mostly occupied the excess land acquired by the government for the construction of the Sharda Canal network, and quite a few among them may actually qualify to be called as “encroachers: even land grabbers”. It is difficult to identify at this point as to how many of them (or their previous generation) were inducted here as Taungyas. A number of them occupy larger size land holdings than those living in type A or B. In fact, a few have carved out big farms, either by buying up or simply occupying more public land. It is also interesting to note that most of these bigger land holders come from higher socio-economic status. Even here they are better off in their legal standing on the land. In the last analysis it appears that those who were settled by the government are the worse off.

It is more relevant to the purpose of the study to trace the linkage between the ecological degradation of the resource base in the mountains and the squatter peasant, phenomenon in the Tarai obviously for the reason that the migrants

from the Himalayan hill region constitute a huge majority of the people living in these squattments. That we take up in the following chapter.

But, let this be clearly stated that factors relating to the ecological degradation of their ecosystem do not figure out directly in the perception of the respondents. They do not straightway perceive this as primary cause. The cause is seen more in economic term, such as lack of adequate means of livelihood, or lack of employment in the native villages.

Table: Showing area and population of the Taungya basties

SL. No.	Name of Village	Settlement Year	Area of the Village Estimated	Population 1993	No. of the Families at beginning	Nos.of Families at the Present
01	Budabagh	1974	75	650	60	88
02	Fagpur	1974	50	400	60	40
03	Devipura	1972	110	600	50	80
04	Garhigoth	1972	60	350	28	57
05	Sisaiya Majra (Melaghat)	1974	500	900	125	150
06	Sisiaya (Melaghat)	1960	--	--	35	85
07	Banmaholia (Melaghat)	1968	664	500	62	70
08	Bhainsajhala	1972	60	180	20	21
09	Chaurapani	1969	75	350	13	43
10	Pachauria (Nai Basti)	1974	156	4000	150	500
11	Panthagoth	1960	10	125	20	14
12	Pachpakharia	1948	15	400	13	50
	TOTAL		1775	8455	636	1198

Table: Distribution of Taungya household According to Land Occupied

SL. No.	Name of Village	Total No. Family	Total No. of Landless	Landholding ½ Acre	Landholding 1 Acre	No. of Families more than 1 Acre
01	Budabagh	88	--	40	45	03
02	Fagpur	40	--	07	29	04
03	Devipura	80	--	--	30	50
04	Garhigoth	57	--	10	37	10
05	Sisaiya Majra (Melaghat)	150	04	--	02	144
06	Sisaiya(Melaghat)	85	20	--	--	65

07	Banmaholia (Melaghat)	70	06	02	10	52
08	Bhainsajhala	21	--	05	10	06
09	Chaurapani	43	--	10	08	25
10	Pachauria (Nai Basti)	500	150	100	150	100
11	Panthagoth	14	--	02	09	03
12	Pachapakhria	50	04	36	08	02
	TOTAL	1198	184	212	338	464

Table: Distribution of Taungya Households According to the Begin of Origin/Ethnic Identify

SL. No.	Name of Village	Pahari	Nepali	East UP/Bengali	Punjabi/Others
01	Budabagh	88	--	--	--
02	Fagpur	40	--	--	--
03	Devipura	80	--	--	--
04	Garhigoth	57	--	--	--
05	Sisaiya Majra (Melaghat)	--	--	150	--
06	Sisaiya(Melaghat)	12	--	63	10
07	Banmaholia (Melaghat)	--	--	70	--
08	Bhainsajhala	21	--	--	--
09	Chaurapani	38	05	--	--
10	Pachauriya (Nai Basti)	492	08	--	--
11	Panthagoth	14	--	--	--
12	Pachpakariagoth	50	--	--	--
	TOTAL	892	13	283	10

Table: Distribution of Taungya Households According to the Caste/Regional Background

SL. No.	Name of Village	Brahaman	Rajput	OBC	SC	Other
01	Budabagh	--	01	--	87	--
02	Fagpur	01	03	--	36	--
03	Devipura	20	--	45	15	--
04	Garghigoth	01	01	--	56	--
05	Sisiaya Majra (Melaghat)	01	--	04	145	--
06	Isaiya (Melghat)	02	02	50	31	--
07	Banmaholia (Melaghat)	--	01	--	69	--
08	Bhainsajhala	06	07	01	07	--

09	Chaurapani	--	39	04	--	--
10	Pachauria (Naibasti)	02	11	--	485	09
11	Pachpakhariagoth	--	--	--	50	--
	TOTAL	33	111	54	991	09

N.B. Naturally OBCs are not reported in the settlement of Kumaon People because their categories are nearly absent in regional caste structure.

Table: Distribution of Taungya Households According to the Occupation (Main)

SL. No.	Name of Village	Cultivation /Farm	Marginal	Agriculture And other Misc.	Services	Total
01	Budabagh	03	40	42	03	88
02	Fagpur	04	07	09	20	40
03	Devipura	30	15	30	05	80
04	Garigoth	05	30	12	10	57
05	Sisaiya Majra (Melaghat)	10	40	100	--	150
06	Sisaiya(Melaghat)	20	20	45	--	85
07	Banmaholia	05	28	37	--	--
08	Bhainsajhala	06	05	10	--	21
09	Chaurapani	25	10	08	--	43
10	Pachauria	50	250	100	100	500
11	Panthagoth	03	02	09	--	14
12	Pachpakhariagoth	02	38	08	02	50
	TOTAL	163	485	410	140	1198

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CHAPTER III

EXISTENCE IN THE TAUNGYA SETTLEMENTS

Settlement Pattern

In the settlement pattern of the Tarai there are no villages, which is so very characteristics of the rural society in India. The only exceptions are the old settled villages, including some Tharu villages. Otherwise what we have is a series of farms and farm houses of varying sizes, and rural market centers are some distances. The pattern generally conforms to the American rural settlement pattern excepting that here there is an immensely big problem of squatters all around. In the whole newly settled area there are no villages of the single cluster-type or helmeted type. This also means that there are no separately designated common residential or homestead lands in the village wise land use pattern. As we have already noted in the section on land reforms, there were no “gram samaj” (community) lands available in the Tarai region for distribution as housing sites among the landless. Squatting is an inevitable consequence in this kind of a situation and it has been aggravated due to the fact that Tarai is a high migrant labor zone.

The farm labor may live on the employers farm but such facility is normally farm but such facility is normally available to the regular farm lands only that too on the more organized large or medium size farms. But the much larger casual labor force are forced to squat on the public lands lying at the forest fringes, or along the canal banks or simply along the road side or pathways, especially in the central Tarai, where all the land has been privatized. The laboring class can scarcely afford to buy land for housing at the going market prices. This explains the concentration of large size squatter settlements on the eastern fringes on the Tarai where some land were available on forest fringes or canal banks and where the present study is based.

Even in the Tanungya-type settlements, where the original settlers were allotted about one acre size plots of land, the farm-stead pattern is the common feature, each dwelling unit standing on individual plot. But the individual holding units are so small that scatter effect is not markedly visible. All the same, there are absolutely no community facilities not even common village lanes and the edge of the field swerve as the access to the separate dwelling units, they despite the fact that most of their settlements are remarkably homogeneous in their social composition, in as much as settlers originating from different regional/sub regional communities, and even analogues caste groups have tended to cluster at the settlement level, and the Taungyas particularly have the same economic status and even the same activity pattern. Yet, there is hardly any community organization in evidence in the

settlement level. The only community feelings manifest from time to time is the insecurity over the tenancy right to the homesteads that looms large before every squatment-living family. Obviously such a lack of community organization, in spite of the fact that the very genesis of these Taungya settlements lies in a common struggle of the landless peasants, arises because the families living in them are too much possessed by the feelings of insecurity and the absolute lack of any community resources or institutions such as village commons a school or a panchayat. In fact, the situation is perceptually different in the settlement where UDI has tried to involve the people in the management of the voluntary schools for their children.

Causes for Migration

Let this be made clear that it is not that all the families living in any settlements at this point of time had initially arrived there. Nor, did they arrive at the same point of time. Quite many had migrated to Tarai-Bhabar in the early 1950s, in their previous generation when its colonization had just begun. Quite many had also been brought here as Taungyas in forest plantations. Particularly, most of those who originate from east U.P. region were inducted by the land grantees from the same region as farm labor or share croppers.

There are thus two clearly distinguished streams of migrants one from the hills and the other from east U.P. and the reasons for migration for the two are somewhat different. Of course, landless prominently figures in either case especially when it comes to the Scheduled Caste families, what they mostly are.

In the stream originating from the hills most of them came from different parts of the Pithoragarh district the obvious most reason being that the Khatima-Tanakpur section of Tarai-Bharbar on the southern boundary of the district, the main access to the district is through communication routes passing through this section and historically it was part of the kingdom of the Chand dynasty who had ruled from the nearby Champavat and some groups from this region like the pastoral peasants and the pastoral Shauka Indo-Tibetan border traders had been coming here seasonally as part of the cycle of transhumance practiced by them until the time this pattern was finally disrupted (in the later case) in the wake of the Sino-Indian conflict in 1962.

The direct cause given by the settlers that made them to leave their villages and migrate to here is “lack of enough food and work to survive” barring those few in the better-off settlements (e.g. Devipura, Chaurapani) who had enough land base back at home in the hills but had come driven by the “urge to live in the plains”. Even in the case of available in the Tarai, motivated them to venture out. This means that in situations of ecological pauperization also, it is usually the more enterprising members of the community who leave thus starting a negative spiral, for the native communities.

Does ecological degradation e.g. shrinking of the resource base and under mining of the livelihood pattern enter into the perceptions of the migrants as the root cause for the survival problem? As lack of “food security” seen in a historical

perspective? Apparently these dimensions are generally missed in the first response. But they start seeing the connection between the two factors when they are subsequently asked about the geographical/environmental changes taking place in their native villages.

For Example:

S.No.	Changes Manifested	Cited By	Area of Origin
01.	Incorporation of agricultural field in municipal area	Group of Presidents in Fagpur particularly	Close to Pitharguer town
02.	Landslides, soil erosion	Fagpur, Garhigoth, Pachauria, Chaurapni	Lohaghat region mostly
03.	Recurring drought situations	Fagpur, Devipura, Pachauria, Bhainsajhala	Diverse
04.	Dwindling water sources drying nala scarcity of drinking water	Fagpur, budabagh	„
05.	Decline in soil fertility “less and less yield from the same land”	Pachauria	„

Link with the Native Communities

One of the worst forms of deprivation that the Taungya peasants must have suffered is social, when as fragments from the stable rural communities they were placed in far away forest settlements. Though these settlements did not come about exactly in the same manner as their likes in the past, they do manifest the same processes of fragmentation and marginalization. So, one of the dimensions that we explored with them is kind of links they still maintain with their native village communities. The response pattern is rather complex but the following observations stand out more or less clearly:

- i. At this point of time that is generally speaking in about 20 years time span migrants originating from the landless and mostly oppressed class has either completely stopped visiting their native villages or it has become very rare. On the other hand the few “fashionable settlers” living who had land and other property and joint families in their native villages still continue to maintain their interest and may make numerous visits there or even return to the hill village during the summer months.
- ii. Most of the visits to the native village are either for worship of village/family deity, gods and goddesses generally marriage, death etc. in the clan/kinship. Thus it can be said that the visits are mostly under some sort of companies rarely for the pleasure of reunion with the old community or a change. But this does not seem to be the case with the better of category of settlers, who may return to their villages every summer.

- iii. In fact the settlers from east U.P. seems to have somewhat greater interaction with the native villages than those from the hills. Their visits to the native villages are much larger number and this given enough scope for social interaction for arranging martial relations etc. moreover, they are in close proximity to the region of their origin in this section of Tarai-Bhabar specially has become more or less extension of Pithoragarh. But this is not the case with the settlers from east U.P. who still feel they are living in Pradesh (other country or land).

Loss or Gain?

As to the relative advantage or disadvantage of settling down in the Tarai, even as squatters with a rather weak position with regard to tenancy right on the bits of land they have done to occupy, it is interesting that almost every one weighs the change as of relative advantage. The relative advantage is generally seen in better availability of food and employment and secondarily in better communication and access to health facilities even these are not available in the settlements. Of course, in the case of the landless the possession of some land that too of more productive type should make quite some positive differences. On the whole the preference for life in these squatments reflects on the distressing conditions of the lower class peasantry in the Himalayan hills and east U.P. plains from where they have originated.

What the settlers from the hills miss most are the “cool climate” and “clear environment” in the hills. Next to this they also miss the “community life family folk and relations” that they enjoyed in their native villages. Also certain facilities such as schools for children and various developments/welfare schemes started by the government what they are denied here. But these must figure as intangibles as compared to the relative security in the matter of food and employment. Therefore, the perception of relative advantage is quite under stable.

Livelihood Pattern

This category of settlers in the Tarai have not moved away from their traditional livelihood pattern “marginal farmer/agricultural labor (MF/A)” is the main occupational category in which most of the workers living in these squatment communities would fall this, more or less, uniformly applies to the settlements that come up on the Taungya basis. The occupational structure is somewhat structure is somewhat more diversified in the pure encroachers settlements.

As the already tiny initial land base further narrowed in this generation, “service” has emerged as a coping up mechanism.

There are hardly 5 percent who may qualify to be called owner cultivations or farmers. They mostly come from the group of the more enterprising settlers who have encroached upon public land rather than receiving it as government

allotment. Service figures as a prominent occupation even in their case as a measure of diversification of the family economy but their members are in superior grade regular jobs as compared to the members of the Taungya settlers, who mostly get casual employment in the unorganized sector, within the region and outside.

The proximity to forest factor notwithstanding, animal husbandry is a significant economic activity only in a few settlements mainly those on the forest fringes. Otherwise there are scarcely any fodder resources available and the tiny bits of land are too small to be used for fodder cultivation. Then the relative inaccessibility of these squatments barring a few, due to the lack of village link/approach roads, makes marketing of milk a difficult proposition. The approach to the settlements is through mud tracks (forest roads) across the rain water channels which become particularly turbulent during the rainy season.

The progressive image on the Tarai agriculture notwithstanding, it has not lost its seasonal character. Most of the employment in the farm sector is in the peak seasons only. There is hardly about 90-100 days work available in the agriculture sector. Next to it, construction is the other major source of employment as casual labor. There has been a major National Hydel Power Corporation (NHPC) project under construction at Tanakpur for the last fifteen years or so, which has been just completed. This had considerably eased the problem of unemployment even for the unskilled type of labor and considerably increased the wage earning of the average labor household. If the condition of object poverty were not very much visible during the time, this field works was done, and the oppressive weight of poverty has not affected the responses of the Taungya settlers, it was largely due to the relative prosperity that they had been in the recent years, but with the closure of the construction phase of the project in the beginning of 1993, the increased employment opportunities have already ended and the fear of unemployment has already started worrying the people. In fact, the labor employment pattern would have been considerably affected by this project.

In the normal years, there is substantial seasonal migration of labor from these migrants settlements largely to the core zone of the Tarai such as Haldwani, Kichha, Pantnagar, Gadarpur and in forest plantations within the same region. At the same time a sizeable labor force arrives in the area from Nepal, across the river during the Kharif (Monsoon) crop season especially for paddy transplantations.

Thus, the labor market is largely unstructured and unorganized. As a result the farm labor wages prevalent in the area belie the popular image of the Tarai as a model of agricultural modernization, the farm wages are below the statutory minimum wages, these averages between Rs.20-25/- for men and Rs.20/- for women. The non-farm wages (for unskilled labor) are generally Rs.5/- higher than the farm wage. Most of the residents of the squatments work as casual labor outside their own settlements. Hardly any one of them works as attached labor to particular farm owners and receive bare wage minus any subsistence in kind such as food.

The practice of the labor being given daytime meal during farm operation, as in the average rural communities, is practically absent in this area.

The respondents were not able to calculate the average monthly/yearly incomes of the average settler family in these squatments. Apparently there is only one pattern obtaining in these squatment communities, but the casual wage employment factor makes it highly variable at the household level. Considering the way that the Taungya settlers earn their livelihood, they must be invariably below the poverty line.

As we have seen a major public sector (NHPC) construction project right in the middle of the area had significantly contributed to the employment opportunities, and wage incomes but its impact must have been of a temporary nature. Firstly, it has not thrown much impact on the farm sector wages. Secondly, since Taungya settlers lack any assets, and there is a ring of uncertainty even with regard to the small pieces of land they occupy, there was hardly any scope for investment of the higher wage earnings. So, in the net the relative ease in the employment situation, and increase in wage earnings for nearly ten years or so, would have only increased the consumption needs of the people and the crunch is sure to be felt, as this factor has been removed with the completion of the construction phase of the project. There would be no other benefits accruing to them from this power generation project. On the contrary, about 40 settler families in the Fagpur squatment have already been displaced as result of seepage from the feeder channel of the hydel power station and the settlement lying below the level. The project-related development rather poignantly brings out the sticky ground on which these settlers have been caught. Notwithstanding this fact, they do not even yet feel wholly disenchanted, so long there is hope of their being able to hold on to the ground. We have already seen that for most of them it was the case of having something, rather than having nothing. But they are really caught on a sticky ground. They cannot make much of the small plots of the land they hold, it is valued mainly as a source of security. They cannot make any investment in it even if they were able to effect some saving.

Nor, can they invest in betterment of their housing condition. The dwelling units are mostly mud walls or jungle reeds for wall and thatch for roofing. The availability of thatch has become acute over years, they are not supposed “to build” anything no structure, even the community schools have to run under make-shift jhala (thatch). Any community/group initiative to build community facilities has been killed by the over-zealous government departments. For an example, in one case the initiative taken by the people in a nearby village could continue to attend school during the monsoon season also was not tolerated by the forest department.

Community Health

We were able to build some data on the health status of the squatment communities from two sources, firstly the information on the general morbidity conditions as given by the panel of interviewees community leaders, and secondly the more technical and systematically gathered data from the school health programme run by UDI. But even the later exercise, conducted under the supervision, of locality based general medical practitioner did not come out as systematic as it was expected, besides the considerably long time it took.

We have already discussed how Tarai-Bhabar was transformed from a highly malaria-endemic zone in the early 1950s. Anyway, the climate remains the same, it is highly hot and humid from June to September and this is the unhealthiest season of the year. Fevers still take an epidemic form during the period. Though it is not officially admitted but most of the suffers believe it to be malaria. At least many syndromes still persist. In fact, malaria seems to have come back in a big way in the Tarai-Bhabar belt. If swamps and thickets of tall-grass where the major breeding ground for mosquitoes in the earlier period, lack of habitat planning and disposal of waste sewage water has taken their place now.

Diarrhea is other major disease syndrome reported from the area. It was most frequently reported in the monsoon months. The climate factor apart, drinking water appears to be the major source of the problem. As already stated the squatments are excluded from all development schemes of the government. Some of the squatments are excluded from all development schemes of the government. Some of the squatments depend on canal water, or the puddles formed in the canal bed, when it is not running. These squatments are situated near the head works where the Sharda leaves the hills, so the canal carries large quantity of silt, sand, dead leaves and similar other matter and it is usually muddy in color. Hand pumps are the other major source of drinking water. The UDI has installed pump sets on group basis, in between 9-10 homesteads in some squatments and some private pump sets have also been installed in recent years. But the sub-soil water is hardly 20-25 feet below surface in the area and the hand pumps use only the first stratum. Therefore, even this water cannot be considered safe for drinking alongside diarrheal diseases, digestive disorders were frequently mentioned. Also skin disorders were frequently mentioned. Also skin disorders, more frequently among the children, could be more directly traced to the sources of drinking water.

Among other chronic diseases few cases of tuberculosis were reported from every settlement, somewhat more frequently from a few settlements such as Bhainsajhala and Fagpur. There could be association not with the environment, other than wide prevalence of the drinking (alcohol) habit is also reported. Also the water in these settlements is reported contain are only substance.

Continues health monitoring was done for 454 children reading in the voluntary primary level schools run with the assistance of UDI. Of these no less 66.75 percent (i.e.303 out of 454) were reported to be suffering from severe type of malnutrition and 29.5 percent less severe (moderate) type of malnutrition. Vitamin A deficiency was observed in 135 cases and iron deficiency in 68. Calcium deficiency was reported in a few cases only. Worm infection was detected in 53 cases. Eye and skin disorders were widely prevalent among the children. Incidentally, lack of oral hygiene was also widely noticed and nearly 25 percent (110) children had a severe problem of dental caries.

All in all, the health status data indicates a high incidence of water-borne diseases, and the problem is not so much of pollution of water sources or the natural properties of the water available in the area, but one of absolute lack of the safe drinking water facilities in some squatments.

But more than physical health, what seem to worry the people, is the social health of the communities. Alcoholism has been reported as the “main problem” from all the squatments and the problem features somewhat more prominently in the settlements of the migrants from the hills. Nothing very surprising either. Apart from the drink-habit, gambling is the other “social evil” that exercises the concern of some of the community leaders at least. They would hold high degree of liquor consumption and drunken behavior calling names and getting into brawls as a major cause of lack of community life in the settlements.

As already discussed despite the fact that settlers from the same regional society have tended to cluster in particular settlements. Even than remain disparate elements from different villages. There is as such a distinct lack of community, and the absence of social constraints on individual behavior that normally operate in the primary groups and communities this may be one of the reason for pervasive normal lessens.

In the perception of a majority of our respondents the incidence of alcoholism is markedly higher among the men living in the squatments than the average settled villages in the vicinity, though some would counter it by pointing out that the people don't earn enough to eat, then where from can they money to drink? We do not have firm data on this aspect of the behavior trait of the squatter people. Apparently on an average evening a large percentage of the men do appear to overtly drunk. There are many reasons for it such as the presence of number of army personnel in the area including a significant number who have acquired homestead land in these settlements, easy availability of liquor from Nepal across the border, opening of liquor these (vends) almost at every roadside market point. In fact, it is well-known how induced drinking was used as a menace for land alienation from the Tharus by invoking their tradition. Lastly, what may have also contributed to the problem is the experience of higher wage incomes from comparatively more steady employment in the construction sector (the NHPC project) in the last few years.

But the main issue is end it is some theoretical interest also. Does the forced kind of existentialism that is literally living from day to day and not being entitled to build a future for themselves, affect their thinking and behavior, the very spending habit of whatever they earn. After all improving the housing status is one thing that an average person in their situation would think of doing since them already had physical possession of homestead land. There may not be any scope worth name to invest in agriculture, but there was certainly some scope investment in housing thus the deep sense of alienation would normally cause a general environment that leads to normalness and powerlessness.

It is of little relevance to talk of the scale of health facilities available in the area. The squatments don't at all come into the delivery system. We are not saying that the health functionaries as the PHC or sub centre close the doors on the patients coming from these basties, but they are not part of their designated service areas and no extension workers visit there, accepts for private purpose. Normally, the PHC system has scarcely any service or medical relief to offer.

The Poverty Cycle

It hardly needs to be brought out in much detail that in the micro-environment surrounding the Taungya squatter settlements there is very little opportunity even for inter-relation mobility leave apart the station of the first generation settlers. Therefore, even in this most “dynamic developing region” of the country, the Taungya and other squatters are caught a cycle of deprivation and poverty. In fact the opportunity structure for them is almost wholly closed and the scenario is laid for perpetual on of inter-generational poverty. In this sort of a situation, their second generation could be about the only potential for any betterment in their socio-economic status, through education and occupational change. But the children are almost wholly excluded from this process. It is true that given the seriousness and will of the parents, up to the primary school level, the children from the squatter settlements can go to the schools located in the settlements , by the time they reach the middle school level, for which children from there squatments have to travel 6-7 kms on the average through the forest and across the drains and streams to the schools. The opening of in few children’s school by UDI seems to have promoted primary education. But the opportunity ends there. It is running only one Junior high school at Pachauria Nai Basti. It was reported that nearly 61% of the boys and 27% of the girls of the corresponding age group were attending primary level schools. But the schools attendance sharply decreases at the Junior High School level. Whatever opportunities are available can at best make them literate. Thus, stark conditions exist for perpetuation of the poverty cycle. The deep sense of alienation would normally cause a general environment that leads to normlessness and powerlessness.

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CHAPTER IV

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this case study could at the most permit us to pose a few conceptual and methodological issues.

As already stated in the relevant chapter, this case study was undertaken as part of a series of such studies on Eco-Health. There was no uniform research design for making these case studies and it can be said that these were of genuinely exploratory nature. However, the minimum that was sought to be established through field research is the connection between a specific environment of ecologically degraded sort and the state of health of the people inhabiting that environment and exposed to its degrading processes. Regrettably, the effect part of the problem that is the community health aspect has remained a rather under developed in this study. The problem was not simply that the investigator is a layman in matters relating to health. He could make a general survey of the diseases that afflict the people inhabiting a certain environment but he is not qualified to make any judgment regarding the cause and effect relation between a particular diseases syndrome and the degrading processes that are spoiling their environment. Otherwise, who does not know that even in the popular perception good ab-o-hawa (water and air) promotes good health and may even be prescribed for restoration of health?

The limitations of the investigator apart, the problem faced were more of a methodological nature. In this case, we see that the ecological/environment setting in which the Taungya type squatter settlements, that served as the empirical base for the study are placed cannot simply be characterized as degraded, that is, beyond certain critical limit, neither at the regional level, or at the micro-regional or small area level. The internal environment of the squatments may be characterized as degraded, but in some aspect or elements only of the internal environment, which may be conceived as sub-system of the locality level environment. It is mainly the social component of the environment, or the human ecology component, conceived as the ecology of social relations. Moreover, whatever health problems exists these are not peculiar product of a specific type of environment. It is denial of the basic social security and access to basic human needs. The problem can be mitigated through adequate provision of basic needs the lake of which directly and adversely affects the state of community health.

This also implies that in any ecological study of the human health-related consequences of the interaction before society and physical/natural environment we may have to conceive of the environments as an aggregate of systems, conditions factors and discern the central or principal components shaping the pattern and structure of interaction. We have also visualized environment at different levels or spheres impinging on each other. Therefore, the simple task of picking up a degraded environment looks rather methodologically problematic.

In fact, the findings of the case study, though nothing very startling, raise many issues. At one level it can be argued that the transformation of the Tarai, through massive human interference with nature, from an inhospitable and inhabitable marshy jungle tract into a fertile agricultural region and its adaption to human needs, was an outstanding act of ecological reconstruction. In this connection it may be noted that according to some historical sources the same Tarai was fully inhabited, prospers country; Bhramapura, in the ancient times, or even through the region of chand dynasty in Kumaon, coinciding with the Moghal period. It seems it was turn into a desolate country due to the huge wash-off effect of ecological degradation and destruction up in the Himalayas.

The problem arose not because there were drastic interferences with ecological/environmental features of the region that the patently malarial climate of the region was modified not simply by destroying on set of organism in the environment, that is, the demonic mosquitoes whose bite “even upturned the elephant” though intensive DDT spraying, but though some drastic changes in the geographical conditions also, such a reclamation of marshy and swampy grounds, improvement in drainage pattern, conversion of the land under tall grass into fertile crop land and so on. The main source of the problem we face at present in a result of the neglect of the basic interest and basic needs of the native tribal communities and the pectoral hill peasants, and also total neglect of the ecological needs of the contiguous Himalayan hill region. Through method of integrated planning for the Tarai and the hill region, it was possible to find a solution to the survival crises created by the states monopoly control and commercial exploitation of forest and the consequent depletion and draining of the ecological resources by utilizing the substantial land resources carved but in the Tarai for planned resettlement of the hill peasants. It was, thus feasible to reduce the effect of degrading process in the Himalayan eco system by reducing the excessive load on its carrying capacity. It was another point that the conversion of the remaining forests in the Tarai into fast growing industrial type tree species such a Eucalyptus had some adverse ecological impact on the environment of the region. At the same time, it is also true that if we were to do any ecological zoning of the whole Himalayan region, it is only in the Tarai that a commercial silvicultural style adapted to the needs of the industry, is feasible with the least hazards in terms of possible ecological imbalance.

The problem arose mainly because the social equity perspective was completely sacrificed in favor of the economic growth and development perspective, and the newly reclaimed lands were parceled off in large chunks to the more resourceful outsiders, if few privileged/welfare categories apart, to promote capitalistic, call it mechanized, agriculture in the area. In other words, the settlements of the Tarai sub-region was totally detached from the Himalayan ecosystem and the needs of it ecological restoration and conservation. Moreover, the huge squatter problem is not as much result of drastic changes brought about in the ecological/geographic conditions.

At another level, this study about what may appear as if fringe problem brings home the truth that the degradation of the forest environment (the principal component) and the resultant logical crises in the far-off Himalayan region, is result of exploitation rooted in colonial history, imperialistic wars and development of

world trade. The Taungya system of labor was also caused by these very forces. It developed in the processes of change of the mode of exploitation of forest resources and deliberate change and the character of the forest through schemes of artificial regeneration and economic elimination of the mixed type natural forests.

In this case, it is suggested that it was neither the land system nor the water system, or the air bio-sphere which sustain life on the plant have been degraded. What has, in fact, been degraded is the agrarian labor relation system. The Taungya system was devised as a means of procuring cheap and captive labor, torn apart from their own communities and lured away work in isolated forest plantations. And, fragments of the low peasantry disposed and impoverished and in the processes of the blatantly iniquitous agrarian relation structure imposed by the colonial masters were caught Taungya arrangements. It was also discarded when this labor intensive method was found to be less economic due to availability of more mechanized means for some of the plantations related operations, or it was found to be redundant with change in the very character of the forest plantations.

In the same way the study also brings out how the Taungya system was converted into a legal structure and how it was used to regulate land and labor relations as a short-term lease form, completely detached from the very purpose (i.e. raising forest plantations) it was invented and at times as in this case, even used to hoodwink the landless peasants agitating for land allotments as promised under the declared policy of the government of the day.

The situation becomes all the more paradoxical, when we find that the Taungya peasants who were settled by the fully authorized agents of the government itself alright for the time till alternate land was found for their settlement, have been treated as unauthorized squatters for about 35 years now. They are being denied tenancy or ownership right over the tiny plots of land on the specious argument that it will encroach on forest land, though in the same area much more flagrant and bigger encroachments have been tolerated. The government is fully apprised that there is much larger area of public land including forest land that has been illegally enclosed by the bigger farms. Even in this case we find that the initial government land allottees stand much interior in their occupancy/tenancy status, pure encroachers. The latter are also more favorably placed because they mostly occupy the civil/revenue lands which is easier to get than the forest land. This shows how the limits to utilization of environmental resources were being used as a weapon only against the poor and how all environmental protection laws basically pinch.

Finally the study underlines the survival problems surrounding the environmental resources utilization policy and practices. It is very clear that environment cannot be saved in this kind of iniquitous structure even the ecological prescription of population control for the poor is no going to work in an iniquitous social structure. Unfortunately the “environmental crises literature” is more devoted to hyperbolizing the ecological problematic and avoids suggesting concrete ways to solve this problem. The environmental studies have to enter the planning sector. It should be possible to find solution to the state “animated suspension” in which the Taungya settlers have been kept all these years, though application of methods of integrated land use and human habitat planning. The Taungya settlements are very

minor drain on the environment. But, there situation links up with the much larger issue that is, the survival conflict over environment.

In the end, it must be said that the concept of eco-health is socially and politically very much relevant. It holds out interesting theoretical possibilities, as well. Beyond, the concept of occupational and environmental health, which pertain to more organized space, as strong example we are visualizing of a situation where degradation changes in the environment have resulted in negative genetic consequences. In other words, the level of pollution and degradation of the life sustaining system has reached such critical limits as to cause genetic degradation among the people living in that medium/environment. The other example could be how degradation has caused emaciation of the entire communities.

Probably, the local or the most proximate environment of the Tanugya peasants was not a fit case to fall in this conceptual frame. Having said so, even in this case there is a theoretical possibility suggested exploring how continuously living in a state of “futurelessness” statutorily denied in this case and perpetual feelings of insecurity/anxiety affect the physical and psychic health of the people living in such an environment (for instance, do they have any abnormally high incident of ulcers?) but in this matter we are not concern so much physical/natural environment. If the “ecological approach” to the study of the problem of community health, understood both as real processes of interaction between society and natural environment, or between organizes and their habitat, and the “science” of such interaction, has to be become meaningful, the societal aspect much inevitably enter in to it because the interaction takes place under certain social, economic political structure. Otherwise, why should has system that was originally devised for the protection of the forest should be rendered, or at least considered, inimical to the (forest) environment in the course of time.

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