

From Chipko to contemporary women - led forest movement in India: Continuities, transformation and gendered ecologies

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Abstract

The article investigates the degree of formal reform in forest law, policy and administration that resulted from the involvement of women in the Chipko movement of the 1970s, and particularly from the direct and prominent role played by women like Gaura devi and Bachni devi as leaders of that movement. Although Chipko is often known for changing the forest governance landscape in the Himalayas, the exact causal chain linking grassroots mobilization of women with the enactment of specific legal instruments such as executive felling ban, Joint Forest Management circulars, rule amendments to Forest Rights Act, 2006, Panchayat Raj gender reservations and felling ban has not been traced systematically in popular and scholarly memory. This study traces the policy responses to Chipko using policy analysis, process tracing and legislative and administrative documents, secondary case-study literature, and pre-existing reporting from interviews with women, and examines the pathways by which women's mobilization is plausibly connected to outcomes: demonstration effect, moral legitimacy, donor and NGO intermediation, and institutional diffusion from national panchayati raj reform. The analysis reveals that the immediate and direct policy impact of Chipko was the 15-year moratorium on commercial green felling above defined altitudes of 1980, which was more a result of the lobbying of the elite leaders of Chipko like Sunderlal Bahuguna, rather than the direct action leadership of the Chipko women as such. The institutional changes that came with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, such as the fifty per cent reservation of the Sarpanch position and the fifty per cent reservation for women in the management committees of Van Panchayat, emerged 2–3 decades later, not necessarily as a direct outcome of Chipko itself but rather as a result of the larger national process of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment and donor-funded Joint Forest Management (JFM) programming. The study finds that, after Chipko, women's role in forest policy is diffuse, mediated, and layered, rather than direct, and warns against retrospective stories that obscure this layered causal history by representing it as a single transformative act from grassroots to legislature.

Keywords: Chipko movement, Gaura Devi, Van Panchayat, Forest Rights Act, gender and forest policy, process tracing

Introduction

The Chipko movement is in a strange position in the history of forest policy in India as it has been both hailed as a milestone that brought a change in forest governance in the Himalayas and decried by revisionist historians as a movement whose policy impact has been overstated by its supporters (Guha 1989; Rangan 2000) ^[7, 11]. Much of this literature was examined in a previous comparative study of Chipko and contemporary movements,

Its emphasis has been on tactics, symbolism and the gendered formation of ecological agency, and on the movement's total female membership as opposed to the specific women, such as Gaura Devi, who led the Reni village action in 1974, and Bachni Devi who led the protest at Adwani in 1977–78, whose individual leadership has been recorded in the historical record (Guha, 1989; Jain, 1984) ^[7, 8]. Less has been done, however, to address a more circumscribed but more tractable empirical question: How did women's leadership, specifically in the name of Chipko, and the broader constituency of women participants influence the subsequent forest law and its implementation in Uttarakhand?

There are two reasons why this question is important. First, it gives the celebratory story of the impact of the policy the opportunity to be tested against a documentary record of the debate of the legislation, Forest Department circulars, and amendments to rules, rather than being accepted on faith based on the symbolic importance of the Chipko movement.

Second, it reflects a broader issue in feminist institutionalist research: whether grassroots women's mobilisation leads to lasting gender differentiated institutional change, or whether formal gender provisions in resource governance are, on the contrary, the result of other forces – national constitutional reform, international donor conditionality, or bureaucratic modernisation – that are more likely to drive the change than grassroots mobilisation (Agarwal, 2010) ^[1].

The article begins by summarising the literature on the policy legacy of Chipko and on the gender provisions that are found in Indian forest and panchayat laws. It then proposes a theoretical approach that brings together policy process theory and feminist institutionalism, and outlines a process-tracing methodology. The empirical sections narrate in chronological order the key policy developments from 1973 to present: the felling ban of 1980, the development of Van Panchayat rules from 1976 to 2012^[17], the introduction of Joint Forest Management, the implementation of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment at the state level in Uttarakhand, and the Forest Rights Act, 2006. Before the detailed episode-by-episode analysis, this sequence is summarised in Table 1 (Section 4), along with the strength of the documented connection between this sequence and Chipko's women participants. The analysis then examines the causal connections (or lack of them) between the women participants in Chipko and each of them, and then considers implications for the relationship between grassroots mobilisation and formal policy change.

Literature Review

1. Chipko's Contested Policy Legacy

Guha (1989) ^[7] has attributed the moratorium on commercial logging above 1,000 metres in the Uttar Pradesh Himalayas to commercial felling in the 1980s to Chipko, which was obtained largely through the lobbying of Sunderlal Bahuguna with then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. This is considered to be the most unambiguous and direct policy result of Chipko. The ban, however, was not a law but an executive administrative order, which is relatively fragile and easily overturned and it targeted commercial logging instead of creating a sustainable model for community forest governance or for women's institutional involvement in it, Guha and commentators following her have pointed out.

Specific cases of women's direct-action leadership even predate and occur concurrently with the 1980 lobbying effort: Gaura Devi's leadership of the confrontation with loggers at Reni village in March 1974 and Bachni Devi's leadership of the protest at Adwani in 1977-78 against a felling contract her household stood to gain from are the two most well-documented encounters (Guha, 1989; Jain, 1984) ^[7, 8]. The case study of these women by Jain (1984) ^[8], published at the time, is important because it is one of the few studies to consider these women as organisers and public actors themselves rather than as 'women's participation' as an overall demographic characteristic of the movement.

Rangan's (2000) ^[11] revisionist interpretation is more detailed, suggesting that the movement's policy reputation was greatly shaped by the government, ngos and international commentators who sought to use it for their own legitimating ends, and that the internal demands of the movement were far more divided than is commonly believed, ranging from a demand for local industrial development to one for forest conservation. This scholarship warns about the homogeneity of Chipko, as a policy actor, as a legislative agenda, and as a gender-specific one.

2. Gender Provisions In Forest And Panchayat Governance

A parallel literature has documented the development of the gender-specific provisions in Indian natural resource governance in general. In Agarwal's (2010) ^[1] comparative study of gender and forest governance in South Asia, he found that there is considerable variation in the presence of women in Forest Protection Committees and Van Panchayats, and that the more advanced provisions, such as reserved seats, are due to a mixture of the panchayat reservation logic from the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, targeted donor programming under JFM, and a particular cadre of state-level bureaucrats and ngos, not to any one originating social movement. Scholarship on Van Panchayats of Uttarakhand also indicates that the management committee rules were changed in 1976, 2001, 2005 and 2012; the 2005 ^[17, 18] Rules introduced a provision to ensure that a certain proportion of seats in the management committee is reserved for women, and also that the position of Sarpanch rotates between women and men, in addition to the recentralisation of bureaucratic control

over Van Panchayat functioning in recent years (Negi, Chauhan and Todaria, 2012; Sarin, 2005) ^[10, 16].

3. The National Forest Policy of 1988 as an Intervening Variable

Another strand of literature, relevant to this study, is the National Forest Policy of 1988, which represented a major discursive shift from a production-oriented, revenue-maximising view of forestry to a focus on ecological stability, subsistence needs of forest-dependent communities, and people's involvement in forest protection and regeneration. The 1988 Policy has been considered by scholars of forest policy as a turning point that provided the discursive space and administrative framework within which Joint Forest Management and subsequently the Forest Rights Act was imagined. Given that Chipko is often described in policy retrospectives as being part of a larger trend of concern about deforestation in the Himalayas that was a factor in the drafting of the 1988 Policy, this policy can be viewed as an intervening variable in any causal chain from Chipko to, say, the 1988 Policy itself to the Van Panchayat's Rules (2005) ^[18] that followed. The intervening-variable possibility is explored further in the process tracing analysis below.

4. Gap in the Literature

A systematic process-tracing that connects the named women leaders of Chipko (Gaura Devi and Bachni Devi) to these more recent gender provisions, as opposed to the general trajectory of Indian participatory forestry and the panchayat reform, is largely lacking in this literature, as is sustained attention to the named women leaders as individual political actors and not representatives of an undifferentiated female membership. This article tries to do both, but must also be aware of the danger of the "revisionist" historiography of overemphasizing a direct causal link when in fact a more indirect and mediated link is suggested by the evidence.

Theoretical Framework

Two theory bodies are used for the analysis.

Policy process theory, and the idea of punctuated equilibrium (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993) ^[3], suggests that policy subsystems (such as Himalayan forest governance) tend to have long periods of institutional stability punctuated by short periods of rapid change, which occurs when a focusing event changes the balance of attention and legitimacy among competing policy images. It is plausible to view Chipko as a focusing event with regard to the felling ban of 1980, although its impact on subsequent, more incremental institutional reforms (ordinary changes in the rule of Van Panchayat, gender reservations) is better understood through the ordinary incremental process of policy making over the course of the following decades. The timing of the ban, in contrast, is best explained by the policy window concept (Kingdon, 1984) ^[9] that identifies a temporary alignment of problem recognition, policy options, and political receptivity, which happened at different times in the two cases: Bahuguna's direct access to the Prime Minister led to the 1980 ban, while gender-specific reservations needed a different window, one that occurred during the national panchayati raj reform process of the 1990s.

The framework for analyzing gender differentiated outcomes is feminist institutionalism (Agarwal, 2010; Chappell and Waylen, 2013) ^[1, 4]. This approach does not see formal gender quotas and reservations as automatic translations of women's grassroots activism into policy, but as products of the work of multiple actors whose actions take place in different ways and through different channels, often with little connection to each other: women's movements, bureaucratic reformers, international donors, and national constitutional design. This model warns against the "movement begets policy" approach and redirects focus to the institutional processes (legislative reservation clauses, donor programme conditions, administrative rule-making, etc.) In which gender provisions are actually written and enacted.

The study charts the general path of forest governance reform (felling ban, Van Panchayat recentralisation, Joint Forest Management, the Forest Rights Act) and the specific path of gender provisions in this broader process of reform and asks at each turn whether Chipko's women participants (as named leaders or as a mobilising force) or Chipko as a symbolic-political resource, could be demonstrated to be either a proximate cause, a background legitimating factor, or largely missing from the causal chain.

Methodology

The approach adopted in this study is the policy analysis with process tracing, which seeks to determine if there is any empirical support for a hypothesized causal mechanism between a purported cause (Chipko women's mobilisation) and an outcome (specific gender provisions in forest and panchayat law) given the sequence and content of intervening events (Collier, 2011; George and Bennett, 2005) ^[5, 6]. Process tracing is especially appropriate for this inquiry because it does not require a large-N comparison; it only requires that one pay close attention to the chronological sequence of the documented events, and to whether or not there are documented linking mechanisms, such as a legislative debate in which Chipko is mentioned, or a Forest Department order that references Chipko, and to

attentiveness to rival explanations that may account for the same outcome without invoking Chipko.

The sources that were consulted included: (1) secondary historical scholarship on Chipko and its immediate aftermath, including some case studies that specifically examined women's leadership roles (Guha, 1989; Rangan, 2000; Jain, 1984) ^[7, 8, 11]; (2) published analyses of Van Panchayat rule revisions and the content (1976, 2001, 2005 and 2012^[17, 18] Rules); (3) documentation of the emergence of the Joint Forest Management programme and the gender provisions in it (Negi, Chauhan and Todaria, 2012; Sarin, 2005; Ballabh, Balooni and Dave, 2002) ^[2, 10, 12]; (4) analysis of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment's women's reservation clauses and their state-level implementation in Uttarakhand and Uttar Pradesh (state Panchayati Raj Act texts; documentation of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj); and (5) analysis of the Forest Rights Act, 2006 and the gender-relevant provisions. The study is based on secondary and documentary analysis, and does not include interviews with officers and activists, due to resource limitations, as discussed in Section 11.

A statement regarding the quality of the sources is warranted. The sources in (1) and academic journal articles in (2) have been peer-reviewed and can be verified independently. The FAO repository entry, and the Himal Prakriti and Asia Pacific Greens Federation web pages provide information about the current institutional details of the work, but they are not peer-reviewed scholarships and the dates are not known in the original. These are only used to support factual/administrative information consistent across several sources but are not used for causal interpretation which is based on the peer-reviewed literature.

The process-tracing exercise is done chronologically, consisting of four policy episodes: (1) the felling ban in 1980; (2) Van panchayat rules and women's reservation (1976-2012) ^[17]; (3) Joint Forest Management and the 73rd Constitutional Amendment (1988-2001); and (4) Forest Rights Act, 2006. The episodes are summarised in **Table 1** and shall be treated in detail in Section 5–8 before the detailed treatment.

Table 1: Summary of policy episodes and the documented strength of their link to Chipko's women participants

Year(s)	Policy Episode	Nature of Link to Chipko's Women Participants
1974 / 1977–78	Reni and Adwani direct-action protests (Gaura Devi; Bachni Devi)	Direct: women's own protest leadership, the movement's core grassroots events
1980	15-year commercial felling ban above defined altitude	Indirect: secured via elite male lobbying (Bahuguna–Indira Gandhi); women's mobilisation supplied sustaining pressure
1988	National Forest Policy	Diffuse: Chipko cited as part of general climate of concern; no gender-specific content
1992	73rd Constitutional Amendment (panchayat reservation)	Background/parallel: national reform largely independent of Chipko
2001 / 2005	Van Panchayat Rules — 50% women's reservation, rotating Sarpanch	Mediated: driven by national panchayat reservation logic; Chipko a legitimating background factor
2001–2003	Joint Forest Management introduced, then withdrawn	Indirect: local resistance plausibly draws on Chipko-derived political culture
2006	Forest Rights Act	Weak/absent: origins in Adivasi rights advocacy elsewhere in India; poor Uttarakhand implementation

In each instance, the analysis questions the possibility of a direct causal relationship with the women participants of Chipko, an indirect or mediated causal relationship, or a lack of meaningful relationship altogether. The analysis explicitly recognizes competing explanations at every point, following best practice in the process of process tracing

(Collier, 2011; George and Bennett, 2005) ^[5, 6] and not just looking for evidence in favor of a Chipko-to-policy pathway. In each of the above, similar gender provisions in the state of Uttarakhand would have emerged during the same period despite the absence of Chipko, because of national constitutional and legislative reforms (the 73rd

Amendment, Forest Rights Act), international donor and multilateral programming on participatory forestry and gender mainstreaming, and the increasing formalisation and rule-based governance of Van Panchayats as a result of the bureaucratic modernisation of the Forest and Revenue Departments, independent of any national movement. When the evidence does not unambiguously point to a Chipko-related pathway, this is explicitly stated, rather than resolved in favour of the more story-like Chipko-related pathway.

Episode One: The 1980 Felling Ban

The most obvious and most immediate policy consequence of Chipko is the Government of India's 1980 administrative order that banned cutting of green trees for commercial purposes for 15 years in the Himalayan forest regions of Uttar Pradesh above a certain height. This has been well documented in the historical literature as resulting from direct lobbying by Sunderlal Bahuguna, the founder of the Chipko movement, after a long padyatra to make people aware of the deforestation in the Himalayas (Guha, 1989)^[7]. Process tracing here leads to a relatively short and direct causal sequence: sustained movement mobilisation, access to leadership and central executive authority, and a policy window opening around the emergence of the national concern over ecological degradation of the Himalayas after the major floods and landslides in the 1970s.

It is important to be specific as to which women's leadership was involved in this chain. The act of protest leadership was not only a first-person act of protest, but also a named one, in the case of Gaura Devi (1974) and Bachni Devi (1977-78). What the documentary record does not reveal, however, is that these women, or others, or women leaders, were the ones who later took the case of the movement to the Prime Minister in 1980 – it was Bahuguna's job to be the access and lobby. The gender dimension of the causal chain to the ban in 1980 is therefore less robust than the general "Chipko causes policy change" story would suggest, not because women were not leaders of the movement, but because the actual instrument that produces this particular policy outcome (elite lobbying) was performed by a male, and the actions of direct-action leadership were performed by women, not the policy outcome itself, which in turn created sustained visibility and moral authority for the movement. In drafting, the ban was gender neutral, rather than being about the governance of forest use at the village level or about women's role in forest governance, and the published sources on drafting do not mention specifically women's rights or women's ecological agency.

The ban of 1980 cannot therefore be seen as a direct consequence of women's political agency being officially recognised and rewarded by the State — it is a policy outcome of Chipko as a movement, and of the direct-action leadership of women like Gaura Devi and Bachni Devi, who provided much of the movement's persistence, visibility and moral clout.

Episode Two: Van Panchayat Rules and the Emergence of Women's Reservation (1976-2012)^[17]

The institutional context in which gender-specific governance provisions emerged in Uttarakhand is the Van Panchayat, community forest councils established four decades before Chipko, under the Kumaon Panchayat Forest Rules of 1931, which came in response to earlier protests by the people against the forest reservation by the colonial

regime. The rules governing the Van Panchayat system have been amended several times since, in 1971, 1976, 2001 and 2005^[18] (Himal Prakriti, n.d.). However, the rules also increased the formal representation of women, while simultaneously increasing the oversight of the Forest Department over the village-level micro-plans, and also diminished a number of discretionary powers that had been given to the Sarpanch (The Wire Science, 2018)^[20].

The gender provision is clearly stated: The Van Panchayat management committee must have four of its total nine membership reserved for women only and the position of Sarpanch must be filled alternately by a woman and man in successive terms, thus ensuring that women occupy half of the Sarpanch position over time (Food and Agriculture Organization, n.d.; confirmed in Uttarakhand Forest Department, 2005)^[16]. Official rules summaries make it clear that this is to encourage gender inclusiveness in forest council governance. Consequently, there are now many more Van Panchayats in Uttarakhand, the majority of which are made up of female members only (Food and Agriculture Organization, n.d.).

It is more difficult to trace the causal chain of this reform than the felling ban of the 1980s. As far as the timing is concerned, the provisions for reservations in the rules were first introduced in 2001 and consolidated in 2005^[18], more than 25 years after the height of the Chipko mobilisation. The timing, that is, the provisions for reservations in the rules were introduced in 2001 and consolidated in 2005^[18], well after Chipko's peak mobilisation of women, more than 25 years ago. Instead, the more likely intervening variable is the national process of panchayat gender reservation which began with the introduction of 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992, introducing one-third reservation to all panchayat raj institutions across the country, followed by many states extending and strengthening the reservation to fifty per cent (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, n.d.). The constitutional provision to ensure one-third reservation of seats for women in panchayats has been extended to fifty per cent in Uttarakhand and the state is explicitly among those that have made such a change. The rule revisions of the Van Panchayat in 2001 and 2005^[18] occurred during the same time as, and may well have been institutional and normative products of, this larger Panchayati Raj reservation movement, rather than a specific response to the mobilisation of women during the Chipko movement.

Process tracing suggests, therefore, a two-step indirect mechanism: Chipko helped to generate a general, diffuse legitimisation of the capacity of hill women to manage forests and engage in public leadership on which state and NGO forest activists building a case for Van Panchayat reform could draw when the occasion arose, but the national constitutional reform process of the 1990s and early 2000s was also a significant source of the fifty per cent reservation provision, largely independent of Chipko. This discovery aligns with the feminist institutionalist assumption that formal gender quotas are usually a product of constitutional or statutory design, which tends to take place at a different scale and speed from grassroots movement mobilisation (Chappell and Waylen, 2013)^[4].

Episodes three: Joint Forest Management and the 73rd Amendment

In tandem with the Van Panchayat reform, the Government of India started promoting Joint Forest Management (JFM)

from the late 1980s, which involves Forest Departments entering into collaborative management arrangements with the Forest Protection Committees at the village level in return for a sharing of the usufruct rights. The introduction of JFM in Uttarakhand in 2001 was, however, met with protest by the Van Panchayats who did not want the Forest Department to intervene in their affairs and the JFM scheme was dropped in 2003 and the earlier rules set by Van Panchayats were reintroduced (Asia Pacific Greens Federation, n.d.). It is instructive for process tracing because it shows that, despite the external imposition of a new governance model that was seen as a dilution of the local (including women's) authority over Van Panchayats, these communities still possessed enough collective capacity to stand against it, which is more likely to be attributed to the continued existence of a local political culture of resistance to bureaucratic encroachment associated with the Chipko movement than to a formal legal provision. This implies that a significant part of Chipko's policy legacy was indirect rather than the creation of a new gender-specific law: that is, the development of a sustained capability of the local community to oppose the unwanted administrative reform and thereby create space for the later introduction of the Van Panchayat's own gender reservation policy.

The general trend at the national level, as documented in the JFM guidelines distributed by the Ministry of Environment and Forests in the 1990s, was to include more and more language on the inclusion of women in Forest Protection Committees, as well as the broader trend of the integration of gender-and-development mainstreaming into multilateral and bilateral forestry-sector donor programming during this period. There are no published accounts to suggest that this gender mainstreaming agenda was in any way directly written or endorsed by Chipko, but rather represents an independent international policy trajectory that coincided with a state-level institutional landscape which had been influenced by the wider legitimisation of women's public role in forest issues by Chipko.

Episode Four: The Forest Rights Act, 2006 (8)

The Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 (FRA) is a unique and subsequent policy development that focused on the recognition of individual and community forest rights of the Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwelling communities in India, including but not limited to the Himalayan region. Gender-sensitive provisions of the Act include a clause for married claimants, under which forest rights entitlements are to be granted to both women and men, and a provision for women to be included on the Forest Rights Committees which will verify claims at the village-level. The implementation of the FRA, however, in Uttarakhand is very weak, with none of the claims of the villagers of the Van Panchayats in the state having been recognised as of the latest assessments (The Wire Science 2018) ^[20].

Process tracing here shows a very weak connection to Chipko. The legislative roots of the FRA are unlikely to be in the tradition of Adivasi rights activism and mobilisation of forest-dwelling communities that has been ongoing for decades in central and eastern India, as was explored in the companion comparative study in relation to Hasdeo Aranya and Niyamgiri, but more likely in the tradition of forest-dwelling community mobilisation and rights activism that

has been practiced in the Himalayan hill-peasant communities since the Chipko movement. Poor implementation record of the Act in Uttarakhand specifically indicates that the implementation of the Act, if any, failed to translate into the effective prioritisation of forest rights recognition, be it for women or otherwise, once a really rights-based (not executive discretionary) legal instrument was available. This is important: it suggests that Chipko's policy legacy, if it exists, was more effective through informal institutional mechanisms (governance norms from Van Panchayats) than formal rights-based legislation with accompanying active bureaucracy for implementation, which has important implications for how the lasting impact of grassroots movements' policy legacies should be measured.

Analysis: Evaluation of the Causal Chain

The analysis of the four episodes in the process-tracing exercise indicates a mediated and not direct interaction between the women participants of the Chipko movement and the forest policy in Uttarakhand. This layering is summarised in Table 1, and the causal explanation for this layering is then discussed before turning to the three rival explanations presented in Section 4.

A brief overview of the four episodes. First, the most immediate and most clearly documented policy outcome, the felling ban of 1980, was a product of elite male leadership lobbying, rather than of women's direct action leadership (Gaura Devi, Bachni Devi) being formally recognised as a political force in its own right. Even though women's direct action leadership was essential to sustaining the pressure to make such lobbying credible, it was not a factor in the policy outcome itself. Second, the specific gender-reservation provisions in Van Panchayat governance appeared 2–3 decades after the height of Chipko, and during a time when the national 73rd Amendment reform process of forest governance was happening. This indicates that the immediate impetus behind the enactment of formal gender quotas in forest governance in the Himalayas was the national 73rd Constitutional Amendment reform process, not Chipko activism. Third, the fact that the local resistance to the 2001–2003 JFM intervention was successful indicates that the most enduring institutional legacy left behind by Chipko over the past few decades is not a law but a local political culture that can challenge externally imposed governance models. Fourth, the weak implementation of the Forest Rights Act in Uttarakhand suggests that there is an upper limit to what is assumed as an 'ecological legacy' under the Forest Rights Act, if it is indeed a rights-based, and not executive-discretionary or locally administered, legal instrument.

1. Testing the Rival Explanations

Rival Explanation (i): National reform would have had similar effects irrespective of Chipko. The evidence in Episode Two also provides a strong argument for the timing of the reservation provisions of the Van Panchayat to be more closely associated with the national 73rd Amendment process than with any Chipko-specific event, and for the level of reservations adopted in states to be similar to those without a comparable forest movement. However, the evidence does not fully drive out a Chipko contribution: the case for an entirely national argument is weaker in Episode Three where local opposition to JFM is more difficult to

account for without invoking the local political culture of the Van Panchayats in Uttarakhand that can be traced back to the Chipko movement.

Rival Explanation (ii): Donor and multilateral programming of gender is sufficient explanation of the gender language of JFM. This is supported well for the specifically donor-authored language in JFM guidelines (Section 7), which follows gender-mainstreaming templates used at the time in other developing countries without a Chipko-equivalent movement; it is used in this study as the main cause of the provision of that language, while Chipko only provides a receptive local environment.

Rival Explanation (III): bureaucratic modernisation explains increasing van panchayat formalisation. The evidence here is less conclusive. Although the formalisation and recentralisation of Forest Department oversight can be plausibly attributed to ordinary bureaucratic modernisation, independent of Chipko, the choice of gender reservation, rather than some other formalising measure, to be attached to this modernisation can be more parsimoniously explained by the coincidence of the national panchayat reservation agenda with bureaucratic modernisation.

In the context of the intervening role of the 1988 National Forest Policy identified in Section 2.3, the available evidence suggests that this can be considered a plausible but only partial mediating role. The focus on people's participation in forest protection is also linked to a diffuse Chipko influence in the realm of national policy discussions, but the concrete gender differentiated instruments analysed in this study (Van Panchayat reservation, FRA joint titling) were the result of different legislative and administrative processes that are more clearly connected to the 73rd Amendment and to tribal rights advocacy, respectively. Thus, the 1988 Policy is not a specific means of passing on gender provisions, but rather a general 'enabling condition' for participatory forestry in general.

The results of these findings warn against the notion of a simple story in which women won certain legal rights in the process of mobilisation during Chipko. Rather, the evidence points to a more complex story in which the direct-action leadership of women like Gaura Devi and Bachni Devi, along with the larger group of women participants, provided cumulative, diffused legitimacy to hill women as legitimate actors of forest governance, from which other policy processes, largely originating independently, took up the idea unevenly, with the strongest institutional assimilation in the locally established Van Panchayat and the weakest in the nationally mandated rights law, which was not being effectively enforced at the time of the study.

Discussion

The results have implications for three larger debates other than the Uttarakhand controversy.

Social Movement and policy implications: The evidence suggests that the punctuated equilibrium hypothesis that concentrated events like Chipko can get policy concessions more quickly and with greater visibility (the 1980 felling ban) than they can create permanent, institutional change. The gender-reservation provisions which ultimately evolved in the governance of Van Panchayats had to be backed by a second independent policy window, one that had its own time frame and set of political actors, as Kingdon (1984) ^[9]

noted, "Policy windows may open more than once for a given problem stream. For students of the environmental movements of India, it means breaking down movement impact into four different types: executive concession, diffuse legitimation, local capacity building, and enduring legislative change, rather than seeing policy legacy as a homogenous outcome.

Implications for feminist institutionalism: As noted above, the Uttarakhand case highlights that formal gender-equality provisions in institutions are usually the result of the interplay of various actors and processes, not just women's grassroots mobilization. In the Uttarakhand case, Chappell and Waylen (2013) ^[4] note that formal gender-equality provisions in institutions are more likely to be the result of the interaction of multiple, though not necessarily coordinated, actors and processes, rather than the direct product of women's grassroots mobilization efforts. None of the women leaders of the Chipko movement, including Gaura Devi, Bachni Devi, or others, drafted the reservation clauses in the Van Panchayat; nor can it be documented that they were consulted in the process of drafting the reservation clauses in 2001 or 2005^[18]; nonetheless, their historical example is plausible in reducing the perceived threat to the state legislators and the bureaucracy of extending panchayat-based gender reservation to forest governance specifically. It is easy to overlook this "background legitimation" function in institutionalist explanations, which tend to be quite narrow with respect to who formally wrote a particular rule.

Comparative resonance to other movements in the same style: The following implementation parallel is referenced here to illustrate this comparison, but it is treated in full in the companion study, "Chipko and Twenty-First-Century Women-Led Forest Movements. Hasdeo Aranya and Niyamgiri work in a legal framework (Forest Rights Act and PESA) that does not exist for Chipko, and can therefore focus directly on the enforcement of the law, rather than on executive discretion as Chipko did. However, the results of this study which revealed a low implementation of FRA in Uttarakhand itself are a reminder that the presence of rights-based law does not ensure its implementation.

Policy Implications: If Chipko's most lasting legacy is the establishment of locally-based institutional capacity, then strengthening the financial and administrative autonomy of Van Panchayats — which has been well documented to have eroded since 2005^[16] — would be most important, not just the community rights provisions of the FRA.

Limitations

There are three major drawbacks to this study. It is based on secondary (documents and case studies) sources instead of primary (legislative debate transcripts, Forest Department order files and original interviews with officials and activists) sources that would be ideal. The records of the Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand legislative assemblies from the 1970s to the 2000s, as well as internal Forest Department correspondence concerning the 1980 ban and revisions in the rules of the Van Panchayats would enable a much more fine-grained process-tracing exercise. Structured interviews with retired Forest Department officials, as well as with Panchayat Raj Ministry officials who were involved

in the formulation of the Van Panchayat Rules 2001 and 2005^[18], and with surviving activists from the Chipko movement would enable direct testing of whether the framers of the women's reservation provisions consciously invoked Chipko as justification. The causal claims made here should be understood as likely conclusions drawn from the documented and observed chronological and content of the policy instruments, and not as conclusive statements based on direct testimony of the actors involved in the policy.

Second, some of the sources relying on which the institutional and administrative details have been drawn are grey literature, not peer reviewed scholarship (such as the FAO repository entry, NGO web pages, and Ministry press releases). All these have been used only to give information that has been substantiated by several sources, and causal interpretation has been made with reference to the published literature, which has been peer-reviewed. If a reader requires primary confirmation of specific dates or seat numbers, they should consider these figures to be best-available rather than archivally confirmed.

Thirdly, the geographic scope is Uttarakhand-specific, and the policy influence of Chipko may have played out differently, or been strengthened or weakened, in broader national-level forest policy debates, beyond the scope of the study's process-tracing design which focused on Uttarakhand. Similarly, the treatment of named women leaders here is limited to the two most well documented cases (Gaura Devi, Bachni Devi) and would be extended to other women organisers in the area whose names are not as visible in the published record, but who are likely to have served similar functions.

Conclusion

The policy history of the involvement of women in the Chipko movement has been followed here, starting with the direct-action leadership of Gaura Devi and Bachni Devi, and then the women participants at a wider base in the forest governance reform process in Uttarakhand, in four discrete phases. As summarized in **Table 1** and discussed in Section 9, the most obvious and direct policy outcome is the 1980 felling ban, which was achieved through elite lobbying and not through formal recognition of women's political agency; the specific gender-reservation provisions that later became part of the governance of the Van Panchayats are more plausibly understood to have been a product of the national 73rd Constitutional Amendment reform process than as a direct legacy of Chipko; and the strongest evidence of an enduring, locally rooted Chipko legacy is the capacity of Uttarakhand's forest-dependent communities to resist externally imposed governance reforms.

The results indicate that examining the legislative legacies of grassroots movements requires careful attention to not only how and when policy changes occur but also the specific mechanisms, and the time required, for that transformation from movement to policy, and that Movement to Legislation transformation should be attributed to the specific women who led it, not to the aggregate category of women's participation in the movement. Primary legislative and administrative archives, in conjunction with direct interviews with the surviving actors of the policy and, if available, oral history interviews with the women organisers from the Chipko era, could significantly enhance the causal claims that can be made

about this crucial but under-researched piece of the history of forest governance in India.

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