

K U M A O N      H I L L S

- Peoples Movement And State Policy

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PEOPLE'S UNION FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS

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In April, newspapers in Delhi reported incidents of repression both by the police and goondas on the people involved in an anti-liquor agitation in the Kumaon districts of Uttar Pradesh. People's Union for Democratic Rights, Delhi sent a team to investigate the matter in the first week of May. The team consisting of Dr.(Ms) Sudesh Vaid, C.V. Subbarao, M. Roy and Harish Dhawan, toured parts of Almora and Nainital districts, interviewed a cross section of people including senior officials of the district, doctors, local MLA, activists and the people. The team found that powerful traders of angrezi and desi liquor and illicit liquor in the form of medicinal tonics, have established a well-entrenched net work through which gallons of liquor is flowing into the Himalayan hill districts. This is resulting in a pernicious and pervasive impact on the social life and economy of the people. The present movement has arisen as a direct result of this situation. The state has responded to it with ambiguity, indifference and at times direct collusion with the liquor traders. Attacks by goondas hired by traders are abetted while the movement to an extent is facing repression. A massive lathi-charge by PAC at Someshwar, arrest of over 60 activists are among the notable instances of it.

Following is the full report of the committee.

## I. SOCIAL BACKGROUND

Kumaon, along with Garhwal, constitutes the Himalayan hill districts of Uttar Pradesh, known as Uttarakhand. For most outsiders, it is famous for its scenic beauty and holy places and attracts both tourists and pilgrims. The Kumaon division consisting of Nainital, Almora and Pithoragarh districts is bounded by Garhwal in the West and South-West, while to the South lie the plains of U.P. (Moradabad, Rampur, Bareilly and Pilbhit districts). The eastern part of the region borders Nepal while to the North lies the Tibetan region of the People's Republic of China. At the base of the hills lies the tropical swampy area of the terai.

The Kumaon region has a long history receding into myths and legends of Puranic Hinduism. It has had strong Hindu kingdoms since medieval times. In 1790 it was captured by invading Gurkha armies from Nepal but within 25 years it passed into British hands with the treaty of Sagauli in 1815. The land revenue system consolidated by the British gave pre-eminent position to the 'thokdars' who continued to dominate social and political life till the early years of Independence when the Kumaon Garhwal Zamindari Abolition Act came into force. With forest exploitation as a newly created source of wealth and power the importance of agriculture itself has declined over time.

The scope for agriculture in any case is very limited in the hilly terrains and not more than 17-27% land is under cultivation. Although the rivers Kosi, Ramganga and smaller tributaries of Ganga pass through the region, water is very scarce with over two thirds of villages not even having regular drinking water facilities. Except in small pockets around the rivers, most cultivation is on small strips carved out of the hill sides. These scattered pieces of cultivable lands viewed from the serpentine roads that pass through the hills are <sup>an</sup> attractive sight to

visitors but to the people it means hard and strenuous labour on land that cannot sustain them for more than six months in a year. It is the forest that has supplemented their subsistence needs.

Forests officially constitute 53% of the area. But actually unofficial estimates put it as low as 2-20%. Commercial exploitation of chir, deodar and other trees for paper, match, chemical and other industries goes on indiscriminately. For the people forests are important both for domestic purposes like firewood, housing, cattle grazing etc. and also for employment opportunities. Since the sixties large scale illegal felling has become common. One important feature of this reckless destruction of forests encouraged by the state development programmes is the emergence of powerful forest contractors who today dominate social life at village level. Eventually all this led to the famous Chipko movement which originated from Garhwal in 1973. The movement led to the replacement of private contractors by the Uttar Pradesh Forest Corporation. But these contractors are back as sub-contractors to the Corporation, and continue to dominate village life.

In addition to cultivation and forests, people also work as casual labour in various government works. More recently mining-soft stone and magnesite is developing. These mines, presently employing not more than 5000 in the region, are mostly privately owned. The indiscriminate and unscientific mining is itself leading to serious ecological imbalances. Consequent floods and landslides have resulted in loss of life. Miners, local labour in Almora and migrant labour in Pithoragarh, live and work under abominable conditions.

Given such limited opportunities for decent living, it is not surprising that large number of men migrate from the region to work as unorganised labour in the plain areas.

But most of them join the army to become part of the Kumaon Regiment. Consequently almost all tehsils in the hill region have larger number of women than men in the villages. Women do all the cultivation work except ploughing. But in general the degradation of forests which leads to the drying up of water resources is contributing to the consistent decline of work force in the total population, for the last two decades. State development programmes have failed to arrest this process.

During the first three Plans, the development of hill areas hardly received any attention. Later special programmes under Indo-German Assistance Programme, and the so-called 100 per cent centrally financed projects were launched in parts of Kumaon. A separate Kumaon Hill development agency (Kumaon Vikas Mandal) was also established in 1976. Most of the programmes are welfare programmes and do not have much to do with development. There are hardly any forest based industries and scarcely any minor irrigation projects in these hilly terrains. Not more than 7% villages are electrified. But these development activities have led to the emergence of middlemen at village level who siphon off the funds.

In most villages the dominant figure would be a former thokdar who also, often, is the forest contractor, and gets elected as the gaon sabhapati or as the block pramukh. The block pramukh and the patwaris dominate village life. Patwaris here are a part of Kumaon Revenue Police (KRP) which combines revenue, excise and law and order duties in the villages. Directly under the collector and the district magistrate they are a parallel police force. The ordinary civil police have jurisdiction essentially confined to urban centers. In the language of a villager we interviewed, the trimurti of gaon sabhapati (who also is often a contractor), patwari and block pramukh are the men who rule social life in Kumaon villages. In recent times the money they have amassed and the power they wield has increased manifold with large scale liquor trade—the cause of the present movement.

## II.

### LIQUOR AND THE PEOPLES MOVEMENT

Drinking has not been a part of traditional social life among the hill people. The exception are the tribals confined to a part of Pithoragarh district. Our investigation revealed that liquor drinking was socially disapproved and habitual only among the thokdars who were not many (there might be one thokdar for 3-4 villages). Those who recruited into the army got familiarized with angrezi liquor, but due to both cost and availability, it did not become a common phenomenon in village areas. It appears to have become common with large-scale forest exploitation. Supply of liquor to forest guards as part of bribe and to labour as part of payment became common. But on a larger scale, the liquor habit has spread with the "tonics" since 1978-1979.

In 1978 the Janta government declared the entire region as dry but the order was withdrawn in 1980, when Indira Gandhi came to power. Only in the border district of Pithoragarh, permit system prevails. Earlier, licences to traders were issued on individual basis, but from 1980 onwards "abkari" contract was introduced by which licences are auctioned off to the highest bidder. The contract for angrezi liquor (the Indian made foreign liquor - IMFL) is usually cornered by powerful local traders. But the desi liquor contract has been in the hands of a well known liquor king of U.P. who, operating from Moradabad, controls the trade of 18 U.P. districts. This group, with a large private army of goondas, is closely associated with Congress-I.

But what is more popular in the region is not the usual desi or angrezi liquor but a unique variety of illicit liquor available in the form of ayurvedic and allopathic tonics. Entering the region in 1978, even when it was declared dry, the liquids - notably SURA, ASHOKA and PUDINHARA - have become widespread throughout the length and breadth of the hill region.

Ashoka liquid is an allopathic tonic made out of ashoka herbs. It is permitted to have about 19% alcohol content but the bottles sold in this region have around 75%. Sura (or "mrita sanjivini sura") is an ayurvedic tonic that normally has around 20% alcohol content but in this region around 80%. It also contains a self-generating element and becomes stronger over time. The fact that ayurvedic medicines need not specify an expiry date, comes in handy here. Pudinhara is also an ayurvedic medicine usually prescribed for stomach disorders. It contains about 78-80% alcohol. Both sura and pudinhara are mainly marketed by the famous ayurvedic company - Dabur. But a number of other firms whose names are not always given on the labels, also market these liquids.

These liquids are manufactured at Ghaziabad and Hathras (U.P.), Shahdara (Delhi), Karnal (Haryana) and recently in Sikkim. They are then transported through railways through a cleverly operated method. Usually the dealer books his consignment under "self-consignment" category where no name is required, which he collects at the destination points such as the Kathgodam railway station or at any of the four railway out-agencies in Almora district. In this kind of system it is not possible to identify the dealer and the entire operation is fool proof. (Why the railways should have a system in which the transporter need not disclose his name is of course a moot point). Sometimes the liquor is also transported through road transport. In any case within the hill region trucks and buses are used for transport. It should be noted that the state owned U.P. Parivahan Nigam operates only in the plains and not in the hills. Kumaon Motor Owners Union Ltd. (K.M.O.U.), a cartel of private bus owners, operate the buses. The trucks are mostly owned by forest contractors. This makes the transport of liquor into the interior, all the more easy. The well connected traders ensure a smooth operation of what is otherwise illegal transaction.



At the district or tehsil level the traders are powerful businessmen, some of whom have other interests also, such as restaurants, hotels, cinema halls and now spreading video parlours. Their linkages with political parties are not always covert. The president of Almora city Congress (I) is a sura trader, while the sitting M.P. of this area, by his own admission, is in this trade. In some places the traders are with the Bhartiya Janata Party. In a village in Ranikhet, a man who is the block pramukh, forest contractor, block president of Congress (I) is also a liquor trader. The trade has also eaten into the roots of the district administration. The all-in-all Kumaon Revenue Police seems to be completely involved with the trade or with the traders. We came across atleast three patwaris, one kanungo (Supervisor, equivalent to Circle Inspector rank) and a sub-divisional magistrate who is either himself a trader or is helping the traders. The situation has reached a stage where almost every activity of the region <sup>from</sup> forest to development works, from trade to tourism, is in some form or other connected with this large scale sale of sura, ashoka and other liquids.

Since the sale of these liquids is beyond any regulation, it is difficult to estimate the precise quantum of it flowing into the region. At the regional level there are only two or three big traders. But at the retailers level there are literally hundreds of sellers of these spurious tonics all over the three districts. From wayside cigarette and paan vendors to well established chemist and cloth stores, almost every shop has become a retail selling counter. On an average there are fifty main selling points in urban centers and four shops per village. Considering that there are over 7000 villages and 14 urban centers in the Kumaon region, the total number of retailers in the region would be around 35,000. Even if one goes by a conservative estimate of 10 bottles per shop sold in a day, it would mean a sale of 3.5 lakh bottles a day. (10 bottles is extremely conservative - in

one village we visited, the sale was to the tune of 120 bottles a day). Since the traders get anything between Rs.3 and 5 per bottle, it became a lucrative business for them. At an average price of Rs.10 a bottle around 126 crores are siphoned off every year through the trade of these liquids. (It may not be out of place to mention here that the annual budget for the entire hill region is not more than 120 crores). This free flow of gallons of alcohol into the region has led to disastrous consequences in the life and the living of the Himalayan hill districts.

#### SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

The spread of cheap, easily available liquor has ruined many families, as most of the males are getting addicted to it. We are told in Chaukhatiya (Ranikhet tehsil), that addicts leave home around 4 P.M. for their drinking and return home only by dawn. In Someshwar (Almora tehsil), it was reported with dismay, that addicts do not wait even till evening. If they can manage it, the drinking starts from morning itself. The economic consequences of this in an area where the majority of the people need to do daily labour for the family to survive are easy to see. An average male in this area earns about Rs.10/- a day while the commonly available Sura and Ashoka liquid costs Rs.8-10 a quart. Things have come to such a pass, that numerous families have got ruined with men drinking away family earnings, mortgaging land, jewellery and selling even household utensils.

What is extremely alarming is that drinking habits have spread even among children. Quite often small boys will pool together a couple of rupees each and buy a small bottle. In Someshwar there was even an instance of a six year old getting drunk. In Sealdeh half a dozen eight year old boys were found drunk in school. In Almora a desi liquor bhatti is located just outside the Ramji school. In a way

the horrifying state of affairs was summed up for us in Chaukhatiya by a young widow with a 2 year old, whose husband had died of alcoholism by the age of thirty. When asked about the anti-liquor agitation, she said that the liquor-racketeers were gone for the present, but 'if they come back, this boy will soon be taking to drinking', and so go the agonizing way of his father.

In the last few years, all festivals, marriages and even deaths have become an occasion for the consumption of alcohol. Violent scenes between drunken people have become common in marriage pandals, cremation grounds and even in temples. Festivals like Holi or the three day festival at Somnath temple at Chaukhatiya have become <sup>occasions for</sup> hooliganism. This also has led to an increase in crime. In some of the more notorious villages, normal public life comes to an end by evening due to fear and insecurity. Ordinarily there is very little crime in the hill areas of U.P. unlike the other parts of the state which has the highest crime rates in the country with over 2000 murders in a year. The Superintendent of Police, Almora, whom we interviewed, told us that 'mar-peat' and general violent brawls have been on the increase in recent times due to the liquor trade.

The ultimate victims of the pernicious phenomenon are women. They have become virtually the sole bread earners of the family. (Women labourers get only Rs. 6-8 a day). They suffer drunken children and watch the deterioration of their health at tender ages, almost helplessly. Quite often drunken husbands beat up their women. Their freedom to move on the streets is curtailed as molestation is on the increase. On all major festivals, they are too afraid to move around. We came to know of an instance in Bikyasen village of a sixty year old woman <sup>who</sup> carries a sickle on her person to protect herself from violence. Women no longer wear their traditional ornaments when they go to fields. A whole way of life of 'pahari' women has completely changed in the last few years.

Considering this pervasive influence on the economy, religion, culture, and tradition of hill people, it is not surprising that the movement against liquor has such wide support, especially among women.

#### PEOPLES MOVEMENT

The movement is led by the Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini formed in 1977 in Almora. The Vahini joined the famous Chipko movement which had already become active in the Garhwal region. Soon the Vahini emerged as the radical component of the movement raising its voice against the powerful forest contractors, the degradation of the environment and championing people's rights in the forest. Later it took up a wide range of issues from drinking water facilities in the villages to trafficking in women. In recent times it has also become active in unionising unorganised labour as well as workers in the magnesite mines of Pithoragarh. It is also helped in its activities by its associates, Uttarakhand Chhatra Sangharsh Vahini, a cultural troupe Jagar, and the recently formed Uttarakhand Mahila Sangathan.

In the current phase, it is also being supported by the Trade Union Coordination Council (T.U.C.C.) Almora. The TUCC, which is an independent trade union of various government and private sector employees, has been in the forefront and its secretary was also jailed during this agitation. In Someshwar, the local Nav Yuvak Sangathan is leading the movement.

The Congress (I) is openly opposing the movement. In Almora, on May 1, in order to sabotage a rally being held by the TUCC, it conducted a rally. It was addressed by H.C. Rawat (MP and general secretary Congress (I)), B.S. Janote (Congress (I) Youth President) and J.S. Bisht (MLA Congress (I) Ranikhet). In Ranikhet the Congress (I) got some of the liquor shops re-opened. The BJP according to the agitators, is opposing the movement clandestinely. But the Democratic Socialist Party and the Uttarakhand Kranti Dal have extended their support.

In general the Vahini is enjoying far and wide support from a cross section of people - old freedom fighters, social workers, teachers, students, lawyers and journalists in urban areas and numerous gaon sabhapatis, shopkeepers and thousands of village poor in the village areas. Women are participating in large numbers while students and youth constitute the backbone of the movement. Its main demands are the declaration of the entire region as dry and complete ban on all medicines which have more than 10% alcohol.

The movement, on a mass scale, began in February this year. It was preceded in January by a month-long padyatra. Starting in Baskhera, it soon spread to Dwarahat, Ranikhet, Bhowali, Kosi, Hawalghat, Ramgarh, Tadikhet and other areas of Almora and Nainital. Some activity also took place in Pithoragarh.

Public meetings were held and those dealing in liquor were caught and paraded through the bazar with blackened faces and wearing placards confessing their guilt. Local youth formed squads for night patrol in Chaukhatiya (liquor headquarters for villages in a 30 km. radius) and caught four persons attempting to take sura and ashoka liquids across the Ramganga. By morning hundreds of people gathered, the bottles were broken, and the offenders paraded. In Someshwar, a KMOU bus laden with liquor was seized and crates of sura handed over to the police. In Kosi, people insisted that a seller they apprehended break the bottles himself. Many offenders were made to give written undertakings that in future they will not deal in liquor. Demonstrations were held in front of liquor shops and godowns and owners were made to close their business. Officials involved in the racket have also been caught.

Where village heads are themselves not involved, they have been instrumental in mobilising people in the local areas. Thus in Jalli (Nees), 35 village pradhans held a meeting and

resolved to support the campaign. In mid-March Holi processions were taken out in numerous places and many people said that for the first time in years men and women have been able to celebrate Holi without fear of hooliganism. Jagar gives performances at street-corners and public meetings, and several of its songs have become popular.

The high point of the campaign was a public rally on March 20 in which it is reported that 10-12,000 people participated. On March 26 a successful Kumaon bandh was observed and large processions carried out against the auction of liquor inspite of Section 144 being imposed. 51 people were arrested and a lathi charge was carried out on the next day. Later dharnas were offered at phattis. In the course of <sup>the</sup> agitation from February to May, activists were arrested at Ranikhet, Almora, Someshwar and Nainital.

Women have found the courage to participate and even take the initiative at times. On occasions they have been attacked by goondas, particularly when picketting liquor bhattis (at Bhowali and Almora). In one instance in Almora, on April 12, they were attacked by the police leading to a protest demonstration and hunger strikes in Almora and Nainital. One of the women on hunger strike had to be hospitalised, while 3 others were in serious condition.

The movement, even according to the officials interviewed is completely peaceful. This is also indicated by the fact that there is not a single case of violence registered against the agitation in any of these three districts. Violence, if any, was indulged in by the law enforcing authorities which reflects the attitude of the state towards the liquor problem.



III.  
STATE POLICY

The state government seems to be taking shelter under a host of contradictory laws and conflicting departments. The movement has brought to the surface the ambiguous policies of the state, complicity of the officials and repression against the movement, along with connivance of the state government with the power<sup>ful</sup>/liquor traders.

The angrezi and desi liquor come under the purview of the excise department. Till recently there were about 20 country liquor bhattis and 50 angrezi liquor shops in Nainital and Almora districts. The auction bid has doubled in the last four years to become around Rs.80 lakhs in Almora and around Rs.200 lakhs in Nainital at the last auction. The traders indulge in sale of quantities beyond the specified amounts and also sell spurious liquor. The excise department, part of Kumaon Revenue Police seems to be abetting this trade, if not actually participating. For instance, demonstrators have caught an excise official, three patwaris and one kanunga involved in the trade. But the sub-divisional magistrate mentioned only one instance of departmental enquiry against an excise official. As the agitation became strong, the state government was forced to announce that Almora (but not Nainital) would be declared dry on 25th April. Two weeks later the order is yet to come creating tension among the people. The K R P shuns all responsibility towards sura, ashoka and other such liquids.

Ashoka, being an allopathic medicine, comes under the drug directorate. According to the CMO, whom we interviewed, none of the 210 license holders in Almora have license to sell ashoka liquid. In the face of large scale selling by chemists, the CMO too has only in one instance taken action against a licensed chemist. Although sale of ashoka without

license is an offence, the medical department pleads lack of sufficient infrastructure to tackle the problem at such a scale. For the entire Kumaon region, there is only one drug inspector, stationed at Nainital. For any raid, on receipt of information, he has to requisition staff from the KRP. If successful, the drug inspector sends the sample to Lucknow and lodges an FIR with the police. And the job of the medical department is over. In effect this kind of procedure, ensures complete inaction. On the whole there seems to be not more than half-a-dozen cases pending in law courts. The traders on the other hand get stay orders from the high courts on the ground that these are 'important medicines' and the biggest trader is running a civil suit against some officials for damage.

In case of sura and other Ayurvedic liquids, it is virtually nobody's baby. Since by law, sale of ayurvedic medicines require no license (except the manufacturer's license at state level), any body is free to sell any amount of these liquids. And both the excise department and medical department shun responsibility in case of ayurvedic liquids.

The law itself is quite complicated since drugs come in the concurrent list (seventh schedule of the constitution). Proposals such as the one to bring these liquids under the state excise department or the demand for ban are gathering dust in the corridors of both state and central governments.

Notwithstanding these elaborate labyrinth of laws and the criminal irresponsibility they rationalize, there are still many laws under which action can be taken by the police. Sale of liquids without proper label, use of colours other than specified attract provisions of various laws including the Indian Penal Code. Sale without the Sales tax permit in hill areas is prohibited. Large scale transport from outside the state without permit violate the Inter State Trade and Commerce (spiritous preparations) Act. But for all these provisions



which can be used against the sale of such large quantities, there are only two notable instances of two truckloads of liquids being confiscated, and that too by the civil police and not the KRP.

Thus altogether one excise inspector, one chemist, and two truck loads worth Rs.2.5 lakhs are all that the entire administration was able to lay its hands upon. That too after the mass movement had begun, it should be noted. In sharp contrast the agitators have caught large consignments twice at the railway outstation agency in Ranikhet, and in shops at Chaukhatiya, Sealdeh Bageshwar, Someshwar, Bikyasen, Masi and Dwarahat. A total of over Rs.30 lakhs worth of liquid was caught by the people. That the complete inaction on the part of the state government, in the face of brazen sales, is not accidental is revealed by the attitude of the state agencies towards the movement. The lathi charge at Someshwar is a good illustration of it.

**SOMESHWAR:** Someshwar (located 40 kms from Almora) is a small urban centre of 2000 people, surrounded by about 70 villages. The place has one inter-college, two schools, five liquor shops and of course a video parlour. Being in a valley it has relatively better agriculture. In the last few years it has earned notoriety for its liquor trade and organised crime. On Holi, in 1983, a murder took place and usually goondas armed with knives and sticks rule the area. The sitting Cong-I MLA himself is said to be involved in the trade of ashoka, sura and other liquids. The patwari is his retail agent who controls all the five local liquor shops. The movement in this area, led by the Nav Yuvak Sangathan, is particularly strong with over 50 gaon sabhapatis backing it. It has effectively put an end to both the sale of liquor and goondaism.

On 12 April, people stopped the traffic for six hours demanding the release of arrested activists at Almora and a ban on liquor. Over 3000 people, including women and children, participated in this "chakka-jaam". It was lifted around 3 P.M. in the afternoon. Half an hour later two

truckloads of the Provisional Armed Constabulary (PAC) led by the SDM came to Someshwar. What happened thereafter is a veritable torture of a large number of people. The PAC went berserk for four hours till around 7 P.M. All the small shopkeepers in the bazaar were beaten up. At least two gaon sabhapatis were mercilessly beaten. The armed police entered houses, schools and even temples and beat up people. A women shopkeeper was assaulted and her guluband (necklace) was snatched. Women working in the nearby fields were beaten up. In one house a buffalo was killed. One eight year old child playing near a pond was beaten up. Not only labourers in the PWD construction work but even their contractor was beaten up. The local postmaster and a schoolteacher were threatened and another teacher was beaten up for supporting the movement. Eventually eight activists including the president of the Sangathan, a former textile worker from Bombay who lost his job during the last year's strike, were handcuffed and beaten up till two of them fainted. Later they were taken to Almora and kept in lock up without medical aid, food or drinking water for a whole day. They were sent to jail the next day. The committee spent a whole day interviewing scores of people.

We should note that this incident has shaken the entire region. A number of people from old freedom fighters to young people in Almora, Nainital and Pithoragarh told us that such an incident never took place in the long history of the hill region. We visited the area three weeks after the incidents but the people continue to talk in an excited state about the incident. When the committee enquired from the SDM, he not only denied the lathi charge but even the presence of the PAC. But other officials, in private admitted that it was an uncalled for attack.

Apart from Someshwar, incidents of lathi charge on a minor scale took place at Almora and Ranikhet. Section 144 was imposed to ensure the auction of liquor contracts in

Almora and Nainital. Women picketeers offering dharna at the bhattis were forcefully dispersed at Almora. Three women were injured. Next day the entire town witnessed a massive demonstration, and seven women went on an indefinite hunger strike. They were joined by batches of 4-5 women on relay hunger strike. The strike was withdrawn when the district was declared dry. On 26 March alone 36 activists including all the senior leaders of the Vahini, TUCC, Chatra Sanghathan were arrested and were sent to jail. Among those arrested were 14 women (released the same day) and one blind man, a popular singer in the cultural troupe of the Vahini. Later they were joined by 8 activists from Someshwar and another 8 from Ranikhet. Two weeks later, some of them were released. Altogether about 22 activists were in Almora prison for more than a month. They were later released unconditionally on 3 May, when the government made conciliatory gestures.

But now the situation remains tense due to the activities of professional goondas. Mobilised from Moradabad, these hoodlums man the liquor shops. On 6 May in a major incident, the goondas threw bottles in a public meeting being held by the Vahini. The team was a witness to a show of strength by goondas at the liquor shop located in the palatial house of the district's biggest liquor trader in Almora. These brazen attacks are for the present confined to urban centers. But the manner in which the administration is abetting their activities has ominous portents for the entire region.

CONCLUSION

The team, in pursuit of an interview, was obliged to go into a well-built building standing out in a row of otherwise dilapidated houses in Chaukhatiya bazar. The house is the private house of the biggest local forest and liquor contractor and inside, in an otherwise uncomfortable atmosphere, we were able to meet the B.D.O. medical officer and their well placed friends from other state agencies. In a way the scene in this place sums up all that is contributing to the destruction of the hill districts of Uttar Pradesh.

A whole network of former thokdars, forest contractors and liquor contractors, coupled with development officials, excise revenue and police at the village level to powerful traders and legislators both at Lucknow and Delhi have ensured a smooth process by which liquor flows into the region and gets them lakhs of rupees in return. The unsuspecting hill people are conditioned to become part of a carnivorous phenomenon whose consequences they can neither control nor withstand. In the process the social, economic and cultural life of a whole community of people in a backward region is being completely destroyed. The present people's movement is a democratic response against these forces.

The state government which otherwise swears by prohibition, is openly taking the side of liquor contractors. In the face of this large scale liquor onslaught, the government response is overt indifference and covert support to the trade. The arrest and beating up of activists, the P.A.C. lathicharge at Someshwar, even as the government admits that the movement is completely peaceful, are a direct assault on the basic democratic rights of the movement.

The fact finding team of P.U.D.R. demands that:

- a) A judicial inquiry be ordered over the incident of the P.A.C. lathicharge at Someshwar.
- b) Immediate action should be taken against the increasing activities of the goondas.
- c) All the liquor manufacturers including big companies like Dabur and all the big traders should be dealt with according to the law, and
- d) Necessary laws be passed to eradicate effectively the menace of the so called medicinal tonics.

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MLA, Ranikhet

and the organisations:

Uttarakhand Sangharsh Vahini  
Uttarakhand Chhatra Sangathan  
Uttarakhand Mahila Sangathan  
Trade Union Co-ordination Council  
and Nav Yuvak Sangathan, Someshwar

and

Lawyers and journalists at Almora  
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Almora and Nainital.

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