



# Uttaranchal Patrika

## January 2011

### **President's Message**

Friends,

Happy New Year. At the outset, I would like to thank Bhandariji and outgoing EXCOM and BOD members for establishing a solid foundation for UANA. To Bhandariji and his team we are truly indebted and we are indeed blessed that we will continue to have their wise counsel as we move forward. I had the pleasure of spending an evening with Bhandariji, Bhakuniji, Pantji (host & chef par excellence), and Vinod Jakhmola where they kindly briefed me on the many current initiatives of UANA. I fully intend to carry these initiatives forward and build on the solid foundation laid down under Bhandariji's leadership. The incoming Executive Committee and Board of Directors are as follows:

### **Executive Committee (EXCOM):**

President: Ajay Adhikari

Vice President: Anup Uniyal

Secretary: Prema Bohra

Treasurer: Vinod Jakhmola

Co-Treasurer: Kishore Pandey (non-voting capacity)

### **Board of Directors (BOD):**

Roop S. Bhakuni, Prakash Khanduri and Harish Pant [5 year term]

Kumud Sanwal, Ajay Rawat and Sunil Kala [3 year term]

Pritam Dimri, Runjhun Saklani and Sachin Bhatt [2 year term]

Ex Officio: J.C.Bhandari

### **Advisory Committee:**

Mohan Barthwal, Naresh Bhatt and Sanjana Raturi

Based on conversations with many members and in consultation with EXCOM and BOD, I have identified a few priorities for the coming year:

**Patrika:** A top priority is to reconstitute the Patrika. I am delighted Sangeeta Bist, has kindly agreed to be the editor of our Patrika. Sangeeta has excellent credentials; she has a Masters in International Relations from Jawaharlal Nehru University and was

an active contributor to our Patrika in the past. Her dedication can clearly be seen in the current Patrika which has been put together at extremely short notice. Our preliminary goals for the Patrika are:

- Three issues per year [January; June (convention issue); November (post convention issue)].
- Mix of fixed [Egs.: Letter from President, Community News, Members corner, Update from Uttarakhand] and floating topics [Egs.: Articles, poetry, stories submitted by members and project updates from our partners in Uttarakhand].
- Editorial team [4-5] – Editor, Community Liaisons including liaison in India. I am very happy to report that, Mr. C.M. Bhandari, our chief guest at last year's convention, has kindly agreed to be a regular contributor to the Patrika.

**Standing Committees:** The lifeblood of any organization are its members. To ensure continuity in the organization and provide opportunities for our members to be involved in shaping the agenda of the organization, I am constituting several standing committees. The committees will be chaired and largely populated by at-large members with one or two members of the BOD/EXCOM serving on these committees in a liaison function to provide communication between the committees and the BOD/EXCOM. The committees would be given broad charges and would provide regular updates through the Patrika and the General Body Meeting at the convention. The standing committees are:

### **Annual Convention Committee (Chair: Dinesh Pant)** Charges include:

- Help coordinate 2011 annual convention working with local convention committee of the hosting city.
- Develop a planning document that outlines important logistics/activities/components including approximate pricing for a successful annual convention to be used for future conventions.

- Explore different formats/programming for the convention.

**Membership Committee (Chair: Surjeet Mastwal)**

Charges include:

- Poll members – satisfaction; suggestions etc. What value proposition does UANA offer or should offer to members?
- Develop a national registry of all members including tracking statistics.
- Expand membership in existing locations and develop members in new locations.
- Encourage conversion to life memberships.

**Outreach Committee (Chair: Ramesh Patwal)**

Charges include:

- Identify contacts/partners in Uttarakhand.
- Identify and develop projects in Uttarakhand.
- Develop an internship program for UANA youngsters in Uttarakhand [e.g., Dr. Bhakuni’s Gyan project] – Model Peace Corps, AmeriCorps.
- Explore partnerships with other non profits in US [E.g., American Indian Federation].

**Social Activities Committee (Chair: Mahender Bohra)** Charges include:

- Develop local and national activities (beyond the annual meeting) to promote interaction among members. For example, a cricket match between New Jersey and Washington DC area chapters or a joint picnic at a central location could be ideas that could be developed. Programming for all age groups is important.
- A UANA sponsored play or comedy show (*Haasya Samelan*) open to the larger public to promote UANA brand and potentially as a fundraiser can also be pursued.

We are also in the process of constituting a Youth Committee comprising of our youngsters who will provide us “oldies” recommendations to keep our programs/initiatives relevant and provide a forum for our young generation to be active and feel a sense of ownership in the organization. [Thanks to Prakash Khanduri for this wonderful idea].

**Website Development:** The website is the first line of contact for many who want to know more about our organization. We need to ensure that we have a dynamic website that is updated regularly. Vinod Jakhmola and Nitin Bhatt will spearhead our effort to

improve our website and make our web presence stronger.

**Change in EXCOM Structure:** Vinod Jakhmola, our Treasurer, wears many hats in UANA. He is also our webmaster, maintains our membership and administrative records, and does a lot of heavy lifting for our annual convention. To lessen his load, we have inducted Kishore Pandey, as a non-voting member of the EXCOM. Kishore is a registered CPA and working with conjunction with Vinod, he will help us automate all our financial records as well as provide an internal audit of our accounts. We are aiming for the financial statements of UANA to be published in our convention issue of the Patrika.

I am excited about the above initiatives, if you have any suggestions please feel free to contact me. Let’s work together to make UANA grow.

Sincerely,

Ajay Adhikari

**What Do We Do? A Focus on Professions**

We plan this to be a regular Patrika column that focuses on career and professions. To make the column accessible to a wide audience, the column will be in a question/answer format featuring two members of a profession drawn from UANA membership. In this issue, we focus on architecture and feature two architects, Ajay Rawat who works for the Fairfax County Public Schools (a public policy perspective) and Runjhun Saklani who works for AKM Architects (a private company perspective).

**1. What attracted you to become an architect?**

**Ajay:** Architecture is a combination of science and fine art. It uses scientific principles to craft artistic creations. My interest in both subjects motivated me to pursue a career in Architecture.

**Runjhun:** A fascination towards natural and built environment combined with an inspiring conversation with my grand uncle Mr. Dharma Nand Kala, a reputed Civil Engineer of his time, motivated me to venture into architecture.

**2. What education and training did you have to undergo to become an architect?**

**Ajay:** A bachelor’s degree in Architecture and State registration is a must to professionally practice Architecture. More than that, in order to be a good Architect one has to have excellent observational skills and ability to conceive things in multi dimensions.

**Runjhun:** I had to complete three steps before becoming an architect. A masters degree in architecture, practical work experience as an intern in architectural firms followed by passing licensing exams known as ARE (Architect Registration Examination).

**3. Please tell us briefly about the organization you work with and your responsibilities?**

**Ajay:** I am currently working with the Fairfax County Public Schools with a primary responsibility of doing long range planning for the school system. We have approximately 175,000 students and the system is growing. As a planner we make sure that the system have adequate infrastructure (facilities to create wholesome learning environment) to support the current and projected student enrollments.

**Runjhun:** I work for AKM Architects, a private architectural firm located in Manhattan, New York. The firm specializes in architectural design and analysis of residential, mixed-use, educational, medical, commercial, and industrial projects. My responsibilities span from initial discussion with clients to the final delivery of the completed project including tasks like designing, preparing construction documents using CAD software, coordinating projects with engineers and building code consultants, visiting project sites, managing, supervising, communicating with clients, city agencies and construction managers.

**4. What do you enjoy most about your work?**

**Ajay:** In our work we see quick turnaround of our vision into reality. We plan, design, build and see them functioning in real world.

**Runjhun:** The challenge of converting a client's wish-list into a feasible design that is eventually built and appreciated by the end user is perhaps the most rewarding part of my job. The other interesting aspect of my profession is the process of solving problems creatively.

**5. What are some of the greatest challenges?**

**Ajay:** A difference in perceptions and concepts is a challenge any time something is designed and created. Architecture is a fine art which at times is viewed as a commodity.

**Runjhun:** The biggest challenge is to comply with New York City Zoning Resolution and the Building Code without compromising with the owner's objectives, budget, requirements and design intent.

**6. Please describe briefly your typical day.**

**Ajay:** A typical day at the office is like meetings with clients, associates and working on the projects.

**Runjhun:** My typical day at work starts with checking and responding to official emails followed by reviewing work with co-workers and updating drawings and documents. During lunch break, I usually go out for a walk in midtown Manhattan. The second half of the day is usually busy with meetings or calling consultants to discuss project status and related issues.

**7. Would you like to share something else with our readers?**

**Ajay:** If you have interests in using your creative side, this is a right career for you.

**Runjhun:** Architects create the overall look of buildings but these buildings must be functional, safe, and economical. They must comply with the applicable building codes and meet the needs of the people who use them. Architects consider all these factors when they design buildings and other structures. The profession of architecture is indeed a challenging one offering many possibilities so if you happen to be or know an aspiring architect, you can learn more about the profession from the American Institute of Architects website at [www.aia.org](http://www.aia.org)

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**Daayen Ya Baayen: A Film Shot in Uttarakhand**

Director: Bela Negi

Bela Negi has directed a film shot exclusively in Uttarakhand with an all Uttarakhandi cast. The film is based in a small village in Uttarakhand and the story revolves around a man in the village who wins a car through an entry into a television contest and its comic repercussions. Shot in Chaukori, Bageshwar, Munsiyari among other locations, the film mixes comedy, action, and drama in the backdrop of the beauty of Uttarakhand. The inspiration for the movie came to Bela from the memorable time she spent in her mother's village. A native of Nainital, Bela is a product of Sherwood College, Delhi University, and the prestigious Film and Television Institute (FITI) Pune. This is her debut film and we wish her all the success. A clip of the movie can be seen at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=axs0t9Qq9lg>

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**Uttaranchal in the News**

**In a First, Uttarakhand Govt. to Launch Free Air Ambulance Soon**

"In what may be among its most notable achievements this year, Uttarakhand is underway to become the first State in the country to provide free and integrated emergency medical assistance to its citizens on air, land and water. While, the first motorboat ambulance will be ready for deployment in the Tehri dam area by April and a second one by the

end of 2011; action is in full swing to launch a free air ambulance within the ensuing six months.

The emergency response services for the masses are being implemented through GVK EMRI 108 in Public- Private Partnership mode. A five-member committee set up to assess and suggest options for sourcing the chopper-ambulance has submitted its preliminary report to the State Government recently.” This is an excerpt from the article written by Anupma Khanna. To read the full article, visit <http://www.dailypioneer.com/308520/In-a-first-Uttarakhand-Govt-to-launch-free-air-ambulance-soon.html>.

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### **An Oral History: Life in Uttarakhand Through the Ages**

History books largely focus on political developments that take place in a region or country. However, a rich oral tradition has the power to pass from generation to generation a richer history on the traditions of a society, the daily life of people, and the trials/tribulations and joys of growing up in a region at different times. In this column, an Uttarakhandi youth will discuss and report on her/his conversation with his parents or grandparents on their experiences in growing up in Uttarakhand. In this inaugural column, Vaibhav Bist reports on his conversation with his grandmother Mrs. Sudha Rawat.

*As narrated by Mrs. Sudha Rawat to her grandson, Vaibhav Bist*

I was born in Pisoli village (Close to Srinagar) in Pauri Garwal in 1941. Life was very hard in villages those days. Education was only for boys and girls used to marry at very early age. I got married at the age of 12 in the joint family. My husband used to study in Delhi with his uncle so I stayed with my in-laws for seven years before moving to Delhi. I used to wake up at 4:00 AM every day. After drinking tea, I would feed the cattle's, bring water from river and then leave to the farms. We use to eat brunch at fields and worked there till late afternoon. Since there were no transportation facilities in villages, we had to carry on the heavy load and grains on our shoulders from one village to another. In the evening, women used to cook the dinner for whole family and men used to relax and drink. Life was very hard but the affection, co-operation and help from the family members and women folks from the village used to make days brighter and shorter. Village fairs were great fun. Those fairs were an opportunity for friends and relatives to meet especially mother and brothers from my village.

### **Community News**

We were greatly saddened to hear of the passing of Sanjana Raturi's father. Sanjana's father and mother had visited the US and many of us had an opportunity to meet them personally and they had also attended one of our annual conventions. Please keep Sanjana and Mayank and their families in your prayers and thoughts as they try to move forward after their deep loss.

### **Tristate UANA Chapter background and Activities**

Nitin Bhatt, Tristate UANA President

The *Tristate Uttaranchal Association (A Local UANA chapter)* is an organization dedicated to promoting Pahari culture in NJ, NY, PA and neighboring communities. Every year since 2000, Association has been holding Diwali function, *Holi Hangama*. Summer picnic & Cricket event Annually. Community has also helped Organize UANA cultural events such as 2000, 2004, 2008 & 2010 UANA Annual conventions in Tristate area.

With the strength of 150 eGroup members, Tristate UANA chapter was officially formed in 2008. Dr. Jagdish Bhandari (Ex UANA president) took the initiative and helped form the first Chapter under UANA to bring a structure to this vibrant community that includes members from *NY, NJ & PA* region.

In last few years, this UANA local Chapter has changed its profile from being simply a great place to meet people from Uttarakhand region, to a community based group that works more on Events, Charity & educates our Kids about our cultural heritage. Aipan art activity & recently staged kids Ramlila skit during Diwali are examples of such activities. Also, a highlight of last year was the event Discourse on Self-Management Techniques for Healthy Living by Diplomat Divine - C.M. Bhandarji, The event was well attended by many members from our community.

Tristate Chapter is involved in various Charity initiatives for needy folks back home. The charity is sustained not only by financial contributions raised in our events, but also by donated prize items and effective ideas from our committed members. Our gratitude extends to members, community partners, guests, and our hard-working volunteers who make this possible. More information on Charity programs can be found on our website.

In our programs, we have learned that members seek meaningful experiences with their family & friends in

this community. The chapter offers festivals/events that matter and that we enjoy sharing with one another. Also, with creation of various committees, we have members on board who are capable of working on different areas of chapters functions. They continue to actively engage the community through a variety of programs and activities that encourage participants to learn more about our culture, festivals & sports, One example of this is “Surabhi” – A Magazine for Kids.

We hope that when you think about *UANA Tristate chapter*, you share our feelings of community pride and enjoyment. As UANA members, Please join us at our events as often as you can. We welcome your involvement and encourage you to stay connected with us through our website: <http://www.tristateuttaranchal.org> , Please checkout chapters Programs, Event Photos & magazine on this community portal as well.

On a personal note, I complete my two year term as the President of the Tristate UANA Chapter. I am proud of my Excom/bod team & all members who have supported me during this time. The New ExCom/Bod is already nominated for fresh elections, the team will change but the groups drive to achieve new heights will remain same.

We hope to see you all in our Next Holi event to be held in NJ on 26th March 2011.

#### **Community Service – Tax Tips**

By Kishore Pandey, CPA  
Assurance Tax & Accounting Services,  
[www.assurancetaxes.com](http://www.assurancetaxes.com)

Each year most people dread ‘tax day’ April 15<sup>th</sup>, but it doesn’t need to be frightening if you are able to take advantage of deductions that the IRS allows, if you know how and when they can be used. No matter how you look at it, everyone has to pay taxes sooner or later but the key is to find out how to minimize what you owe or better yet .....maximize your refund.

According to IRS press release every year millions of tax payers over pay their taxes by overlooking some of the most common deductions that are available to all tax payers. Before you are in a rush to finish your taxes, it’s a good idea to make sure that you are utilizing all the deductions and credits that are available to you.

Here are a few common deductions we may neglect or may not be aware of:

**Charitable Contributions:** These are the contributions that are made to qualified charitable contributions. The contributions can be in the form of Cash or Non-Cash Items.

- **Cash contribution** is deductible only if, regardless of amount, you keep a proper record such as canceled check, a bank statement, a receipt or letter from the qualified organization showing the name of the organization, amount contributed and the date of contribution. If the deduction is through payroll, then the documents relating to contributions should be furnished by your employer or the qualified organization.
- **Non- cash Contributions:** Generally you required having the receipts for all the non-cash contributions, but if the value of the donated items is less than \$250.00 you may not need the receipts, but must have records showing the name of the organization and location, date of contribution and the descriptions of the items that were donated. If the contribution of non-cash item is more than \$250.00 then you need to have a receipt from the qualified organization, date of the contributions and the descriptions of the items donated. If you think that your non cash item contributions is going to be more than \$ 250.00, then make sure that you donated to a location that will provide you with the receipt, description and good faith estimates of the value of the goods donated.
- **Out of Pocket expenses:** If there are unreimbursed out of pocket expenses related to rendering services to a qualified organization they are deductible under certain conditions.
- **Car Expenses:** If you use your car for providing the services you can deduct actual expenses or you can use standard mileage rate of 14 cents per mile.

**Refinancing Points:** When you buy the house, you get to deduct the points paid to get the mortgage in full in that year. But if you refinance your mortgage any points paid, needs to be deducted (amortized) over the life of the loan.

**Job Hunting Cost:** If you are looking for a new job in the same line of work, you can deduct the job hunting cost as miscellaneous deduction subjected to 2% adjusted gross income limitation. The total of miscellaneous must exceed 2% of adjusted gross income. This deduction is not available if you are

looking for your first job. The deductible job expenses included but not limited to

- Food, lodging, and transportation if your search takes you away from home for overnight
- Cab fares
- Employment Agency fees
- Cost of printing resume, business cards, postage and advertising

**Moving Expenses to take the first Job:** Even though you cannot deduct job hunting cost for your first job, but you can deduct the moving cost for taking up your first job. And you get to write-off even if you don't itemize. To qualify for the deduction your new job should be at least 50 miles away from your old house. If you qualify, you can deduct the cost of moving your household items to new location. You can also deduct 16.5 cents per mile for 2010 for driving your vehicle, including parking and tolls.

**Health Insurance Expenses for Self Employed:** Business owners have always deducted the cost of health insurance for themselves and their family in computing adjusted gross income on the front page of form 1040. **For 2010 they can also deduct the cost of health insurance premiums in calculating self-employment tax on Schedule SE.**

**State Taxes paid for last year:** If you owe state taxes for 2009 filed in the spring of 2010, make sure to include the amount with your state –tax deduction for 2010 along with state income tax withheld from your paycheck or paid via estimated taxes.

**Credit for Energy Saving Home Improvements:** You can claim a tax credit of equal to 30% of cost the energy saving home improvement up to the maximum credit of \$1,500. This cap is applies for both 2009 and 2010 combines. If you have already take the credit in 2009 you cannot double dip in 2010. The credit applies to biomass stoves, heating, ventilating, air conditioning, insulations, roof, water heater windows and doors. This credit is only available on your primary residence. Rentals and new constructions do not qualify. For 2011 this credit goes back to pre-2009 limit (For example, \$500 credit for all years with no more than \$200 for windows). Also not all **ENERGY STAR** qualified products qualify for the tax credits.

**Making Work Pay Credit:** You've probably been enjoying the fruits of this credit via reduced payroll withholding throughout the year. But to get the credit of \$400 for single and \$800 for married filing jointly

you will need to claim this credit by filing schedule M. What a great way to reduce your tax bill by up to \$800 depending upon your filing status. For single the credit of \$400 start to phase out at adjusted gross income of \$75,000 and dries up at \$95,000. For couples the phase out zone is \$150,000 to \$190,000.

**Student Loan Interest Paid by Mom and Dad:** Generally you can deduct mortgage interest and student loan interest if you are legally required to pay the debt. But if parents pay back the child's student loan, the IRS treats it as though money is given to child, who then paid the debt. The child who cannot be treated as dependent can take the deduction of up to \$2,500 of the student loan interest paid by Mom and Dad. And he or she doesn't need have to itemize to use this money saver.

**Safe Deposit Box Rent:** You can deduct safe deposit box rent if you use the box to store taxable income-producing stocks, bonds, or investment-related papers and documents. You cannot deduct the rent if you use the box only for jewelry, other personal items, or tax-exempt securities.

**Home Office:** If you use a part of your home regularly and exclusively for business purpose, you may be able to deduct a part of the operating expenses and depreciation of your home. The regular and exclusive use must be for the convenience of your employer and just appropriate and helpful in your job

Some Reminders:

This year the tax payer will have Monday, April 18, 2011 to file their 2010 taxes and pay any amount due because Emancipation Day, a holiday observed in District of Columbia falls on Friday, April 15<sup>th</sup>. By law, District of Columbia holidays impact the tax deadlines in the same that federal holidays do.

- Tax payers requesting extensions will have till October 17, 2011 to file their 2010 taxes.
- Some tax payers including who file form 1040 and Schedule A will have to wait until mid February to file their taxes as per IRS communications. This is due to the fact that some tax provisions had expired at the end of 2009 and were renewed by the Tax Relief, Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization, and Job Creation Act Of 2010 enacted Dec. 17.
- Those who need to wait to file include:
  1. Schedule A filers claiming deductions for mortgage interest, state and local taxes, charitable contributions, dental and other medical expenses.

2. Taxpayers who are claiming higher education tuition and education fee.
  3. Taxpayers who are claiming educators expenses deductions. This deduction is for kindergarten through 12 grade educators with out of pocket classroom expenses up to \$250.00 and who claim this deduction on line 23 of form 1040 and line 16 of form 1040A.
- For 2011 Business Mileage rate is 51 cents per mile whereas charitable mileage rate is same as last year at 14 cent per mile. The medical and moving mile is increase from 16.5 cents per mile to 19 cents per mile.

I hope this information has been helpful to you and that you will be able to use some of the above mentioned deductions for filing your 2010 taxes this year. The best resolution is to ask a tax professional for advice on taking advantage of every deduction that you may be qualified for. Professional assistance doesn't cost....it helps.

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**A LIFE INSPIRED BY THE DOON SCHOOL**

**Nalni D. Jayal**  
(100-T, 1936<sup>1</sup>-1945<sup>1</sup>)

I joined Doon in the spring term of 1936 at the age of nine and remained for over nine formative years until mid-1945 in the cloistered and privileged environment of Chand Bagh. I was placed in Tata House, and as I grew to begin to understand the world around me, I realized the inspirational influence of my Housemaster, RL Holdsworth (Holdy), and the towering awesome personality of the first Headmaster, Arthur Foot. They were my first friends, philosophers and guides who, I can affirm in retrospect unhesitatingly, set the course of my future life in terms of basic values, hard creative work, love for music and the many gifts of Nature, spirit of adventure, virtues of austerity and simple living, but above all service to the lesser privileged of our world.

I was too young in my early years in School to grasp the full significance of the classic words of Arthur Foot at his first Founder's Day address in October 1935 when he said, "Truly, we mean that the boys should leave the Doon School as members of an aristocracy, but it must be an aristocracy of service inspired by ideals of unselfishness, not by one of privilege, wealth or position". For a long time since I became aware of them, these words remained locked somewhere in my consciousness, gradually surfacing in my senior years as I grew to grasp and appreciate Arthur Foot's deeply felt liberal values, especially in the Indian context, far ahead of the times.

Which British Headmaster in those colonial days in India would, almost since the School's inception, devise a social service system seeking to instill in the boys the desire to serve the community? Thus Foot, assisted by others, laid the foundations of this ethos which is something that still prevails. Under a Labor Quota System, a variety of tasks were listed from muddying your hands to working for the adopted Tunwala village to plucking the sitar strings for the School Orchestra, etc. I can recall enthusiastically digging to make terraces for the Open Air Theatre, planting and picking potatoes near Jaipur House to increase food production during war-time shortages, visiting the Military Hospital to write letters on behalf of the war-wounded soldiers, playing the sitar for the School Orchestra, pruning roses in our House garden, and much else. I remember being well ahead of my prescribed weekly quotas, and enjoying activities which reached out beyond ones own narrow concerns to others for the larger good of the community.

Arthur Foot was a unique Headmaster in many other ways. He made it a point to take weekly GK classes to get to know more closely the boys of each form in turn. On one occasion, still etched in my memory, he introduced us to the relevance in the then industrial age of the trade union movement as the only mechanism available to secure equity and just treatment for the grossly underprivileged and often exploited sections of the working class. By the passage of time the situation may have changed today, but at that time I could begin to sense his deep concern for the less fortunate and poor segments of societies. As a prefect in his tutorial, he would read out excerpts from Aldous Huxley's *Ends and Means* on the virtues of non-attachment especially in the context of avaricious acquisition of material gain. This was, after all, wisdom from the Indian scriptures conveyed to eager listeners by a sensitive English mind.

**Face to face with human tragedy in Contai (Bengal)**

I had no hesitation in volunteering when Arthur Foot announced that in December 1943 for the third time since December 1942 a party of boys and masters would proceed to provide relief to famine stricken and cyclone ravaged areas of Contai in Midnapur District of Bengal. We were a party of 4 masters, namely, VN Kapur, S Khastgir, SC Roy and SC Agarwal, and 7 boys ( having just completed their SC exams and hailing from different parts of the country), who covered two villages, Jaunput and Pichabani. What we saw was truly heart-rending – a tidal wave whipped up by the cyclone had destroyed all the crops and salinised all drinking water sources.

The villagers had lost everything – most of the huts, their belongings, with no clothes to wear and no blankets for cover. Malaria and Cholera were taking a heavy toll of lives, and those spared were dying of starvation. We visited every standing hut in 8 villages during the fortnight we were there, distributed quinine and arranged cholera injections, provided potable drinking water, distributed clothes and blankets, carried the gravely ill on stretchers for transportation to hospitals, and much else documented in detail elsewhere in this book. This was my first grim and painful experience of the fragile existence of our villagers, stricken to succumb so easily to natural or man-made calamities, with miniscule support from the privileged outside world.

The five such Doon expeditions, conceived and organized by Arthur Foot, with active support from several masters of the time, although perhaps drops in the ocean of suffering and deprivation in rural India, were undoubtedly a unique humanitarian endeavour involving and stirring the conscience of impressionable young school boys, a few of whom I believe continued with such work later in life in their different spheres of activity. In our community service we were set the example of not playing Lady Bountiful or try to dispense charity; it was more a partnership which was implicit in the ethos. For me it was a deeply moving experience with a sense of sorrow and shame over human inequities. How could one contribute to lessen if not wipe out misery from the lives of vast numbers of our own people? The thought nagged me for many years.

While I can never forget Arthur Foot's, and masters like SC Roy's, immense contribution in fostering the values and virtues of a social conscience and of service to the community, my last five formative years under Holy's Housemastership were inspiring in several other aspects, equally unforgettable. He brought the joy and beauty of adventure and aesthetics into my life and opened my eyes and ears to the wondrous world of Nature, mountains and music. Weekend visits with him to the lush forests of the Doon Valley, tending flowers in our House garden under his keen guidance, nurturing from his courageous mountaineering eminence a desire, later fulfilled of climbing in the Himalaya as a total experience, and becoming a music addict listening to his ample collection of Bach, Beethoven and Wagner.

It was after I left School that I grew to really love climbing in the Himalaya, and learnt to respect and admire its doughty dwellers. Apart from Holdy, Jack Gibson, John Martyn, and Gurdial Singh (Guru) whom I got to know soon after I left School, left me their unique legacy in instilling this spirit of adventure, which blossomed into a very satisfying

career of service in the Himalaya in my later years. And what a gift to host, during the early sixties when heading a Himalayan border district, all my mentors in School – Holdy, Jack Gibson and John Martyn! Guru, with whom I attempted my first major Himalayan peak, Trisul, in 1951, came too as a close friend. It was for me a happy culmination of profound links with a School that equipped me with all that I could ask for to set course on a purposeful and fruitful career.

### **I move to frontier administration**

After straying, by accident, into a flying career in the Air Force for eight years, when the opportunity came I transferred in 1956 to a special civil service constituted for the tribal border areas of the North-east Himalaya. It was a challenging assignment in the remotest tropical forests inhabited by a large number of isolated tribes, especially for an urbanite like me softened and spoilt by easy living in relative material comfort. But what a transformation of my life occurred when the brilliant Dr. Verrier Elwin, having come as Tribal Adviser with 30 years' experience of living among India's tribes, introduced me to this fascinating world through his spell-binding discourses! I had found yet another friend and mentor from whom I learnt to value and respect the cultural values and ways of life of the tribes and „to approach the tribesman with the mind of the tribesman“.

My first assignment, as Assistant Political Officer, was to as remote a place as you could find on the map of India, called Tuting, close to where the Siang (Brahmaputra) river emerges from Tibet, at the low altitude of about a thousand feet in the midst of the densest tropical rainforest imaginable. A few sparsely populated villages inhabited by the Adi tribe dotted the landscape, harmoniously blending with it by huts built of only bamboos, grass and cane. I lived in one such hut for three years barely insulated from the incessant year-round rainfall, with leeches, snakes and a myriad tropical insects, as frequent unwelcome visitors. But, Arthur Foot's legacy persisted here too in unusual ways ... in the form of the most welcome and readable New Statesman magazine delivered to me weekly in my dripping hut!

We had inherited a historical legacy of suspicion in the minds of the Adis of all plains people, and sporadic conflicts with British officials who set out on annual tours to establish legal control over the territory and secure the Tibetan border, led to local distrust and resentment. My first task, therefore, was to gain the people's confidence by touring extensively from village to village, picking up a smattering of local dialects and soaking in the rich diverse cultures of the different tribes in the large area under my charge. Adapting to this totally new



environment was initially by no means easy, but as I got to know the friendly upright people who looked you straight in the eye as equals and insisted at meetings on this non-drinker sharing with them their generous offering of rice beer, and it was not long before the foundation was laid of a mutual trust and respect. I soon found them forging friendship and affection by visiting my hut at all hours of the day with their real and often imagined problems. I realized the tribes people were truly children of Nature, depending so much on their rich forests for most of their basic needs – never in want should their shifting cultivated rice crop prove deficient as the forests provided abundant nutritious supplementary food. It gave them sufficient pure water, medicinal plants, material for shelter, canes for bridges, and so on. They looked very healthy and happy, with perfectly evolved social and community systems to take care of all aspects of their lives, whether to resolve personal problems or legal disputes. I often wondered what I, as an official of a far away administration, could do for them which Nature had not already provided in full measure, thus mercifully insulating them from the dubious gifts of our civilization's consumerism! My four years in the remote mountain forests of the eastern end of the Himalaya, among some wonderful so-called primitive, but culturally and socially advanced tribes of our country was not only an exciting educational experience in its broadest sense, but what struck me forcefully was the immense value of our natural forest wealth in sustaining large segments of our tribal population. Indeed I never came across a really poor tribal short of any basic livelihood needs!

### **My seven years in Kinnaur**

I moved on in 1960 to another not so remote area in the Western Himalaya, as the first head of a newly established district of Kinnaur in Himachal Pradesh, this time in the temperate zone, bisected by the Great Himalayan Range and bounded in the south by the Dhaula Dhar range and in the north by the Zaskar Range. It was sparsely populated in 77 villages most of which were situated at an altitude of between 8,000 to 12,000 ft. and thus snow-bound for about half the year with a harsh winter climate exacerbated by fierce icy cold winds sweeping down from Tibet through the Sutlej valley. The people, by virtue of their isolation from the rest of the country with poor communication links, practiced a delightful mixture of a unique form of Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism, speaking an entirely non-Sanskritic derived Kinnauri language confined to within the district. I found the Kinnauras warm and friendly and exceptionally honest and upright posing, mercifully for me, no law and order problem of any kind.

One of my first tasks was to make out a strong case before a visiting Central Govt. (Dhebar) Commission to give all Kinnauras the status of a Scheduled Tribe, in which I succeeded, greatly facilitating in later years the rise of the people to high positions in the country's mainstream.

The border problem with China had also blown up, causing a large influx of Tibetan refugees, and sealing the border from any further traditional trade or valuable grazing facilities in Tibet for our border villagers, thus leading to severe economic distress among them. These and other developmental problems were gradually tackled and solutions found.

I lived in a small room of a Forest Rest House built by the British about 50 years earlier near the village of Chini, the District HQ being renamed Kalpa, which lay on the Hindustan-Tibet bridle path barely now broadened to jeepable specifications. A year later I moved to a small bungalow built for me just above the Rest House which I had hardly foreseen would be my home for seven long, exciting, adventurous and looking back, perhaps the most fulfilling years of my life – the seed had surely been well and truly sown by my Alma Mater with introduction to the often grim realities of village India.

I decided first to get to know and understand the social and cultural ethos of the people, and record their priority-wise felt needs by trekking or riding to every village in the district. This I accomplished in my first year, not only learning about the ways of life of a lovable and fascinating people, but also being enchanted in my travels by the beauty and grandeur of a wonderful part of the Himalaya. It seemed Nature and humans had conspired to create in Kinnaur a perfect Paradise! From the information gathered I prepared a five-year plan and secured from a sympathetic Planning Commission all the money we needed. During the ensuing six years, with a limited working season, we fulfilled all the felt needs of the villages, such as schools, ayurvedic dispensaries, water-supply, „kohl's for irrigation, communications, etc., and income generating schemes largely through horticultural and temperate vegetables, and marketing of their colorfully designed traditional woolen shawls. This task was made easy by the Govt. extending a single-line administrative system in which I as head was also made the head of all the district-level officers of every department, thus ensuring effective coordination and fully integrated functioning .

But what I conceived to be my crucial task was to identify the poorest segment of the population, those of lower castes who were later migrants into Kinnaur and others with little or no land or natural assets. A comprehensive socio-economic survey was

carried out and recorded in registers to cover every family in the district by our team of senior-most officials, and all families fitted into four categories. The last two categories were the poorest on whom our team of development officers were entrusted to focus priority attention by meeting their needs, whether of land, timber for housing, pasture for grazing, means of livelihood, etc. The onus of this was placed on the officials, not the needy, the results of which to mitigate poverty were very encouraging.

Horticulture, especially apples and dry fruits, such as *chilgozas* (product of conifer *Pinus gerardiana* unique to the area), walnuts and almonds, proved to be the magic wand in transforming the local economy. By virtue of its location largely beyond the reach of the monsoon rains, the golden apples of Kinnaur, sweetened and blushed by the sun, are counted among the best in India, of export quality, and fetch the highest price in the market. This was how the border villagers of Pooh, rendered destitute by the loss of the trade with Tibet, mentioned earlier, were rehabilitated to unimaginable prosperity within a few years. A large arid tract near the village was made arable by the extension of an expensive kuhl from a distant snow-fed stream, and a garden colony established, planned and assisted by the Govt's Horticulture Department, with each family allotted an acre of land under their ownership, care and supervision for growing apples, peaches, pears, cherries, etc. The garden colony is now a thriving villagers' cooperative, with each family averaging an annual income of up to rupees one and a half to two lakhs. This is in brief Kinnaur's success story, perhaps now the most prosperous, apart from being the most beautiful district in the Himalaya.

What a blessing for me to have remained to serve the tribe of Kinnauras I loved and respected for seven long years – perhaps the golden years in my life of service for the underprivileged. During those years I was doubly blessed with the privilege, as mentioned earlier, of hosting my mentors in School who drew my eyes to the mountains – Holdy, Jack Gibson, and John Martyn. John also did us the honour of inaugurating the Kalpa High School building, and in his quiet moments captured the beauty of Kinnaur with paint and brush in a precious portfolio.

### **An opportunity to protect Nature ... my years at the Centre**

Some divine design moved me in 1976 to New Delhi, in the final noteworthy phase of my civil service career, to work for Nature by saving our country's forests and wildlife. Forests were looked upon as a purely marketable resource to satisfy insatiable human desires, and with that our wildlife

was being lost at an alarming rate. A series of saving measures were made possible with the help of sensitive conservationists, like Dr. Salim Ali and the support at the topmost level of the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, a true lover of Nature. Forest policy changed from exploitation to ecological orientation with a ban on any further conversion of natural mixed forests to monoculture plantations; exploitation of our most precious tropical rainforests was disallowed; a Forest Conservation Act required Central Govt's clearance for converting forests to non-forestry purposes; the first major hydel project involving the destruction of a most valuable tropical rainforest in the Silent Valley was scrapped and the Valley was protected as a National Park; the Chipko leader, Sunderlal Bahuguna, was honoured rather than pilloried for his role in the women's movement to save the forests of Garhwal, by the imposition of a ban on any further exploitation of the over-exploited forests of Uttarakhand; and the duty and responsibility of every citizen was spelt out in the Constitution to help in protecting Nature. As I was concurrently Director for Wildlife Preservation, a series of measures were initiated to stop or strictly control trade in our threatened species of flora and fauna, which received further protection through national and international laws by listing them under endangered and threatened categories. For the first time I focused on protecting our rich natural Himalayan heritage by setting up a network of representative National Parks (NPs) – the Great Himalayan NP in Kullu, the Nanda Devi and Valley of Flowers NPs, the Kangchendzonga NP and the Namdapha NP in the extreme North-eastern end of the Himalaya. I have continued my efforts to maintain the sanctity of the Nanda Devi National Park (later in 1988 listed by UNESCO as a Natural World Heritage Site).

The richest forest in the country closest to the Equator, the Great Nicobar Island, was providentially saved from becoming a free port by being protected instead as a Biosphere Reserve through a decision taken at meetings of the Island Development Authority chaired by the then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, of which I was a member. The continuing ruinous exploitation of the rich tropical rainforests of the Andaman & Nicobar Island by powerful commercial interests was also terminated, not without bitter conflicting views at these meetings. Earlier in collaboration with a specialist friend from the Fish & Wildlife Service of the US, the country's first Marine National Park was created in the Gulf of Mannar to save our rich marine coral wealth.

I have listed above a few of the many initiatives taken during my four-year tenure in the

forests & wildlife wing of the Union Ministry of Agriculture. I was particularly happy to have been able to protect the Valley of Flowers, first introduced by Holdy in his delightful account of the Valley in Frank Smythe's book, *Kamet Conquered*, after scaling the peak in 1931. It is now a World Heritage Site – a fitting tribute indeed to Holdy's role in first so vividly revealing its alpine floral treasures to the World!

### **Setting up a Ministry for Environment**

When Ms. Indira Gandhi established the Ministry of Environment in 1980 I was given the challenging task of making institutional arrangements to cover the wide ranging aspects of the environment. These included independent environmental impact assessments of all major projects, a centre for environment education, an institute for Himalayan environment and development, a wildlife institute, a centre for ecological research at the Indian Institute of Science, a centre for ornithology and natural history, etc. For the first time the concept of Biosphere Reserves evolved by UNESCO was sought to be applied to involve peripheral human populations to manage and gain from protected areas rather than be excluded from National Parks. Big dam projects were carefully and comprehensively examined for their social and environmental impact. I came to realize the obsession of those in authority with destructive large projects and large money rather than small projects quickly implemented with small money for the benefit of the have-nots, while the former benefited the haves at the cost of the poor who were constantly being displaced.

### **Crusading for Natural Heritage with INTACH**

After three decades of service in Government, I was not unhappy to assume the mantle of an ordinary citizen. In 1985, I took over as head of the Natural Heritage wing of the Indian National Trust for Art & Cultural Heritage (INTACH). I could see that the ghosts of Arthur Foot and Holdy were still peering over my shoulders compelling me to take up many crusades in the cause of environment degradation which impacted most upon the poor majority of our people. Having experienced Government's development philosophy that had little concern for the social and environmental consequences of major dam projects, I was able to commission in-depth impact assessment studies of two major controversial river valley projects of Tehri and Narmada, which had already aroused widespread resentment among the displaced people. In their support I followed it up with a Public Interest Litigation in the Supreme Court against the Tehri

Dam, which I was convinced was neither socially nor environmentally justified.

There were other battles, well fought, such as highlighting earthquake hazards to large dams in the Himalaya, on the impact of nuclear energy on public safety, and many educational efforts on environmental issues through books and films.

So my ten years with INTACH were both a learning and knowledge disseminating endeavour on burning social and environmental issues, and an effort to alter destructive prevailing concepts of development in favour of those that save Nature and are poor-friendly. An extension surely of all that I imbibed from my Alma Mater!

### **A full circle: my final mission with Himalayan Kinsfolk**

In the evening of my life at the age now of over 80, I have continued to work through a voluntary organization, the Himalaya Trust, which I set up 15 years ago with the valuable support of like-minded friends and colleagues. I am happy to be able to work from Dehra Dun, in the shadow of the Himalaya and return to both my familiar home-and school-town.

Now, after all these years of following my own inner voice, it gives me the deepest satisfaction to be able to see life as it really should be seen from the grassroots up. The Himalaya Trust has kept its work small focusing on encouraging and supporting small village initiatives which improve well being of the community on a day to day basis – issues like developing and conserving water sources and extending sanitation, ensuring fodder and fuel supply through regenerating mixed natural forests, developing livelihood skills, and helping village communities to pursue their own realistic goals towards self-sufficiency with confidence. Perhaps in a sense this is a completion of my life's mission.

I must end with a special mention of the valuable help readily extended by John Mason, the then HM of the Doon School to join in helping us to resettle seven destitute families who had lost everything when their village was submerged by a major landslide in the Madhmaheshwar Valley of Garhwal in 1997. We were able to collect over two lakh rupees donated by individuals and the Doon School for resettlement on land we acquired for the seven families in Batoli village about 15 km. from Dehra Dun. With the help of the Doon School boys a community centre was built for them – a task deeply appreciated and carried out in the true spirit of the School's community service ethos.

In that same spirit, inherited from my days in School 60-70 years ago, I feel a sense of satisfaction and fulfillment over the opportunities of

social and community service that fortuitously came my way, I hope in some measure living up to Arthur Foot's expectation in his inaugural Founder's Day address of 1935

**[Editor's Note:** We are grateful to Runjhun Saklani for providing us with this inspirational article written by her grand uncle]

#### **2011 Membership Dues**

The annual membership dues remain unchanged at \$25/- per household. Please send a check of \$25/- payable to "Uttaranchal Association" at the below address. We encourage members to consider the life membership option of \$250/- to avoid the inconvenience of paying dues every year and helping to reduce administrative work for UANA.

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#### **Editor's Corner**

I hope you enjoyed our first 2011 issue of the Patrika. We encourage everyone to send articles, poems, community news/announcements on a regular basis. In particular, we greatly welcome contributions from children.

For the first year, we will publish the Patrika both in hard copy and also post it in our website. Clearly a hard copy version involves certain expenditures – printing and postage costs. **You can help us save on these costs by sending us an e-mail at [editor@uttaranchal.org](mailto:editor@uttaranchal.org) indicating that you do not need a hard copy.** Moreover, we welcome advertisements, sponsorships, and donations to cover the cost of producing and disseminating the Patrika to our membership. Lastly, we look forward to all your questions, suggestions, and comments on how to improve the Patrika.

Sangeeta Bist, [editor@uttaranchal.org](mailto:editor@uttaranchal.org)

In celebration of the Golden (50<sup>th</sup>.) Wedding Anniversary of Shri Sher Singh Gosain and Smt. Saroj Gosain, their children and families (Gayatri & Ariel Acebal, Anita and Ajay Adhikari, Chitra and Dinesh Gosain, and Geeta and Rakesh Rawat) are partly underwriting the costs of this issue of the Patrika.

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