

Supplies for Kolti from Texas

by Leah Renold

Part I: The Paharis



A mountain villager at work in Mussoorie

This all began when John asked me over the phone from Texas if I had any ideas about a good cause in India to which Mahomet Christian Church and First Christian Church Bertram could contribute. I told him about the Pahari men, who walk miles into town from their villages every morning to sell milk and to find manual labor jobs. Everyday I saw them carrying heavy burdens on their backs for other people. The men who had donkeys or mules

used them to haul sand or cement for building projects around Mussoorie, the town in the Himalayan foothills where I was staying.



I called the men Paharis [taken from “*parhar*” or mountain) as that is a general term for people in India who live in the mountains. A more specific name for them is Garhwalis, as they live in the specific area of the Himalayas called Garhwal. Their language, which is also called Garhwali, is a dialect of Hindi, which is the language spoken by the majority of people in north India.

John told the churches about these hard working people and both churches donated funds to help the people in some way.

One afternoon after John arrived here, we were taking a walk and saw this Pahari man loading sand onto his mule.



Bulbir Singh loading his donkey

I talked to him and he told me that his name was Bulbir Singh and that he lived in the village of Kolti. I asked what kinds of things the people in his village needed most. He told me that they needed *atta* (flour). *Atta* is whole-wheat flour that is used to make a type of unleavened bread called *chapattis* or *rotis* that is the staple food of the area. I asked him how many people lived in Kolti and he told me fifty families. I asked him what else they needed and he told me that the children needed copies (notebooks) and pens for school, and maybe some biscuits (cookies) and toffees (small candies).

Bulbir spoke very softly and politely. He did not ask for money and asked nothing for himself.



Bulbir Singh and Leah Renold

A couple of days later, we found Bulbir again working at the same place and told him that we wanted to go with him to his village the following Monday to take some things for the families there. He asked me how we would go as there was no road to the village. I told him we could walk. I told him that we would need some donkeys, though, to carry things. I asked him how many donkeys he could bring and he told me that he could bring three or four. I told him that we would need a lot more donkeys because we would bring flour for the village. He asked me how much flour we were bringing and I asked him how much they needed. He told me that a family needed a forty-five kilogram bag (99 lbs.) I told him okay. He asked me how many bags we were bringing. I asked him again how many families there were and he told me fifty. I told him that we would bring fifty bags. He looked at me with what seemed like total disbelief.