

# 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention

*Saturday, July 23<sup>rd</sup> 2005 MIT Campus, Boston, Massachusetts*



The 7th Annual Convention of UANA was held on Saturday the July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2005 at MIT Campus, Boston, Massachusetts. Nearly 250 people gathered from several parts of North America for the annual convention.

The day started with a presentation about Indo-Tibetan ethnic group referred to as the Bhotiya people of the Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve and their epic struggle for cultural and ecological survival in the lap of the High Himalayas. It showed one of many efforts by the inhabitants to reclaim their land rights and preserve their cultural heritage. This was presented by well known social justice activist and environmentalist Rajiv Rawat.

In the next presentation seasoned Mr. Jack Croucher explained about his work and love for Uttarakhand.

Manisha Sharma did a presentation on Association for India's Development, Inc. (AID). AID is a voluntary non-profit organization committed to promoting sustainable, equitable and just development in India, by working with grassroots organizations and movements in India. AID supports and initiates efforts in various interconnected spheres such as education, livelihoods, natural resources, health, women's empowerment and social justice. Presentation included social projects handled by tow AID sathis Malika Viridi (Munsiyari, Pithoragarh) and Reetu Sogani in Uttarakhand.

Malika Viridi is one of the India's greatest women-mountaineer. She led successfully the All Women Trans-Himalayan trekking expedition that covered India, Bhutan and Nepal over a period of six months during 1997. She is a social activist working for the empowerment of women, besides being a sarpanch of the village van panchayat.

Reetu has been promoting and documenting people's knowledge in the areas of agriculture, health, etc. Her initiatives include setting up seed banks, working with Van Panchayats and interventions for health services for the poor and marginalized communities. Reetu has a Ph.D. and MBA from Jaipur University in Environmental Management. Reetu had been a consultant to World Food Program and received a fellowship from Govt. of Netherlands.

Seminar was followed by a business meeting that elaborated various initiatives taken by local chapters of UANA in North America. Reorganization of the key roles was discussed and it was agreed to pass on the baton of central roles from Washington DC chapter to NJ/NY Chapter.

The evening started with an exhibition displaying the culture, heritage and rituals of Uttarakhand. This was followed by a cultural program and dinner. The commitment and enthusiasm shown by the young Uttarakhandis was commendable. Their involvement in every aspect of the convention fills us with hope for the future leadership in our community and in this part of the globe. It was really exciting to observe Uttarakhandis in the Boston area work in tandem for the convention. This also helped Uttarakhandis coming from different parts in North America meet many new Uttarakhandi families from Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire and Rhode Island.

*-Vijay Sharma*