

Rise of Environmentalism in India: Grassroots to Governance

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Abstract - Environmental movements revolve around the issue of Development and Democracy. The issue of environment and development is an enduring topic of human civilization. The history of human civilization to some extent is the history of the explorations on how to correctly handle the relationship between man and the environment during its development. Balancing Development with Sustainability still remains a challenging task in different stages of transition. This article deals with the various phases of Indian environmental movements, environmental legislations, policy interventions and various environmental movements which happened in India.

Introduction - In India, environmental movements have arisen in reaction to several issues such as land degradation, climate change, industrial pollution, deforestation and water scarcity. With protests against exploitative forestry practices and dam projects during the colonial eras modern environmental activism emerged. In India, Environmental movements are the movements by the weakest section of the society. The major participants are the tribals and people whose life is dependent on nature. India has a long history of environmental movements. The tribal revolts against the British Colonialism were the earliest environmental movements.

One of the noted environmentalists in India Ramchandra Guha has made comparison between Environmentalism in the North and the South. Environmentalism in the North is lead by Scientists whereas environmentalism in the South is led by the poor and ignorant. Environmentalism of the North is full stomach whereas environmentalism in the South is empty stomach.

Phases Of Indian Environmental Movement

Ramchandra Guha has analyzed Indian environmental movement in three phases:

Phase I - 1970's : In his book "The Unquiet woods" he traces the origin of modern environmental movement to Chipko Movement in 1970's in Uttarakhand where women played the prominent role. Environmental movements have added a new dimension to India's democracy. It also opposes ideological challenge to the dominant notions of meaning, contents and patterns of development in India.

Phase II -1980's: 1980s is marked by the growth of Environmental Consciousness. Environmental issues started getting media attention. Prominent Environmental journalists like Anil Agarwal, Nagesh Hedge and Shekhar

Pathak could bring the attention of the Government. In 1980 the Government of India has set up "Department of Environment" which was later on upgraded into full fledged ministry.

PHASE- III: In 1990's, there was growth of Professionalism in Environmental Movement. The positive aspect was professional scientists and social scientists started taking environment as an area of research. There has been the growth of NGOs including Foreign NGOs. Environmentalism got more complicated. Environmental degradation had increased many times with the introduction of New Economic policy. It is unfortunate that the Ministry of Environment made project clearances of formality resulting into high level of air pollution and depleted ground water. According to Ramchandra Guha, "Polluted skies, dead rivers, disappearing forests, displaced peasants and tribals is what we see around us."

Reasons For Emergence Of Environmental Movements In India: Major reasons for the emergence of the environmental movements include:

1. Control over natural resources
2. False developmental policies of the government
3. Socio-economic reasons
4. Environmental degradation
5. Spread of environmental awareness and media

Ideological Trends In Indian Environmentalism : Gadgil, Madhav and Guha Ramchandra (1998: 450-472) have identified five broad strands within the environmental movements in India. These strands include:

1. Crusading Gandhians : Crusading Gandhians relies heavily on a moral/religious idioms in its rejection of modern way of life. They propagate an alternate, non-modern philosophy whose roots lie in Indian tradition.

2. Ecological Marxist : Ecological Marxists, “see the problem in political and economic terms arguing that & it is the unequal access to resources rather than the question of values which better explains the patterns and processes of environmental degradation in India.

3. Appropriate Technology: This strand of the environmental movement strives for a working synthesis of agriculture and Industry, big and small units and western and eastern technological traditions.

4. Wilderness Enthusiasts: Wilderness Enthusiasts have provided massive documentation of the decline of natural forests and their plant and animal species urging the government to take remedial action.

5. Scientific Conservation: Scientific Conservationists are concerned with efficiency and management.

Emergence Of India's Environmental Policy: In the early 1970's the environment feasibility of economic growth became an issue of governmental concern in its own right for the first time in India.

India is one of the leading developing countries in so far as having incorporated into its constitution the specific provisions for environmental protection e.g., article 48A and article 51A(g) of the Constitution of India

Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Wildlife (Protection) Act was introduced in 1972 which aimed at:

1. Expand the Protected area network of the country.
2. Revisit the norms, criteria and needs of data for placing the particular species in different Schedules of the wildlife protection act.
3. Formulate and implement programs for conservation of endangered species outside protected areas.
4. Empower, build capacities and facilitate access to finance and technology for local people in particular tribes.
5. Ensure that human activities on the fringe areas of PAS do not degrade the habitat or otherwise significantly disturb wildlife.

Environmental Protection Act, 1986: The environment (Protection) Act, 1986 was introduced as an umbrella legislation that provides a holistic framework for the protection and improvement to the environment.

The National Forest Policy, 1988: The National Forest policy 1988 and the Indian forest act as well as the regulations under it provide a comprehensive basis for forest conservation.

The following are included:

1. Legal recognition of the traditional entitlements of forest dependent communities taking into consideration the provisions of the Panchayat (Extension to the Scheduled Areas), Act, 1996(PESA).
2. Formulate innovative strategy to increase forest and tree cover from 23.69 per cent in 2003 to 33 per cent of the country's land area by 2012.
3. Formulate appropriate methodology for reckoning and restoring the environmental values of forests which are

unavoidably diverted to other uses.

4. Denotify Bamboo and Similar other Species as “Forest species” under the Forest Conservation Act to facilitate their cultivation outside notified forests and encouraging their productive utilization in economic activities.

Biological Diversity Act 2002: To regulate access to genetic resources and associated sharing arrangements apart from developing policies and programmes on long term conservation and protection of biological resources and associated knowledge Biological Diversity Act, 2002 was promulgated.

National Environment Policy, 2006: The principal objectives of the National Environmental Policy are the following:

1. Conservation of critical Environmental Resources.
2. Intra-generational Equity; Livelihood Security for the poor.
3. Inter- generational equity

Environment Impact Assessment: India has a well-devised environmental Impact Assessment programme for incorporating environmental concerns in development process and also in improved decision-making. The programme of EIA was initiated with the appraisal of rives valley projects. The scope of appraisal was subsequently enlarged to cover other sectors like industry, thermal power, hydroelectricity, nuclear mining, construction projects and infrastructure.

Forest Certification: Forest Certification has emerged as one of the market mechanisms to address environmental Concerns of the green consumers on one hand and help promote sustainable forest management on the other.

Major Environmental Movements In India

1. Bishnoi Movement: Bishnoi is a religious group that is prevalent in western India's Thar Desert and northern states. It is a peaceful community of nature lovers. Around 1700 AD, the Sage Sombaji began this effort against deforestation. Following that, Amrita Devi propagated the movement.

2. The Chipko Movement : The Chipko is a well-known Indian environmental movement. The Chipko Campaign brought global attention to the Alaknanda watershed basin in the western Himalayas. Preserving Himalayan forests has been a part of the Chipko movement since before independence according to Reddy (1998)

3. Save Silent Valley Movement: These are 89 sq. km of tropical virgin woods on the lush undulating hills of Kerala's Silent Valley. The Kundremukh Project included a 200MV hydroelectric dam on the crystal pure river Kunthipuzho. The planned project will submerge an important piece of the valley's rainforests endangering endangered species of both flora and wildlife. The Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) has been working for environmental awareness for three decades. In many ways, the fight to rescue Silent Valley was a public education effort.

Conclusion: The idea behind environmental movements

is that they are large networks of individuals and groups working together to improve the environment. It is recognized that environmental movements are extremely diverse and complex with organizational structures ranging from the highly their "operations" spatial extent from the local to virtually worldwide, their priorities ranging from a single problem to the complete spectrum of global environmental concerns. Especially after the 1970s, India saw the emergence of several environmental movements. However, as these movements have expanded their focus from fundamental survival requirements to ecological issues, several of which modern movements have gained the distinction of ecological or environmental movements in hindsight.

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