

Emergence of Environmental Movements in India: An Analysis

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The first lesson is that the main source of environmental destruction in the world is the demand for natural resources generated by the consumption of the rich (whether they are rich nations or rich individuals and groups within nations)....

The second lesson is that it is the poor who are affected the most by environmental destruction.

(Anil Agrawal, 1986)

Environmental movements of various countries have emerged due to different reasons. It is basically due to prevailing environmental quality of the locality. The environmental movements in the north are basically on the issue of quality of life. Whereas the environment movements in the south arise due to some other reasons, such as due to conflicts for controlling of natural resources and many more. It is being said that the, environmental movements in U.S.A arises, when the book silent spring written by **Rachel Carson** came in the market in the year 1962. In this book she had written about the impacts of poisonous chemicals, particularly the DDT on the environment. This book had raised the public consciousness. And it leads to the emergence of environmental movements in the U.S.A. The participants of these movements in North are the middle class and upper class people, who have concern for the nature. But in the south the protesters are generally the marginal population – hill peasants, tribal communities, fishermen and other underprivileged people. The different environmental movements in our own country support this argument. The examples could be taken as Chipko, N.B.A. , Mitti Bachao Andolan, Koel-Karo Andolan etc. That is why the environmentalism of the North is refereed as “full stomach” environmentalism and the environmentalism of the south is called as “empty – belly” environmentalism.

THE REASONS FOR EMERGENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA?

CONTROL OVER NATURAL RESOURCES.

Control over natural resources is an important reason for emergence of environmental movement in India. Some good examples of these kinds of movements are like Chipko and N.B.A. In the first case, the reason for conflict was control over forest; whereas, in the second the reason was control over water. Let's have a look on the reasons behind the emergence of Chipko movement in the Garwhal Himalyas.

The movement started in the Garhwal Himalaya in April 1973. Between 1973 and 1980, over a dozen instances were recorded where, through an innovative technique of protest,

illiterate peasants, men, women and children- threatened to hug forest trees rather than allow them to be logged for export. Notably the peasants were not interested in saving the trees per se, but in using their produce for agricultural and household requirements. In later years, however the movement turned its attention to broader ecological concerns, such as the collective protection and management of forest, and the diffusion of renewable energy technologies.

The Chipko movement was the forerunner of and in some cases the direct inspiration for a series of popular movements in defense of community rights to natural resources.

Sometimes these struggles resolved around forest and in other instances, around the control and use of pasture, water, and mineral or fish resources. Most of these conflicts have pitted rich against poor: Logging companies against hill villagers, dam builders against forest tribal communities, multinational corporations deploying trawlers against traditional fisher folk in small boats. Here one party (e.g. loggers or trawlers) seek to setup the pace of resource exploitation to service an expanding commercial – industrial economy. A process which often involves the partial, or total dispossession of these communities who earlier had control over the resources in question, and whose own patterns of utilization were less destructive of the environment.

One important factor is that those poor peoples are solely dependent upon those natural resources for their survival hood. So, the changes in control of resources directly hamper their subsistence economy due to which their survival hood came in danger. Therefore the protest of the people rise against those outsiders, which had ultimately taken the shape of environmental movement in many instances.

POLITICAL REASONS

Let's see the political scenario of the country after independence; it will answer some part of our question. After independence in 1947 people have great expectation from the indigenous government, it was assumed that the new government which was more aware of the Indian problems and was equally concerned for the people would definitely seek to eradicate all problems, with the installation of new government under the leadership of Nehru , with the observations of industrializations raised hopes but the government policies were only for industrialization without looking the environment and equal sharing of natural resources.

The governmental policies resulted into a lot of displacement of people due to large projects such as dams like Bhakra – Nangal and many others. These policies pushed the

local people on the edges more often than not, the agents of resource intensification are given preferential treatment by the states through the grant of generous long leases over mineral or fish stocks, e.g., or the provision of raw materials at an enormously subsidised prices, with the injustice so compounded local communities at the receiving end of this process have no recourse except direct actions, resisting both the state and outside exploiters through a variety of protest techniques. So we can say these struggles might perhaps as seen as manifestation a new kind of 'traditional' class conflict were fought in the cultivated field or in the factory, these new struggles are waged over gifts of nature such as forests, and waters, gifts that are coveted by all but increasingly monopolized by a few.

If we talk in explicitly ecological terms then we can say that history of development in India can be interpreted as being, in essence, a process of resources capture by the omnivorous (individuals and groups with the social power to capture, transform and use natural resources from a much wider catchment area) at the expense of ecosystem people (those communities which depend very heavily on the natural resources of their own locality). So, we can say the environmental movement is the resistance offered by ecosystem people to the resource capture by omnivorous: as embodied in movements against large dams by tribal communities to be displaced by them or struggles by peasants against diversion of forests and grazing land to industry.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC REASONS

The other angles by which we look upon the cause of emergence of environmental movements are the socio-economic reasons. Almost most of the environmental movements in India are some how related with this aspect, also, if we see the location where these movements have started then we would found that most of these areas are tribal dominated. These people have strong beliefs regarding their forests, land and water. At the same time they are also totally dependent upon these resources for their survival hood. Therefore, when these forests or other sources of livelihood get disturbed by the outsiders, their socio-economic conditions get hampered and the ultimate recourse is the movement against those people who were harnessing those resources. Also, women had generally played an important role in these movements, in tribal groups; women are accustomed to responsibility and leadership for community survival. Their work involves them directly and daily with forests and natural resources. So, whenever their survival came into risk, they take the lead role for the protection of their community and its resources.

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION/DESTRUCTION

Environmental degradation is also an important cause which many time leads to environmental movement. One such e.g. was the silent valley case. Here the proposed

dam by the Kerala State Electricity Board was supposed to submerge a large tract of virgin forest. Those are one of the few virgin rain forests left in the country. So, the local people of vicinity along with the N.G.O.s resisted this move. In this movement the K.S.S.P. also get help from scientist community of India and abroad. And the result was withdrawal of this project by the government.

One another e.g. of movement which arose due to the degradation of local environment was the movement against the limestone quarrying, in the Doon Valley in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In this case the retired officials and executives of the locality formed the 'friends of the Doon' and the 'Save Mussoorie' committees to safeguard the habitat of the valley. They were joined by hotel owners in Mussoorie, who were worried about the impacts of environmental degradation on the tourist in-flow in this well known 'hill station.' They used different techniques of resistance. Finally they put a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) that resulted in a landmark judgment of the Supreme Court, recommending the closure of all six limestone mines in the Doon Valley.

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND MEDIA

The spread of environmental awareness and media has also played pivotal role in emergence of environmental movement. People were previously unaware of the importance of the environment. But as the environmental awareness increased due various reasons people started protecting their environment. Some e.g. are the local movements to protect the purity of different rivers such as Ganga and Yamuna. The greening of many Indian cities also comes under this category. The Bhagidari movement of Delhi is a good e.g. Of this kind of environmental movement. Media has also played an important role in sustaining these movements.

CONCLUSION

Now on the above arguments the conclusion could be drawn that the nature based conflicts, the false developmental policies of the government, the marginalization of the tribal and other underprivileged groups and the environmental degradation are the root causes of emergence of environmental movements in India. The lopsided, inequitous, and environmentally destructive processes of development have propelled the people to go against the state in many cases and this leads to the emergence of environmental movements in the country. The risks on the survival hood of the marginal people due to the above mentioned factors had resulted in the emergence of these movements. Therefore the point comes that the environmental movements in different parts of the country grows out of the distribution conflict over the ecological resources needed for livelihood. So we can conclude that environmental movements in India are the resistances by the people for their livelihood and for their survival.