



Volume: 2, Issue: 9, 699-702
Sep 2015
www.allsubjectjournal.com
e-ISSN: 2349-4182
p-ISSN: 2349-5979
Impact Factor: 4.342

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A study on Historical Prospective of Green Movements in India

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Abstract

The green movement, a term that includes conservation and green politics, is a diverse scientific, social, and political movement for addressing environmental issues. It is an umbrella term for different groups, ideologies and attitudes. Its growth has been stimulated by a widespread acknowledgement of an ecological crisis of our planet. During 1970-80 people in various regions of India have formed nonviolent action movements to protect their environment, their livelihood, and their ways of life. These environmental movements have emerged from the Himalayan regions of Uttar Pradesh to the tropical forests of Kerala and from Gujarat to Tripura in response to projects that threaten to dislocate people and to affect their basic human rights to land, water, and ecological stability of life-support systems. Even with limited resources the environmental movements have initiated a new political struggle for safeguarding the interests of the poor and the marginalized, among whom are women, tribal groups, and peasants.

Keywords: Green Movements, ecological movements, Chipko movement, environmental conservation

Introduction

Man is a complex being: he makes deserts bloom – and lakes die.

Oxford dictionary defines 'movement' as an instance of moving of a body of persons with a common object and a campaign undertaken by such body. [<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com>] Movements can be social, political, economic, cultural etc. The goal of a movement is to bring about some desired change in the respective fields. These can be understood within the context of the societies they seek to change. Environmental movement is not an exception.

Social movements are a type of group action. They are large, sometimes informal, groupings of individuals or organizations which focus on specific political or social issues. In other words, they carry out, resist or undo a social change. [Thomas, Sabu 2011, Sanghvi Sanjay 2007] ^[7, 5]

The global ecology movement is based upon environmental protection, and is one of several new social movements that emerged at the end of the 1960s. As a values-driven social movement, it should be distinguished from the pre-existing science of ecology.

The environmental movement, ecological movement or green movement, a term that includes conservation and green politics, is a diverse scientific, social, and political movement for addressing environmental issues. Environmentalists advocate the sustainable management of resources and stewardship of the environment through changes in public policy and individual behavior. In its recognition of humanity as a participant in (not enemy of) ecosystems, the movement is centered on ecology, health, and human rights. The ecology movement has evolved and branched out to different means of effecting change. There is the political branch with the Green parties. Organizations like Greenpeace were more radical, taking direct action against environmental destruction. Its views on people, behaviors, events centered around the political and lifestyle implications of the science of ecology and the idea of nature as a value in itself. "Ecology movement" is an umbrella term for different groups, ideologies and attitudes.

The green movement's growth has been stimulated by a widespread acknowledgement of an ecological crisis of our planet. Its story has run alongside the environmental narratives that have reached popular consciousness. From the conservation movement at the beginning of the 20th century, then with concern in the sixties about chemical pesticides, the ecological movement was born with Rachel Carson's Silent Spring. There was a great deal of concern over nuclear weapons and nuclear power in sixties and seventies, then there was acid rain in the eighties, ozone depletion and deforestation in the nineties, and now climate change and global warming are the biggest concern for many. As well as the bigger global issues like these and species extinction, the ecology movement also encompasses any group wishing to protect our environment.

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The environmental movement is an international movement, represented by a range of organizations, from the large to grassroots and varies from country to country. Due to its large membership, varying and strong beliefs, and occasionally speculative nature, the environmental movement is not always united in its goals. At its broadest, the movement includes private citizens, professionals, religious devotees, politicians, scientists, nonprofit organizations and individual advocates.

During 1970-80 people in various regions of India have formed nonviolent action movements to protect their environment, their livelihood, and their ways of life. These environmental movements have emerged from the Himalayan regions of Uttar Pradesh to the tropical forests of Kerala and from Gujarat to Tripura in response to projects that threaten to dislocate people and to affect their basic human rights to land, water, and ecological stability of life-support systems. They share certain features, such as democratic values and decentralized decision making, with social movements operating in India. The environmental movements are slowly progressing toward defining a model of development to replace the current resource-intensive one that has created severe ecological instability (Centre for Science and Environment 1982, 190) ^[1]. Similar grassroots environmental movements are emerging in Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Thailand. Throughout Asia and the Pacific citizenry organizations are working in innovative ways to reclaim their environment

Even with limited resources the environmental movements have initiated a new political struggle for safeguarding the interests of the poor and the marginalized, among whom are women, tribal groups, and peasants. Among the main environmental movements are Chipko Andolan and Save the Bhagirathi and Stop Tehri project committee (Manu 1984) in Uttar Pradesh; Save the Narmada Movement (Narmada Bachao Andolan) in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat; youth organizations and tribal people in the Gandhamardan Hills whose survival is directly threatened by development of bauxite deposits; the opposition to the Baliapal and Bhogarai test range in Orissa, the Appiko Movement in the Western Ghats; groups opposing the Kaiga nuclear power plant in Karnataka; the campaign against the Silent Valley project; the Rural Women's Advancement Society (Gramin Mahila Shramik Unnayan Samiti), formed to reclaim waste land in Bankura district; and the opposition to the Gumti Dam in Tripura.

In addition, there are local movements against deforestation, water logging, salinization, and desertification in the command areas of dams on the Kosi, Gandak, and Tungabhadra rivers and in the canal-irrigated areas of Punjab and Haryana. Local movements like Pani Chetna, Pani Panchayat, and Mukti Sangharsh advocate ecological principles for water use. A movement in the small fishing communities against ecological destruction exists along the coasts of India.

These environmental movements are an expression of the socio ecological effects of narrowly conceived development based on short-term criteria of exploitation. The movements

are revealing how the resource-intensive demands of development have built-in ecological destruction and economic deprivation. The members have activated micro action plans to safeguard natural processes and to provide the macro concept for ecological development at the national and regional levels. In the rest of this article I focus on the Chipko movement in the Himalaya, Save the Narmada Movement in central India, and the Silent Valley Project in Kerala as case studies of the nonviolent direct-action environmental movements of grassroots origin in India.

The Green Movement in India is an emerging movement that stresses environmentally friendly practices and initiatives in infrastructure development, resource utilization, construction, law and more.

"An appreciation of the situation marked by the loss of resource potential and human disruption of natural process is well expressed in numerous national and environmental movements and scientific programmes".

As Cotgrove says, "There is nothing new, of course about environmental concern" ecological crisis was not unknown in ancient societies. Plato, author of *Republic*, was already complaining in the crito about how deforestation and overgrazing had degraded the environment and reduced Attica "to the bones of a wasted body" [Stephen Cotgrove 1967] ^[5].

Environmental degradation is one of the causes for the extinction of earlier human civilizations from the pages of history. There is now a growing support for the view that "Mohenjodaro and Harappa civilization became extinct due to environmental degradation". With the increase of ecological crisis, occurs environmental awareness. As *Vandana Asthana [2009]* notes, "environmental concerns started seedling in the 1960s and then gained epoch-making prominence in the form of a so-called environmental revolution".

The awareness is not confined to one place but the entire globe. A new age seems to have dawned ever since the beginning of the 1970s. Within the last four and half decades a new perception towards the global environment has developed. Environmental awakening and movements to protect the environment began in the Third World since the 1970's. Environmental movement believes in the conservation of nature as every form of manifestation has evolved through the ages and as a part of ecosystem has every right to a continued existence as man has. This movement in its incipient stages believed in protecting and preserving certain natural forms.

Environmental movement believes in the conservation of nature as every form of manifestation has evolved through the ages and as a part of ecosystem has every right to a continued existence as man has. This movement in its incipient stages believed in protecting and preserving certain natural forms. The environmental degradation gained momentum with the exploitation of natural resources by the colonial rulers. After Independence, developmental activities replaced colonial exploitation in causing unprecedented damage to our environment. The expression of people against the exploitation of nature is not new. There are many instances of people who carried out struggles. People, during the colonial era, responded to the damage of their environs. Indigo movement in eastern India-1860, Deccan Movement for land rights—1815, forest movements in the forest areas of the country—the Western Ghats, the central Indian hills and the Himalayas—these were the expressions of people who had suffered due to ecological degradation.

From time immemorial, the original or native inhabitants of a region have lived in close harmony with the natural

surroundings until conquest or invasion has virtually destroyed the fragile ecosystem that they lived in. In America, the Native American population and the timeless knowledge that they accumulated over the ages has almost become extinct. They have been reduced to the fringes of society in small reservation land holdings whereas earlier they roamed the entire continent. The same story holds true in all the other continents including the Indian subcontinent.

Human civilization seems to reach the most intense development in what was originally forested region. These forested regions have been greatly modified from their primeval condition, but the basic nature of these ecosystems has by no means been changed. Man settled in the forests and in the process he replaced most of the native vegetation closer to his settlement by grass lands and agriculture lands for meeting his requirement of food and for his cattle. But he continued to depend on forests for all his other needs of fuel,

small timber, poles, medicines etc. Thus he derived two basic things from the landscape: production and protection. Apart from this, he derived various ecosystem services for his survival.

In this backdrop, it is important to enumerate different human ecological events happened in the past to understand the evolutionary phase of human civilization and dependence of man-folk on his surrounding forests has affected the local ecology. Changing pattern of land use with increasing population and excessive and unbridled use of natural resources resulted in depletion of resource base. With the dawn of community awareness, consciousness and growth of belief systems, practice of nature conservation has taken its roots.

A snapshot of human ecological events may be traced in the following table:

Years before present	Era	Ecological events
> 12,000	Paleolithic	Hunting and gathering
12,000-5000	Mesolithic	Hunting-gathering, use of fire, forest decline and increase in grasslands.
5000-3000	Neolithic	Agri-pastoralism, vegetation change, deforestation, use of iron, immigration of community from other parts.
3000-1000	Megalithic	Agri-pastoralism, shifting cultivation, decline in primary forests, emergence of sacred groves as an institution, extraction of timber and fuel from forests
1000-200	Historical	European trade, extraction of timber for ship building, start of organized settled agriculture and shifting cultivation continues.
200-100		Increased timber harvest, forestry science taking roots, Shifting cultivation regulated, natural forests start showing depletion, Plantations of commercial species started.
100-30		Timber harvest intensified, timber stocks depleted, Conservation efforts by state, forests land diverted for agriculture, mining, construction of dams and canal network, roads, settlements, increase in townships, importance. Spread of invasive alien species like <i>Lantana camara</i> , <i>Eupatorium odoratum</i> , <i>Parthenium hysterophorus</i> are seen.
30-	Recent	Conservation of forests gained importance, collection of minor forest produce increased, biodiversity conservation given importance, people's participation in conservation increased, in-situ conservation and ex-situ plantation and propagation of threatened species given importance. Less diversion of forest land for non forestry purpose. Stringent legislation to protect forest, wildlife and all forms of biodiversity.

Source: Subramaniam K. [2014] Management of Sacred Groves as CPR of Bastar Region and its Socio-Economic and Politico –Legal Significance in the Tribal Life: An Indigenous Perspective, Thesis, Pt. Sunderlal Sharma (OPEN) University, Chhattisgarh, Bilaspur

In India, tribal communities had their own simple and unique way of life. They relied mostly on hunting and gathering in the rich and lush forests that they inhabited until complex religious societies and agriculture took over. British colonialism that spread to India heightened the exploitation of forests and mineral wealth in India. Monoculture plantations of pine, teak, eucalyptus, etc, diminished the biodiversity of the forest regions and herbal and other unique knowledge of the local people was lost forever as they became uprooted and displaced from their land.

One of the earliest local environmental movements in colonial and feudalistic India occurred among the Bishnoi community in Rajasthan in the 1730s. [Gottlieb, Roger S, 1996] [3] The king of Jodhpur wanted to cut down trees for use to build his palace. Amrita Devi, a brave lady from the Bishnoi community, clung to a tree and protested vehemently on seeing the king's men trying to destroy the sacred Khejari trees which they were worshipping for centuries. This led to 363 villagers following suit and hugging the trees. They were all killed by the king's men. The king of Jodhpur on hearing of the tragic incident became very ashamed and asked for forgiveness. He declared the Bishnoi region and its forests a protected area.

Another world-famous early environmental movement in the industrial age was the Chipko Movement in the Garhwal

region of the Himalayas in the 1970s. Similar to what happened in Bishnoi centuries earlier and inspired by Gandhian values of non-violence, women protested the felling of trees by the forest department of India for industrial purposes. [Guha, Ramchandra, 2004] [5] They hugged the trees and successfully prevented them from being felled. This led to a series of grass-root environmental movements which ultimately led the government to establish laws to protect forest areas from the Himalayas to the Western Ghats. [Srinivasaraju, Sugatha (2005)]

In this information age that we now live in, sustainable development and sensitivity to environmental issues along with working in close collaboration with local communities will ensure a cleaner and greener world.

These protests in turn became part and parcel of the national struggle for independence. India has a tradition of sacrifice for the protection of her trees. About two hundred and fifty years ago, 363 men and women led by Amrita Devi sacrificed their lives by hugging the trees around their village. This tradition has been survived. People are unequivocal in terms of evaluating the environs around them. As the intensity and range of ecological degradation increases, the intensity and range of environmental movements have kept on increasing. "It looks as if environ-mentalism is an idea whose time has come," writes Anil Agarwal. Public, media, politicians and

professionals are obviously turning their attention towards the grave environmental problems—Many organisations-Volunteer and Non-Governmental Organisations are focusing their attention on environmental issues. "The number of Voluntary groups in India, actively interested or involved in environmental issues today is much larger than any other Third World Country."

Acknowledgement

I pay my deepest regards to my guide Sri Ashok Masih IFS an eminent Forester and Administrator, Ex Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests the then Madhya Pradesh for his continuous support, encouragement and valuable insight which prompted me to probe deeper into the subject. I am highly grateful to Dr. Sheena Abraham Head, Department of English, MATS University Raipur, Mr. Niraj Tewari, Controller of Examination, Open and Distant Learning Programme, MATS University and Mr. K. C. Yadav IFS, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Chhattisgarh Raipur for their very valuable support.

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