UNIT 16 ENVIRONMENTAL AND ECOLOGICAL MOVEMENTS

Structure

16.1 INTRODUCTION

Environmental and ecological movements are among the important examples of the collective actions of several social groups. Protection and recognition of constitutional and democratic rights, which are not defined by law but form an important part of the day to day living of the subaltern masses like the control over their resources, the right of indigenous people to preserve their culture, protection of environment and maintenance of ecological balance are significant concerns of these movements, as they affect the human life to a great extent.

These movements also reflect an enlarged vision of economics and politics. Economic justice sought by these movements does not mean mere distribution of resources but encompass a larger vision like enhancement in the quality of life through recognition of people's right over their natural resources, their right to live with dignity, and their participation in the decision–making. The concerns of human environment received spectacular attention of scholars following the conclusion of the United Nations Conference on Human Environment, Stockholm in 1972. By the 1980s the "green movement" became a worldwide phenomenon encompassing various countries of the world including India. It is signified by several movements of people for the protection of their environmental and ecological rights in India, 'eco-greens' or 'green movement' in Germany and North Amercia.

In this unit, our focus will be on environmental and ecological movements. While agrarian or working class movements have had a long historical trajectory, environmental or ecological movements gained worldwide attention only in the second half of the twentieth century. These movements focus not only on basic survival issues but also on larger ecological concerns. These are different from earlier social movements and there is need to understand them in terms of their nature and strategies.

It may be mentioned here that scholars have tried to understand and analyse these movements in diverse ways. In general these movements are grouped under tribal and peasant movements and as well under New Social movements. This is so because ecological aspects are generally associated with peasant and tribals whose survival is

associated with the state of natural resources like forests, water etc. Some treat them as middle class or elite movements as the problems and concerns of the local communities, indigenous people or non–tribal poor are generally articulated by the urban middle class elite. In fact, there has been no single unified and homogenous environmental discourse in India. There has been what Guha calls 'varieties of environmentalism'. In this context the present unit attempts to understand history of environmental movements in India. Different environmental and ecological movements will also be dealt in this unit.

16.2 ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA: ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The environmental movement is a broad generic term which is generally used to describe and understand different types of local struggles and conflicts concerned with livelihood issues and ecological security within the larger context of the development debate. These struggles in fact critiqued and questioned the notion of development and conservation ecology pursued by the Indian state and its officials since colonial time. The genesis of the environmental movement in India can be traced to the Chipko movement (1973) in Garhwal region in the new state of Uttranchal. In fact, between 1970s and 1980s there were several struggles in India around issues of rights to forest and water which raised larger ecological concerns like rights of communities in forest resources, sustainability of large scale environmental projects like dams, issues of displacement and rehabilitation etc.

The Indian environmental movement is critical of the colonial model of development pursued by the post–colonial state. The post–independent state failed to build up a development agenda based on the needs of the people and continued to advocate the modern capitalist agenda which led to the destruction of environment, poverty and marginalisation of rural communities. Formation of national parks, sanctuaries, protected areas in India, in fact represents the conventional environmentalism which the Indian state advocated with the aim of preserving wildlife and biodiversity by pushing people out of these areas. In response to this conventional environmentalism which considered the Indian state to be the custodian of natural resources, the environmental movement in India advocated the ideology of 'environmentalism of the poor'. It not only critised modern developmentalism but also strongly advocated the revival of traditional 'self – sufficient village economy'. It brought communities to the centre stage of Indian environmental discourse. The environmentalist stated that local communities were best suited to conserve natural resources as their survival depended in the sustainable use of such resources. They argued that in order to make the sustainable use of the resource the customary rights or traditional rights should be given back to the people which were taken away by the State, and traditional institutions should also be recognised. In a nutshell, the environmental movement in India concentrates on the issue of equity in relation to access and use of natural resources.

Unlike in the West, a significant characteristic of environmental movements in India is that they have mainly involved the women, the poor and disadvantaged masses who have been directly affected by or are victims of environmental degradation. Thus these movements are primarily political expressions of the struggle of local communities and people who are victims of environmental degradation or abuse of resources.

Gadgil and Guha identify four broad strands within the environmental movements in India based on vision, ideology and strategy. The first types are those which emphasise on the moral necessity to restrain overuse and ensure justice to the poor and marginalised. Mainly Gandhians belong to this strand. The second strand stresses on the need to dismantle the unjust social order through struggle. Marxists mostly follow this strand. The Third and fourth strands advocate reconstruction, i.e. employing technologies appropriate to the given context and time. They reflect the concerns of the scientists or the spontaneous efforts of the communities at the village level who aim at protecting local community forests or the right to pursue environment-friendly agricultural practices.

Before we discuss some examples of environmental and ecological movements in India it will be relevant to reproduce the table 10.2 from Ghanshyam Shah's book *Social Movements: A Review of Literature* (2004: 257-58). This table will help you to have an overview of the issues, categories and examples of environmental movements, which have taken place in India.

Table 1

Categories	Issues	Some Examples
Forest and land-based	• Right of access to forest resources. • Non-commercial use of natural resources. • Prevention of land degradation. • Social justice/human rights.	Chipko, Appico, tribal movements all over the country (for example, Jharkhand/Bastar Belt).
Marine resources and fisheries, aquaculature	• Ban on trawling, preventing commercialization of shrimp and pawn culture. • Protection of marine resources. • Implementation of coastal zone regulations.	National Fishermens' Forum Working for traditional fisherfolk on Kerala, Chilka Bachao Andolan, Orissa.
Industrial pollution	• Stricter pollution control measures, compensation. • Prevention of reckless expansion of industries without considering design, locational factors and livelihood issues of local population.	Zahiro Gas Morcha in Bhopal; Ganga Mukti Andolan in Bihar; movement against Harihar Polyfibre factory in Karnataka; movement against pollution of Sone river by Gwalior Rayon factory led by Vidushak Karkhana Group of Shahdol district, MP; movements against poisoning of Cheliyar river in Kerala by Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP).
Development projects: a) Dams and irrigation projects	• Protection of tropical forests. • Ecological balance. • Destructive development. • Rehabilitation and resettlement of the displaced.	Silent Valley movement by KSSP; Narmada Bachao Andolan; movements against Tehri by Tehri Bandh Virodhi Samiti; the Koshi Gandhak Bodhghat and Bedthi; Bhopalpatnam and Ichampalli in the west; the Tunghbhadra, Malaprabha and Ghatprabha Schemes in the south: Koyna Project affected Committee

b) Power projects	• Ecological balance. • Rehabilitation and resettlement, high costs.	Jan Andolan in Dabhol against Enron; Koe-Karo Jan Sanghatana in Bihar. Anti-mine project in Doon valley.
c) Mining	• Depletion of natural resources.	Anti-Bauxite mine movement (Balco project) in Orissa.
d) Industrial plants/ Railway projects/ Airport project	• Land degradation. • Ecological imbalance. • Realignment. • Rehabilitation and resettlement of the displaced. • Ecological balance.	Protests and demands of Kakana Railway Realignment Action Committee. Citizen's group against Dupont Nylon 6.6. Goa. Amravati Bachao Abhyan against a large chemical complex.
e) Military bases	• Ecological balance. • Rehabilitation. • Resettlement and safety.	Anti-missiles test range in Baliapal and at Netrahat, Bihar.
Wild-life sanctuaries. National parks	• Displacement, rehabilitation and resettlement, loss of livelihood.	Ekjoot in Bhimashankar region of Maharashtra, Shramik Mukti Andolan in Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Bombay.
Tourism	• Displacement, cultural changes, social ills.	Himachal Bachao Andolan. Bailancho Saad. Goa.
Advocacy groups/ individual campaigns, citizen's Action Groups	• Policy inputs, stricter measures for protected areas. • Clear policy on national park and wild-life sanctuaries, lobbying, research, training and documentation on wild life, conservation, education, community-based environmental management. Publications on environmental issues.	Society for Clean Cities. Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS). Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), Delhi. Research, training and documentation organizations such as Bombay Environmental Action Group. Save Bombay Committee. Save Pune Citizen's Committee, etc.
Appropriate technology/ organic farming	• International debates. • Sustainable development. Eco-friendly models of development. • Low cost, environmental-friendly housing and technology.	Ralegaon Siddhi (Anna Hazare's village). SOPECOMM. Laurie Baker's Housing experiments. People's Science Institute, Dehradun.

Source: Janki Andharia and Chandan Sengupta. 1998. 'The Environmental Movement: Global Issues and the Indian Reality'. *The Indian Journal of Social Work,* 59 (1), pp. 429-31.

16.3 THE POPULAR MOVEMENTS

This section discusses some of the forest-based movements, Anti-dam movements and movements caused due to the environmental pollution. The forest-based movements discussed here include Chipko and Appico movements; the anti-Dam movement includes NBA; the anti pollution–movement include those which took place in Delhi.

16.3.1 Chipko Movement

As mentioned earlier, the origin of modern environmentalism and environmental movements in India can be ascribed to the Chipko movement in the central Himalayan region in the early 1970s. Chipko movement, launched to protect the Himalayan forests from destruction, has its' roots in the pre-independence days. Many struggles were organised to protest against the colonial forest policy during the early decades of 20th century. Peoples' main demand in these protests was that the benefits of the forest, especially the right to fodder, should go to local people. These struggles have continued in the post-independent era as the forest policies of independent India are no different from that of colonial ones. The origin of 'Chipko' [*chipak jayenge* - to hug] took place during 1973. In the early 1973 the forest department refused to allot ash trees to the *Dashauli Gram Swarajya Sangha* (DGSS), a local cooperative organisation based in Chamoli districts, for making agricultural implements. On the other hand, the forest department allotted ash trees to a private company, i.e., Symonds Co. This incident provoked the DGSS to fight against this injustice through lying down in front of timber trucks and burning resin and timber depots as was done in Quit India movement. When these methods were found unsatisfactory, Chandi Prasad Bhat - one of the leaders, suggested of embracing the trees and thus 'Chipko' was born (for details see Bahuguna, 1990 and Guha, 1989). This form of protest was instrumental in driving away the private company from felling the ash trees. With its success the movement spread to other neighbouring areas and subsequently the movement came to be popularly known as Chipko movement internationally. From its beginning the Chipko movement concentrated on ecological issues such as depletion of forest cover and soil erosion.

Three important aspects were responsible for the success of Chipko movement. First, the close links between the livelihoods of the local people and the nature of the movement. The local people consider Chipko as a fight for basic subsistence which have been denied to them by the institutions and policies of the State (Guha, 1989). In addition, specificity of the area where Chipko movement took place; involvement of women in the contribution to households' subsistence and the overwhelming support to anti-alcohol campaign have led to the overwhelming support of women which is unique to the Chipko movement. The second aspect is with regard to the nature of agitation. Unlike other environmental movements Chipko has strictly adhered to the Gandhian tradition of freedom struggle, i.e., non–violence. Third, the simplicity and sincerity of the leaders like Sunderlal Bahuguna and their access to national leaders like Mrs. Indira Gandhi, other politicians and officials also helped to the success of the movement to a large extent.

The demands of the Chipko movement were as follows:

i)   complete stoppage of cutting trees for commercial purposes;

ii)   the traditional rights should be recognised on the basis of minimum needs of the people;

iii) making the arid forest green by increasing people's participation in tree cultivation;

iv)   formation of village committees to manage forests;

v)   development of the forest related home-based industries and making available the raw materials, money and technique for it; and

vi) giving priority to afforestation in the light of local conditions, requirements and varieties.

What is distinctive about Chipko movement is that it was the forerunner as well 'as direct inspiration for a series of popular movements in defense of community rights to natural resources. Sometimes these struggles revolved around forests, in other instances, around control and use of pasture, mineral or fish resources.

16.3.2 Appiko Movement

Inspired by the Chipko movement the villagers of Western Ghats, in the Uttar Kannada region of Karnataka started Appiko Chalewali movement during September – November, 1983. Here the destruction of forest was caused due to commercial felling of trees for timber extraction. Natural forests of the region were felled by the contractors which resulted in soil erosion and drying up of perennial water resources. In the Saklani village in Sirsi, the forest dwellers were prevented from collecting usufructs like twigs and dried branches and non timber forest products for the purposes of fuelwood, fodder .honey etc.They were denied of their customary rights to these products.

In September 1983, women and youth of the region decided to launch a movement similar to Chipko, in South India. Women and youth from Saklani and surrounding villages walked five miles to a nearby forest and hugged trees there. They forced the fellers and the contractors of the state forest department to stop cutting trees. The people demanded a ban on felling of green trees. The agitation continued for 38 days and this forced the state government to finally concede to their demands and withdrew the order for felling of trees. For some time government stopped felling of trees which was resumed again after some time which resumed the movement again. The movement was backed by the local people. Even the daily wage labourers hired by the contractors to fell tree stopped doing their work.

In October, the movement entered into its second phase and this took place in Bengaon forest Here the forest was of mix tropical semi–evergreen type and mostly on hilly terrain. The inhabitants of the region who were primarily tribal or the indigenous people depended on the forest for their survival and livelihood. Disappearance of bamboo due to commercial felling deprived them of the basic source to make items like baskets, mats, etc. The main source of their income was the sale these items. When felling of trees did not stop people started the movement. The movement was spontaneous in nature. The local indigenous people hugged tree to stop them from cutting and finally the government had to give in to their demands. Similar movements also started in other areas like Husri. It also inspired the local people to launch the movement.

In fact *Appiko* movement became a symbol of people's power for their rights of natural resources vis-a-vis the state. In November, the movement spread to Nidgod village in Siddapur taluka preventing the state from commercial felling of trees in this deciduous forest of the region. The Appiko movement was successful in its three fold objectives, i.e., protection of the existing forest cover, regeneration of trees in denuded lands and utilising forest wealth with proper consideration to conservation of natural resources. The movement also created awareness among the villagers throughout the Western Ghats about the ecological danger posed by the commercial and industrial interests to their forest which was the main source of sustenance. Like the Chipko, the Appiko

movement revived the Gandhian way of protest and mobilisation for sustainable society in which there is a balance between man and nature.

16.3.3 Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA)

Narmada river project encompassing three major states of western India Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra is the most important case study in terms of maturation of environmental movement and dynamics related to politics of development. No other development project in India has brought into focus the intensity of magnitude of ecodevelopment problems to such a level of informed debate, political mobilisation and grass root activism as this project. The controversy which surrounded this project has challenged the government at all levels and at the same time was successful in creating and forging linkages with civil society organisation and NGOs, both at the national and international level. In fact, it has contributed to the political discourse of alternative development in India.

Sardar Sarovar Project which is a interstate multi-purpose project with a terminal major dam in Gujarat is being built on river Narmada which is the fifth largest river in India– 1312 km long. The Narmada Valley Project, with its two mega projects- Sardar Sarovar Project and Narmada Sagar Project in Madhya Pradesh ,is the largest single river valley project with the objective of making the world's largest man–made lake.

The consequences of the project are, however, quite glaring and alarming. The reservoir will submerge 37,000 hectares of land of which 11,000 hectares are classified as forest. It will displace about one lakh persons of 248 villages- 19 of Gujarat, 36 of Maharashtra and 193 of Madhya Pradesh. The state government initiated the project as Gujarat was one of the worst water–starved regions in India and there was drastic shortage of water for domestic, commercial, agricultural and industrial needs. Further, the state had witnessed one of the worst droughts between 1985-88 which further reinforced this project. However, according to the critics, it is seen as "the world's worst man–made ecological disaster" and it is considered unviable. It may be mentioned here that originally Narmada project was considered to be an irrigation project of a 161 feet high dam. Later it was found that water could be technologically harnessed making it a multipurpose dam if its level is raised to 455 feet. Consequently, the state governments started looking for finances not only from the centre but also from the World Bank.

Plans for damming the river at Gora in Gujarat surfaced as early as 1946. In fact, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru laid the foundation for a 49.8-meter-high dam in 1961. After studying the new maps the dam planners decided that a much larger dam would be more profitable. The only problem was hammering out an agreement with neighboring states– Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. In 1969, after years of negotiations attempting to agree on a feasible water-sharing formula, the Indian government established the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal. Ten years later, it announced its award – the Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal Award. The award envisaged that land should be made available to the ousters at least year before submergence.

Before the Ministry of the Environment even cleared the Narmada Valley Development Projects in 1987, the World Bank sanctioned a loan for $450 million for the largest dam, the Sardar Sarovar, in 1985. In actuality, construction on the Sardar Sarovar dam site had continued sporadically since 1961, but began in earnest in 1988. Questions arose

concerning the promises about resettlement and rehabilitation programme set up by the government. As a consequence, each state had a people's organisation which addressed these concerns. Soon, these groups came together to form the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), or, the Save the Narmada Movement under the leadership Medha Patekar , a social activists.

It may be mentioned here that the NBA began as a fight for information about the Narmada Valley Development Projects but developed as a fight for just rehabilitation for the lakhs of people to be ousted by the Sardar Sarovar Dam and other large dams along the Narmada river. Eventually, when it became clear that the magnitude of the project precluded accurate assessment of damages and losses, and that rehabilitation was impossible, the movement challenged the very basis of the project and questioned its claim to development.

In 1988, the NBA demanded formally the stoppage all work on the Narmada Valley Development Projects. In September 1989, more than 50,000 people gathered in the valley from all over India to pledge to fight "destructive development." A year later thousands of villagers walked and boated to a small town in Madhya Pradesh to reiterate their pledge to drown rather than agree to move from their homes. Under intense pressure, the World Bank was forced to create an independent review committee, the Morse Commission. It published its report the Morse Report in 1992. The report "endorsed all the main concerns raised by the Andolan (NBA). Two months later, the Bank sent out the Pamela Cox Committee. It also known as suggested exactly what the Morse Report advised against: "a sort of patchwork remedy to try and salvage the operation". Eventually, due to the international uproar created by the Report, the World Bank withdrew from the Sardar Sarovar Project. In response, the Gujarati government decided to raise $200 million and go ahead with the project.

Many issues of the project are yet unresolved. However, what is more important is that the Movement has been successful a considerable extent. The achievements of the movements include:

- Exit of the World Bank from Sardar Sarovar in 1993

- Halt of Sardar Sarovar construction 1994-99

- Withdrawal of foreign investors from Maheshwar dam 1999-2001

The NBA is unique in the sense that it underlined the importance of people's right to in formation which the authorities finally had to concede under media and popular pressure. It was successful not only in mobilising hundreds of thousands people from different walks of life to put pressure on the State government for its anti-people policies ,affecting and displacing lakhs of tribals from their homes and livelihoods. It also received immense international support. Resorting to non–violent mode of protest and following Gandhian vision of constructive work, NBA, as its popularly known is distinctive landmark in the history of environmentalism in India. However, in the face of recalcitrant attitude of the governments, the NBA continues with the involvement of effected people and civil society organisations.

16.3.4 Urban-based Environmental Movements

In the recent past environmental pollution caused due the industrialisation has become the focus of collective action by the civil society organisations, NGOs, concerned individuals, especially lawyers, scientists, environmentalists and social activists. They sought the intervention of the judiciary and drew the attention of the state for showing concern to the pollution caused by the process of modernisation. However, the main focus of the collective action against pollution has been in the urban areas. Certain tragedies like gas leakage in Bhopal based Union Carbide MNC, Charnobyl in former Soviet Union where thousands of people were killed created worries among the people on the negative effect of the industrialisation. Though the 1990s have seen increased concern about the environmental pollution, awareness about the disastrous impact of the environmental pollution started growing in the 1960s. All the major cities of India are facing acute air, water and other kinds on environmental pollution. Continuous immigration of the people from rural areas into the cities, their habitat in the congested areas which exist along with the polluting small scale industries; increasing number of vehicles; and unplanned expansion of cities, open drainage, etc. have created levels environmental hazards. This pollution made people susceptible to multiple diseases.

The protection of environment did not form significant part of the policies of the state. The Nehruvian model gave more emphasis to the industrialisation without showing much concern for the pollution it was going create. However, in 1976 an Constitutional Amendment called upon the state "to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forest and wildlife of the country" and made the fundamental duty of every citizen "to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife, and to have compassion for living creatures". In the following decades the state passed legislations to prevent air pollution and environmental protection like The Air Act of 1981 and Environmental Protection Act of 1986. The judiciary has become the arbiter of people's rights which include their protection from the environmental protection also since the emergence of the device of the Public Interest Litigation (PIL). In the face of indifference of the executive and legislature about the people's problems, the PIL has become an effective weapon through which people seek the intervention of the state on these issues. The intervention of the judiciary forced the state to introduce some measures for prevention of environmental pollution. Justice Krishna Iyer, Justice Kuldeep Singh and advocate MC Mehta have made remarkable contribution in protection of the environment.

Delhi is one of the most polluted cities in the world. Three issues related to the environmental pollution have been focus of activities of some concerned of the civil society components in the recent past. These are air pollution caused due to the vehicular and industrial pollution and water pollution in Yamuna river. The number of private and public vehicles has increased many fold in the recent past. This has polluted the environment and made people, especially children and old vulnerable to multiple diseases. Reacting to the court order which was result of a PIL, the government made it compulsory to introduce the CNG vehicles and make the pollution check mandatory for all private vehicles. The introduction of the CNG vehicles has resulted in the reduction of the environmental pollution in the city. Similarly, the Delhi government has been force to shift the polluting industries out of the city and launch the Yamuna river cleaning operation. The closing down of the polluting factories and industries proved the labour

unrest in the city. It resulted in the police firing, which killed one labourer. In fact, this is related to the unplanned development policy. The migration to the cities from the villages is inevitable. Unless some measures are adopted to absorb the migrating population, and increasing usage of the vehicles is stopped, it seems the environmental pollution will remain.

16.4 SUMMARY

To sum up, environmental and ecological movements became prominent in India since the 1970s, like other such movements. The concerns of these movement are not confined to any particular groups. They are all encompassing – the entire village and urban communities, women, tribals, peasants, middle classes and nature. Even the issues raised by them concern all sections of society in varying degrees. These issues are: protection of people's right to access of natural resources, prevention of land degradation, preventing commercialisation of nature resources and environmental pollution, maintenance of ecological balance, rehabilitation of displaced people, etc. These issues are also related to people's dignity, environmental rights and their decision-making rights on the issues concerning them.

The state in collaboration with the donor agencies disturbed the ecological balance in the society following independence. In the process this adversely affected the people. The latter launched environmental and ecological movement with their leadership, NGOs and other civil society organisations. These movements have raised the levels of people's consciousness, and achieved some success. They form a significant aspect of democracy in India.

16.5 EXERCISES

1) Highlight the main issues and concerns of the environmental movements in India.

2) Discuss the main feature of the Chipko movement.

3) Write a note on Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA).

4) In your opinion, how are the environmental and ecological rights related to democracy and development in India? Explain.