

Role of Public Participation in Protection of Environment

Sonia Bhardwaj

Assistant Professor, DCR University of Science and Technology,
Murthal, Sonapat, Haryana, India
E-mail: architectsoniabhardwaj@gmail.com

Abstract—*The protection of environment is a pressing issue. Every person, organization and institution has an obligation and duty to protect it. Environmental protection encompasses not only pollution but also sustainable development and conservation of natural resources and the ecosystem. Public Plays a very important role in protecting the environment. Environmental sensitivity in our country can only grow through a major public awareness campaign. . Green movements can grow out of small local initiatives to become major players in advocating environmental protection to the government. People and the role played by them in the protection of the environment is not only important but also necessary because no government alone with any amount of laws and acts can achieve the objectives of environment protection without individual and public participation which can be achieved only through a network of motivated and dedicated Population.*

Keywords: Public Participation, NGO, Movements, Environment

1. INTRODUCTION

Growing population and technological advancement are continuously putting a strain on the environment and on country's natural resources. Over-exploitation of the country's resources like land, water, fuel etc. has resulted in degradation of resources mainly due to industrial pollution, soil erosion, deforestation and urbanization. Hence, it is utmost important to conserve and promote the natural resources and environment.

The term 'public participation' in the measures refers to the participation of citizens, legal persons and other organizations in public undertakings of environmental protection in accordance with the law, such as policy-making, decision-making, law enforcement and law implementation. The range of public participation in environmental protection covers: Environmental pollution control work and Ecological protection work such as designating and adjusting the scope of natural reserves, ecological function areas and environmental function areas. Environmental protection can be done by spreading education, publicity, social practice, volunteering and public activities etc. Public participation should be lawful, orderly, voluntary, open, interactive and beneficial to the public. The public are entitled to the rights to acquire

environmental information, participate in and supervise environmental protection. The public can resort to administrative or judicial remedy if they feel infringements on their environmental rights and interests.

2. SOME ENVIRONMENT PROTECTION MOVEMENTS:

Some of the best known environmental movements in India have been briefly described below:

A. Bishnoi Movement

This movement was led by Amrita Devi in which around 363 people sacrificed their lives for the protection of their forests. This movement was the first of its kind to have developed the strategy of hugging or embracing the trees for their protection spontaneously .

B. The Chipko Movement

The Chipko is one of the world known environmental movements in India. The Chipko movement focused world attention on the environmental problems of the Alaknanda catchment area in the mid-Western Himalayas. "Chipko movement, launched to protect the Himalayan forests from destruction, has its roots in the pre-independence days. Many struggles were organized to protest against the colonial forest policy during the early decades of the twentieth century. The main demand of the people in these protests was that the benefits of the forests, especially the right to fodder, should go to local people".

The volunteers of the Mandal realized them that forest and land and forest and man were intricately linked. Then they started educating the people about the ill-effect of deforestation in the hill slopes and gradually they geared themselves into a movement.

The strategy of 'embracing' the trees to resist the felling of the trees was thought of by Chandi Prasad Bhatt in a meeting in the Mandal on April 1, 1973. The name 'Chipko' was derived from the consensual strategy of clinging on to the trees as a non-violent direct.

C. Narmada Bachao Andolan

The most popular movement in the environmental history of India is the movement against the Narmada River Valley Project. The Narmada is the largest west-flowing river on the Indian peninsula...

The Narmada winds its 1,312 km long course to the Arabian Sea through lovely forested hills, rich agricultural plains and narrow rocky gorges in a series of: More than twenty one million people live in the valley, mostly in villages. Many tribal groups, such as the Bhils and the Gonds, occupy the forested 12 uplands.

The Narmada valley is the site of one of the world's largest multipurpose water projects: the Narmada River Development Project, which involves the construction of thirty large dams and many small ones on the river and its fifty-one main tributaries. The project will transform the valley and the lives of its residents and will increase food production and hydropower generation in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra.

The construction of dams and reservoirs will displace an estimated one million people and will submerge 350,000 hectares of forestland and 200,000 hectares of agricultural land.

The Sardar Sarovar Dam in Gujarat, which is under construction, is facing major opposition from tribal groups that hunt and forage in the jungle canyons and from villagers who are being displaced by the inundation from the reservoir, which will submerge almost 40,000 hectares of land and 250 villages.

The Narmada movement started as early as the late 1970s. Their demands included complete stopping of the dam, resettlement and rehabilitation benefits to the oustees. The movement, however, gained wider public attention with mobilization and organization of oustees (mostly tribes) and the joining of the eminent social workers like Baba Amte, Sunderlal Bahuguna and Medha Patkar.

D. Appiko Movement

Appiko Movement is one of the forest-based environmental movements in India. The movement took place in the Uttara Kanada district of Karnataka in the Western Ghats. After independence, the government also began felling trees for revenue and the Forest Department, which continued the colonial forest policy, converted the primeval tropical forests into monoculture teak and eucalyptus plantations. A group of youth in Balegadde village, protesting against moves to establish teak plantations, wrote to forest officials asking them to stop clearing the natural forest. But this appeal was ignored. Then the villagers decided to launch a movement. They invited S. L. Bahuguna, the architect of Chipko movement and gathered local people to take up oath to protect trees by embracing them. In September 1983, when the axe-men came for felling to the Kalase forests, people embraced the trees and thus the 'Appiko movement was launched.

Objectives include 1] protecting the existing forest cover, 2] regeneration of trees in denuded land, and 3] utilizing forest wealth with proper consideration to conservation to conservation of natural resources. The Appiko movement saved the basic life sources for the people- trees like bamboo useful for making handcrafted items which they could sell for earning a few rupees.

E. Silent Valley Movement

Silent Valley in Kerala has a rich 89 sq. km biological treasure trove in the vast expanse of tropical virgin forests on the green rolling hills. The proposed project was not ecologically viable, as it would drown a chunk of the valuable rainforest of the valley and threaten the life of a host of endangered species of both flora and fauna. The movement in many ways saves the ecosystem of Silent Valley. The movement acknowledged the obvious economic needs of the people of Malabar but concluded that the Silent Valley Project would make only a marginal contribution to regional development. Thus the group opposed the project with a campaign that brought into sharp focus the ecological consequences, specifically the possibility of extinction of species that had evolved over millions of years. The movement began to challenge the idea that energy generated by the dam would benefit the rural people of Kerala. Most of the energy from the project was to be exported to industrialized areas of Kerala and surrounding states. The movement asserted that the local environment would be disrupted with benefits going to Trivandrum, the state capital. The central issue of the Silent Valley protests included: The protection of the tropical rainforest, maintenance of the ecological balance. The campaigns and petitions were the main strategies adopted by the activists in the movement, basing it on the non-violent, Gandhian ideological orientation the protest against the destruction of forest, an opposition to ecologically unsustainable development, and above all, maintenance of the ecological balance.

F. Tehri Dam Conflict

One of the most protracted environmental movements in the recent years is the movement against the Tehri Dam. The 260.5 meter high Tehri Dam on the Bhagirathi in the Garhwal-Himalayas. The project has generated controversy since its inception. In spite of objections of several scientists of national and international repute, the project is yet to be modified or stopped. The Tehri Baandh Virodhi Sangharsha Samithi founded by veteran freedom fighter Veerendra Datta Saklani has been opposing the construction for more than a decade. The major objections include, seismic sensitivity of the region, submergence of forest areas along with Tehri town etc. Despite the support from other prominent leaders like Sunderlal Bahuguna, the movement has failed to gather enough popular support at national as well as international levels and the government is determined to complete the project. For 15 according to the latest reports, the construction of the dam is being carried out with police protection as

Sunderlal Bahuguna is sitting on fast unto death. After prime minister's assurance to review the project, Bahuguna ended his fast but construction goes on, though at a slower pace.

3. IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Environmental sensitivity in our country can only grow through a major public awareness campaign. This has several tools—the electronic media, the press, school and college education, adult education, which are all essentially complementary to each other.

Green movements can grow out of small local initiatives to become major players in advocating environmental protection to the Government. Policy makers will only work towards environmental preservation if there is a sufficiently large bank of voters that insist on protecting the environment

Orienting the media to project pro-environmental issues is an important aspect. Several advertising campaigns frequently have messages that are negative to environmental preservation. The increasing awareness of environmental issues has generated great activity in recent years.

It has also brought to the knowledge of common citizens of India that for sustaining agriculture and maintaining the quality of environment at least one-third of the country's land should be under forest. This public awareness has helped government as well as voluntary organizations to take up the issue of environmental protection. People and activists agitation in connection with Chipko Movement, Appiko Movement, Silent Valley (Kerala) and Sardar Sarovar Project on Narmada are some illustrations to show how to clean and pollution free.

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Merging the ideas and philosophy of environmentalism with the structure of formal education systems, it strives to increase awareness of environmental problems as well as to foster the skills and strategies for solving those problems.

4. ROLE OF NGO

The emergence of NGOs represents an organised response by civil society especially in those areas in which the state has either failed to reach or done so inadequately. The importance of public awareness and NGOs involvement in environmental protection is acknowledged worldwide. NGO's have been taking a number of steps to promote discussion and debate about environmental issues, outside the broad spheres of popular media and the educational system. Advocacy and awareness is especially crucial in promoting concepts such as

sustainable development, natural resource conservation and the restoration of ecosystems. NGOs can sensitize policy makers about the local needs and priorities. They can often intimate the policy makers about the interests of both the poor and the ecosystem as a whole. In providing training facilities, both at community and government levels, NGOs can play a significant role. They can also contribute significantly by undertaking research and publication on environment and development related issues. It is necessary to support and encourage genuine, small, local level NGOs in different parts of the country which can provide much needed institutional support specific to the local needs. NGOs can make the following Contributions:

- I. Conducting education and citizen awareness programmes in the field of environment
- II. Fact – finding and analysis
- III. Filing public interest litigations
- IV. Innovation and experimenting in areas which are difficult for government agencies to make changes in Providing expertise and policy analysis
- V. Providing factual and reliable information with a network of professional expert staff
- VI. Remaining independent while passing relevant information to the public and governmental bodies
- VII. Solidarity and support to environmental defenders
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Working in collaboration with the government for capacity building and promotion of community participation in environmental awareness and protection and working out at the grass root level and reaching far – flung areas with or without the government invitation. Having due regards to the importance of the role of NGOs in motivating the society for participation in environmental conservation programmes the Ministry has launched several programmes, which are being implemented with their active participation. These programmes aim at spreading environmental consciousness not only among the student community, professionals and other intellectuals but also general public

5. TERI (INDIA)

Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI) was formally established in 1974 with the purpose of tackling and dealing with the immense and acute problems that mankind is likely to be faced with in the years ahead: I On account of the gradual depletion of the earth's finite energy resources which are largely non-renewable and I On account of the existing methods of their use which are polluting TERI has launched a major project, the first phase of which is completing near completion. This project called growth with resource enhancement of Environment and nature (GREEN INDIA-

2047)” has vigorously estimated the reduction in India’s key natural resources during the period 1947- 97, and has completed economic values of consequent loses, which in some cases are alarmingly high.

6. PEOPLE’S PARTICIPATION/ JOINT FOREST MANAGEMENT IMPLEMENTATION

In Haryana, joint forest management was started as early as 1972 though the government notification in this regard was issued in 1990. Thereafter, at present, 350 Hill Resource Management Societies (HRMSs), managing 60, 734 ha of forestland. JFM is practiced in degraded forests. The net income is apportioned between the government and the HRMS in the ratio of 70%: 30%. The HRMSs contributed 30% of their share towards the improvement and management of areas under this control and another 10% towards KalyanKosh (welfare fund).

The Green Revolution in India has achieved self-sufficiency in food production. However, in the state of Haryana this has resulted in continuous environmental degradation, particularly of soil, vegetation and water resources.

Soil organic matter levels are declining and the use of chemical inputs is intensifying. Newly introduced crop varieties have been responsive to inputs but this has necessitated both increased fertilizer application and use of irrigation resulting in water contamination by nitrate and phosphate and changes in the ground water table.

7. SUGGESTIONS

Suggestions towards environmental protection: Some suggestions that can be made towards protection of environment could be made in the following areas where NGOs could play an effective role with the assistance of the governmental agencies for achieving the ultimate goal of healthy and blissful environment:

Educate the students about the pollution problem and the harmful effects of pollution.

Minimizing the use of plastic for different purposes.

Buy only environmental friendly products i.e. the products which do not reduce the natural resources.

- I. Not to waste water for various purposes.
- II. To plant and grow more trees in the house garden.
- III. To support the NGOs financially which are rendering service to the health and environment sector.
- IV. To support the initiatives taken by central and state government in protecting our environment.

8. CONCLUSION

Environmental non-governmental organizations and community, in recent years, have grown in size and in number as a result of governmental negligence towards the environmental crisis.

NGOs have grown in importance to a point where they act as key arbitrating agents within the field of environmental policy. By interrelating global and local concerns, NGOs find themselves able to not only emphasize important ecological issues, but also raise consciousness about the environment.

People and the role played by them in the protection of the environment is not only important but also necessary because no government alone with any amount of laws and acts can achieve the objectives of environment protection without individual and public participation which can be achieved only through a network of motivated and dedicated Population.

The Earth is yours, Save it.

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