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ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

- In view of Guha and Gadgil, environmental movements are organized social activity, consciously directed towards promoting sustainable use of natural resources, halting environmental degradation or bringing about environmental restoration.
- In view of J. Bandopadhyay and Vandana Shiva, **environmental movements are the expression of protest against the destruction of the vital economics of natural processes and survival** from the anarchy of development based on market economy.

Origin & Nature

- The resource intensive development led to environmental degradation which threatened its ability to sustain human population. The **issues of ownership and conflict over access to the resources** came to the forefront which was manifested in form of environmental movements.
- In contrast to west where modern environmentalism was led by the scientists and it was guided by 'deep ecology paradigm', in India its genesis (origin) lies in the protest of several communities and was basically guided by survival. 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.
- Hence, Ramchandra Guha calls environmental movements in India '**empty stomach environmentalism**'. These movements were concerned with environmentalism related to poor and the question of equity was their dominant concern.
- **The theme of man-nature relationship is its central core** and it was reflected in a deep feeling of disempowerment of the people who had to suffer disruption of traditional life styles and cultures. These movements serve as a critique of political development system where traditionally oppressed people are treated as non-entities and exploited for the benefit of already well-off sections.

Chipko Movement

- The genesis of the environmental movement in India can be traced to the Chipko movement .Chipko Movement was born in a small hilly village, Advani in Tehri Garhwal district of Utter Pradesh. The illiterate adivasi women led this movement in December 1972. One of the women, Gaura Devi led 27

village women to prevent the contractors and forest department personnel, about 60 men in all, from entering the Reni Forest to cut trees.

- The 1970 floods mark a turning-point in the ecological history of the region. Villagers, who bore the brunt of the damage, were beginning to perceive the hitherto tenuous links between deforestation, landslides and floods. It was observed that some of the villages most affected by landslides lay directly below forests where felling operations had taken place.
- It challenged the old belief that forests mean only timber and emphasised their roles in making soil, water and pure air as the basis of human life. This philosophy popularised the movement in many countries. The women symbolically tied sacred threads around the trees, faced police firing in February 1978 and later courted arrest. This movement continued under the leadership of Sri Sunderlal Bahuguna in various villages. The movement's plan is a slogan to plant **five F's-**

- **Food**
- **Fodder**
- **Fuel**
- **fiber and**
- **fertiliser** to make communities self-sufficient in all their basic needs.

- The Chipko women believed that the trees were alive and could breathe like them. Thus, trees should be respected. Besides supporting agriculture and animal husbandary, the forests grew medicinal herbs used for healing powers. The hill women used fruit, vegetables or roots from it in times of scarcity. This dependency on forest resources was institutionalised through some social and cultural mechanisms, like religion, folklore and oral tradition.
- Women repeatedly challenged administrators and politicians stating, planning without fodder, fuel and water is one eyed planning. In the course of this movement, Garhwal women successfully undertook leadership roles and questioned the right of the men to decide the fate of the forests or to enter into contracts without consulting them, who were the worst affected.
- The Chipko movement proved that women who produce all subsistence goods can maintain the status quo by retaining the traditional eco-system. They saw that conservation of forest seems to be their only source of living and survival. **Chipko movement offered women a platform to realise command over Public power and authority.**
- New ecological concepts were built through this movement that made women to realise these issues which were earlier controlled by their male counterparts. This has resulted in various changes in the gender relations in rural Garhwal region in performing the household and social responsibility.
- The top down approach long adopted by the State in development of women could not bring much change in the power structure of the rural people. The experiment could make people believe that

participation of women in the development process can be achieved by a mere ideological commitment and a few organisational devices. Belief in non-violence, cooperation and self-help are the basic axioms of the Sarvodaya Philosophy helped the Chipko movement moving forward.

- In his book *Unquiet Woods*, Guha analyses the nature of **Chipko Movement** which launched environmentalism in India. This movement symbolized concerns about economy, ecology and political representation. At stake was the question of villager's subsistence and hence **the economy of subsistence was pitted against the economy of profit**. This movement also raised the issue of ecological sustainability and it also expressed the resentment of the hill villages against a distant government head-quartered in plains (Lucknow) that seemed indifferent and hostile to their concerns.
- The Chipko movement had been successful in forcing a fifteen year ban on commercial green felling in the hills of Uttar Pradesh and generated pressure for a national forest policy that is ecologically more sensitive.
- Chipko still survives and the philosophies of the movement has spread beyond Uttarakhand hills and linked to social activists, humanitarian scientists and people in need.
- Some issues in Environmental movements (EM)
 - Against deforestation like Chipko movement
 - Against Dams and factories -Displaced people not given proper Relief &Rehabilitation. eg - Narmada Bachao Andolan led by Medha Patekar
 - Pollution – Bhopal Gas Tragedy (World's worst industrial tragedy)
 - Against Wildlife Sanctuaries and Natural Park.
 - For protection of Marine Resources and Fisheries etc.
- There has been widespread contestation of project-induced displacement. The recognition of inequity, and of violation of the basic rights of the affected people, has resulted in growing interaction between local communities and activists from beyond the affected region. Resource rights were demanded in the early years of protest in the matter of forests; conservation and the right of the people to access forest produce for their subsistence and in acknowledgement of the traditional relationship between forests and dwellers in and around forests. Environmentalists and those supporting the dwellers' and forest users' causes have spoken together. The Narmada Bachao Andolan led by Medha Patkar has been a prominent example.
- Many local movements centering deforestation, water logging, salinization and desertification in the command areas of major rivers of Kosi, Gandak, and Tungabhadra and in canal irrigated areas of western India, like Punjab and Haryana, have established the efficient use of water as a source of natural commodity. All these movements have reflected the ill-conceived natural resource consumption by the so-called development projects, which have resulted in devastations in the natural resource base of the nation.

Q. 5e) Write short note on the significance of Chipko Movement. [2019/10marks]



