

Power of Community for Conservation

March 10, 2021

Community-led environmental movements are an expression of the socio-ecological effects of narrowly conceived development based on short-term criteria of exploitation. The movements reveal how the resource-intensive demands of development have built-in ecological destruction and economic deprivation.

In news: Role of Community Participation for Environmental Conservation

Placing it in syllabus: Environment

Dimensions

- Popular movements
- Bishnoi Community of Rajasthan
- Amrita Devi and Amrita Devi award
- Sacred Groves
- Efforts by government for environmental conservation

Content:

- An environmental movement can be defined as a social or political movement, for the conservation of the environment or for the improvement of the state of the environment. The terms 'green movement' or 'conservation movement' are alternatively used.
- The environmental movements favour the sustainable management of natural resources.
- The movements often stress the protection of the environment via changes in public policy. Many movements are centred on ecology, health and human rights.

Popular Movements

Chipko Movement:

- The Chipko movement or Chipko Andolan, was a forest conservation movement in India.
- It began in 1973 in Uttarakhand, then a part of Uttar Pradesh (at the foothills of Himalayas) and went on to become a rallying point for many future environmental movements all over the world.
- It created a precedent for starting non-violent protest in India
- Sunderlal Bahuguna, a Gandhian activist, gave the movement a proper direction and its success meant that the world immediately took notice of this non-violent movement.
- One of Chipko's most salient features was the mass participation of female villagers.
- As the backbone of Uttarakhand's Agrarian economy, women were most directly affected by environmental degradation and deforestation, and thus related to the issues most easily.
- The women of Advani village of Tehri-Garhwal tied the sacred thread around trunks of trees and they hugged the trees, hence it was called 'Chipko Movement' or 'hug the tree movement'.
- 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 Chipko movement gathered momentum in 1978 when the women faced police firings and other tortures.
- The then state Chief Minister, Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna set up a committee to look into the matter, which eventually ruled in favor of the villagers.
- This became a turning point in the history of eco-development struggles in the region and around the world.
- A United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report mentioned, Chipko activists started "working a socio-

economic revolution by winning control of their forest resources from the hands of a distant bureaucracy which is only concerned with the selling of forestland for making urban-oriented products”.

Appiko Movement

- The Appiko Movement, a movement similar to the Chipko Movement, was launched in September 1983 in Uttara Kannada and Shimoga districts of Karnataka State.
- It was launched to save the Western Ghats in Southwest India. The Appiko Movement was locally known as “Appiko Chaluvali”.
- Appiko’s greatest strengths lie in it being neither driven by a personality nor having been formally institutionalised.
- The locals embraced the trees which were to be cut by contractors of the forest department.
- The Appiko movement used various techniques to raise awareness such as foot marches in the interior forest, slide shows, folk dances, street plays etc.
- The second area of the movement’s work was to promote afforestation on denuded lands. The movement later focused on the rational use of the ecosphere through introducing alternative energy resources to reduce pressure on the forest.

Jungle Bachao Andholan

- The tribals of Singhbhum district of Bihar started the protest in 1982 when the government decided to replace the natural sal forests with the highly-priced teak.
- This move was called by many as “Greed Game Political Populism”.
- Later this movement spread to Jharkhand and Orissa.

Bishnoi Community of Rajasthan

- The Bishonis inhabit western Rajasthan and parts of

Haryana and Punjab.

- Animal life, plants and trees are sacred for the Bishnois, who have a long tradition of risking their lives in order to nurture and protect them.
- In 1542 AD, Guru Jamboji (or Jambeshwar), while forming the new sect, laid out twenty-nine tenets, of which, eight relate to preservation of bio-diversity, non-felling of green trees and non-killing of animals particularly antelope.
- Black bucks are considered the manifestation of Jamboji and are especially sacred.
- Bishnois do not keep goats and sheep because of their habit of over-grazing.
- They bury their dead so that no wood is used.
- Usually, they cultivate a single seasonal crop so that the soil enriches itself. Their environment-friendly lifestyle, governed by religious tenets, makes them more prosperous than other communities in the region.

Amrita Devi and Amrita Devi award

- Amrita Devi Bishnoi is most remembered for the protection of Khejri trees in Rajasthan.
- In 1786, when the then-Maharaja of Jodhpur ordered trees to be cut in order to build his palace, the Bishnois resisted by hugging Khejri trees
- Amrita Devi, a female villager could not bear to witness the destruction of both her faith and the village's sacred trees.
- She hugged the trees and encouraged others to do the same. 363 Bishnoi villagers were killed in this movement.
- The repentant Maharaja apologised and decreed that no trees would be cut and no antelope would be killed in Bishnoi villages.
- The Bishnoi resistance to protect the environment at that early stage of human history is considered the

first environmental movement in the world, inspiring the Chipko and other similar movements later.

Amrita Devi Bishnoi Wildlife Protection Award

- The award is in the remembrance of Amrita Devi Bishnoi
- This award is given for significant contribution in the field of wildlife protection, which is recognised as having shown exemplary courage or having done exemplary work for the protection of wildlife.
- A cash award of Rupees One lakh is presented to individuals/institutions involved in wildlife protection.
- Individual(s) and community based organisation(s), from rural areas, including Gram Sabha, showing exemplary courage or valour for protection of wildlife are eligible.

Community Participation:

- Even when the communities do not have such religious and cultural values like the Bishnois, they can still develop a stake in conservation due to tangible economic benefits accruing to them and thereby participate effectively.
- Community participation by Adivasis is characterized by their cultural tenets about the forests.
- Such participation can help to formulate forest policies in conjunction with administration and the grassroots civil society organisations.
- Sustainable use of forest produce for the tribal people's benefit is worth considering as a policy measure in order to provide livelihoods without causing harm to forests.
- Such a form of community participation sometimes based on religious and cultural values to preserve wildlife and their habitats.

Sacred Groves

- Sacred Groves are the tracts of virgin forests that are left untouched by the local inhabitants and are protected by the local community due to their culture and religious beliefs.
- Sacred groves are relic vegetation of once dominant flora.
- They are repositories of our rich biodiversity; they are also the last bastion where the rich culture and the customs of the indigenous people are still preserved.
- Indian sacred groves are often associated with temples, monasteries, shrines or with burial grounds.
- Sacred groves are scattered all over the country, and are referred to by different names in different parts of India.
- Sacred groves occur in a variety of places – from scrub forests in the Thar Desert of Rajasthan maintained by the Bishnois, to rain forests in the Western Ghats of Kerala.
- Himachal Pradesh in the north and Kerala in the south are specifically known for their large numbers of sacred groves.
- In Meghalaya, as part of religious beliefs, an estimated 1,000 sq. kms of forest areas (Survey carried out by the Regional centre of NAEB), under the administrative control of District Councils have been preserved through the ages by the indigenous tribal communities as 'sacred groves

Mawphlang sacred grove, located in East Khasi hills District, 25 km from Shillong is internationally known and important tourist destination and educational centre. It is spread across 78 hectares and protected by the local deity-Labasa.

Threats

- Sacred groves in Meghalaya are now increasingly coming

under threat as the tribal way of life changes.

- The area under sacred groves is also shrinking and quite a few have been turned into degraded forests.
- The erosion of traditional values and deterioration of sacred groves in recent times is, however, as a matter for concern.
- Some sacred groves though protected in the past have fallen prey to encroachments and degradation due to decline of the very social and ethical values that had helped them to thrive

Efforts by government for environmental conservation

- The **Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006**, recognizes the rights of forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers over the forest areas inhabited by them and provides a framework for the same.
- The **Forest Conservation Act 1980** was enacted to help conserve the country's forests. It strictly restricts and regulates the de-reservation of forests or use of forest land for non-forest purposes without the prior approval of the Central Government. To this end the Act lays down the prerequisites for the diversion of forest land for non-forest purposes.
- The **National Green Tribunal** has been established in 2010 under the **National Green Tribunal Act 2010** for effective and expeditious disposal of cases relating to environmental protection and conservation of forests and other natural resources. It is a specialized body equipped with the necessary expertise to handle environmental disputes involving multi-disciplinary issues.
- Various wildlife conservation programs such as

- **Project Tiger:** Centrally Sponsored Scheme aims to foster an exclusive tiger agenda in the core areas of tiger reserves, with an inclusive people-oriented agenda in the buffer.
- **Project Elephant:** aims to ensure the long-term survival of viable conservation reliant populations of elephants in their natural habitats by protecting the elephants, their habitats, and migration corridors.
- **Indian Rhino Vision 2020:** goal is to have a wild population of at least 3,000 Greater one-horned rhinos in the Indian state of Assam – spread over seven protected areas
 - **Project Snow Leopard:** To safeguard and conserve India's unique natural heritage of high-altitude wildlife populations and their habitats by promoting conservation through participatory policies and actions.
 - **Sea Turtle Project:** objective of conservation of olive ridley turtles and other endangered marine turtles; implemented in 10 coastal States of the country with special emphasis in the State of Orissa.
 - **Indian Crocodile Conservation Project:** to protect the remaining population of crocodilians in their natural habitat by creating sanctuaries
 - **Project Hangul:** To conserve 'Hangul' (Kashmiri Stag) in its natural habitat. 'Hangul' (Kashmiri stag) is the only surviving species of the red deer family in Kashmir

Mould your thought: Write a short note on the community-led environmental movements in India.

Approach to the answer:

- Introduction
- Discuss about Bishnoi Movement before independence
- Discuss the movements in Independent India
- Discuss the success of these communities and the factors behind them
- Conclusion