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HISTORY OF ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA AND ROLE OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT:

The environmental movement in India has played a crucial role in addressing ecological degradation and advocating for sustainable development. This paper explores the emergence, significance, and impact of key environmental movements, highlighting their role in balancing development with ecological preservation. Beginning with an overview of environmental concerns, the study examines the origins of environmental activism in India and the grassroots movements that have shaped environmental discourse. Landmark movements such as the Chipko Movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan, and Save Silent Valley Movement illustrate the collective resistance against deforestation, dam construction, and industrial exploitation. Education has been instrumental in fostering environmental awareness, mobilizing communities, and influencing policies. Environmental studies in school curricula, grassroots campaigns, and digital platforms have contributed to a growing consciousness about sustainability. Despite these efforts, challenges such as limited rural outreach and insufficient practical engagement persist. The study concludes that while environmental movements have significantly impacted policies and conservation efforts, continued education and advocacy are necessary to ensure long-term ecological sustainability.

KEYWORDS: Environmental Movement, deforestation, sustainable development, environmental education.

INTRODUCTION:

The environment, encompassing resources like air, water, land, and forests, is essential for our survival, but its misuse through pollution, deforestation, and degradation has led to significant harm. Environmental movements in India, such as the Chipko Movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan, and Save Ganga Movement, emerged as responses to the socio-ecological impacts of exploitative development. These movements highlight the conflict between resource-intensive

industrialization and the survival needs of local communities. Over the past decades, rising resource demands have intensified these conflicts, spurring collective efforts to protect natural resources and advocate for sustainable ecological development.

What is Environmental Movement? :

Environmental movements are social or political efforts aimed at conserving natural resources and improving environmental health. These movements, ranging from grassroots initiatives to global campaigns, often focus on sustainable resource management, public policy reform, and ecological, health, and human rights issues.

Definitions highlight the diverse nature of these movements, from local grassroots actions addressing specific pollution issues to broader social movements pushing for systemic environmental reforms.

Origin of Environmental Movement in India:

Environmental movements in India gained momentum after the 1970s, raising awareness about balancing development with ecological preservation. They opposed harmful projects, promoted community-based resource management, and expanded their focus from survival needs to broader ecological concerns. Movements like the Bishnoi Movement and Save Silent Valley exemplify these efforts, demonstrating the collective push for sustainable and participatory development practices.

Major Environmental Movements in India:

- i. **Bishnoi Movement (1730):** The Bishnoi community, founded by Guru Jambaji in 1485 in Rajasthan, is known for its deep reverence for nature, guided by 29 principles promoting environmental preservation. In 1730, to protect khejri trees from being cut for a palace, Amrita Devi and 362 other Bishnois sacrificed their lives by hugging the trees. This act of nonviolent protest inspired future environmental movements like the Chipko movement.
- ii. **Chipko Movement (1973):** Originating in Uttarakhand, this nonviolent movement aimed to prevent deforestation. Villagers, especially women, hugged trees to stop logging. Initiated by Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sunderlal Bahuguna, it led to bans on commercial logging in the region. Key events include protests in Mandal and Reni villages, where women like Gaura Devi played pivotal roles. The movement highlighted forest rights and sustainable resource use.
- iii. **Save Silent Valley Movement (1970s–1985):** This movement in Kerala opposed a hydroelectric project in the Silent Valley, which threatened a pristine evergreen forest. Public campaigns, petitions, and protests led to the cancellation of the project in 1983 and the establishment of Silent Valley as a National Park in 1985, showcasing the power of collective action for environmental conservation.

- iv. **Jungle Bachao Andolan (1978–1983):** Focused in Singhbhum, Jharkhand, this movement was a tribal struggle to protect their land, forest, and water resources from exploitation. Despite severe government crackdowns, the movement raised awareness about tribal rights and led to later legislative milestones like the Forest Rights Act of 2006.
- v. **Appiko Movement (1983):** Inspired by the Chipko Movement, this protest in Karnataka's Western Ghats opposed deforestation by hugging trees. Villagers, led by youth and women, demanded a halt to green tree felling and advocated forest regeneration and sustainable resource use. Their efforts successfully pressured the government to withdraw logging orders, making it a landmark movement in forest conservation.
- vi. **Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA):** The Narmada Bachao Andolan is one of India's most prominent environmental movements, opposing the Narmada River Valley Project. The Narmada River, flowing westward for 1,312 km, is a lifeline for the region's people and environment. The project involves constructing 30 large dams and numerous smaller ones, affecting over 21 million people, displacing around one million, and submerging vast forest and agricultural lands. The Sardar Sarovar Dam alone has displaced thousands, drawing resistance from local tribes and villagers. The movement began in the 1970s, focusing on human rights and rehabilitation of displaced communities, with leaders like Medha Patkar, Baba Amte, and Sunderlal Bahuguna gaining international support. It uses methods such as Satyagraha, hunger strikes, and rallies to highlight issues of displacement, environmental impact, and sustainable alternatives.
- vii. **Tehri Dam Conflict:** The Tehri Dam, planned to dam the Bhagirathi River in the 1990s, became a focal point of opposition due to its environmental, cultural, and seismic risks. Displacing thousands and submerging large areas, it faced protests from locals and activists like Sunderlal Bahuguna, who undertook multiple hunger strikes. Despite protests and legal challenges, the dam was completed by 2004, causing ecological and social disruptions. The movement highlighted the failure to rehabilitate affected communities and the dangers posed by large-scale infrastructure in seismic zones.
- viii. **Baliapal Movement:** The Baliapal movement opposed the establishment of a missile testing range in the fertile Baliapal and Bhograi blocks of Odisha. Villagers resisted with roadblocks, slogans, and forming a "suicide squad" to protect their lands. Despite government pressure and restrictions, the movement showcased the determination of locals to protect their livelihoods and environment against militarization.
- ix. **Save Ganga Movement:** Founded in 1998 by Rama Rauta, the Save Ganga Movement

advocates for the ecological restoration of the Ganga and the Himalayas. Rooted in Gandhian principles, the movement has organized rallies, yatras, and panel discussions to raise awareness and pressurize governments for sustainable development policies. It aims to protect rivers, forests, and mountains as essential to India's ecological and cultural heritage.

- x. **Navdanya Movement (1982):** Established by Vandana Shiva, Navdanya promotes biodiversity conservation and organic farming. It connects farmers to sustainable markets and has created over 111 community seed banks across India. With over 650,000 farmer members, the movement focuses on eco-friendly, biodiverse farming to improve rural livelihoods, combat poverty, and promote environmental sustainability.

Role of Education in Environmental Movement in India:

Education has played a pivotal role in shaping and supporting the environmental movement in India. It has not only raised awareness about environmental issues but has also fostered a sense of responsibility among individuals and communities to actively participate in protecting the environment. Here is a thorough discussion of its role:

- ❖ **Environmental Education Programs:** The inclusion of environmental studies in the school and university curricula (as mandated by the Supreme Court of India in 2003) has significantly increased awareness among students.
- ❖ **Campaigns and Workshops:** NGOs, schools, and community groups organize campaigns, seminars, and workshops to educate the public about issues such as deforestation, climate change, water scarcity, and biodiversity conservation.
- ❖ **Grassroots Movements:** Education has been crucial in mobilizing communities for movements like the Chipko Movement (1973) in Uttarakhand, where villagers were educated on the importance of forests for their livelihood and environment.
- ❖ **Advocacy for Sustainable Practices:** Programs like watershed management and organic farming involve educational initiatives to train rural populations in sustainable agricultural practices.
- ❖ **Policy Influence and Advocacy:** Environmental education equips citizens and policymakers with the knowledge to frame and implement effective environmental policies. For example, organizations like the Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) have been instrumental in influencing policies through education and research.
- ❖ **Youth Activism:** Educated youth play an active role in advocacy and protests, such as climate marches and campaigns against unsustainable industrial projects.
- ❖ **Integration with Traditional Knowledge:** Education helps revive and integrate traditional ecological knowledge with modern scientific understanding. Indigenous

practices of sustainable resource management have been incorporated into educational frameworks to promote holistic conservation strategies.

- ❖ **Role in Biodiversity Conservation:** Initiatives like Project Tiger and Project Elephant have included education programs to sensitize local communities about the importance of wildlife conservation.
- ❖ **Eco-Clubs:** Schools and colleges have established eco-clubs to engage students in activities like tree planting, waste management, and biodiversity documentation.
- ❖ **Urban and Rural Engagement:** Environmental movements in urban areas, such as the campaign for the preservation of the Aravalli Hills or the cleanup of rivers like the Yamuna, have relied heavily on education to garner support. Rural environmental education focuses on issues like afforestation, water conservation, and sustainable farming, which directly impact livelihoods.
- ❖ **Role of Media:** Documentaries, TV programs, and social media campaigns have become powerful tools to educate the masses about pressing environmental issues.
- ❖ **Digital Platforms:** Online courses and webinars, hosted by organizations like WWF-India and the Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), provide accessible education on sustainability and environmental conservation.
- ❖ **Challenges and the Way Forward Challenges:** Limited reach in rural and underprivileged areas. Insufficient emphasis on practical, action-oriented education.
- ❖ **Recommendations:** Strengthening environmental education policies and making them more action-oriented. Enhancing collaborations between government, NGOs, and educational institutions to extend the reach of environmental programs.

Education serves as the backbone of the environmental movement in India by fostering awareness, encouraging community participation, and advocating sustainable practices. To ensure a more profound impact, education systems must integrate environmental literacy into mainstream learning while empowering individuals to act as stewards of the environment.

CONCLUSION:

From the above discussion we can say that in India, the environmental movement has grown rapidly over the last three to four decades. In India especially after independence environmental movements has become one of the important discourses. The environmental movements have emerged from the Himalayan regions of Uttar Pradesh to the tropical forests of Kerala and from Gujarat to Tripura. The main environmental movements are Chipko Andolan, Save the Bhagirati and Stop Tehri project committee in Uttar Pradesh, Save the Narmada Movement (Narmada Bachao Andolan) in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat, the opposition to the Baliapal and Bhogarai test range in Orissa, the Appiko Movement in the Western Ghats, the campaign against the Silent Valley project.

Local movements are working 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. Some other local movements like Pani Chetna, Pani Panchyat and Mukti Sangharsh advocate ecological principals for water use.

In spite of all these movements peoples are still not so much aware about the environmental degradation. Beside all, the environmental movement started or introduced in different times has its own significance and importance irrespective of various limitations.

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