

Philosophy of Environmental Activism in India

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ABSTRACT

Environmental issues and environmentalism are major topics of discourse all over the world. An environmental movement is a systematically organized activity in which the base of the society, i.e. common people, plays an important role. It calls for sustainable use of natural resources and to check environmentally destructive activities. Such movements take birth not to increase luxuries but to ensure the basic facilities, which include food, shelter, water, and also a viable environment.

This paper is an attempt to unravel the philosophical standpoints of environmental activism in India, with particular focus to the concepts of development and sustainability. The recent environmental movements in India not only raise the issues that emerged as a result of human exploitation of nature, but also work as catalysts in adopting our inherent values which give pivotal significance to nature. These environmental movements are aimed to equip people to follow our philosophical tradition of preservation of nature.

1. Introduction

Environmental issues and environmentalism are major topics of discourse all over the world. Almost all streams of knowledge mention environment and environmental conservation. In this perspective, development is defined as sustainable development and 'green knowledge' is dominating all streams of knowledge. The term environment is not only limited to science. It comprises a lot more things: sacred and scientific, romantic and radical, and commercial and ethical. This paper is an attempt to unravel the philosophical standpoints of environmental activism in India, with particular focus to the concepts of development and sustainability.

Environmental movement is a systematically organized activity in which the base of the society, i.e. common people, plays an important role. It calls for sustainable use of natural resources and to check environmentally destructive activities. Such movements took birth not to increase luxuries but to ensure basic facilities, which includes food, shelter, water, and also a viable environment. The existing environmental scenario favours only the ruling and the affluent class. This ruling paradigm is biased. Vandana Shiva points out that this bias creates two types of misconceptions. Firstly, the bias against the third world countries is that they cannot afford the luxury of protecting environment and that they are more directed towards development and less directed towards preservations of ecology. The second bias is that the common man cannot contribute towards solving environmental problems as they themselves are part of the problems¹.

When one studies the environmental movements in India, it becomes very clear that the above mentioned allegations are totally wrong. About four-fifth of rural people in India, who live closely linked to nature by using natural products and consider forests as life-giving system and worship with reminiscence, are the primary protectors of environment in the country. Ramachandra Guha also speaks about this bias. He points out

the misconception that exists among developed countries, that the phenomena of environmentalism are peculiar to rich countries. Most of the scholars working in the field of environmental movements the third world countries cannot afford the cost of protecting the environment.² Guha counters this allegation by citing examples of poor peoples' initiative in environmentalism. The unique feature of these examples is that it is the poor people who spearhead the agitation against environmental degradation. They get inspiration to fight mainly from the ethical and cultural philosophies with regard to nature.

The two important faces of environmental movement are the regional and the global perspectives. In regional point of view, environmental movements are the result of poverty and lack of basic amenities for sustenance of life. In such movements, the main sources of inspiration are traditions and tradition-oriented value system. Such movements are rich with folklore and stories that the workers of the movement carry in their mind and heart. The region-oriented environmental movements are more focused and have wide participation. Robert Putnam, who developed the concept of 'social capital', argues that region-oriented cultural patterns, whose work was based on local interactions, were crucial in making democracy work.³

The global perspective of environmental movement is that most of the agendas are common and it surpasses regional characterization. The themes of such movements are unified one, applicable in all areas irrespective of regions. Therefore, an Indian might be working in Antarctica for the restoration of ecology where nationality becomes less significant and preserving the earth takes primary importance.

Another important pattern of mindset related to environmental movements is the differences in geographical conditions and cultural traditions that resulted in different frameworks. People living in countries like India have older traditions of ecological heritage than those in the countries in

Europe. Unlike Western countries, Asian countries have long traditions and cultural patterns in relation with nature. The process of industrialization and modernization might have led to the evasion of the traditional values in some Asian countries, but they are still powerful enough to revive a cultural reformation.

The cultural dimension of environmental movement is an important area where we can learn a lot from different cultural traditions. However, the policy makers and political scientists have not yet given enough attention to these areas. Understanding the cultural philosophy of each geographical area can help in adopting different policies and programmes suited to that area. Therefore, the cultural dimension of science and technology should also be taken care of while implementing development programmes. Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha point out that the existence of a dual society, i.e. rural and urban, has distorted the environmental policies. At the same time, the relatively high level of democracy and democratic institutions compared to other developing countries has also provided larger space to civil society.⁴

The environmental movement in India has a wide range and width as the geographical area and cultural phenomena are not uniform in India. Yet, all the environmental movements in India are related with common people and not affluent ones. The common people who depend on natural environment to satisfy their material needs are characterized as 'ecosystem people'⁵ by Raymond Desmann. Such ecosystem people, who live under the pressure of modernization and globalization and who fight for their natural environment, are being sidelined by government and capitalist monopolies.

The ethical point in this context is that nature and common people's concerns should be taken into consideration whenever development process is discussed. There is a tendency to completely neglect ethical questions under the banner 'anti-development'. Environmental movements questions and fights against this tendency. According to Vandana Shiva:

*The emergence of social movement around ecological issues related to forests and water systems, indicates that it is the marginalized communities in the third world for whom the protection of nature is essential for survival. From their perspective, it is destructive development which is a luxury that the third world cannot afford. Also, ecology and economics are not opposed but converge in the survival economies of the third world poor.*⁶

All the environmental movements that have occurred in different parts of the country were people's movements. People initiated and worked for these movements, where they planned the strategies, suffered losses, and enjoyed victories. All these movements were not started as environmental movements. They had a larger social character over environment, but it is the environmental philosophy or environmental ideology that made them environmental in nature. Environmental philosophy or ideology means common man's realization and vision of their rights over natural resources, which they have been using

for centuries. The main ideological contribution from these movements is the realization of the need to control greed and limiting the needs by employing some sense of justice among people. These environmental movements show that it is people's coordinated action towards environmental crisis that gives solution rather than the policies declared by government.

2. Philosophy of Environmentalism

In contrast to all other movements in the history of thought, environmental movements stand apart. They go beyond the cause of promoting human interests, are multi-dimensional and have the deepest implication on society. They fight against poverty, ignorance, overpopulation, crime, and inequalities; and stand for freedom, compassion, and knowledge and self-realization. Their standpoint is more radical and it aims at sustainable, progressive development. The grassroots environment resistance organization has mainly emerged from a variety of oppositional political movements motivated by anti-colonial, national, independence, and Marxist movements. Most of the groups stand for different ideologies but their primary concern was common, such as socio-economic and religious concerns.

Ramachandara Guha and Madhav Gadgil identify three strands within the dominant ideologies of India's environmentalism.⁷ The first strand in the ideology is influenced by moral and religious perspective that rejects modernity. It stands for traditional points and attacks against capitalist and industrialist development because they create a disharmony in social and ecological environment. It calls for a return to the pre-colonial village life style.

The second strand, which had the strong backup of Marxist ideology, finds the faults with capitalism. The capitalists' over exploitation of natural resources are the root of degradation. Marxists point out that only by creating economically just society one can think of ecological harmony. The final is known as appropriate technology, which stands for a connecting link between agriculture and industries. Such connecting bonds can be used for promoting technologies for social liberation process. Elliott Sober points out that there are two main philosophical problems for environmentalism.⁸ They are:

- 1) Most philosophers agree that environmental movements, irrespective of their political alliances, finds considerable theoretical difficulties in justifying environmental movements.
- 2) There is a need for revolutionary reassessment of ethical norms with regard to environment.

Elliott Sober also points out the main difference between environmentalist and an animal liberationist:

Environmentalists care about entities that by no stretch of imagination have experiences (e.g. mountains). What is more, their position does not force them to care if individual organisms suffer pain, so long as the species is preserved. Steel traps may outrage an animal liberationist because of the suffering they inflict, but an environmentalist aiming just at the preservation of a balanced ecosystem might see here no cause for

complaint. Similarly, environmentalists think that the distinction between wild and domesticated organisms is important, in that it is the preservation of 'natural' (i.e. not created by the artificial interference of human beings). Objects that matters, whereas animal liberationists see the main problem in terms of the suffering of any organism – domesticated or not...⁹

Sober continues:

Both animal liberationists and environmentalists wish to broaden our ethical horizons – to make us realize that is not just human welfare that counts. But they do this in very different, often conflicting, ways. It is no accident that at the level of practical politics the two points of view increasingly find themselves at loggerheads. This practical conflict is the expression of a deep theoretical divide...¹⁰

2.1. Environmental Conflict

By analyzing the environmental movement at the global level, one can easily assume that there is a grave difference between rich and poor, between developed and developing. Aldous Huxley, an English writer, often points out that the support and love for nature could only exist in benign temperate ecologies, it could scarcely export to the dangerous tropics. The environmental conflict is a most important ethical question. The conflict puts forth that the worship of nature

comes only for the people who lies in a cool and temperate climate. For the people who live in harsh climatic conditions, they cannot love nature but think of it as dominating.

The above-mentioned conflict is a Western idea. It is a Western contribution in the sense that the Western man after having denaturalized land to agricultural lands and agricultural land to golf courses can find aboriginal nature only in forests. The Indian episode is different but still, the conflict remains in another form between poor and rich. This conflict is between developed and developing countries. The fundamental difference is that in the developed countries, environmental movement is closely related with post-industrialized society whereas in the developing countries, such as India, the environmental movements emerged in pre-industrial process. Ramachandra Guha points out that "Nature based conflicts are at the root of the environmental movement in countries such as India. These conflicts have their root in a lopsided, iniquitous and environmentally destructive process of development in independent India."¹¹

Ramahandara Guha brilliantly classifies this variety of environmentalism in a table. It is the environmentalism for the affluence versus environmentalism for the survival, the environmentalism for improved quality versus the environmentalism for livelihood. The table is as follows.

Table-1
Varieties of environmentalism by Ramachandran Guha¹²

	Materialist	Non-materialist
In affluent countries	Reaction against the increased impact of the effluents of affluence e.g. the environmental justice movement in the United States, the antinuclear movement.	Cultural shift to post-material quality of life values and increased appreciation of natural amenities because of declining marginal utility of abundant easily obtained material commodities.
In poor countries	The environmentalism of the poor i.e. the defense of livelihood and communal access to natural resources, threatened by the state or by the expansion of the market	Biocentric Eastern religions as distinct from anthropocentric religions
	Reaction against environmental degradation caused by unequal exchange, poverty, population growth	Essentialist eco-feminism (poor women intrinsically close to natures)

Source: Ramachandra Guha and J. Martinez Alier, ed., Varieties of Environmentalism: Essays North and South (London: Earth Scan Publications Ltd, 1997) p. 17

2.2. Ecological Movement and Cultural Philosophy

Although, the environmental philosophy of India starts from the age-old traditions, the present-day environmental philosophy is the result of hot debates in India on environmental issues and deeper cultural experiences unique to the subcontinent as a whole and particular to the locality. Andrew Jamison points out that in India, the solutions to environmental problems came not from science and technology, but from cultural, philosophical, and religious perspectives. He says:

In India and other developing countries, Science and Technology were not so much seen as providing solutions to environmental and social ills as being themselves a major part of the problem. The "Paradigm" or interpretive lens through which the world was seen tended to be

cultural and critical, and the frame works of understanding were drawn from such academic subjects as history and anthropology, philosophy and psychology, as well as from the ideas of those intellectuals who were articulating the messages of critical movements...¹³

A spirituality-based environmental movement has many long lasting advantages than the one without it. The environmental movements that lack spiritual dimension are not getting desirable strength and direction. If it has some spiritual contents, then gradually such movements can convert into mass movements.

What is needed is an original vision which addresses our current situation fully. It should provide a coherent framework of values and ideas based on definition of a

*person which puts him or her in a broader context; how a person interacts with and affects (or ought to interact with and affect) other people, other species, and the environment generally. It should open up ways in which we can contribute, and are inspired to contribute, to our local and global community...*¹⁴

As the so-called affluent countries in Europe try to expand its market-oriented economy in third world countries, they face strong rejection there. The main source of this rejection is the countries' cultural heritage. Such cultural philosophies are the backbone of village communities, which they were preserving like their soul. It is because of this cultural heritage that India has a stronger and deeper democracy than free-market democracy. So the concept of sustainable development is viewed as an extension of cultural transformations by which the visionary ideas are applied in environmental movement.

Indian civilization with its long history of traditional background has been very sensitive to natural ecosystems. All the natural resources were used and consumed in India according to the social norms of the country. These social norms were coded mainly on the purpose of sustainable use. The most important difference in the environmental movements of the East and the West is that in the East it is the common people who initiate and are informed about environmental movements.

The country's present-day environmental awareness and environmental movements originated from traditional society in rural India. The main reason for this is that Indians engaged cultural philosophy at the level of relationship between society and nature. The environmental movement originated from the lower segment of the society and travelled up to the upper segment. It is the common people who informed the intellectuals about ecological crisis. For the commons, destruction of nature means destruction of value system in society. So the reverence to nature has a strong link with harmony of the people.

This nature–people harmony deteriorated during British rule. The utilization of natural resources changed our value system drastically during the British period. Natural resources began to be exploited according to the needs of the Western people who were customers of East India Company. The Company's officials were always conscious of destroying Indian ethical value principles. They were convinced of the theory that to dominate a country, one needs to break ethical principles prevalent in that country. The society which has the absence of moral principles is easier to rule. This resulted into the forced cultivation of commercial crops and gradually poverty and deprivation started to spread its evil hands. For countering these evils, people united locally and tried to regain control over natural resources. That was the beginning of environmental movements in India. Among the pre-independent environmental movement the most prominent ones were Indigo movement, land right movement, and forest movement.

The irony is that India continued the same policies on environment even after attaining freedom. The colonial

framework of exploiting natural resources continued in independent India. The rulers failed to provide alternative mechanism to the problems of environment. They failed to acknowledge India's vast heritage and blindly followed Western policies and idealization. The present-day ecology movements are fighting against these policies. Another interesting feature of these movements is that one donot find too many intellectuals working for the movement. The soldiers of the movements are marginalized sections of society including women, tribals, and peasants.

The term 'liberation ecology' denotes the integration of critical approach to ecology with ideas and ideals derived from post-structural philosophy. Liberation ecology tries to understand and unify environmental practices and knowledge in a way that it can set for reformation. Although the presumption of liberation ecology can be traced in Marx's society nature relationship, Indians and Indian philosophy practised it long before Marx. In Marxian terms the initial steps in liberation ecology are that first nature is humanized and then humans are socialized. The main factors that helped in the emergence of alternative terms of environmental practice and knowledge are Marxian notions of ideology, critiques of Enlightenment reason, and the objections to Western models of development. So in the search for alternative ways and means to perceive environment naturally resulted in an approach to Eastern systems. In fact, Vandana Shiva confidently claims that the universal feature of Indian and other Asian environmental movements is that they succeeded in creating new value system, new approach to rationality and a new economics for a new civilization.¹⁵

2.3 Gandhian Eco Philosophy and Ethics

Gandhi never wrote anything on ecology and environment, but we can find Gandhi as a man who practiced the principles of environmental ethics in his life. Gandhi preached and practiced environmental ethics, based on the ethical principles of Indian philosophy. As an ardent opponent of anthropocentric concept of nature, all his writings were concerned with man's attitude. He formulated the seven sins of mankind that can be considered as his basis of environmentalism also. The seven sins are:¹⁶

- (1) Politics without ideology
- (2) Business without morality
- (3) Money without work
- (4) Education without character
- (5) Science without conscience
- (6) Service without humanity
- (7) Devotion without ethics

Gandhi's environmentalism is mainly based on ethical principles of Ahimsa, Satya, Asteya, Brahmacharya, and Aparigraha. Gandhi always advised that if we want to solve the environmental problems, we should reorient our ways of life and our environment. The way of life is influenced by our ways of thinking on the philosophy of life. Gandhi always talked about changing the society by changing the behaviour of people. According to him, society cannot be rid of its evils in a single day. Before trying to change the society, people should change their own behaviours, and then those changes will

naturally reflect on the society. So thinking is primary step for change, and this thinking should be in harmony with one's environment. As an environmentally conscious person, Gandhi was a strict vegetarian. The reason for his vegetarianism was that plants are the primary producers and as long as we maintain the Earth in a good condition vegetarian food will always be available for future generations also. Although Gandhi was not an environmental philosopher in any sense, nor his wide range of writings says about ecology, he is still considered as forerunner of Indian environmental movement. It is because Gandhi's name and charisma is attached with numerous social and political reform movements. As a strong critique of Western model of industrialization, he implicitly expressed the need for a holistic relationship between man and his environment. The famous figures of Indian environmental movement, whether it be Baba Ampte or Sunderlal Bahuguna, Medha Patkar or Vandana Shiva, have all acknowledged that they received inspiration from Gandhiji and Gandhian philosophies.

The most crucial and most important point in Gandhian ethics is the equalization of ends and means. Gandhi gives equal importance to ends and means, and declares that ends and means are convertible terms in his philosophy of life. By denouncing Machiavellian principles, Gandhi challenged the Marxist view that ends justify means. Marxism adopts the view that if the ends are good, concern about means should be banned. The Gandhian view promotes non-violence that results in harmonious relation in nature.

The end in Gandhian ethics is Satyagraha. By Satyagraha, Gandhi means the attainment of truth which exists in every spatio-temporal manifestations. According to Gandhi, the way or means to attain this end is ahimsa, and when ahimsa is put into practice, it is called nirahara in Gandhian terms. Therefore, Nirahara Satyagraha is practical application of ethical principles in Gandhian philosophy.

According to Gandhi, the term ahimsa admits the ethical virtues of Indian philosophy. The foundation for Gandhian ecology starts from the following five ethical principles:

- (1) Truth or Satya
- (2) Non-violence or Ahimsa
- (3) Aparigraha
- (4) Asteya
- (5) Brahmacharya

The social aspect of Gandhian ethics has wider connotations. The Gandhian term 'society' does not refer to humans alone, but the harmonious co-existence of every manifestation on this earth. In such a society, every being has equal importance and man is only one among the various manifestations of nature. By this, it is clear that Gandhi attacked the anthropocentric claim over nature. Gandhi ever gave undue importance to man. According to him, in nature every being is equal and strives for perfection.

Gandhian ethics stands for the ecological balance between all species. It speaks that ethical life is possible only when all the members of this earth gets opportunities to

manifest itself. This means, each beings' right should be protected along with man. Gandhi defines dharma as anything which preserves life on earth. In this sense, dharma is equated with ahimsa also.

Gandhian concept of religion is worth noticing as it is an ideal example of ecological balance between all manifestations. Gandhian religion is not concerned with man alone, but peaceful co-existence of all beings on this earth. It is because of this concept that Gandhi asked to worship cow. For him, cow stands for all the silent creatures among God's creation, so for Gandhi, religious experience is possible only when man can experience fellowship with all creatures.

The concept of compassion to all beings and nature conservation is implied in Gandhian ideals. He staunchly criticized the way in which industrialization is being carried out. He feared that industrialization will make all citizens mere consumers and there will be no place for village products. According to him, all villages must be a self-sufficient unit, capable of producing whatever they want on their own in a rational manner. Gandhi criticized that India is adopting Western ways of industrialization without considering the indigenous factors of India and Indian villages. According to him, the overuse and over spread of machine culture will dehumanize the culture of India. The overuse of machine culture will result in mass production by a single individual instead of production by masses. This will result in concentration of wealth in a small group, which adversely affect the country's growth and widen the gap between the rich and the poor.

Gandhian social philosophy, known as Sarvodaya, means upliftment of all. It includes every spatio-temporal manifestation. According to R.K. Gupta, "As distinguished from the utilization ideal, the ideal of Sarvodaya consists in the promotion of greatest good of all, including animals."¹⁷ Gandhian concept of Sarvodaya firmly believes that by nature all men are good. This has extensions to the non-human world also.

2.4 Chipko – Ecological Philosophy of an Environmental Movement

The Chipko Andolan is considered to be the mother of ecological movements in India. In different ways, the philosophy of the movement is being carried forward to all parts of the country. The movement adopted various strategies to spread the message of the movement. In one of the songs about the Chipko, the workers sang:

*Sister, it is a fight to protect
Our mountains and forests,
They give us life
Embrace the life of the living trees and streams
Clasp them to your hearts
Resist the digging of mountains
That brings death to our forests and streams
A fight for life has begun
At Sinsyaru Khala¹⁸.*

The song graphically picturises people's apprehension on the destruction of nature in the name of development. The

Chipko movement started mainly because the post-independent India followed the same policies formulated by the British, which were inimical to the public. The movement worked as a union of humans with nature. Women and children played crucial and active roles in this movement because of which the Chipko movement is one of the most celebrated environmental movements in the world. Sundarlal Bahuguna, the prime mover and philosopher of the movement, points out that ecological problem in Himalaya is not an isolated event. It has its roots in the nature of man and the spread of materialistic culture. This materialistic culture contributed to the anthropocentrism. The leaders of the Chipko movement, Bahuguna and Chandī Prasad Bhatt point out that the main reason for ecological deterioration is the alienation of modern scientific true needs of the people.

Philosophically, the Chipko movement can be considered an extension of Gandhian philosophy. It took place in post-independent India, but maintained continuity between pre-independent and post-independent India. Throughout the independence movement, there was no use of violence from the followers of Gandhi and the workers of the Chipko movement inherited this non-violent strategy from Gandhians. Vandana Shiva views the Chipko movement in a wider context and explains that this movement helped to expose the social and ecological costs of short term growth-oriented forest management. According to Shiva:

*The movement underwent a qualitative transformation from being based merely on conflicts over resources to conflicts over scientific perceptions and philosophical approaches to nature. This transformation also led to that element of scientific knowledge which has allowed Chipko to reproduce itself in ecological and cultural contexts. The slogan has become the philosophical and scientific message of the movement, and has laid the foundations of an alternative forestry science which is ecological in nature and oriented towards public interest.*¹⁹

The Chipko movement as a whole can be considered as an unrelenting fight against neo-colonial values which tried to dethrone Indian value system. The growth of the Chipko movement is attributed to the seeds of Indian ethical principles in the form of Gandhian philosophies. It is a movement of innocent rural people, and Bahuguna worked as medium for these people. It is these illiterate people with Bahuguna who proclaimed to the world that forests bear air, water and soil; not timber and dollar. Bahuguna's concept of development is revolutionary, as for him, nothing is development if the activity pollutes air, water, and soil in any form. According to him, this world is rich with ideologies and philosophies but deficient with implementation and morality. For Bahuguna, the greatest contribution of material world is war, poverty, and pollution. The Chipko symbolizes fight against these evils and not just protecting the trees of Himalayas alone.

The Chipko movement is founded on a strong religious and moral sanction. This is evident from Bahuguna's religious narratives, folk songs, and poems celebrating the value of nature and humans' relations with it. Bahuguna points out that Indian wisdom is represented by the saints who meditated

deep in the forest and produced best piece of wisdom ever in the world. The Chipko is an organization which rejects the concept of scientific forestry, technology, and businessmen who see nature as a commodity for exchange of money. Based on the traditional Indian ethical values, the Chipko considers nature as a union of all creatures, living and non-living.

Like Gandhi, Bahuguna also is an ascetic who has deep knowledge of Hinduism and other spiritual texts. He believes that to change the world you need to have only two things, namely personal morality and unselfishness. In an interview given to Ranchor Prime, author of the celebrated work Hinduism and Ecology, Bahuguna says:

*Bhagavat Gita, our basic book of Hindu Philosophy, tells us to carry on acting – doing things in this world – but without any desire for the fruits of our action. Every action has some result, good or bad, which we call the fruit of action. . . . The difficulty today is that we have big heads – too much knowledge – so we try to solve all our problems just with knowledge. Unfortunately our destinies today are being decided by intellectual prophets and technocrats. Modern man has a big head, very feeble hands and no heart. We are the problems we are facing on every front.*²⁰

Bahuguna is a man who always stood for the unity of creatures. He says, "Hindus see life everywhere, not only in human being, but in trees, birds, animals and insects – a oneness of life in all creation – and they have worshipful attitude towards this life. Some see nature as a commodity; they see a tree not as a living being, but as timber. But Hindu culture teaches us to worship life".²¹

Bahuguna has been successful in educating masses, especially women and children. It is because of women's active participation that the Chipko became a success story. He proved that by educating women, we are helping the whole family to get rid of its ills. As a unique personality, he attracted large crowds wherever he went. He organized padayatras, to organise rural people and spread the message of the Chipko to children by storytelling.

Ramachandra Guha, who did an extensive study about the Chipko movement, says about Bahuguna:

*Bahuguna's method of functioning is far removed from that of self-seeking politicians. A non-political person, he was able to strike a chord in the hearts of those disenchanted with the hypocrisy of politicians and the electoral process. Gandhian methods of non-violence and Bahuguna's personal asceticism were appreciatively responded to by the predominantly Hindu peasantry. The capacity for physical suffering and spirit of sacrifice in an age of selfishness were constantly marvelled at by villagers who read into these acts, the renunciation of worldly ambition as exhorted by Hindu scriptures.*²²

Movements, such as the Chipko, are embodiments of people's resistance for survival. For the peasants, it is a struggle for existence but for the upper class, forests are meant for recreation or profit. When the villages maintained and

controlled their forests, it was their resource to service and forests played a crucial role in evolving various art forms and folklores. But the government took away the authority of the forests from the villagers and declared it as reserved forests. With this change, the villagers not only lost the means for survival but also a whole generation of cultural forms. So conflicts over natural resources became a matter of right. The Chipko movement successfully proved this point.

According to Vandana Shiva, this transformation of common property right to private property right means the exclusion of right to survive for large sections of society. She says:

*The realization that under conditions of limited availability, uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources involves taking away resources from those who need them for survival has been an underlying element of Indian philosophy. Prudent and restrained use of resources has been viewed as an essential element of social justice. According to an ancient Indian text, the Isopanishad, a selfish man over utilizing the resources beyond one's needs would result in the utilization of resources over which others have a right. This relationship between restraint in resource use and social justice was also the core element of Gandhi's political philosophy.*²³

The Chipko was essentially an environmental movement with a social background. This social background was regarded as primitive and backward. The propagators of this movement seemed to be the marginalized sections of Indian society. Another striking aspect is that this movement was mobilized by women, and it was a non-violent movement against violence done to the nature. The Chipko is also considered to be a philosophical narrative, which explains the deep moral story behind the Chipko movement. According to Haripriya Rangan:

*A distinctive feature of environmental narratives is that they almost always are, in a sense, morality tales. The particular, moral or telos of an environmental narrative remains constant over time. Consequently, an environmental narrative follows a path that travels through time and space, but inevitably reaches towards, or arrives at the moral position where it first began; it becomes a teleological form that links past actions to the present or a future which culminates or continues its teleos.*²⁴

Sunderlal Bahuguna, one of the prime architects of the Chipko movement began his struggle to protect nature by the end of 1956 when he retired from active politics. His main argument was that there is link between ecological crisis and poverty. In order to establish this link, he studied the Himalayan region closely and put a check on commercial timber extraction in Garhwal regions. He used the rhetoric of tree protection and conservation in educating the masses. Bahuguna stressed the collective identity of masses in their role in preserving the ecosystem of the Himalayan region, there by established a strong bond with local masses.

Bahuguna followed and used Gandhian philosophy and Gandhian principles in all his efforts to educate masses

regarding ecological importance of nature "His descriptions of movements are a skilful blend of Gandhian aphorisms, environmental doom – saying populist critiques of 'Western' models relationship between humans and nature."²⁵ Bahuguna categorically asserts that the striving force behind the Chipko emerged from the ancient philosophies and the rich cultural heritage of India. He describes the peculiarity of Indian masses is that they could see God in nature. He explains that through the Chipko movement, he wanted to point out the importance of values in aranya culture. He directs to make spirituality as the guide to science and technology.

The name 'Bahuguna' developed as a great image in the fight to preserve Mother Nature in India. This was mainly because he used popular idioms and Gandhian aphorisms in all his narratives and public meeting. Common people actively gathered to hear his speeches as he was considered as a leading representative of their own group. According to Rangan:

*Bahuguna's narratives draw on symbolic images that appear perfectly natural; Chipko emerges as a movement struggling to re-establish the link between humans and nature analogous to that between a child and its mother, a biological and social bond necessary for the continuation of life on earth; this relationship is viscerally understood and defended by the village women of Garhwal when they embrace trees in the Himalayas.*²⁶

The philosophy of fundamental freedom is an effort to achieve civil and political rights of individual. The primary purpose of freedom itself denotes enjoyment of rights assigned to each individual. In a democratically free country, each individual is free to act and free to express one's own feelings without effecting any one. Just as freedom movements formed to achieve civil and political rights, in the same manner environmental improvements are formed to fight for ecological right. This ecological right is a birth right of each individual. All the environmental movements aroused out of this negation of ecological rights. Ecological right does not mean man's right over other animals and species. It does not allow man to exploit and dominate nature. Ecological movements are for enjoying the fundamental right of each individual's existence. Ecological existence is possible only where there is no domination. The domination of natural resources by a few questions the ecological existence of many. An environmental movement questions such domination and allows each species to its natural life.

The main agenda behind all environmental movements is not the dream of greening India but common man's rights over natural resources. This ecological right asserts that natural resources are for living and not for business and profit. Rangan writes:

*Thus the core demand of human right, today, is the right to human survival and existence. Human survival and existence include not only decent and safe human life but also protected socio- economic, political and natural environment as such. An environment is the precondition for obtaining sustainable development. Here a healthy natural environment has been taken as a basic factor determining human security.*²⁷

This does not undermine the value of preserving nature from aesthetic point of view. But the fundamental issue has been survival itself. The ecological right of common man to use natural resources and exist along with other species is being threatened by the powerful multinational companies in their greed to exploit natural resources for profit.

The Chipko attacked this commercialization of natural resources with the indigenous strategies. They were not against using forest products for day-to-day use but they were against large felling of trees, which were their symbol of existence. The Chipko was a fight against this colonialism and industrial capitalism, which transferred the forests and its products under the state monopoly. Before colonisation Indians treated forests and their products "as a free gift of nature to which all had equal access."²⁸ The Chipko fought against these colonialists forces and succeeded to a great extent. The methods and strategies used by the Chipko activists were unique. Rangan writes:

*Chipko had made its way into the language with the appearance of two commonly used, not always flattering terms which refer to environmental activism and activities; 'tree-hugging' and 'tree-huggers', whenever Chipko is invoked in the English speaking world, it is as a symbol of people- particularly women – hugging trees, a symbolic act that defies state power, and signifies a bond between humans and nature, and a commitment to nature's protection.*²⁹

The Chipko movement became an inspiratory movement to many activists of environmental movements such as the

Appico movement, the Silent Valley movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan, and many others.

3. Conclusion

Placing an environmental movement in its philosophical and cultural background is picturing conflictual forces of culture and society in India. Looking at India in its spiritual perspectives, one finds that India's cultural context developed in the background of nature. The background of ecological movement is man's realization that reason and rationality cannot solve all the problems. To redeem the curses of technology that resulted in the destructions of natural resources, man realized that new efforts are needed. According to Rajendra Singh:

*The ecology movements constitute transnational, biophilic, universalized and moral movements. Their basic commitment and fundamental ideology not only transcend the human categories of cast, class, race, religion and nations but the categories of species divisions and the divisions of organic and inorganic world also. This movement is a unique event which brings together the otherwise divided humans on one platform around a single issue, mobilizes them to struggle for one cause, the defense of all living beings, born and unborn.*³⁰

The recent environmental movements in India not only raise the issues that emerged as a result of human exploitation of nature, but also work as catalysts in adopting our inherent values which give pivotal significance to nature. These environmental movements are aimed to equip people to follow our philosophical tradition of preservation of nature.

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