

The Relivency of Chipko Movement in Present Era (21th Century) To Environment Threat

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Abstract

During the 1970's, the Chipako Movement mobilized popular opposition to Commercial forestry in the India Himalaya. Today, the legacy of this Movement remains contentious for protection of natural resources.

This paper divided with the Introduction of topic, Definition of this movement, philosophy behind this movement, importance of this movement in present scenario and finally submitted a brief conclusion with some suggestions.

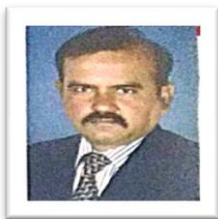
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Introduction

Chipko movement is an environmental movement which originated in the Himalayan region of Uttar Pradesh (now Uttarakhand) in 1973 spread over to Indian Himalayas. Chipko a Hindi word means “to hug” or “to cling to” and reflects the demonstrators’ primary tactic of embracing the trees to impede the loggers. It is a movement by rural villagers, particularly women; aimed at protecting trees and forests slated for government-backed logging, against the development projects as it depends on vast amounts of natural resources and their injudicious use and exploitation, against the western model of development which is theorized under the term of ‘modernisation’. Modernisation is the process of change towards those types of social, economic and political systems that have developed in the western Europe and North America as stated by Eisenstadt in 1966.

The Himalayan region is characterized by high mountains and valleys, with different types of vegetation, flowers, pastures and glaciers and keeps the atmospheric circulation in balance over a large part of the Indian subcontinent. This region also gives rise to the Ganga-Yamuna river system with tributaries such as the Bhagirathi, Alakananda, Sharda and others which are born out of glaciers. The rainwater gradually released to the rivers. The forests help prevent soil erosion and the food system also depends on it. A disruption in this interrelated system led to the imbalance of the entire ecosystem. Chipko is an environmental movement which started with having a conflictual interest of the people of Garhwal with center over the rights of the use of natural resources as latter snatches all the rights regarding the use of forest resources from them which was previously communally owned by them in the name better management of these resources but the hidden motive was something else.

It's concern of preserving the forests resources and maintaining the ecological balance between forests and human as they were very much aware of the consequences the dis-balance between the which get visible in the form of soil erosion, loss of habitat, water level got decreased, flooding, and etc. The Chipko Movement is an ecological movement, concerned with the preservation of forests and thereby with the maintenance of the traditional ecological balance in the Himalayan region, where hill people have traditionally enjoyed a positive relationship with their environment. It was a movement which carries an element of sustainability and thought of preserving the valuable limited natural



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resources from the rampant exploitation and appropriation of resources and various developmental projects. Thus, it strives to maintain the traditional status quo between the people and the environment.

Aim of the Study

Chipako' Andolan even more pertinent into today's world, hence we need revisiting detenets of the movement.

Genesis

Emergence of Chipko Movement can be traced back to the drastic changes made in forest management and utilization during the colonial period with the Forest laws. The Forest Act which arises conflict. Before 1865, forest dwellers were free to exploit the forest wealth but after the report of the then superintendent of Burma, British rulers issued a memorandum which restricts the rights of people to forest dwellers over forest resources. It was further modified in 1894 which stated -

"The sole object with which State forests on which are administered is the public benefit. In some cases, the public to be benefited is the whole body of tax payers; in others the people on the track within which the forest is situated; but in almost all cases the constitution and preservation of a forest involve, in greater or lesser degree, the regulation of rights and restriction of privileges of users in the forest areas which may have previously been enjoyed by the inhabitants of its immediate neighborhood. This regulation and restrictions are justified only when the advantage to be gained by the public is great and the cardinal principle to be observed is that the rights and privileges of individuals must be limited otherwise than for their own benefit, only in such degree as is absolutely necessary to secure that advantage".

In actual practice, however, all these pious declarations were set aside whenever they came in the way of British interests. For example, forests in Nagaland and the Terai were unscrupulously cut to meet the increasing demand of wood during both world wars. The conflict arises when the communally managed forests resources with a traditional social mechanism of sustained productivity goes in the hand of colonial administrators for the unlimited exploitation and appropriation of forest resources by the private contractors. A big rally was held to protest against forest act at Tilar in 1930. The rally ended with the murder of 17 commoners by the Royal army. In 1949, the Tehri Garhwal region constituting part of Uttar Pradesh was annexed to the Indian federation. In remembrance of the 17 martyrs, May 30 is observed as the 'Forest Day' every year.

The New Forest Policy of 1952 was framed on the line of post-colonial forest policy which aimed at maximization of revenue from forests by replacing the broad leaf trees such as oak and rhododendron from fast growing and

high yielding species such as Eucalyptus. India continued on the colonial path of commercialization and encroachment by the private contractors were continued as it was happening previously but due to the rapid increase in developmental projects in Himalayan region of Uttar Pradesh with the conclusion of Sino-India border conflict resulted into a better connectivity of Himalayan regions with plains which invites more exploitation and appropriation of forest resources by distant private contractors. This forest policy adversely affected the climatic patterns in the hills, leading to frequent floods and droughts which responsible for the genesis of strong movement during the early 1970s.

Philosophy of The Himalayas

Due to its geographical location, Garhwali society was insulated of outside influence and its dense forests act as defense of foreign invasion in pre-colonial era which helps them in keeping their culture enact and traditional method of ensuring sustained productivity. As the people of Garhwal were largely depended on the forests resources for their livelihood they accorded a high value to nature and its creations including trees, mountains, rivers, etc., and rituals related to them were zealously observed. There were rituals such as daily tree worshipping which reflected the philosophy of himalaya - nature is the mother which provides us a means of subsistence for living. The concept of peaceful protest is an old age in Garhwal society as "Dhandak". Dhandak was a form of protest used by them urging monarch to remove the corrupt officials or repeal laws which they felt were detrimental to them. Hence, when mother earth got injured due to the continuous encroachment of private contractors for the monetary benefit in the name of development backed by modernization against the system of traditional sustainable economy the people of Garhwal raised their voices and peacefully protest with the values of non-violence and got success with the 15-year ban on commercial felling.

Chipako Events

Chipko movement does not emerges out of the blue rather it was a cumulation of protests which was initiated by the locals, mainly women, against the commercial felling. The first Chipko action took place 'in 1973 when around 300 ash trees had been auctioned in Mandal to a manufacturer of sports goods. With the protest against it by the women of the region led by a 75-year-old Shyama Devi, the contractor withdrew but the focus subsequently shifted to the Alakananda valley, in the village of Reni. When the Forest department announced an auction of almost 2500 trees in the Reni forest overlooking the Alakananda river, which had flooded in 1970, Bhatt reminded the villagers of the earlier flood and warned of more landslides

and more floods if the remaining forests were cut down. The commercial contractors had to backtrack their activities because of the constant vigilance on the activities of the contractors by villagers who were mostly women as the male were migrated to cities to earn. On one such occasion, sensing the absence of men from the village, the commercial contractors sent their labour to axe the trees before the villagers get to mobilise and start protecting the trees. Later when women spotted it, they mobilised and hugged the trees in order to prevent the felling which was led by Gaura Devi, head of the local village women's organisation Mahila Mangal Dal and Gunga Devi, along with their co-workers, the movement was a much successful one. Consequently, the government imposed a ban on the commercial green felling in the region. After the success story of Mandal village, the workers of Dasholi Gram Swarajya Sangh and Sunderlal Bahuguna (a Gandhian activist) started sharing the movement's tactics with the local people of other villagers.

In October 1977, the auction of Adwani forests took place against which Bahuguna undertook a fast but despite the popular discontent the auction undertaken. In the first week of December 1977, the Adwani forests were scheduled to be felled. A group led by a Bachhni Devi, who was a wife of one of the contractors cum head of the village, came forward against the felling and it was backed by Dhoom Singh Negi who took a fast itself. By tying a thread around the tree women take a vow to protect it and guarded the forest while discourses on the role of forests in Indian life from ancient texts went on. It was here in Advani that the ecological slogan "What do the forests bear? soil, water, and pure air" was born. Later, policemen came with a two-truck load of armed forces to keep the people away from the felling operation but their plan got failed as each tree was being guarded by the people.

In December 1978, Bahuguna started a fast unto death against the large felling planned by U.P. Forest Development Corporation led in the Badiyargarh area which resulted in the arrest of Bahuguna on 11th day of his fast. Arrest of Bahuguna fuels the protest, folk poet Ghanashyam Raturi and priest Khima Shastri led the movement as thousands of men and women from all the villages around joined them in the Badiyargarh forests. The people remained in the forests and guarded the trees for eleven days, when the contractors withdrew. The Chipko demand for declaration of Himalayan forests as protection forests instead of production forests for commercial exploitation was recognized at the highest policy-making level. The late Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, after meeting with Bahuguna, issued a directive for a 15-year ban

on commercial green felling in the Himalayan forests of Uttar Pradesh.

Leadership and Organization

The Chipko movement is a non-violent movement which stands on the line of Gandhian Satyagraha. The philosophical and conceptual articulation of the ecological view of the Himalayan forests has been done by Mira Behn and Sunderlal Bahuguna, the organizational foundation for it being a women's movement was laid by Sarala Behn with Bimla Behn in Garhwal and Radha Bhatt in Kumaon. Sunderlal Bahuguna gave his prominent contribution by giving it a Gandhian (non-violent) nature. An environmentalist and Gandhian social activist 'Chandi Prasad Bhatt' was the founder of modern India's Chipko movement and a cooperative organization named 'Dasholi Gram Swarajya Sabha' (now Dasholi Gram Swarajya Mandal) in 1964 to foster small industries for the rural people using local resources. Chandi Prasad Bhatt and his fellow workers involved completely in the protest of large-scale industrial logging after Alakananda valley get severely hit by the flood which resulted in the first organized Chipko protest initiated in Mandal village of Chamoli district in April 1973. The rapid spread of resistance, success in enforcing changes become possible due to awareness created by Ghanashyam Raturi through his folk songs, Dhoom Singh Negi and Chandi Prasad Bhatt at a grassroot level. The Chipko movement would not be possible without the efforts of women.

Strategy and Resources

As the leaders of Chipko movement carried a Gandhian philosophy of non-violence (ahimsa) for resisting the environmental degradation and external control of natural resources. Hence, the strategies they embraced for the mobilization of masses and for the success of the movement was non-violent in nature. Some of the non-violent strategies which were visible in Chipko Movement are *pradarshan*, *dharna*, *bhook hartal*, and *chipko*.

Pradarshan

Pradarshan is demonstration of popular disaffection and the strength of numbers.

Dharna

Dharna or sit-down strike aims specifically at stopping economic activities that threaten the survival options of the resource dependent communities.

Bhook Hartal

Bhook Hartal or hunger fast is widely observed by the popular leader is a coercive technique to compel the state to yield, in fear of the consequences of the leader succumbing to the fast.

Chipko

Chipko means "to hug" or "to embrace" was the key strategy of this movement which was adopted from another environmental

movement i.e., Bishnoi movement's strategy plays such a huge role in its success that the entire movement got named over it.

There were other tactics which were used by its leaders such as the use of print media. Sunderlal Bahuguna wrote signed articles in newspapers related to the movement and communicate it to all over the world as it draws attention towards the struggle. When there is a widespread organized protest occurred in 1972 against commercial exploitation of forests, the folk songs of Ghanshyam Raturi were the central to the mobilization of the supporters for the protest which reminded them of their culture. Here is the excerpt of the poem by him:

*“Embrace our trees
Save them from being felled,
the property of our hills
Save it from being looted.”*

Conclusion

A Chipko Movement is an environmental movement which emerges as a resistance against the commercialization of forests that is western model of development which promotes commercialization of resources, manipulation of nature by 'man' and thinks that natural resources are income. It is a movement which advocates for the sustainable growth over the exploitative western led economic growth. Vandana Shiva argued that economic growth was a new colonialism, draining resources away from those who needed them most. The discontinuity lay in the fact that it was now new national elites, not colonial powers, that masterminded the exploitation on grounds of 'national interest' and growing GNPs, and it was accomplished with more powerful technologies of appropriation and destruction.

E.F. Schumacher said that the changes we are experiencing in both quantity and quality of man's industrial process, have produced an entirely new situation- a situation resulting not from our failures but from what we thought were our greatest successes. The massive exploitation and appropriation of our natural resources for various development projects led to the ecological dis-balance which resulted into a frequent case of floods, landslides, extinction

of flora and fauna species and in real sense it is not our victory rather a great loss.

Recently, on February 7, Nanda Devi glacier burst near the Reni village of Chamoli district in Uttarakhand one of the villages from where Chipko Movement emerges triggered a massive flood in the Joshimath area causing casualties of 38 and over 166 were missing. This incident is an indicator that we crossed the 'tolerance margin' of benign nature and we have to stop taking natural resources as income rather than treat it as an irreplaceable capital asset which is limited and valuable. As Mahatma Gandhi's famous line summarized the whole debate which is that, "The world has enough for everyone's need but not enough for everyone's greed".

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