CHAPTER- 1
ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION:

The present study focuses on the Local Environmental Movements in the Kolhapur District. Therefore, as a part of theoretical/conceptual background, the present chapter deals with concepts such as ‘social movement’, ‘environmental movements’, ‘old’ and ‘new’ social movements and a brief elaboration of major environmental movements in India.

SECTION-I

1] Concept of Social Movement:

The scholars have, in a more general sense, different notions of what constitutes a social movement. The term social movement “first came into use, early in the nineteenth century, it had a more specific meaning: the social movement meant the movement of the new industrial working class, with its socialistic, communistic, and anarchistic tendencies (Sills, David L., 1968: 439). The term “social movement or its equivalent in other Western languages is being used to denote a wide variety of collective attempts to bring about a change in certain social institutions or to create an entirely new order- - -movements occur in society and tend to affect, directly or indirectly, the social order, it would be permissible to apply the term social movement to all them” (Ibid: 438-439). In this context Sills, David (1968: 439) notes that:

Social movements are a specific kind of concerted action groups; they last longer and are more integrated than mobs, masses, and crowds and yet are not organized like political clubs and other associations. A social movement may, however, be comprised of organized groups without having one over all formal organizations (for example, the labour movement, which comprises trade unions, political parties, consumer cooperatives, and many other organizations). Group consciousness, that is, a sense of belonging and of solidarity among the members of a group, is essential for a social movement, although empirically it occurs in various degrees. This consciousness is generated through active participation and may assume various socio-psychological characteristics. By this criterion social movements are distinguished from ‘Social trends’, which are often referred to as movements and are the result of similar but uncoordinated actions of many individuals for example, the suburban movement, fads and fashions.
Definitions of Social Movements:

As defined in International Encyclopedia of Sociology, “a social movement is an organized attempt by a number of people united by a shared belief to effect or resist changes in the existing social order by non-institutionalized means. The ultimate objective of a social movement is what its members see as the betterment of society” (Frank, N. Magill, 1995: 1253).

International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences has defined social movements as “Socially shared demands for change in some aspect of the social order” (Sills, David, 1968: 445).

Martell has defined a social movement as “a collective attempt to further a common interest or goal through collective action outside established institutions” (Martell, Luke 1995: 2).

According to Diani “Social movements are a network of informal interactions between individuals and organizations that engage in collective action on the basis of a shared identity…. Organizations….formal, informal, institutionalized or non-institutionalized can only be considered to be part of a movement if they are networked to other organizations that engage in collective action on similar issues” (c.f. Saunders, Clare 2007: 229).

The functions of Social Movements:

Sills, David L. (1968) noted the following two functions of social movements.

1] The movement contributes to the formation of public opinion by providing for the discussion of social and political problems and through the eventual incorporation of same of the movement’s ideas into dominant public opinion and
2] It provides training of leaders who became part of the political elite and may eventually rise to the positions of leading statesmen.

These two functions have reached the point where the movement, after having changed or modified the social order, becomes part of it, the life cycle of the movement comes to an end- it has become an institution (Sills, David L., 1968: 444).

2] Concept of Environmental Movement:

Environmental movement is a type of “social movement that involves an array of individuals, groups and coalitions that perceive a common interest in environmental protection and act to bring about changes in environmental policies and practices” (Tong, Yanki 2005: 167-168).
Tong, Yanki (2005) points out that environmental movements are also an example of social movements. The emergence and development of social movements depend on the dynamic interaction of three broad sets of factors.

First, social movements are shaped by the broader political constraints and opportunities unique to the national context in which they emerge. These constraints and opportunities involve the institutional structure and informal power relations of a national political system, including the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system, the stability of the elite alignments that undergird the polity, the presence or absence of elite allies for a particular social movement, and the state's capacity and propensity for repression.

Second, organizational resources, informal as well as formal, must be available to mobilize people into collective action and sustain a social movement. Resources may include preexisting organizations, such as informal networks, voluntary associations, and religious groups, as well as the movement initiated organizations. Different types of social movement may need different organizational forms. The organizational culture of a given society may also affect the forms of social movement.

Third, the collective process of interpretation, attribution, and social construction gives meaning and value to collective action. By bringing shared meanings and definitions to their situation, people who feel aggrieved about some aspect of their lives can become more optimistic that, by acting collectively, they can redress their problem. Without proper framing, it is highly unlikely that people will mobilize even when afforded opportunities to do so (Tong, Yanki 2005: 169-170).

Definitions of Environmental Movements:

According to Rootes, Christopher (1999):

The environmental movements are conceived as broad networks of people and organizations engaged in collective action in the pursuit of environmental benefits. Environmental movements are understood to be very diverse and complex, their organizational forms ranging from the highly organized and formally institutionalized to the radically informal, the spatial scope of their activities ranging from the local to the almost global, the nature of their concerns ranging from single issue to the full panoply of global environmental concerns. Such an inclusive conception is consistent with the usage of the term amongst environmental activists themselves and enables us to consider the linkages between the several levels and forms of what activists call ‘the environmental movement (Rootes, Christopher: 1999: 2).

According to Almeida, Paul and Linda Brewster Stearns (1998):

There are three levels of collective action: 1) the local grassroots movement level; 2) the social movement level; and 3) a cycle of protest. A Local Grassroots Environmental Movement (LGEM) as a movement fighting a particular instance of pollution in a geographically specified region. Local Grassroots Environmental Movements have a limited range of goals that are tied to specific pollution problems. A social movement is a broader struggle
that involves a formal organizations or a federation of loosely affiliated networks. Social movements have a wide range of goals directed at fundamental social and political reform. Finally, a cycle of protest is a specific period of heightened protest involving several social movements spread across different geographical areas and sectors of society. The identification of each level of movement activity is critical to understanding the political environment in which an Local Grassroots Environmental Movement operates (Almeida, Paul and Linda Brewster Stearns 1998: 38).

3) ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Social Movements:

The scholars distinguish between the ‘old and ‘new’ social movements. The main basis on which ‘old’ and ‘new’ social movements are often distinguished has been briefly elaborated by Martell, Luke (1995: 112-114).

i] Location: Old social movements tend to be located in the polity, in political parties, whereas new social movements are autonomous movements outside conventional political institutions.

ii] Aims: Old social movements aim at securing political representation, legislative political reform and rights associated with citizenship in the political community, whereas the new social movements want to defend civil society against political power and redefine culture and lifestyle in civil society rather than pursuing legislative change through the state.

iii] Organization: Old social movement organizations are characterized by formal and hierarchical internal forms of organization, whereas new social movements go for informal or unstructured organization rather than structures of authority.

iv] Medium of Change: Old social movements are oriented towards political institutions through which change can be achieved. The new social movements go for newer and more innovative forms of direct action. They work on new redefinition of meaning and symbolic representation in culture rather than change through political apparatus.

Rootes, Christopher (1999) notes that, “New social movements which emerged from the student movements of the late 1960s, it is environmental movements which have had most enduring influence on politics and which have undergone the most wide-ranging institutionalization in terms both of the professionalisation of their activities and of the regularization of their access to policy-makers (Rootes, Christopher 1999: 1).
Nepal, Padam (2009) argues that, “the new social movements in India emerged because of the failure of the established oppositional forces in India’s national politics, especially the left, and more particularly after the smashing of the Naxal movement, in giving direction and providing organization to the activity of the subaltern, marginal groups in the period characterized by the failure of the National Project and one-party dominance” (Nepal, Padam 2009: 98).

The new social movements, including the environmental movements in India are studied in at least two different ways in India. In this context Nepal, Padam (2009) has pointed out:

First, the leftist perspective which looks at the environmental movement as a displaced form of class struggle, and having its roots in the class-divided Indian society. The second perspective looks at the new social movements as struggles against the centralized state. This perspective although acknowledges the movement as a byproduct of class exploitation, yet it focuses on particular, issue-specific nature of the new social movements.

……..a new social movement including the environmental movement has a dual aspect: general aspect in the sense that predominantly it represents a movement against omnipotent nature of the modern state to which the certain class of people fall a prey; and a particularistic aspect of addressing a specific, localized issue concerning a particular social category like the women’s issue, an environmental issue, issue of displacement of a tribal population from its natural habitation etc. (Nepal, Padam 2009: 98-99).

4] Whether Environmental Movements are ‘Old’ or ‘New’?

The environmental movements are characterized by the features of both old and new social movements have been critically brought out by Martell, Luke (1995: 112-114). The features of environmental movements that fit them in the category of ‘New’ Social Movement include:

i) Some environmental groups are keen to pursue non-hierarchical forms of organization in their movement, playing down the role of hierarchy of leaders.

ii) Many environmental groups prefer grass roots based decentralized form of participation. Many keep on arguing that, political legislation is inadequate without widespread change in our acquisitive value systems and ways of living. This involves changes in modes of consciousness in civil society rather than the passing of new laws through the state.
Some features of ‘Old’ movements in Environmental Movements include:

i) Many environmental organizations are concerned to get politicians to do things to remedy degradation. In the developed world green parties have emerged and they are aimed at getting into political power.

ii) Some 'realists' think that formal leadership structures and hierarchies are the most effective way to pursue political change.

Some scholars categories environmental movements under various labels such as ‘tribal or peasants movement’ or ‘new social movements’, some even title them as ‘middle class’ or ‘elitist movements’ (Reddy, Ratna V. 1998: 685).

SECTION- II

In this section, a brief sketch of origins of environmental movements in India, their causes and a brief descriptive account of major environmental movements in India have been presented.

1] Origin of Environmental Movements in India:

The genesis of concern for environmental protection in India, “can be traced back to the early twentieth century when people protested against the commercialization of forest resources during the British colonial period”(Sahu, Geetanjoy 2007: 3). Again, he notes that, “It was only in the 1970s a coherent and relatively organized awareness of the ecological impact of state-monolithic development process started to develop, to grow into a fully fledged understanding of the limited nature of natural resources and to prevent the depletion of natural resources” (Ibid).

At the international level, growing salience of environmental crisis was brought out by four important events. The first event was the United Nations Conference on ‘Human Environment’ held in Stockholm, Sweden (1972). The second event was publication of the report “Limits to Growth”. The third, release of the report of the Brundtland Commission entitled ‘Our Common Future’ (1987). Fourth, event was the ‘Earth Summit’ in 1992 ((Vig, Norman J. and Regina S. Axelrod 2006: 29; Salunkhe, S. A., 2008: 38-40).

Guha, Ramchandra (1997: 345-346) lists the three events which occurred within the country in 1973, that facilitated debate on environmental issues in India:
First, in April, the government of India announced the launching of Project Tiger, an ambitious conservation programme aimed at protecting the country’s national animal...Indian conservationists, encouraged and helped by the international agencies like World Wildlife Fund and International Union for the Conservation of Nature, were instrumental in bringing pressure on government to create a network of national parks and sanctuaries all over India to protect endangered wildlife.

Second, the publication of an article in Economic and Political Weekly (March 31, 1973) entitled ‘A Charter for the Land’ authored by B. B. Vora, a high official in the ministry of agriculture, which drew attention to the extent of erosion, water logging and other forms of land degradation in the country. The author through this article called for the formulation of an effective policy by the state in this regard and also for the creation of government departments to monitor and manage environmentally appropriate land use patterns. This reflected first official concern relating to the environmental degradation, which subsequently led to the creation of a national Committee for Environmental Protection and Control later that year. The Department of Environment was established in 1980 and a full-fledged Ministry of Environment and Forests was created five years later.

Third, on March 27, 1973, in Mandal, a remote Himalayan village, a group of peasants stopped a group of loggers from felling a stand of trees by hugging the trees. This event sparked a series of similar protests through the 1970s, collectively known as “Chipko” movement. This movement raised basic questions relating to the ecology, equity and social justice and promoted lively debate and action throughout the country.

Thus, “the emergence of environmental debate in contemporary India and renewed scholarly attention towards environmental topics can be attributed to the factors such as the influence of international events/agencies concerning global environmental conditions, growing official recognition of certain environmental problems in the country, and the emergence of environmental movements in India” (Guha, Ramchandra 1997: 345).

A large number of environmental movements have emerged in India especially after 1970s and 1980s. In this context Sahu, Geetanjoy (2007) noted that:

In India, the environmental movement has grown rapidly over the last three to four decades. It has played a key role in three areas such as 1] in creating public awareness about the importance of bringing about a balance between environment and development, 2] in opposing developmental projects that are inimical to social and environmental concerns, and 3] in organizing model projects that show the way forward towards non-bureaucratic and participatory, community-based natural resource management systems (Sahu, Geetanjoy 2007: 7).

As pointed out by Reddy, Ratna (1998), “In India especially after 1970s a large number of environmental movements have emerged. However, some of the
contemporary movements acquired the status of ecological or environmental movements in retrospect as these movements have widened their focus from basic survival needs to ecological concerns” (Reddy, Ratna V. 1998: 685).

**Reasons of the Emergence of Environmental Movements in India:**

Major reasons of the emergence of environmental movements in India have been discussed by Sharma, Aviram (2007) which include reasons such as i) control over natural resources, ii) false developmental policies of the government, iii) socio-economic reasons, iv) environmental degradation/destruction and, v) spread of environmental awareness and media. (Sharma, Aviram, 2007).

**Major Environmental Movements in India:**

As pointed out above, a large number of environmental movements have emerged in India especially after 1970s. These movements have grown out of a series of independent responses to local issues in different places at different times. The emergence of environmental movements is not restricted to any particular part of the country. As pointed out by Karan, P. P. (1994: 32-33):

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, youth organizations and tribal people in the Gandhamardan Hills whose survival is directly threatened by development of bauxite deposits, the opposition to the Baliapal and Bhogarai test range in Orissa, the Appiko Movement in the Western Ghats, groups opposing the Kaiga nuclear power plant in Karnataka, the campaign against the Silent Valley project, the Rural Women’s Advancement Society, formed to reclaim waste land in Bankura district and the opposition to the Gumti Dam in Tripura.……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.

The following map shows the locations of activities of main environmental movements in India.
Fig. 1—Locations of activities of main environmental movements in India.

[Source: The above map has been reproduced from the article by Karan, P. P. (1994): ‘Environmental Movements in India’, American Geographical Society, Vol. 84, No. 1, p. 33]
Some of the best known environmental movements in India have been briefly described below:

1] Bishnoi Movement:

This movement was led by Amrita Devi in which around 363 people sacrificed their lives for the protection of their forests. This movement was the first of its kind to have developed the strategy of hugging or embracing the trees for their protection spontaneously (Nepal, Padam 2009: 136).

2] The Chipko Movement:

The Chipko is one of the world known environmental movements in India. The Chipko movement focused world attention on the environmental problems of the Alaknanda catchment area in the mid Western Himalayas (Santra, S. C. 2009: 827). As Reddy (1998) notes that, “Chipko movement, launched to protect the Himalayan forests from destruction, has its roots in the pre-independence days. Many struggles were organized to protest against the colonial forest policy during the early decades of the twentieth century. 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” (Reddy, Ratna V. 1998: 686). In this context Santra, (2000) notes that:

In 1960, from the point of view of border security a vast network of roads was constructed in this area besides taking up projects of various other types. All this was disastrous for the forests and also total environment of the area felling of trees and rolling them down hills loosened the upper soil which eroded further during rain all this resulting the devastating flood in the Alaknanda in July 1970, which caused havoc in the upper catchment area. It was here the Dasholi Gram Saraiya Mandal (DGSM), Gopeswar, was engaged in social work in the Uttarakhand stepped in the relief works during 1970s flood. The volunteers of the Mandal realized them that forest and land and forest and man were intricately linked. Then they started educating the people about the ill-effect of deforestation in the hill slopes and gradually they geared themselves into a movement (Santra, S. C. 2009: 827).

Reddy (1998) notes that, “in early 1973, the forest department allotted ash trees to a private company. This incident provoked the Dasholi Gram Swarajya Sangha (DGSS) a local cooperative organization to fight against this injustice through lying down in front of timber trucks and burning resin and timber depots as was done in the quit India movement. When these methods were found unsatisfactory, Chandi Prasad Bhat, one of the leaders, suggested embracing the trees to prevent them from
being cut. With its success, the movement has spread to other neighboring areas, and then onwards the movement is popularly known internationally as Chipko movement” (Reddy, Ratna V. 1998: 688).

The name of the movement, that is ‘Chipko’, comes from the word ‘embrace’, in Hindi. It is said that the villagers hugged or embraced or stuck to the trees in the forest to prevent them from being felled by the contractors. The strategy of ‘embracing’ the trees to resist the felling of the trees was thought of by Chandi Prasad Bhatt in a meeting in the Mandal on April 1, 1973. The name ‘Chipko’ was derived from the consensual strategy of clinging on to the trees as a non-violent direct action (Nepal, Padam 2009: 135-136).

Karan (1994) notes that, “by the late 1980s the movement had splintered into two groups that have broad grassroots support and advocate participatory methods which respond to local issues in the context of local social and cultural traditions. One group pursues a strategy that emphasizes ecologically sound development of forest by local people to meet local needs. The second group follows the deep-ecology paradigm of environmental management” (Karan, P. P. 1994: 37).

Reddy, Ratna and Mukul (1998; 1993) points out that, Chipko movement has had six demands- only one of which is complete stoppage of commercial cutting of trees. The other demands include:

1) on the basis of minimum needs of the people, a reorganization of traditional rights should take place; 2) arid forest should be made green with people’s participation and increased tree cultivation; 3) village committees should be formed to manage forests; 4) forest related home-based industries should be developed and the raw materials, money and technique for it should be made available; and 5) based on local conditions and requirements, local varieties should be given priority in afforestation (Reddy, Ratna V. 1998: 687; Mukul 1993: 621).

3) Narmada Bachao Andolan:

The most popular movement in the environmental history of India is the movement against the Narmada River Valley Project (Reddy, Ratna V, 1998: 688). The Narmada is the largest west-flowing river on the Indian peninsula...The Narmada winds its 1,312 km long course to the Arabian Sea through lovely forested hills, rich agricultural plains and narrow rocky gorges in a series of falls (Kothari, Ashish and Rajiv Bhartari 1984: 907). As Karan (1994) notes that:

More than twenty one million people live in the valley, mostly in villages. Many tribal groups, such as the Bhils and the Gonds, occupy the forested
The Narmada valley is the site of one of the world’s largest multipurpose water projects: the Narmada River Development Project, which involves the construction of thirty large dams and many small ones on the river and its fifty-one main tributaries. The project will transform the valley and the lives of its residents and will increase food production and hydropower generation in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra. The construction of dams and reservoirs will displace an estimated one million people and will submerge 350,000 hectares of forestland and 200,000 hectares of agricultural land. The Sardar Sarovar Dam in Gujarat, which is under construction, is facing major opposition from tribal groups that hunt and forage in the jungle canyons and from villagers who are being displaced by the inundation from the reservoir, which will submerge almost 40,000 hectares of land and 250 villages (Karan, P. P. 1994: 37-38).

The Narmada movement started as early as the late 1970s. Reddy (1998) notes that:

To start with, this movement was centered around the issue of human rights…….The main leaders of the movement at present like Medha Patkar were working towards proper rehabilitation programmes for the dam displaced. Due to improper implementation of the rehabilitation programmes by the state, the human rights activists have become the articulators of anti-dam protests. Their demands included complete stopping of the dam, resettlement and rehabilitation benefits to the oustees……..The movement, however, gained wider public attention with mobilization and organization of oustees (mostly tribals) and the joining of the eminent social workers like Baba Amte, Sunderlal Bahuguna and Medha Patkar. Though its wider public attention is due to its coverage (impact) in three states, the most notable feature of this movement is the international support it has received (Reddy, Ratna V. 1998: 688).

As pointed out by Nepal, Padam (2009) the Narmada Bachao Andolan has drawn upon a multiplicity of discourses for protests such as: “displacement risks and resettlement provisions; environmental impact and sustainability issues; financial implications of the project; forceful evictions and violations of civil liberties; issues pertaining to river valley planning and management; implications of Western growth model, and alternative development and appropriate technology among many other. The movement uses various tools of protest such as Satyagraha, Jal Samaran, Rasta Roko, Gaon Bandh, demonstrations and rallies, hunger strikes and blockade of projects” (Nepal, Padam 2009: 197).

4] Appiko Movement:

Appiko Movement is one of the forest-based environmental movements in India. The movement took place in the Uttara Kanada district of Karnataka in the Western Ghats. As Santra (2000: 827-828) notes that:
Karnataka’s Uttar Kannada which forms part of the Western Ghats, is known as the ‘forest district’. The area has rich forest wealth with a typical microclimate for cash crops such as black pepper and cardamom. During the colonial rule, the rich forest resources were exploited; the teak trees were felled to build ships and timber and fuel woods were sent to Mumbai. After independence, the government also began felling trees for revenue and the Forest Department, which continued the colonial forest policy, converted the primordial tropical forests into monoculture teak and eucalyptus plantations…….A group of youth in Balegadde village, protesting against moves to establish teak plantations, wrote to forest officials asking them to stop clearing the natural forest. But this appeal was ignored. Then the villagers decided to launch a movement. They invited S. L. Bahuguna, the architect of Chipko movement and gathered local people to take up oath to protect trees by embracing them. In September 1983, when the axe-men came for felling to the Kalase forests, people embraced the trees and thus the ‘Appiko movement was launched.

Sheth, Pravin (1997) pointed out that, “the Appiko movement succeeded in its three-fold objectives include 1] protecting the existing forest cover, 2] regeneration of trees in denuded land, and 3] utilizing forest wealth with proper consideration to conservation to conservation of natural resources…..The Appiko movement saved the basic life sources for the people- trees like bamboo useful for making handcrafted items which they could sell for earning a few rupees. It also saved medicinal trees for their use by the local people” (Sheth, Pravin 1997: 222).

Further he also notes that, “the movement created awareness among the villagers throughout the Western Ghats about the ecological danger posed by the commercial and industrial interests to their forest which was the main source of sustenance” (Ibid).

5] Silent Valley Movement:

Silent Valley in Kerala has a rich 89 sq. km biological treasure drove in the vast expanse of tropical virgin forests on the green rolling hills. In 1980s, a 200 MW hydroelectric dam on the crystal clear river Kunthipuzha under the Kundremukh project was to come up (Sheth, Pravin 1997: 216). The proposed project was not ecologically viable, as it would drown a chunk of the valuable rainforest of the valley and threaten the life of a host of endangered species of both flora and fauna (Nepal, Padam 2009: 105).

The Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) an NGO, was working for three decades among masses of Kerala for growing environmental awareness……..The
campaign to save Silent Valley turned out to be a public education programme in many respects. The movement in many ways saves the ecosystem of Silent Valley area (Santra, S. C. 2000: 827). Karan (1994) notes that:

The Kerala People’s Science Movement (Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad) is a network of rural school teachers and local citizens that promotes environmental scientific projects in the villages. The movement acknowledged the obvious economic needs of the people of Malbar but concluded that the Silent Valley Project would make only a marginal contribution to regional development. Thus the group opposed the project with a campaign that brought into sharp focus the ecological consequences, specifically the possibility of extinction of species that had evolved over millions of years……The movement began to challenge the idea that energy generated by the dam would benefit the rural people of Kerala. Most of the energy from the project was to be exported to industrialized areas of Kerala and surrounding states. The movement asserted that the local environment would be disrupted with benefits going to Trivandrum, the state capital (Karan, P. P. 1994: 39).

As pointed out by Nepal Padam (2009) the central issue of the Silent Valley protests included: The protection of the tropical rainforest, maintenance of the ecological balance……The campaigns and petitions were the main strategies adopted by the activists in the movement, basing it on the non-violent, Gandhian ideological orientation…..the protest against the destruction of forest, an opposition to ecologically unsustainable development, and above all, maintenance of the ecological balance. (Nepal, Padam 2009: 106).

6] Tehri Dam Conflict:

One of the most protracted environmental movements in the recent years is the movement against the Tehri Dam. The 260.5 meter high Tehri Dam on the Bhagirathi in the Garhwal-Himalayas…….It will prosperity by generating 2,400 MW peaking power, which according to the dam builders, will help in establishing 140 industries cities…….The project has generated controversy since its inception. In spite of objections of several scientists of national and international repute, the project is yet to be modified or stopped (Santara, S. C. 2000: 829). As noted by Reddy (1998):

The Tehri Baandh Virodhi Sangahrsha Samithi founded by veteran freedom fighter Veerendra Datta Saklani has been opposing the construction for more than a decade. The major objections include, seismic sensitivity of the region, submergence of forest areas along with Tehri town etc. Despite the support from other prominent leaders like Sunderlal Bahuguna, the movement has failed to gather enough popular support at national as well as international levels and the government is determined to complete the project. For
according to the latest reports, the construction of the dam is being carried out with police protection as Sunderlal Bahuguna is sitting on fast unto death. After prime minister’s assurance to review the project, Bahuguna ended his fast but construction goes on, though at a slower pace (Reddy, Ratna V. 1998: 687-688).

Ideological Trends in Indian Environmentalism:

Gadgil, Madhav and Guha Ramchandra (1998: 450-472) have identified five broad strands within the environmental movements in India. These strands include:

1] Crusading Gandhians: Crusading Gandhian, “relies heavily on a moral/religious idiom in its rejection of the modern way of life….They argue that the essence of ‘eastern’ cultures is their indifference, even hostility to economic gain….They have worked hard in carrying their message of moral regeneration across the country and indeed across the globe. They have sharply attacked the stranglehold of modernist philosophies particularly those upholding rationalism and economic growth on the Indian intelligentsia….They propagate an alternate, non-modern philosophy whose roots lie in Indian tradition” (Ibid: 465-466).

2] Ecological Marxist: Ecological Marxists, “see the problem in political and economic terms, arguing that it is the unequal access to resources, rather than the question of values, which better explains the patterns and processes of environmental degradation in India. In this sharply stratified society, the rich destroy nature in the pursuit of profit, while the poor do so simply to survive” (Ibid: 466).

3] Appropriate Technology: “This strand of the environmental movement strives for a working synthesis of agriculture and industry, big and small units, and western and eastern technological traditions…….Their emphasis is not so much on challenging the ‘system’ as in demonstrating in practice a set of socio-technical alternatives to the centralizing and environmentally degrading technologies presently in operation” (Ibid: 466-467).

4] Wilderness Enthusiasts: Wilderness Enthusiasts, “have provided massive documentation of the decline of natural forests and their plant and animal species, urging the government to take remedial action…..Wildlife preservationists have used the scientific rhetoric of biological diversity and the moral arguments in favour of
‘species equality’ in pursuit of a more extensive system of parks and sanctuaries and a total ban on human activity in protected areas” (Ibid: 468).

5] Scientific Conservation: Scientific conservationists are concerned with efficiency and management.

According to Ramchandra Guha, “Crusading Gandhians, Appropriate Technologists and Ecological Marxists represent the three most forceful strands in the environment-development debate in India” (Guha, Ramchandra 1988: 2580).

Linkages between Environmental Movements and NGOs:

The most significant feature of environmental movements in India is that, there is involvement of local voluntary organizations or Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in these movements. Many examples can be cited. In case of the famous Chipko movement, the work of Dasholi Gram Swarajya Mandal (DGSM), Gopeswar, which was engaged in social work in the Uttarakhand, was significant. The volunteers of the DGSM realized that forest and land, and forest and man were intricately linked. Then they started educating the people about the ill effects of deforestation in the hill slopes and gradually they geared themselves in the movement. The same is true in case of Silent Valley Movement. The Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), an NGO, was working for three decades among masses of Kerala for growing environmental awareness. This voluntary organization was working with people in popularizing science and appropriate technology and in campaigning against the environmentally destructive development projects. The KSSP launched a campaign against the Silent Valley Project. Many NGOs are also connected with the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Salunkhe, S. A. 2011: 17-18).

During last some years, “voluntary organizations have been increasingly viewed as an integral part of India’s development process. Hundreds of NGOs are working at the micro level, and although environmental concerns are relatively new, they are an overwhelming phenomenon. Indeed, since the beginning of the last decade, almost all Indian NGOs have been working with environmental issues. Community organizations have emerged through local rights and environment. NGOs are local or external interveners that create and support community groups in protecting local rights and environment” (Swain, Ashok 1997: 829).
Significance of Local Environmental Movements:

Rootes, Christopher (2007) points out the significance of the study of local environmental groups and movements in the following words:

Local environmental campaigns are ubiquitous and recurrent, even in times when environmental issues are not salient on national agenda. Yet their relationship to trans-local environmental movements and issues has been relatively neglected. Local environmental campaigns are variously related to national and local organizations, and the peculiarities of place are one factor in that variation. But place itself acquires meaning through campaigns, and communities forge identity even as they mobilize against threats of their survival. The relationship between local campaigns and global environmental issues is problematic, but the ways in which local mobilizations often combine issues of environment, economic justice and democracy mirror the emerging agenda of transnational environmentalism (Rootes, Christopher 2007: 722).

It can be argued that, the above quote makes clear the significance of the study of local environmental NGOs and local environmental groups and their movements in a democratic country like India, where there is lack of in-depth research on this topic. Therefore, systematic study of these grassroots local environmental NGOs/Groups could be regarded as one of the fertile areas of research in the field of sociology of environmental movements. The present research was is a small step in this direction of filling the research gap.

Against this background, the next chapter deals with the review of relevant literature and research methodology.
References:


