Chapter VII

CONCLUSIONS

Today the world is facing grave environmental problems. The very survival of mankind on this planet is in danger. As a matter of fact, environmental issues have drawn the attention of the entire world community. At the global level, the United Nations (UN) is making modest efforts to protect environment. It has organised a series of Global Environmental Conferences from time to time to create environmental consciousness worldwide. One noticeable point in the conferences is the presence of a large number of environmental NGOs who took active role and enlightened the environmental thinking of the delegates. However, it appears that while implementing the recommendations and agreements of the conferences national governments were not so effective. All over the world, in a number of instances most national governments have failed to protect the environment. As a consequence, the problems of the environment are growing at an alarming rate. Under such circumstances, the emergence of environmental NGOs is the best hope for solving most of the environmental problems.

The Indian delegation has actively participated in all the International Environmental Conferences and signed a number of agreements for the protection of the environment. Obviously, the Indian government is duty bound to implement the outcomes of these conferences. But, in reality, these are not implemented properly. As a consequence, the country has been facing multi-dimensional environmental problems. The large number of environmental NGOs
operating in the country have been pressurising the government to adopt sound environmental policies. Unfortunately, the government policies, instead of protecting the country's environment, have been systematically destroying it. As a result, the worst sufferers are always the poor people. The NGOs took up the challenges where the government had left. They organised the people, created awareness and launched powerful movements to protect environmental degradation. Consequently, for the last four decades the country has been witnessing numerous environmental movements. NGOs have been closely associated in every environmental controversy, and they have played a major role in making of these movements successful.

In the present study we have made an attempt to analyse the role of NGOs in the environmental movements in India in general, and in Karnataka in particular. We started our analysis from the Chipko movement, which has been considered the mother of all environmental movements. From the Chipko movement to the present ongoing Narmada movement, it is found that the role of environmental NGOs in all these struggles is visibly prominent. As these NGOs consist of noted environmentalists, they have developed environmental thinking of the people by organising seminars, workshops, rallies, padayatras etc. This study reveals NGOs' crucial role and their pioneering efforts in promoting people's movements. As a result, movements like 'Chipko' and 'Silent Valley' have achieved a significant success. In the case of other environmental movements, though they have not succeeded to the extent of Chipko and Silent Valley, yet these movements have highlighted the negative aspects of the government's development policies.
In this study, we observed how Karnataka government's developmental projects have affected the state’s rich biodiversity flora and fauna of the region. The state is gifted with plenty of natural resources like Western Ghats, rivers, thick forest etc. The Western Ghats region of Karnataka is a rich treasure house of natural resources. Unfortunately, most of the projects have taken place in this ecologically sensitive area. Consequently, the affected people under the guidance of environmentalists and NGOs protested against these projects. Therefore, the state of Karnataka is witnessing intense environmental struggles. In this study, we came to know that the NGOs in Karnataka have played a crucial role in making of the environmental movements successful.

The sampling NGO selected for this study is Samaja Parivarthana Samudaya (SPS). The SPS has a great concern for the protection of the environment. This study examined the local elites' perception of the role of SPS in preventing Tungabhadra water pollution in protecting village common lands and in other environment related activities. For this purpose, we have identified eighty local elites from the eight villages representing ten local elites from each village, and their perceptions with regard to environmental protection activities of the SPS have been analysed quantitatively with the help of computer. We have formulated two hypotheses, and both are tested in this study.

The first hypothesis is: "NGOs approach to the environmental movement politics is positive", and it is confirmed in this study.

The second one is: "Local elites’ perception of the role of NGOs and environmental movement is determined by their socio-economic status (SES)". This hypothesis has been disproved.
The following are the major findings of this study:

1) By and large this study reveals the government’s ineffectiveness in solving environmental problems. Today the government is overburdened with a number of activities. Therefore, environmental issues are not taken proper care by the government. In India, it appears that the nexus, of polluter-politician-bureaucrats is considerably growing strong in spite of a number of environmental protection activities.

2) The study indicates the emergence of environmental NGOs is to be seen as the better alternatives for solving various environmental problems effectively.

3) It is found out that the root of most of the environmental problems is mainly in the developmental policies of the government. For example, the construction of big dams, establishment of the big industries, has resulted in acute environmental controversies.

4) Generally, environmental problems hit the poorest sections of the society. This is to be found in every environmental controversy.

5) This study considered the major role of SPS in environmental protection. Local elites of the study area are having better perception with regard to the environmental protection activities of SPS. They held the opinion that because of the SPS's efforts the Tungabhadra water could be less polluted today. The local elites of Kusnur say that it is due to the sincere efforts of the SPS that they have been able to regain their common land.
6) Generally, socio-economic status of the people determines their perception with regard to public affairs. The interesting finding of the present study is that the frequency of participation in environmental protection activities is not influenced by the indicators of SES, namely, sex, age, caste, educational level and economic status. This may be due to the magnitude of the problems of the environment and their effect on the life of the people. The pollution of Tungabhadra River by the HPF and the confiscation of village common lands by the KPL have adverse effects on the lives of the village people. Therefore, the villagers' perception, thinking, reactions are not induced by the SES.

In order to protect the environment from further degradation and for making the activities of NGOs more meaningful, the following suggestions may be considered:

1) The government should encourage the NGO sector by releasing more funds for its activities as they have been facing financial problem. The government should not think that the emergence of a large number of NGOs is a threat to its existence. Therefore, the government has to accept NGOs as partners in the public policy making, including environmental policy.

2) The Government of India still continues the 1860s Society's Regulation Act. The fresh legislative package is to be made and implemented for effective functioning of NGOs.

3) The government has to take measures to involve NGOs in the making of environmental policies. Perhaps, the perspectives of NGOs on problems of environment will contribute to understand
various dimensions of the problems of environment, which ultimately contribute to the formulation of sound and democratic environmental policy making since they represent the aspirations of people in a better way.

This study is not conclusive, but it points to the need for further extensive and intensive study of the role of political parties in the environmental policy making process.