

UNIT 27 ENVIRONMENT

Structure

- 27.0 Objectives
- 28.0 27.1 Introduction
- 27.2 Historical Background
 - 27.3.1 Man - Nature Relationship
 - 27.3.2 Emergence of Eco-politics
 - 27.3.3 Debate on Development and Sustainability
- 27.3 Major Issues
 - 27.3.1 Role of the State
 - 27.3.2 Role of Judiciary
 - 27.3.3 Environment versus Livelihood
- 27.4 Nature of Environment Movements
- 27.5 Two Case Studies
 - 27.5.1 Silent Valley Movement
 - 27.5.2 Chipko Movement
- 27.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 27.7 Key Words
- 27.8 Some Useful Books/Articles
- 27.9 Answers to Check Your Excercies

27.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit deals with an important and so far quite neglected theme in political science, namely; environment movements in contemporary India. After reading this unit you should be able to:

- understand historical relationship between man and the nature, emergence of ecopolitics and debate on development and sustainability;

Man is one of the many species on earth. He is a major actor and component in the environment. Nature has its own ways to create and maintain balance among its various components. However, man has been mindlessly exploiting natural resources for development and generating prosperity in the last centuries with the growth of industrialisation. This has created an imbalance. In other words, the process of development brought about by the industrial revolution has depleted the resources faster than the natural replenishing capacity of the environment. Hence, the resulting of crisis of the environment. In order to overcome the limitation, man has adverse consequences on the environment. For instance, vehicles of various kinds are invented to increase the speed of transportation and movement. The adverse effect is poisonous emissions from vehicles causing greenhouse effect in biosphere.

27.2.2 Emergence of Eco-politics

The term eco-politics is of recent origin. Eco-politics is about interrelationship and mutual connection between environmental and political issues. Earlier, the ecological issues were paid attention only if they concerned national defense or collective security such as nuclear fall out or oil scarcity. Over the time, the focus has got extended to issues of development. Ecopolitics pleads for a value-based regulations regarding the use of natural resources in a manner that on one hand it prevents narrow unilateral exploitation and on the other hand, ensues equitable distribution of fruits of development.

In the third world or developing countries, conflict on the issue of development takes a different form. Here the divide is between those who wish to protect the environment at all cost and those who are committed to development at any cost. This does not mean that the environmentalists are as such against development but plead for an eco-friendly development. They prefer alternative or sustainable development. Eco-politics results in the process of determining the preferred path of development.

dismissed by the elite interest. Thus, the situation in developing countries are sensitive and crucial. Such issues as land degradation, desertification, deforestation and pollution of air, water and soil by industries either remain ignored or inadequately and nominally attended. All in all, the poverty, resulting degradation and insensitive political system make the matters worse. A ray of hope lies in emergence of positive ecopolitics by green parties and groups in Europe and micro environment movements by environmental organizations in the developing countries. This leads us logically to explore the relationship between the civil society, state and ecopolitics.

27.3 MAJOR ISSUES

As is clear from the discussion in the previous section, the environment movement has thrown up various issues regarding vital inter-domain relationships between the victims and redressal systems existing in a society. Those who are adversely affected by the environmental problems and are protesting and resisting against a repressive alliance of vested interests need to be paid attention to understand the dynamics of environment movement. First and foremost major issue is pertaining to the nature and role of the state. Judicial option and intervention is second major issue discussed here. The third issue is regarding the debate between environment versus livelihood.

27.3.1 Role of the State

In order to understand what role state has played, we must understand theoretical conception and contemporary context of state. One understanding of state is that it is a neutral space or impartial agency for resolving the conflicts of interest which occur in market and civil society. However, Indian state's performance for last five decades provides contrary evidences. The Indian state has failed to play its role and hence the civil society has to fill the void. Let us first explore the contemporary status of the state. Ever since the ending of cold war, collapse of communism and triumph of advancing capitalism, most nation-states are ruthlessly overrun. There has been an upsurge in global democratic aspirations as a result of the collapse of communism. The forces of free market are linking national economies with global economic systems. Globalisation of

27.3.2 Role of Judiciary

The environment movement in India has essentially passed through three phases. In the first phase which was the longest phase, legislative hurdles were crossed. That is to say, opposition, obstruction or dilution of pollution laws was done while being framed in legislatures. In the second phase, opposition to implementation of already made anti-pollution laws was experienced. Here also the iron-triangle operated in favour of the polluters rather than in protecting the interests of the victims of pollution. In the current phase, as a final recourse to redressal of their grievances against those polluting and jeopardizing the increasingly fragile ecosystem, doors of the judiciary are knocked. Eminent legal scholar Upendra Baxi (1991) has observed that, “the growth of environmental jurisprudence in India is a very recent phenomenon. And even now it is confined to a few activist judges, lawyers, law academics and active citizens”. Baxi has argued that this is so mainly because “the Constitution itself is environment-blind”. The chapter on rights in the Constitution does not explicitly state about protecting the citizens from air and water pollution, deforestation, destruction of wild life and displacements of habitats. Much later 42nd Amendment to the Constitution has added a provision vide Article 48-A instructing the state to make efforts for protecting and improving the environment, forests and wild life. Article 51-A is about the fundamental duty of the citizens “to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wild life...” The absence of environmental concerns in the Constitution is due to its obsession with development.

These provisions have improved the prospects of judicial intervention considerably. It has encouraged environmental litigation by the victims of pollution or of environmental degradation. However, from 1950-84, neither the state nor the civil society was concerned about systematic and organised degradation and destruction of the environment while pursuing the policy of generating prosperity through massive industrialisation. Judicial activism rose in response to this neglect. In Ratlam Municipal Corporation case, Mr. Justice Krishna Iyer gave a new, progressive and environment-friendly interpretation. He stated that Constitution is “a remedial weapon of versatile use”. He further recognised that people’s struggle for “social justice” includes environmental justice and “the remedial weapon” must be available to them. Anti-power

maim or kill the other. If livelihood is generated, environment is threatened and if environment is protected, livelihood is threatened. This is a strange predicament. The environment movement in India reflects this predicament and dilemma amply.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the Space below for you answers.

ii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of unit.

1) What do you mean by environment movement?

2) How do the environmentalists view the development?

3) What is the “iron-triangle” and what is its relationship with the environment movement?

4) Comment on the role of judiciary in the environment movement.

the work hours of women in collecting fuel wood and water longer, the tribals lose benefits of forest produce, the fisherman in Goa and Kerala suffer from excessive trawling. The victims are so dispersed and marginalised that for effective raising of voices and redressal of grievances, they require a chain of actors from more vocal and experienced realms of voluntary organisations, media, professionals like scientists, researchers, doctors, engineers, lawyers, technologists, human right groups, sympathetic and concerned policy-makers and bureaucrats. Each of these actors add strength, vigour, guidance and direction to struggle.

By way of organisational and interventionist strategy, it has become imperative for environment movements that not only to strengthen and hold together the victim-folks in solidarity but also make holes in the opposite camp by skillfully raising doubts about possible benefits being outweighed by collective harm and so on. Most struggles are raised against development projects and therefore, they are likely to be fought back as anti-people, anti-national, anti-development, anti-progress and so on. This is usually countered by careful and systematic analysis of issues at stake and propagation of correct, data-based campaign material in actual resource-use. The limitation of this strategy is that when the issue goes beyond local limit, the original victim-actors are left behind and either the middle class professionals, media or voluntary agency leaders come to the fore. The leadership role and power shifts from local hands to mediating actors. Harsh Sethi has observed this is good strategically but bad ethically. Another aspect of this process is internationalisation of local or national issues as strategy which can harm the movement. In most cases, the central issues of environment movements revolve around fixing tolerance limits on carrying capacity of environment or cost-benefit ratios. Most struggles are of reformist nature. These issues have concomitantly raised interesting interconnections between ecology and feminism as well as ecology and human rights. The most significant issue raised by the movement is about our understanding or theory of knowledge. The present development model is nurtured on the myth of universal, objective and value-free notion of science. What was held as true universal knowledge for long time is today challenged. Science is increasingly viewed as partisan, parochial and ideological. These movements have also raised the issue of redefining our understanding of market, society, state, science and nature. The issue of preserving diversity and plurality in society and nature is well-raised by environment movements.

The prime aim in building the dam was to generate power for industries. The construction of dam was to cover 77 sq.kms. as catchment area. As a consequence, India's richest tropical forest, known as Silent Valley was to be flooded and submerged. It is interesting to note that unlike in most such cases, there was no problem of displacement and rehabilitation of the people as the dam was to be constructed at a location where there was no human settlement. In this sense the Silent Valley movement was the first purely and primarily fought environment movement. The odds against the movement were heavy. The state government of Kerala was in total control of the issue as all the political parties and industrial lobby were in full support of the scheme and backed the government.

Kerala Shastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), an already existing, active, progressive local people's science movement group took up the challenge and steered the movement right from its infancy to maturing into a potent people's power. The KSSP successfully mobilized local opinion against the dam and managed to rope in environmental experts like botanists, zoologists of international repute like Salim Ali, well known economists and engineers. This move strengthened the KSSP's argument and position vis-a-vis government's technical teams. It forcefully presented its argument against the scheme on the grounds of adverse environmental consequences on "a rare ecosystem, rich in biological and genetic diversity". The KSSP went a step ahead as a strategy and argued that the required electricity could be generated easily by setting up thermal power stations in dispersed locations as well as by improving the power transmission systems. The KSSP was able to give this controversy the status of a genuine public debate far beyond the state. National attention was drawn. It was stretched to international arena by involving World Wildlife Fund and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources. These global bodies had joined the issue of the movement on the grounds of protecting the lion-tailed macaque which is the rare breed of monkey, habitant of Silent Valley. This struggle lasted quite long. Furious debates, persistent campaigns and constant relentless lobbying through the media, parliament and expert committees made dropping the idea of dam in Silent Valley possible. Besides, the KSSP won the region the status of "national biosphere". As a result of this successful movement, the scope for challenging environmentally unviable development policies, projects and schemes increased. This movement was preventive in nature, in the sense that it was launched unlike in many other cases, much before the project was executed

As a result of this resistance by the villagers, the company men beat retreat. In order to appease the protesters, the forest department showed readiness to concede one ash tree to Sarvodaya workers, if they let the Simon Company cut trees of its original quota. The temptation was raised to two, three, five and ten ash trees of full quota but it was rejected. The Simon's quota was cancelled but re-allotted in Phata Forest in other part of the district. In June 1973, another local leader organized resistance and launched Chipko movement. The trees were guarded by the village upto end December when permit will automatically lose its validity.

Sunderlal Bahuguna of Uttarkhand Sarvodaya Mandal, based in Tehri Garhwal, began his long march of 120 days on foot to spread the ideology of Chipko movement to entire region of Himalayas. What made this movement instantly popular is a decade old history of flash floods in this region. Mountain slopes were bared of forest covers by clear-cutting of trees, causing quick rushing of water. Road-building activity in this region also caused land-slides. Some mobilisation activities were already initiated before the Chipko was launched. The flood relief work had brought the Sarvodaya workers and the flood-marooned people together into a dialogical relationship regarding the environmental degradation, disasters and conservation. This strengthened environment agenda of the movement. In 1974, C.P. Bhatt re-launched Chipko struggle in Reni forest area. He appealed women to hug the trees in case they come to cut them. An attempt to cut 2500 auctioned trees in Reni forest near Alaknanda river, was foiled by woman leader Gaura Devi in village Lata. A band of about 30 women led by her saved the trees by risking their lives. As a result of this persistence by the Chipko protesters, a government ban was imposed on tree-cutting in Reni for ten years. Whenever need arose, these women intermittently came out to save the trees at Gopeshwar in 1975, Bhynder valley in January 1978, Parsari in 1979 and at Dongri Paintoli in February 1980. Thus, the Chipko demonstrations, protests and resistance became frequent in this region.

Thus, Chipko movement became a good example of people's non-violent resistance to the destruction of environment by vested interests. This movement was spontaneous as ordinary hill people had come out in huge number without the usual lead, support or guidance of any centralized organizational apparatus. This movement accorded central position to the issue of renewable resources like soil, water and trees in the lives of ordinary dependent people. Chipko rose as a voice from the distant, neglected hills.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: i) Use the Space below for you answers.

iii) Check your answers with the model answers given at the end of unit.

1) Identify the types of environment movement.

2) What do you mean by internationalisation of environment issues?

3) Analyse the impact of environment movement.

27.6 LET US SUM UP

The environment movements have emerged as a result of mindless and wasteful use of resources, irrespective of the type of political regime. A new class of environmental haves and have nots have emerged. This has led the global human society to debate the theme of economic development and environmental sustainability. Peoples' movement against the environmental degradation faces opposition from the networking of the vested interests – the bureaucrats, industrialists and politicians. Nevertheless, the environment movement has been able to internationalise the environmental issues, raise the level of peoples' consciousness about environment, and impacted on the policy initiatives.

27.7 KEY WORDS

Biosphere : That part of earth and its atmosphere which is inhabited by living things/beings.

Deforestation : Destruction or removal of forests by denudation or clear-cutting.

Desertification : The formation of desert in arid and semi-arid regions from overgrazing, deforestation, poor use of land, excessive withdrawal of ground water or climatic changes.

