

and that resource depletion poses major threat to human survival. Therefore the movements are often organised to protest against the exploitation of the nature thus bringing in the concept of ecological and environmental sustainability.

According to the noted environmentalist, Dr. Vandana Shiva, 'movements are major social and political processes, however, and they transcend individual actors. They are significant precisely because they involve a multiplicity of people and events which contribute to a reinforcement of social change' (Staying Alive, 1988, p.68). The movements related to environmental and natural resource protection witnessed large participation from the concerned local and other communities. They have been movements of social change that set classic examples for all times to come.

It is also appropriate to quote her words relating to the ecological movements. '*Ecology movements are political movements for a non-violent world order in which nature is conserved for conserving the options for survival. These movements are small, but they are growing. They are local, but their success lies in non-local impact. They demand only the right to survival yet with that minimal demand is associated the right to live in a peaceful and just world. With the success of these grassroots movements is linked the global issue of survival. Unless the world is restructured ecologically at the level of world-views and life-styles, peace and justice will continue to be violated and ultimately the very survival of humanity will be threatened*' (V.Shiva, 1988, p.37).

The modern environmental movements in the West started long after the industrial revolution set in and changed the lives of people into an affluent and consumerist lot. Sheth describes that 'in USA, modern environmental movement passed through different though not entirely unrelated waves' (Sheth, p.28). At first there was a movement for land and wildlife conservation, followed by pollution control measures and third related to lobbying for regulation to minimise industrial wastes. Grassroots green movements followed thus heralding a completely new era of voicing environmental concerns.

Unlike the West, India's concern for environment and nature date back to centuries where the concern for natural resources and elements formed a part of the lifestyle of the people. The emphasis has been more on the spiritual and moral dimensions of life rather than materialism and affluence. Thus the care and concern for nature has been inherent since ages in our society. The post-independent and much later the liberalised economic phase saw many a structural changes in the economy thus exposing the nation to materialistic and consumerist lifestyle.

The 1970s saw the environmental issues coming to the international fora with the Stockholm Conference being one of the pioneering conventions on this issue. India committed itself to the protection of the natural environment according to the International norms and rules. Around the same time, the Chipko Movement or Andolan has already been in the making, which later inspired subsequent movements on environment.

Environmental movements in India have been more or less conducted at the grassroots level and more so not by the educated elite but by simple village folk and tribals depending on the region. These have been initially characterised by protests against the big companies indiscriminately using the forest resources for commercial purposes. Later the movements focussed on water issues, flora and fauna, biodiversity, and massive deforestation till the recent river pollution, the prime examples being the Ganga and Yamuna clean-up action plans.

One of the earliest known cases of forest conservation dates back to 1730, where around 300 members of the Bishnoi community in the Rajasthan State, led by a woman called Amrita Devi tried to protect the *Khejri* trees from felling by clinging to them and sacrificed her life in the process. The natural resource exploitation is said to have started prominently during the British rule, when the enormous forest resources were used for commercial purposes and for the railway network link. The local tribes and communities are especially involved in saving the natural resources not only for sustaining their livelihood needs but also for the nation at large. Chipko Movement is one such pioneering movement in the post-independent India and set an example to be emulated by others.

9.4 CHIPKO ANDOLAN (MOVEMENT)

The Chipko Movement, which is also identified chiefly as a women's movement, originated in the Garhwal Himalayan mountain region of the present Uttarakhand state. The region is known for its fragile ecology, often prone to earthquakes, erosive rivers and steep valleys that are least conducive to agricultural growth. Its vast forest cover and reserves enables the local communities to pick the fodder, fuel and fibers that contribute to their daily sustenance. With no opportunities for viable income, the men folk search for income outside the region while the women are left in the villages often leaving them as the real custodians of the available resources.

The region was also prone to massive deforestation as the commercial exploitation of forests took place on a gigantic scale in order to meet the needs of ever growing population and urban settlers. It is important to note that the first forest laws were enacted during the British rule. With more demand for wood for commercial and rail link purposes, 'in Tehri Garhwal State, between 1840 and 1885, the forests were leased out to contractors for exploitation' (Weber, p.20). 'The forest laws were enacted to safeguard the vested interests of contractors. Power moved from the hands of the local people into those of government forest officials' (Ibid, p.19). The encroachment by the influential contractors was highly resented by the local population, an encroachment on the resources over which they had traditional rights.

With massive felling of trees and deforestation in the hills, and with the trees becoming few and far, the village women, who rely mainly on the forest resources for the sustenance, found it difficult to spend enormous time and energy in collecting the necessary fodder and fuel. They would, sometimes go to distance of at least five kilometers to collect the necessary supplies. With the denuding forests, there was also a danger of devastating floods and landslides submerging the houses, crops, and affecting the movement of people and throwing out of gear the irrigation facilities.

It is crucial to note the extensive contribution of Mira Behn (Madelaine Slade), a close associate of Gandhi, who moved to the Himalayan region as early as in 1940s. In order to promote agricultural growth, the cattle are the most important source. To take care of these, Mira Behn started *Pashulok* (Animal World), a cattle centre in the region. She was one of the first to realise the drastic effects of the deforestation and how it triggers the water crisis. Further, she also noted the disappearance of *banj* trees, replaced by the commercially important pine trees. The basic ecological nature and functions of both the trees are different from each other, with *banj* being more eco-friendly. Also, Mira Behn spoke in high veneration of the Himalayas. As she says, 'it is not we who are testing the Himalayas, but the Himalayas who are testing us; and by the looks of things we are

proving unfit. Unless we humble our minds and approach the Sacred Mountains as disciples before a mighty *Guru*, we cannot expect to win favour' (KM Gupta, Mira Behn, Gandhiji's Daughter Disciple, 1992, p.111). She warned as early as in 1950 that '*Something is Wrong in the Himalayas*' and elaborately explained the demerits associated with deforestation, water-logging and soil erosion; she further regretted over how the private enterprises are exploiting the resources, making it a 'business proposition, carried on by people who have no background of agricultural experience, and who think only in terms of soil exploitation for quick return' (ibid, p.148). Sunderlal Bahuguna worked closely with Mira Behn and inherited many of her meritorious thoughts and ideas regarding the above mentioned issues. Later, he was instrumental in giving necessary guidelines and direction in the Chipko Struggle.

Sarala Behn (Catherine Mary Heilman) was also a disciple of Gandhi who in 1936, joined Gandhi at his Sevagram ashram to assist in the former's experiments in basic education. She worked in the hills of Kumaon region and 'started an Ashram for girls along Gandhian lines and soon collected a band of dedicated young women social workers around her. She too strove to create environmental awareness. In 1961, she created the 'Uttarakhand Sarvodaya Mandal' to work for the uplift of the population and the protection of the hill environment' (Weber, pp.29-30).

In order to protect the forest region and thereby the livelihood necessities, the women of the region largely combined with the cooperatives and Gandhian organisations like Dasholi Gram Swaraj Sangh (DGSS), Gangotri Gram Swaraj Sangh and so on. Their concerns related to forest reserve conservation and taking care of the needs of the local population. But 'soon, a new separation took place between the local male interests of commercial activity based on forest products, and local women's interests for sustenance activity based on forest protection' (Vandana Shiva, 1988: p.71). Nevertheless, this does not undermine the role of men who actively took part in the Chipko Andolan. As Shiva puts it, 'the significant catalysers of the movement are women like Mira Behn, Sarala Behn, Bimala Behn, Hima Devi, Gauri Devi, Gunga Devi, Bachni Devi, Itwari Devi, Chamun Devi and many others' (V Shiva, 1988, p.68). Further, 'the philosophical and conceptual articulation of the ecological view of the Himalayan forests has been done by Mira Behn and Bahuguna, the organizational foundation for it being a women's movement was laid by Sarala Behn, Bimala Behn in Garhwal and Radha Bhatt in Kumaon' (ibid, p.71). The men of the movement like Sunderlal Bahuguna, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Ghanshyam Shailani and Dhoom Singh Negi were glad to acknowledge themselves as their students, messengers and followers and played crucial role in spreading the movement to different parts of the state.

The organisational base of the women in the region at first found its origins in the anti-alcohol movement and later prohibition movement in 1965. It further spread to utilising the local forest resources by the local people and led to organised protests against the commercial exploitation of the forests. One of the inspiring words against this exploitation was put down by Raturi in his famous poem:

Embrace our trees

Save them from being felled

The property of our hills

Saving it from being looted

One of the key events 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 Alaknanda valley, in the village of Reni. The region was already devastated by the massive floods of the 1970 wherein water inundated 100 sq.kms of motor roads, washed away 6 metal bridges, 10 kms of motor roads, 24 buses, 366 houses collapsed, 500 acres of paddy crops destroyed (Guha, 1989, p.155). It was attributed to the denuding of the forests for commercial purposes and felling of trees in the region. Large scale auction and plans for felling of trees in the region was planned by the commercial contractors but had to backtrack their activities because of the active role of the women and the villagers who kept constant vigil on the former's activities. 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, as the women spotted the labour with axes, who came to cut the trees, they protested and vowed to protect the trees. Small groups of women kept constant vigilance and hugged the trees in order to prevent the felling. Led by Gauri (sometimes referred as Gaura) Devi 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.

This incident gave the movement a further momentum to mobilise all the villages in the region to protest against the commercial felling of trees, as it led to the fragile ecology dwindling further. The women trekked far and wide for about 75 days appealing to their counterparts in the region to join the demonstrations and vehemently protest against the commercial exploitation of the forests. The method of hugging the trees to prevent their felling was actually used for the first time by Dhoom Singh Negi in Salet forest near the village of Pipleth in Henwal (V Shiva, 1988, p.75). Another significant event that took place in 1977 was against the auction and cutting of trees in the Adwani forests, in the Narendernagar district. Bahuguna undertook a fast against this measure but the felling order was not withdrawn. The women, who became the 'front-line soldiers', as pointed out by Weber, gathered and tied sacred threads to the trees as a part of their vow to protect them and constantly guarded the forests. The axe-men returned with armed police to keep the people away from the area but the volunteers already took positions to guard the trees. When questioned by the contractor as to why the women wanted to stop the felling, they sang in chorus thus:

What do the forests bear?

Soil, water and pure air.

Soil, water and pure air

Sustain the earth and all she bears.

The movement, consequently, was successful and the Adwani Satyagraha, as it is known, gave new directions and strength to women especially to protect their forestry system and instilled in them a new confidence to continue the struggle. In some of the regions, the women even defied their men folk and took part in the movement. To quote Turner's work, one of the prominent women of the movement, Gaura (Gauri) Devi recalls that 'it was not a question of planned organisation of the women for the movement, rather it happened spontaneously. Our men were out of the village so we had to come forward and protect the trees. We have no quarrel with anybody but only we wanted to make

the people understand that our existence is tied with the forest' (Guha, 2000, p.159). The Chipko movement was not confined to Reni but spread to Tehri, Kumaon and other areas of the State like Adwani, Amarsar, Chanchnidhar, Dungari, Paintoli and Badiyagarh. The most beneficial outcome of the movement has been the Government's order imposing a ban on the felling of trees in the region apart from the joint forest management mechanisms that followed later. Chipko thus stands out as the most significant movement in the arena of environmental protection. It further highlights the role of women as the torchbearers of similar movements everywhere.

9.5 CHIPKO AS AN ECO-FEMINIST MOVEMENT

There have been arguments-both for and against the Chipko Movement's label as a women's movement. While the contribution of the local communities consisting of both men and women is not ruled out, the extraordinary role played by women, who with firm determination pledged to restore the nature to its pristine, attracted worldwide attention. Undoubtedly, the movement has been a complete non-violent achievement, and can be likened to Satyagraha in the environmental arena. Since by nature women are known as nurturers of creatures- living and non-living-'ecofeminism takes the woman-nature connection a step further' (Turner, 2003, p.4. see URL). Most of the interpretations are heavily drawn from the arguments of Dr.Vandana Shiva with special references to her works, 'Staying Alive-Women, Ecology and Development in India' and her joint work with Maria Mies, 'Ecofeminism'.

Firstly, the nature is viewed in terms of feminine principle. Since the ancient ages, women in general and India in particular are considered as an inseparable part of nature. At one level, nature is symbolised as the embodiment of the feminine principle, and at another, she is nurtured by the feminine to produce life and provide sustenance (Shiva, 1988, p.38). This is a manifestation of shakti or energy, from which all existence arises. This energy is called nature (Prakriti). Nature, both animate and inanimate is thus an expression of shakti, the feminine and creative principle of the cosmos; in conjunction with the masculine principle (purusha), Prakriti creates the world. Further, nature is inherently active, a powerful, productive force in the dialect of creation, renewal and sustenance of all life (Ibid). From this, the world derives its activity and diversity manifest in the form of life on earth-mountains, trees, rivers, animals etc. The human being, so much a part of this world of creation, ideally is to live in consonance with nature. Regrettably, man's attitude towards nature has turned into that of a dominant force, who can subjugate nature to the maximum extent. This, in a way, symbolises man's eternal urge to demonstrate domination over woman.

Shiva identifies women as traditional natural scientists, whose knowledge is ecological and plural, reflecting both the diversity of natural ecosystems and the diversity in cultures that nature based living gives rise to (p.41). She credits women with producing and reproducing life not merely biologically but also in terms of providing sustenance, more so a social role. Mies, who worked on 'Ecofeminism', describes woman's special relationship with nature. The relationship is based on mutual reciprocal process, mutual cooperation and as producers of new life. With the disharmony between both created by the affluent and consumerist culture, the natural relationship finds enormous strains. Shiva attributes the disharmony as triggered 'by the arrival of masculinist, reductionist, industrial, colonising forces of Western culture'. It is appropriate to quote her words in this context: 'an ecologically sustainable future has much to gain from the world-views of ancient civilisations

and diverse cultures which survived sustainably over centuries. These were based on an ontology of the feminine as the living principle....not merely did this result in an ethical context which excluded possibilities of exploitation and domination, it allowed the creation of an earth family' (Turner, 2003, p.5).

The large number of women participating, even defying their men, demonstrates their innate power or shakti. In India, in spite of women's suppression, there is a universal agreement, even if grudgingly, that women are nurturers of nature. The ancient civilisation and texts have often put women on a higher pedestal in the context of ecological/environmental concerns. This view finds a wide spread critique among the Western scholars, thus bringing to the fore the cultural differences and the perception of nature as a sacred force to be restored and not exploited.

At the same time, there is also a critical perspective that women are dependant on nature for their own sustenance which is also economic nature. Since the disharmony disturbs the latter's sustenance, they are compelled to take up the cudgels of resource protection and not just for restoring nature to its original glory and definitely not out of selfless motive. A reference in support of this argument is found in Turner's article. Though there is no doubt regarding the disproportionate burden on the women due to environmental degradation, the concern is not limited to preserving the health of the forest. Mawdsley (cited in Turner's article) observes that if a hill woman's needs and responsibilities for subsistence conflict with 'sound ecological practice', then she will likely give priority to the more immediately pressing (Turner, p.6). The women's environmentally friendly ways are ascribed to their short-term benefits. Infact, the household responsibility and the necessities are said to be the main reasons for a woman's friendly co-existence with nature.

Another criticism that faces the ecofeminist perspective is that it failed to end the marginalisation of women. Though the movement has brought forth the issues of forest management and concern for ecological conservation, it failed to mitigate the woes of women who continue to move far and wide in search of resources necessary for subsistence. Further the non-participation of women in the official roles like joint forest management bodies further deprives them of playing a direct, constructive and authoritative role. Thus, the discrepancies in representation are obvious rendering the constructive role of women in the whole debate obsolete. The movement otherwise has brought in few policy changes related to the protection of environment and natural resources.

Whether the Chipko movement was led by women or witnessed a participation of large number of women due to which it was called an eco-feminist movement leads to several debates. What concerns the most in this context is the preservation of ecological resources. Even if an economic motive is attributed to the women's participation, it should be remembered that the resources needed for subsistence is far less than the massive tree felling efforts of the commercial contractors. Thus comparing women's subsistence needs to contractor's greed would be totally unwarranted. Even if a short-term economic motive is attributed to women's resistance, the scenario of long-term benefits of forest conservation cannot be underestimated.

In final, the arguments related to ecofeminism as put forward by Vandana Shiva deserve meritorious scrutiny. Considering the background of ancient Indian civilisation and the veneration of nature and ecology in the ancient texts, the adoption of Spartan life was in consonance with the prescribed rules and regulations of life, that impose little or no stress on the ecology or vast biodiversity. Man's endless desire to conquer nature for fulfilling unmitigated wants is an alien concept in the Indian context. Reverence of nature as

bhumata (mother earth) and *vana devata* (forest deity, mainly goddess) confirm the significance attached to the natural resource protection in the Indian culture.

Lastly, the Chipko struggle is essentially an effort to save the natural resources and forests for the benefit of all. In the words of Shiva, 'the Chipko struggle is a struggle to recover the hidden and invisible productivity of vital resources, and the invisible productivity of women, to recover their entitlements and rights to have and provide nourishment for sustained survival, and to create ecological insights and political spaces that do not destroy fundamental rights to survival. Chipko women provide a non-violent alternative in forestry to the violence of reductionist forestry with its inherent logic of indispensability. They have taken the first step towards recovering their status as the *other* silviculturists and forest managers, who participate in nature's processes instead of working against them, and share nature's wealth for basic needs instead of privatising it for profit'(Shiva, 1988, p.95).

9.6 SUMMARY

The concept of development in a market economy concentrates on material progress and the growth of commodity production as the main tenets for a contented human life. What it ignores consists of two crucial elements: (1) the air, water, land and other living beings, flora and fauna are all part of the universal existence and (2) any resource depletion affects the women and children first, the former who play a significant role in ecological conservation and latter, who represent the future generation. It needs to be remembered that any development agenda that ignores the real welfare of all and that which exploits nature as well as humans is bound to return negative effects. The Chipko struggle/movement is precisely a struggle against this concept of development. It was against the commodification of forest resources, and fighting for the conservation of resources useful for the local population and fighting for the rights of subsistence. The women, often the marginalised and the first and the most affected in any negative development trend, had displayed an enormous capability to become 'their own leaders, their own decision-makers, their own sources of strength' (Mies and Shiva, 1993, p.246). As Weber points out, 'the Chipko activists have found an effective means of conducting environmental campaigns along non-violent lines. Much can be learned from their experience, and a knowledge of their struggle can bring strength to those fighting a similar battle in other parts of the world' (pp.12-13). Thus the movement also demonstrated the resurgence of woman power and their concern for the mother earth and ecology. It brought into light the burning issue of judicious use of 'natural capital', which would, in the long run, benefit the whole humankind, and through it, the recovery of earth's most precious resources.

9.7 TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by environmental movements? What positive changes do they bring in the social realm?
2. Trace the origin of the Chipko Movement.
3. 'Chipko Movement is an ecofeminist movement'. Do you agree with the statement? Give reasons.

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