
UNIT 12 ROLE OF U.N., N.G.O.S ETC. IN THE SHAPING OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

Structure

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12.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you will be able to grasp:

consciousness and awareness of environment and human interface;

concept, structure and functions of civil society (NGOs) in relation to environment; and

success stories of civil society pertaining to environment at both international and national levels.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

You came to know about environmental history in earlier readings. Here, you will know how this environmental trajectory and consciousness evolved in 20th century, particularly after the world war. Environment has been prominent part of any political, economic and social agenda after the world war owing to expansion consumerism and new global economy. You will emergence of civil society for protection of ecology or environment at different levels – from small grassroot actions to United Nations and other international nonprofit organizations across the world.

12.2 ENVIRONMENT – HISTORICITY, SIGNIFICANCE AND HUMAN INTERFACE

Environmental history refers to history of human beings and their interface with nature. Importance of environment is known and traced with the beginning of human civilisation, whether as science or religion. It is strongly linked with our daily lifestyle that is closely associated with fauna, flora and ecological system. This significance has developed with dependence on nature as a whole, which established a symbiotic relationship between biotic-abiotic. Most of the literature of environmental history has been classified into three important thrust areas:

- 1) concept of nature and its dynamics with time and space;
- 2) impact of such changes on nature and its interface with fauna, flora and ecological system, with special focus on humans and their surroundings i.e. land, water, atmosphere and biosphere;
- 3) most important aspect is people's perception or thinking about nature, which includes their attitudes, beliefs and values.

These are the broad coverage of not only vast environmental history but also demographic transition, means of production, technological changes as well as production and consumption processes. This relationship among all components of ecosystem can be depicted by the following graph.

Now we will see interaction between humans and environment as well as its consequences on ecosystem. Broadly, this interaction can be classified into three important categories.

- a) First interaction – intervention or modification: Here we will look at human action either in form of intervention or modification in natural environment like construction of dams, bridges and other buildings. These interactions include positive or negative consequences. Usage of plastic and chemicals in variety of ways modify ecology. Increasing use of plastic products, fertilisers in agriculture and medicines intervene with environment.
- b) Second interaction – adaptation: In this we will see humans adapting with environment for their basic necessities. Harmonious relation between humans and environment is viewed as positive interface.
- c) Third interaction – dependence on environment: Humans are dependent on environment for their needs like, food, timber, water and many other resources.

Therefore, interface of all components/stakeholders of environment are intermingled and influence each other.

12.2.1 Civil Society: Structure and Functions

Civil society, contrary to state and profit institutions, encompasses large arena of associational institutions which have many expressions – trusts, foundations, non-government developmental organizations (NGDO), trade unions, self-help groups and other formations under broad category of ‘third sector’. After failure of first and second sectors, namely, government and corporate, it has played a significant role in relation to concern for social responsibility, nation-building and other development process. This sector has grown by leaps and bounds, particularly in last four decades, both within the country and at global level. UN General Assembly in its 52nd session declared the year 2001 as International Year of Volunteers (IYV). Proclamation of IYV was meant to recognize vital contributions and achievements of volunteers and voluntary organizations in the past and promote their outstanding work in non-governmental fields of activities.

World Bank viewed civil society as “wide array of non-governmental and not for profit organisations that have a presence in public life, express interests and values of their members and others based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil society organizations, therefore, refer to a wide array of organisations: community groups, NGOs, labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organisations, faith-based organizations, professional associations and foundations”.

The concept of civil society subsumes associations, organizations or institutions which have distinguishing features:

- 1) An association has short-term objectives and may be formal or informal.
- 2) Organization connotes a formal organized effort of a group.
- 3) A more difficult distinction is between organization and institution which are often interchangeably used. When an organization becomes a stable, accepted and collectively valued basis of society’s work it changes into an institution.

Structure

Before coming to structure of civil society we must have clarity about its basic nature. Civil society is visualised with large variations in its structure from small grassroots organisation at small villages to international level whose branches are spread globally. Structure and types of civil society also vary with many criteria:

- a) informal and formal,
- b) registered and unregistered,
- c) dependence on external funds – state fund/corporate fund.

Under formal registration there are five legal options in India:

- 1) Society Act (1860),
- 2) Co-operative Society Act (1912),
- 3) Trade Union Act (1926),
- 4) Company Act, Section 25 (1956) for non-profit activities, and

5) Indian Trust Act (1982).

Most of the literature viewed two major types of associations and non-profit organizations:

- 1) social influence type
- 2) expressive type

Social influence types of associations are those which are designed to act as interest or pressure groups. They act as a mediating institution between state and citizens. While expressive type fulfills emotional needs of its members as a substitute of primary groups. (Rose, 1954).

Smith and Freedman have used a variety of bases for classification of voluntary associations:

- 1) Size
- 2) Internal political structure
- 3) Dependence or independence on outside control
- 4) Societal functions
- 5) Source of their support
- 6) Locations
- 7) Class and characteristics of their member
- 8) Intimacy among members
- 9) Incentives – material, solidarity or purposive
- 10) Beneficiary – member, client, public or owner

Bell and Force (1956: 360) in their structural-functional approach of classifying voluntary associations delineated three categories:

- 1) general interest association,
- 2) specific stratum interest association, and
- 3) specific individual association.

Whereas M. A. Muttalib (1987) identified five types of voluntary associations in Indian situation on the basis of source of voluntarism:

- 1) mutual-aid,
- 2) philanthropic,
- 3) religious,

- 4) governmental, and
- 5) business associations.

Functions

Its functions are in a large range of activities such as small, local need to larger needs identified by local and international organisations. Accordingly, its role and function evolve. Structural and functional approaches are mentioned here with separate sub-headings but both are very much associated. This is popular thinking in established theory of social sciences to analyse and examine any social institution. Radcliff Brown and Malinowski analysed this theory with respect to primitive social institutions with structural-functional approach. They visualise that most of social elements/structures emerge with certain purpose/function. Rose, too, has analysed two types of associations – social influence type and expressive type (mentioned above) – on the basis of their functions towards society.

The nature of functions of civil society varies with time and space. Indian society has long history of charity, welfare and voluntarism often called “traditional voluntarism”. From last four decades, 1980s onward, this approach has moved towards modern voluntarism along with traditional approach. Globalisation and world economic integration also played significant role towards modern voluntarism. There is difference between traditional and modern voluntarism – the former is characterised by charity, moral and ethical values whereas the latter is known for activism and right-based approach. Therefore, owing to dominance of traditional voluntarism in Indian society the necessity of modern civil society was never felt earlier as much as today. However, earlier the discourse of civil society existed in Western European countries and American society; later it has permeated to other developing countries including India.

funding and resource support are now considered the most significant component for efficient functioning of civil society. Today, funding has enhanced not only the volume of modern civil society but also the nature of its function which was not a major concern in traditional voluntarism. Secondly, civil society is dynamic in playing new roles – from non-profit ventures to becoming profit social enterprises, supporting government institutions for people’s legitimacy. After globalisation this trend has shown increasing pace with increasing corporate organisations and their sister charity wings.

Graph-II

Major Functional Areas of CSOs

12.3 CIVIL SOCIETY (N.G.O.S) AND ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

After world war the world has faced ill effects of conflict and destruction that forced all to follow peaceful norms and develop an institution to work for conflict resolution. Voluntary agreement led to development of world-level association to prevent such conflict and destruction. It is called United Nations (UN). Here we will study how UN and other various international organisations played significant and different roles of civil society:

- 1) directly implementing programs,
- 2) collaborating with agencies,
- 3) valuable research support,
- 4) policy making,
- 5) advocacy, and
- 6) most importantly, as a funding agency.

12.4 U.N. AS INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATION – U.N.E.P.

UN is an important inter-governmental organization to maintain internal peace and security. It has developed friendly relations among nations and achieves international cooperation by removing conflict issues. After world war the world witnessed severe crisis and social-political unrest. To remove these problems and move towards international peace and security was major mission of this organization. It was established on 2th October, 1945 with 51 member-states and today has grown to 193 representing states. Besides, the number of states' membership and we can see its various branches grown for specific needs. There are almost 61 organizations directly or indirectly monitored and recognized by UN, including International Labour Organization (ILO) established before the UN in 1919. Out of these 61 organizations 16 are established by UN after its inception.

United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is one such international organisation established in 1972 for environmental protection whose headquarter is located in Nairobi (Kenya). UN environmental programme is focused on following issues.

- 1) Air,
- 2) Water,
- 3) Biosafety,
- 4) Cities and lifestyles,
- 5) Chemical and waste,

- 6) Climate action,
- 7) Disaster and conflicts,
- 8) Ecosystems and biodiversity,
- 9) Education and environment,
- 10) Energy,
- 11) Extractives,
- 12) Environment under review,
- 13) Environmental rights and governance,
- 14) Forests,
- 15) Gender and environmental issues,
- 16) Green economy,
- 17) Ocean and sea,
- 18) Resource efficiency,
- 19) Technology,
- 20) Transport, and
- 21) Sustainable development goals (SDGs)

All of these are monitored in detail with region-specific focus. UNEP accordingly advises the concerned country to fight and mitigate upcoming threats to its ecology. It is also advocating for planetary and human health for almost 50 years and delivers scientific approach to help the world understand damage due to carbon emission and resource-hungry development. It has supported policies and actions to halt and reverse this damage. The planet spoke up for itself by COVID-19 hitting hard, claiming lives and magnifying inequalities. Our economies are facing deepest recession in the past 30 years. The pandemic is driving the world far from achieving the promise of 2030 SDGs. UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres put these issues at top of the agenda and said that humanity must be peace with nature. Otherwise be prepared to face more disasters in future for damaging nature like COVID. Harmony and peace with nature requires resetting the system for long-term transformation of how humans extract and consume resources. Immediate environmental impacts such as increased waste is laying foundation for a green post-pandemic recovery.

Apart from UN many other international organizations are working hard as civil society organizations for protection of environment:

- a) Governmental Organizations
- b) Industry-based Non-governmental organizations/NPOs.

Former category evolved for regional political and economic objectives while global issues like poverty, food security, health etc. are common objectives of both categories. These are directly or indirectly focused on environmental aspects.

A. Governmental Organizations include:

- European Economic Community (EEC)
- Food and Agriculture Organization of United Nations (FAO)
- Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)
- United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)
- United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO)
- World Health Organization (WHO)

B. Industry-based Non-Governmental Organizations include:

- Bureau International de la Recupération (BIR)
- Business and Industry Advisory Committee to OECD (BIAC)
- International Chamber of Commerce (ICC)
- International Environment Bureau (IEB)
- Union of Industrial and Employee Confederations of Europe

C. A third category constitutes Organizations for Special Branch of Industry. These include:

- European Confederation of Pulp, Paper and Board Industry (CEPAC)
- European Council of Chemical Manufacturers' Federation (CEFIC)
- International Group on National Association of Manufacturers of Agro-chemical Products (GIFAP)
- International Petroleum Industry Environmental Conservation Association (IPIECA)
- International Iron and Steel Institute (IISI)
- International Primary Aluminum Institute (IPAI)
- Lead development association (LDA)
- Vial Companies European organization for Environmental and Health Protection Concave (CONCAWE)

12.5 GREEN PEACE MOVEMENT

Green Peace Movement is one of the important success stories for global environmental movement initially developed in Canada by a small group of people. Unitarian church support was explicit in this vision of green and peaceful world action. Media communication also played significant role to build world's largest environmental activity started in 1971 in Canada that spread worldwide and became a dominant force for environment movement. Basic objectives of Greenpeace Movement were to act or protest without using any force where they go to the place where an activity is considered harmful to the environment. They try to stop that activity by protesting against welling Greenpeace members in boat positioned themselves between Wales and welling ships. Greenpeace is a campaigning organisation and organizes popular campaign for following causes:

a) Protection of oceans and marine endangered sea species:

In 1970s Green Peace Movement started with protecting ocean and marine lives i.e. to prevent more than 3000 endangered sea species in Amchitka island, Alaska (Canada). A small group of people visited underground nuclear testing site and their peaceful protest stopped the project. As we are aware that oceans have important role in the planet. Significant part of living organisms, from microscopic plankton to largest of breed whales, comes from oceans. They also provide half of oxygen requirement of the earth. Latest vessels and equipment used to exploit marine life, coupled with burning of fossil fuels and dumping of chemicals into oceans, threaten to their ability to cleanse themselves and maintain a natural balance. Indiscriminate exploitation of oceans causes dead zones of life, sea decimation of fishing stocks, extinction of whales etc. Greenpeace movement played a significant role for saving our oceans.

b) To end nuclear threat:

Nuclear threat started in July 1945 when US tested their first nuclear bomb near Alamogordo (New Mexico) and few years later in 1951 further launched atomic bomb and claimed it for peace program. However, use of nuclear power has never been peaceful and always destructive to nature. As we are witnessing more than half of the century the planet is left with legacy of huge nuclear waste which will be radioactive for thousands of years. This radiation not only posed a threat to environment but also led to contamination of soil, rivers and oceans, causing cancer and other diseases. Green Peace is campaigning to nuclear power reprocessing and tried to shell into US nuclear weapons testing in its initial attempt. Since then it continually opposes nuclear weapons but this does not mean they have clearly have disappeared it. Nuclear armament grew to 70,000 during cold war and more than thousand of them were ready to launch at short notice. However, after cold war it has drastically reduced to 13,000.

c) Protection of ancient forests

World's natural ancient forests are diverse that include:

1) temperate forests,

- 2) tropical forests,
- 3) coniferous forests, and
- 4) rain forests.

These forests have multiple roles in our ecosystem like:

- 1) balancing oxygen proportion in atmosphere,
- 2) controlling rainfall and evaporation,
- 3) prevention of soil erosion,
- 4) providing ample resources of food, herbs and livelihood needs.

Ancient forests are home to millions of forest people and animals who depend on them for their survival in terms of both physical and spiritual needs. These forests are also house to around two third of the world's best species of plants, animals and insects. Destructive logging operations and encroachment in ancient forests are changing ecosystem and drastically reducing biggest forests of the world – Amazon rainforest and Africa's Cameroon rainforest. This is because of demand for cheap timber for international market as driving factor behind forest destruction. Green Peace played initial catalytic role to protect and alerted concern nations as well as suggested environmentally and socially responsible forest management worldwide.

d) To eliminate toxic chemicals:

Toxic chemicals in our environment threaten not only rivers and lakes but also the quality of air, land and oceans. We are engaged in production of many synthetic chemicals and products now viewed as a global threat to human health and environment. World's chemical industry continues to produce and release thousands of chemical compounds every year without any testing and understanding its impact on environment. In 2019 it was reported that 53.6 million ton electrical or electronic equipment waste (e-waste) is was generated worldwide and every year 2 million ton is added to it. India alone creates roughly 00.146 million tones e-waste every year. This is biggest threat to developing and underdeveloped countries owing to lack of recycling/ disposal process. We are constantly exposed to polluting substances. Further, increase of global market for electrical and electronic products continues to accelerate contamination of environment. Greenpeace raises awareness about man-made hazardous chemicals in consumer products, house dust and rainwater. Its task is to sensitize international community to substitute hazardous chemicals and other toxic components. In order to prevent these threats, European Union, Japan, South Korea and states of USA have already introduced legislations to end use of toxic chemicals.

e) Campaign against genetic engineering:

Scientific development in molecular biology has great potential to increase our understanding of nature and provide new medical tools. It is also used to turn environment into giant genetic experiment for commercial interest. Biodiversity and environmental integrity of world's food supply is very important for our survival. Genetic engineering enables scientists to create plants, animals and microorganisms by manipulating genome that does not occur naturally. These are called genetically modified organisms. This also leads future generations to an uncontrollable genetic development which is harmful for following reasons:

- 1) genetically modified organisms cannot be recalled once released into environment for commercial interest,
- 2) public is denied the right to know about genetic engineering & its complications occurring in food chain, and

Thus, on one side we support agriculture production and corporate interest but on the other our actions are unpredictable in terms of their future consequence on environment and we are unable to readdress the upcoming biosafety protocol.

f) Attempt towards safe and sustainable trade:

Green Peace Movement was never against development and trade, rather it suggested optimum and sustainable use of natural resources. However, trade's purpose should be profit-making without loss to nature that often led to all above mentioned fivefold problems. Hence, it focused on sustainable use of natural resources without disturbance or with minimal interference to environment.

Green Peace is a popular non-governmental environmental organisation operational in more than 40 countries and an effective international coordination head quartered in Amsterdam, (Netherlands). Its slogan thrust upon "to ensure ability of the Earth to nurture life in all its diversity". It works worldwide with prominent environmental issues like:

- 1) safeguarding marine oceanic life,
- 2) anti-nuclear protest,
- 3) address issues such as global warming, ancient deforestation, commercial whaling and overfishing.

It uses direct action, lobbying and research to achieve its goals to protect environment. It's funding and financial support is truly voluntary, it functions without any state and corporate support. Apart from Greenpeace there are many other international environmental success stories before and after, however, isolated and less popular. These are also important to know about:

- 1) Wildlife Conservation Society, USA (1895),
- 2) Fauna and Flora International Cambridge (1903),
- 3) National Historical Danish Organization (1911),
- 4) Wetlands International, Netherland (1937),

- 5) Environmental Defense Fund, USA (1967),
- 6) Traffic Conservation Programme (1976),
- 7) World Resources Institute, USA (1982),
- 8) Rainforest Alliance, USA (1987),
- 9) International Network for Sustainable Energy, Denmark (1992),
- 10) Green Cross International, Geneva (1993),
- 11) Earth Charter Initiative (2000),
- 12) Society for the Environment, England (2004),
- 13) Climate Reality Project, Washington (2006),
- 14) Project Green World International, Oman (2012).

12.6 N.G.O.S AND ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

India has long historical roots of social and environmental movements. Environment is imbedded in our culture as we consider existence of gods in each living and non-living things of nature. The concept of “totem” is well known “social fact” in primitive communities and accordingly practiced. India followed the principle “वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्”. It means whole earth is one family including both biotic and non-biotic beings. In this regard we have a long history of various voluntary efforts for environmental protection/nature conservation. Some popular success stories are:

Bishnoi movement: This is well known and truly voluntary environmental movement started in 1730 by Jameshwarpanthis, the followers of Jameshwar sect (or Bishnoi sect). Amrita Devi Bishnoi refused to let king’s men cut trees in her village Khejrali of Marwar region (Jodhpur district). This initial resistance against deforestation resulted that her head was severed and more than 300 people were killed for trying to protect the trees. Popularly, these people are known as Bishnoi sect who are nature worshippers and their movement was completely non-violent. Bisnoi movement played significant role as precursor for further movements like Chipko and Appiko.

Chipko movement: This was one important unique movement for protection of trees against deforestation in 1973 at Chamoli district of Uttarakhand (Himalayan region). Like Bishnoi movement it was also led by women of that region who offered strong opposition for illegal cutting of trees by villagers. Two charismatic leaders spearheaded this movement: Sunderlal Bahuguna and Chandi Prasad Bhatt. They galvanized this civil society movement.

Silent valley movement: Silent Valley is an evergreen tropical forest in Palakkad district of Kerala. To protect the forest and their inhabitants this movement was started in 1973 by local communities, local NGOs and eminent environmentalists against government’s approval for construction of Kuntipuzha hydroelectric dam

across Kunthipuzha river that runs through Silent Valley evergreen forest. This project has many-fold impacts assessed:

- 1) loss of forest cover,
- 2) displacement of forest dwellers,
- 3) loss of wildlife varieties, and
- 4) submergence of 8.3 sq. kms. of moist evergreen forest.

Appiko movement: In south India this was well known movement after Silent Valley movement at Salkani village of Uttara Kannada district in 1983. Appiko in Kannada language means hugging trees. This forest conservation movement focused against tree-felling and deforestation in hill districts in Karnataka and Kerala for plywood factories, pulp and paper mills and due to various development projects like dam construction, rail and roadways. Local people observed heavy reduction in forest cover from 80 percent in 1950 to only 25 percent within 30 years. It was led by environmentalist Panduranga Hegde. He lamented that over 30 million people were adversely affected by deforestation in the region.

Narmada Bachao movement: This was also against huge hydroelectric dam construction on Narmada, the only westward river flowing through Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Gujarat. Since 1985 this protest is going on against building of this dam at various levels:

- 1) locally effected tribal groups,
- 2) NGOs,
- 3) environmental activists like Medha Patkar, Baba Amte etc.

Apart from them, many international NGOs are supporting and providing resources for this movement. A long legal battle highlighted ill effects of high-rise hydroelectric dams:

- 1) large submergence of fertile land,
- 2) people's displacement,
- 3) disturbance in biodiversity.

Tehri dam conflict: Tehri Hydro Power Corporation began planning a dam on Bhagirati river, main tributary of Ganga at Himalayan foothill town of Tehri in Uttarakhand (earlier under Uttar Pradesh). This is another popular resistance started by local people of Tehri Garwal during 1986-1990. Despite protests the plan went ahead that indicated that it would be fourth largest dam in the world. Sunderlal Bahuguna and people sitting on fast unto death after assurance from government to abandon the project ended the construction. But it started again

with development activities without viewing the danger to local ecology. Scientists advised that the high earthquake prone area of Tehri could easily destroy the dam and kill up to 500,000 people. Furthermore, Bhagirathi is sacred in Himalayan culture, therefore, damming the river would be an affront to this sacredness.

Hence, India has a long tradition efforts and endeavours towards environmental protection. These mentioned civil society initiatives are only a few among other numerous similar initiatives that are popularly unknown and unorganized.

Check Your Progress Exercise

1) Discuss role and significance of United Nations towards environmental protection, conservation and restoration.

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2) Throw light on Green Peace Movement.

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3) State which of the following are true and which are false:

- a) Appiko movement was a precursor to movements like Bishnoi and Chipko. ()
- b) Chipko movement was in Chamoli district of present-day Uttarakhand. ()
- c) Silent Valley movement was against construction of dam on Kunthipuzha river. ()
- d) Appiko in Kannada means cutting trees. ()
- e) Tehri dam was planned on Bhagirathi tributary of Ganga and was planned to be fourth largest dam in the world. ()

12.7 SUMMARY

In this Unit we read about dynamics of environment, its important components and their mutual interactions. Understanding of these interactions is crucial to know dependency between biotic and abiotic components of nature. There are large number of NGOs, NPOs and voluntary organisations engaged in environmental protection activities across the globe working in varied ways of actions – advocacy and awareness campaigns, policy making, research support, voluntary participation, protesting against state and corporate agencies. These initiatives range from village to international level. At international level in 1945 United Nations emerged as largest international association for variety of purposes: environmental protection, educational needs, global health issues, international legal support etc. For these it expanded various lateral organisations as its branches. You also read about role and significance of NGOs’ success stories on national and international level.

12.8 KEY WORDS

Totem: A sacred thing widely legitimized.

Social fact: This concept was given by Max Weber. It means social actions legitimised by society.

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation.

NPO: Non-Profit Organisation.

12.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISE

- 1) See Section 12.4
- 2) See Section 12.5
- 3) a) False, b) True, c) True, d) False, e) True

12.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

Seth, D. L. and Sethi, H. (1991). The NGO Sector in India: Historical Context and Current Discourse.

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