***Class-notes prepared and uploaded by-Dr Adidur Rahman***

***Dept. of Pol. Science, HAAC***

***For 6th sem. (Major), paper-6.6.***

Topic:

(a) Chipko Movement:

(b) Role of women in the Chipko Movement:

The Chipko Movement is an ecological movement, concerned with the preservation of forests and thereby with the maintenance of the traditional ecological balance in the sub-Himalayan region. It is related to the way as perceived the Chipko Movement as a ‘back-to-nature’ strategy and to their preference for a traditional type of economic development. The main objective of the movement was to maintain the traditional status quo between the people and the environment.

**Origin of the Movement:** In the 1970s, an organized resistance to the destruction of forests spread throughout India and came to be known as the Chipko movement. The name of the movement comes from the word 'embrace', as the villagers hugged the trees, and prevented the company contractors' from felling them.

The Chipko is an environmental movement that started in the year 1972-73. The participant of the movements ‘cling to’ the trees as their protectors by clinging to them. To begin with the Chipko movement was centered on economic considerations. The main demands were discontinuation of forest exploitation by outside contractors, payment guaranteed minimum wage to forest labourers, supply of materials to small-scale industries at concessional rates and the protection of ancient village forest rights.

However, the first Chipko action took place in April 1973, in the village of Mandal, an interior village in the Garhwal region of Himalayas. Over the next five years, it spreads like bonfire to many states to Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa and Karnataka. Again, it was sparked off by the government's decision to allot a plot of forest area in the Alaknanda valley to a sports goods company. The incident angered the villagers because their similar demand to use wood for making agricultural tools had been denied earlier. With encouragement from a local NGO called Dasoli Gram Swarajya Sangh (DGSS), the women of the area under the leadership of an activist, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, went into the forest hugging the trees and did not allow the company to cut them.

**Main supporters and their slogans:**

The supporters of the Chipko movement, mainly village women, have successfully banned the felling of trees in a number of regions and influenced natural resource policy in India. Dhoom Singh Negi, Bachni Devi and many other village women, were the first to save trees by hugging trees coined the slogan: *'What do the forests bear? Soil, water and pure air'.*

Some other persons have also been involved in this movement and have led it in proper direction. Sunderlal Bahuguna, a Gandhian activist, whose appeal to Mrs Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, resulted in the green-felling ban. Mr Bahuguna coined the Chipko slogan: ***'ecology is permanent economy'***. Likewise, Chandi Prasad Bhatt is another leader who pioneered the Chipko movement, encouraged the development of local industries based on the conservation and sustainable use of forest wealth for local benefit. He raised slogans as "*Saving the trees is only the first step in the Chipko Movement*," and also says ***"****Saving ourselves is the real goal. Our future is tied up with them"*. Indu Tikekar, a doctor of philosophy, whose spiritual discourse on the ancient Indian sanskrit scriptures have laid stress on the unity and oneness of life in the Chipko movement.

Another supporter of the chipko movement was Ghanasyam Raturi, the Chipko poet, wrote a poem describing the method of embracing the trees to save them from felling:

***‘Embrace the trees and   
 Save them from being felled;   
 The property of our hills,   
 Save them from being looted.'***

**Demonstrations:**  On 22 October 1971, villagers from nearby areas demonstrated in Gopeshwar against government forest policy. Meanwhile, the Forest Department, which had earlier refused the DGSM's annual request for 10 ash trees for its farm-tools workshop, allotted 300 ash trees to the Simon Company, a sporting-goods manufacturer. In March 1973, the agents of the Simon Company arrived in Gopeshwar to supervise the cutting of the trees.

On 27 March 1973 at a meeting in Gopeshwar, local people decided not to allow a single tree to be felled by the Simon Company. A month later, DGSM workers and villagers from nearby areas marched out of Gopeshwar to Mandal, beating the drum and singing traditional songs. It was a rally of about 100 persons. The Simon Company agents and their men retreated from Mandal without felling a single tree. This event had an impact on the Forest Department, which now offered to let the DGSM have one ash tree if it allowed the Simon Company its full quota. The DGSM refused and finally, the Forest Department had to cancel the Simon Company's permit and the trees were assigned to the DGSM instead.

The Forest Department also ended the ban on pine sap supplies, but at the same time it allotted the Simon Company a new set of ash trees in the Phata forest in another part of the district. On 20 June 1973, a local leader joined hands with the Savodaya workers and organized a Chipko demonstration in Phata, 80 km away from Gopeshwar. Villagers of Phata and Tarsali kept a vigil on their trees until December, thus starting the long story of the Chipko Movement.

**Techniques of Chipko Movement:** The Chipko movement became a classic example of Non-Violence resistance by the ordinary hill people without any formal leadership from any central authority. The local leadership of the movement came from the Gandhian Sarvodaya workers, and consequently the techniques applied by the activists were taken from Gandhian Satyagraha and Non-Violence.

In order to disseminate the Chipko message to remote villages, they employed different techniques such as padayatra, telling the old stories of movements to save India’s forest cultural heritage, Chipko foot marches took to local village schools, temples and mosques. Taped messages from popular leaders about the adverse effects of deforestation were carried out by them. Besides, they used folk songs, peaceful demonstration and sold pamphlets to draw the support of the public to their objectives.

**Major Achievements of the Chipko Movement:**

1. The Chipko protests in Uttar Pradesh achieved a major victory in 1980 with a 15-year ban on green felling in the Himalayan forests of that state by the order of Mrs Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India. Since then, the movement has spread too many states in the country.
2. The success of the Chipko movement in the hills saved thousands of trees from being felled. It was successful in influencing the government policy both at the national and state level.
3. As an organized effort, the Chipko movement has had some success. Sometimes it won moratoriums through government bans or court battles; sometimes it managed to replant trees in areas close to village homes. In 1987 Chipko was chosen for a “Right to Livelihood Award,” known as the “alternate Nobel” prize honor. The honor was rightly deserved for this small movement dominated by women which had become a national call to save forests.

**Role of Women in the Chipko movement:**

The Chipko movement is environmentalist movement gathered popularity worldwide. The supporters of this movement often called it an eco-feminist or women’s movement. In the case of women's role in the Chipko movement, it is both-Chipko, a Hindi word meaning ‘hugging’, is used to describe the movement because local village women literally hugged trees, interposing their bodies between the trees and the loggers to prevent their being cut down.  The prominent women leaders were Gauri Devi, Ganga Devi Chamun Devi, Iswari Devi and 72 years old women Shyama Devi who mobilized and formed vigilance parties to protect the forest from deforestation even at the cost of their life.

It is worth to be mentioned here that despite strong protest by the Dashauli Gram Swarajya Sangh (DGSS) in 1974, about 2500 trees of Reni forest were auctioned by the Forest Department. In protest against this auction the DGSS launched Chipko movement vigorously. Surprisingly, twenty seven women of Reni village prevented sixty men from entering the forest from cutting trees. Since then, the Chipko movement was projected to be a women’s movement. After the incident, the U. P. Government on the recommendation of the Reni Investigation Committee banned about 1200 sq. km. of river areas for commercial exploitation

In the wake of Reni incident, the impact of Chipko could be seen in the neighbouring areas as the women folk came forward to protect their forest. The women of Gopeshwar in 1978 and Bhyudar Valley of Dongary-Paitoli in 1980 took active part in preserving their forest resources. Even the women vehemently opposed their male members decion to give about sixty acre oak forest to construct horticulture firm in Dongary and Paitoli. They demanded their right to be associated with the management of forest. In fact, the women who participated in the Chipko meetings, processions and other programmes have become aware of their potentialities and are now demanding a share in the decision-making process at the community level.

Local village women leaders like Iswari Devi and Chamun Devi guided the chipko movement with their own strength. The whole forest echoed with Chipko slogans hugging the trees with commitment like:

*Soil is ours,  
Water is ours,  
ours are these forests.  
Our forefathers raised them,  
it’s we who must protect them.*

The impact of Chipko movement could also be seen to other fields also. For instance, the women of the Doon valley, the Garhwal region of Himalayan foothills, launched movement by laying blockage in mining operations in their areas on the banks of the stream Sinsyaru Khala, which was the lifeline for the villagers. Again in 1995, when the region was severely affected by massive landslide, local hill women under the leadership of Hema Devi started organizing public opinion and called for a total ban on commercial exploitation of forest.

Thus, women exhibited their power in the Chipko movement which continued more than two decades. Their participation in the Chipko movement not only protected the ecology and environment, but also developed the world’s consciousness on environmental issues. Indeed, the Chipko Movement can indeed be considered an important success story in the fight to secure women's rights, in the process of local community development through forestry and in environmental protection.

**&&&**