

Reflection on Women Eco-centric Movements in Uttarakhand

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Movements are best described as genitor of the process of change in the contemporary scenario. These mobilisations are collective actions that imply some uniformity or common interest among the people. The interest of these social-beings might be rooted in the similar socio-economic background of the masses. The social structure keeps changing, and so the demands of the component forming the social fabric. Therefore to balance the dynamics these movements continue to reshape the social and ecological landscape.

Morris & Herring (1987) says that without these movements there would not have been people coming into the field who were receptive to a new orientation. Turner & Killian (1957) describes movements as an agent to lose the structure, which is flexible and have a tendency to absorb the changes continuously occurring in a society's value system. These movements in the contemporary scenario are best described as a confluence between the persistent, changing and evolving elements in the community.

In India, movements have changed by ideology, goals, objectives, strategy, mobilisation and resources. In the pre Britishers era, protest and reforms were not made widely because of uniformity in intellectual orientation and rigid authority. During the time of Britishers, the protest was raised for religious and caste reforms, tribal and agrarian rights as well as some changes in the land reform. In present India, the movement has shifted its realm to political fragmentation, regional linguistic and resources disparity among the people.

Della (1999) talks about the recent approaches emerging such as collective behaviour perspective, resource mobilisation theory, new social movements' theory and the political process model. The present article is written keeping in mind the role of women in resource management. Women who have been the traditional custodians of the resources available to them in their surroundings are indulged from selection of seeds to farming and preservation. Shiva (1996) beautifully describes the relation by using a verbatim "I do not despair ever, for I guard one seed, a little life seed that I shall safeguard and plant again". To quench the need and impact of such movements article attempts to know the reasons for initiation and the results of various ecological movements by the women of Uttarakhand.

The state of Uttarakhand is known for many historical environmental movements where women participated in a large number. The very first is the Chipko Andolan or Chipko Movement which started in April 1973 by Sundarlal Bahuguna due to the tremendous deforestation in the Garhwal Himalayas which led to an ecological imbalance in the region and was one of the primary reason for devastating floods in Alaknanda in 1970. Since then many movements attempted to save the ecological balance in the state. During the late 1980s, the Beej Bachao Andolan which is also known as saving seed movement started in the Jardhar village of Tehri in Uttarakhand. The main leader of the movement was Vijay Jardhari who introduced the old tradition of baranaja which means 12 anaja or grains. During the process, the land is nourished with the traditional methods followed by growing of 12 seeds. These twelve seeds belong to different species and replenish the excellent mineral content in the soil.

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Some of these local seeds are either immune to drought or the pest. Hence even in the case of natural calamities, the local farmers are left with some products which were resistant to the natural calamity.

Once the cultivation of twelve seeds is harvested, it is followed by the paddy or wheat plantation and thus the cycle of crop rotation repeats. The main aim of the movement was to preserve indigenous varieties of seeds and traditional agricultural practices which are losing their base in the era of green revolution and mechanised agrarian practices. The movement introduced with the concept of baranaja which is a mixed farming and intercropping of twelve seeds in the same piece of land. Along the practice of baranaja, the movement also focuses on traditional methods of controlling pest and fungus by using local herbs. The growing of cash crops and monocropping is strictly not recommended and has led to the decline of seed varieties in agriculture. Therefore this movement attempts to revive and give priority to traditional agricultural practices which can help in the continuation of local species as well as give sustenance to the local villagers. The achievement of the movement resulted in the changes in the attitude of local villagers and government towards organic farming. The agriculture department did agree and supported the practice of such traditional agriculture in other regions of the Uttarakhand too. The increase in the momentum of movement has led to the collection of large number varieties of paddy, wheat, barley and other from all over the Garhwal region. Hence such movements can preserve the local seeds as well as increases the agrobiodiversity in the region.

The next movement is Raksha Sutra Andolan – A bond to save Nature which was started in 1994 by Suresh Bhai in the Riyala forests of Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand. The forests are in the altitude of above 1,000m. Despite the ban of cutting down trees by the state government in such high altitude, the trees were illegally cut down by the wood mafia. By some deceitful means, the region was declared as a dry zone by Uttar Pradesh Forest Corporation. The villages which were profoundly affected were the Harsil, Haruntha, Adala and Mukhem in the district of Uttarkashi and Tehri in Uttarakhand. When local left with no hope from the government to check the illegal trading in the woods, the local villagers started the Raksha Sutra Andolan or movement. The word has symbolic mean and sentiments attached while tying a thread and taking a pledge to protect and safeguard the same. The sacred thread was tied around the trees on the festival of Raksha Bandhan and was mainly contributed by the large chunk of

women by tying a thread around the trees in the villages.

The main aim of the movement was to protect the region from deforestation and recklessly to cut down of trees in the Garhwal region. To protect the trees, they tied threads around the trees and taken an oath to protect them from being cut. Slogans such as

Forests survive, the nation endures, and every village thrives sung all over the region resulted in saving many precious indigenous varieties of trees such as Mauro, Kail, Buransh and Muranda in the region. It is seen in various movements how the state government fails to keep the check, and the initiatives are taken by the local government in safeguarding the forests and other natural resources. The movement has created an awareness in the region, and the women were able to chase the forest officials and wood mafia in the area.

The next movement started by the women is Maiti Movement where the changes begin at home. The word Maiti is derived from the local language which means parental home of a woman. The movement involves the planting of a sapling by a newlywed girl when she leaves her home on the day of marriage. The Kalyan Singh Rawat started the campaign in 1995 in the village Gwaldam of Chamoli district in Uttarakhand. Some amount of money is given to bride side from groom's family for the maintenance of the plant as well as to provide some financial assistance to the underprivileged girls in the village. The event began once the marriage is fixed and the responsibility owned to take care of the plant is in the hands of the younger unmarried sister of a bride. The unmarried girls in the village chose for a plant which is good for the local environment, soil and atmospheric conditions. When in the extreme climate situation especially during the hail and snowfall sapling dies, it is being replaced by the other plant. The tradition of growing a plant is not only limited to weddings but has also widespread. In the nearby village called Ochat, the women in paying homage to the soldiers of Kargil war planted trees and gradually with a significant contribution of villagers and Border Security force it turned out to be Maiti forest. The forest has a different name such as Shaurya Van or Gallantry Van. The movement was kept in the name of women because it is observed that in hilly areas women are more engaged in agricultural activities than male and their sustenance is directly or indirectly dependent on the forest. The women in hilly areas walk miles and miles in search of grass, water and forests. So their active participation in the mountainous terrain has led to the initiation of many such movements. This movement is appreciated all

over the world and spreading its aura in other states as well. Such eco women-centric movements are the dire need to check the imbalance made so far in the climate and biodiversity. As we know the life of people living in the hilly terrain is not easy. They still share a close relationship with their surroundings and are directly dependent on natural resources for their livelihood. The Pahari women face all kind of ecological hardships. Be it scattered farming lands or reaching to the water sources; they have to walk miles and miles to collect water, grass and woods.

Even today the necessary facilities such as education, healthcare and communication reach late to them as seen in the above movements how women in Uttarakhand played a heroic role in preserving natural environment around them when the government failed to assist them. Therefore for any government, it is the primary duty to work on the ecological as well as economic hardships faced by the unheard voices. The programs and policies on the ground should be framed keeping in mind the voices, emotions and sentiments of the women they share with their surroundings while executing any development plan in the region.

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