



ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

For M.A (Semester – 4)

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What is Environmental Movement?

An environmental movement can be defined as a social or political movement, for the conservation of environment or for the improvement of the state of the environment. At present Environmental movements in India focuses on dams, displacement and resettlement effectively articulated their agenda on the human consequences of tampering with the courses of natural resources, have initiated protest action against the forces and agencies responsible for environmental degradation.

In India it is also seen that the ethnic practices of worshipping plants, trees, forest, and rivers reflects the natural and social domains and the wisdom of seeing unity in the living and the non-living world in the Indian tradition. The environmental movements in India encapsulate all categories of caste, class, race, religion, nations and also categories of species divisions and the divisions of the organic and inorganic world.

Definitions of Environmental Movements:

According to Rootes, Christopher (1999):

“The environmental movements are conceived as broad networks of people and organizations engaged in collective action in the pursuit of environmental benefits. Environmental movements are understood to be very diverse and complex, their organizational forms ranging from the highly organized and formally institutionalized to the radically informal, the spatial scope of their activities ranging from the local to the almost global, the nature of their concerns ranging from single issue to the full panoply of global environmental concerns. Such an inclusive conception is consistent with the usage of the term amongst environmental activists themselves and enables us to consider the linkages between the several levels and forms of what activists call ‘the environmental movement’” (Rootes, Christopher: 1999: 2).

Definitions of Environmental Movements:

According to Almeida, Paul and Linda Brewster Stearns (1998):

“There are three levels of collective action: 1) the local grassroots movement level; 2) the social movement level; and 3) a cycle of protest. A Local Grassroots Environmental Movement (LGEM) as a movement fighting a particular instance of pollution in a geographically specified region. Local Grassroots Environmental Movements have a limited range of goals that are tied to specific pollution problems. A social movement is a broader struggle that involves a formal organizations or a federation of loosely affiliated networks. Social movements have a wide range of goals directed at fundamental social and political reform. Finally, a cycle of protest is a specific period of heightened protest involving several social movements spread across different geographical areas and sectors of society. The identification of each level of movement activity is critical to understanding the political environment in which an Local Grassroots Environmental Movement operates.” (Almeida, Paul and Linda Brewster Stearns 1998: 38).

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

Bishnoi Movement

Bishnoi is a religious sect found in the Western Thar Desert and northern states of India. It was founded by Guru Maharaj Jambaji in 1485 AD in the Marwar (Jodhpur) desert region of western Rajasthan, India. It is a non-violent community of nature worshippers. This movement was started by sage Sombaji around 1700 AD against deforestation. After that Amrita Devi forwarded the movement. The 363 people from the Bishnoi community were killed in the protest. When the king of this region came to know the protest and killing then he rushed to the village and apologized, and declared the region as a protected area. It is noteworthy that this legislation still exists today.

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA

Chipko Movement

The Chipko is one of the globally known environmental movements in India. The Chipko movement focused world attention on the environmental problems of the Alaknanda catchment area in the mid Western Himalayas (Santra, S. C. 2009: 827). As Reddy (1998) notes that, “Chipko movement, launched to protect the Himalayan forests from destruction, has its roots in the pre-independence days. Many struggles were organized to protest against the colonial forest policy during the early decades of the twentieth century. The main demand of the people in these protests was that the benefits of the forests, especially the right to fodder, should go to local people”(Reddy, Ratna V. 1998: 686). “in early 1973, the forest department allotted ash trees to a private company. This incident provoked the Dasholi Gram Swarajya Sangha (DGSS) a local cooperative organization to fight against this injustice through lying down in front of timber trucks and burning resin and timber depots as was done in the quit India movement. When these methods were found unsatisfactory, Chandi Prasad Bhat, one of the leaders, suggested embracing the trees to prevent them from being cut. With its success, the movement has spread to other neighboring areas, and then onwards the movement is popularly known internationally as Chipko movement.”

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (Continued...)

The name of the movement, that is 'Chipko', comes from the word 'embrace', in Hindi. It is said that the villagers hugged or embraced or stuck to the trees in the forest to prevent them from being felled by the contractors.....The strategy of 'embracing' the trees to resist the felling of the trees was thought of by Chandi Prasad Bhatt in a meeting in the Mandal on April 1, 1973. The name 'Chipko' was derived from the consensual strategy of clinging on to the trees as a non-violent direct action (Nepal, Padam 2009: 135-136). Karan (1994) notes that, "by the late 1980s the movement had splintered into two groups that have broad grassroots support and advocate participatory methods which respond to local issues in the context of local social and cultural traditions. One group pursues a strategy that emphasizes ecologically sound development of forest by local people to meet local needs.....The second group follows the deep-ecology paradigm of environmental management" (Karan, P. P. 1994: 37). Reddy, Ratna and Mukul (1998; 1993) points out that, Chipko movement has had six demands - only one of which is complete stoppage of commercial cutting of trees.

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (Continued...)

The other demands included 1) on the basis of minimum needs of the people, a reorganization of traditional rights should take place; 2) arid forest should be made green with people's participation and increased tree cultivation; 3) village committees should be formed to manage forests; 4) forest related home-based industries should be developed and the raw materials, money and technique for it should be made available; and 5) based on local conditions and requirements, local varieties should be given priority in afforestation (Reddy, Ratna V. 1998: 687; Mukul 1993: 621).

Sunderlal Bahuguna and Chandi Prasad Bhatt were the leaders of this movement. The most notable characteristics of this movement were the involvement of women.

Finally the then state Chief Minister, Hemwati Nandan Bahuguna set up a committee to look into the matter, which eventually ruled in favor of the villagers. This became a turning point in the history of eco-development struggles in the region and around the world.

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (Continued...)

Appiko Movement

Appiko Movement is one of the forests based environmental movements of India, often looked at as a continuation of the Chipko Movement (Alvares: 1984). The movement took place in the Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka in the Western Ghats. It can be said that Appiko movement is the southern version of the Chipko movement. The Appiko Movement was locally known as “Appiko Chaluvalli”. The locals embraced the trees which were to be cut by contractors of the forest department. The Appiko movement used various techniques to raise awareness such as foot marches in the interior forest, slide shows, folk dances, street plays etc. The second area of the movement’s work was to promote afforestation on denuded lands. The movement later focused on the rational use of ecosphere through introducing alternative energy resource to reduce pressure on the forest. The movement became a success.

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (Continued...)

Silent Valley Movement

The Silent Valley Movement is one of the most important ecological movements in India. Silent Valley is the narrow valley of the Kunthipuzha River in the state of Kerala in the Malabar region at the southern end of the Western Ghats. It stands at an elevation between 2400 and 1000 meters (Sudarsan and Sinha: 1996). It has 8950 hectares of rainforest, one of the few remaining rainforests in India, with valuable flora and fauna. In 1973, the then state government of Kerala decided to build a dam across a gorge in the Kunthipuzha River, which flows through the Silent Valley. The proposed project would generate 200 MW of electricity and form the basis for regional economic development. However, the proposed project was not ecologically viable, as it would drown a chunk of the valuable rainforest of the valley and threaten the life of a host of endangered species of both flora and fauna. Hence, by 1979, students, rural school teachers, science forums, journalists, citizens, and voluntary organizations made a well-reasoned 'case against the project. As a result, an organization called Save Silent Valley Committee emerged which spearheaded the protest against the construction of the dam across the Kunthi River in the Silent Valley.

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (Continued...)

The central issues of the Silent Valley protests included the protection of the tropical rainforest, maintenance of the ecological balance, and an opposition destructive development. The campaigns and petitions were the main strategies adopted by the activists in the movement, basing it on the non-violent, Gandhian ideological orientation. The movement also portrays as to how the coalition was formed of the people belonging to different professions came together to fight against the project. It has also enmeshed several themes within it such as of the protest against the destruction of forest, an opposition to ecologically unsustainable development, and above all, maintenance of the ecological balance. This diversity of the theme of the movement could attract people belonging to the different walks of life, thereby giving energy and vigor to the movement to move and to transform.

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (Continued...)

The Fisherfolk Movement

Kerala occupies the foremost position in marine fish productions and export earnings in India. The famous Wadge Bank is situated within the exploitable limits of Kerala. The presence of shallow mud banks that result in the surfacing of particular species of fishes is a unique feature of the coast. Despite the existence of such opulent resources, traditional fishing communities have remained socio-economically marginalized. Traditional fishing was carried out by small-unpowered craft confined to shallow waters. Mechanization began with an Indo-Norwegian Project in 1953 to meet the rising demands for shrimps from countries/ like Japan and the USA. This led not only to the dwindling of fish stocks but also to the livelihood problems of the traditional fisherman who could not afford the mechanization of their fishing equipments. The Fisherfolk, therefore, felt the need to strengthen themselves to check this trend. Hence the Fisherfolk Movement emerged with the formation of cooperatives and networks as revealed in studies made by a host of scholars (Mathur: 1977; Abraham: 1995; Murickan Mathew: 1998; Chakraborty: 1999; Aerthayil: 2000).

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (Continued...)

Tehri Dam Movement

One of the most protracted and a celebrated environmental movement in the recent years is the movement against the Tehri Dam, which is being built on the Bhagirathi River in Garhwal, Uttaranchal. The Tehri Dam, partly funded by Russia, is a major hydroelectric project that was conceived long back in 1949 by the Geological Survey of India. However, it was only in 1963 that detailed investigations to this end were made. After the visit of the then Minister for Power and Irrigation Shri K. L. Rao, in 1965, the site was finally confirmed. By 1967, several experts both at home and abroad visited the site and recorded their opinions. The cost of the project as initially prepared in 1967 was estimated at Rs. 126.8 crores. However, the figure moved up to Rs. 3000 crores in 1989 and in March 1990, it went up to Rs. 4142 crores. The Projected Dam Height is 260.5 meters, impounding 3.22-million cubic meter of water. The construction of the Tehri Dam is opposed on the ground of seismic data projecting earthquake disaster and displacement of the people of old Tehri town and the neighbouring villages. The anti-Tehri Dam. movement is spearheaded by Tehri Baandh Virodhi Sangharsh Samiti (Committee for the Struggle against the Tehri Dam) founded by the prominent leaders like V. D. Saklani, Sunderlal Bahuguna and other leaders active in the movement. The movement continued from 1980s to 2004. The core of the conflict was against the displacement of town inhabitants and environmental consequence of the weak ecosystem.

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (Continued...)

Narmada Bachao Movement

The most popular movement in the environmental history of India is the movement against the Narmada River Valley Project (Reddy, Ratna V, 1998: 688). The Narmada is the largest west flowing river on the Indian peninsula...The Narmada winds its 1,312 km long course to the Arabian Sea through lovely forested hills, rich agricultural plains and narrow rocky gorges in a series of falls (Kothari, Ashish and Rajiv Bhartari 1984: 907). The Narmada movement started as early as the late 1970s. Reddy (1998) notes that: To start with, this movement was centered around the issue of human rights.....The main leaders of the movement at present like Medha Patkar were working towards proper rehabilitation programmes for the dam displaced. Due to improper implementation of the rehabilitation programmes by the state, the human rights activists have become the articulators of antidam protests. Their demands included complete stopping of the dam, resettlement and rehabilitation benefits to the oustees.....The movement, however, gained wider public attention with mobilization and organization of oustees (mostly tribals) and the joining of the eminent social workers like Baba Amte, Sunderlal Bahuguna and Medha Patkar. Though its wider public attention is due to its coverage (impact) in three states, the most notable feature of this movement is the international support it has received (Reddy, Ratna V. 1998: 688).

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (Continued...)

Chilka Bachao Movement

Chilika Bachao Andolan is one of the most discussed environmental movements in India. The movement began as a grassroots movement and in the subsequent years it evolved in to an organized mass movement. Although the movement has achieved the initial objective of preventing the entry of big business houses like the Tatas into the commercial aquaculture of prawns, thereby threatening the livelihood of the poor, yet the movement continues with greater 'environmental and ecological objectives. It has been a movement attracted a wide academic interest (Bogaert: 1992; Dogra: 1992; Shankhar: 1992), a movement that highlighted the importance of local communities in the protection and preservation of the natural environment. A heterogeneous population comprising of both fishermen and farmer belonging to different caste groups inhabits the surrounding area of Chilika. To be more precise, Brahamagiri, Kanasa, and Krishnaprasad Blocks of Puri District, Tangi and Chilika Blocks of Khurda District and Khalikot and Ganjam Blocks of Ganjam District with an approximately 12, 363 fisherfolk households inhabiting it surround the Chilika area. Fishing and agriculture are the two primary sources of livelihood of the populace. The fishermen belong mostly to the lower castes and most of them are either landless or possess tiny landholdings. Hence, over a lakh of fisherfolk are completely dependent on the ecosystem for fishing to earn their livelihood (Abassi and Mishra: 1997). Recently, the upper castes also have taken to fishing because of steadily lucrative nature of the prawn market.

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (Continued...)

As a response to this Integrated Shrimp Farm Project, people, majority of the fishermen of Chilika launched the Chilika Bachao Andolan (Save the Chilika Movement). Non-fishermen farmers, students especially from Utkal University, intellectuals, and human rights activists supported the fishermen in their struggle, that is, the Chilika resistance. Subsequently the *Orissa Krusbak Mabasangha* (OKM) entered the fray to protect the livelihood rights of the fisherfolk. Rallies, demonstrations and meetings were held, and the Chilika Lake reverberated with voices of protests opposing the Tata business house, the government and the developmental idiom that gave priority to the commercial use of resources as against the local use for subsistence. The entry of OKM gave a new dimension to the movement since 1992 by raising the question of ecological health of the Chilika Lake, which was hitherto left out, along with the issue of the impairment of the livelihood opportunities of the indigenous communities. The movement was intense, involving moving of judicial institutions to rallying and demonstrating, even leading to bloodshed on May 29, 1999 in Sorana police firing, an incident after the departure of the Tatas from the site.

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (Continued...)

However, the movement was episodic in nature and uneven in speed. Although there were internal conflicts and contestations within the movement, yet the movement succeeded in raising certain critical and pertinent issues like the ownership of Chilika, destruction of the livelihood opportunities and the consequent fate of the fishing community, and also questioned the role of the state during the instances of conflict of commercial use of resources by the business houses with the livelihood pursuit of the poor people. The struggle of the Chilika Bachao Andolan exhibited the might of the fishermen as well as the role played by the fisherwomen. This Andolan amplified the local struggle in to a larger movement and has focused its attention on the nature of development. The movement as attracted international attention due to several issues such as environmental degradation through intensive prawn aquaculture, deprivation of the main support base for the livelihood of the poor fishing communities, pollution of the lake environment, etc. In other words, it successfully questioned the existing paradigm of resource use and the encroachment of people's rights over their livelihood resources. Thus, the movement has evolved through different stages, with internal conflicts and contradictions and moved on to address the issues confronting the fisherfolk and exposed the inability of te current development paradigm to address the local livelihood needs of the people.

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (Continued...)

The Baliapal Movement

The popularly known Baliapal movement is a struggle against the establishment of the National Testing Range (NTR), India's first missile testing project in the Baliapal and Bhograi blocks of Orissa's Balasore district. The Baliapal Movement is also regarded as an environmental movement on the ground that it concerns the appropriation of land previously used by the people by the NTR in the recent years. Baliapal is located in the north of the state of Orissa in its Balasore district on the Bay of Bengal coast. It is inhabited by a population majority of who are landless and poor and middle peasants with a landholding ranging between one to five acres. In October 1984, the government announced that Baliapal had been chosen as the appropriate site for the National Testing Range (NTR) - a base for testing and launching of rockets, satellites and ballistic missiles with a range of up to 5000 kilometers. The base would cost an estimated Rupees 3000 crores as initially calculated, however, it was slashed to 1600 crores to soften the peoples' resistance (Ravi: 1988), and cover 100 square kilometers of land, necessitating the eviction of approximately 100000 people from 130 villages.

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (Continued...)

As a response to this plan and its perceived threats to the livelihoods of the people, the resistance movement emerged, popularly called the Baliapal Movement, under the leadership of Gadhagar Giri and Gannanath Patra. The movement began in December 1985 with the formation of the *Uttara Balasore Khepanastra Ghati Protirodh Samiti* (KGPS), which did not allow the government to evict people from the site of the National Testing Range (NTR). They successfully mobilized all sections of the population in to the movement and formed the Resistance Committee to lead the movement, comprising of people from all strata of social and economic hierarchy. At the peak of the movement, around 50, 000 people participated in the movement. However, it is worth noting at this point that the Baliapal movement was a localized movement because it remained restricted to the Baliapal Block, and it did not spread to Bhograi Block where over thirteen villages were to be acquired by the project.

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (Continued...)

Like most other environmental movements in India, the Baliapal movement also followed a non-violent path of resistance. Intervention, non-cooperation, protest and persuasion are the various methods used by the movement. For instance, the people of Baliapal erected barricades along the approach roads to prevent the entry of government agents into the village; as non-cooperation with the government, the villagers have refused to pay taxes and loans to the government since 1985; they have demonstrated, written and performed songs, music and plays detailing the struggle. While the movement is defensive in its goal to prevent people's eviction from the area and maintain the status quo, it is apparently offensive in its challenge to the national security decision-making process of the Indian state and the underlying premise that the national security interests must always take precedence over the local concerns. However, the question still arises: national security at what cost? The ideology of the movement draws upon the cultural and economic dimensions of the peasants' everyday reality, and hence, more Gandhian in its appearance.

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (Continued...)

The Koel Karo Movement

The Koel Karo Movement is a movement against the Koel Karo Hydel Power Project. This project was formed with the help of the Bihar government and the National Hydel Power Corporation (NHPC). The project was designed to benefit the states of Jharkhand, Chhatisgarh, Bihar and Orissa by producing 710 MW of power. This project was first conceived of in 1954 to promote lift irrigation, rural electrification and industrialization in Ranchi, Gumla and Singbhum districts. The project was to be built on the river Koel and North Karo in Ranchi, Gumla and Singbhum districts of Bihar. For the project, as according to the official estimate, 55 thousand acres of land was to be acquired of which 40 thousand acres was the Rayati Land (Ansari: 2003); it was to submerge approximately 10, 522 hectares of cultivable land, 5666 hectares of barren land and 364 hectares of government land. It was estimated to displace 3282 families in 26 villages of Gumla district, and 1157 families in 16 villages of Ranchi district of which 90 percent are tribals. The dam would also submerge 150 *sarna* (Places of worships), and 300 *samsan diris* (Places of burial of the bones of the ancestors). The prospect of losing these two sites of cultural heritage amounted to a direct attack on the tribal culture, which was simply outrageous to the tribals (Aganval and Narain: 1999).

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (Continued...)

Thus, the project was opposed and a movement against the project was launched. However, in the initial years, the movement formed its organization against the project in Koel and Karo separately. However, under the leadership of Moses Gudia, the two organizations were merged in to one called the *Koel Karo Jan Sangathan* (KKJS). KKJS launched its movement to stop the work in the project by 1977-78. The main issues of the movement included the social, cultural and economic rehabilitation of the displaced; necessity to involve the affected people in the decision making process of the project; etc. The movement was supported by Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) and All Jharkhand Students Union (AJSU). The agitation continued even after the formation of the new state of Jharkhand. Finally, Arjun Munda's government on 28 August 2003 decided to shelve the Koel Karo Project. Thus, the *Koel Karo Jan Sangathan* successfully stalled the project after a long drawn struggle of 49 years.

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (Continued...)

Jungle Bachao Movement

The tribal community of Singhbhum district of Jharkhand (Previously, it was a district of India during the British Raj, part of the Chota Nagpur Division of the Bengal Presidency) agitated against the forest policy of the Government in 1982. The Government wanted to replace the natural soil, forests with the high-priced teak. Many environmentalists refer to this movement as “Greed Game Political Populism”.

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (Continued...)

Other Movements

Apart from the movements discussed above, there are other movements, which also have strong environmental themes. They include Jharkhand Bastar Belt Movement, Zahrili Gas Morcha in Bhopal, movement against Harihar Polyfibre Factory in Karnataka, movement against the poisoning of Cheliyar river in Kerala, movement against Vishnuprayag Dam, Koyna Project Affected Committee's struggle, Jan Andolan in Dabhol against Enron, Anti-Balco Project Movement in Orissa, Amravati Bachao Abhiyan, Shramik Mukti Andolan in Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Himachal Bachao Andolan, Save Western Ghats Movement, Save Bombay Committee, Save Pune Citizen's Committee, Clean Baroda Movement, and the Rahmeria Movement in Assam, among many more. Thus, it goes beyond the scope of the present work to present a detailed analysis of these movements.

MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS IN INDIA (Continued...)

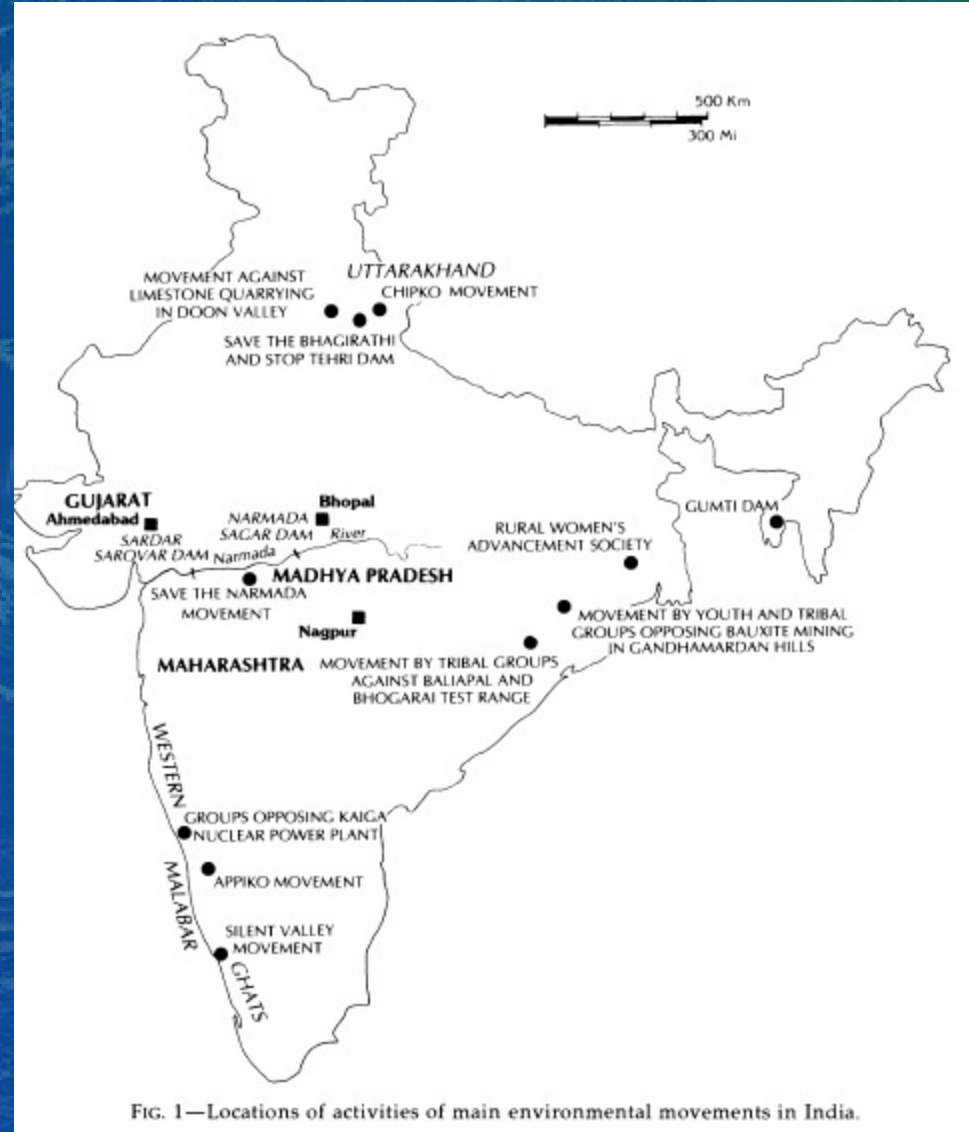


FIG. 1—Locations of activities of main environmental movements in India.



THANK YOU!

The End