

Community Participation and Forest Governance: From State Centric to People Centric Approach Through Analysis of Joint Forest Management

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Abstract

This paper tries to explore role of community participation in forest governance through analysis of various policies and Acts and their impact on present scenario. Paper discusses how policies and act by government have evolved from revenue generation to conservation of forests. How forests management have taken centre stage in this era of global warming, natural disasters and human made calamities. It also emphasises on the importance of synergy between environment and people by taking forward concept of Sustainable Development. It explores the field of Environment Sociology which is fairly new but necessity of today's world. In this paper there is a discussion about improvement in policies to strength the core of forest conservation through the help of participatory action of community and government. It also tries to draw conclusion and some suggestion.

Keywords: Community Participation, Forest Governance, Environment Sociology, Sustainable Development.

Introduction-

The relationship between environment and people are existed since time immemorial. Forest is a crucial part of environment as it consists of different species like animals, plants etc.” The participation of local communities and other stakeholders in managing forestry and conservation projects would definitely help to improve forest productivity, alleviate poverty, enhance environmental sustainability and make rules governing forest accessible and more enforceable”, says the World Bank (1995). It further emphasises on the government commitment to increase participatory management in Forest Management.

The survival of people without forest is unimaginable. Their culture and way of life is strongly connected to forest. Natural resources are crucial for human's survival like food, fibre, housing, fuel and fodder. They worshiped earth, water, air, fire and natural objects like trees, animals' rivers as their deities. They cannot even think of abusing them as it is their duty to protect them. However, depletion of forest is result of population explosion and human's need and greed (Guha, 1994).

Local community heavily depend on resources of forest. therefore, conflict between greed of people and environmental interest exists. According to India State of Forest Report 2011, there are 69.20 million hectores of forest in India (21.05% of total land area). This fall short of national target of 33% of land area being covered by forest set forth in the national Forest Policy of

1988. According to Forest Survey of India, 2011 only 12.30 % of the forest cover out of 21.05% have high ecological value, while remaining 8.75% are degraded open forest.

In today's scenario the protection of forest is essential for survival of human beings. It can drastically reduce carbon footprints created by humans. Afforestation and Forest conservation are solution of global warming, climate change, uneven rainfall, habitat protection of species. We cannot think our future without forest as they play a crucial role in our lives. The Concept of Sustainable Development focuses on development which took future generations need in consideration. Sustainable Development suggests that the prevailing paradigm of development is not well. It brings into the focus the ecological sustainability issue cause due to the present way of development.

Community participation refers to process of assigning specific role to people with certain rights and responsibilities to for conservation of forests. People are granted permission to use of forest resources with provision of wage labour etc. the active involvement of people in decision making of their resources and lives is real form of community participation it create a bond between them which in turn also boost conservation of forest. (Oakley et al, 1991).

The significance of forest has been seen from Mahabharata and Ramayana to Mughal period to pre- independence period. The policies before 1988 were mainly focused on revenue generation at the cost of rights of indigenous people closely connected to their environment. Post-independence movements like Chipko Movement forced a policy shift toward participatory governance from revenue centric policy (Guha, 1989). The National Forest Policy of 1988 acted as setting stone for Joint Forest management Policy. JFM was strengthened through Forest Right Act of 2006 which also known as the scheduled Tribe and other traditional forest dwellers Act aims to recognise and document the rights of forest community, which depend on forest resources for survival. These policies help people to connect with their surroundings.

Joint Forest Management is need of hour as it connects people with their environment and provide them certain rights with responsibilities. Joint forest management is policy initiated by Ministry of Environment and Forest. It is a shift from the traditional State -Centric approach. It emphasises active participation of local communities to protect forest and sustainable use of forest resources by them. Under this policy there are provisions which demands active participation of women and other section of society. Under this policy there is a joint forest management committee at village level which consist of forest departments and village communities. This committee prepared a micro plan which include data of village and proposed activities identified by local communities such as nursing raising, soil and moisture conservation work, awareness programmes, forest protection its conservation, afforestation of different models, livelihood improvement and development of forest.

This policy consists of Joint Forest Management Agreement under which villagers assist in safe guarding of forest resources through protection from fire, grazing and illegal harvesting in exchange of non-timber forest resources and products and a part of revenue from sale of timber products.

The Forest Right Act (FRA) 2006 was a Act which helped forest-dwelling Scheduled Tribes and other traditional forest dwellers. It grants them rights over forest land and resources.

However, its implementation has been uneven, facing resistance from forest departments and powerful people at the local level. This clearly shows that people are greedy.

Methodology

This paper is based quantitative and qualitative data. The data is secondary in nature from books, journals and schemes and government reports. It also uses ecological theory for explaining need of Joint Forest Management.

Review of Literature

Raymond Dassman, Gadgil and Guha (2004 cf Chaudhury, 2014) in their book *Ecology and Equity*, spoke about three categories of people concerned with ecology of environment:

- i. Ecosystem people are those who depend on the natural environment of their own locality to meet their materials needs. They are India's poor masses numbering about four-fifths of India's rural people and over half of the total population.
- ii. Ecological refugees are those who are the victims of the shrinking capacity of ecosystem. They are the millions of displaced India's peasants and tribes, constituting about one-third of the population.
- iii. Omnivores are the remaining one-sixth of India's population who are the real beneficiaries of economic development. They include rich landowners, entrepreneurs, urban professionals, government and semi-government employees. They enjoy the produce of the entire biosphere.

Sustainable Development suggests that the prevailing paradigm of development is not well. It brings into the focus the ecological unsustainability causes due to the present way of development.

"The first major reference to environmental destruction came from Rachel Carson's book *The Silent Spring* (1962). This book draws attention to the forest destruction caused by the use of DDT. This book significantly changed the understanding of environmental, economic and social welfare.

Mukherjee (1968) in his book *Man and His Habitation: A Study in Social Ecology*, has expressed important views on social ecology. According to him, ecology or environment affects human and community resources. On this basis, Mukherjee has mentioned two aspects of ecology - individual ecology and community ecology. These two aspects are interdependent and interrelated because the response expressed by the individual to the factors related to the environment affects the community and the response expressed by the community to the environment affects the individual. So, both of them have to adapt to the environment. He further says that natural conditions have great importance in ecology. Hence the web of life consists of multiple elaborate threads that bind together the different parts of the living world. That's why it is very important to maintain harmony among them.

Guha (1994) says that ecology has five fold scheme:

1. Ecology Infrastructure (soil, water, forest etc.)
2. Economy (trade, forces of production)

3. Social Structure (family and kinship caste, community etc.)
4. Polity (State, Law, Power)
5. Culture (Religion, ideology)

He gave utmost importance to Ecology because it lies at the base of all and if ecology is distributed then economy, social structure, polity and culture will also be affected.

Gadgil and Vartak (1975) in their article 'Sacred Groves of India - A Plea for Continued Conservation' have described the importance of sacred groves from the point of view of conservation and its economic importance. They say that there is a large part of small forest areas all over India, which is saved due to religious beliefs because there is no interference by humans. The author mentions the examples of two such minor forest areas of Maharashtra.

Agarwal (1997) focuses that people participation in forest management is quite new. Government-sponsored Forest rejuvenation, development and management initiative are based on government and public partnership. The failure of previous forest management schemes was result of state- centric approach. The lack of participation of people led to failure of these schemes.

Poffenberger & Mark and Gean (1996) examined the community forest management in India and its socio-economic, institutional and technical implication. It reviewed the new participatory forest management policies. It also mentioned that community forest management groups and local governance bodies must ensure that system is flexible enough to accommodate new setup for performing critical tasks.

Dhanagre (2000) studied the forest management initiatives in Uttar Pradesh. He said that sustainable use of land and forest produce requires change at the part of government officials and local community. There is a need of NGOs participation for micro planning and motivating the local people to participate in Joint Forest Management. He further emphasised that JFM should be integrated with Rural Development Programmes for better adaptation and role of women should be given more importance.

Singh (2000) examined that people's participation in forest management through NGOs in Ranchi district of Bihar and observed that people's participation in JFM has created a feeling of ownership among villagers for forest as they treat forest and its resources as common property which can be used in future.

Dwivedi (2014) says that by 1970s, there has been increase in number of Protected Areas (PA) in India. The number rises from 130 (in 1975) to 520 PA. The people residing near these areas were displaced without giving fair compensation which resulted resentment in them towards government. It also led to resistance by them.

Findings

Community Participation is crucial for forest management and conservation. It helps people to connect and create a emotional bond with forest as seen in various movements. The imagination of conservation and sustainable development without community participation is myth.

There are many challenges in present policies as at local level Gram Panchayats lack the capacity to manage their daily affairs. Equitable distribution of benefits among people requires proper planning. Local people lack proper knowledge to manage forest they need training for this. Illegal activities are major concern such as encroachment and deforestation, pinning of soil etc. Lack of accountability is also major drawback.

There should be proper guidelines with clear instructions for Forest management. Awareness should be first step. Proper training to officers and local people is must. Professionals, specialists should be member of policy making committees. School curriculum should include environment studies and children should participate in tree plantain drives, awareness programmes as future is with them

Conclusion

Community participation in forest governance represents a significant paradigm shift in India's environmental policy landscape. However, its success depends not just on institutional design but on addressing underlying social inequalities and ecological realities. A truly participatory and ecologically grounded forest governance system must go beyond formal inclusion to foster genuine empowerment, environmental ethics, and collective action.

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