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VOLUNTEERS' OPINIONS REGARDING ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS: A STUDY OF NGOs IN SATARA DISTRICT

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Abstract:- On the basis of data collected from selected sample of fifty eight NGOs working for environmental protection and conservation in Satara district, the present paper understands the opinions of the environmental volunteers with regarding to certain issues relating to the field of environmental protection and conservation. The empirical area of the present study forms part of Western Ghats which is ecologically rich. Especially, after 1980 with the rise in the local environmental problems and along with them increasing felt need to address these issues environmental NGOs have emerged in Satara district. To address local environmental problems many environmental NGOs have been formed in Satara district.

Keywords: Environmental NGOs, Environmental Problems, Protection and Conservation.

INTRODUCTION:

The evolution of environmental issues on the agendas of international institutions can be better understood by dividing the postwar period into three periods defined by two landmark meetings: the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, which was convened in Stockholm in June 1972 and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, known as the Earth Summit, which was held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. The first, or pre-Stockholm era, extends to 1968, the year in which the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution to convene the Stockholm Conference four years later. The second, or the Stockholm era, spans two decades, from 1968 to 1987... The third, or Rio de Janeiro era, commences in 1987 with the release of the influential report of the Brundtland Commission entitled 'Our Common Future' (Soors, Marvin S. 2006: 28-29).

The emergence of environmental debate in contemporary India and renewed scholarly attention towards environmental topics can be attributed to the factors such as the influence of international events/agencies concerning global environmental conditions, growing official recognition of certain environmental problems in the country (Guha, Ramchandra 1997: 345).

There is hot debate about developmental projects and environmental degradation at the global level. It has been noticed that the developmental projects in our country at various places have resulted on large scale of destruction and ecological degradation. Various NGOs have come into existence and they have started the environmental movements for the protection and conservation of environment. In Satara District there are also various types of developmental projects viz. Dams,

Electricity Power Generation Projects, Irrigation Projects, Road Projects have been undertaken in the process of planning. The NGOs in Satara District have critically analyzed various types of developmental projects and their environmental effects. So, various awareness generation activities and action programmes for protest and legal actions in the context of negative environmental/ecological consequences of various developmental programmes mentioned above are on the agenda of NGOs.

METHODOLOGY:

The present study was undertaken to document the environmental NGOs and their work in Satara District of Maharashtra, with a view to understand their role in environmental protection. The descriptive research design has been adopted for the present study. A list of NGOs working in the field of environmental protection and conservation was compiled by using snow-ball technique. After preparation of the list of 58 NGOs, each and every NGO was contacted and preliminary information regarding all these NGOs was collected from the contact persons. The data were collected by using a questionnaire.

ORGANIZATIONAL FEATURES OF ENVIRONMENTAL NGOS:

The salient features of the environmental NGOs in Satara district are as Follows:

1) The more activities of environmental NGOs are found in urban areas than the rural, 2) The environmental organizations are working spontaneously and voluntary. The nature of organizations (NGOs) are non- profit basis, 3) The majority environmental NGOs in Satara district are having small size (below than 25 members), 4) The majority of NGOs in Satara District are registered, 5) The NGOs executive bodies are constituted, from the middle class and these body members are coming from highly educated, well being civil societies.

Social Background of Volunteers in Environmental NGOs:

1) The majority of the volunteers were of the middle age. 2) The male volunteers were more than female. 3) The majority of environmental NGOs volunteers were coming from Maratha and other higher castes, they are mainly Hindus. 4) Most of the environmental volunteers belonged to ‘Middle Class’ and ‘Rural Background’. 5) The majority of environmental volunteers were coming from highly educated families of society. 6) The majority environmental volunteers participate in different activities organized by NGOs and they were coming from government/private services and own business strata.

Volunteers’ Opinions Regarding Environmental Problems:

This section of the present paper is devoted to understand the opinions of the environmental volunteers with regarding to certain issues relating to the field of environmental protection and conservation. The opinions of the volunteers about some relevant environmental issues/problems are presented below.

1] According to the Volunteer’s view, which are crucial environmental problems at the global level?

According to the volunteers’ some major environmental problems at the global level such as: Global Warming, Air, Water and Sound Pollution, Depletion of Ozone Stratum, Industrial Pollution, Land Pollution, Deforestation, Solid and Liquid Waste, Decline of Biodiversity percent, Natural Disasters and Forest Fire, followed by more serious problems.

2] According to the Volunteer’s view, which are the basic causes of the environmental problems in India?

According to the volunteers’ point of view some major environmental problems are: Population Growth, Greedy Nature of Human Nature, Growth of Industrialization, Urbanization, Excessive Use of Natural Resources, Forest Cutting, Excessive use of Vehicles, Wastage/Garbage,

Unlimited needs of Human Beings, Unplanned Development, Use of Plastic and Lack of Environmental Awareness.

3] Major Environmental Problems from the Key Volunteers point of view of the NGOs in Satara District:

According to the volunteers' the most serious environmental problems in Satara district are: Degradation of Kas Plateau, Oppose to New Mahabaleshwar Project, Conservation of Historical Forts/Places, Forest Fire, Tree Cutting, Loss of Biodiversity, Problem of Drinking Water etc., followed by some more serious problems such as; Excessive use of Vehicles, Excessive use of Chemical Fertilizers and Pesticides, River Pollution and Excessive Exploitation of Natural Resources.

4] Effective implementation of Laws regarding environmental protection and conservation by NGOs:

Majority 47 (81 percent) organizations have given negative response. The majority volunteers said that, there are loopholes in laws, it must be corrected and should be strictly implemented. Majority 52 (89.7 percent) organizations are against solving environmental problems through courts and laws. Majority 45 (77.6 percent) organizations believe that environmental protection and conservation can be done through Legal procedure and 13 (22.4 percent) organizations are not in favour of it. Majority organizations said that they believed in the court process but that process was taking much time. The volunteers of 13 organizations said that, because of the loopholes in laws they could not get justice and late justice was like a denied justice.

5] Necessity of Environmental Clearance, Environmental Impact Assessment and Public Hearing before implementation of Developmental Projects:

A question was asked to understand the opinions of the key environmental volunteers of the organizations regarding the compulsory environmental clearance, environmental impact assessment and public hearing before the implementation of developmental projects. The data indicated that the entire respondent's were of the opinion that the environmental clearance, environmental impact assessment and public hearing should be made compulsory before actual commencement of developmental projects.

6] Measures suggested by the environmental volunteers of the NGOs to the Government for solving environmental problems:

The most important measures suggested to government authorities for solving the environmental problems are as follows:

a] Strict Implementation of the environmental laws and rules by the government, b] The environmental movement should be reached at the grassroots level, c] The Government should include environmental education at all levels in educational sectors, d] The Government should use media to increase the intensity of environmental issues, e] The Government should form environmental committee at local and national level, f] Direct action programmes should be implemented through peoples' participation for the protection and conservation of the environment.

7] Which role can be played by the NGOs for the protection and conservation of environment?

An open ended question was asked to the environmental volunteers regarding the role of the NGOs in protection and conservation of environment. The volunteers have given multiple responses to the question and the most important received responses are as follows:

1] NGOs can create awareness about environmental protection through rallies, demonstrations, media, seminars and workshops, 2] NGOs can increase peoples' participation for solving environmental problems, 3] NGOs can form environmental movements to protect environment, 4] NGOs can help for coordination between the Government and public for the implementation of research, protection and conservation of environment, 5] NGOs can create awareness about

watershed development, 6] NGOs can help the Government and other organizations to implement various activities, 7] NGOs can participate directly to understand the environmental problems and give solutions for it, 8] NGOs can organize various tree plantation programmes on the occasion of national days, 9] NGOs can act as pressure groups and play a role of watch dog to take an appropriate action.

8] Measures Suggested by the Volunteers of NGOs for Solving Environmental Problems in Satara District:

The most frequently told solutions adopted by the NGOs for addressing environmental problems included: NGOs should organize various awareness programmes or activities to create awareness among the masses about the environmental issues, NGOs should be given environmental education for the protection and conservation of environment, NGOs should organize action programmes for the protection of environment, NGOs should promote peoples’ participation in various environmental activities/programmes, NGOs should use media for creating awareness about crucial environmental problems, NGOs should create awareness about the organic farming among the farmers, NGOs should be trained about the first aid medical treatments on wounded birds and animals and their proper rehabilitation, for creating awareness use of poster exhibitions, lectures, slide shows, newspapers, journals, should be made, the Government should promote for funding to develop research activities about the environmental protection, the pressures groups should be formed for stopping environmental degradation and the joint activities and public education should be organized by the various NGOs.

9] Problems faced by Non-Governmental Organizations in Satara District:

The open ended question was asked to the NGOs “Which problems are faced by NGOs at the time of working for environmental protection and conservation”? The volunteers’ responses are collected, classified and presented below:

i) Lack of participation of masses in environmental protection and conservation, ii) Inadequate funding for the nature protection, iii) Lack of coordination among the Govt. officials, and volunteers, iv) Illiteracy and poverty are the serious causes of environmental degradation, v) Lack of political aspirations, scientific attitude of people towards environmental issues and lack of powerful leadership at local level, vi) Need of public education to create awareness among the masses, vii) Environmental laws are not properly implemented, viii) Negative attitude of the people about the environmental protection.

CONCLUSION:

Ecologically, the Satara district occupies prominent place in Maharashtra. Especially, after 1980 with the rise in the local environmental problems and along with them increasing felt need to address these issues environmental NGOs have emerged in Satara district. To address local environmental problems many environmental NGOs have been formed in Satara district. The environmental organizations in Satara district are working spontaneously and voluntary. The nature of organizations (NGOs) are non- profit basis. Environmental volunteers were coming from highly educated families of society.

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