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History of Post Independence India

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11.1 Introduction

We, human beings have, seriously altered and endangered the environment in our evolution from the primitive phase, when both we and our livelihoods were determined by the environment we lived in, to the modern phase today, when we are constantly tampering with it, for a better human civilisation. The consequences of our meddling with the environment, mostly for our own benefits and ease of life, are becoming ubiquitous in the form of global warming, climate change and loss of biodiversity, rather mass extinctions, amongst other similar phenomena

The awareness of our detrimental actions has dawned upon us and concerted action has begun to preserve the environment and even reverse the damages done. The human race has together initiated a number of programmes to this end. More recently, in 2015 a climate pact was reached in Paris with an aim to control the global rise in temperature and prevent the concomitant disastrous impact on the human civilisation and our only planet, which sustains life, the Earth.

The environment prevention and protection movements have history of their own both within India and world. In this chapter, we will look at genesis and evolution of environmental movements in the country and discuss some of the major environmental movements in the country. Finally, we will analyse the role of women in the environmental movements in the country.

11.2 Historical underpinnings

Pre-History

Environment, the sum of range of complex physical, chemical, and biotic factors, has had a privileged position throughout the history of human civilisation in the Indian sub-continent. Beginning with the nature worship, also evident in many other primitive societies, to non-violent traditions of Buddhism and Jainism which preached non-killing of animals and even plants.

In 1730, Amrita Devi Bishnoi and more than 300 others belonging to Bishnoi sect, sacrificed their lives in protests of felling of Khejarli trees in Rajasthan. This is the earliest noted incident for own market protection in India.

The British, in their pursuit of furthering Britain's economic interests, first regulated the forests and then promoted commercial exploitation of the forests, which was resented by the tribal forest dwellers. In fact, the genesis of concern for environmental protection in India can be traced back to the early twentieth century when people, especially forest dwellers, protested against the commercialization of forest resources during the British colonial period.

Beginnings

However, it was only in the 1970s that a coherent and a relatively organized awareness of the ecological impact of state's monolithic development process started to develop and grow into a fully-fledged understanding of the limited nature of natural resources and to prevent the depletion of such natural resources. The origins of Indian environmental movement can be traced to the critique of nationalized economic development that gathered momentum in the aftermath of Jayaprakash Narayan's 'total revolution' movement of the 1970s.



Although colonial rule throughout the world was accompanied and supported by exploitation of forest and environmental destruction, independence of India from the British colonial rule did not stop any of these processes. Rather, the disruption of the relationships between local societies and their natural resources bases, has continued in the worldwide movement toward modernisation, as in India.

India in comparison to Western countries

Unlike in the West, where modern environmentalism was given birth to, by scientists; in India, it began through the protests of rural communities.

There was an unequal competition over resources such as forests, fish, water, and pasture. On one side were local communities who depended on these resources for subsistence; on the other, were urban and industrial interests who appropriated them for commerce and profit. State policies tended to favour the latter, leading to protests that called for a fairer and more sustainable use of the gifts of nature.

Reasons for the emergence of environmental movements in India

Some of the important reasons for the emergence of environmental movements in India, are:

1. Control over natural resources.
2. Ineffective developmental policies of the government.

3. Socioeconomic reasons.
4. Environmental degradation/ destruction.
5. Spread of environmental awareness and media.

Ramchandra Guha, an eminent environment historian, lists three events which occurred within the country, in 1973, that facilitated debate on environmental issues in India:

1. In April 1973, the government of India announced the launching of Project Tiger, an ambitious conservation programme aimed at protecting the country's national animal.
2. The publication of an article in Economic and Political Weekly, in 1973, entitled "A Charter for the Land" authored by B. B. Vora, a high official in the Ministry of Agriculture in government of India, which drew attention to the extent of erosion, water logging and other forms of land degradation in the country.
3. In 1973, in Mandal, a remote Himalayan village, a group of peasants stopped a group of loggers from felling a stand of trees by hugging the trees. This event sparked a series of similar protests through the 1970s, collectively known as "Chipko" movement.

A large number of environmental movements have emerged in India, especially after 1970s. These movements have grown out of a series of independent responses to local issues, in different places at different times.

11.3 Chipko Movement



Chipko Movement, 1973

Year	1973
Place	Garhwal district of Uttrakhand
Leaders	Sunder Lal Bahuguna, Gaura Devi, Bachni Devi, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Shamsheer Singh Bisht and Ghanasyam Raturi.
Aim	To protect the trees on the Himalayan slopes from the axes of contractors of the forest.

Background

In early 1973, the forest department allotted ash trees, of the Alaknanda catchment area in the mid-Western

Himalayas, to a private company for commercial logging. Earlier the forest department had refused permission to the villagers, around the forest, to fell the same ash trees for making agricultural tools. This government action favouring commercial interests enraged the villagers and provoked the Dasholi Gram Swarajya Sangha (DGSS), a local cooperative organization, to fight against this injustice by lying down in front of timber trucks and burning resin and timber depots, as was done during the Quit India movement. When these methods were found unsatisfactory, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, one of the leaders, suggested embracing the trees to prevent them from being cut.

Protest

On 27th of March 1973, a group of peasants embraced the trees in a remote Himalayan village, to stop a group of loggers from felling a patch of trees. Thus, there was born the Chipko movement, and through it, the modern Indian environmental movement itself.

Demands

Chipko movement had six demands-one of which was banning of commercial cutting of trees. The other demands included:

1. On the basis of minimum needs of the people, a reorganization of traditional rights should take place.
2. Arid forests 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 techniques for it, should be made available.
5. Based on local conditions and requirements, local varieties should be given priority in afforestation.

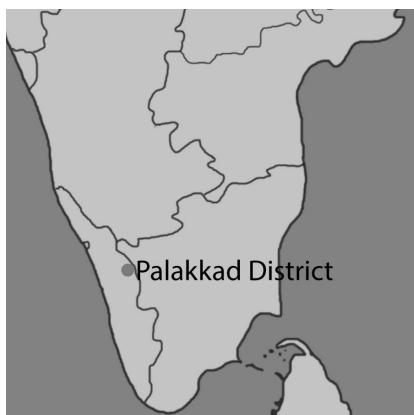
Government response

The government bowed to the relentless protests of the villagers and finally banned felling of trees in the Himalayan regions for fifteen years, until the green cover was fully restored.

Significance

- The movement focused world's attention on the environmental problems.
- With its success, the environment movements spread to other neighbouring areas.
- It used consensual, non-violent direct action/strategy of clinging on to the trees as a response against the violent action of felling the trees by the contractors.
- The movement drew thousands of women into its fold, as the forest contractors usually doubled up as suppliers of alcohol to men in the region.
- It became a symbol of many such popular demands in different parts of the country during 1970s and later. The Appiko movement in Karnataka (discussed later in the chapter) was inspired by this movement.

11.4 Silent Valley Project



Year	1978
Place	Silent Valley, an evergreen tropical forest in the Palakkad district of Kerala.
Leaders	The Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), an NGO, and the poet activist Sughathakumari.
Aim	To protect the Silent Valley, the moist evergreen forest from being destroyed by a hydroelectric project

Background

Silent Valley in Kerala is a rich 89 square kilometers biological treasure trove in the vast expanse of tropical virgin forests on the green rolling hills. In 1970s, a 200 MW hydroelectric dam on the river Kunthipuzha under the Kundremukh project was to come up. The proposed project was deemed to be ecologically unviable, as it would drown a chunk of the valuable rainforests of the valley and threaten the life of a host of endangered species of both flora and fauna.

Protest

The Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), an NGO working in the region for three decades amongst masses of Kerala to create environmental awareness, began a campaign to stop the Silent Valley Hydel Power Project in 1978. The campaign to save Silent Valley turned out to be a public education programme in many respects. The protestors demanded the protection of the tropical rainforests and maintenance of the ecological balance.

Government response

In May 1979, Morarji Desai, the then Prime Minister of India, directed the state government to expedite the completion of the project. Many environmentalists including the noted ornithologist Salim Ali voiced their objections. The International Union of Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) also registered its disapproval. A public interest litigation case was filed in the High Court which was, however, dismissed subsequently. Finally, in December 1980, the Kerala government announced the scrapping of the project. The Silent Valley was declared as a National Park.

Significance

- The Silent Valley movement contributed to the growth of environmental consciousness amongst the people of Kerala.
- The success of the 'Save Silent Valley' movement became the inspiration for similar agitations, including the Narmada Bachao Andolan and protests against the Tehri Dam.
- The movement permanently shifted the equilibrium of the debate over environment, making it difficult for green-unfriendly measures to succeed in the state.

11.5 Jungle Bachao Andolan



Year	1982
Place	Singhbhum district of Bihar (now in Jharkhand).
Leaders	The tribals of Singhbhum.
Aim	To protect the sal forest in the region.

Background

The Jungle Bachao Andolan took shape in the early 1980s when the government proposed to replace the natural sal forest of Singhbhum district, Bihar, with commercial teak plantations. The movement, which spread to nearby states, has highlighted the gap between the forest department's aims and the people's wishes.

11.6 Appiko Movement



Year	1983
Place	Uttara Kannada and Shimoga districts of Karnataka state.
Leaders	Pandurang Hegde helped launch the movement in 1983.
Aim	Against the felling and commercialization of natural forest and the ruin of ancient livelihood.

Background

Karnataka's Uttar Kannada which forms part of the Western Ghats is known as the 'forest district'. The area has rich forest wealth with a typical micro climate for cash crops such as black pepper and cardamom. During the colonial rule, the rich forest resources were exploited; the teak trees were felled to build ships and timber and fuel woods were sent to Mumbai.

After independence, the government also began felling trees for revenue and the forest department, which continued the colonial forest policy, converted the primeval tropical forests into monoculture teak and eucalyptus plantations.

Protest

A group of youth in Balegadde village, protesting against moves to establish teak plantations, wrote to forest officials asking them to stop clearing the natural forest. But their appeal was ignored. Then the villagers decided to launch a movement. They invited S. L. Bahuguna, the architect of Chipko movement, and gathered local people to take up oath to protect trees by embracing them.

In September 1983, when the axe-men came for felling trees in the Kalase forests, people embraced the trees and, thus, the 'Appiko' movement was launched. Appiko means 'hugging' in Kannada.

The protests continued for 38 days, after which the government finally withdrew the felling orders.

Objectives

The objectives of Appiko movement were:

1. Protecting the existing forest cover.
2. Regeneration of trees in denuded land.
3. Utilizing forest wealth with proper consideration to conservation of natural resources.

Significance

- The movement created awareness amongst the villagers throughout the Western Ghats about the ecological danger posed by the commercial and industrial interests to their forest, which was the main source of their sustenance.
- Since the movement, people, now, closely monitor the exploitation of the forests by the forest department

and have been able to highlight discrepancies in the professed and actual forest management practices.

- It forced the government to change its forest policy. Some specific changes include ban on clear felling, no further issuing of concessions to logging companies, and moratorium on felling of green trees in the tropical rainforests of Western Ghats.
- The success of this agitation spread to other places and the movement was launched in eight areas covering the entire Sirsi forest division in Uttara Kannada and Shimoga districts.

11.7 Narmada Bachao Andolan



Year	1985
Place	Gujarat, M.P. and Maharashtra.
Leaders	Medha Patekar, Baba Amte, adivasis, farmers, environmentalists and human rights activists.
Aim	A social movement against a number of large dams being built across Narmada River and the consequent damage to the environment.

Background

In early 1980s the government launched a project to construct 30 big, 135 medium sized and around 3000 small dams on Narmada and its tributaries that flow across Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra. Narmada Bachao Andolan, a loose collective of local voluntary organisation, began a movement opposing the constructions of Sardar Sarovar Project, one of the two biggest projects planned in that area.

Sardar Sarovar Project

It is a multipurpose mega-scale dam built on the Narmada river near Navagam, in Gujarat. The dam provides water for drinking and irrigation purposes, generates electricity and facilitates effective flood and drought control in the region. The dam submerged around 245 villages in the state and required relocation of around two and a half lakh people from these villages. The relocation and rehabilitation of the project affected people and became a major cause of tussle between local activists and the government.

Protests

The movement began with a protest for not providing proper rehabilitation and resettlement for the people displaced by the construction of Sardar Sarovar Dam. Later on, the movement turned its focus on the preservation of the environment and the eco-systems of the Narmada valley. Activists also demanded the height of the dam be reduced to 88 m from the proposed height of 130m. In the wake of increasing protests, World Bank, the funding agency for the project, withdrew from it.

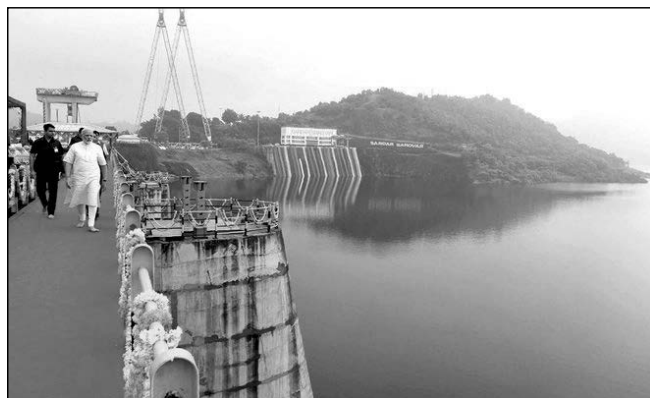
The Narmada Bachao Andolan has drawn upon a multiplicity of discourses for protests such as:

1. Displacement risks and resettlement provisions.
2. Environmental impact and sustainability issues.
3. Financial implications of the project.
4. Forceful evictions and violations of civil liberties.
5. Issues pertaining to river valley planning.

The movement used various tools of protests such as Satyagraha, Jal Samarpan, Rasta Roko, Gaon Bandh, demonstrations and rallies, hunger strikes and blockade of projects.

Government response

The protest had long demanded reduction of height of the dam, which had stalled project for over three decades. The NDA government, in June 2014, gave the final clearance and dam was, finally, inaugurated on 17th September, 2017.



Sardar Sarova Dam

Significance

- The movement, through its efforts, brought larger issues such as efficacy of the model of development and public interests on public forum.
- The movement compelled the government to relook and revamp its rehabilitation policy.
- It was and is, still, as the leaders of the movement continue their protests for reduction of its height and better assessment of the benefits and impact on the people, longest continuing environmental movement in the history of the country.
- The journey of the movement depicted a gradual process of disjunction between political parties and social movements in India.

11.8 Environment and Women



A lot of studies on women and environment have shown that women are significant actors in natural resource management and they are major contributors to environmental rehabilitation and conservation. In addressing some key environmental problems, women play a dominant role. Women, through their roles as farmers and as collectors of water and firewood, have a close connection with their local environment and often suffer most directly from environmental problems.

Women, particularly those living in rural areas or mountain areas, have special relationships with the environment. They are more close to the nature than men and this very close relationship makes them perfect managers of eco-systems.

The Indian women were, always, ahead in the matter of prevention of pollution and protection, preservation, conservation, promotion and enhancement of the environment. The strong desire, devotion and dedication towards better environment made Indian women crusaders against environment pollution.



Women Protesting against cutting of trees

Women, in our country, have brought a different perspective to the environment debate, because of their different experience base. In fact, they have led some of the major environmental movements in the country from the forefront, such as:

1. Amrita Devi gave up her life with her daughter's Ashu, Ratni and Bhagu in the year 1730 to save green trees

which were being felled by the then Maharaja of Jodhpur, at place Khejarli of Marwar in Rajasthan. More than 363 Bishnois (people belonging to Bishnoi sect), also, gave up their lives for saving Khejarli trees and this incident has gone down in history as Bishnoi Movement.



Painting Depicting women’s Protest in Marwar

2. The Chipko movement, as we have already seen, witnessed a large women participation. Women of the villages resisted, embracing trees to prevent their felling to safeguard their lifestyles, which were dependent on the forests.
3. Narmada Bachao Andolan, which focused on the preservation of the environment, and the eco-systems of Narmada valley, was led by Medha Patkar and saw large women participation in various protests, held during the course of the movement.



Narmada Bachao Andolan

4. It is important to recall the names of Indian women who have fought legal battles in the court of law for environment protection, as Mrs. Sarla Tripathi of Indore, Kinkari Devi of Sirmour district, Krishna Devi of Rajasthan, etc.



5. In 2007, Radha Behen and other activists, along with villagers embarked on a padayatra to the source of Kosi in Uttarakhand. It was during this walk that they became aware of the scale of the threat to Uttarakhand rivers. Since then, the Uttarakhand Nadi Bachao Andolan has continued its bitter fight against the government.

11.9 Critical analysis of environmental movements

Robert Nisbet says that when the history of the twentieth century shall be finally written, the single most important social movement of the period shall be judged to be 'environmentalism'. It is no longer possible to treat ecology and international political economy as separate spheres.

Positives

- In India, the environmental movements have grown rapidly over the last three to four decades and have played a key role in three areas such as:
 - ♦ In creating public awareness about the importance of bringing about a balance between environment and development.
 - ♦ In opposing developmental projects that are inimical to social and environmental concerns.
 - ♦ In organizing model projects that show the way forward towards non-bureaucratic and participatory, community-based natural resource management systems.
- The environmental movements through their persistence and perseverance have compelled the government to change its policies and realign the development strategies to a sustainable path.
- A notable aspect of the environmental movements in India has been its association with the voluntary organisations.
- A number of community organisations have emerged in the course of these environmental movements, which are actively working for inclusive and sustainable development, in different parts of the country.
- These movements have played a key role in bringing Indian women from remote areas in the socio-political sphere by drawing them in the movements and even allowing them to lead protests on issues which affect their livelihoods.

Negatives

- The environmental movements have been blamed for stalling developmental projects in the country and perceived as being anti-developmental and regressive in nature.



12.1 At Independence

India inherited a semi-feudal agrarian structure with oppressive tenure arrangements over substantial areas at the time of independence. Two hundred years of colonialism had shattered the basis of traditional Indian subsistence agriculture without bringing in any substantial changes.

At the time of Indian independence, not only intermediaries like 'Zamindars' and 'Talukdars' dominated the agriculture in the country but there, also, existed several layers of absentee landlords. Land was mostly concentrated in a few hands. To put this in perspective, on the eve of independence, around 60 to 70 per cent of the total cultivable land was owned by landlords. According to a report, at independence, about 60 per cent of rural households were either landless or small and marginal landholders and together held just about 8 per cent of the total area of cultivation.

This uneven distribution of land was made worse by the unfair tenancy arrangements, begar (forced labour) and illegal exactions by landlords, and rack-renting of the peasants. The agricultural production suffered due to lack of investment in the land, which, in turn, was a result of the above mentioned factors. The agriculture sector had also been under severe pressure due to shifting of people to agriculture in the wake of decline of traditional handicrafts and artisanal industries during the British rule.

For agriculture, being the primary sector of the Indian economy at the time of independence, a consensus seemed to have had emerged in a broad spectrum of political opinion, on the need to reform the existing agrarian structure in the country, to drive the economy on a high growth path.

12.2 Phases

The land reforms process in India after Independence can be categorised mainly in two phases.

First phase

A phase of institutional (or the first phase) reforms started immediately after the independence and continued roughly till early 1960s. The following were the main features during this period:

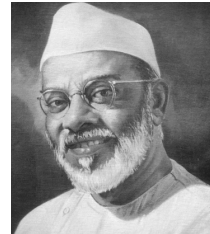
- Abolition of intermediaries—zamindars, jagirdars, etc.
- Tenancy reforms involving providing security of tenure to the tenants, decrease in rents and conferment of ownership rights to tenants.
- Ceilings on size of landholdings.
- Cooperativization and community development programmes.

Second phase

This was gradually followed by a phase of technological reforms (or the second phase) around the mid or late 1960s and witnessed the so-called 'Green Revolution'. The two phases cannot be divided into rigid watertight compartments. In fact, they were complementary to each other and there was a fair degree of overlap in the programmes followed during these phases.

12.3 Kumarappa Committee

Soon after independence, the Congress Agrarian Reforms Committee, also known as 'Kumarappa Committee' for the first time, made a detailed survey of the agrarian relations prevailing in the country and forwarded comprehensive recommendations covering all issues of land reforms.



J.C. Kumarappa

The committee opined that all intermediaries between the state and the tiller should be eliminated and land must belong to the actual tillers of the soil, subletting of land should be prohibited except in case of widows, minors and other disabled persons, persons who put a minimum amount of physical labour and who participate in actual agricultural operations should be deemed to cultivate personally, etc.

The committee, also, felt that there should be a ceiling to the size of holdings which a farmer should own and cultivate. The committee considered collective farming for the development of reclaimed waste lands, on which landless labourers could be employed.

12.4 Zamindari Abolition

While the Constituent Assembly was in the process of framing India's Constitution, a number of provinces such as Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Madras, Assam and Bombay introduced zamindari abolition bills or land tenure legislation, which provided for removal of intermediary levels or layers of various amorphous and parasitic groups (zamindars) on the land between the state and the actual cultivators.

The Constitutional provisions were framed to allow the state assemblies to pass the pending zamindari abolition bills on payment of compensation to the owners of the land. The first amendment in 1951 and the fourth Amendment in 1955, further strengthened the hands of the state legislatures for implementing zamindari abolition, making the question of violation of any fundamental right or insufficiency of compensation, not permissible in the courts of law. However, the zamindars made numerous

appeals to the High Courts and Supreme Court to delay the acquisition of their estates. Another major hurdle in implementing the zamindari abolition legislation was the absence of adequate land records.

Amidst all these developments, the land reform process in the country was completed by the end of 1950s.

Impact

After the abolition of zamindari system, around 20 million tenants became landowners. It was believed that tenancy declined swiftly from 42 percent in 1950-51 to between 20 and 25 percent by the early 1960s. Land reforms helped tenants in many ways; it not only made them landowners but many of them were also evicted from the shackles of existing land owners.

Limitations

Although the process of abolition of zamindaris was completed, it suffered from a number of limitations.

Reluctance of zamindars

- After the law was passed, the zamindars went to High courts and Supreme Court to stay the implementation of the law. Such litigations greatly reduced the effectiveness of these legislations.
- Even after the law was finally implemented, the zamindars refused to cooperate with the revenue authorities.
- The petty revenue officials at billage and tehsil level actively sided with zamindars for bribes.

Thus, many years passed by, before the intention of zamindari abolition became a reality.

Loopholes in laws

Most state laws permitted zamindars to keep part of land for personal cultivation. But the definition was vague. Zamindars misused this loophole to evict tenant farmers and keep most of the land with themselves. Zamindars started capitalistic farming in the area to increase productivity.

New intermediaries

- Main beneficiaries of zamindari abolition were the superior tenants. While earlier, they had direct leases from the zamindar, then they became virtual landowners.
- These new landowners leased the same land to inferior tenants/sharecroppers, based on oral and unrecorded agreements.
- These inferior tenants/sharecroppers could be evicted as per the whims and fancies of the new landowners.

Thus, even after the abolition of 'Zamindari', the system of 'intermediaries' and exploitation continued.

Critical Analysis

Despite the initial success of the zamindari abolition, laws failed to eliminate intermediaries from the agrarian arrangements in the country. It even created a new intermediary.

Many economists do not attach much significance to zamindari abolition, as according to them, it merely

changed the hierarchy of land revenue administration and did not bring any change in the method of farming nor in the nature of agricultural units.

12.5 Tenancy Reform

After passing the Zamindari Abolition Acts, the next major problem was of tenancy regulation. Tenancy reforms aimed to regulate rents, provide security of tenure and confer ownership rights to tenants.

The tenancy reforms laws provided the provisions for registration of tenants, or giving ownership rights to the former tenants to bring them directly under the state. The political and economic conditions in different parts of India, however, were so varied that the nature of tenancy legislations passed by different states and the manner of their implementation, also, varied a great deal.

Security of tenure

Providing security of tenure was an important reform brought about during the first three five-year plans, via tenancy acts. Legislations for security of tenure had three essential elements:

- Ejection could not take place except in accordance with the provisions of the law;
- Land could be resumed by an owner, but only for personal cultivation;
- In the event of resumption, the tenant was assured of a prescribed minimum area.

Several states enacted legislations conferring security of tenure on tenants. But they were not uniform. Except for U.P. and Delhi, in no other state, tenants have been provided complete security. In some states, there was no provision for minimum land to be left for the tenants, in case of resumption of land for self-cultivation. In fact, the legislations even laid down the conditions under which the tenants were liable to ejection, on the grounds of non-payment of rent, sub-letting the land and using the land for non agricultural purposes.

Regulation of rents

Before the enactment of laws regulating rents, tenants paid exorbitant rents ranging from 50 to even 80 per cent of the produce to the landlords. Legislations were passed to regulate the rents. Now, the maximum rates of rent were fixed at levels not exceeding 1/4 of the gross produce, in all states except in Andhra Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab.

Rights of ownership

Several states passed necessary legislations to enhance the tenants ownership rights. In some states, the governments took over the land from the owners after paying compensation to them and then transferred the same to the tenants-cultivators in lieu of its price to state, in instalments. In others, the tenants were asked to pay a fixed compensation directly to the owners in instalments. The available data reveals that ownership rights were conferred on 7.2 million tenants on 5.9 million hectares of land.

Constitutional safeguards

During the process of the framing of the Constitution as well as after it came into force, the property provisions turned out to be the most controversial. Court cases challenging the agrarian reforms began to proliferate, and the 1st amendment to the Constitution became necessary. Introduced in 1951 in the provisional parliament, this amendment inserted new Articles 31A and 31B and the Ninth Schedule; thus, securing the Constitutional validity of zamindari abolition laws by, among other things, specifying that they could not be challenged on the grounds that they violated the Fundamental Rights.

12.6 Land Ceiling

Land ceiling means fixing maximum size of landholding that an individual/family can own. The objective of land ceiling was to make distribution of land more equitable. Land owned above the ceiling limit, was called surplus land. If an individual or a family owned more land than the ceiling limit, the surplus land was to be taken away with or without paying compensation to original owner and then this surplus land was to be distributed among small farmers, landless labourers, or to be even handed over to village panchayats or given to cooperative farming societies. Thus, ceiling on land holdings was an important step toward achieving growth with social justice.

Laws imposing ceiling on agricultural holdings began to be implemented during the Third Plan.

Limitations

The long delay, as well as the nature of the legislations, ensured that the ceilings would have a very muted impact, releasing little surplus land for redistribution. By and large, the ceiling laws in most states had certain major shortcomings such as:

- Firstly, in a situation where more than 70 per cent of landholdings in India were under 5 acres, the ceiling fixed on existing holdings by the states was very high. Moreover, in most states, initially, the ceilings were imposed on individuals and not family holdings, enabling landowners to divide up their holdings 'notionally' in the names of relatives, merely to avoid the ceiling. Only in some states, where very few holdings exceeded the ceiling limits, such as in Jammu and Kashmir, West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, no allowance was made for the size of the family.
- Secondly, a large number of exemptions to the ceiling limits were permitted by most states following the Second Plan recommendations that certain categories of land could be exempted from ceilings. These were tea, coffee and rubber plantations, orchards, specialized farms engaged in cattle breeding, dairying, wool raising, etc. However, the exemptions were often carried to absurd limits with Tamil Nadu reportedly permitting twenty-six kinds of exemptions.
- Finally, the long delay in bringing in ceiling legislations to a large extent defeated its purpose. The large landowners had enough time to either sell their excess

lands, or make mala fide transfers in the names of relatives and even make benami transfers. Further, the landowners also resorted to mass eviction of tenants, resuming their lands at least up to the ceiling limits, and claiming, often falsely, to have shifted to progressive farming under their direct supervision. Thus, by the time the ceiling legislations were in place, there were barely any holdings left above the ceiling and, consequently, little surplus land became available for redistribution. This was recognized by Congress leadership and the Third Plan also admitted it.

12.7 Bhoodan Movement

Bhoodan was an attempt at land reforms, at bringing about institutional changes in agriculture, like land redistribution through a movement and not simply through government legislations. Eminent Gandhian Acharya Vinoba Bhave drew upon Gandhian techniques and ideas such as constructive work and trusteeship to launch this movement in the early 1950s. Unfortunately, its revolutionary potential has generally been missed.



Acharya Vinoba Bhave during Bhoodan Movement

He and his followers set on a 'padayatra' (walk on foot from village to village) to persuade the larger landowners to donate at least one-sixth of their lands as bhoodan or 'land-gift' for distribution amongst the landless and the land poor. The target was to get 50 million acres as donation, which was one-sixth of the 300 million acres of cultivable land in India.

The movement, though independent of the government, had the support of Congress, with the All India Congress Committee (AICC) urging Congressmen to participate in it actively. Eminent former Congressman and a prominent leader of the Praja Socialist Party, Jayaprakash Narayan withdrew from active politics to join the Bhoodan movement in 1953.

Meanwhile, towards the end of 1955, the movement took a new form, that of gramdan or 'donation of village'. Again taking off from the Gandhian notion that all land belonged to 'Gopal' or God, in Gramdan villages the movement declared that all land was owned collectively or equally, as it did not belong to any one individual. The movement started in Odisha and was most successful there.

By the 1960s, the Bhoodan/Gramdan movement had lost its elan, despite its considerable initial promise. Its creative potential essentially remained unutilized.

Yet, the movement made a significant contribution by creating a moral ambience, an atmosphere, which, while putting pressure on the landlords, created conditions favourable to the landless.

Question [2013]

Critically discuss the objectives of Bhoodan and Gramdan movements initiated by Acharya Vinoba Bhave and their success. (200 Words)

12.8 Cooperatives and Community Development Program

A wide spectrum of the national movement's leaders including Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, the socialists and communists were in consensus that cooperativization would lead to major improvement in Indian agriculture and would particularly benefit the poor. Thus, cooperativization was seen as an important element in the agenda for institutional changes sought to be achieved through land reforms.

However, as in the case of the land ceiling issue, there was no general consensus, particularly amongst the peasantry, on the question of cooperatives. Correctly reflecting this situation, the Congress at independence made tentative proposals—like the state making efforts to organize 'pilot schemes for experimenting with cooperative farming among small holders on government unoccupied but cultivable lands'.

In July 1949, even the Kumarappa Committee, recommended that the state should be empowered to enforce the application of varying degrees of cooperativization for different types of farming. The First Plan approached the issue more judiciously and recommended that small and medium farms, in particular, should be encouraged and assisted to group themselves into farming societies.

The early planners hoped that the village panchayat activated by motivated party workers and aided by the trained workers of the newly launched Community Development Programme (in October 1952) would not only help implement rural development projects but would help bring about critical institutional changes in Indian agriculture, for example, by assisting in the implementation of land reforms, by organizing voluntary labour for community work and by setting up of cooperatives.

The Second Plan declared that "the main task during the Second Five Year Plan is to take such essential steps as will provide sound foundations for the development of cooperative farming so that over a period of ten years or so a substantial proportion of agricultural lands are cultivated on cooperative lines".

The Third Plan, in sharp contrast to the Second plan, reflected the mellowed position regarding cooperativization and took a very pragmatic and cautious approach. As regards cooperative farming, it accepted a modest target of setting up ten pilot projects per district.

At the same time, it put in the caveat that "cooperative farming has to grow out of the success of the general agricultural effort through the community development movement, the progress of cooperation in credit, marketing, distribution and processing, the growth of rural industry, and the fulfillment of the objectives of land reform". This sounded like a wishful platitude, not a plan of action.

Types of Cooperatives

As for joint farming, two types of cooperatives were observed:

- First were the ones that were formed essentially to evade land reforms and access incentives offered by the state. Typically, these cooperatives were formed by well-to-do and influential families who took on a number of agricultural labourers or ex-tenants as bogus members.
- Second were the state-sponsored cooperative farms in the form of pilot projects and were previously uncultivated lands made available to the landless, harijans, displaced persons and such underprivileged groups.

Limitations of Cooperativization

Typically, the leadership of a cooperative, that is, its president, secretary and treasurer, consisted of the leading family or families of the village which not only owned a great deal of land but also controlled trade and money lending.

In fact, quite often, low interest agricultural credit made available through cooperative rural banks was used by such families for non-agricultural businesses, consumption and even money lending.

Forming a cooperative helped evade the ceiling laws or tenancy laws. The influential members got the lands tilled by the bogus members who were essentially engaged as wage labourers or tenants.

Moreover, forming these bogus cooperatives enabled the influential families to take advantage of the substantial financial assistance offered by the state in the form of subsidy, as well as get priority for acquiring scarce agricultural inputs like fertilizers, improved seeds and even tractors, etc.

The poor quality of land, lack of proper irrigation facilities, etc., in the government run cooperatives and the fact that these farms were run like government-sponsored projects rather than genuine, motivated, joint efforts of the cultivators led them to be generally expensive unsuccessful experiments.

The expected rise in productivity and benefits of scale, which is a major 'raison d'être' of cooperative farming, was not in evident in these farms.

A common shortcoming of the cooperative movement was that instead of promoting people's participation it soon became like a huge overstuffed government department with officials, clerks, inspectors, and the like, replicated at the block, district, division and state levels.

A large bureaucracy, generally not in sympathy with the principles of the cooperative movement and quite given to being influenced by local vested interests, instead of becoming the instrument for promoting cooperatives, typically, became a hindrance.

Positives of the Cooperatives

It is evident that service cooperatives had started to play a very important role in rural India. Their role in making available a much increased amount of cheap credit to a wider section of the peasantry was critical. They not only helped in bringing improved seeds, modern implements, cheap fertilizers, etc., to the peasants, but they also provided them with the wherewithal to access them. And, in many areas, they also helped market their produce. In fact, in many ways, they provided a necessary condition for the success of the Green Revolution strategy launched in the late 1960s, which was based on intensive use of modern inputs in agriculture.

12.9 Operation Barga

During the decade of 1967-77, West Bengal witnessed increasing violence and chaos, a crisis of governance and splits in Congress, which ruled the state directly or through President's Rule from 1969 to 1977. Unprecedented levels of state suppression were especially directed against the Naxalites and the movements of the rural poor. In the end, the CPI(M)'s popularity, combined with the mass reaction against the Emergency gave them victory in 1977, and the CPI(M), was able to form the government. Since then, the CPI(M) further consolidated its power and entrenched itself, especially amongst the peasantry. It succeeded in maintaining the left coalition as well as control of the government during the next thirty years, and through seven assembly elections.



Farmer tilling field

After coming to power, the CPI(M) launched the programme called 'Operation Barga' which reformed the tenancy system in the interests of the bargadars (sharecroppers), who constituted nearly 25 per cent of the rural households. For decades, sharecroppers had suffered from the two ills of:

1. insecurity of tenure, for their tenancy was not registered, though law provided for permanency of tenure.
2. high and illegal levels of the share of the crops they had to give to jotedars as rent. Jotedars will wealthy peasants of Bengal.

Through Operation Barga, which included politicization and mobilization of sharecroppers, by the party and peasant organizations, the government secured legal registration of sharecroppers; thus, giving them permanent lease of the land they cultivated and security of tenure, and enforced laws regarding the share of the produce they could retain while improving their income.

Analysis

The reform of the jotedari system provided the incentive to all concerned, to increase production. It became a contributory factor in the ushering in of the Green Revolution and multicropping, leading to increase in income of both sharecroppers and jotedars. It also enabled those jotedars, who were cultivators to concentrate on increasing production. The government supplemented tenancy and land reform measures with program for providing cheap credit to sharecroppers and small peasants, saving them in the bargain from the clutches of moneylenders.

12.10 Farmers' Movements

Background

The years since independence have seen agrarian struggles of enormous variety, ranging from the legendary Telangana peasant movement and the PEPSU tenants' movement, which continued from the pre-independence years, to the Naxalite or Maoist movements in the late 1960s and the 'new' farmers' movements of the 1980s. Interspersed in between are many lesser-known struggles, such as the Kharwar tribals' movement in Madhya Pradesh and Bihar in 1957-58, the Bhils' movement in Dhulia in Maharashtra from 1967-75, or the Warlis' struggle led by the Kashtakari Sanghatna headed by the Marxist Jesuit Pradeep Prabhu since 1978.

In Punjab and Andhra Pradesh, peasants protested against betterment levies imposed for covering costs of irrigation schemes, for better prices for crops, and other similar issues. The CPI set up the first nationwide agricultural labour organization, Bharatiya Khet Mazdoor Union, in Moga, in 1968.

In Tanjore and Kerala, movements of agricultural labour and tenants took place, as did numerous others all over the country. The trajectory of these movements in many ways maps the process of agrarian and social change since independence. Constraints of space do not permit an exhaustive account of these struggles; the choice has inevitably fallen on the more dramatic ones, while many quieter stories must await their turn.

New Farmers' Movement

The farmers' movements burst onto the national political stage in 1980 with the road and 'rail roko' agitation in Nasik in Maharashtra, led by the Shetkari Sangathana of Sharad Joshi. Nearly 200,000 farmers blockaded road and rail traffic on the Bombay -Calcutta and Bombay -Delhi route on November 10, 1980 demanding higher prices for onions and sugarcane.

Led by the Vivasayigal Sangam in Tamil Nadu, the Rajya Ryothu Sangha in Karnataka, Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, Khedut Samaj and Kisan Sangh in Gujarat and the Shetkari Sangathana in Maharashtra, farmers in thousands and lakhs, at different times for different demands, stopped traffic on highways and train routes, withheld supplies from cities, sat on indefinite dharnas at government offices in local and regional centres, gheraoed officials, prevented political leaders and officials from entering villages, especially at election time, till they agreed to support their demands, etc.

The basic understanding on which these movements rested is that the government maintains agricultural prices at an artificially low level in order to provide cheap food and raw materials to urban areas, and the consequent disparity in prices, results in farmers paying high prices for industrial goods needed as inputs into agriculture and receiving lower returns for their produce.

These 'new' farmers' movements that attracted much media and political attention, especially in the 1980s, focussed mainly on demanding remunerative prices for agricultural produce, and lowering or elimination of government dues such as canal water charges, electricity charges, interest rates and principal of loans, etc. This has brought on them the charge that they are mainly vehicles for demands of rich or well-to-do agriculturists most of whom are beneficiaries of post-independence agrarian development, including the Green Revolution, and have little or no room for the concerns of the rural poor.

This is denied by the leaders and ideologues of the movements, who point to the diverse social base of the movement amongst medium and small peasants, as well as some other features such as inclusion of demands for higher minimum wages for agricultural labour and the insertion of women's and dalits' issues. These organizations have, however, shown scant concern for the landless rural poor or rural women. It is, however, true that they are broad based amongst the peasantry and not confined to the upper sections, as alleged by some critics, for smaller-holding peasants are as much interested in higher prices and lower rates of government dues, since they, too, produce for the market and pay government dues.

While there is often justice in the demands for higher prices and better facilities, the basic rural versus urban or Bharat vs India ideology is essentially flawed, and can only lead the farmers into a blind alley of mindless resistances and state repression of which, inevitably, the smaller peasants are likely to be the chief victims. In fact, this is what happened in Tamil Nadu in 1981, where a very strong movement was killed by state repression brought on by refusal to repay loans and consequent forcible confiscation by government. Leading movements

are as much about knowing when and where to stop as it is about knowing when and how to begin, as Gandhiji knew so well.

These movements are often referred to as 'new', the suggestion being that they are part of the worldwide trend of 'new' non-class or superclass social movements which have emerged outside the formal political party structures, examples being the women's and environmental movements.

The 'new' farmers' movements are not all that new as similar demands were made by peasant organizations earlier as well, but without the regressive rural versus urban ideology. In Punjab, for example, a big movement was launched by the Kisan Sabha under the CPI's direction against the imposition of a betterment levy or irrigation tax in 1958.

The other ground on which 'newness' is asserted is that these movements are not linked to political parties, whereas earlier organizations were wings of parties. This is only partially correct. While it is true that none of the organizations were started by political parties, it is also true that over time they have inexorably got linked to politics.

Tamil Nadu organization was the first to openly become a party and this led to the disarray in the All-India BKU which Naidu, the Tamil Nadu leader, had helped found, as distance from political parties had been enunciated as a basic principle of the organization. Karnataka Ryothu Sangha (KRS) contests in elections. Punjab BKU has retained the character of a farmers' lobby more than any other, but did link up with Akalis when it suited them.

Ideologically as well, the movement is deeply divided. Sharad Joshi now favours liberalization, with the farmer being linked to the world market. Organizational and ideological unity have thus eluded the movement. Also, there has been a distinct loss of momentum in the 1990s and, by the index of longevity, the movements may be ranked quite low. The movements, no doubt, touched a vital chord amongst the peasants by drawing attention to the neglect and backwardness of rural areas; its problem remained that instead of focusing on redressal, it began to pit peasants and villagers against town dwellers in a fratricidal struggle, which is unnecessary.



Anti Farm Laws Protest in Delhi, 2021