



SWINGING SILENCE: TREES, BODY, SOUL AND THE CHIPKO MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT : Chipko has been considered as an environmental movement to protect the trees in the Himalayas. the immediate reason behind the origin of Chipko movement was to stop commercial cutting of trees, but as the word connotes 'Chipko' describes the sentiment '*Cut me down before you cut down a tree*' that portray a deep-seated suspicion among the mountain communities of the outsiders and the distant governments that they see as trying to steal their forest resources. In the present paper, the main aim is to figure out the pragmatic relationship established among trees, human body and soul via tree hugging gesture that further helped local forest dwellers to sustain forests and trees.

KEYWORDS : Chipko, Tree hugging, Gestures

1. Introduction

The Chipko movement emerged as an anti-deforestation movement in the early 1970s in the Garhwal region of the Indian Himalayas. In attempting to draw attention to the difficulty of sustaining their livelihoods in the region, local communities engaged in protest by hugging trees that were marked for felling in state-owned commercial forests. Translated from Hindi, Chipko means 'embrace', and many called 'tree-hugger'. (Heaslip, 2005) To 'stick to' or to 'hug' refers to the method used to protect the trees of the Himalaya from commercial timber cutters. The traditional Indian strategy of resolving conflict by non-cooperation, the Satyagraha, has been revived in the Chipko movement to protect forests from commercial felling. As the local dwellers were unsuccessful in their arguments to convince the government to forbid cutting trees, so they adopted Gandhian nonviolent resistance-they attached themselves to the trees to protect them from the axe. The movement's activists embrace the tree trunks to interpose their bodies between the trees and the axe men. (Karan PP 1994). Sacrifice is the first qualification for a soldier of the non-violent movement (in Padre, 1992). It is true that hugging or embracing trees was a symbolic act that underlies the deep cultural and social ethos of the hill people which led them to respond in such a way to crisis. Chipko invoking images of poor peasant women hugging trees to prevent their felling have become global icons of popular political, and, above all, 'indigenous' mobilisation and resistance to unjust and unsustainable economic development. (Sinha S., Gururani S. Greenberg B. 2008). 'Chipko' has taken on the functions of a metaphor for subaltern environmental resistance in that it has acquired meanings and associations that extend far beyond, or even have little resemblance to, the specific times, places and circumstances of its mobilization. Chipko was born as a meaningful social movement with regional implications. (Mawdsley E) Well, the immediate reason behind the origin of Chipko movement was to stop commercial cutting of trees, but as the word connotes 'Chipko' describes the sentiment '*Cut me down before you cut down a tree*' that portray a deep-seated suspicion among the mountain communities of the outsiders and the distant governments that they see as trying to steal their forest resources. It was the people's realization of the forests' significance in spiritual value as well as its role as source of livelihood that sparked their vigor to stand as shields for the trees. (Nayan S. M. 2013). The present paper would be an attempt to figure out the pragmatic relationship established among trees, human body and soul via tree hugging gesture that further helped local forest dwellers to sustain forests and trees.

1.1. Conceptual Framework

Until World War II, research on the meaning of gestures was considered valuable in that gestures were seen as opportunities to make generalizations with regard to the human soul but not as communication strategies. According to a recent study (Driskell & Radtke, 2003) indicates that gestures enhance both comprehension and production, while additional research stresses the communicative value of gesturing (Grewling & Bavelas, 2005; Melinger & Levett, 2005) Albert Mehwarbian (1968) whose popular formula of 55/38/77 states that, in human encounters 55% of the meaning is understood via facial expression, 38% is transmitted by the voice and only 7% is transmitted by verbal content. The body is at once the most elusive, illusory, concrete, metaphorical, ever present and ever distant thing-a

site, an instrument, an environment, a singularity and a multiplicity (Turner B. 1984). Pointing gestures are used to indicate something to locate or to mark a direction. They are commonly performed with the hands, but at times, the head, eyes, elbow and even foot and lip may be used to point at a direction. Adam Kendon (2004) presents a captivating comparative analysis of hand shape used in pointing, concentrating on the difference between seven such shapes of hand. For instance he found that although the index finger is most likely to be used in pointing, there is also an open hand supine pointing. He found that in such cases, the object is not just indicated as location or individuated as topic but rather as something that should be attended to and inspected in a particular way. Gestures as a communication strategy remain largely unnoticed by nature, even though non verbal information plays a central role in communication.

St. Augustine (AD 354-430) defined a natural sign as one that is found, literally, in Nature. Bodily symptoms, the rustling of leaves, the colors of plants, etc., are all natural signs, as are the signals that animals emit in response to physical and emotional states. He distinguished this type of sign from a conventional sign, which is a sign made by humans. Words, gestures, and symbols are examples of conventional signs. In modern-day semiotic theory, these are divided into verbal and nonverbal-words and other linguistic structures (expressions, phrases, etc.) are examples of verbal signs; drawings and gestures are examples of nonverbal signs.

A hug is a simple and universal gesture that instantly creates a positive exchange of energy between two people. When you hug someone, you bond with them that create a very powerful connection and communicate a gamut of emotions. Hugging a tree is no longer considered some new age hogwash. Scientific research has shown that touching and even better, hugging a tree does make you healthier. People with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), low concentration levels, slow reactions, headaches, fatigue, loneliness, depression and children with cognitive and emotional difficulties can all benefit from the practice. Every living and nonliving thing has a vibrational frequency that has a biological effect on other beings that interact with it. And the vibrational frequency of trees has a very positive impact on human beings. (Murgai B. 2012)

It was observed by Taoist masters that not only trees can absorb carbon dioxide and transform it into oxygen, but they can also absorb negative forces and transform them into good energy. Trees stand very still, absorbing the Earth's Energy and the Universal Force from the Heavens. Trees constantly meditate and help in cultivating calm, presence, and vitality. Throughout history human beings have used all parts of the tree for healing and medicine. (Metanoia World Blog 2014). It is evident in almost every study done on 'Chipko' that women played a major role in raising up this movement as they rely on the forests not only for fuel wood, but also for agricultural implements, tea-leaf, manure for their fields, fodder for their animals, and wild fruit and medicines. Chipko 'to cling' is a method to interact with trees. Chipko creates a ritual of silent communion that a person tied to tree and the tree can understand, and so increase the potential for harmonious interaction.

Though 'Chipko' applies to communion with anything: tree, rock,

human, or animal, although is concerned specifically with trees. Spiritual communion with trees resembles love more than any other human activity. For Darwin, emotion expressions not only originated as part of an emotion process that protected the organism or prepared it for action but also had an important communicative function. Darwin saw in this communicative function a further adaptive value: "We have also seen that expression in itself, or the language of the emotions, as it has sometimes been called, is certainly of importance for the welfare of mankind" (Darwin, 1872/1965).

The present analysis of Chipko movement is based on an assumption that the gesture of hugging the tree (Signifier) signifies not only forest dwellers' love and protection for trees but also a symbolic representation of their dependency on it for their daily needs. It is based on Jakobson's idea that communication is regulated by personal, social, and purely semiotic factors. The semiotic interconnection between the body, the mind, and culture can be shown as follows:

Input from the World

Body: The physical source of signs Mind: The ability to use signs to connect with the world Culture: The system that preserves and distributes signs for practical purposes (Source: Danesi M.2004).

It is relevant to note that in spite of dominance of vocal language as a form of communication among human beings, it does not fade the gestural modality. It remains a functional subsystem of human communication that can always be utilized as a more generic form when vocal interaction is impossible or limited. (Danesi M.)

1. Aim

The present paper tries to figure out the pragmatic relationship established among trees, human body and soul via tree hugging gesture that further helped local forest dwellers to sustain forests and trees.

2. Objectives

1. To understand the special relationship between the everyday life of mountain communities and the forests
2. To establish that tree-hugging was a symbolic gesture of love, protection and forest dwellers dependency on trees that further helped them to conceive a big movement 'Chipko'

3. Methodology

This study is based on Secondary Sources of data collection. Existing literature pertaining to tree hugging gesture vis-à-vis Chipko movement has been analyzed for the semiotic analysis of this movement.

4. Review of Literature

Forests, like other places of nature, are dialectically constituted by local politics of place, history, and ecology and are constitutive of social relations. Forests are more than a source of fuel or a 'natural resource': they shape myriad social relations that are locally specific and respond to the ecological and geographical contexts of a place. (Gururani S. 2002). Chipko movement was an extraordinary conservation movement of the poor while for many it was a local people's movement to regain control of their natural resources snatched away first by a colonial power and then by the free government of India. Pathak in his research study discussed about Social movements pre and post Independence protest movements in Uttarakhand Himalaya compellingly show unjust attitudes of the state systems. Through different protests movement, the society was trying to systemize itself and to restore the ecological balance of the region. (Pathak S, 1997) And finally it was a women movement trying to save their environment with a message to the loggers. Infact as a women movement it inspired eco feminism in India and to some extent throughout the world.

Guha have traced three main Chipko streams one led by Bahuguna, which blames materialism for ecological degradation and wants strict conservation; another led by Bhatt, which works at environmental regeneration with people at the Centre and the third named Uttarakhand SangarshVahini (USV) which seeks to move Chipko away from being publically identified with Bahuguna and Bhatt though the later founded it.

The Chipko first battle took place in early 1973 in Chamoli district when the villagers of Mandal, led by Bhatt and the Dasholi Gram SwarajyaMandal (DGSM), prevented the Allahabad-based sports

goods company, Symonds, from felling 14 ash trees. This act took place on April 24 and, in December; the villagers again stopped Symonds agents from felling in the Phata-Rampur forests, about 60 km from Gopeshwar.

As per HaripriyaRangan stated in his book *Of Myths and Movements*, people in Garhwal region used to live in harmonious and peaceful coexistence with the nature. As they learnt everything from their surroundings so more or less they were dependent on the forests for their livelihood. After India's war against China this peace was disrupted as the Indian government did not want to lose any territory in the Himalayas and therefore wanted to take control of its border regions. For this, roads began to be constructed, an army base was established and mining projects were launched. This gave enough freedom to timber merchants to purge forests in pursuit of commercial gain. They brought laborers with them to clear forest tracts. Degraded and barren lands were left behind and due to this during every monsoon that followed entire villages, mountain slopes and farmlands were washed away into the turbulent rivers.

Soon the local forest dwellers raised voice against cutting down the forests by timber merchants and urged government to interfere taking strict action immediately. But nothing happened that was a great disappointment for the forest dwellers. Later in 1973 their requested to Forest department to allot two ash trees to for making agricultural implements was straight away refused which led to a historical event Chipko. The people united and forests and trees are like their brothers and sisters and they would not let them be harmed for the profits of the forest department and timber merchants. Women played a major role in this as they rely on the forests not only for fuel wood, but also for agricultural implements, tea-leaf, manure for their fields, fodder for their animals, and wild fruit and medicines.

The Chipko movement emphasized local knowledge, local resources, local language, and locally relevant methods and styles of communication. As a result, the region - its people, its history, and its culture - was communicatively linked into an effective means of challenging the dominant paradigm of development with an alternative vision of empowerment that emphasized local needs, resources, and rights. (Shah H.)

Started as a peasant movement to a global campaign Chipko movement is no longer a hill-people's movement only but evolved into a philosophy "The Earth has enough to satisfy everyone's needs But it has got too little to satisfy everyone's greeds", Mahatma Gandhi's famous statement. (Bandyopadhyay J. 1992)

Humans use symbols to communicate (Kuypers, 2009; Foss, 2004; Griffin, 1969). Some examples of these symbols, or representations of other things, include spoken and written words, art, dance, clothing and the body. In rhetorical criticism, scholars assume that words, visuals and actions are used as symbols to communicate and/or persuade. (Kuypers, 2009, p.13) LlyodBitzer's theory consists of three components – exigence, audience and constraints.

Given this cultural and religious backdrop, the Chipko movement's philosophy revolved around three main beliefs, namely: 1) There is life in all creation of God be it human beings, animals, plants, rivers or mountains; 2) All life is a testimony of a higher power. All life deserves respect; and 3) Austerity is held in high regard since a desire for excessive materialism interferes with one's path to self-realisation and true happiness (Bahuguna, 1987, p. 9).

'Chipko' has taken on the functions of a metaphor for subaltern environmental resistance in that it has acquired meanings and associations that extend far beyond, or even have little resemblance to, the specific times, places and circumstances of its mobilization.

All in all, though studies done so far establish the fact that 'Chipko' as a tree-hugging movement caught on all around in its time and space, a symbolic act to conserve and honor Mother Earth, but still questions pertaining to decode this humane gesture in relation with the origin of Chipko movement still requires viable inputs and further exploration of 'Chipko'. The paper would try to interpret gesture of 'hugging tree' by semantically analyzing it.

5. Interpretations:

Gesture is a form of bodily semiosis. Local residents in the mountains do not know much about technical aspects, revenue, economy, and all those heavy words that becomes agendas and issues in the meetings or conferences or brainstorming sessions been conducted but they know few things very clear about environment that it should be protected.

As researchers have shown that touch communicates distinct emotions such as anger, fear, happiness, sympathy, love, and gratitude. So what else one can do but to show your concern embracing the dear one to stop him going away or been taken away by someone else. The pain of losing a tree cannot be felt by anyone more than a local resident feels as not only depends on forests for the livelihood but knows that it is their moral responsibility to conserve forests.

People hugged trees warmly as if someone hugs dear ones. Though forests has always been seen as the source of revenue and livelihood but focusing only on these aspects overlooks the historically and culturally specific meanings and values associated with nature beautifully embedded in a gesture of hugging trees warmly as if someone hugs dear ones.

It is quite evident that the environment provides resources which not only supports life but also help in the growth of a relationship of interchange between living organisms and the environment in which they live. In their attempt to conserve the dwindling bio-diversity, humans started demarcating fragile ecological zones ranging from forests, wet lands, bio-sphere reserves, mangroves, etc., as reserves to preserve not only the flora-fauna but also the physical attributes of ecological niche itself. It often led to conflicts with the communities sustaining on such resources, e.g. forest-dwellers. (Kumar M.)

7. Conclusions

In the Chipko movement, the protesters' state of spirituality was clearly obtained via their focus on non-violent means. The protesters' inclusion of hugging trees was a conscious effort to stop tree felling with a non violent approach.

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