

Public Participation in Conservation of Forest in Uttara Kannada



Political Science

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ABSTRACT

The Essence of public participation for successful environmental policy has been recognized at both the international and the national level. At the international level, the documentation generated by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992 (UNCED or the 'Earth Summit') emphasized the need for public involvement in the design and implementation of all sorts of environmental policy. Environmental issues can be handled properly by the people at various levels.

At present the issue of forest protection has become buzz word and of late people are realizing the significance of protecting the environment. Many opine that governments and large scale organizations alone can halt the environmental destruction. But this kind of opinions can not be accepted. In fact too much of dependence of people on the government machinery is not fair. This kind of attitude will make people lethargic and inactive. People must know their civic responsibilities and come forward to participate in the over all development process. Most of the time it is observed that people talk of their rights but never talks of their Duties.

In India the Fundamental Duties are a novel feature of the Indian Constitution. Initially, Constitution of India did not contain these duties. The Forty Second Constitution Amendment Act, 1976 has incorporated ten Fundamental Duties in the constitution of India.

The Eighty-Sixth Constitution Amendment Act, 2002 added one more Fundamental Duty in the constitution of India. As a result, there are now 11 Fundamental Duties of the citizen of India. It is largely expected that the proud citizen of India, while enjoying fundamental rights, must also perform these basic duties. Even when there is no provision in the constitution for direct enforcement of any of these duties, yet, the courts are guided by these duties while interpreting various laws. These duties have Sanctity as these are included in the Directive Principles of State policy. As a matter of fact the Indian Constitution mention to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wild life and to have compassion for living creatures. The Essence of public participation for successful environmental policy has been recognized at both the international and the national level. At the international level, the documentation generated by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992 (UNCED or the 'Earth Summit') emphasized the need for public involvement in the design and implementation of all sorts of environmental policy. Environmental issues can be handled properly by the people at various levels. Each individual must be provided with necessary information concerning the environment preservation and it must not be restricted to experts alone. The governments must facilitate and encourage public with regard to awareness and participation by making information widely available. In the major UNCED statement, *Agenda 21*, there is considerable reference to encourage public participation, i.e. women, children, indigenous peoples and farmers. Public stay outside the science/counter-science dialectic because of their 'non-expert' status says Sally Eden while writing on Public participation in environmental policy *Public Understand. Sci.* 5 (1996) 183-204. Printed in the UK. Jungles and forests are the backbone of a society, not only because of their natural economic importance, but also because of their importance in maintaining ecological equilibrium. Trees and for-

ests help in formulating the seasons and, also act as a cleanser of the air surrounding human society and help in maintaining ground water levels and the water cycle too. Hence the public participation in conservation becomes important. The forests can be saved by the people. People must come forward to protect the environment. Mere laws will not work out. In order to achieve public participation it is essential to involve people in the organization and decision-making processes of conservation. Participation can be strengthened by sound communication and initiating working together approach with different people and groups as to achieve the desired conservation.

Participation is sometimes difficult but the rewards of truly participatory processes can be impressive, particularly if forests are conserved effectively. Conserving forest resources requires that stakeholders trust one another and commit themselves to sustainable forest use. Legal or administrative procedures may have to be reformed or power redistributed to build relations of trust. Mutual trust often takes time to develop, especially if stakeholders have no previous experience of sharing decision-making or management responsibilities. It is the concrete actions taken by stakeholders in relation to each other—rather than their words or promises—which ultimately determine whether trust will evolve or not. (Lutz & Caldecott 1996; Wily 1997).

In India, as else where in the world the concern was to search for a people oriented approach to save the forests. Later on due to the sustained and concerted efforts of activists, scholars and rural communities, the government of India accepted in principle the need for the participation of village communities in forest management. Thus arose the concept of "Joint" Forest Management. In Karnataka, the initiation of Joint Forest Planning and Management began in 1993. In the backdrop of many environmental issues in Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka state, many scholars, environmentalists, youths have come forward to protect the environment. The local people have formed the groups and are doing a wonderful service in preservation of forests. The NGO's are conducting awareness campaigns and the educational institutes are holding academic seminars, conferences as to create awareness and policy inputs. Due to global needs, urbanization and modernization the human needs have increased and they have posed a great threat to the mother earth. This being the reality of the nation and the world at large the state of Karnataka and specially the Uttara Kannada district is also not exceptional to these kinds of devastating activities. Deforestation, Floods, River Pollution, Climate change, Extinction of animals are the major environmental issues in the Uttara Kannada District. Today the Deforestation is a big threat to human beings through out the world and nation, Uttara Kannada district is also not exceptional to these kinds of devastating activities. The thick forests are disappearing due to modernity and urbanization. Experts in the field of environment and conserva-

tion have stressed the need to protect the Western Ghats as it is a hotspot of biodiversity and home to many rare species. (N. Anantharam Madhyastha.) He pointed out that 14 of the 120 species of mammals, 19 of 508 species of birds, 97 of the 157 species of reptiles, 94 of the 121 species of amphibians, and 116 of the 218 species of fish are endemic to the Western Ghats region. He stressed the importance of creating awareness about conservation and said that the Western Ghats was recognised and identified as one of the 25 biodiversity hotspots in the world.

The Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel reporting to the Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has made several salutary recommendations for the long-term conservation of this global biodiversity hotspot. Participatory forest management has been initiated by some interested voluntary civil society organizations in Uttara Kannada district. Kali Bachao Andolan is active in this district and have rallied at various places and attempted to draw the attention of the government to intervene and with held the sanctions for environmentally unsound power projects in Uttara Kannada. This movement was taken up in the light the state government 's decision on not sanctioning of further projects involving diversion of forest land for other uses will be undertaken on Kali River or its tributaries in 1987. To build awareness on the threats to the Kali River, and to stop further damming and pollution, the Parisara Samrakshana Kendra (PSK), along with several local community organizations and tribal villages, have formed the Kali Bachao Andolan. Pandurang Hegde, leading the Kali Bachao Andolan, and several others conducted a Padayatra (an awareness - building and protest walk along the entire course of the river). Sunderlal Bahuguna, leader of the Chipko Andolan, had launched this Padayatra. There has been overwhelming response from local communities to this effort. At Bangalore, the Environment Support Group (ESG), a local research and advocacy NGO, supports the Kali Bachao Andolan. The 184 kilometers long Kali River in the Uttara Kannada district of the Western Ghats region in Karnataka, already has 6 major Hydroelectric dams. In addition, the river supports the nuclear plant i.e. Kaiga Nuclear Power Station which has generated about 1200 MW power from these dams, and an additional 440 MW from Kaiga. Now the activists have opposed the further expansion on the Kali River. Any expansion would cost the submerging 210 ha of forests along the Kali. The last flowing stretch of the Kali would be lost. Over the decades over 32,000 acres of forests have been submerged in this district to build the six dams. The last riverine stretch of forest left along the Kali would be lost forever is the concern of these activists. Environment Support Group and Parisara Samrakshana Kendra are quite active in this region and on the basis of an affidavit filed by Environment Support Group, and other evidences gathered during an Environmental Public Hearing held most of the projects are not been allowed.

The Uttara Kannada District Environment Protection Committee is contributing to preserve the degrading forests and has taken initiative and had organized a conference at Sirsi to discuss the suspected ecological and health hazards caused by the Kaiga atomic power plant near Karwar. Chairman of the Task Force for Conservation and Protection of the Western Ghats Anant Hegde Ashisar claimed that residents of villages in Yellapur taluk had been facing a lot of health problems. Water in the Kali and other streams was contaminated due to release of effluents, he alleged.

Mr. Hegde urged the State Government to appeal Prime Minister to constitute a citizens' committee to monitor the nuclear power plant's impact on ecology. Several scientific studies are carried out to suggest the measures to check the further degradation of environment. The study, 'Integrated ecological carrying capacity of Uttara Kannada', was carried out by the Energy and Wetlands Group of the Indian Institute of Science's Centre for Ecological Sciences. It was funded by the Karnataka Biodiversity Board and the Western Ghats Task Force. The study was carried out by T.V. Ramachandra, M.D. Subash Chandran and N.V. Joshi. A report was submitted to the State government in December and the findings made public in Sirsi. This study was initiated to guide policymakers in choosing developmental and income-generating projects that are in tune with the ecology of the district. Carrying capacity refers to the maximum number of activities — developmental, agricultural and industrial — that can be supported over a period of time without damaging the existing quality of life, ecology and productivity of the ecosystem. According to the report, no more hydroelectric projects should be executed in west-flowing rivers as they will adversely impact mangroves and fisheries. It would lead to fewer opportunities for livelihood for fishing communities and reduce the availability of fish and other estuarine food, especially for people in coastal regions.

People must understand the reality that the responsibility of saving the forest or the environment is not the duty of the governments alone. People must volunteer themselves to contribute for the successful afforestation activity says Pandurang Hegde, Parisar Samrakshan Kendra Sirsi. Salley Eden of School of Geography and Environmental Management Middlesex University says the success of the environmental policies of the government largely depends upon the public participation. It is observed over a period of time that the local people belonging to forest areas took maximum interest in conservation as it is a question of survival for them. Need of the hour is to encourage the public participation to cut down the further degradation of forests.

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