

Environmental Movements and Public Awareness – A Sociological Study of Slum Population in Bangalore

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Introduction

Widely called 'new social movements', Environmental Movements are so called because they don't subscribe at least explicitly to any class ideologies and that they are committed to holistic approach to development and that local communities must enjoy the fruits of development. Environmental movements have been the most dramatic and visible social movements in the post-World War period. The existing literature on environmental sociology has related rather overwhelmingly with, **a)** The causes of environmental destruction, **b)** The rise of environmental consciousness and movements. The fact of the matter, however is that nothing whatsoever ever becomes an issue much less an environmental issue unless people concerned perceive, define and articulate it as an issue. The phenomena of environmental issues have a great deal to do with dynamics of human behaviour. The role of social activist groups occupies an important and significant place in the preservation, conservation and protection of environment and environmental management. Besides pollution, there are other environmental effects of human behaviour which are experienced as annoying or risky ex: noise, radiation and heat. These experiences are termed as 'Environmental stresses'.

Keywords: Environmental movements, development, preservation, conservation, protection, pollution

The present paper is an attempt to study the environmental movements and public awareness – a sociological study of slum population in Bangalore on the following broad objectives.

Objectives

1. To know the level of understanding about environment among slum dwellers
2. To elucidate their perception towards environmental hazards
3. To explicit the role of environmental movements in creating awareness

Methodology

The study is based on primary data obtained through interview schedule, case study and observation method. Secondary data have been drawn from textbooks, newspapers, Journals, internet etc.

Results and Discussion

Urbanization and Industrialization accompanied by profound technological changes have altered the relationship of man, animal and nature and one of the inevitable and almost unavoidable social consequences has been the unabated proliferation of slums accompanied by environmental degradation among much else. Patrick Geddes, sociologist emphasized the need for the involvement of the people in management of environmental resources. The most pressing environmental health problems today, in terms of disease, illness, disabilities and even death are associated with urban slums in the developing world. The main agenda of the environmental movements, among much else, is basically three folds-

- To prevent further ecological destruction.
- Bring about ecological regeneration.
- To put environment at the service and control of people who live within that environment.

In recent decades, urban-centres in less-industrialized countries in general and India in particular have experienced unprecedented growth, and mega cities with populations of 10 million or more people have emerged in many countries. In India alone there are four such cities, with three others expected to join the ranks in the next 20 years. Indian cities are

among the most polluted in the world, with concentrations of a number of air pollutants being well above level as recommended by the World Health Organization. The dearth of data exists across the entire causal chain of risk assessment, from sources of pollution to atmospheric concentrations to human exposures and their health effects. Hardly anything is known about unknown sources that contribute to air pollution.

The main categories of urban air pollution sources in India are vehicular emissions, industrial emissions, and fuel use for domestic purposes such as cooking, and a potentially large miscellaneous category, which includes burning of household wastes, emissions from small businesses and cremation grounds. Rapid urbanization in India has led to an increase in transportation demand that public transport systems have been unable to meet adequately. Consequently, the use of personal vehicles has increased dramatically. Another key issue in the derivation of emission factors is the quality of fuel used. In the Indian context, the quality of fuel, especially adulteration of gasoline by kerosene, is particularly important, if understudied issue. This problem is almost universal among motorized three-wheeled vehicles (auto-rickshaws), which for the most part are not owned by their operators. Mention is also made of other elements like the pulverizer which makes too loud a racket for the customers, adding to the decibel level are the loudspeakers, either advertising products or haranguing the public, etc.

Today, despite its label as a 'less-industrialized country', India is heavily industrialized, with a thriving manufacturing sector that until recently was largely indigenous. Mumbai and Delhi are both major industrial centers with many large and small-scale industries. In addition to being India's financial and commercial capital, Mumbai is also India's most industrialized city.

A number of diseases have been associated with inhalation exposure to airborne PM including:

- Respiratory disorders whose effects range from minor symptoms such as coughs and dyspnea to severe ones such as acute respiratory infections (ARI), asthma, and pneumonia, chronic obstructive lung diseases such as bronchitis, cardiovascular disease, tuberculosis, lung cancer, and blindness.
- Pre-natal effects such as stillbirths and low birth weights are also associated with air pollution.
- One third of the households use biomass fuels, including wood, animal dung, or crop residues, that produce wide-array toxic particles, carbon monoxide, and other indoor pollutants.
- Exposure to indoor pollutants can cause or aggravate ARIs, including upper respiratory infections such as colds and sore throats, and lower respiratory infections such as pneumonia.
- Water Pollution through contaminated water and inadequate sanitation cause a range of diseases, many of which are life-threatening.

The factors helping for maintenance and improvement of environment such as Greenery which improves air quality, protects water quality, provides water availability, stabilizes climate, helps preserving biodiversity, prohibits noise and vibration has been stressed upon so as to bring awareness about the importance and need of the hour to address these aspects much seriously.

Perception, attitude and values among other things, together determine human personality. An analysis of these aspects of the sample of slum population becomes absolutely essential for assessing the role of human behaviors in the field of environmental protection and environmental management. They need to be educated, motivated, mobilized and organized if necessary trained for a planned, consolidated, collective action.

Peoples' perception, attitude, knowledge and environmental consciousness (behaviour), play an important role in determining the level of understanding, views on various health and environmental issues, assessing the knowledge of human beings on the same and to react accordingly to bring about the required changes. In spite of poor and limited knowledge about health and diseases on the one hand, it is surprising to note that many of them are very much familiar about HIV/AIDS which reflects the extent of publicity given to the hazards of that disease.

Environmental laws and legislations in India have been the most effective instruments of environmental protection, their enforcement, meaning and significance of Public Interest Litigations (PIL) and its role in environmental protection, to improve environmental quality in India through few case studies (samples) wherein the Petitioners have succeeded in preventing further damage or successfully avoided the damage being caused to the Environment and otherwise have posed a great threat to the health of the public living within the vicinity of such activities. Lack of environmental consciousness further makes enforcement of environmental legislation a frustrating experience. In the recent past, Supreme Court in particular and other Courts in general have come to play a very important and vital role in regulating human behaviour in the area of environmental protection.

Findings

- Most of the environmental movements have been doing excellent work in mobilizing and organizing people at the local grass root level.
- Environmental degradation in India has almost always followed the misuse and abuse of natural resources by vested interest.
- The urban slum dwellers lack the awareness and environmental consciousness.
- Lack of environmental consciousness further makes enforcement of environmental legislation a frustrating experience.

Conclusion

Development as a process should seek to maintain balance between socio-economic development and environmental safeguard in which the development needs of not only the present but future generation are taken into consideration along with maintenance of social equality. Development and environmental protection must go hand in hand. However; by implementing policies that help reduce environmental hazards it is possible to improve quality of life. Improving the conditions of daily life may by itself help to reduce poverty. Removing the health hazards, equitable distribution of resources and judicious utilization of the same would go a long way in contributing for the economic and social development of the people in particular and the urban areas in general.