

RAISING AWARENESS ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND NATURE CONSERVATION: ROLE OF INDIAN MEDIA

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Abstract :

This paper attempts to highlight the role that Media has played in setting perceptions and creating awareness on environmental issues. In the past decades, sustainability and environmental awareness have gained media attention. Due to increasing media coverage, our society is becoming more aware of the effects that our activities put on the health of the environment. In this regard the media has a big role to play in making people aware of environment issues. Most recent steps by the Government of India for promoting sanitation 'Swachchha Bharat Abhiyan' has got success by the united efforts of the Government and media. Media has always covered social and environmental issues thus it is the most revolutionary device for spreading consciousness towards environment protection.

Keywords: Environment, Media, awareness

Introduction:

We are in the last decade of an extra -ordinarily eventful twenty First century. The world has seen spectacular political, social, cultural, economic and scientific progress during this century. But this progress has been monopolized by the chosen few at the unbelievably and indescribably large cost of the majority of mankind. The most disconcerting manifestation of this lops sided progress has been our planet's ravaged ecology.

During the past 50 years, our planet has undergone dramatic changes in pollution, to the pressures that humanity puts on its natural resources. Our environmental problems are largely traceable to rapid population growth which is putting severe stress on the earth's natural resources. Geographically the environment and the society are in the process of continuous change. The earth that supports all kinds of life is slowly becoming inhospitable for human beings. This is compounded by scientific and technological development coupled with industrial growth. Many parts of the global system are at the perils of myriad of environmental problems - a situation that is increasingly becoming more challenging. While we may feel minute changes in global temperature, personally witness the disappearance of species, or understanding how deforestation affects individual livelihoods, the degradation of the environment is real and must be addressed if we are assure of our survival.

A good environmental sense has been one of the fundamental features of India's ancient philosophy. However, during the last few decades global circumstances have forced our country into a situation where it

is becoming increasingly difficult to practice a life style that does not push this planet towards doom. During the last ten years, there has been a gratifying resurgence of this good environmental sense in this country.

Environmental issues are not peculiar to one zone or area in India. Each geo-political zone in India is faced with its own environmental issues. Our environment is the greatest gift to mankind. This word environment has too many synonymous with air, land, water, plants and animals, while the scientists see the environment as consisting of both living organisms and their physical surroundings such as water, soil and air. In India, the problems of drought, ecology and the environment have had a very deleterious effect on people, thus making acute an already delicate situation.

In the past, we had a great tradition of environmental conservation which taught us to respect nature and to take cognizance of the fact that all forms of life - human, animal and plant - are closely interlined and that disturbance in one gives rise to an imbalance in others. Even in modern times, as is evident in our constitutional provisions and environmental legislation and planning objectives, conscious efforts have been made for maintaining environmental security along with developmental advances. The Indian Constitution has laid a new important trail in the Section on Directive Principles of State Policy by assigning the duties for the State and all citizens through article 48 A and article 51 A (g) which state that the "State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to safeguard the forests and wildlife in the country" and "to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes and rivers and wildlife, and to have compassion for the living creatures".

ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM: NATURE AND DIMENSIONS

Environmental problems in India can be classified into two broad categories:

- A. Those arising as negative effects of the very process of development; and
- B. Those arising from conditions of poverty and under-development.

The first category has to do with the impact of efforts to achieve rapid economic growth and development and continuing pressures of demand generated by those sections of society who are economically more advanced and impose great strains on the supply of natural resources. Poorly planned developmental projects are also often environmentally destructive.

The second category has to do with the impact on the health and integrity of our natural resources (land, soil, water, forests, wildlife, etc.) as a result of poverty and the inadequate availability, for a large section of our population, of the means to fulfill basic human needs (food, fuel, shelter, employment, etc.). Needless to say, the two problems are interrelated.

Environment and Mass Media

Media is also playing a key role in creating environmental awareness among people. Public actions and attitudes towards environmental protection are largely shaped and influenced by the media. The Radio, Television, Newspapers are the instruments to manipulate public opinion and overall belief systems. It is still to be confirmed that the role of mass media is one of the most important factors underlying the knowledge of environmental problems: This can only be true on the conditions that first, mass media are accessible to large proportions of the population, second, are spending some time on environmental issues and third, people are interested in information on ecological issues provided by the media so that they view or listen to the corresponding programs as well as read newspaper articles or other written publications dealing with environmental issues.

Media can focus on factors that cause environmental problems as well as adverse impact on people. The environmental problems, which threaten the present day existence as well as the future of humanity, are brought to peoples notice by the media. Some of these issues are really quiet alarming and need to be focused upon, so that people can be made aware of their intensity. Straight reports, discussions, photo features and articles by experts help in informing the people about different aspects of environmental issues. The layman may not be able to assess the impact of many of the environmental problems persisting around them. The effect of the depletion of ozone layer and its long term effect on global warming, poses threat of melting ice caps in the polar region. The inducing rise in sea level and extinction of all species of living beings on earth cannot be comprehended in full measure by everybody. If media attempts to educate the masses on such vital issues, at least, the intelligent and right-thinking people will become aware about the need to take the precautionary measures and they get sensitized towards the natural resource conservation and protection.

Enlightening the Masses

Media acts as a catalyst in enlightening the masses on issues related to environment. A few issues, on which global media reporting widely are global warming, green peace movement, depletion of ozone layer, climate change, green house gases effect, acid rain etc. Most of these problems are caused by the random destruction of nature and its resources, created by the irresponsible lifestyle of human beings. At the national level, a section of the media has drawn our attention on several environmental issues like Ganga River Action Plan, Chipko Movement, Narmada Bachavo Andolan and Appiko Movement. The waves of these movements were kept alive mainly by the coverage in various media. Of course, there are quite a good number of regional issues at the regional level covered by vernacular media.

Biodiversity conservation issues are beginning to gain prominence in the media. Media coverage of environmental conservation and biodiversity has experienced a steady increase since 1990, when it hardly

showed up in newspapers. The newspapers' usage of the term biodiversity has grown to nearly 0.1 articles per newspaper in 2000 and 0.2 articles per paper in 2010. The role of the media in building environmental friendly civil society and practically assisting in solving local problems by providing the public and decision makers with information for informed participation in decision-making is crucial. Most citizens get their information on the government through the media.

Role and Responsibility of Media

These days, the world is not safe as disaster can strike at any moment. Reducing the losses of life and property caused by disasters is a compelling objective now receiving worldwide attention. It is now being increasingly believed that the knowledge and technology base potentially applicable to the mitigation of disasters has grown so dramatically that it would be possible, through a concerted cooperative international effort, to save many lives and reduce human suffering, dislocation, disaster shock and economic losses simply by providing better information, communication and awareness. In disaster, media should show its preparedness, emergency management and critical infrastructure protection long before a disaster actually strikes.

Now media-print, audio, video and web have accustomed to the modern behavior and needs. The journalists should have a total commitment and involvement and work for the betterment of the society. Media professionals should consider this situation in all importance and social accountability in the larger interest of preserving not only the age old traditions, culture and values of the land, but also protect the environment and ecology in the changing scenario of climate and strive for the sustainable development.

Responsible journalism requires providing socially useful contributions that deepen understanding of problems and encourage search for workable solutions. Media is to benefit the public. Social responsibility is the only criterion to distinguish journalism from blogging, disinformation or agenda-driven information. Of all the difficult problems facing humankind, climate change is the most open-ended and with the widest impact on everyone and everywhere. Media has an important role and a vital responsibility in providing accurate information to the public during a disaster.

Media and Disaster Communication

Media has certain characteristics that make them powerful instrument of disaster communication as they provide quick and easy access to large number of people located at different places. They highlight the problems and difficulties faced by the people affected by disasters. Media mobilizes public opinion for relief and rehabilitation assistance. Access to information is crucial for the effective management of disasters. All those who are concerned with managing disasters necessarily have the need to access timely and accurate information.

During Pre-Disaster

Media alerts the people about the possibility of occurring disaster and the precautionary measures to be taken. Before disaster hits, emergency management officials hit the airwaves to broadcast the message of

impending danger and a specific action plan on how public can stay safe. Instances such as tsunami, fire and flood typically have warning signs, allowing officials hours and possibly days to prepare beforehand. Officials hold media conferences whenever they receive updated information about the disaster. Emergency management officials update the public on the current situation and give specific directions on how the public can prepare. Special disaster preparedness news broadcasts air during prime television viewing time in an effort to reach the masses. Some news coverage is interactive and allows the public to call the station and ask questions on air. Producers often invite disaster management professionals to answer on-air questions and present special information to help the public prepare for the situation.

During Disaster

When a disaster strikes, the public must be informed on what to do throughout the disaster to stay safe. If the public has no prior warning, coverage during the disaster is critical. For example, during Cyclone which occurred in 2014, news media provided 24-hour coverage on what people should do where to go and who to call if they thought their family members or well known persons were victims. Media also provided updates on search and recovery efforts and tracked the government's efforts to respond to the situation.

In other instances, television during disaster may not assist people immediately affected due to power outages. During disaster, nearly every household in affected areas lose power and television reception. In these cases, radio broadcasting helps to keep others informed about the storm's progress, track and possible damage. Reporters often stand out in the middle of the storm to report on the effects, which can help the viewing public assess the severity. Amateur radio operators can use hundreds of frequencies and can quickly establish networks tying disparate agencies together to enhance interoperability.

During Post-Disaster

Post-disaster coverage is vital to keep the public informed of potential safety hazards and business closings. Schools and offices in the affected area closed immediately following a disaster. Local television news stations broadcast which facilities are closed, so that residents can make alternate plans. News programs also cover which areas are destroyed or are dangerous. Emergency management officials will appear on TV to hold updates concerning service restoration. Television media coverage may continue as long as there is a threat to public safety.

Communication Technologies and Media used in Disaster Management

Communication is the only relief at times of disaster and hence the need for an efficient disaster management system becomes imperative in public places and even in business establishments and important commercial joints, where people move around in large numbers. Scientific and disaster mitigation organizations should seek to develop working relationships with media based on mutual trust and recognition of differing characteristics, goals, and needs. Regular, effective communication among these disparate groups, before, during, and after disaster "events" can greatly enhance those relationships.

Identifying and communicating specific themes and messages, both through the mass media and in the other alternative forms of communication are necessary.

For the wide spread of disaster information, several communication methods and strategies are adopted by Government and Non-Governmental organizations. All the possible communication methods-traditional folk media and modern mass media, big and little media, print and electronic media, web and wires, vertical and horizontal, linguistic and non linguistic, oral and written communication are used optimum. Their potentialities are explored extensively to reach the messages not only in the affected area but also across the nations and continents. This acknowledgment goes to each and every means of communication, media and organizations that contribute their best.

Print Media in India

Print media is used to disseminate all the needed information. The beauty or practicality of print materials is that you can go back to it, refer to it, read ,review and study the material at your own pace and convenient time. The print media focuses on the factors that cause environmental problems as well as the negative effects of them on people at large. The environmental problems that threaten the present day existence as well as the future of humanity are brought to every bodies notice by print media. Some of these issues are really quiet alarming and need to be focus upon so that people can be made aware of their significance. Straight reports, discussions, photo features and articles by experts help in informing the people about different aspects of each issue and its intensity.

Print media can educate, warn, inform, and empower people to take practical steps to protect themselves from disasters. In addition to reaching communities that may be beyond the reach of mass media, the pamphlets, posters, and books appeal more directly to children and provide a more interactive and entertaining educational mechanism. Indeed, they may have an immense and ever lasting impact on the minds of the people.

However, during disaster it becomes difficult to concentrate and comprehend sophisticated information. Rescue material must be simple and summarized. The best print media conducive to disaster information are pamphlets, brochure and small leaflets.

Electronic Media in India

Before, during and after disaster strikes, radio and television are extremely important communication tools to warn and assist the public. The officials use radio and television to communicate specific plans and procedures that end up saving lives and property. If disaster management officials have a warning of an impending disaster, they can broadcast special conferences days before the event to prepare the public. Officials also have an opportunity to communicate action plans before, during and after disaster to ensure public safety. The message has been formulated and disseminated specific disaster preparedness and prevention instructions through television and radio. The disaster management organizations and NGOs

should create and air their own programming on cable television, public broadcasting stations, and satellite television to educate people on disasters.

Amateur Radio

In times of crisis and natural disasters, amateur radio is often used as a means of emergency communication when wire line, mobile phones and other conventional means of communications fail. Amateur radio is not as dependent on terrestrial facilities. It is dispersed throughout a community without "choke points" such as cellular telephone sites that can be overloaded. Amateur radio operators are experienced in improvising antennas and power sources and most equipment today can be powered by an automobile battery. Annual "Field Days" are held in many countries to practice these emergency improvisational skills. The operators use hundreds of frequencies and quickly establish networks tying disparate agencies together to enhance interoperability.

Conclusion:

Nevertheless, over the years, there has been progressive pressure on the environment and the natural resources, the alarming consequences of which are becoming evident in increasing proportions. These consequences detract from the gains of development and worsen the standard of living of the poor who are directly dependent on natural resources. It is in this context that we need to give a new thrust towards conservation and sustainable development. In this regards communication, education, and public awareness (CEPA) play a role in developing this collaboration and change in society.

The pursuit of sustainable development and environmental conservation policies, objectives and targets requires the public to be sufficiently sensitized about the multiple dimensions of environment and development. Awareness and understanding of environmental issues provide the basis and rationale for commitment and meaningful action towards environmentally sound and sustainable development.

It is difficult to clearly delineate the causes and consequences of environmental degradation in terms of simple one-to-one relationships. The causes and effects are often interwoven in complex webs of social, technological and environmental factors. For instance, from a purely scientific and technological standpoint, soil erosion would result from the cultivation of marginal lands. However, from the point of view of a comprehensive environmental impact analysis, it is important to go further back and analyze the circumstances that force people to cultivate marginal lands. Viewed in this light, it becomes clear that a concern for the environment is essentially a desire to see that national development proceeds along rational, sustainable lines. Environmental conservation is, in fact, the very basis of all development.

Media plays a pivotal role in educating and enlightening the people and the governments to protect and preserve natural resources in the interests of future generations and the climatic chaos. Sustainable Development is attained by protecting the environment in a judicious use of natural resources. Countries both the rich and the poor have an equal stake in this stewardship of the earth. The very survival of our

planet depends upon it. In this regard media plays a pivotal role in creating awareness and bringing the positive behavioral change among people in mitigating the anthropogenic climate change. Hence, the role and the responsibility of Communication and Mass Media are immense in Climate Change and Sustainable Development.

Thus, mass media have become an indispensable partner in global biodiversity conservation and management through their various roles of not only increasing awareness on the problems and challenges towards environmental sustainability, but also in achieving the ultimate goals of changing human perception, attitudes and behavior towards environmental resources.

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