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**The Civil Society and Environmental Movements in North East India**

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| **\*Corresponding author**  *Geetashri Sarma*  **Article History**  *Received: 23.08.2017*  *Accepted: 28.08.2017*  *Published: 30.09.2017*  **DOI:**  10.36347/sjahss.2017.v05i09.015  **C:\Users\Habibur Rahman\Downloads\SJAHSS.png** | **Abstract:** The constitution of India itself contains provision for environment protection in the article 48-A. The concerned for the protection of environment in India can be traced back to the early twentieth century when people protest against commercialization of forest in the colonial period but it was only in the 1970s an organized awareness of the ecological impact of state monopolistic development process started to develop. The growing consciousness on environment and threat to the nature a large number of civil society organizations/ action groups are form the different part of the country. The present paper shows the role of civil society organizations in environment protection in Northeast India.  **Keywords:** Civil Society, Environmental Movement, NGOs, Environment. |
| **INTRODUCTION**  The issue of environmental activism has received wide salience in the literature of social science. The issue is particularly significant at the present juncture with the alarming deterioration of the environment worldwide. The emergence of environmentalism in academic discourse is the phenomenon of 1970s and thereafter. The United Nations conference on human environment, Stockholm, 1972 pave the way for numbers of studies and reports on the condition of the environment and its affect on the present and future generations. It expressed concern to protect and improve |

the environment.This conference has drawn a large number of NGOs from the different concerns of the world to deal with the issues of environment. The development of ‘green politics’ or ‘eco greens’ or ‘green movement’ in Germany and North America in early 1980s boosted the green movement throughout the world. A number of organizations, research groups, institutions have been established to study environmental issues [1]. Environment provides valuable material not only on various aspects of the environment but also peoples resistance and struggles. India is a country blessed with abundant natural resources. There are large areas of forests, which are inhabited by rare species of animal life. The country is also having many rivers, which provide livelihood for a considerable numbers of people. However, these natural resources were a favorite prey for the stake in the state. They exploited the nature without any social concerns. The agenda of state for promoting development with the construction of big dams through massive displacement of indigenous people and common masses as a whole poses a threat for the very survival of the affected people. Apart from that the over exploitation of natural resources for industrialization, mining and resultant environmental degradation are some of the challenges of democracy at present times. As a response to these challenges, a vibrant civil society is emerged in the form of various associations or organizations, which provides a space for the common people to raise their common concerned on common issues. Civil society includes all non-profitable and nongovernmental organizations. The growing consciousness on environment and threat to nature many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are upsurge in India, which plays a vital role in the protection and preservation of natural resources. Many examples can be cited. In case of famous “chipko” movement, the work of Dasholi Gram Swaraj Mandal, Pagladia Bandh Prokolpor khyotigrasta Alekar Sangram Samittee which is engaged in anti dam movements in Assam was significant. The volunteer of NGOs started educating the people about the ill effect of environmental degradation and gradually they gathered themselves in the movement. This voluntary organizations or action groups was working with people and campaigning against the projects of the state. During last, few decades’ voluntary organizations have been increasingly viewed as an integral part of India’s developmental process. Many NGOs are working at micro level, and although environmental concerns are relatively new, they are an overwhelming phenomenon [2]. There is a need to look at the issue of people’s action towards the environment.

The increasing importance of civil society organizations in different sectors including environmental protection makes it important to have knowledge of the civil society organizations and their activities in environmental movements. The present paper is concerned with environmental movement in northeast India with special focus on the role of Civil Society organizations in the region. The study is done on the basis of study of some NGOs, which are involved in environment protections in Northeast India. The study is based on secondary data and it includes research articles, books, journals, newspaper reports as well as information provided in websites.

**A Brief Survey of Literature**

India’s northeast falls under the eastern Himalayas, one of the two bio-diversity hotspot of the country is known for its rare and varieties of abundant flora and fauna. The region is the homeland of varieties ethnic groups. About 25.81 percent of the region’s population comprised tribal communities. Study of environmental movement in northeast India appears interesting for its geographical location and ethnic compositions. Various studies have been done on environmental movement in North East India. Carter A. [3] finds that the continuous rise of the environment issues in the world and explores the environmental philosophy and Green political thought which urges political intervention for environmental protection. There are also studies, which try to find out the causes of environmental polluting factors. R. Carson [4] finds that use of various polluting elements in the industries affect the life process and other harmful substances that creates serious problems especially for the living species. The study also discusses that all unchecked growth of industry has threatened human health and life of animals and endangered the natural environment. P. P. Karan [5] focuses mainly on anti-dam and protection of forests resources in several regions where movement are active. In India Environmental Movements is an emerging issue because the Governments are determined to go for development through construction of large dams and other infrastructures. He also finds that Women have been the prominent leaders which they are participate on environmental protection from the cutting of trees in the rainforest areas particularly on the Himalayan hill locks gathered by contractors or outsider but he did not mentions about the role of civil society organizations in leading the movement within the region. Sya Kedzior [6] find that the political ecology of India’s influence in the study of environmental movements which provide a complex issues surrounding the structure of Indian society which focus on social and ecology events that distinct from the more traditional approaches to the study of new social movements. He also find that the *Chipko* movement is associated with those of the religious and cultural norm, which is more emphases on various issues that classified the eco-feminist, eco-sustainable management, religious or Gandhian ecology, post-colonial revolution and forest rights based. Author finds that protest movements agitate on large dams across the nation and other environmental problems emerge. Similarly M. Gadgil and R. Guha [7]in their bookdiscuss that various strikes and demonstrations by the local inhabitants in various parts of India took active movement affected by the Environmental degradation and deterioration, particularly by the Dams construction. The study discuss that Movements in India have involved conflicts and Environmental threats in Himalayan foothills due to cutting of forests trees by the outsiders. Study determine that deep forests has been vacated which are filled by major and small Dams and displaced the local, tribal or indigenous communities. R**.** Dutta and K. S. Sarma [8]find that large numbers of Dams are going to be constructed which will cause and affect Environmental benign which result in serious decline of freshwater, Biodiversity and fishes species extinct in Assam and the North East of India and the elsewhere.Vullli Dhanaraju [9] finds that the concept of Ecology, Nature, Environments and Biodiversity are related and explains the interaction between man and environment in the past and the Environmental factors had wider impact on human civilization and culture of Indian history. It finds that the new perspectives which influence the contemporary issues which focus on modification of landscape, reoccurrence of natural calamities and conflicts over the control and use of natural resources which relate interdisciplinary approach in understanding about the Indian Ecology, Culture and Environment from the pre-history to the contemporary period. The study also argued that how Ecology and Environment have shaped the cultural behavior of the communities, its effects on human activity and its ideas on non-human nature.

Above studies, highlight many aspects of environmental movement. Very little study does exist concerning the role of action groups/ civil society organizations in leading the environmental movements or environmental protection within the region. Northeast India is being an ethnically sensitive region comprises of multiethnic communities who are not only conscious of their ethnic identity but also active in to preserve their identity that lead to variety of movements within the region.

**Ngos and Environmental Movement in Northeast India**

The most significant features of environmental movement in India is that, there is involvement of local voluntary organizations or non- governmental organizations. NGOs are playing a significant role in the different arena of society. As far as emergence of these voluntary organizations is concerned, it has been seen that the upsurge took place mainly in the last few decades. Although some organizations are exists in 60s and 70s but their numbers were very small. There are more than thousands of organizations are working on Environmental issues in various state of northeastern region. The organizations are spread over different parts of the region. Some of the organizations that are located in one state, and extend their areas of operation beyond the state. Organizations focusing on environment along with other issues of interventions such as health, education, and upliftment of deprived sections etc. Northeastern region is one of the bio-diversity regions of India. The region is comprises of 8 states- Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Arunachol Pradesh, Nagaland, Meghalaya and Sikkim. The state of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Arunachol Pradesh are the predominantly tribal states whereas, other states such as Tripura, Manipur and Assam also have considerable number of tribals in them along with the non- tribal plain people. Each ethnic group is very much different from others in respect of their culture. Interestingly the region with its diverse flora and fauna, mineral resources and subsistence livelihood is now facing threat brought by the modern development paradigm. The development paradigm adopted by state has also threatened the traditional pattern of livelihood of the people of the region. Most of these people depend upon the nature for their survival. Above facts contributed to the growth of a vibrant civil society in present era and various NGOs or action groups are emerged within the society. According to the Directory of centre for environment education North East, there are 152 NGOs are involved in Environmental movements in Assam. Similarly, there are 44 numbers of recorded NGOs in Manipur, 70 numbers in Mizoram. It is not possible to collect the complete list of NGOs, which are working on Environmental protection in North East India because some of them are still not registered or they are only popular within their local areas of operation. However, it will be difficult to study all the organizations in detail. The present study covers only few NGOs, which are working on environmental movements or environmental protection in Northeastern region.

Following are some NGOs, which covered under study-

**Association for Environmental Preservation**

The organization was formed in the year 5th June 2005. It is an association of volunteers from all over different parts of Mizoram coming together and working for the improvement and protection of environment of Mizoram. Its office situated at kulikawan, Aizwal. The motto of the organization is “save our environment and wildlife”. At present, the organization has 300 members. The main objectives of the organization are to preserve and protection of our environment and wild life, development, sow the seed of deep affection, and love for our environment and wildlife to the people, to channelized effective effort for the well-being and betterment of the poor and needy. The organization had taken extensive steps for the things, which it stands for. It organized awareness campaign through media, newspapers, public meetings, seminar, poster; environmental rally etc. organization also publishes environmental leaflets, book and meaningful cartoons. Sometimes they erected artificial nest boxes at various point in the city and prove to be the quite handy for nesting birds. Thus, this organization working for environmental protection in Mizoram.

**Green Mizoram Network**

Green Mizoram network was formed on 4th June 2009. It is a nongovernmental organization. The main theme of the NGO is peace with our environment. Vanlalruata Tochhawng is the president of the NGOs. The main aims and objectives of the organization are to foster among the citizens awareness about the value of bio diversity, delightful landscape and curious nature gift. The organization also wants to conserve rare and endemic species in their natural habitats, to re- vegetate degraded forest, as well as to protection and conservation of natural resources through active involvement of local artiste and wearing away the tribal community from the destructive habit of shifting cultivation.

The organization has arranged a discussion at all India radio Aizawl on green Mizoram day and world environment day since 2009. The organization also arranges a free green concert on world environment at vanapa hall, Aizwal in collaboration with state environment and forest department. Artists enthralled the audience with beautiful environment related songs. At this green concerts all the students, officials and public were requested by green Mizoram network to do their bit towards protection of environment, forest and wild life. They also arrange a concert for prevent forest fire as well as arrange a plantation programme on pine trees. Thus, this organization is working for environmental protection in Mizoram.

**Nature’s Beckon**

The organization was constituted in the year 1982 in Assam. The aim of the NGO is to conserve the wildlife of Assam. The major objectives of this organization are to preservation of the forest and wildlife through people’s participation, to conservation of the bio-diversity of the hotspot areas along with the cultivation of traditional food plants of the forest villages, to create the environmental awareness among the people and to work for social and environmental justice. The awareness programme of the organizations in the form of poster campaigning, writing articles on newspaper and journals, organizing meetings etc. The organization is successful in different aspects. They were successful in driving the smuggler out of the forest area, success in involving villagers to protect the wild life as well as success in getting Chakrashila hill reserve to be declared as wildlife sanctuary. Thus, this organization is successful in full fill their goal.

**Early Bird**

This NGO is located in Guwahati and established in the year 1991. At first, the organization was established to protect the diverse species of bird of Assam but gradually they incorporated the preservation and protection of wildlife of Assam in their objectives. They organized health camp for animals and bird rescue of wildlife if trapped in the human habitation etc. The organization is involved in different kinds of activities such as awareness campaigning for preservation and conservation of wildlife, raising voice for protecting wild life etc. the organization distributing wildlife information related booklets among the people. This organization mobilized people to protect birds and wild life of Assam. This organization also got financial support from various international or national organizations such as WWF NE, WWF Tiger cell etc.

**Ngunu Ziro**

Ngunu Ziro is a community-based organization situated in the lower Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh. Hibu Tatu is the chairperson of this NGO. The main objectives of this organization is to community empowerment by building capacities, environmental conservation by promoting healthy traditional practices and awareness activities for schoolchildren, livelihood initiative for the village people etc. The mission of this organization is to bring about sustainable development to ziro velly by empowering the communities to participate in the process that affects their lives. The organization takes initiatives to preserve the rich cultural heritage of the tribal’s and to maintain the pristine environment using traditional knowledge are taken up. The NGO also organized a butterfly meet at zero to create awareness about the rich bio diversity of the valley and the need to conserve it.

**Oriental rural development organization (ORDO)**

The ORDO is a non-profitable organization registered in the year 1984. The organization is located in Tamei, Tamenglong district Manipur. Because of communication problem, the organization has its mailing and branch administrative office at Imphal. The guiding philosophy of the organization is rooted in the ethical value of caring for our planet and all life that it sustains now and in the future. The ORDO is committed to contributing towards the creation of an equitable society based on mutual obligations and responsibilities in which development patterns will satisfy the shared needs of all people and respect the earth’s living system and natural resources. The organization was established under the inspiration of the depressed tribal communities and aim is to improve quality of life of the tribal poor in the hill areas through the conservation of bio diversity and regeneration of the degraded environment and ecosystems. To achieved its goal the organization attempts to initiate agriculture, aforestations, agro-forestry, horticulture, natural resources management, agro-based programmes to the old type of cultivation from “Jhum” and rehabilitation programmes etc. The organization takes some step for environment protection and conservation in the state. ORDO promotes local initiative for sustainable, equitable agriculture development keeping in mind the global impact on the environment due to destructive jhum cultivation. Thus, this organization active in the state to received their goal.

**CONCLUSION**

The study of environmental NGOs in Northeast India shows that, most of the action groups are emerged after 1970s and 80s and most of the organizations lead by some educated youth. The present study shows that, concerned for the environment is very much prevalent in the region. Various organizations taking up different steps to preserve and protect the environment. These organizations exhibit high degree of autonomy so far as their objectives is concerned. Sometime these organizations also raise the voice against the fault of the government. So far as their fund flow is concerned, they manage it from their own contribution as well donations but sometimes many takes up projects sponsored by government or international nongovernmental organizations. However, some action groups were form out of a felt need to protect the environment but sometimes they loose the spontaneous rigor of the movement spirit and concerned more with projects and action. Above study shows that these action groups motivated the people towards the environment protection and preservation, encourage for plantation, arrange some environmental awareness programme through meeting, musical concert, leaflets, and poster campaigning etc. Sometimes these organization protests against the government, campaigning by press released or assembling in public for protest demonstration. The study shows that, these organizations also interfere with the traditional practices of tribal people in the region, which are unfavorable to nature, such as ‘Jhum’ cultivation. From the above study, it can be said that most of these organizations are involved in some sort of activism by using different ways to achieve their goal. It is difficult to say, how far they are success in their goal because the degradation of environment cannot be upgraded in a day, it is a complex process and required a long-term goal.

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