

Sustainable Development for Future:

“Insights from agriculture, Health, Aquaculture, Energy, Education and Environment”



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ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN PROLIFERATION OF ENVIRONMENT MOVEMENTS IN UTTARAKHAND

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Introduction:

Media built a strong base for any society, as it opens a door for common people to communicate with the authorities. It shoulders an explicit social responsibility towards the society and plays a pivotal role in shaping the minds of people and has a well-defined effect on their behaviors.

The traditional forms of media are print and electronic and now digital media has become a new form of mediated communication. Social media per se has given a new impetus and has now become a new voice for the people. It has opened the new roads for mass movements and for people to raise their voices against any public issue.

Environmental movements or Public movements for conservation of Environment and natural resource have always been

vastly covered by print and electronic media. It always played a crucial role in making public aware about issues of general interest and Environment conservation. In Uttarakhand, which is a land of dense forest is itself a result of social and environment movement. Uttarakhand has a very rich and diverse flora and Fauna and is always considered to be a land of social movements linked with environment conservation. The very famous Chipko Movement which was originated by the local resident Gaura Devi in 1973 at the Himalayan region of Uttarakhand. This 'tree hugging' movement by local residents went on to become a mending point for many future environmental movements in India and all over the world. Many recent environment movements in Uttarakhand got their inspiration from the Chipko movement itself. Many Environmentalist like Sunder Lal Bahuguna, Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Dr. Vandana Shiva, Rajendra Pachauri and Dr. Anil Joshi are among the prominent faces of environment movements in Uttarakhand.

Recent Environment Movements in Uttarakhand:

The Mainstream print and electronic media played a very influential role in inspiring the youth to become aware about natural heritage of their state and to stand tall to safeguard the environment of their own land. Along with regional media, new media or social media has recently given a new face to the environment movements or save environment movements in Uttarakhand. The participatory nature of social media provides a platform for people to express their opinions and views on such issues which further can be identified and duly rectified by the respective authorities.

With the presence of social media channels like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Twitter and Telegram etc. communication has become instant and boundless. It has open new roads for mediated communication which further pave the way for better and stronger societies globally. And to strengthen our societies, we need

to safeguard the environment and natural heritage. With the course of time people participated in many social and civil movement for protecting the environment and natural resources.

One such movement is 'Save Thano Forest campaign' started by young people in Dehradun in December 2020. This campaign was started as a Chipko movement like stir in October 2020, to safeguard 10,000 trees of Thano forest that are slated to be cut for Doon Airport Expansion.

Along with 'Save Thano', another movement which participants named as 'Chipko movement 2021' is prevalent in Dehradun city to save 2200 trees from chopping off in the lieu of development for a smart city.

In Uttarakhand, up till now almost a total of 1493 fires spread over 1960 hectares of forest land till May 2019. To save forest and wildlife of Uttarakhand from the spread of forest fire an online petition was registered which was supported by almost 1000 people. This has become another citizen movement supported by people online.

Ganga Clean Mission is another project which is started by Government of India to rejuvenation of river Ganga and its tributaries. Along with the associates of Government, local public of Uttarakhand associated themselves with this dream projects.

The local activist group 'Making a difference by being a difference' (MAD) is very much active and popular among youth of Dehradun, the Capital city of Uttarakhand, who are putting their efforts to safeguard the environment and running local campaigns associated with the rejuvenation of local rivers, reversing the cycle ban campaign and making the city clean by wall transformations.

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An ongoing online movement against the clearance of seven hydro power project plants in upper Ganga Basin in Uttarakhand has been started in August 2021 and continuously gaining supporters through signature campaign on online platforms.

Role of Social media in Environment Movement in Uttarakhand:

New media and Social media being participatory in nature is very popular among youth and with every single passing day becoming an inevitable part of mediated society. New media being an instant source of information creating awareness and upholding the very nature of an operational society. The user friendly and direct approach of web media made it possible for common people to express their opinions and become an active unit of informed and well versed society.

One such online platform is 'change.org' organization where people can directly start petitions through signature campaigns. In Uttarakhand, many activists used this platform to stand for protecting the environment in the state. These movements and petitions are further proliferated with the assistance of social media platform like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp used by the youth. There are some movements in Dehradun, the capital city of Uttarakhand which gained popularity among young generation and were supported by them wholeheartedly.

A recent one is 'Save Thano Forest Campaign' which become most hyped and successful environmental movement in the year 2021. 'Save Thano Forest campaign' was started by youth as a protest and with the help of parallel online petition through signing campaign on change.org it has now reached a mark of 70,000 supporters. The local environment activists, professors, students and many more people gathered on roads in Dehradun and rallied against the cutting of 10,000 trees in the name of development or making

Dehradun a smart city. The number of people involved in it strengthens public viewpoint that it is just not a campaign to save a forest but to save a self-sustaining ecosystem which we cannot cut just in the name of development. Apparently, social media played a very positive role here in making us aware about our environment and natural heritage.

An activist group called 'Been there, Doon That (BTDT)', initiated by Lokesh Ohri, an Anthropologist, historian and a cultural activist in Dehradun city is actively voicing for environment and natural conservation in Uttarakhand. This group was initially started with the aim to explicate people about the cultural and natural heritage of Dehradun and nearby areas. The founder of the group, Lokesh Ohri has always been an active member of cultural activities in Uttarakhand and has a prominent stand on it. He along with his group members started with heritage walks in Dehradun connected activists, youth and locals for the noble cause of saving the cultural and environmental Heritage in Uttarakhand. He wrote a number of books on cultural heritage and nature of Uttarakhand. They are running a Facebook group of 60 thousand members named as "Been There, Doon That, where people express their opinions and exhibits their association with the nature. This group actively participated in the 'Save Thano Campaign' and motivated others to associate with the cause through their social media platforms.

There are numerous pages on Facebook and Instagram naming 'Save Thano' and 'Save Thano Forest' started by local activist groups. People shared posts on these groups and united the youth to be a part of this noble cause. A local environment activist, Dr. Anchal Sharma collaborated to this citizen movement in a way that many locals and youth participated in the movement and rallied against the chopping off 10,000 trees for expansion of Airport and another plan of cutting of 2200 trees for widening the roads in the name of development.

Dr. Anchal posted live on 'Save Thano Forest' Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1045294732578379/permalink/1284343522006831/>) expressing her dissent over it and making people aware about this movement. She has always been an active environmentalist in Uttarakhand and become a very prominent part of these citizen movement. Many times she motivated the youth and locals of Dehradun to get inspired by Gaura Devi, the pioneer of Chipko Movement, who started the campaign by hugging the tree and not let them cut by the authorities.

Local residents and environmentalists use their social media handles like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp for disseminating the information among each other and becoming the part of such citizen movements. One such participant of an environment movement in Dehradun which they named as 'Chipko movement 2021', Dr. Jagriti Jaiswal, Assistant Professor, Doon University shared her views that- "This protest was named as Chipko movement to save the 2200 trees on the way of Sahstradhara road via Thano in Dehradun. Government announced to widen the highway road. Against this announcement, various organization has arranged one meeting and decided to collect people and named it 'Chipko movement 2021'. I got this news through social media Facebook group and Whatsapp share menu."

Moreover, she also decided to disseminate this information in her group and shared this post on her Facebook status. She further said that social media multiplied the effect of this movement and many organizations, individuals, and students has reported their presence and made this successful. The post effects of movement were also visible on social media. People shared photos, posts, videos on their social media handles which further strengthen the movement. Social media made this analysis easy for Government to understand the public take on their decision and also impacted their decision.

One of the most popular activist group 'Making a difference by being a difference' (MAD) started by a few young graduates in 2011 under the leadership of Abhijay Negi, who currently completed his Masters in Law from the University of Oxford. They started the group with the aim of cleaning the city of Dehradun. Initially MAD was started as a voluntary Sunday-based activity providing a platform for people mostly youngsters who would be keen to work and contribute some efforts for the society. With course of time they gained popularity among teenagers and youngsters who willingly joined the group and extend their support to make a difference by being a difference actually. In an interview with the logical Indian, Abhijay Negi said- "Well, frankly speaking, I am myself unaware of the process. I don't know what to tell – today; we are many hundreds, mostly teenagers, imbued with the spirit of selfless service, determined to work towards making a difference by being the difference ourselves." (Bhattacharya, 2017)

MAD being the oldest activist group arrange almost 500 Activities about river rejuvenation, cleanliness, wall transformation for the purpose of beautification of city and annual MADATHON in which people from different areas of the state participated actively. The Mainstream media gave a huge coverage and played a commendable role to further enhance the effect of these activities.

MAD also has a wide presence on Social media. Their Public group or a page on Facebook 'MAKING A DIFFERENCE (MAD)' has a vast following up to 13 thousand members. MAD has a huge recognition among the Government and eminent environmentalist of Uttarakhand. Their constant efforts for rejuvenation of river Rispana was hailed by Maj. General B.C. Khanduri, Harish Rawat and T.S. Rawat, the Ex Chief ministers of Uttarakhand. Many prominent environmentalists like Padma Bhushan Dr. Anil Joshi, Dr. Vandana Shiva, Padma Shri Kalyan Singh Rawat, Miteshwar Anand extend their support to these young

environment activists by constantly associating themselves in activities organized by MAD and through online seminars sharing experiences related their participation in previous Environment movements in Uttarakhand. Their Facebook and Instagram pages time to time update posts before and post activity, so that more people can get an awareness about it and can actively become a part of a responsible society.

The social media made it possible for them to be active during the time of Covid-19 pandemic also in the year 2020-2021. They organized activities and extend a supporting hand to help fight the pandemic. Their constant quest to work for a clean environment in Uttarakhand helped many others to be a part of these citizen movements and to shoulder a responsibility towards safeguarding the environment and natural heritage.

Conclusion:

The future of the country is in the hand of the young generation and with a boom in the information, communication technologies made it more effortless for them to get associated with our cultural and natural heritage. The easy access of smart phones and new technologies pushed it in a smoother walk. Omnipresence of social media creates a social environment of awareness which proliferated the participation of young generation towards sheltering their natural resources. The way media has expended their dimensions and become more user friendly and accessible created an informed culture of free expression and decision making. The participatory approach of social media worked as a tool of development communication connecting the authorities to understand it better. Social media is a hope of new informed society if it works in spreading positivity and awareness. This would be a great tool for people extending their support in protecting their natural resources and environment.

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