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Mains Practice Questions

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Q. Throw light on the major environmental movements witnessed in India. Also, discuss the economic and identity issues associated with environmental movements. (250 words)

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Approach

- Highlight the major environmental movements witnessed in India such as Bishnoi movement; Chipko movement; Appiko movement etc.
- Then discuss the various 'economic' and 'identity' issues associated with these movements.

Introduction

- Environmental movement is a type of social movement that involves an array of individuals, groups and coalitions that perceive a common interest in environmental protection and act to bring about changes in environmental policies and practices.
- The genesis of environmental movement in India can be traced back to the early twentieth century when people protested against the commercialization of forest resources during the British colonial period.

Major Environmental Movements in India

- **Bishnoi Movement:** This movement was led by Amrita Devi in which around 363 people sacrificed their lives for the protection of their forests. This movement was the first of its kind to have developed the strategy of hugging or embracing the trees for their protection spontaneously.
- **The Chipko Movement:** The Chipko movement was a non-violent agitation in 1973 that was aimed at the protection and conservation of trees, but perhaps, it is best remembered for the collective mobilisation of women for the cause of preserving forests, which also brought about a change in attitude regarding their own status in society. The name of the movement 'chipko' comes from the word 'embrace', as the villagers hugged the trees and encircled them to prevent being hacked.
- **Narmada Bachao Andolan:** This movement is against the Narmada River Valley Project. It has drawn upon a multiplicity of discourses for protests such as: displacement risks and resettlement provisions; environmental impact and sustainability issues; financial implications of the project; forceful evictions and violations of civil liberties; issues pertaining to river valley planning and management etc.
- **Appiko Movement:** Appiko Movement is one of the forest-based environmental movements in India. The movement took place in Uttara Kannada district of Karnataka in the Western Ghats. The movement created awareness among the villagers throughout the Western Ghats about the ecological danger posed by the commercial and industrial interests to their forest which was the main source of sustenance.

- **Silent Valley Movement:** Silent Valley Movement in Kerala was against the construction of a hydroelectric dam on the river Kunthipuzha under the Kudremukh project.
- **Tehri Dam Conflict:** It is one of the most protracted environmental movements in recent years. The major issues of the movement include- seismic sensitivity of the region, submergence of forest areas along with Tehri town etc.

These environmental movements were mainly against the ecological concerns such as greater exploitation of the already depleted natural resources, construction of big dams etc.

However, along with these ecological concerns, there were also economic and identity issues associated with these environmental movements.

Economic Issues

- All the villagers relied on the forest to get firewood, fodder and other daily necessities. The livelihood needs of poor villagers were put at stake against the government's desire to generate revenues from selling timber.
- The need for infrastructural development attracted many foreign logging companies, who were eyeing the vast forest resources. This led to denying of villager's control over these natural resources on which they relied for both food and fuel.
- Widespread flooding of the villages and forest areas, which was attributed to the mismanagement due to commercial logging and construction of big dams, led to displacement of villagers thereby losing their means of livelihood.

Identity Issues

- The villagers valued the forest for their own sake and were of the view that their existence and identity is closely linked to the forest. They were able to perceive the link between their victimization and the denuding of mountain slopes by commercial interests.
- Women, being solely in charge of cultivation, livestock and children, suffered the most due to floods and landslides.
- The message of the environmental movement leaders made a direct appeal to them.
- Women were given no share in the decision-making process, public power and political activities like men. These movements provided them with the opportunity to raise their concerns and fight for their rights.