



Impacts of Forest Fires on Environment: Role of Environmental NGOs in Satara District

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ABSTRACT

Forest fire is a common phenomenon in the world and forest fire is as old as the forest itself. Forest fires destroyed considerable forest resources and its biodiversity. It is degrading environment and affects on flora and fauna. Forest fires cause soil erosion, floods, natural vegetation, loss of animals and birds. Forest fire is one of the major environmental issues facing today, due to the carbon being released in the atmosphere, and it is commonly called 'Green House Effect'. The GOs and NGOs conduct various activities for the protection of environment and sustainable development for the survival of society. The NGOs play a vital role in maintaining the balance of nature. When the government cannot solve these problems, the non-governmental organizations have entered in the field of environmental protection and conservation.

KEYWORDS

Environment, Environmental NGOs, Protection, Role of NGOs.

Introduction:

Forest fire is as old as the forest itself. It is a common phenomenon in environment. Most of the fires are caused by humans and commonly considered to be a major cause of forest degradation. It is estimated that, most fires are caused by human's activities. Often dry grass is burnt down for quick growth of new grass which can also lead forest fire. The environmental NGOs should be aware about the damage caused by forest fire. The environmental NGOs educate the ill effects of forest fires. The NGOs organized various activities to decrease the ignorance, blind-beliefs and illiteracy among society. The NGOs give training programmes to the people outdoor. Most of the forest fires are seen in between month of February to May.

The environmental NGOs organize training programmes such as scientific knowledge about beekeeping and collecting honey. The NGOs in Satara, Karad, Patan, Mahabaleshwar, Wai and Jawali have taken active participation in disposal of wastes or garbage at proper place. They organize rallies, demonstrations, agitations about garbage for creating awareness among the society. The environmental NGOs actively participated to reduce the damages done by campfires. They organized public campaign to educate and inform people, about prevention methods of forest fire. The local NGOs arrange film-shows, documentaries, poster exhibitions, slide shows for creating awareness about protection and conservation of forest fire to save the nature and life of all living being.

In Satara district, there is a separate forest department working for the protection and conservation of environment. But due to limited man power and resources of department they can't work satisfactorily and are unable to restrict forest fires. Fire has great impact on the people and surrounding environment. Today environmental organizations in Satara district have scientific knowledge about forest fire and they generate awareness. There is much political interference in activities of Forest Department creating obstacles and hurdles for maintaining and protecting the forests. The government does not give sufficient funds and manpower, so it does not work efficiently to achieve the target.

Objectives of Study:

The objectives of the present paper are as follows.

- i) To understand the serious environmental issues of Satara District.
- ii) To discuss the causes and precautionary measures taken by NGOs.

- iii) To understand the contribution and role of ENGOs in environmental protection.

Methodology:

This paper is mainly based on the data collection from the various key activists and volunteers of the organizations by conducting questionnaires, interviews with scheduled and field work observation.

Different Causes of Forest Fires from view point of the activists in Satara District:

1) Natural Cause: There are forest fires starting from natural causes they are; lightning which set trees on fire. If there are high atmospheric temperatures, dryness and low humidity then they are favorable circumstances for the forest fire.

2) The Human Causes: Generally most of the forest fires are caused by human activities. There are picnickers, campers, hikers, fisherman, tourist, hunter, grazer, or local residents those who smoke in the forest and this carelessness cause disaster of fire

3) Ash Cultivation: In the shifting cultivation of the Western part of the Satara district cleaning of area for cultivation is a common practice. In that area fire is used to burn the existing vegetation as an easy practice. Pasture burning for new regeneration to graze cattle, fire to control insect pests, rubbish and debris burning are the major causes of wildfires.

4) Traditional Beekeeping: In Satara district Mahabaleshwar, Patan and Panchagani are popular for beekeeping. There are most people, their occupations are to collect the fruits, leaves of tree, collect honey and gums from trees. The people in these areas use smoke to clear bees and make them less aggressive during the harvesting period.

5) The Waste Garbage: The waste and garbage collection are lacking in most part of the country, so uncontrolled scattering and dumping of garbage is widespread. There is no proper way for final disposal of most solid waste. In Satara city and around widespread scattering and dumping of waste were seen along roadside or near the hilly forest area. Open burning of these waste in forest area may cause of forest fire.

6) The Campfires: Campfires are a popular feature of camping, particularly among organized campers such as Scouts or Guides. There are various hill stations and picnic points in Satara district in those areas where camping, hunting, hiking, pic-

nicking are popular centers. The campfires are frequent cause of forest fire.

Adverse Impacts of forest fires from view point of the volunteers:

The interviews were taken of the volunteers and their responses are recorded below.

1] Grass, plants are vanished and degradation of catchment areas
 2] Wild animals enter into habitat due to forest fire and there is conflict between man and animals,
 3] Reduces water level, strength of absorbing water, increases erosion of soil, decrease rainfall etc.,
 4] Birds, homes of animals, nests of birds are vanished, reptiles like snakes, and insects are killed,
 5] Wood is burnt in the forest fire and it can be used as fuel. With the help of smokeless chulas (hearths) we can save maximum fuel, and
 6] Air is polluted and depletion of ozone stratum due to forest fire,
 7] Global warming,
 8] Loss of natural regeneration and reduction in forest cover
 9] Health problems leading to diseases,

NGOs Contribution in protection of Nature: Anti-Forest Fire Oath Prepared by NGOs: The NGOs have prepared anti- fire oath for the members of organization.

"We, the people of village take herewith an oath in front of village deity, that from this occasion onward we will not let fire, and do not let others around village, on hills and in cattle fields. We are well acquainted with the adverse effects of burning grass and plants. If such incident happens, we all villagers will come together and try to douse it"

Activities of NGOs in Satara District

The environmental NGOs in Satara district and various volunteers of NGOs are essential not only for firefighting but also to keep watch on causes of forest fire and sound alert. Often the volunteers arrange the fire fighting drill. Forest fire also poses serious health hazards due to smoke and gases. The burning of vegetation gives off not only the carbon dioxide but also that leads to global warming and ozone layer depletion. Thousands of people surrounding areas suffer from serious respiratory problems due to various toxic gases the burning forest and grass land also add to already serious threat to global warming.

NGOs Different Activities with Collaboration of Forest Department in Satara District:

The Forest Department is the custodian of forests. It is responsible for protection and management of forests. It carries out various activities accomplish to acquiring these objectives. The Government has made 'Wild Life Protection Act 1972' for protection and management of wildlife. In Satara district Mahabaleshwar, Panchgani, Koyana Sanctuary and Kas plateau have become restricted places for the protection of wild life. It has become an important objective of the Forest Department.

The major activities jointly conducted by NGOs and the Forest Department in Satara district are management of forests, forest protection, control of forest fire, plantation, joint forest management, wildlife protection and management and tourism. The management of forests does protection and conservation of forests. In case of wildlife sanctuaries or national parks management is carried out according to sectioned management plan. The various activities are carried out for the protection and conservation of forest fires with the help of NGOs and the locals in Satara district.

Precautionary Measures have taken about Forest Fires by NGOs:

1) Individual Contact: The most effective method of prevention of forest fire is personal contact. The NGOs in Satara, Wai, Karad, Patan, Mahabaleshwar cities and District Collector office demonstrate fire prevention techniques of dousing forest fire. The prevention of forest fire may become easier through public understanding and cooperation.

2) NGOs: The environmental groups or NGOs in Satara district come together at time of disaster for protection and conservation. The co-operation groups could be gained from associations and special group of the people. These groups can assist in the detection and protection of forest fire. The various NGOs such as wildlife clubs, environmental groups, scouts, camping association, community forest user groups, and youth clubs are working for the environmental protection.

3) Mass Communication: The uses of mass-media are one of the powerful and best means of public education and create awareness about forest fire prevention and conservation of nature. The radio, television, newspapers and various other publications are included in mass media to reach general public. The different organizations use media to get information about forest fires and some leaders of the NGOs write articles, essays and news in magazines, newspapers and journals for creating awareness about environmental protection and conservation.

4) Involvement of Schools/Colleges/Universities: The Supreme Court has given directions to the middle and higher education to introduce environmental science subject in syllabus. How to introduce in it, It is depending on particular school and college administration. Forest fires protection training in schools and colleges is an important part of any prevention effort. The best approach is that students can be involved by providing information and supplying relevant material to them. The NGOs in Satara district have actively participated to organize workshops, seminars and group discussion on forest fires and other issues also.

5) Street Plays/Drama: Street play is an important means of forest fires prevention. It is the way of protection of fires. The effectiveness of drama depends on written scripts and different roles played by the artists. Some NGOs in Satara, Karad, and Wai have prepared street plays and perform at the time of festivals or national holidays to create awareness among the masses. The NGOs also prepare the posters on different issues and they put up at the public places such as market place, bus stands, public office, schools and colleges.

6) Suggestions Boards: The NGOs have prepared the signboards, warning boards and they put these at public places to inform people about rules, regulations, restrictions, and fire danger. The signboards put on carefully at selected places, where it will be most effective. The site of the signboard and notice board may be along with roadside or where the people gather together.

7) Forecast of Fire Incidents: The radio, television gave instructions about weather forecasts such types of arrangement have made for the fire danger warning. This is very useful service for both fire prevention and for fire suppression. It is very good means to make aware of masses from fire danger.

8) Fire breaks Barriers: Fire breaks lines may be natural barriers. The roads, streams, and fire lines are the barriers to limit the spread of fires. The NGOs fires control lines to be constructed to reduce speed of fires and spreading from one area to another area.

Forest Eradication Campaign: NGOs Involvements in Various Activities:

We have proud of living in the Sahyadri region which is beautified with biodiversity. Today different hill ranges, forests are caught by fire. There are various environmental NGOs in Satara District, which are working for environmental protection and conservation. They organize different programmes for eradication of forest fire nearby villages to increase awareness among the people about nature. There are various environmental NGOs in different places working for protection of nature, namely Astha Wai, Drongo, Enca, Geosoft-Nature Club, Sahyadri Adventure, Vanrai Charitable trust, Dr. Kalpna Chawala Vidyan Kendra, Ranwata, Appropriate Rural Technology, Bhumi Putra Vidyan Kendra, Kartvya Social Group, Astha Samajik Sanshta, Sarp Sanrashak Sanshta, Manvendra Nath Roy

Anopcharik Shikshan Va Sanshodhan Sanstha, etc. These organizations are actively participating in different programmes organized by different NGOs. There are intimate relations and healthy co-ordination among different NGOs in Satara district. They are working in Satara district against forest fire.

The Manvendra Nath Roy Anopcharik Shikshan Va Sanshodhan Sanstha, in Karad is actively working in environmental protection and conservation. Dr. Sudhir Kumbhar is an active member of the organization, who dramatically inspires secondary and higher secondary students for the work of nature conservation and protection.

Contribution for Eradication of Forest Fires through NGOs in Satara District

- 1] In every village they have made provision of posters, banners, pictures, slogans and rallies for creating awareness among society.
- 2] Organizations have prepared songs; poems etc, and reach them to people through entertainment.
- 3] Organized programmes at public places, gave invitation to elder people and answer their questions regarding forest fire with scientific explanation to eradicate their superstitions and persuade them to take an oath in front of village deity for not letting forest fires and if occurs douse them.
- 4] The educational and forest fire programmes have developed to achieve the target.
- 5] They have given training of dousing forest fires. Dr. Sudhir Kumbhar, Member of Manvendra Nath Roy Informal Educational Institute, Karad, he has taken direct and indirect interviews of villagers about forest fire and his point of views, that the Forest Department workers, various NGOs, volunteers, nature lovers are creating awareness about the care of nature and he also guide and demonstrate to how to douse the forest fire. He also appealed to masses to maintain the eco-balance of nature for future generation.

Conclusion:

The wildfire destroys considerable forest resources and definitely degrading biological diversity in Satara district. The forest fires cause soil erosion and induce floods and landslides due to the destruction of natural vegetation. In many villages every year there is loss of lives, cattle and other property due to forest fires. One of the major environmental issues facing today is the strong possibility that our climate is warming due to the excess carbon dioxide that is being released into the atmosphere by the burning fossil fuels and forest. This is commonly called the 'Green House Effect'. The innovative programmes and movements have launched by NGOs in Satara District to create awareness about the forest fire. Every individual should participate in all activities which are conducted by the organization for environmental protection. Sometimes emotionally they should be prepared to take an 'oath' for saving nature. The volunteers of different NGOs have created awareness about forest fire through slide shows, film shows, documentaries, songs, mimicries and thought provoking programmes, poems, stories, slogans, posters, banners, pamphlets, superstitions, effects of fire, conflict with animals and food chain for maintaining eco-system as it is from the forest fire.

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