

Environmental Awareness among Rural Folks of Hamirpur District, H.P.

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-----Abstract-----

Environment constitutes a very important part of our life. To understand life without studying the impact of environment is almost impossible. We use renewable and non-renewable resources in our day to day life. We have to be more careful in using resources especially non-renewable which will vanish as we use them. All human activities have impact on environment. This impact is increasing day by day as the population in the recent times have increased rapidly. Thus there is need for the awareness about the environmental issues. In the present study the status of environmental awareness of rural folks of Hamirpur district, Himachal Pradesh is studied. A total of twenty five villages were selected and the population were asked question about the different issues of the environment and the level of their awareness is studied.

Keywords: Environment, renewable, awareness.

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I. Introduction

Environmental Education and Awareness plays a significant role in encouraging and enhancing people's participation in activities aimed at conservation, protection and management of the environment. Development has paved the path for rise in the levels or standards of living but it has simultaneously led to serious environmental disasters. Issues related to environment have often been branded as anti-development. Environment involves everything, living or non living that surrounds us. We live in the environment and use the environmental resources like air, land and water to meet our needs. Every one of us has a right to live in an environment of quality. Therefore, it is essential to understand the function and interaction of physical and biological elements of the environment and apply this knowledge to sound management of the environment. Development also means meeting the needs of the people. While meeting the ever-growing needs, we put pressure on our resources and environment. When the pressure exceeds the carrying capacity of the environment to repair or replace itself, it creates a serious problem of environmental degradation. If we use any environmental resource beyond its limit of replacement, we may lose it forever. Therefore, there is a need to create 'awareness' about Environmental protection. The complex environmental problems not only require imaginative and innovative specialists and technologies but also the people's participations. This is not only essential for our present generation but also for future generations. One of the most important aspects of environmental management is environment education and the most important aspect of education is environmental awareness. There are two approaches to the management of environment, viz. (i) preservative approach, and (ii) conservative approach. According to the preservative approach man should not disturb the natural system and should adjust according to it. But this is not possible because for all types of developmental activities he will have to use nature and its components, resulting in eco-imbalance of varied intensity. The conservative approach is that there should not be overexploitation of nature and conservation of natural resources is essential for sustainable development. Agriculture is the mainstay of the Indian population and economy and more than half of the Indian population still gets their livelihood directly from agriculture. Most of India's population live in rural areas and are engaged in agriculture. Climate change and food security have become burning issues in the world. Continued deforestation is a major challenge for forests and livelihood and one of the major causes of environmental degradation in India can be attributed to rapid growth of population, which is adversely affecting the natural resources and environment. The projected population indicates that India will be the first most populous country in the world and China will be second in 2050 (Kapoor 2011). If the world population continues to multiply, the impact on environment will be devastating. The growing trends of population and consequent demand for food, energy and housing have considerably altered land - use practices and severely degraded forest area as well as environment. These include pressure on land, forests, loss of biodiversity, rising demand for energy, global warming, climate change, water scarcity and pollution.

Environmental awareness envisions the increasing of awareness and understanding of the environment through education. By its very definition “awareness” means “having knowledge or cognizance”. Most of our population is not aware of our finite resources and how quickly they are being used up. The main goal of many environmental groups today is to increase awareness because that is the only way to develop a more sustainable world. Accordingly, all environmental awareness must begin with education. Similarly, when we throw liquid or solid wastes into rivers, lakes or oceans ponds, we damaged the aquatic environment. When pollutions in large quantities are allowed to enter the atmosphere, it leads to air pollution. We know that unscientific agricultural practices, unplanned industrial process, and even grazing of pastures can damage the environment.

There is no doubt that agriculture is essential, grazing of animals is unavoidable, forests have to be harvested for their produce, industries and thermal power plants have to be set up, dams have to be built and automobiles have to run for transporting people and goods. We cannot do away with these. However, we can certainly do these things in a scientific and planned manner so that the balance of the ecosystem does not get disturbed. Hence, environmental awareness becomes imperative.

Objectives of the study

Both developing and developed countries are facing serious environmental problems. Some of the problems are global in nature (e.g. global warming, depletion of the ozone layer), others are specifically local ones. How do people out of different cultures perceive these problems? How do they react to them? Public awareness can play a vital role in environmental management. Damaged to environment is caused by the activities of individuals who are not conscious and who do not have adequate knowledge of the environment. For example, when we cut forests on a large scale to get timber and fuel wood or clear land for agriculture, we damage the environment.

The aim of this study is to figure out what is the level of awareness of the people of the study area and factors are most important in explaining different levels of awareness concerning environmental problems and to compare the level of awareness as well as the actual behaviour towards environment of people living in rural area of Hamirpur tehsil. The main objective of the study is:

1. To assess the environmental awareness in rural areas
2. To work out the exposure to environmental pollution in everyday life
3. To assess the actual environmental friendly behaviour by the rural people.

Data and Methodology

This study is based both on fieldwork and a survey of literature and Primary information /data. A survey of rural people living in the provinces of Hamirpur tehsil was conducted. In the present study a sample study of the rural folks of Hamirpur Tehsils, Hamirpur district, Himachal Pradesh was done. In order to ensure representative sample, 25 villages named as Druhi, Kehdru, Guwardu, Dhanwana, Bohni, Chiyodi, Malana, kothi, Chowki, Baloh, Balet, Jhinkari, Tal, Patta, Lalri, Ukhli, Mair Baturda Matani Pakka Bharo, Saned, Kangroo, Dhalot, Salasi, Morsu of the Hamirpur tehsil in Hamirpur district were selected as research areas. The data collection method includes questionnaire, interview schedule, observation, and discussion with the respondents. Study is based on primary data. A questionnaire is prepared about the different aspects of environment and people of the rural areas were asked about the different aspects of environment.

Study area

Physical: The Hamirpur district is situated between $76^{\circ} - 17' - 50''$ to $76^{\circ} - 43' - 42''$ east longitudes and $31^{\circ} - 24' - 48''$ to $31^{\circ} - 53' - 35''$ north latitudes. It is located in the south western part of Himachal Pradesh. It is covered by lower Himalayas; the elevation varies from the 400 meters to 1,100 metres. The main hill ranges of the district are known as Jakh Dhar & Sola Singhi Dhar. The Jakh Dhar runs in continuation of Kali Dhar range in the Kangra district. It enters in Hamirpur district near Nadaun and transverses it into south eastern direction. The town of Hamirpur lies to the east of this range where the country is undulating but in the north and north east bare and rugged hills, deep ravines with precipitous sides transform the landscape into what has been described as an agitated sea suddenly arrested and fixed stones. The Chabutra hills have the same dip and strike as in the Jakh Dhar and are continued beyond the Beas to what is known as the Changar, a mass of rugged and broken hills. The Sola Singhi Dhar is the longest range of the tract and is known under various names such as Chintpurni and Jaswan Dhar in Una and by Sola Singhi in Hamirpur. Thus Dhar enters Hamirpur to the east of Tappa Daruhi and traverses it in a south-easterly direction more or less parallel to the Jakh Dhar and terminated on the Satluj. Hamirpur district is bounded in the north by river Beas which separates it from Kangra district. In the east Bakar and Seer Khads separate it from Mandi district. In the south, It is bounded by Bilaspur district and in the west by Una district. A total of 1208 respondents were circulated the questionnaire. The respondents were selected by random sampling from among 25 villages

selected for the study. The personal profile of the respondent is given in the table 1. Of the total respondent 53.6% were male and 46.4% were females. Of the total respondents only 5.5% are illiterates that too above the age of 50 years. Maximum respondents (50) are educated up to high school.

Table: 1. Profile of the respondents:

Variable	Categories	Rural(1208)	
		Male (%)648	Female (%) 560
Age	20-35	25	20
	36-50	35	40
	Above 50	40	40
Education	Illiterate	04	07
	Primary	25	33
	High School	50	50
	College	15	08
	University	06	02
Occupation	Service	40	10
	Govt. + Pvt.	40	10
	Non Service	20	80

Results and Discussion

People from rural area of Hamirpur were asked different questions on environment to know about the status of environment awareness. During the survey, 1208 people were selected as respondents from the Twenty five villages from study area. Respondents comprising of 648 male and 560 female were randomly selected between the age - group of 28 and above 58 years for the study (Table - I). A questionnaire was used during the study for collection of the information from the respondents and results of the responses were summarized in form of percentage. Respondents were asked questions on different aspects of environment and it was tried to find out the knowledge of people about environmental problems that can be considered with environmental awareness. It is clear from the study that 95.5% of the respondents are aware of the environment and its aspects. The results showed that there is still a lot of work to be done in informing people on the global environmental problems. This is especially true for those on a global level like global warming or depletion of ozone layer that only 17% of the people were aware about these global problems. People of the study area know less about the renewable resources and conservation of biological diversity. In contrast to that many people were aware of local environmental problems like air pollution (82%), water pollution (81%) and noise pollution (64%), household waste (76%) that are not properly collected and disposed. Air pollution was considered as the most serious problem by a vast majority of people (70%), followed by water pollution and waste. Only 20 % of the people think that garbage is a problem in their area. This is due to the fact that 79% of the people burn their waste 14% throw their waste in the fields and that is converted into compost by natural process. Of the total respondents 64% think that air pollution is one of the main problems in the area. The main problem of noise pollution is due to the DJ and sound systems.

Regarding the ban on polythene bags in the state, 82% of the surveyed population were aware about the ban and 18% did not know about the ban. Of the total surveyed population about 91% of the male and 81% of females did know about the ban of polythene bags (fig.1). About 99% of the respondents were using polythene bags before they were banned in the state. 7.3% of the respondents were still using the polythene bags after the ban by the state government. This is due to the fact that they have the stock of polythene bags and are using them.

Awareness of the respondents towards the ban on polythene bags in Himachal Pradesh

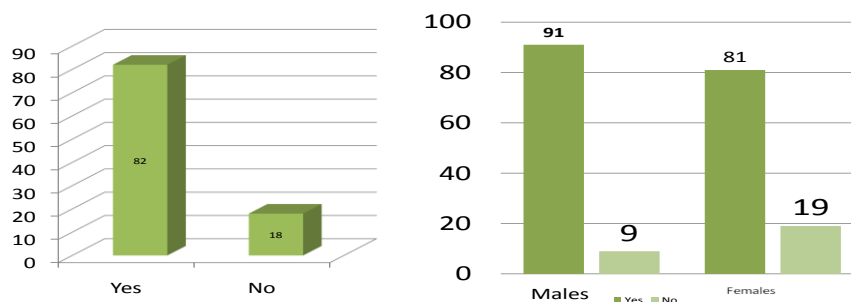


Fig.1

It is clear from the study that media play an important role in creating environmental awareness among people. Of the total respondents all have TV at their houses but only 39% of the people purchase News paper daily. When asked about the source of knowledge about the environment and related issues 56.3% gain knowledge from TV and Newspaper. 18.7 watch TV only and gain knowledge from it (fig. 2). These results show that the efforts in educating people on environment through media have been fruitful.

Source of knowledge about environment

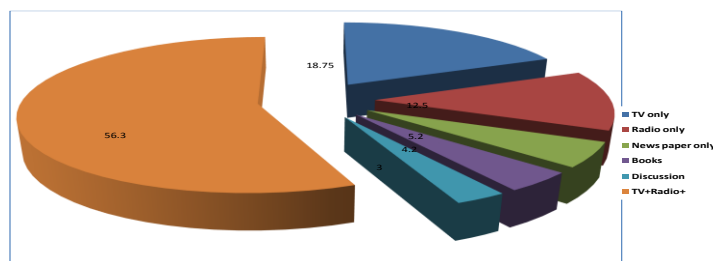


Fig.2

Environmental education is supposed to play an important role in creating environmental awareness. Nevertheless there is no doubt that additional factors are influencing the level of environmental awareness. The degree to which environmental issues are set on the political agenda is not only an indicator of the prevailing level of environmental awareness itself, but will also influence the general awareness among the population. At the national level different issues concerning environment form a good basis for environmental protection, but implementation still remains a huge problem. In India, in the post independence period our attitude was dominated by developmental growth and we did not have a culture of pollution control. The total insensitivity at the bureaucratic / administrative level, which persists still, has given the nation a very heavy backlog of pollution and ecological degradation" (Bandhu, p.100).

Exposure to pollution in day to day life could be another factor contributing to an individual's level of awareness of environmental issues. About 96% of the respondents in the study area were exposed to different types of environmental pollution in day to day life.

The results showed that there is still a lot of work to be done in informing people on the major environmental problems because people seems to be aware but not responsible.

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