



Chipko's Legacy to 'Ek Ped Maa ke Naam': India's Evolving Environmentalism

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ABSTRACT

India's environmental journey presents two distinct yet interconnected chapters: the necessity-driven chipko movement and the values based 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign. This article deconstructs the profound ideological migration that connects these two pivotal moments. It argues that environmentalism in India has shifted from a utilitarian discourse centred on local livelihood and resource rights to a symbolic and ethical framework focused on global legacy and individual responsibility. The chipko movement of the 1970s was an act of ecological defence, born of a desperate, immediate need to survive. It was adversarial, challenging the state and commercial loggers, and deeply embedded in the tangible realities of a subsistence economy. The core narrative was one of resistance and rights. In stark contrast, the contemporary 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign is proactive and collaborative. It operates on the abstract plane of global climate change, leveraging India's deep cultural reverence for motherhood to inspire mass participation. The action is symbolic, a personal act of tribute rather than a collective protest. The action is symbolic, a personal act of tribute rather than a collective protest. The government acts as a facilitator, not an adversary. This analysis highlights a fundamental transformation: environmental action has been re-imagined from a political struggle rooted in material necessity to a moral imperative

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approaches, we gain a nuanced understanding of how the context of development, globalization, and climate awareness has reshaped the nature, of environmental consciousness. The abstract highlights the deep ecological and social roots of the Chipko movement, emphasizing the pivotal role of women who protected trees by embracing them. This action reflected India's age-old reverence for nature as "Dharti Mata" or Mother Earth. 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' carries the Chipko message forward into a new era, representing a collective responsibility for India's green heritage and future. The article concludes that both campaigns share the same ultimate goal: the preservation of nature.

INTRODUCTION:-

In a nation as vast and diverse as India, the story of environmentalism is not a linear progression but a rich tapestry of interwoven motivation, methods and meanings. In the tapestry of India's environmental history, few movements are as resonant and evocative as Chipko. Born of a fierce, non-violent resistance in the Himalayan foothills of the 1970s, it etched an indelible image into the global consciousness: villagers, led by women, hugging trees to save them from the loggers axes. Nearly half a century later, a national campaign, "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam" ("One Tree in the name of Mother"), has emerged. While its methods are contemporary and its scale national, this initiative is a direct spiritual descendant of Chipko, embodying its core message of environmental stewardship with a modern, emotionally resonant appeal. By tracing the journey from a protest-driven, local movement to a voluntary, mass-participation campaign. We can understand how India's relationship with environmentalism has evolved. Yet remained rooted in the foundational belief that the earth is to be revered as a mother.

The profound connection between love for one's mother and reverence for Mother Earth has long been embedded in India's cultural and Environmental ethos. This deep-seated sentiment was powerfully demonstrated by the Chipko movement, the movement was more than an act of protest; it was a visceral assertion of the intrinsic relationship between local communities and the forests that sustained them, a relationship they viewed as sacred. This iconic image became a global symbol of grassroots, non-violent environmental resistance.

Decades later, that powerful legacy has been re-imagined for the 21st century with the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam'(one tree for the name of Mother) campaign launched by Prime-Minister Shri Narendra Modi on



World Environment Day 2024, this initiative is an emotional and voluntary call to action that transforms environmental stewardship from a passive responsibility into a personal tribute. This campaign strategically draws a parallel between the nurturing care of a mother and the life-sustaining bounty of Mother Earth, inviting citizens to plant a tree in honour of the women who raised them.

This article will also delve into the nuances of these shifts by comparing and contrasting the philosophical underpinning, methodologies, and societal impacts of both initiatives. We will examine how the narrative of nature has been reshaped from a vital resource to be defended to a symbolic entity to be honoured. We will explore the changing role of women, contrasting their active, leadership-driven engagement in Chipko with their symbolic representation in 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam'. Furthermore, we will analyze the political transformation of environmentalism, moving from an adversarial, protest-based model to a collaborative, government-led partnership. Through their exploration, we aim to provide a nuanced understanding of India's evolving environmental consciousness, highlighting how external pressures, internal priorities, and changing cultural context have reshaped the journey from grassroots resistance to national reforestation.

This comparative analysis examines the shift from a protest-based environmentalism rooted in the local livelihood concerns to a cooperation-based approach, moving from localized, livelihood-centric concerns to broader, global climate goals.

CHIPKO'S FOUNDATIONAL PHILOSOPHY: THE EARTH AS A MOTHER

To understand the power of Chipko, one must first grasp the deep cultural and ecological context from which it sprang. The Garhwal region of Uttarakhand, where the movement took root, is a landscape where human existence and forest life are inextricably linked. For the villagers, particularly the women who were the backbone of the community, the forest was not merely a collection of trees: it was the primary source of life—providing fuelwood, fodder for livestock, and clean water. The rampant deforestation by commercial logging companies in the 1970s was a direct assault on this life-sustaining relationship, an act that threatened their very survival.

The protest that began in the village of Mandal was a visceral and intuitive response to this threat. Faced with logging contractors arriving to fell the trees, the villagers, led by the indomitable Gaura Devi, formed a human chain around them. This act of hugging the trees was a powerful, non-violent form of resistance that was deeply symbolic. It conveyed that to fell a tree, one would first have to confront and harm a human being. The term "Chipko" itself, from the Hindi word 'to stick', captured this message perfectly. But beyond the immediate protest, Chipko was a profound philosophical statement. The women's resistance was rooted



in an ethic of care and protection, much like a mother shielding her child. This mirrored the age-old Indian cultural reverence for the earth as “Dharti Mata” or Mother Earth. The trees, the forest, and the rivers were all seen as manifestations of a divine, feminine power that nurtured and sustained all life. Chipko was not just a fight for resources; it was a local grassroots expression of a universal truth: humanity’s dependence on nature. The movements success lay not just in stopping the logging in specific areas, but in igniting a nationwide environmental consciousness and inspiring similar movements elsewhere. The movement, championed by Sundarlal Bahuguna promoted the slogan “ecology is permanent economy”. This introduced a new way of thinking about sustainable development.

“EK PED MAA KE NAAM” A CAMPAIGN OF LOVE:

Decades later, the environmental challenges facing India have evolved, and with them, the strategies to address them. While Chipko was a reaction to localized deforestation, “Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam” is a proactive, nationwide campaign addressing climate change, air pollution and the broader loss of green cover. Launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on World Environment Day in 2024, the initiative calls upon every Indian to plant a tree in honour of their Mother. The genius of this campaign lies in its emotional framework instead of a conforntational or regulatory approach, it taps into one of the most powerful emotional bonds in human culture: the love for one’s mother. By framing the act of planting a tree as a personal tribute, the campaign elevates environmental action from a public duty to a private, heartfelt gesture. It makes conservation personal, intimate, and accessible to everyone, regardless of their background or location.

“Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam” fosters a collaborative, rather than conforntational, relationship between the government and its citizens. The Government act as a facilitator, providing the framework and motivation for individual action, often leveraging digital platforms and social media to amplify the campaign’s reach. The emphasis is on personal responsibility, urging every citizen to contribute to a collective national goal. This reflects a shift from a focus on community rights over resources to an ethos of individual duty and collective restoration. The campaign also aligns with the broader “Mission LiFE” initiative, which promotes sustainable lifestyle changes, integrating environmental consciousness into everyday life.

The symbolism is potent. A mother nurtures, a tree nurtures. A mother’s love is unconditional, just as nature provides its bounty unconditionally. By linking these two concepts, the campaign creates a powerful psychological incentive. Planting a tree becomes an act of love, a living tribute to the women who gave you life, and a recognition of the planet that sustains all life. This is a stark departure from the adversarial



context of Chipko, where the action was driven by survival and resistance. In “Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam” the motivation is derived from a place of love, respect and gratitude.

CHANGING NARRATIVE BETWEEN CHIPKO AND EK PED MAA KE NAAM CAMPAIGN:

Over five decades, environmentalism in India has evolved significantly, shifting from the confrontational, local-centric activism of the Chipko movement to the contemporary, government-driven, and individual-focused campaign of ‘EK PED MAA KE NAAM’. The comparison reveals changes in the motivation, methods, participation, and goals of tree related conservation efforts.

The narrative to nature: From resource to ritual

The central philosophical difference between Chipko and ‘EK PED MAA KE NAAM’ lies in their fundamental understanding of nature. For the villagers of the Garhwal Himalayas in the 1970s the forest was not an abstract concept or a distant ideal – it was a tangible, life-sustaining entity. The forest provided fodder for their livestock, fuel for their homes, and herbs for their medicine. The reckless felling of trees by commercial interests was a direct threat to their survival, disrupting the ecological balance that ensured clean water and stable hillside. The Chipko movement, therefore, framed the environment as a vital resource to be defended, a life-support system in need of protection. Its famous slogan, “what do the forest bear? Land, Water, and fresh air!”, articulated a utilitarian, yet deeply reverential, relationship with nature.

In contrast, the ‘EK PED MAA KE NAAM’ Campaign, launched in 2024, operates from a very different philosophical premise. It frames the environment not just as a resource but as a ritual, a symbolic act of reverence. By encouraging citizens to plant a tree “in the name of Mother”, the campaign personalizes environmental responsibility, transforming it from a collective struggle into an individual, emotionally charged gesture. The tree becomes a living monument, a metaphorical extension of the mother figure – a provider of life and a symbol of unconditional love. This framing is less about immediate livelihood and more about a cultural duty, a kind of modern day tapasya (penance) for the planet. This shift from material necessity to symbolic piety reflects a significant change in Indian’s environmental narrative, moving from a discourse of need to one of ethics and personal legacy.

The changing role of woman: From agents of action to object of inspiration

The role of women in both movements provides a powerful indicator of changing social dynamics. The chipko movement is widely recognized for the pivotal, active and confrontational role played by women like Gaura Devi and her companions. These women were not merely supporters; they were the frontline



defenders of the forest, using their physical presence to block loggers and becoming the face of the movements. Their participation was born of necessity, as they were the most directly affected by deforestation's impact on daily life. In doing so, they transcended traditional gender roles and asserted their voices in community decision-making, contributing to powerful ecofeminist narrative. The women of Chipko were agents of action, their empowerment forged in the crucible of resistance.

The 'EK PED MAA KE NAAM' campaign, conversely, positions women as objects of inspiration. The Mother is a powerful, unifying symbol used to motivate action, but the campaign itself does not necessarily require the same level of active, frontline participation in the plantation drives, the movement's ethos is driven by a patriarchal framework that venerates the mother figure, rather than one that necessarily empowers women's leadership in environmental governance. The action-planting a tree-is directed in honor of the mother, but the organizational and driving force remains largely centralized. This is crucial distinction: Chipko showcased women's empowerment through their direct engagement in a fight for survival, whereas 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' uses the symbolic power of motherhood to inspire a broader, but less the symbolic power of motherhood to inspire a broader, but less confrontational, environmental consciousness.

The politicization of environmentalism: From protest to partnership

The political context surrounding these two campaigns illustrates the profound change in the relationship between environmental activists and the state. Chipko was an adversarial movement, defined by its conflict with state-sanctioned commercial logging. The villagers' actions were a form of civil disobedience, a direct challenge to government that was perceived as siding with corporate interests over the needs of its people. The movement's success lay in its ability to exert pressure on the state from the outside, ultimately forcing a policy change-a temporary ban on commercial logging. The Chipko movement demonstrated that grassroots activism could hold the government accountable and influence policy from the ground up.

The 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign, however, operates from a position of partnership, not protest. It is a government-led initiative that seeks to harness collective action through official channels, leveraging a 'whole of government and whole of society' approach. By launching the campaign on World Environment Day and tying it to national goals like increasing green cover, the government integrates environmentalism into its broader agenda of sustainable development. This partnership model diffuses potential opposition by co-opting environmental action into a state-sponsored program. While this approach can mobilize resources on a national scale, it also raises questions about accountability and the ability of civil society to challenge



top-down environmental decisions. Environmentalism, in this model, is less about a contentious political struggle and more about a coordinated national project.

The evolution of goals: From local survival to global sustainability

Finally, the shift in environmental goals mirrors India's broader economic and political journey. Chipko was a movement rooted in the immediate, local concern of subsistence communities. Its focus was on protecting specific forests that were essential for the villagers survival and its success was measured by tangible outcomes. The environmentalism of chipko was a response to a direct, visible threat to a localized way of life.

The 'Ek Ped maa Ke Naam' campaign conversely, is driven by the abstract and far-reaching concerns of global sustainability. Its goals are framed in the language of climate change, sustainable development, and global ecological resilience. The individual act of planting a tree is not just for the benefit of the local community but is presented as a contribution to a global movement. The motivation is less about defending against an immediate threat and more about participating in a collective, national effort to address a planetary crisis. The shift reflects India's growing economic power and its increasing engagement with global environmental governance. Environmentalism has expanded from a local fight for survival to national effort to secure a place on the global climate stage. By gaining national and international attention, the chipko movement helped place the issues of deforestation and sustainable development on the global agenda. Its contribution to conservation were officially recognized when the movement was the Right Livelihood Award (also known as the 'Alternative Nobel Prize') in 1987.

THE DIGITAL ECHO: TECHNOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL CAMPAIGNS

The digital sphere of 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign serves as a modern extension of the Chipko movements core principles, leveraging social media for mass mobilization, emotional connection, and unprecedented levels of tracking and accountability. While chipko used physical presence and local community networks, 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' uses digital tools to scale these ideas nationwide. The campaign uses a dedicated app and a microsite integrated with the Eco clubs for Mission LiFE Portal .Where participations upload geo-tagged photos of their planted saplings. This user- generated content inspires a viral loop of engagement, making environmentalism a visible, personal and social activity. The campaign's hashtag, #Plant4Mother, is heavily promoted on social media to maximize visibility and drive mass participation. Social media allows the campaign to reach millions instantly, for exceeding the localized, face-to-face mobilization tactics of the Chipko movement.



The campaign taps into the same deep-seated Indian cultural reverence for nature that inspired chipko, but with a modern framing. By linking tree planting to honoring one's mother, it creates a personal and emotional connection that resonates with a broad audience, from school children to spiritual leaders. Social media becomes a story-telling platform where individual can share personal notes and stories about why they dedicated to tree to their mother. This emotional sharing makes the campaign relatable and personal, fostering a long-term sense of responsibility. The campaign's digital infrastructure provides a centralized way for government ministries and departments to track collective progress toward specific targets. This ensure transparency and provides a clear metric of success, demonstrating government accountability. The digital tracking features, such as promotes to upload new images of the growing tree, encourage participants to remain invested beyond the initial act of planting.

GLOBAL RESONANCES: CHIPKO'S INFLUENCE ABROAD AND THE EXPORT OF CAMPAING.

Chipko's influence was not confined to India. Its model of non-violent, grassroots environmentalism resonated with activists worldwide. The Chipko movement inspired similar environmental campaigns in other countries by exporting a replicable model of nonviolent, grassroots resistance and amplifying universal messages of community rights, eco-feminism and sustainable development. Its iconic tactic of embracing trees to prevent logging, popularized by activists like Sunderlal Bahuguna, became a powerful and accessible symbol of environmental protection that resonated for beyond India's borders. For instance, the Chipko method directly inspired India's Appiko movement in the western Ghats and later influenced protests as far away as Japan's Mount Takao and movements in Sweden during the late 20th century. By demonstrating the local communities, particularly marginalized women dependent on forest resources, could stand against powerful commercial interests, Chipko fuelled a shift in international environmental discourse toward prioritizing indigenous knowledge and community-led conservation. This exported massage of ecological sustainability and social justice continues to guide contemporary efforts in environmental governance, climate action, and the defence of indigenous rights worldwide.

Chipko's success helped shift international environmental discourse by demonstrating that effective conservation requires the participation of local communities not just top-down management. This is emphasis on community-based conservation and social justice continues to influence global environmental policy today. The movements blend of social justice, women's empowerments, and environmentalism has a source of inspiration of subsequent social and ecological movements both in India and globally. Rooted in



Gandhian philosophy, the image of villagers-especially women –hugging trees to protect them become an internationally recognized symbol of peaceful protest against deforestation.

Sustaining the Echo: A Living Legacy

The success of ‘Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam’ ultimately depends on its ability to truly honor the spirit of Chipko-not just in name, but in action. This means more than just planting a tree, it means fostering a sense of collective ownership and responsibility of India’s green future.

The campaign can learn from chipko’s legacy of community participation and stewardship. In Chipko, the women who saved the forests later become the primary caretakers, leading afforestation efforts and protecting the new growth. Similarly, ‘Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam’ can empower communities to take ownership of the sapling planted in their localities. Local bodies, schools, and self-help groups can be involved in the nurturing process, ensuring that the trees thrive. Furthermore, the campaign can serve as a potent tool for environmental education. By sharing the story of the Chipko movement alongside the modern campaign, it can teach a new generation that environmental protection is not a modern fad but a timeless value, deeply embedded in India’s cultural and spiritual heritage. It can connect the dots between the defiant acts of a few villagers decades ago and the collective responsibility of a nation today.

In essence, ‘Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam’ is more than a tree-planting drive; it is a cultural reimagining of environmentalism. By invoking the sacred bond between a child and its mother, it aims to transform environmental action from a burden into a blessing, from an obligation into an act of love. It is a modern echo of historic movement, a message that reminds us that the best way to honor our mothers, and Mother Earth, is to become their fierce and loving protectors. As the saplings grow into trees, they will stand as a living testament to this enduring legacy, rooted in the earth and nurtured by a nation’s love.

CONCLUSION:-

The legacy of the axe has given way to the promise of the sapling. In the transition from Chipko’s defensive embrace to the ‘Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam’ campaigns symbolic planting, we witness the re-coding of India’s environmental DNA. It’s journey from the raw politics of survival to the nuanced ethics of legacy. Chipko was a roaring “No” to exploitation, a visceral assertion of community rights forged in the crucible of necessity. ‘Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam’ is a hopeful “Yes” to a sustainable future, an act of individual piety scaled by national ambition. The urgent need for livelihood has evolved into collaboration; the urgent need for livelihood has evolved into a global call for a shared legacy. The core spirit remains a deep reverence for the feminine provider- Mother Earth. As India builds its future, this new environmental model- blending



personal responsibility with collective, tech-enabled action will define its relationship with nature. The fight for survival is now a march for a sustainable tomorrow.

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