
1.1 INTRODUCTION

The term *environmental sociology* is a compound of two words — ‘environment’ and ‘sociology’. *Environment* comprises a close interconnection between people, other living beings, land, water, air— all that is essential for physical life on earth. *Sociology* is the systematic study of the society we live in. It is about people, groups, institutions, interactions between them and the resulting processes and structures in the society — all that is essential for social life. Therefore, *environmental sociology* is the study of relations between human societies and their physical environments, or according to R. Dunlap and Catton, ‘societal-environmental interactions’ (Dunlap and Rosa. 2000. Encyclopedia, 2000). These interactions, at the interface of society and environment have a reciprocal influence on each other. However, environmental problems or concerns emerged as a consequence of these interactions. Some of the glaring environmental concerns being — global climate change, soil degradation, declining biodiversity, ozone layer depletion, solid waste problem, pollution, acid rain, water scarcity, and many more.

The unit will start with an account of the emergence context of Environmental Sociology as a discipline. Following which we will examine some of the theoretical accounts of the nature of the relationship between humans and their environment. Underlying these environmental problems is the recognition of detrimental impact of industrialisation, urbanisation and the continuing globalisation on the bio physical environment. Acknowledging the pervasive environmental degradation has led to recognition of exercise of power and the consequent conflict deriving from environmental issues. Since, exercise of power tends to operate unequally in the society, conflicts in the realm of environmental problems tend to highlight the significant role of social inequality. Thus leading to the emergence of environmental activism through the various environmental movements (like, Chipko, Narmada Bachao Aandolan, Earth Hour, Environmental Justice Movement, Greenpeace, etc.) which try to bring about a balance in the relationship between society and environment, which has become highly skewed in favour of society apparently, but does not favour either society or the environment in the long run.

Hence, the emergence of a new field of Environmental Sociology “...out of the intellectual and political ferment generated by movements for social reform and change.” (Hannigan, 1995).

1.2 EMERGENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIOLOGY

Thinking about the environment, prior to the emergence of discipline of Environmental Sociology, lay at the door of Conservationist (like George Perkins Marsh, Gifford Pinchot, Aldo Leopold and others) and