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Q6(b)

In the face of rising global climatic concerns, how do you contextualize the relevance of Chipko Movement and its Gandhian tone? Answer analytically

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · Sociology GS 2 · 20 marks · Perspectives on the study of Indian society
Perspectives on the study of Indian society: Indology (G.S. Ghurye); Structural functionalism (M.N. Srinivas); Marxist sociology (A.R. Desai).

Core demand of the question

- In the face of rising global climatic concerns, contextualize the relevance of the Chipko movement and its Gandhian tone
- Answer analytically with history, method, and climate meaning

Revision summary

Chipko was 1970s Himalayan resistance to commercial felling, led in key actions by village women.

Its Gandhian tone was non-violence, moral pressure and local control of livelihood resources.

Climate politics now rereads forests as sinks, sponges and gendered commons.

The movement names contractors and the state, which is climate justice in local form.

It is a teaching case, not a complete national climate plan.

Introduction

Chipko began in the 1970s Uttarakhand hills as villagers, many of them women, hugged trees to stop commercial felling. Its Gandhian tone was non-violence, local swaraj over livelihood, and moral claim on the state. Global climate concern now rereads that local forest defence as an early climate politics of care, carbon, and commons.

Body

What Chipko was

- **The movement grew from hill economy:** forests as fodder, fuel, water sponge, and landslide shield, not as timber volume for contractors.
- Gaura Devi's Reni action, and the organising work of Chandi Prasad Bhatt and Sunderlal Bahuguna, made a village method nationally visible.
- It was not a city NGO first. It was agrarian and gendered resistance, which Desai's class lens can still hold: who owns the forest surplus.

The Gandhian tone

- Satyagraha without arms, constructive local organisation, and an appeal to the conscience of rulers echo **Gandhi's** repertoire.
- Bahuguna's fasts and marches used the body as argument, as **Gandhi** had done.

- **The tone is also village swaraj:** those who live with the forest should decide its use, against a distant developmental state.
- **It is not a full copy of Gandhi:** Chipko spoke ecology more clearly than Hind Swaraj spoke carbon.

Climate relevance today

- Forests as carbon sinks, monsoon regulators, and disaster buffers are now global climate language; Chipko already defended those functions as livelihood.
- Climate justice asks who pays for emissions and who loses the commons; Chipko named contractors and the state, not a nameless Anthropocene.
- Women's leadership in Chipko prefigures the fact that climate harm is gendered in water, fuel, and care work.
- **Narmada later showed the same conflict at dam scale:** development versus river people. Chipko remains the forest-scale classic.

Analytical limits

- Chipko cannot be romanticised as a complete climate policy; India still needs energy, jobs, and urban mitigation.
- A Gandhian tone can be ignored by a growth coalition unless law, as in later forest rights debates, records community power.
- Yogendra Singh would see Chipko as orthogenetic ethics meeting a heterogenetic commercial forest regime.

Why the case still teaches

- Climate policy that only trades carbon in cities repeats the contractor logic Chipko fought.
- Non-violent local veto plus scientific hydrology is a usable mix, not a museum of the 1970s.

Flow diagram

Hill forest livelihood -> Chipko hug the tree
Gandhian satyagraha swaraj -> Chipko hug the tree
Chipko hug the tree -> Commons against contractors
Commons against contractors -> Climate sinks disaster buffer justice

Conclusion

Chipko is relevant to climate concern because it defended forests as living commons through Gandhian non-violence and local claim. The climate age needs that sociology of who owns the sink, not only a global temperature number.

Facts & figures

Reni 1974

Gaura Devi and village women stopped felling by embracing trees, a defining Chipko action.

Bhatt and Bahuguna

Organisers who linked local forest defence to a national ecological argument.

Gandhian repertoire

Non-violent body protest, fasts, marches and village constructive work.

Forest as sponge

Chipko's claim that trees protect soil, water and slope, now central to climate adaptation.

Gender

Women as daily users of forest who became public defenders of the commons.

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