

Assessment of Environmental citizenship: Case of Pune

Associate Professor Ar. Neelima Bhide¹

¹S.B. Patil College of Architecture & Design, Nigdi, Pune, Maharashtra, India

Corresponding Author: n.bhide@sbpatilarchitecture.com

Article Information

Article history:

Received Sept 16,2023

Accepted Sept 16,2023



ABSTRACT

Public participation or citizen activism is primarily the engagement of the citizens of an area to manage their built and unbuilt environment. The deterioration of natural resources is a pressing issue at urban level and with that respect the idea behind community participation is by involving citizens and stakeholders, the public utilities, infrastructure and natural environment is preserved and managed better. For the citizens, instead of constantly complaining, this involvement brings in awareness, a sense of ownership and commitment. This is for their own benefit and benefit of their future generations. Since environmental citizenship can be practiced through the broad spectrum of citizen participation, it is necessary to study both. This paper discusses citizen participation to tackle environmental issues. It is divided broadly into two sections. The first section briefly studies the provisions by the Indian government to facilitate community participation through an administrative set up The second section includes case studies for environmental citizenship modules in India and abroad. Five, selected participatory movements across Pune city have been studied. The paper ends with an assessment of all the case studies and environmental movements of Pune city. It summarizes the future environmental citizenship, the challenges faced and possibilities that arise.

KEYWORDS: Environmental citizenship, Citizen Activism, Pune city

1.INTRODUCTION

It is a well-known fact that currently the most pressing issue for all cities around the world is rapid and unplanned growth leading to pressure on public infrastructure, increase in air and water pollution, decline of natural open spaces and environmental deterioration. The need to increase our efforts to develop expansive approaches for environmental conservation has become extremely necessary. Here, public participation becomes crucial for a sustainable outcome of the conservation movement. Primarily there are two aspects to the success of an environmental protection movement:

- Backing by the local government with enabling systems and policies
- Active role of citizens with effective performance and accountability

The community at local level can play a key role in environmental protection for their own benefit and benefit of their future generations.

Also, community participation is an important and necessary tool for successful governance, both at urban and rural level. It helps bring in citizens' involvement

in the process of governance which leads to effective development and will be beneficial for the stakeholders as well as the government. This decentralization is the key for a sustainable future. Rural decentralization of governance in India has been partially successful in spite of issues of vested interests, socio-cultural dominance but the same is not the case at urban level where the setting up of ward committees or "area Sabha's " could not take off except for a few states. [1].The system of ward committees and "area sabhas" for urban governance mandated by the Indian government for citizen participation is not yet running and effective.

Following study first briefly gives information about the provision of community participation law in India, and the idea of environmental citizenship. Further three examples of environmental citizenship are studied before moving on to the study of environmental movements in Pune city

2. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION LAW IN INDIA

There are two main contributory legal provisions for community participation in India, mandated in 1992 and 2006.

According to the section 243 S of the 74th Amendment act (1992) of the Indian constitution, a provision for setting up ward committees is made to enable citizen participation and ensure that the gap between the citizens and local governance is reduced. [1]

The Community participation Law (CPL) also known as “Model Nagar Raj Bill” introduced in 2006 mandated by the ministry of Urban Development (MoUD), is required to be implemented by each and every Indian state which is benefited under the JNNURM, The aim is to introduce citizen participation in urban areas at the lowest level of governance i.e. The Area Sabhas (AS) which is at a lower level than Ward Committees (WC). However, each State Government has been given freedom to constitute such ward committees as per their concept of decentralization of democracy. [2]

In the case of Maharashtra, the municipal corporation law provides ward committees with elected representatives and civilians (nominated by the councilors) from a registered NGO and community based organization engaged in social welfare activities. The number of ward committees will be based on the population of the area. [2] The draft discussion paper by TISS from the year 2015 on the proposed amendments in Maharashtra on the community participation in urban governance discusses and analyzes the provisions of ward committees and decentralization of power in urban governance under 3 states’ laws viz. Maharashtra, Kerala and West Bengal. As per the study, in Maharashtra, there is no representation from members from any educational, residents associations, neighborhood groups or trade unions in the Ward committees,, which is allowed only in the state of Kerala. Functions and duties prescribed to the ward committees as per laws of Kerala and Maharashtra give limited power to the committees and is limited to recommendation, facilitation , grievance redressal and in general maintenance of the ward. Compared to Maharashtra, the Kerala and West Bengal laws give a wide range of rights to secure information related to the ward. [3]

The Area Sabha act came into existence in 2009 in Maharashtra which gives provision for citizen participation in the matters related to roads, cleanliness, water, drainage issues & priority of developmental works. The corporator has to convene a meeting of area Sabha in his ward from time to time with a prior notice about date and time. [4].

In spite of all the legal provisions in place for decentralisation of governance, very little information is available about the status of the functioning of the ward committees and area Sabhas. in most of the states including Maharashtra. So it is a challenge to gauge the success of citizen participation. It should be noted that even though there is inconsistency in implementation of the law, there has been a rise in the number of NGOs from India as well as abroad, working in various fields including environment

protection, and citizen participation. This has brought awareness among citizens for the need for transparency and accountability from the government side. [1]

3. ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP

Just as a person’s citizenship of a particular country is his fundamental right, the idea of “environmental citizenship” is defined as “the responsible pro-environmental behavior of citizens who act and participate in society as agents of change in the private and public sphere, on a local, national and global scale, through individual and collective actions, in the direction of solving contemporary environmental problems, preventing the creation of new environmental problems, achieving sustainability as well as developing a healthy relationship with nature.” [5]



Fig 1: Illustrates the types of environmental citizenship in a 4 axis system [6]

In simple words, it means a person who does recycling and saves energy in his household also values the natural environment outside his home and is actively involved in conservation of natural resources and biodiversity.

4. CASE STUDIES

The case studies have been selected based on the success of citizen participation in environmental protection.

4.1. ARAVALLI BIODIVERSITY PARK, GURGAON, INDIA

Located on the Mehrauli-Gurugram Road, at the border of Delhi & Gurugram, the Aravali Biodiversity Park is part of the Nathupur Village of Gurugram. Extensive mining for more than 40 years, to extract quartzite and Badarpur sand, cattle grazing, waste dumping and tree cutting had caused grave environmental damage leading to massive loss of

habitat for the native flora and fauna in the region of the country's oldest mountain range. The concerned residents of Gurgaon came together to reclaim their forest in 2011.

After making the authorities aware of the situation, a joint venture between Municipal Corporation of Gurugram (MCG) and "iamgurgaon" (IAG), an NGO, a native park was conceptualized. The driving force and main participants of this movement were the elected representatives and residents of the city from all walks of life. The result was the creation of a native Aravali forest. The Aravali Biodiversity Park (ABDP) enjoys a wide variety of flora and fauna. For Gurugram, Delhi and the entire NCR Region, it provides a means to replenish the polluted air as well as recharges the groundwater table. The park serves to revive the local ecosystem services with an abundance of biodiversity. Architect Atal Kapoor has designed the Park's infrastructure and MCG, under his guidance has executed the civil works.

"Of the people - for the people - by the people" is the sole motto for the development of the park

This is a unique and rare example of environmental activism where the collaboration of an NGO, citizens, corporates and the local administration has brought natural forest landscape back into the city [7]

4.2. GROUNDWORK, BIRMINGHAM U.K.

An alliance of charities from the UK, Groundwork (GW) organizes community action for poverty eradication and the environment across the country. Environmentalist John Davidson was the inspiration behind the Groundwork initiative. The team pledges to invest in the places and people in need of revival while working with local leaders and listen to local voices & act as environmental leaders. One example of GW community projects is the Grow Speke garden which was created on a site that attracted illegal dumping, drug use and antisocial activities. The hard work of local volunteers has now transformed it to vegetable gardens, fruit orchards, with beehives Local families in need benefit from donations of food grown on the site. The garden is also a venue for training people in horticultural and construction skills where local school children attend outdoor learning sessions and is a community hub that brings neighbors together. The GW volunteers have helped install a first of its kind tidal floating ecosystem along the Newcastle Quayside on the Tyne River under the 'Love my River' project. This is an excellent opportunity for people to connect with their local rivers to help them to protect and monitor biodiversity. [8]

4.3. COMMUNITY GARDENS, SINGAPORE

Community gardens are finest examples of citizen participation where people from varied backgrounds collectively create develop and sustain a gardening space for their locality. A gardening culture,

environmental stewardship and a greater sense of civic ownership is manifested by participating in community gardening. This is beneficial to the public and private properties, schools and organizations and serves the purpose of bringing nature to the built environment and beautifying the city. In the case of Singapore (SG) which is a multi-ethnic society, community gardens instill the values of cooperation among its diverse population .The setting up and operation of Community Urban Farms is encouraged by the government of SG through the Social Enterprise Community Urban Farm (SECUF) grant.

The common open green spaces available in public estates are used for cultivating community gardens by neighborhood residents where sharing horticultural knowledge is beneficial to everyone. These are managed by the Residents' Committees. In private housing estates cultivation is done by residents on the roadside open spaces, in front of their homes, in neighborhood gardens, or on common green open spaces within high rise towers managed by the Neighborhood Committees. Corporate organizations have cultivation on green spaces within the organization's property. In schools, community gardens are cultivated by students, teachers & volunteers from parent groups on open spaces within the school premises which are managed by schools' environmental clubs. Many schools have set up wildlife-attracting gardens that act as an educational tool as well as create intrigue amongst the children. [9]

5. EXAMPLES OF ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP IN PUNE CITY

Pune is one of the top 100 populous cities in the world, considered an automobile and IT hub; it attracts students as well as professionals in large numbers. The city with 5 rivers, lakes and offshoots of Sahyadri mountain range makes saucer shaped topography with a moderate climate. Today, even as it is perceived as a happening place, it unfortunately is losing its charm due to pressures of urbanization like any other city in the world. The municipal corporation is not able to keep up pace with the rapidly expanding city limits which is putting pressure on its infrastructure, hills, rivers and open spaces.

The citizens of Pune are equally responsible to keep their surroundings clean and protect the natural environment along with the authorities. Pune city has a number of citizen led movements and Nongovernmental organizations (NGO) that are working actively over the years for the cause of environmental issues such as deforestation, encroachment and development in the banks of the city's rivers and destruction of hills

The case studies of NGOs from Pune city selected below are from 3 categories, one which works for saving hills and forests, one which works to save rivers and lastly one which is focused on a particular neighborhood only.

The author is associated with two of these organizations, namely, Jeevitnadi (associated since 2021) and Bavdhan citizen's Forum. (associated since 2023) Work of other organizations was studied through media coverage and by attending live seminars and online webinars in the year 2023.

5.1. SAVE VETAL TEKDI MOVEMENT

Vetal Tekdi is a prominent hill in the western part of Pune city, abundant with its own flora and fauna acting as a lung for the city. It is under threat due to a proposed north south road connecting two parts of the city cutting across the hill which will result in cutting of a large amount of trees and bring in automobile noise and air pollution .Citizens of Pune have been fighting for this cause for the past 40 years. It began with the protest by few environmentally conscious women against the proposal of Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) that was added in their draft Development Plan (DP) of 1987-2007. Their agitation prompted the PMC to delete the road from the DP. Over the years, due to fierce opposition from citizens groups and activists, the work of this proposed road has been stalled, while an expert committee was set up to assess the environment impact assessment and traffic study by the Mumbai high court. The authorities are adamant on the road construction, tenders for it might be floated anytime and the agitation still goes on. Twelve NGOs have been involved in this protest. There is a divide among the local political parties who are either for the proposed road or against it. PMC has been ignoring the petitions filed by the citizens for all projects on Vetal Tekdi be scrapped during the Development Plan process in 2013 as well as now. [10]

5.2. SAVE PASHAN BANER HILLS MOVEMENT:

Another citizen led movement from Pune , is to save the hills located in the suburbs of Baner & Pashan. In 2019, the Pashan-Baner hills bore the brunt of destruction for the Smart City initiative under which a road connecting two parts of the locality had to be built. To oppose the destruction, a large number of citizens had come together at the demolition site. A signature campaign was also carried out by the group to support their appeal. In July 2019; citizens met the representatives of Smart City along with the members of Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) where the then CEO of Smart City, reportedly admitted to the mistake of demolition of the hills and jointly with the PMC assured the citizens that they would never build a road touching the hill in future[11]

5.3. JEEVITNADI:

'Jeevit Nadi' is an NGO working for keeping rivers clean and alive, primarily in the Pune region. They call out for citizen participation from all strata of society, through their very successful "Adopt a stretch Initiative "for river bank cleaning. They have good

logistical support from the Pune municipal Corporation (PMC) to carry away the waste collected from designated time and locations, based on the administrative jurisdiction of the wards to recycling plants etc. They also coordinate with the elected members of the PMC, file complaints, and involve businesses through their CSR activities in cleaning up drives. The focus is now to stop the river contamination at source by installing solid waste blockers. The process of identification of the chronic spots is underway. The PMC has been installing CCTV cameras at such spots. With the help of CSR initiatives and institutes like PRO EARTH and INORA, temple waste composters are being installed at temples along the river banks to stop contamination by throwing "nirmalya" in the river. The volunteers are identifying spots where the sewage drains running along the river bank are punctured by miscreants, coordinating with PMC for repairing these lines. Their volunteers and experts constantly work towards awareness building among stakeholders whose livelihood is dependent on the river but are causing harm to the river ecosystem Two of the important movements that JeevitNadi has taken up are the Ramnadi restoration mission and the protest for the Pune riverfront development project. According to Mrs. Shailaja Deshpande, director Jeevitnadi, all these efforts are still at a much smaller scale compared to the scale of the problem and there is a need for a bigger public participatory movement to see some effective changes in the ecosystem.

5.4. BAVDHAN CITIZEN FORUM (BCF)

It is a group of like-minded individuals who started the NGO to contribute to the development of Bavdhan, a western neighbourhood of Pune through community involvement. The group organizes socio-cultural activities and health check-ups to improve the outreach. Over the past 5 years they have now developed a strong base of volunteers and collaborations with businesses and PMC officials for a sustainable and effective model of community development. They carry out tree plantation drives,, take up various issues such as "Zero garbage Bavdhan ", illegal tree cutting, and awareness drives for ground water recharge etc. They are also actively involved in protection and cleaning up of the hill and river passing through Bavdhan. Every fortnight there is a cleaning drive organized for the open spaces, parks and hills in Bavdhan.

BCF enjoys solid and effective support from administrators of the ward office as well as elected representatives of various political parties while having representation in the mohalla committee. They work closely with the police department and traffic department to carry out all of their campaigns.

5.5. VASUNSHARA SWATCHATA ABHIYAN (VSA):

Starting with planting of trees at the Pashan, Baner and Mhalunge hills, it is now involved in various

initiatives, such as forest and ground water conservation, as well as, bringing toxin-free farmer's products to consumers. They boast of planting and nurturing 20000 plus trees with a success rate of 95% covering more than 200 acres of land. VSA members have made sure that many of their respective building societies follow good rainwater and groundwater harvesting practices. They have also participated in the Ramnadi cleaning drives. They have done continuous contour trenching and built check dams along Pune hills to promote rainwater harvesting. The VSA receives support from donors and volunteers, and are continuously engaging all the concerned authorities. [12]

6. DISCUSSION

All the three case studies demonstrate the power of citizen participation and volunteering to achieve ecological restoration as well as to transform urban open spaces into productive areas. They also show how employment and revenue can be generated while addressing the issues of environmental protection which makes them sustainable models.

The examples of environmental citizenship from Pune city listed above prove that when citizens are driven by a cause which they strongly believe in, the movement gathers sufficient support from political parties, government authorities as well as business to sustain in the longer run. Due to unsuccessful implementation of the CPL in urban areas, citizen participation in urban developmental projects is very weak. Until there is a sustainable and successful solution to the implementation of CPL the elected representatives as well as the administrative department of the municipality need to act responsibly and listen to the citizens' concerns while preventing any environmentally disastrous developmental projects in his wards. It is positively seen happening in the case of JEEVITNADI and BCF where the trust and support between citizen and government has increased over the years. Other cases, though not successful, citizens are at least heard and though delayed and insufficient but there is partial result to their agitation.

The awareness among citizens towards environmental degradation is still lagging though. In an article in Hindustan times Satish Khot from the NGO, National society for Clean Cities (NSCC) says that the absence of sense of ownership of our neighborhood and the city as a whole leads to the lack of awareness and interest in environmental It can be developed by the mohalla/parisar committee movement which encourages the citizens to get together and raise their discontent and issues to the civic administration. Mr. Khot thinks transparency in the selection process where detailed reasons explaining the rationale of the selection of the projects are given will bring in awareness among citizens and they will understand that their suggestions are not being ignored. as implied by the Nagar Raj Bill for better governance, this is one of the tool to reduce the

distance between the voters and their elected representatives [13]

7. CONCLUSION

Environmental citizenship needs an all-encompassing approach of awareness, thoughtfulness, action and governmental support. To achieve this ideal scenario, a citizen should have access to information related to developmental projects which might adversely affect his immediate natural environment. and he should be allowed to discuss and participate in the policy making (through the Citizen participation laws) and raise concerns and seek remedial actions if there is any violation. Hence, the strengthening of CPL is extremely important. The government and the citizens have to work together proactively only then any citizen led environmental protection movement is truly successful. Citizen participation for particularly environmental cause needs entire spectrum of the society to be involved i.e. schools, colleges, senior citizens, NGO's , social clubs, government offices, corporate offices etc.

There are many environmental NGOs in Pune city working to mobilize citizens towards the cause but the scale of participation is still very less, compared to the scale of environmental degradation. It needs to spread across a much larger citizen base in order to mitigate the issues and secure a sustainable future. This will put pressure on the government to follow all the environmental protection laws while planning and implementing any developmental project.

REFERENCES

- [1] TERI, "mohua.gov.in," 2010. [Online]. Available: https://mohua.gov.in/upload/uploadfiles/files/TERI_Sabhas_Report28.pdf. [Accessed 04 2023].
- [2] m. government, "maharashtra.gov.in," 09 June 2014. [Online]. Available: [https://lj.maharashtra.gov.in/Site/Upload/Acts/\(02\)%20The%20Mah.%20Municipal%20Coorporation%20Act%20\(H-4062\).pdf](https://lj.maharashtra.gov.in/Site/Upload/Acts/(02)%20The%20Mah.%20Municipal%20Coorporation%20Act%20(H-4062).pdf). [Accessed APRIL 2023].
- [3] "urk.tiss.edu," TISS, 2015. [Online]. Available: <https://urk.tiss.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/cpl.pdf>.
- [4] R. Jadhav, "timesofindia.indiatimes.com," 16 September 2015. [Online]. Available: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/pune/pune-residents-voices-in-area-sabhas-to-get-work-done/articleshow/48977831.cms>. [Accessed April 2023].
- [5] E. n. f. e. citizenship, "enec-cost.eu," 2018. [Online]. Available: <https://enec-cost.eu/our-approach/enec-environmental-citizenship/>.
- [6] A. C. H. a. D. Paraskeva-Hadjichambi), "Springer," 27 02 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978>

- 3-030-20249-1_15.
- [7] V. Dhasmana, "era-india.org," 2011. [Online]. Available: https://era-india.org/project/aravali-biodiversity-park/#era_project_about_project. [Accessed April 2023].
 - [8] Groundwork, "www.groundwork.org.uk," [Online]. Available: <https://www.groundwork.org.uk/about-groundwork/federation-structure-and-governance/>.
 - [9] S. Government, "www.nparks.gov.sg," 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://www.nparks.gov.sg/gardening/community-gardens>. [Accessed April 2023].
 - [10] P. M. Bureau, "https://punemirror.com/pune," 15 03 2023. [Online]. Available: <https://punemirror.com/pune/civic/hariyali-aur-rasta/cid1678834482.htm>.
 - [11] D. Bengrut, "www.hindustantimes.com," 11 12 2022. [Online]. Available: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/cities/pune-news/citizens-protest-illegal-razing-of-pashan-baner-hills-101670779894998.html>.
 - [12] "www.vso org.in," [Online]. Available: <https://www.vsaorg.in/how-it-all-began>.
 - [13] S. Khot, "www.hindustantimes.com," [Online]. Available: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/pune-news/puneonmymind-satish-khot-a-citizen-activist-on-how-citizens-must-take-ownership-of-their-city-for-better-governance/story-IgpSj3tfflFGNkjONdNjVxM.html>.