



## ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN MP AND APPROACH OF MEDIA

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**Abstract:** Madhya Pradesh which happens to be the state with largest area under forest cover is witnessing shrinking of forest according to a 'Times of India' report quoting the recent estimates of Forest Survey of India. The report mentioned that the state was witnessing decrease in dense forest in many districts of the state including Sidhi, Mandla, Satna, Umaria, Jabalpur, Jhabua, East Nimar, Dewas, Chhindwara, Chhatarpur and Balaghat.

In addition to the decline in the forest cover, the state in the process of making development, has also been witnessing several environmental issues like excessive mining causing large-scale pollution, decrease in agricultural land due to rapid urbanization around cities like Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur, Gwalior and others, shrinking of Upper Lake of Bhopal which is known as the lifeline of the city, continuously increasing pollution levels in the industrial cities like Singrauli and others.

These issues are, time-to-time, brought up in the newspapers of the state but however, the state government is unable to show a resolve to redress all these issues which are a great cause of concern for the human lives and even more worrisome for the generations to come. This situation raises a question – whether journalists are adopting an approach in representing the environmental issues of the state aggressively compelling state government to chalk out some strong policies to redress these issues.

This paper would attempt to study the approach of the state's major newspapers in redressing these alarming environmental threats by interviewing the environmental journalists deployed with them to cover these issues. This way, the research would try to know the state of environmental journalism in the state directly from the horses' mouth.

**Keywords:** Environment, Journalism, Madhya Pradesh, Environmental Issues, Environmental Journalism, Environmental Reporting, Deforestation, Mining, Pollution.

### INTRODUCTION

**Objectives:** This research work would be carried out with the following objectives:

- ❖ Examining the contemporary environmental issues in the state Madhya Pradesh and their basic causes
- ❖ Exploring the effect of these issues on human health, flora and fauna
- ❖ To investigate the role and approach of media in reporting these issues

### Hypothesis:

This has been seen that media is very eager and upfront reporting issues like politics, elections, crime, sports, business and others as they happen but it has been apparently mild in raising the issues pertaining to the environment the same way.

Media be it electronic or print, have not been very aggressive in raising these issues to an extent that it

compels government and administration to take some immediate action to put a tab on the activities that are causing several serious issues like shrinking forest cover, shrinking of Upper Lake in Bhopal, fast decreasing agricultural land due to rapid urbanisation, climatic changes thanks to the environmental hazards, surge in pollution level following mining, industrialisation, manifold increase in number of vehicles and others.

#### RESEARCH METHODS:

To be able to find out authentic information related substantiating the subject and to reach a meaningful and logical conclusion, the methods adopted for the study would be – content analysis and interviews.

**Content analysis:** Content analysis method was applied for this research work so that the literature related to the environmental concerns could be referred and the prominent environmental issues in the state could be underlined. In the process of finding the major problems related to environment in Madhya Pradesh, literature of all kinds from newspapers to magazines, books to articles and reports would be referred to come up with the authentic information and data related to the subject.

**Interviews:** Journalists of Bhopal looking after the beats like environment and National Green Tribunal (NGT) would be interviewed to know about the key environment issues and the find out what do they think about the status of environmental journalism in the state. This would also help us in understanding the challenges that the journalists come across in reporting the environmental issues.

#### BACKGROUND:

The state of Madhya Pradesh located in the central region of the country has for long been known for its natural beauty with a large part of its area under the cover of green forest. The state is quite rich in terms of natural resources like coal, minerals, water and others. Using these resources, the state, in the past few years, has been witnessing developments on many fronts like – power supply, water supply, infrastructure development in the cities and other parts, real estate development and others. But in the process of development, the state has started exploiting the natural resources spread across the region instead of their optimum use.

Madhya Pradesh is the state with largest area under forest cover in the country. But today, this forest cover is fast shrinking. The state is seeing decrease in dense forest in many districts of the state including Sidhi, Mandla, Satna, Umaria, Jabalpur, Jhabua, East Nimar, Dewas, Chhindwara, Chhatarpur and Balaghat.

And today, as the entire nation faces numerous environmental concerns in the process of rapid urbanization and industrialization, for Madhya Pradesh too, the decreasing forest cover is not the only environmental issue to confront with. Issues like excessive mining causing large-scale pollution, decrease in agricultural land due to rapid urbanization around cities like Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur, Gwalior and others, shrinking of Upper Lake of Bhopal which is known as the lifeline of the city, continuously increasing pollution levels in the industrial city of Singrauli are all equally threatening for the ecosystem of the state.

In addition to these issues, Madhya Pradesh is a state which is known world over for one of the biggest industrial catastrophe claiming around 3000 lives instantly as it occurred and crippling thousands others. The 350 metric tons of toxic chemical waste in the state capital is still awaiting disposal. The soil sample tests carried out in and around the plant revealed that the waste was causing air and water pollution in the surroundings having huge human settlement.

One of the other major issues that brought Madhya Pradesh to the global map is Narmada Bachao Andolan (save Narmada campaign) which launched to prevent the displacement of thousands of tribals who were dispossessed of their livelihoods because of the Sardar Sarovar Dam in the name of 'national interest'. The movement led by the veteran social activist Medha Patkar strongly opposed the government's plan to build 30 large, 135 medium and 3000 small dams over river Narmada and its tributaries to harness their water. Apart from this, the recent Chutka Movement by the people of Mandla protesting against the Centre's idea to set up nuclear plant at the Chutka village of the district showed people's concerns over the government's insensitivity towards the threat it posed towards people lives. However, Chutka movement was very less reported in media.

These issues are, time-to-time, brought up in the newspapers of the state but however, the state government and the Centre did not to show any resolve to redress all these issues which are a great cause of concern for the human lives and even more worrisome for the generations to come.

This situation raises a question – if journalists are adopting an approach in representing the environmental issues of the state aggressively compelling state government to work out some strong policies to redress these issues? Although media prominently reports on other issues of the society like crime, business, sports, politics and all but the increasing environmental issues are not as strongly brought to the light by media which raises a serious concern over the environmental health of the state.

**Contemporary environmental issues in MP and approach of Media:**

Madhya Pradesh, in the last few years, has been moving fast on the path of development. In this process of development the state has seen unprecedented increase in activities like deforestation, industrialization, hardscaping, relentless mining and others. Today, the entire nation is moving forward on the road to development. And Madhya Pradesh is no exception. However, in the race of development, the state has failed in striking a balance in nature. The shrinking of forest cover in the state is a serious point of concern which if not redressed immediately would lead to fatal results.

If we go by the history of human civilizations, we see that they have always born and developed close to the natural resources like forests and rivers. Mining and quarrying has destroyed large tracts of forest land in Madhya Pradesh. And if we take into account the today's scenario, we see a worrisome situation wherein the definition of the development being followed by the state is making tremendous damage to the nature and creating ever increasing social inequality. The resistance against the monaural kind of development in the state like Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) and Chutka Movement of Mandla district are outcome of the unrest caused in the society as a result of this social inequality that comes as a byproduct with today's so-called social and economic development wherein a particular section of the society benefits while the other suffer.

According to a report submitted a high power committee (2014) chaired by AB Akolkar, member secretary of the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) to the National Green Tribunal (NGT), the ever-increasing level of pollution in Singrauli – the industrial belt and power hub of the state, has started spreading across Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. The committee identified several air and water pollution concerns that added to the pollution burden of the region.

A report of The Times of India (Bhopal edition) on February 16, 2014 quoting a study carried out by a Professor of Department of Environmental Science and Limnology, Barkatullah University, Ashwani Wanganeo titled 'A study on Bhoj Wetland and Bhopal' said the Upper Lake which is considered as the lifeline of the state capital was dying a painful death thanks to the mindless dumping of solid waste from many wards of the city into the lake. The study rang an alarm bell over shrinking of the vital water body. Almost 100 per cent of the human waste finds way into the Upper Lake from the city and around 247608 litres urine each day is released in the wetland, the report read quoting the study. The report also mentioned that the clay, clothes, papers, wood and insoluble paints containing harmful substances dumped in the lake during the festive season was also playing havoc with the health of the Upper Lake.

If we look at the increasing pollution level, a survey of Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) revealed Gwalior city of the state as one of the top five critically polluted cities of the country in terms of particulate matter. Other prominent cities including state capital Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur, Ujjain and Satna were also among the most critically polluted cities surveyed in the country.

With all these issues surfacing in the state of Madhya Pradesh ringing an alarm bell, media which plays an important role in representing serious societal problems at the governance levels hence seeking an apt solution, seems to be going little mild on this front. Even as the environmental issues in the state get graver, state media seem to be paying least attention to them.

There is no doubt about the fact that media plays a crucial role in a democratic set up both in helping the government and administration in making important policies for development by apprising them of the several issues existing in the society and forming public opinion on umpteen problems. However, when it came of reporting environmental issues, media seemed to lack that spirit and aggression which the situation actually demands.

**What Journalists looking after environmental issues in Bhopal say?**

**Anil Dubey**

**City Chief & Editorial In-charge, The Hitavada, Bhopal Edition**

**1. What are the major contemporary environmental issues in Madhya Pradesh?**

Fast deforestation in Madhya Pradesh has been witnessed following the expansion of towns as state recorded higher urbanization rate than national average during last century. The escalated urbanization rate is evident with the fact that more than 30 towns are having more than one lakh population. The number of towns in state has grown to 476 in 2011 from 105 in 1901. The urbanization has also caused several other problems including depletion of water in addition to ground water pollution by industries. The ground water level in certain pockets has gone down to 20 meters according to Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) findings. For Example, over exploitation of ground in Bhopal has resulted severe water crisis in city areas not having the piped water supply system. The urban forest around Bhopal is also fast vanishing due to farm houses/institution run by influential people in eco-sensitive zones around state capital viz Mendori, Kerwa Road, Chandanpura and adjoining areas. These areas

directly affect eco-system of 1000-year old Upper Lake (Largest man-made lake of Asia) and Kerwa Dam, which is in Ratapani Sanctuary. Similarly, the tourism activities have also increased in other sanctuaries. In Vindhya region of state, the mining for Cement and Power Projects has created major dent to the environment. Frequent agitations headed by international organisations like Green Peace is also witnessed in this area. The industrialization of Malwa region has also created shortage of water in Malwa region in addition to increasing pollution levels in rivers.

**2. What are their immediate repercussions?**

As discussed above, depletion in water level, ground water pollution, urban forests are vanishing, pollution level increasing in rivers due to industrialization.

**3. What are the main causes of the current environmental issues according to you?**

The main causes are the rapid urbanization, industrialization, relentless mining, increasing tourism activities etc.

**4. What could be the immediate course correction?**

The government has been claiming that upgradation of state's forests is underway through fresh plantation. But, the fact is that deforestation for new industries and urbanization continued well under the administrative protection. So, there is immediate need to push vertical development of towns and cities instead of expansion. For example, there are huge government spaces lying in the city like Bhopal where re-densification schemes could be undertaken. Forest laws need to be implemented strictly instead of promoting polluting industries backed by government legislation. Instead mediation of National Green Tribunal (NGT), the government itself should take initiatives for strict implementation of environment laws. The better use of technology can also save industries. Compromising in a bid to ensure industrial development for creating jobs would only harm the environment in long run. Increasing pollution in rivers has also been a big issue in context of Madhya Pradesh. The recent reports suggest multi-fold increase of pollution in Narmada River, which provide a large chunk of water to state for drinking and industrial purposes. Other water bodies and rivers are also facing similar situation.

**5. How do you think media treat these issues?**

The regional media in Madhya Pradesh has not been very serious towards environment or related issues. Instead, media focuses towards political issues in addition to promoting the urbanization. The authorities are also not sensitive even if media covers environment related issues. The reporters when they cover such issues have to struggle to get space in their respective media as editors are not willing to vex authorities. Over all, a thorough change of mindset is needed in media organisation and government authorities.

**6. What is the condition of environmental journalism in Madhya Pradesh?**

As I said, regional media does not seem very serious towards reporting environment and related issues. They rather focus on political issues and other sensitizing news stories.

**7. What are the major challenges that media and media-persons face while reporting environment-related issues in the state?**

At times, when journalists bring good environmental related stories, they are not published as the editors, or the owner of the media-house, himself do let those reports published as they do not want to displease the authorities and their advertisers.

**8. Do you think media is as sensitive in reporting environment-related issues as other issues like crime, politics, sports, business etc.?**

No. Not at all.

Rageshri Ganguly  
Senior Correspondent, The Times of India, Bhopal Edition

**1. What are the major contemporary environmental issues in Madhya Pradesh?**

Major contemporary environmental issues in MP are illegal sand mining from around river beds, illegal mineral mining, tiger poaching, flouting environmental norms by industries resulting in pollution (Mandideep Industrial Area), ill-treatment and disposal of municipal solid waste (MSW), decreasing forest cover etc.

**2. What are their immediate repercussions?**

Loss of ecological balance, increasing pollution of environment, endangering habitat of animals and degrading quality of life

**3. What are the main causes of the current environmental issues according to you?**

Lack of political and bureaucracy will in curbing the anti environmental forces as often the polluter is hand in glove with the administration offering them a free rein in carrying out their illegal activities. Besides, general apathy of people towards environment and lack of civil society's awareness on such matters also is a cause of concern

**4. What could be the immediate course correction?**

Judicial recourse in high courts and green tribunals are important. Also, stricter laws for polluters and their efficient enforcement

**5. How do you think media treat these issues?**

In the past few years, increasing sensitivity and awareness has come about in media. Many issues have also been taken up by different media houses as causes and run regularly as campaigns

**6. What is the condition of environmental journalism in Madhya Pradesh?**

Environmental journalism is thriving in the state. There is constant focus on wildlife and especially tiger poaching and illegal mining. However, often some topics are always in spotlight due to which others are not accorded their due importance or relegated to the background

**7. What are the major challenges that media and media-persons face while reporting environment-related issues in the state?**

Powerful lobbies with vested interests with high reach who can influence or even kill your story besides, administrative non cooperation

**8. Do you think media is as sensitive in reporting environment-related issues as other issues like crime, politics, sports, business etc.?**

Mostly but it also depends on knowledge and understanding of the reporter covering the beat.

Neeraj Santoshi

Principle Correspondent, Hindustan Times, Bhopal Edition

**1. What are the major contemporary environmental issues in Madhya Pradesh?**

Major environmental issues in MP are primarily related to illegal mining, pollution of water bodies, pollution from thermal coal plants, fly ash dumping by coal plants and lessening of green cover. Also, some studies have shown that present norms need some changes which should be in tune with the local scenario. In September this year I did story on a new climate study which found that Madhya Pradesh's twelve districts were most vulnerable to climate change and as such a "single policy for all of the districts would not be appropriate". The study stressed that "rather, judicious and different combinations of policies for different districts could help authorities and climate experts in moving closer to achieving sustainability and climate resilience". Also environment and wildlife needs to be seen in a holistic context and not in bureaucratic categories.

**2. What are their immediate repercussions?**

The immediate repercussions are damage to environment which will contribute in the climate change in the long run. Changes in green cover can also lead to change in precipitation levels in the state.

**3. What are the main causes of the current environmental issues according to you?**

Primarily environmental protection is the duty of the government. There are loopholes in the way government is monitoring and implementing environment related norms.

**4. What could be the immediate course correction?**

Civil society should come forward in a major way along with NGOs to put pressure on the government to strengthen enforcement of environmental laws and rules. Also, more awareness is required with regard to laws and rules related to the protection of the environment.

**5. How do you think media treat these issues?**

Media has been selective in its environmental reporting here. There are many areas which remain underreported like long environmental trends in particular areas. But media has overall reported about the major issues like pollution levels, deforestation and damage due to mining activities.

**6. What is the condition of environmental journalism in Madhya Pradesh?**

It is still dependent on official sources and documents. There are no independent investigative stories with in-depth field work. Also, there are 51 districts in the state, many of which have never been looked into for environmental issues.

**7. What are the major challenges that media and media-persons face while reporting environment-related issues in the state?**

Challenges media faces: Official apathy, lack of environmental experts in the state, lack of interest and passion among some government officials concerned with environmental issues, reporters not encouraged for time consuming investigative environmental reporting, reporters not sent often on tours to see how environment of a particular area is faring.

**8. Do you think media is as sensitive in reporting environment-related issues as other issues like crime, politics, sports, business etc.?**

Environmental issues are not given that prominence compared to crime and politics. But media is sensitive enough to report about major issues, especially in urban areas. The decision of giving importance lies with the editors and not reporters. Environmental issues in far flung areas of the state are definitely being ignored.

**SUMMARY:**

Having referred to different literature related to environment issues in Madhya Pradesh, it is clear that there are some very serious environmental problems that need immediate redressal. These issues include fast deforestation, increasing mining activities, industrialization, water pollution, air pollution, illegal sand mining, tiger poaching, improper treatment and disposal of solid municipal waste and many others. On the other hand, media which could play a significant role in putting a tab on practices damaging the environment seems to be little apathetic towards raising these issues prominently. To sum up the research work, the major environmental issues and media's approach towards them could be underlined with following points.

- ❖ Major environmental issues of Madhya Pradesh:
- ❖ Fast deforestation due to the expansion of towns and cities, mining, industrialization etc.
- ❖ Escalated urbanization rate i.e. the number of towns in state has grown to 476 in 2011 from 105 in 1901
- ❖ The ground water level in many regions has gone down tremendously according to Central Ground Water Board (CGWB) findings
- ❖ The urban forests around Bhopal and other major cities are vanishing fast due to farm houses/institution run by influential people in eco-sensitive zones

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- ❖ The mining for Cement and Power Projects have created major dent to the environment.
- ❖ The industrialization of Malwa region has created shortage of water in addition to increasing pollution levels in rivers.
- ❖ Illegal sand mining from around river beds and illegal mineral mining
- ❖ Tiger poaching
- ❖ Flouting of environmental norms by industries resulting in pollution in industrial areas,
- ❖ Improper treatment and disposal of municipal solid waste (MSW)
- ❖ Fast decreasing forest cover and others
- ❖ Endangering habitat of animals
- ❖ Increasing air-pollution and degrading quality of life

### Condition of Environmental Journalism in Madhya Pradesh:

- Regional media in Madhya Pradesh has not been very serious towards environment or related issues
- Media focuses towards political issues and promoting urbanization
- Journalists have to struggle to get space for environment-related stories in their respective media as editors do not want to vex authorities and their advertisers who are the major drivers of their revenue
- There is constant focus on wildlife especially, tiger poaching and illegal mining
- Often some specific issues get more attention due to which others are not accorded their due importance or relegated to the background
- Environment issues are not given prominence like politics and crime in state media
- Environmental problems in far flung areas of the state are ignored by media
- Journalists are not encouraged to do time-consuming investigative stories related to environment
- Out of the three environmental journalists interviewed during this research work, two said that media is not prominently raising the environmental related issues the way it does in case of politics and crime while one said it mostly depends on the knowledge and understanding of the journalist covering the beat.

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