

## SOCIAL CAUSATIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT

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### **Abstract**

*Any state is in dilemma of conserving and preserving the natural environment on one hand and facilitating human habitations on the other. The quality of environment is the important aspect of development. Any development is incomplete without taking into consideration of the conservation of natural environment, biodiversity and our eco-system. If this consideration is not taken into account, this becomes the cause of environmental movements. Environmental movements are being the integral to the very process of national development which has been environmentally insensitive and ecologically destructive. This article based on the theoretical and the content analysis on various environmental movements, their social-demographical factors and surfaces the issues of environmental challenges in India.*

### **Keywords:**

*Social Movement, Environment, Environmental Movement, Ecological Degradation, Ecosystem People.*

Environmental movement may be defined as an organized social activity consciously directed towards promoting sustainable use of natural resource, halting environmental degradation or bringing about environmental restoration' (Gadgil and Guha,1995). Baviskar (1995) analyses environmental movements as being the integral to the very process of national development, which has been environmentally insensitive and ecologically destructive.

There have been social conflicts arising due to the depletion of natural resources, which have profound impact on socio cultural, economic life of people like that of major socio- historical processes of colonialism and capitalism. As such depletion of natural resources not only creates shortage of natural resources but also

destroys the livelihood of thousands of people dependent of forest and nature.

### **Origin of Environmental Movements in India**

After independence many changes took place like rapid urbanization and industrialization, enactments of social legislations, protections to vulnerable sections, planned development, pluralistic political system and ideals of socialism and welfare governance. All these factors influence the emergence, the spread and the nature of social movements in India (Oommen, 2012). Environmental movements in India centers around nature- based conflicts. They have their origin from the 'lopsided, iniquitous and environmentally destructive process of development in independence India' (Guha and Martinez-Alier, 1997).

### **Social Base of Environmental Movements in India**

In Indian context, the movements regarding women, environment, farmer, and dalit (ex-untouchables) are characterized as New Social Movements (Guha, 1989; Omvedt, 1993). Such movements arise in the civil society because the state is unable to resolve the problems of exploitation, poverty and unequal development. Thus, NSMs become the vanguards of democracy.

The environmental movements reflect not only the consequences of environmental crisis but also the social conflicts between competing groups for resources. Some movements remain as localized movements like Baliraja dam struggle in Maharashtra, Barh mukti abhiyan while some become pervasive and vibrant environmental movement like Narmada Bachao Andolan, Chipko movement, etc.

The localized environmental movements often show a conflict between poor landless peasants and rich farmers over use of grazing grounds.

Thus, largely these movements are peasants' movements in claiming their rights over natural resources like land, water, etc. in the robe of environmentalism and this is described by Ramchandra Guha (1989) as 'public' and 'private' faces of Indian environmental movements. As Chipko movement was a peasant struggle for the protection of their traditional rights over forest and safeguarding their source of livelihood. So, this the 'private' face of this movement but as it was prominently an environment movement thus, it is its 'public' face.

According to Gadgil and Guha (1989), in India the environmental movements are necessarily the struggles over the processes of production and extraction i.e. the conflicts pertaining to the issues of resource capture, mode of resource use, and technology adopted for its extraction. To quote A. Baviskar (1995), the social conflicts between competing groups for resources in India mirrors the contests between two versions of economy i.e. 'political economy of profit', means establishing control and ownership over nature and 'moral economy of need', means claims about differential relationships, uses and world view of nature.

There are some inherent traits of the environmental movements discussed by many sociologists. According to Guha (2000), there are basically four features underlines the environmental movements in India i.e. firstly, the concern for social justice; secondly, the unique language of protest or the mode of protest. In industrial countries, modern methods like electronic media are used to disseminate, ideology, information and to organize the protesters while in India, the methods of communication are mostly based on traditional networks and primordial loyalties like village community, caste, tribe, and lineage. Thirdly, the significant contribution of women in environmental movements. Women's participation in environmental movements reflects that they are closer to nature and their day-to-day involvement in the use of nature. This fact is very much highlighted by the followers of eco-feminism in India (Shiva, 1988). Finally, in India, environmental movements challenge the

destructive, anti-poor and elite-state centered developmental process. Besides Guha's description about the traits of Indian environmental movements, its other feature is the role played by middle class intellectuals and their leadership. These intellectual leaders were outsiders, neither as forest dwellers and tribals, nor the peasants. These leaders helped the local protesters to articulate their ideology and organize vibrant movements.

### **Actors Involved in environmental movements**

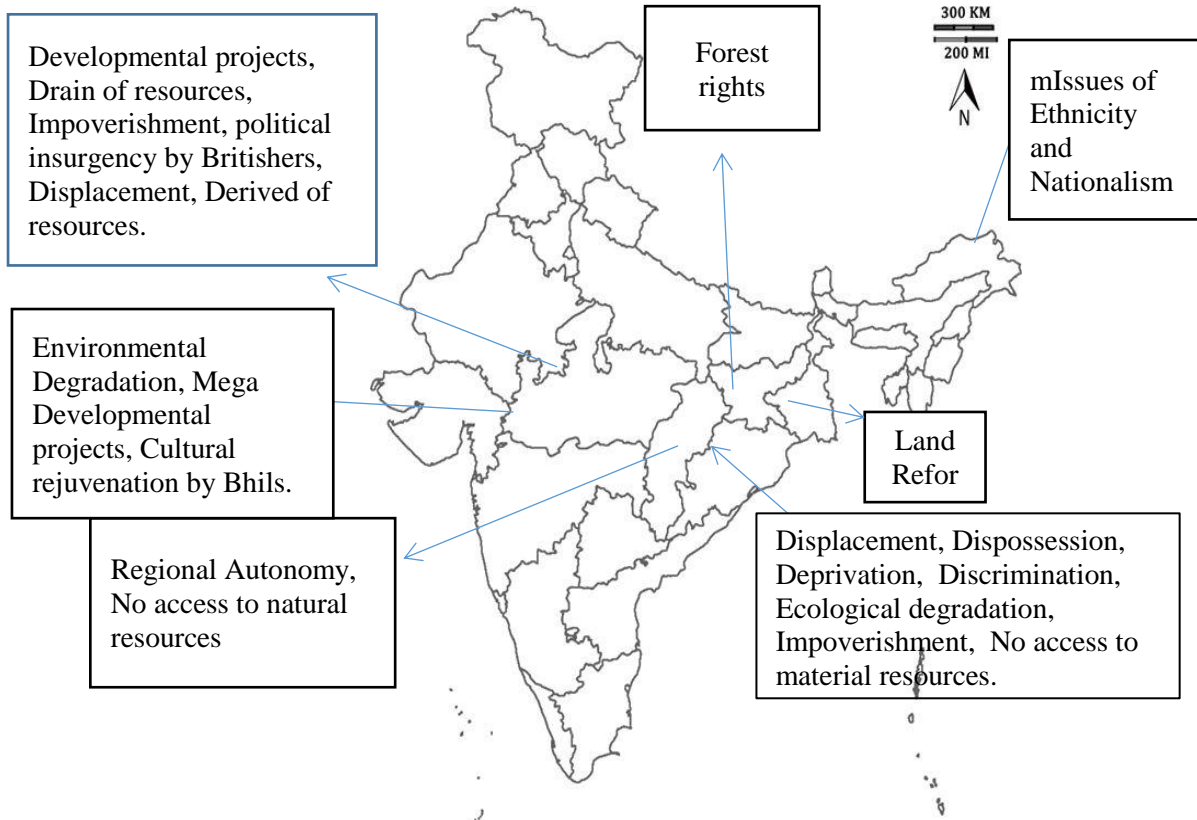
As stated by Oommen (2012), political parties in India mobilize two types of social categories into collective mobilization or social movement through the associations and unions they sponsor. These social categories are: (1) Occupational or class category (e.g. industrial workers, students, farmers, etc.) and (2) Biological category (e.g. youth, women, etc.). In environmental movements, the parties involved are sometimes the poor against the poor, sometimes the rich against the rich but usually when we look at the persistent environmental movements they involve the rich against the poor. That is a social conflict between 'omnivores' i.e. those with social power to capture, transform and use natural resources from wider catchment area and 'ecosystem people' those who heavily depend upon their surroundings for existence (Guha and Martinez-Alier, 1997). Thus, these movements in India can be seen in terms of resistance from the side of 'ecosystem people' to the process of capturing of natural resources by 'omnivores'.

### **Environment and Tribal Issues**

A tribe refers to the endogenous primordial solidarities living in the close proximity to forest territories united by ties of descent from a common ancestor, community of customs and traditions, adherence to the same culture and language distinctly their own (Xaxa, 1999a). Tribes lead their life in nexus with nature and forest. There is a great proximity between tribal movements and degradation of environment and their alienation from forest. Forest is their habitat and niche and various development projects pose a threat to their habitat and subsistence. Indian states where tribal

movements have occurred, revolves round directly or indirectly to environmental factors. For example, main environmental causes for emergence of tribal movement in Madhya Pradesh are developmental projects, drain of resources, impoverishment and displacement; in Chhattisgarh are regional Autonomy, no access to natural resources; Central India

environmental degradation, mega developmental projects; in Jharkhand Forest rights; and in Odisha displacement, dispossession, deprivation, discrimination, ecological degradation, impoverishment. The following map reveals the representative outlay of causation of environmental movements in the states of India:



On the Issues of autonomy, Mita Sarkar (2016) traced the history of tribal movements and conducted a study of tribal struggles in Surguja District of Chhattisgarh. She concluded from her study that the main cause behind the tribal revolts in this area is the issue of autonomy with regard to access of natural resources, specially land (Zamin), forest (Jungle) and water (Jal). She also highlighted the origin of forest satyagrah and Naxalite movement in Chhattisgarh and their responsible factors. On the basis of interpretation of the contemporary agitation in tribal areas of Madhya Pradesh, Joshi (2016) has concluded that the contradiction between the issues of development and natural resources is the major reason behind the tribal unrest in those areas. These tribal areas though rich in natural

resources but tribal are not able to link themselves to mainstream economy and to take real advantage of their natural resources. An in-depth study of the causes of tribal unrest in Madhya Pradesh by Joshi (2016), he traces that drain of resources from these natural resource rich areas to already developed areas, on one hand and negative impact of the developmental process at the cost of degradation of natural environment and impoverishment on the another hand are the responsible factors. Thus, to him there is an inverse relationship between the development and natural resources in tribal areas, the resultant fall out of which is the discontentment among local gentry. A study of contemporary movements in light of Mega developmental projects in Odisha was

made by R.K. Mohanty (2016). He concludes that tribal unrest in Odisha is the outcome of 4Ds i.e. Discrimination, Deprivation, Dispossession and Displacement induced by development process in that state. His study reveals the repercussions of mining and industrial projects in Odisha on the lives of tribal people and resultant of which are 4Ds mentioned by him. Due to these factors, the main tribal movements organized in these areas are: Narayanpatna movement, Kashiur movement, Anti-Posco movement, and Kalinganagar movement.

In his research article, Ravi Bhatia (2016) discusses the main cause of tribal resentment is displacement due to developments like construction of dams, mining, and also encroachments on their lands. They lead their life in rapport with environment and their livelihood and sustenance depend upon the forest. The large-scale developmental activities in the forest lead to not only destruction and pollution of the nature but also cause dislocation of millions of Adivasis from their natural habitat, results in tribal unrest. In case of tribal movements in Odisha, Mohanty (2016) said that these movements are the results of four factors i.e. discrimination, deprivation, dispossession and displacement induced by developmental activities in tribal areas.

**In his article ‘Sustaining the Environment: The Adivasi Way’,** Ravi Bhatia suggested a development model which does not lead to mass destruction, degradation, pollution and encroachment of environment and the displacement of tribal from the forest. These factors are responsible for the resentment among tribal people and agitation by them, as these destroys their habitation and livelihood based on forest.

There have been conflicts in the areas where infrastructural and developmental projects are being run. Such areas are ecologically sensitive regions and face problems with regard to mining operations, tribal habitats, dams and rivers, forest and hills. Bhatia (2010) emphasized that there is a close relationship of the tribal population with the surrounding hills and forests and when their lands are taken over,

they feel deprived, resentful and helpless and sometimes indulge in violence.

Debnath (2016) highlighted that history has witnessed several violent protest against British insurgency and invasion and also against outsiders’ intrusions. So, tribal revolted for claiming their rights on their own land and for protection of bio resources. He concludes that since 1960s, under the influence of conservation ethos and sub-nationalistic ethnicity among tribal, they organized many macro and micro environmental movements for forest protection. This resulted into the framing of pro-poor and pro-people forest policy in 1988 and the development of participatory forestry.

There are many tribal movements in connection with establishing their forest rights. Chipko movement was the representative of a far wider spectrum of forest-based conflicts in India. Guha (1989) asserts that as a powerful statement against the violation of customary rights by state forestry, Chipko brought into focus a wide range of issues concerning forest policy and the environmental debate as a whole. This movement took place in central Himalayas. It was a female peasant uprising in which protesters embraced trees and was successful in reclaiming the peasant's rights and stalling the felling of trees by contractors of the forest department (Phookan, 2016). So, in April 1973 the peasants of Mandal village in Garwhal Himalayas effectively stopped commercial felling in a nearby forest by threatening to 'hug the tress' and asserted their rights on forest.

Environmental movements have shifted the focus of movement from basic survival needs of tribal or peasants to their habitat conservation. Thus, Wignaraja (1993) and Omvedt (1993) have called them new social movements. According to Debashis Debnath (2016), the environmental movements can be categorized into two parts i.e. Micro- the movements aiming at a result oriented sustainable development practices, and Macro- the movements aiming to influence the policy.

### **Environmental Movements as New Social Movement**

According to Guha (1989) Omvedt (1993), the movements pertaining to issues of women, environment, farmer, and dalit (ex-untouchables) are characterized as New Social Movements. These movements emerge in the civil society, where the state is lacking to resolve their problems of exploitation, poverty and unequal development. Thus, new social movements have become the yardsticks of democracy.

Localized lower-class resistance which are relatively new than the larger processes of colonialism, imperialism and capitalism, also fall under the category of new social movement. For example, the localized struggles for promoting sustainability and prohibiting environmental crisis and environmental degradation such as Baliraja Dam Struggle in Maharashtra in 1980s. As this affected livelihood of numerous people dependent on forest resource.

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