

Environment And Development: Locating Uttarakhand Amidst Developmental Politics

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Abstract:

The research paper is an attempt to analyse the close relationship between environment and development with special reference to Uttarakhand state. With the rise of human population and needs, development becomes essential for any society. At the same time, extensive development actions, equipped with modern science and technology, compelled us to think about the rapid environmental degradation. In developing and less developed countries like India, this issue becomes more alarming due to the lower quality of scientific and technological equipment and implementation methods.

Since the formation of Uttarakhand state in 2000, the state governments put forth various methods to mobilise resources and develop infrastructure and other amenities. In spite of considerable development of infrastructures and industries, several issues haunt the people of the hilly area in whose name and as a result of whose struggle the state came into being. This study deals with study of various development projects which have been taken by the government as well as major people's movements associated with these projects.

Key words: Environment, Displacement, Resource, Environmentalism, Decolonisation, Chipko Movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan, Urja Pradesh, Natural resources, Ecological Security

Introduction:

Environment has been a very vexed and contentious issue in the contemporary world and there is no surprise it has to be; today we have reached almost at that brink that if we do not awake the human life on this planet could be annihilated. Though the environment has been majority of times approached from the scientific point of view still its study from the social sciences perspective regarding the policies, planning and the control of resources i.e. the

location of power is very crucial. From this perspective the study of various environmental movements in India gives a wide glimpse of the various thematic issues.

It's an unquestionable fact that the concern for environment emerged in the west. Richard grove and Vinita Damodaran delineate the growth of environmentalism into two distinct phases: the European expansionism and European decolonization. The environmental movement was a result of European expansionism that started in the 17th and 18th century which was also a product of the metamorphosis that the European society was undergoing due to industrial revolution. During Industrial revolution, the colonial powers started extracting resources from the colonies. In this phase the history of environmentalism grew in the form of as Grove and Damodaran calls "historical geography"ⁱ. Scholars like historian G.M. Travelyn gives a similar view and places the love of 'nature as a cultural force'ⁱⁱ in the modern west. The analysis of 17th and 18th century gives a glimpse of two distinct but contrary phenomena. The first one is associated with the uninterrupted growth of industries leading to the prosperity on one side and the exploitation of resources on the other from the colonies of Africa, Asia and Latin America to fulfill the greed of the bourgeoisies to set up industries and other production hubs like Manchester, Lankashire etc. The second voice is from the naturalists who gave a clarion call of 'go back to nature' which we can trace in the writings of Rousseau in political science and William Wordsworth in literature. The intensity of both the movements can be judged from Travelyn's statement "no doubt it is partly because the destruction is so rapid that the appreciation is so loud". The English intellectual Aldus Huxley gave his contribution to the environmental literature and published his famous article "Wordsworth in the tropics" which is a contribution to the "comparative study of the environmentalism"ⁱⁱⁱ between the European and tropical countries. In this phase the relation between human being and environment was studied aptly by the geographers, archaeologists and ecologists.

The second phase started with the decolonisation process in the 1950-60's and reached its culmination in the 1970's which witnessed various environmental movements across the world. The industrialisation and urbanisation processes on the one hand "alienated"^{iv} the human beings and at the same time created an indispensable need to be associated with it. In this period several pioneering works came into being starting from the in depth study of the impact of pesticides and other chemicals on the productive capacity of the earth by Rachel

Carlson (The Silent Spring). The other one is the classic work “The Population Bomb” by Paul Erlich which alerts the world community of the consequences of the population growth.

Indian scenario:

The Environmental movement in India began with a bang in a hilly and small village located far in the foothills of Himalayas. The village was “Reni” which became famous due to the indefatigable resistance shown by the women against commercial foresters which they did by hugging the trees when the axe-men came to cut the trees. Thus marked the beginning of a historical struggle called “the chipko movement” which is seen by the historian Ramachandra Guha as a ‘peasant struggle against commercial forestry.’^v Chipko literally means ‘embracing’ and it gives an indication to the practice of embracing the trees to prevent them from felling. Later on under the efficient leadership of Sunderlal Bahuguna and Chandi Prasad Bhatt the movement gained a pan-India character and took up various issues of environmental degradation, deforestation, landslides, large scale downstream flooding, indiscriminate felling of trees for commercial purposes, protection of Himalayan bio-diversity and questioned the developmental paradigm of the neo-liberal state. They have challenged the ‘scientistic-developmental paradigm of the state’^{vi} at the cost of environment. Chipko movement started a chain of environmental movements. Highly influenced from the Chipko’s success the young men and women followed the axe men into the forests of western ghat and embraced the trees giving rise to another movement known as the Appiko Chalewali movement in 1983. At this juncture another phenomenal struggle “the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save Narmada Movement)” demanding the proper rehabilitation of the people started in the Narmada valley under the leadership of social activist Medha Patkar. The Narmada valley project envisages a construction of 30 major, 135 medium-sized and 3000 minor dams, so the question that haunts is not only associated with the proper rehabilitation of the affected populace but also of the heavy violence unleashed on the river by the state. This gigantic imagination of the state has been termed by Claude Alveres, one of the prominent environmental thinkers of India as the “world’s largest planned environmental disaster”.

If we try to sketch the environmental conflicts in broad canvass we can categorise them into various range starting from the conflicts over land use, the conflicts over forest reserves and resources, conflicts over water i.e building of dams and other use of water(domestic,

industrial, agricultural, navigation and fishing), conflicts over mining, conflicts over fishing etc. The environmental movement is not just a mere struggle of the people fighting for the conservation of the natural resources rather it means much more than that. Archana Prasad writes that “The environmental movement is an umbrella term which is used to describe a series of various local struggles and conflicts that highlight issues of livelihood and ecological security in the developmental debate.”^{vii} After independence the Indian state focussed on setting up heavy industries which was a part of the Nehruvian vision of nation building, in which the state was at the commanding height of the economy, so that the economic growth of the country could be enhanced. The travails of the tribal communities across the country, especially in relation to their displacement in order to facilitate the growth of corporate interests, came into sharp focus at regular intervals. B.R. Ambedkar once said “where ethics and economics come in conflict, victory is always with economics.

Locating Uttarakhand:

It is a common understanding that every industrial activity is bound to have its own environmental consequences which need to be assessed and evaluated with available gross benefits arising out from the industrial enterprise. Who benefits out from these industrial activities and at whose cost becomes the central concern of any study. Every capital intensive industrial activity can't be simply executed purely with local concerns since they are mainly implemented with a profit motive for various macro-purposes such as providing electricity or connectivity to a larger section of the society.

The state of Uttarakhand was formally born on 9 nov.2000 as UTTARANCHAL; the 27th state of India. Its creation brings to an end the struggle for a separate state carved out of UTTAR PRADESH, comprising the hills of Kumaon and Garhwal

(Garhwal and Kumaon refers to the two kingdoms that once ruled Uttarakhand through much of the medieval period, now they constitute the two divisions of the state).

Newly created states like Uttarakhand naturally have a less possibility of mobilising resources and a huge burden of government aspiration. For a state whose nearly 3/4th population lives in rural area, it is challenging to provide basic facilities and creating livelihood activities. The various issues in the hand are-----

1. The Pahar (Hills) v/s Maidan (Plains) issue, which includes the issues of alienation and the asymmetrical development in the hills vis-a vis plains.
2. The interrupted and uncontrolled mining, construction and dam activities in the delicate mountains and the increasing humanitarian intervention in the ecological system.
3. The issues of displacement of people due to ambitious power projects.

In the current political climate the issues of generating resources has become a contention leading to loopsided developmental activities which as we have seen culminated in a historical deluge of June 16/2013. In spite of its mammoth destruction the flood has made it clear that the state can't exploit the natural resources and engage in rampant development activities at will, as it can lead to immense destruction of un-proportionate nature.

It has been said that while all development is change, all change is not necessarily development. From a 'money order economy', the economy of Uttarakhand has followed a path of higher economic growth since its formation but its growth process has been limited to the plain districts only. How could the state evolve a policy and a developmental approach that could meet the aspirations of people without causing grave damage to the existing environmental system?

A separate Hill Development Department was created in 1973-74 to formulate Five year plans for Uttarakhand region and to ensure integrated decision making and effective implementation of its developmental plans. The provision of special financial assistance was also granted by the central government which was in addition to the funds provided by the State government under its development plan. The main task of this department is to investigate, identify the potential areas of development, and initiate a package of development approach which may be suitable for the area, to implement the programme and timely evaluate and monitor the launched programmes to make them more successful in the interest of the development of Uttarakhand. The high priority areas were suggested which have immense potential for development, these include Horticulture, diversification of Agriculture, development of tourism, animal husbandry, minor irrigation, forestry, soil conservation, development of locale resource based industries, augmenting the availability of various infrastructural facilities like roads, power, marketing and credit institutions and

fulfillment of basic needs and amenities of life like drinking water, elementary education and health facilities (Draft five year plan 1978-83)^{viii}.

Developmental politics:

The rampant construction of roads in order to facilitate the connectivity in the delicate mountains has opened the Pandora box. Roads are considered to be the “lifeline” as they connect the distant hilly areas to the main cities of Uttarakhand and are the only ways through which the goods and essential commodities reach the hills. Development of basic infrastructure such as construction of roads leads to environmental problems such as slope instability. The Tenth Plan has noted a number of problems associated with the construction of road network in the hills:

- Deforestation along the road network and the practice of substitute plantation elsewhere •
- Blasting vibrations • Hill cutting, exposing planes of weakness followed by toe erosion •
- Alteration of seepage line by hill cutting • Alteration of hill slope gradient of cutting • Mass scale construction of houses, sewerage systems, structures on both sides of the road network •
- Side casting or dumping of excavated material downhill • Vibrations caused by heavy vehicles on the road • Undermining caused by mining and tunneling • Blockade of natural drainage systems by logs, boulders and gully formation, especially at narrow culverts • Rapid rate of gully formation down slope of the culverts (in view of concentrated flow resulting from additional flow from road side drains being discharged into the existing gully) • Road side cutting on valley side (especially on outward sloping roads) by surface runoff • Absence of proper road side drains at locations.

Another issue is the hydroelectric power generation. The vision of making Uttarakhand an “Urja Pradesh”(Energy State) has inspired the state of Uttarakhand to embark upon an ambitious plan of having more than 180 big and small hydroelectric projects that are expected to generate more than 21,200 MW of electricity. Why such large number of dams are being constructed in this small state having an area only 53,483sq km is worth noticing. Eminent geologist K S Valdiya elucidates three factors contributing to this: i) the narrowness of the valleys of Uttarakhand . ii) being Himalayan rivers there is always adequate water supply in the rivers. iii) head of water requisite for turning turbines of generators.^{ix}

Several questions come to forefront when the issue of stalling any power project hovers round. i) Are the projects being stalled are multipurpose in nature i.e used for irrigation purpose, fisheries development and supply of drinking water or are confined only to produce electricity. ii) the villages, the local populace that gets affected, do they get properly rehabilitated and get adequate compensation. iii) why such large dams in this seismically sensitive zone, when we have several examples of the success of small scale dams in 'environmentally sound and economically rewarding manner'^x. China way back in 1985 built nearly 80,000 small power projects that produced around 8000MW electricity of the total 20,000 MW generated. These are not more than 10-30 m high, so there was no question of human migration from their ancestral land to a new place. Though the cost of generating power doubles in case of small projects vis a vis large power projects but considering the loss of natural resources, agricultural land, forest area, rehabilitation and relocation of the displaced people, these all could be compensated.

The development process is continues function, but how could it be scientifically and ecologically viable so that the diversity of our naturally embellished state could be saved is the point of concern.

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End notes:

ⁱRichard Grove and Vinita Damodaran: Imperialism, Intellectual Networks, and Environmental Change: Origins and Evolution of Global Environmental History, 1676-2000: Part I EPW, Vol. 41, No. 41 (Oct. 14-20, 2006), pp. 4345-4354

ⁱⁱ R.guha and J.martinez-Alier: Varieties of Environmentalism:Essays North and South;o.u.p,delhi,1998

ⁱⁱⁱ ibid

^{iv} Alienation here be seen as what Karl Marx pointed in his theory of Alienation. Alienation from the production process, from community, from nature,from self

^v Ramachandra Guha: The Unquiet Woods, O.U.P,1989

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^x ibid