

Ideas of Nationalist Historians about Forest and Relations with Tribes in the Early Colonial rule - A Study

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Introduction

Forest, one of the Major natural resources, not only maintains environmental stability but plays a vital role in preserving ecological balances. Forests provide raw material for a wide range of industries, supply fuel for cooking, timber for shelter, fodder for the livestock and wood for making agricultural implements besides yielding fruits and roots for sustenance. In pre-historic days, the region was mostly a forest clad area. As years passed, when civilization dawned, lands were brought under cultivation. As a result, the boundaries of the forest were gradually relegated to the hills and mountains. In the subsequent periods, the rulers did not pay attention to the conservation of forests. Therefore, its forests were open to all and hence the people exploited forests freely for fodder, firewood and timber. Thus, the reckless felling of trees for many years resulted in the destruction of forests. Yet, in the pre-British period, the forest seemed to be adequate to meet the requirements of the dependable economy of the people.

Objectives:

1. To identify ideas of nationalist historian about forest people
2. To identify nature of Indian forest
3. To identify early British relations with forest tribes

Development of conservation ideas and early environmental concern was dependent on the diffusion of desiccation concepts, on the formation of a desiccations discourse linking deforestation to rainfall reduction. Notion of species rarity, extinction and endemism also played a significant role although secondary part in early environmentalism. The linking of the deforestation causes for changing of climate and rainfall reduction. Besides, famines which accrued in India during 1830's also led to a re- examination of evidence of deforestation-rainfall links in the report of the Famine Commission of 1880. The fear of these consequences forced the colonial rule to comply with the protection of the Forest. The result was a series of measures by the colonial state for conservation of forest as well as soil, establishment of Indian Forest Department in 1865. These measures need to be studied thoroughly. Further, in Assam too, a Forest Department was established later. Current preoccupation with global environmental crisis about pollution, climate change and resource overuse are now the problem of every man and every woman and of all the states. It may be because of the growing environmental concerns that led other disciplines of knowledge as well to relates to their studies with the changing environment. Environmental history leads the subject closer to disciplines like economics, anthropology, art, religion literature and geography. But one of the doubted attractions of environmental history is its ability to draw upon the insights and techniques of several disciplines and then to

combine them in novel, provocative and constructive ways. (David Arnold, and Ramchandra Guha 1995). Until recently physical scientists, engineers, or administrators with little or no training in the social sciences have been the ones who studied or sought solutions to the problems relating to the environment changes. However, because of increasing and aggravating environmental problems faced by the country and the world at large, academicians have turn back to study the role played by British Forest Policy in the long drawn-out process of environmental degradation. In fact, British forest policy appears to be one of their most subtle and ingenious imperial creations. Changes in civilization and culture have through time resulted in both intentional and unintentional modification of the global environment of which forest the most important component. (Carole Cumley).

India remained for a long time until its recent ecological acknowledgement as being one of the twenty "hotspots" of the world, because of its very rich biodiversity. There is an extremely high rate of organic evolution together with a high rate of endemism and endangerment. It is also where large numbers of primitive flowering plant families are found and general totally new to science have been discovered also a mega-evolutionary centre of diversity of plants and animals and is particularly rich in agro-biodiversity and harbours ecosystem people, who depend on local flora and fauna for their sustenance. Rich biological diversity's always associated with varied and rich social and cultural diversities. These two diversities are mutually supportive and reinforcing. Further, this study aims at achieving a meaningful understanding of the relationship between people and environment and between the environment and the development. Human history has been a story of prudence and profligacy and man's destructive role as far as his relation with the environment is concerned is quite evident today. (Madhav Gadgil, and Ramchandra Guha 1993).

HISTORICAL PERCEPTION:

When we study human history under the framework, four distinct moods of resources can be identified; gathering (including shifting cultivation) nomadic pastoralist, settled cultivation, industrial mode of resource utilization. (Madhav Gadgil and Ramchandra Guha, .p.12.) In assessing the ecological impact of different modes, one is struck by two paradoxes, which is illustrated with respect to use of forest. Spatially, hunter-gatherers lives in interior Places of forest; agriculturists live in adjacent to the within striking distance of the forest, and urban- industrial men live far away from the forest. Paradoxically, the more the spatial separation from the forest, the greater the impact on its ecology, and the further removed the actors from the consequences of this impact. The same conditions operates with regard to other resources, such as water, second, the faster the development of formal, scientific knowledge about the composition and functioning of forest types, the faster the rate of deforestations. One of the most important reasons here is undeniably higher levels of economic activity, but another thoughtless obvious factor is the idiom of resource use itself. (ibid)

THE NATIONALIST SCHOOL

The nationalist school of history primarily argues that the ecological and environmental degradation of India are a direct outcome of exploitative colonial policies. It argues that colonial policies were motivated by concerns such as industrial augmentation, expansion of agricultural land and attainment of sleepers for railways. Focusing exclusively on the causality of ecological disorder, this school relies on a 'cause-effect' model of analysis.

One of the first works to examine the impact of colonial policies on the environment was Whitcombe's study on irrigation. Whitcombe examines how irrigation investments and Reservoir construction activities of the Colonial Government led to ecological degradation, salinity and malaria in the Sind and Ganges basins of north India. (Whitcombe, Elizabeth, 1995) Likewise, Mann's detailed study on the agricultural

transformation of the Ganga-Jamuna Doab region during the early 19th century focuses on the salinity and huge destruction of woodlands due to 'the effects of colonial policy'.(Mann, Michael, 1999) He argues that policies forced villagers to convert more than 70 per cent of forests into agricultural land to pay revenue. This led to adverse natural impacts such as high levels of moisture reduction in the air and spread of saliferous soil by the sand carrying winds, and increased salinity levels as a result of water logging in agricultural fields. Subsequently, devastating famine and drought hit these places. This causes to the diseases like malaria because of malnutrition. Industrialization causes for villagers were forced to shift production from food to cash crops, leading to malnutrition. Moreover, they sold agricultural lands to meet tax requirements.

Pandian's study on agrarian transformation in southern India during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, suggests that the activities of the colonial state such as construction of dams (which was meant to expand agricultural land) and the reservation of forests permanently altered the pre-existing relationship between forest resources and peasant communities. (Pandia, 1990) This forced peasant communities to depend on the market to buy inputs and sell agricultural output. He demonstrates that commercialization of agriculture destroyed the earlier agrarian sector stability in the region. Further, he argues that the central concern of colonial policies was to augment revenue. Likewise, Satya shows that the colonial regime severely disturbed the equilibrium between forests, common grazing lands, and agriculture in the Maharashtra region of central India. (Satya, Laxman 2004) As a result, it damaged the local ecology, made human life more vulnerable and resulted in epidemics.

A number of studies followed with the nationalist school of environmental history deals with deforestation. Rangarajan and Guha show that during the 19th Century first part the British indiscriminately cut down forest trees for laying roads, ship building and railway sleepers. Subsequently, the British administrative policy of sourcing for the forest products for wood became more systematic. (Guhan, Ramachandra 1989) Forest woods were classified into four categories, namely superior, auxiliary, accessory, inferior and worthless species, based on quality. The superior quality woods were axed for commercial purposes by the colonial state. Further, Rangarajan also argues that while forest-dwellers were hunting animals merely for food and survival, colonial agents hunted for leisure, recklessly killing unprecedented numbers of animals. (Rangarajan, Mahesh 2001).

Mann's study focuses on the use of famine for profit making by the colonizer in the region of Chambal-Jamna in north India, where a food for work scheme (felling and plantations) was implemented to counter famine in the 1890s. The scheme was used as an instrument to control famine-hit people, forcing them to get involved in other criminal activities.(Mann, Michael, 1998) Furthermore, the episteme of 'scientific conservation' was strategically deployed to enhance the colonial state's control.

Another important theme foregrounded by the nationalist school is the restrictions placed by the British on tribals and peasants vis-à-vis natural resource use. Gadgil and Guha examine how 'eco-system people' (who make use of nature for their survival by only collecting those resources in their vicinity) have been exploited by the 'omnivores' (who can get natural resources from wherever they want, using their political and economic clout). Socio-ecological classes are, therefore, central to analysing natural resource exploitation.(Gadgil and madhav and RamamchandraGuha 1995) Agarwal analyses how the domination of man in local conservation institutions restricted the access of subaltern groups to natural resources and excluded women from administering common property resources.(Agarwal, Bina 2004) Saravanan's work examines how tribals were alienated from cultivable forest land during the colonial and post-colonial periods in Salem district of the Madras Presidency.(Saravanan, Velayutham 2001)

Uprisings of forest dwellers against the colonial regime are documented by Saldanha. Uprisings occurred in varied forms when forest dwellers were not allowed into forests land to access forest resources.(Saldanha,

IndraMunshi 1998) Similarly, Guha examines collective resistance and different forms of protest of forest communities in British Kumaon.(Guha, Ramachandra 1989)

The nationalist school blames the colonial regime for environmental degradation in India. On the other hand, it celebrates pre-British environmental practices of forest-dwellers and peasants as based on a symbiotic and nonexploitative relationship between men and nature. The nationalist school also claims that the different streams of Indian religious thought were environmentally sensitive. (Gadgil, Madhav and Ramachandra Guha, 1993) At one level, they argue that, during the pre-colonial period, forest dwellers, cattle grazers and peasants used natural resources primarily for their own survival without causing harm to the local environment. At another level, they argue that Indic religions such as Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism never endorsed wanton destruction of nature. In contrast, they argue that Christianity and Islam as religious thoughts and praxis have led to large-scale and indiscriminate destruction of the Indian environment. Some pigments of environmentalism are applied in the canvas of environmental history for romanticizing Indian religious traditions. Gandhian politics (Arnold, David and Ramachandra Guha 1995) is a case in point. For instance Arnold and Guha note, 'Gandhi's environmentalism has its roots in a deep antipathy to urban civilization and a belief in self-sufficiency, in self-abnegation and denial rather than useful consumption.'(Ibid)

In environmental history, the commoditisation of forests is largely analysed within the purview of forest laws. Ravi Rajan's primary concern is to reveal the origin and politics of forest laws and show how shifting cultivation, soil erosion, forest protection and development of forests were used as instruments to execute forest management, to collect revenue from people and to bring physical areas under colonial control. Ideas pertaining to forest management were transplanted from Africa and put into practice by the colonial state in the British Raj.(Rajan S. Ravi 1998)

The nationalist school while adding significantly to our understanding of the environmental history of India has a number of analytical problems. First and foremost, this literature gives centrality to colonialism. By and large, it views environmental change as mono-causal. As a result, even while the literature addresses environmental concerns and changes, for the most part, it turns out to be a history of colonialism. Second, the views and voices of the environmental subjects are to a large degree silenced; the historians of the nationalist school speak for them instead of allowing the environmental subjects to speak out. If at all the environmental subjects figure in this literature, they figure only in terms of responses to the oppression of colonialism. Their subjectivity is thus treated as though defined only in relation to the colonial regime and its exploitative practices. Third, being nationalist in orientation, it produces an environmental golden age out of the pre-colonial past and uncritically celebrates Indic religious thought and practices.

RELATIONS BETWEEN TRIBES AND GOVERNMENT

In historical age the relation between tribes and governments were independent and they lived according to their own Rules customs and traditions. When the Generations were passed away, Indian sub-continent was witnessed heavy populated and the population was started to cultivate the interior places of the Forest regions its causes de-forestation as well as the societies were depend upon the Forest resources. From ancient to medieval periods the governments were extract resources of forest. At times of the great of Hindu culture they never concentrated to organized attempts to draw aboriginal groups into the orbit of caste society. In modern times the missionary activity was introduced by British to rethink of Hindu society. The existed social philosophy based on the idea of the permanence and inevitability of caste distinctions saw nothing incongruous in the persistence of primitive life-styles on the periphery of sophisticated civilizations. In such regions, cultural distinctions were blurred, and tribal communities became gradually absorbed into the caste system, were probably at one time independent tribes, and in their physical characteristics they still resemble neighbouring tribal groups which have remained outside the caste system. Under British rule, a new situation arose. The British policy of a centralized administration causes for occupation of interior areas

of Indian land over areas which had previously lain outside the effective control of native rulers and though most, basically Colonial government they never had any intention to interfere in Tribal life, but they had a intention of Effective administration in the name of maintaining law and order in those interior areas came under the control of new rule, this was exposed the aboriginals to pressure of British administration in areas which had previously been virtually un-administered, and hence unsafe for outsiders who did not enjoy the confidence and goodwill of the aboriginal inhabitants this was become an opportunity to traders and moneylenders to establish themselves under the protection of the British administration. Some protected people who succeeded in acquiring large tracts of the aboriginals' land. The exploitation of the aboriginals' which in many parts of India began as early as the middle of the Nineteenth century and continued upto the Twentieth century, occurred despite that the fact many British officials sympathized with the tribesmen and some of the British Civil servants. Then they started to change the tribal society towards the Civilized, and implemented much legislation and executed forest Acts, Yet, the recommendations for reforms contained in numerous reports were seldom implemented in full, and even where they were incorporated in legislation they did not always prove effective.

Some provinces of British India where a policy of non-interference and protection enabled the tribal populations to practice their own way of life, some regions of Northeast India where earlier British administration was not stretched out the place of Brahmaputra Valley in the shape of an enormous tribes such as Nagas, Mishmis, Adis, Miris, Apa Tanis, and Nishis were the inhabitants of a vast region of rugged mountains and narrow valleys into which above tribes settled in the plains of Assam had never penetrated. In such conditions aboriginals had relations with outside their society in the name of Barter trade but most of the hill people never set foot in the Brahmaputra Valley. From 1860s to the first decades of the 20th century the British extended their administrative control over part of the hill regions, but they never encourage the entry of plainsmen, a system of administration which allowed the hillmen to run their affairs along traditional lines. The system of British administration was not allowed any plains men to purchase the land in hills, and the indigenous system of land tenure was retained virtually unchanged. British policy was protected the hill people from exploitation and land alienation.

The system of exploitation was familiar in some places of Telangana region which was suffered at the hands of land grabbers and land lots money landers, many local tribal groups and as well as local people were raised against their oppressors in outburst, many organized groups were suppressed these rebellions, to injustices as severe as those suffered by Gonds, Kolams, Koyas, and Reddis, massacre would have been the order of the day most of the tribes of the south India are on the whole so gentle and inoffensive, but sometimes that extreme provocation is necessary before they take the law into their own hands, rebellions of tribesmen against the authority of the government are among the most tragic conflicts between ruler and ruled. The struggle between aboriginals and Governments become the illiterate verses uninformed and the unorganized power verses organized power of a sophisticated system both sides. They may have loss but it is always causes huge loss upon the Tribals. To the previous risings of the tribes whose aims were basically political, but to the rebellions of primitive aboriginal tribes of Peninsular India got political independence all were ruined by British administration, for example Santals in Bihar, Bhil rebellion in Khandesh, and the Rampa Rebellion in the East Godavari District of (Andhra Pradesh) madras presidency. All these uprisings were defensive movements crushed out by British, Themajot revolt of tribes in 19th century Santal Rebellion of 1855–56, which only majorly concerned, but E. G. Mann, writing in 1867,[1] mann listed also a number of specific reasons as having caused the Santals to rise against an inefficient government in dealing with primitive tribes. the grasping and aggressive manner of merchants and moneylenders in their transactions with the Santals, the misery caused by the religious converts and system of allowing personal and hereditary bondage for debt, the heavy corruption and extortion of the police in aiding and the impossibility of the Santals obtaining redress from the courts. The Santals' uprising is one of the greatest rebellions in the annals of tribal India; all were very similar to the circumstances which led to outbreaks of violence in other tribal areas of Indian subcontinent. A revolt which occurred in an area part of modern Andhra Pradesh involved

the Hill (konda) Reddis, a tribe uprising occurred in 1879 and is known as Rampa Revolt, at the time of the succession of the Northern Circars by the Nizam to the East India Company, the Rampa area was in the possession of a ruler alternatively styled zamindar, mansabdar, raja. That feudal lord was not a Reddi, he appears to have leased his villages to certain subordinate hill chiefs known as mansabdar, and from these he received an annual income of Rs 8,750 per annum, mansabdar was succeeded by his daughter after that subsequently by an illegitimate son. The latter's oppressive rule led to several minor uprisings, but the last straw was excise regulation forbidding the drawing of palm wine for domestic purposes and leasing the toddy revenue to contractors entitled to collect taxes at their own wish. Their illegal extortions and oppressiveness of a Brutal police were the main causes of the Rampa Revolt in the year of 1879. The government act of the new law promulgated in Indian society which was another grievance of the Tribes.

The rebellion started 1879 in the month of March, the tribes committed for attack on police station in Chodavaram and it spread over the surrounding region of Andhra. Before the Revolution the Madras provincial government was restricted the tribes not to cultivate of podu, had been virtually unrestricted and increased the Tax on land and Revenue this become burden on the Peasant and as well as on Tribal communities. Because above reasons the Rampa rebellions broke out the Revolution against the British Rule, this Revolution was spread 5000 thousand miles of surrounding areas which included in Madras, Nizam Provinces. Rebels are adopted guerrilla war strategies against the British force. Finally the British government gain control over the Tribals in Andhra region and they adapted a Government act the name is agency Tracts interest and land Transfer act in 1917, this Act the Government also implemented in other Provinces of the British Rule. This rule basically to protect the Tribes from Non-Tribal groups. "1. interest on any debt or liability shall not as against a member of a hill-tribe be allowed or decreed at a higher rate than 24% per annum nor shall any compound interest or any collateral advantage be allowed against him; 2) the total interest allowed or decreed on any debt or liability as against a member of a hill-tribe shall not exceed the principal amount." According to this act is restricting the transfer of land from Tribal to Non-tribal in this act given some provisions to the tribes. The section given the following benefits. 1) Land Transfer is applicable to the Tribal to tribal outside Non-tribes were restricted for land transfer or land Encroachment in Tribal areas 2) Where a transfer of property is made in contravention of sub-section (1) the Agent may on application by anyone interested decree ejectment against any person in possession of the property claiming under the transfer it may restore it to the transferor or his heirs. Such types of sections of the Act of 1917 promulgated, fully implemented, have put a stop to all alienation of tribal land, and it is a sobering thought

Conclusion

In that most interesting of books " The Naturalist on the Amazon " the author, Mr. Bates, makes the remark that no country can make any progress in civilisation so long as it is covered with forests, and this statement needs no proof. Until the ground is cleared, and light and air are admitted, no crops can be raised, and life stagnates in the dense shade, while the people that live in the depths of the forest, as in " darkest Africa," the Andaman Islands and Brazil itself are debased and ignorant. Thus, the first step in improving a country is to clear away its forests, and thus, although a great part of the surface of the globe was at one time covered with forests, by far the greater portion of them has been cut down. In fact they have been, treated as one writer says "as an enemy to be extirpated, rather than a friend to be encouraged." But a reaction has now set in. It is generally admitted that forests have their uses and cannot be dispensed with, a fact which is being brought more prominently into notice year by year.

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