POVERTY ERADICATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract- The paper aims to highlight the problems in achieving the goal of sustainable development in India as the one of the major cause of environmental degradation is poverty. This can be proved from the fact that whereas the aspect of right to life and liberty is interpreted in the west by the quality of air and water among other things, for the rest of the world, the very concept of right to life and liberty is related to the issue of the survival of large sections of population. The Indian environmental history is woven more intricately into social, agrarian, and cultural history. The relation between the government over management of natural resources and the spread of environmental awareness has changed tremendously over the years as people are now becoming more and more aware of the conditions of environment and the causes of its deterioration.

Keywords: poverty, sustainable development, environmental degradation, development

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Introduction

The paper aims to highlight the problems in achieving the goal of sustainable development in India as poverty is perceived as one of the major cause of environmental degradation. This can be proved from the fact that whereas the aspect of right to life and liberty is interpreted in the west by the quality of air and water among other things, for the rest of the world, the very concept of right to life and liberty is related to the issue of the survival of large sections of population. The Indian environmental history is woven more intricately into social, agrarian, and cultural narrative of the country. But during the colonial period, there was a sharp transformation in agriculture and its potential relation to forests, farms and pastures, and altered patterns of political control of land (Sivaramakrishnan, 2008). Prior to independence the major concern of the colonial powers was mostly the extraction of forest resources for commercial purposes that resulted in a negative impact on both the environment and tribal population. Their main aim was not to conserve the natural resources of the colonial countries but to exploit them for their own commercial purposes. Although the British government in 1927 adopted the forest bill, it was not to conserve or protect the forest or environment but to extract the resources by controlling the geographical area.

After independence, the ecological considerations took firmly a back seat for promoting economic and social development. Since the 1980s India has pursued a pro-business growth strategy and a piecemeal process of liberalization. It was against the model adopted by India immediately after independence which aimed to acquire self-sufficiency and uplift the Indian economy by building state-owned industries, commonly called Import-Substitution-Industrialization model. By the 1980s this model had come under sharp attack with the rise of social movements against state-led development induced displacement.

In India, there have been both periods of convergence, especially around issues of sustainable development, participation and decentralization as well as periods of divergence, in particular the discontentment with community-based approaches to conservation and the prioritization of poverty over environment, during the 1990s and 2000s (Roe, 2008). The relation between the government over management of natural resources and the spread of environmental awareness has changed tremendously over the years as people are now becoming more and more aware of

the conditions of environment and the causes of its deterioration. But still there is a need to reach many as this awareness about the environment is seen as mostly an urban phenomenon. There is still a need to connect to the masses at large. Even the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals gives utmost priority to poverty eradiation by ensuring social protection, enhancing access to basic services, and building resilience against the impacts of natural disasters which can cause severe damage to people's resources and livelihoods (UN SDG, 2015). One of the target areas till 2030 talks about build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate- related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters.

India's environmental problems have acquired a global significance because of the rapid population growth, aggressive speed of urbanization and lack of infrastructure, which consequently puts tremendous pressure on natural resources. The developmental projects are generally taken up for the generation of income, power, employment, and in general, improvement of the living standards of people. But on the contrary, if local communities get uprooted from their traditional places are not rehabilitated properly, it raises the question of what kind of development is taking place and for whose development the state is pursuing its policies. The unforeseen environmental consequences resulting from modern planning are creating consequences which are detrimental to the entire society because not every aspect of modern planned development is planned. In order to recognize the discontent and alienation that may result from resettlement and rehabilitation, one needs to take into account the forced eviction, the loss of a traditional social system, and the fundamental changes where an agricultural economy is replaced by changes in land use due to development projects.

Due to many developmental projects, a lot of displacement, rehabilitation and resettlement activities have been taking place both by the government as well as the agency responsible for displacement of the local population. It has also raised a lot of issues which, many a times, leads to confrontation between them. Usually, rehabilitation and resettlement is done on the land where no prior survey of social, ecological and physical characteristics is done with regard to factors like land and water use, socio-economic patterns etc. It has been argued that rehabilitation measures should include compensation for losses for land, cash and other forms, and assistance

to start a new life in terms of opportunities, training, credit and community services for schooling and healthcare etc. It is evident now that rehabilitation, resettlement, relocation and compensation have to be clearly defined and made strictly operative by the law. Their implementation must also be worked out with serious attention and sufficient care, for such policies also often proves ineffective on the ground given particular circumstances. Thus, the policy of providing job per family to those displaced by industrial project have been selectively applied and is not proving useful as most of the ousters tend to be unskilled and end up with the lowest paying and temporary jobs.

This kind of displacement without any proper means of rehabilitation and resettlement, in turn, also leads to the aspect of deskilling of the labour. The term deskilling implies the process by which the skilled labour is eliminated from the economic ladder either by snatching away his/ her means of livelihood or by imposing the way of life which a person is not used to. This issue has been put forth in the context of capitalism numerous times wherein it is argued that the capitalism continues to degrade and deskill human labour. The skills of a labour which are acquired and mastered by him over the period of time are taken away in the process of displacement and rehabilitation process. Deskilled individual may take different mechanisms to deal with the situation. Therefore, s/he is being denied to lead a decent life which s/he had been leading prior to the process of development as s/he has to work in low skilled job compared to the previous job. This also leads to the issue of forced migration as with inadequate means of livelihood, a person is forced to migrate to the urban areas for searching for the source of income. To access the labour market, a person has to re-educate himself to fit in with the exiting labor market demand. This itself is a challenging task as person who was previously skilled in one area prior to his displacement might not get a hold of another skill even after putting in hard work. As a result, a large number of migrants remain unemployed, which again leads to increase in poverty as deskilling leads to downward mobility. The re-education which is below the previous skill level causes disempowerment in terms of choice a person has to make as it is guided by the lack of means of survival.

The social impacts of the recent thrust towards a greater market-driven economic process point to a reality that as the national and global economies penetrate deeper into the interior areas of

the country, the lives, livelihoods and lifestyles of those who critically depend on the natural resource base will continue to be seriously threatened (Roe, 2008). So, the active intervention of the government is greatly needed for the welfare of the people in a country like India. Yet, at the same time we can see the opposite trend of government agencies working in nexus with the private players in the name of development, which is working against the people especially the economically and socially weaker sections of the society. Thus, it is entirely not surprising that people are losing faith in the very government that they have elected time and again, which is supposed to be working for their welfare but is found supporting the unjust demands of private players for petty gains. This dissatisfaction and unrest is leading to what we can term as people's movements. If the government which is supposed to be working for the people fail to not only protect the interests of the people but collaborate with private capital to threaten their basic needs, then the question naturally arises as to whose interests guide the logic of governance. If, moreover, their interests time and again prove to belong to a few, served at the cost of many who are poor and powerless, it dangerously weakens the very foundation of democracy and the legitimacy of development.

To Conclude

India's environmental problems have acquired a global significance because of the rapid population growth, aggressive speed of urbanization and lack of infrastructure, which consequently puts tremendous pressure on natural resources.

The current patterns of economic development which are constantly invoked to justify the forced eviction of people all over the country are themselves incompatible with the goals of creating wider conditions of equity and social security (Kothari, 1996). The people who would be eventually affected by the project should be made a part of the whole process and they should also be given adequate support facilities that would permit communities to manage their resettlement in an open and transparent manner. It should also be taken into consideration that the process of resettlement takes place with the least possible social, economic and environmental disruption. The capacities of governments and humanitarian agencies to assist affected people are stretched to the limit. Assistance is also not fair and just as it is injected into resource-poor settings where powerful people have disproportionate control over resources. It

has been usually observed that the assistance and compensatory system is opaque and somewhat closed, where lodging complaints is difficult, and few have even a basic understanding of the whole process and practically no idea where to go for grievance redressal. Land for land should be provided as a rule while also offering the choice of skill upgradation and permanent absorption in the projects that are displacing them. In other words, the need is for creating conditions where if displacement is inevitable, resettlement can become a real opportunity, a mandate for reconstructing production systems, raising standards of living, restoring community and kinship relations and minimizing the conflict with the host community (Kothari, 1996).

When a person does not have sufficient means of livelihood to fend for himself and his family, the issue of protection and preservation of environment is the least we can expect. But at the same time, it is also a fact that traditional ways of living includes protecting the nature which also act as the main source of livelihood of the local people. Ironically, the consequences of environmental degradation are usually severe on the people who are least involved with the degradation of the environment. On the whole, although the issue has gained more importance in today's grave scenario, environment conservation is still a neglected sector, with excessive emphasis on 'growth' in terms of numbers, without focusing on 'development' in terms of quality and indeed, equality.

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