



Research Paper

Environmentalism and environmental governance in Kerala

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I. Introduction

Environmentalism became a debate in Kerala during 1970's when there was a wider level of political articulations on the environmental question of Silent Valley project. It paved the way for the clash between state and capital on the environmental question in Kerala. Silent Valley project became the meeting point of the state interest and the civil society interest.

The state interest in environmental question usually focuses on developmental needs and the state is always concerned about market demands. Very often, Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) advocates ecological destruction for the market demands. For instance, KSEB can produce electricity at a cheaper cost from hydro-electric projects; however, all the sources of hydro-electric projects are in ecologically-sensitive Western Ghats regions. Most of the time, construction of new dams in the ecologically sensitive Western Ghats regions creates environmental debates in Kerala.

Environmental awareness in Kerala society originated during 1960's and 70's through the well-accepted writers, who paved the way for the 'environmental idealism' in Kerala society. This new outlook characterised environmental question in Kerala Civil society. Silent Valley movement provided a space for Kerala Civil society to critique, debate and dialogue about the direction of the environment and development question in Kerala. It created a public sphere as a popular alternative to well-established political parties in Kerala. These civil society interactions conceived a new environmental politics in Kerala. It was the starting point of civil society and state interaction in Kerala, where development and environment became the pivotal point of conflict and interactions.

Through environmentalist who stood for conservation activities, the idea of environment consciousness became deep rooted in Kerala society. This consciousness became counter-hegemonic against governmental policies on the environment. Most of the policies are related to power generation in ecologically-sensitive areas of the Western Ghats. These actors in the environmental question also influenced other stakeholders in the environmental activism. Political parties, religious and various other environmental organisations formed their views by the principles of the environmental idealism and Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP)¹ positions.

Environment consciousness promoted by the environmental idealist positions and KSSP paved the way for Peringome Anti-nuclear struggle, Anti-Endosulfan Movement, Athirapally dam issue, Save Chaliyar movement, Kathikodam River pollution, thereby accelerating new environmental politics in Kerala. This wider environmental consciousness subsequently altered the state decision-making process. These civil society organizations acquired the ability to act as the counter-hegemonic force against the state decision. Environmental idealist had bargaining power in the decision-making process but it gradually declined because of the various interests originated in the society.

The concept of 'environmental idealism' had been hegemony over the environmental question in Kerala civil society. Market mechanism and environmental activism create competing positions between capitalism and environmental conservation in Kerala society. The new developmental paradigm of understanding based on market demands of the state transformed cultural and environmental ideals. Environmental idealism proposed by the writers and intellectuals also faced criticism or dissent voice against their principles. Market vs.

¹ Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad is a People's Science Movement of Kerala, India. Founded in 1962. It started its works at the science society interface with about 40 members as an organisation of science writers in Malayalam.

Environmental idealism paved the way for the decline of 'environmental idealism' in Kerala. It transformed the basic understanding of the environment in the society. New work culture and wealth generation from Gulf remittances created a new way of lifestyle and accelerated the 'consumerism' in Kerala.

The new market mechanism in Kerala formed new conflicting positions in the environmental question. The socio-economic-political complexities of the environmental question in Kerala could be understood through the conceptual framework of political ecology. The pressure, or, focus on development and question of sustainable development led to putting aside the environmental idealist positions. These environmental values are criticised and denied from the market perspective because of the unrealistic nature of environmental positions taken by the 'environment idealist.' These discussions led to the formation of alternative environmental positions in Kerala.

The market- driven, new consumerism got momentum in environmental thinking, and it led to unlimited exploitation of the natural resources in the state. Environmentalism and conservation debates were side lined as 'environmental fundamentalism.' During the 1990's, excessive consumerism forced the state to formulate policies rendering to the popular needs. This transformed the state positions to hawkish on environmental question satisfying market demands.

Kerala environmentalism is a mixed one - neither rural nor urban. A new environmental consciousness was formed by developmental concerns rather than the conservation of the environment. The new model of developmental understanding got momentum in environmental debates and was discussed in Kerala public sphere. These environmental questions do not have an urban, rural division. The new environmentalism has been induced beyond the rural-urban divide, which seems to be against the Amita Baviskar's ideology of 'bourgeois environmentalism.'

Political right positions of Neo-Malthusian narratives of political ecology became insignificant in the Kerala spectrum. The Neo-Malthusian argument is that overpopulation is the reason for the ecological degradation, however, in Kerala's context, it was a paradox. In the case of Kerala, ecological degradation happened because of the market force interaction and conflicting positions between various power centers in the state.

The new environmental consciousness got such a large acceptance in the society that it altered the civil society positions of environmentalism. The changing position of environmentalism formed contestation within the civil society. The other institutions, like religious and caste organisation act according to the market demands. These organisations implicitly argue that market demands are the peoples demand. This discourse led to the contestation of various environmental interests in Kerala.

This new environmental consciousness created a new form of environmental modernity in Kerala in the absence of industrialization and modernization. This new environmental modernity had reservations on an environmental problem from different angles. It addressed the basic life style needs of the society and the interest of the larger middle-class society. This transformation slowly had a negative impact on the society. It led to excessive exploitation of natural resources.

The public spheres on environmentalism in Kerala always have contestation with an old and new form of environmentalism. Institutions like religious organisations interpret the question of environmentalism in a completely different way as that written in holy texts. Religious organisations accept market demands and argue for the 'believers needs.' Religion itself addresses the concerns and needs of the believer. These transformations led to a wider impact on Kerala society resulted in a conflict of interest within the civil society and also resulted in change of policies and decision making process.

Popular Environment movements in Kerala

Silent valley movement and several movements in Kerala facilitated a space for progressive public sphere within the Kerala civil society. This space articulated various issues concerned on progressive social change in Kerala. Civil Society in Kerala evolved through oppositional, counter hegemonic, trust based on normative need to realize.

Silent Valley movement in Kerala

Silent Valley movement started when the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB) decided to construct a hydroelectric project in Silent Valley forest area in Palakkad District, which is a well-known ecological sensitive area and hotspot. The project was sanctioned by Planning Commission in 1973 at a 24.88 Crores. Subsequently this project was modified in 1976 and 1979 (Prasad, 2004).

Following the footsteps of UN Conference on the human environment held in Stockholm on 1972, Government of India established the National Committee on environmental planning and coordination (NCEPC), which propose a task force under the chairmanship of Zafaruthehally to study the ecological problems in Western Ghats region including the Silent Valley Forest. The taskforce propose abandment of the hydro power project and declared a biosphere reserve. This taskforce suggested some safeguards in case the project could not be abandoned for any reasons, NCEPC itself expressed the view that the safeguards would not be able to preserve the biosphere in Silent valley region (Korakandy, 2000).

Meanwhile the Congress led Kerala Government made the chief Ministership of A.K Antony opted for the safeguards measures, the Kerala State Assembly unanimously gave consent to go ahead with the project. In 1978 April Prime Minister Moaraji Desai under Janatha Coalition accorded approval of the project subject to the enactment of necessary safeguards. This creates upsurge in Kerala civil society, Kerala Sastra Parishad (KSSP) strongly opposed this project, Silent Valley Samrakshna Samithi, Kerala natural History society, The Bombay Natural historical society and Indian Science Congress, strongly urged the government to abandon the project on ecological grounds. These organisations accelerated the debate of environment and politics (Madhusudhanan, 2012).

Anti-environmental stands of the government could not long last as it was difficult to succeed in Kerala public sphere. Silent Valley movement opened the space for counter hegemonic struggles on environmental questions. In this Kerala State pressurised the central government for the implementation the project. Congress and CPM stood for the pro-governmental stand favouring dam however the mass organisations like Students Federation of India (SFI) and Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI) took critical stand on dam and backed environmental questions.

Indira Gandhi constituted a multidisciplinary committee headed by MGK Menon, then secretary of the national Committee for environmental planning and conservation, to examine whether the project would be feasible without causing any significant ecological damage. The committee proposed Silent Valley project would cause to environmental degradation of the particular place. They advised the Kerala government to scrap the project and they suggest an alternative place in Idukki district. In September 1984 Mrs Gandhi scrapped the Silent valley Project (Madhusudhanan, 2012).

Within the debates around the Silent Valley project we can see two broad positions regarding the politics of environment. The first one is pro-environmentalism on the polices of government. They agitated to create a public debate against state policy. Civil society acted as counter hegemonic group by forming public opinion against government decisions. Second ideological stand was a pro-government stand (panikar, 2003).

During 70's and 80's, there were wider level of political articulations happened in favour of the Environmental questions in Silent Valley project, which articulated various NonGovernmental organisations and Civil society movements question the power relationship between State and society. Silent valley became the first movement in Kerala, which directly challenge the developmental policies in Kerala. This dam project was a potential damage to the environment despite the both CPM and Congress supported the project.

This movement provided a space for Kerala civil society to critique, debate and dialogue concerning the direction of the environment and development question in Kerala. Civil society thereby expanded the public sphere as a popular alternatives against well-established political parties in Kerala. This civil society interactions conceived a new environmental politics in Kerala. This is the starting point of civil society and political society interaction in Kerala where development and environment became the pivotal point of conflict and interactions.

The Peringome Anti-nuclear Struggle

The environment consciousness promoted and spread by 'Silent valley' movements apprehends the Peringome anti-nuclear struggle in Kerala. In the pretext of 'Energy crisis', the Atomic Energy Commission and Congress-led K. Karunakaran ministry in 1990's proposed installing a Nuclear reactor in Perigome. The proposed nuclear plant surrounded by thickly populated residential areas (Ramachandran, 2012).

Peringome Anti-Nuclear movement created wide spread agitations against nuclear plant. Through Peringome Anti- Nuclear forum from social, cultural and public health activist and writers and scientist participated against this campaign. This movement suggested some alternative ways to resolve energy crisis in Kerala. They proposed mini-Micro hydro project, solar options could be the alternative options for this project (Ramachandran, 2012).

The mainstream political parties and trade unions campaigned in favour of the project. They started a propaganda to convince people for the need of the nuclear project. Nuclear experts took a stand which favoured the nuclear plant. This propaganda machinery labelled the environmentalists as anti-developmentalists. This put wide discourse in Kerala public space. This movement was against conventional hierarchical movement. There were no leaders for this movement but the local organisers took initiative to convince the people. The Anti-Nuclear campaign has made questioning the present paradigm of development and in promoting people friendly and environment friendly attitudes and technologies in Kerala.

Athirapilly dam issues

The project was mooted in 1979, and the KSEB moved a formal proposal in 1982. Congress Ministry under K. Karunakaran again proposed a dam to build 168 MW capacity hydropower project at the Athirapilly waterfalls across Chalakudy River, Kerala. In 1998, Athirapilly Hydro-power project got clearance from the BJP Backed central ministry of environment and forests (MoEF). Athirapilly dam project escalated debate between pro-developmentalists and environmentalists (Philp, 2016). In spite of the governmental approval the project could not materialise because of the broader debate happened in Kerala by environmentalists and prodevelopmentalists.

The pro-developmentalists argue Kerala losing about 1400 million units of electricity from the Athirappally projects. This leads to the dependence by the state on power projects. For them the Athirappally project conceived minimal environmental impacts. All the authorities concerned have been adequately apprised and obtained clearance from MoEF and various other stakeholders of environmental governance agencies like MoEF sanctioned project in 1998 and 2007. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) conducted by the Tropical Botanical Garden and Research Institute approved and gave technical feasibility of this project. Pro-Developmentalists considered the WGEP (Western Ghats Ecology Expert panel) as the major hurdle to this dam proposal (Ramesh, 2010).

Environmentalists claimed that the proposed dam could affect 138.6 hectares of forest land and livelihood of tribal families depending on the forest and river. They argued that the Athirappally hydro-power project got clearance from Ministry of Governmental and Forests (MoEF) without any public hearing. In October 2001, Kerala High Court directed (KSEB) Kerala State Electricity Board and MoEF to follow all procedures on environment clearance. Based on High Court Verdict, a public hearing was held in February 2002 where all the stakeholders got a platform to show their stand regarding the proposed project. Water and Power Consultancy Services (India) Ltd (WAPCOS) prepared Environment Impact Assessment and based on this MoEF sanctioned clearance to the Project in February 2005. In March 2006 Kerala High Court cancelled the clearance and directed to reconvene the public hearing proceedings. The court ordered the MoEF to publish public hearing details, and based on the court directive public hearing was held in 2007 (Philp, 2016). LDF government in 2007 made a fresh proposal before the MoEF for environmental clearance. The MoEF reacted to the proposal saying that the Kerala Biodiversity Board and the Kerala Forest Department had already indicated the adverse effect of the project on ecology of the area (Ramesh, 2010). Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP) led by Madhav Gadgil, constituted by MoEF suggested to stall the project as the proposed project site was within the ecologically sensitive area. The project has been rejected based on the WGEEP recommendations (Gadgil, 2014).

However, the Kasturirangan report on the Western Ghats gave conditional sanction to the KSEB to pursue the power project. Subsequently, the MoEF extended the green clearance for the project until 2017, which has allowed the KSEB to go ahead with a set of conditions, including that the flow at the waterfalls should be maintained, and that power generation should be limited to four hours at night during the four summer months. While comparing with the other environmental movements, the Athirappally movement has triggered a debate on environmental governance in Kerala. Athirappally Dam movement accelerated question displacement and ecological protection in that area.

Environmental governance in Kerala

The State Government has been pursuing to implement several regulatory and promotional measures for environmental protection and conservation through their various departments such as Department of Environment, Science and Technology, Health and Family Welfare, Forests and Wildlife, Factories and Boilers, Industries, Mining and Geology and Groundwater.

Some such regulatory measures introduced on the basis of Acts/Rules/Notifications are listed below:

1. The Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 as amended in 1983, 1986 and 1991, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2003.
2. The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Cess Act, 1977 amended in 1991, 2003.
3. The Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 as amended in 1988, 1992 and 2003.
4. The Air (Prevention and Control Pollution) Act, 1981 as amended in 1987.
5. The Environment (Protection) Rules 1986 as amended in 1991, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2003 and 2004.
6. The Hazardous Waste (Management and Handling) Rules, 1989, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003.
7. The Manufacture, Storage and Import of Hazardous Chemicals Rules 1989, 2002, 2003.
8. The Coastal Regulation Zone Notification 1991, amended in 1998, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003.
9. The Manufacture, Use, Import, Export and Storage of Hazardous Microorganisms and Genetically Engineered Organisms or Cells Rules 1989.
10. The Environmental Impact Assessment, 1994, Amendments 1997, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004.
11. The Chemical Accidents (Emergency Planning, Preparedness & Response) Rules 1996.
12. The Environmental Public Hearing Notification, 1997, 2000, 2003.
13. The Biomedical Waste (Management & Handling) Rules 1998, 2000, 2003.
14. The Recycled Plastics (Manufacture & Usage) Rules 1999, amended in 2003.
15. The Environment (Setting for Industrial Projects) Rules 1999.
16. The Noise Pollution (Regulation & Control) Rules 2000, amended in 2002.
17. The Municipal Solid Wastes (Management & Handling) Rules 2000.
18. The Biological Diversity Act 2002 and the Biological Diversity Rules 2004.
19. Kerala River Bank Protection and Sand Mining Regulation Act (2001).

Kerala is one of the first states in India to constitute a State Pollution Control Board for monitoring and regulating measures for the abatement of pollution. The Government had also taken initiatives for the conservation and management of its forest and wildlife resources through the Department of Forests and Wildlife.

In order to strengthen the R&D efforts required in the field of environment, the Government had established Kerala State Council for Science, Technology and Environment and a number of autonomous R&D centres such as the Centre for Earth Science Studies (CESS), the Tropical Botanic Garden & Research Institute (TBGRI), the Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI), the Centre for Water Resources Development and Management (CWRDM), the Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Biotechnology (RGCB), National Transportation Planning and Research Centre (NATPAC) and Agency for Non-conventional Energy and Rural Technology (ANERT). The State's Science and Technology Policy was revised in 2002 to ensure that science and technology inputs become an essential part of its decision making process with regard to environmental issues. Further, University departments, colleges, research centers and a few NGOs also pursue R&D on environment-related issues in the State.

The Government constituted Environmental Protection Programme Planning Committee (EPPPC) and an Environment Protection Task Force (EPTF) for facilitating the implementation of environmental protection, regulation and management measures. The EPTF has provisions for facilitating expert consultations on critical environmental issues. Considerable effort is being taken through various public as well as non-governmental institutions for creating environmental awareness among the public. As a result, the State has already achieved the distinction of being a highly environmentally conscious State. The Government of Kerala has brought out a State Water Policy addressing the water related issues and to sustainably manage water resources with the primary objective of ensuring availability of safe drinking water.

The State Government has established the Kerala State Biodiversity Board (KSBB) during 2005, as per the provisions under the Biological Diversity Act, 2002 & Biological Diversity Rules 2004, in order to take measures for documentation, conservation and sustainable utilization of the State's rich biodiversity. The KSBB facilitates the formation of Biodiversity Management Committee (BMC) in all the Panchayats. The BMCs are expected to lead preparation of People's Biodiversity Registers, and biodiversity management plans and regulate collection of biological resources for commercial purposes.

The decentralized development system established through the three-tier Panchayat institutions is the most effective vehicle to address the issue of conservation of environment at the grass-root level, as it ensures active participation of the citizens. This has raised environmental consciousness in local development planning. A few Panchayats have attempted to set up biodiversity gardens and bird sanctuaries. A major effort is underway to prepare watershed-based master plans at the block level, which will lead to a long-term perspective plan towards sustainable and equity oriented development. There, however, is a need for environmental empowerment of Panchayats.

The achievements of these environmental management initiatives, although modest, are by no means insignificant. However, there is a greater need now than ever before for a comprehensive Environmental Policy considering the ever increasing thrust for 'development', unmindful of the deteriorating health of the environment and the life-support Systems.

Problems on Environmental governance in Kerala

Environmental governance in Kerala can be seen as trying to balance positions between different sets of attitudes, informed by varied experiences and influenced by information flows from our history, culture, geography and numerous other disciplines. It can also be seen from the broad framework of environmental justice, which brings issues of equity to the centre stage. In a state where inequalities exist because of class, caste, ethnicity, religion and economic conditions, there is a need for discussion on the underpinnings of the development model adopted so as to ensure equitable outcomes.

Environmental governance in Kerala no longer deals only with issues of environmental protection. It exists within a background of the economic growth paradigm, issues of livelihoods, issues of rights of communities and of institutional arrangements that influence the environment discourse. Within the economic growth paradigm, the nature of investments are changing with a bigger role for the private sector, new arrangements through joint ventures and international financial institutions taking the place of large public sector entities.

Different stakeholder opinions have been articulated for the utilisation of natural resources: the private sector has pursued its agenda of profit maximisation through resource exploitation; the urban communities have expressed their demands for products and services which are provided for by businesses; the rural communities are changing their way of life, aspiring to better standards of living and shifting into roles that no longer demand them to be custodians of the environment; and tribal communities facing constant pressures in sustaining their traditional way of life are demanding their deserved rights to environmental resources that are sought by other stakeholders.

Interacting with all these stakeholders, the government and its various levels are facing the challenge of following an ethical, socially acceptable and economically stimulating course of action. This has created numerous conflicts between ministries—on promoting projects that are ‘important’ to the economy and stalling clearances on the basis of environmental damage and lack of remedial action. The contested nature of the balance between environment and development has created disagreements even within the Ministry of Environment and Forests on the governance of sensitive ecosystems. This was most apparent in the treatment and Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel (WGEEP), which was replaced by the less nuanced recommendations of a High Level Working Group (HLWG).

The varied stakeholder interests in the country points to the changing nature of the concept of development with static economic indicators. But this begs us to ask—how are the actors and institutions to decide on a viable course of action for sustainable development in a closed system, with limited resources, and ever increasing environmental pressures.

Role of Judiciary in Environmental Governance

Judicial interventions and most notably the processes of Public Interest Litigations (PILs) have played an important role in the realm of environmental decision-making, particularly when the executive and legislature failed in upholding the rule of law. But the issue of judicial overreach has come into light with the judiciary substituting its wisdom for that of the legislature or executive, especially when there is a distinction between matters of law, which can stay only in the purview of the judiciary, and matters of policy, which are supposed to remain in the purview of the executive and the legislature. Within the judiciary, the operationality of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) has also had certain loopholes that are creating top heavy structures of decision-making. This has depreciated the powers of the NGT and lower courts to consider environmental issues, as has been seen in the appeals in the Supreme Court against several mining bans directed by the NGT. The judiciary’s role needs to stop at identifying problems and gaps in the functioning of the executive and the legislature—as a check on the two—rather than taking up the task of solving the problem completely on its own and through its own devices.

Political party’s interference in environmental issues in Kerala

In the contemporary period, environmental politics became the centre stage of Kerala political sphere. In most of the environmental struggles in Kerala related to the livelihood struggles, there remain overwhelming problems yet to be addressed, despite Kerala civil society leading the way in environmental activism. Development and change in post politics of independence was the motto of Nehruvian development model. This was also applicable to Kerala politics. EMS Namodripad first Communist Chief Minister was careful to manage the confrontation between central government and pan Indian capital interest.

Developmental attitude possessed by consecutive governments in Kerala and the modernisation principles created a better place to live in. These development policies addressed a wider capital interest in Kerala society. The electricity developmental projects started to harm the environment ideals of the Kerala society. These flaws were unmasked and challenged by a group of highly conscious people as a reflection of the environmental and developmental ethics in Kerala.

Parties in Kerala became the articulators of environmental values. The environmental values transformation that evolved in Kerala political sphere was in a dialectical process. The Communist parties in Kerala respond to environmental issues from contextual positions. Most of the time, the decisions were taken as per the interest of the mass organisations like Centre of Indian Trade Union (CITU). On the other hand, most of the stands on environmental issues taken up by the Congress were from capital interest as well as pressure from various socio-cultural organisations, apart from political party framework. In all the environmental movements in Kerala, both political parties in Kerala had taken a similar stand on environmental debates. The parties in Kerala intervened and changed their positions on the environmental issues according to the changes in circumstances. The discussions on environmental issues in the Kerala political sphere were always from a peripheral understanding, or, from a particular standpoint. Capital interest and institutional interest prevented core discussions on environmental issues in Kerala. Prior to 1970, capital and institutional interests were very minimal in environmental issues. During this time, ‘environmental idealism’ took a very strong position on environmentalism in Kerala. Writers and science movements in this period were free from external pressure.

The Western Ghats issues raise serious questions on environmental governance in the country. Protest in Kerala against the Madhav Gadgil and Kasturirangan report was a sharp reaction against the tailor-made conservation tools. Parties in Kerala, especially CPI (M) and Congress, mobilised people’s anger against both these reports. Congress and UDF was on defence because they wanted to mobilise people, but the ruling party, both in central government and state government, was led by Congress. In this backdrop, both fronts in Kerala mobilised people’s interests against both these reports. This study would aim to analyse the alliance and counter-alliance in both fronts in Kerala on the Western Ghats issue.

In my study, state, capital and religious interactions are studied from Political ecology framework. Political ecology is a relatively new field of research that has been widely analysing the interactions between

human and the environment. Political ecology emerged as a new approach to human-environment interactions by bringing together ecology and the diverse disciplines of Political Economy, Human Ecology, and Cultural Ecology. Political Ecology have recently used a dialectical approach to the mode of discourse of social and environmental relations as well as to the explanation of those relations (Stephen Morse & Michael Stocking, 1995).

Political Ecology is an interdisciplinary approach that is still in its formative phase. Majority of political ecology research consists of local environmental changes, which are related to broader social and political structures. While analysing the political and social structures, there are various actors, interests, actions and discourses that are happening.

History of Political Ecology

The term 'Political Ecology', was coined by Frank Thone in an article 'Nature Rambling, we fight for Grass' published in the science Newsletter in 1935. As analytical framework, it owes its genesis from Eric R. Wolf's Writings. In his famous article entitled, 'Ownership and Political Ecology', he discusses about pressures exerted by society on the local ecosystem and links environment with Political Economy.

Political Ecology explores the complexities by taking into account the contextual sources of environmental impacts of the state and policies. It is not a coherent theory of the ecological discourses, rather it includes within its ambit environmental conditions, conservation outcomes, environmental conflicts, political identities and social struggle pertaining to the basic issues of livelihood and environmental activity as well as socio-political conditions.

Paul Robins in his book, 'Critical Political Ecology', he characterises according to the argument, text and narratives. There are five narratives. First, the degradation and marginalization thesis, in which he explains environmental conditions and reasons for their change. Second, the conservation and control thesis, which discusses conservation outcomes, third, the environmental conflict and exclusion thesis, that describes access to the environment and conflicts over exclusion from it, especially natural resources, fourth, the environmental subjects and identity thesis, which enlightens identities of people and social groups especially new or emerging ones, and lastly, political objects and actors' thesis, that elucidates socio-political conditions, especially deeply structured ones.

The idea of political ecology approach is primarily an inquiry into the political sources, conditions, and ramifications of environmental change. The political ecology is grounded less in a coherent theory and seeks to integrate it with a wide variety of political ideologies. There are two major ideological strands within the broad spectrum of political ecology, namely positions of political right and political left positions (Schubert, 2005).

The political right position looks at issues from a Neo-Malthusian narrative. Malthusian framework stated that while food production levels grow at a linear rate, human population grows at a geometric rate if unchecked. Therefore, Malthus predicted a decrease of available food per capita with ensuing famines and eventual extinction of human race. This led to the population pressure on resources which lead to resource scarcity. The Neo-Malthusian thought gives prominence to the occurrence of war as a result of resource scarcity. Homer-Dixon links resource scarcity to conflict. In his writings, he narrates that the resource scarcity induced conflict that driven by political and economic factors. In the case of Homer-Dixon and Neo-Malthusian framework, methodological shortcomings, simplicity of the models employed and various findings indicate contrary outcomes that have led to widespread criticism of his work, primarily in the field of environmental conflict research and subsequently in Political Ecology (Schubert, 2005).

The political left position in political Ecology varies from the Neo-Marxist and Post-Marxist approaches. Initially, the Marxist tradition made use of power to interpret human/ society/nature relations. Orthodox Marxist analysis sees the issue from an industrial progress and technological domination, so they had side-lined nature altogether, or they view it simply from the impact of human exploitation. Neo-Marxist explains the environmental change in the context of underdevelopment and poverty by deploying from three major frameworks. One is core-periphery analysis, second is global capitalist analysis, and the third is class inequality analysis. Post-Marxist approaches to political ecology include feminist and post-structuralist perspectives. Feminist scholars have examined power from a gender perspective, and they claim that gender relations are pivotal for explaining human/society/nature relations. Post-structuralists focus on 'non-material dimension of power.

The major thinkers use the term political ecology from a Marxian angle. Blakie and Brookfield, in their book, 'Land Degradation and society' describe the intertwined and reciprocal relations between land use and the environment in the case of soil erosion, as just a result of human action and by very distinct forms of societal structures. According to them, the concept 'Political Ecology' stood for the consideration of environmental degradation with its historical, political and economic context as well as ecological aspect (Brookfield, 1987).

Relevance of Political Ecology

The idea of Political Ecology is relevant because of the reasons like control on natural resources, unscientific and unfocussed governmental policies, environmental degradation by various forces, spread of

awareness and media interventions. These political reasons contributed to the development of Political Ecology in larger environmental discourse. In the contemporary period, the idea and nature of politics is shaping the ecology and environment movement in the third world countries (Schubert, 2005).

Environmental issues are very much political issues, as the policies on environment directly affect subsistence of the local people in third world countries. Political ecology in third world countries takes into consideration the state and its policies on environmental question and relates with inter-state relations and global capitalism (Brayant Raymond and Sinead Bailey, 1997). Peasant communities and socially disadvantaged groups also articulate environmental question, environmental degradation and state policies that affect their subsistence. These environmental and political deliberations make the Political Ecology in Third world countries significant.

Political ecology is not a single coherent theory or analytical framework to which all political ecologists subscribe. Thus, it would be appropriate to term it as a shared perspective and common research agenda. It helps in the analysis of historical circumstances leading to local patterns of resource use and control to understand contemporary struggles for safeguarding environment. Concerns on state policies, socio-economic conditions, local issues, the role of ecological leadership figured prominently in the discourse of Political ecology

Indian Environmental Positions

Indian environmentalism and politics being discussed from the point of view of glorious past provided no room for the questions of marginality. In this crude capitalist development model, the people who suffered most are from the frames of marginalised caste. Their interaction and bargaining to the society and state on environment question is also very significant because they are the stakeholders of all environment and development debate. There were articulations and movements from wider perspectives of the marginalised sections and they criticised the mainstream environmental articulations from a deeper perspective. Through this, an attempt is made to redefine certain key concepts such as development, modernity, community, livelihood and social movements. (Sharma, 2012)

Indian environment movement understands the struggles from a rural India backdrop. This movement focuses on the loss of land and livelihood due to the construction of dams, deforestation, and other development projects. Amita Baviskar argues that there are rural bias in environmentalism that has led to the neglect of urban environmentalism. Baviskar highlights that there is a powerful presence of 'Bourgeois environmentalism', which challenges us to examine the issues of political legitimacy and the ability to bring it in the public sphere (Baviskar, 1994).

Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha have identified five broad strands on the ideological positioning of the environmentalism: 1) Crusading Gandhians, which mostly relied on moral and religious idioms that reflect modern way of life. They believed in modernist philosophies, and are propagating Non-Modern Philosophy whose roots lie in Indian tradition. 2) Ecological Marxism, which views the problem in political and economic terms. This argues that the unequal access of resources creates environmental problem in India. They propose that the rich exploits the poor in this highly stratified society for the pursuit of their profit. 3) Appropriate technology, which does not emphasis much on challenging the state system but focuses on demonstrating in practice a set of socio-technical alternatives to the centralizing and environmentally degrading technologies presently in operation. 4) Wilderness Enthusiasts, who argues tht state action is responsible for the decline of natural resources. 5) Scientific conservation, which are concerned with efficiency and management. Out of the five strands, Guha states that Crusading Gandhians, Appropriate Technologists and Ecological Marxism are the three major stands discussed in Indian environmentalism (Guha, 1998).

A landmark ecological discourse in India has been the Chipko movement. This protest movement was against commercial forestry. It was argued that the forest policy of the government was inimical to local needs. This movement unravelled several vital aspects of political ecology. Chipko movement demonstrated that there was deep linkages between human beings and forests. It also brought to the discussion culture and traditions of the hills was a binding force in the protest movement.

A similar protest movement in defence of traditional values and community rights over forest land was launched in Chotanagpur region, where tribal people asserted their customary rights over forest land and its products, and started Jungal Bachao Andolan. Subsequently, the Narmada Bachao Andolan led by Meda Patkar, brought a new discourse fore in the field of political ecology. This entire movement started against Sardar Sarovar Project, a dam on the Narmada River, in North West India. his execution of the dam project affected a large number of tribal inhabitants in the submerged area of this project. Narmadha Bachao Andolan exposed the weakness of rehabilitation policy of the government and pointed out the likely impact on eco-system, crops and human health.

The ecological discourses started by the Narmada Bachao Andolan is akin to 'Save Silent Valley Movement', that aimed at protection of Silent Valley, an evergreen forest in the Palakad district of Kerala. The Silent Valley movement endeavored to save the reserve forest from being inundated by a hydro-electric project. This highly effective movement forced the government to drop the project and Silent Valley was declared a National Park.

The Western Ghats Movement of the 1980s also contributed to the ongoing ecological discourses in India. Several local and regional organizations joined the movement for awareness building and protest against the construction of dams and power stations that tend to destroy one of the world's richest treasures of bio-diversity. It was virtually a conservation movement of the common mass against growing deterioration of the eco system. Mohan Kumar, Kumar Kaland Mani, Anil Agarwal, Jagadish Godbole, N.K. Venkachlgu, and Y.Divansulu Naidu were prominent among the ecological leaders in the 'Save Western Ghats Movement'.

Besides these ecological movements, Navadanya Movement initiated by ardent ecologist, Vandana Shiva, is a distinguished endeavour to propound an alternative discourse in the sphere of Political Ecology. Her main focus is on bio-diversity, bio-piracy and she propounds a new concept of 'Earth Democracy'. According to Vandana Shiva, it has shaped multiple and diverse practices of people reclaiming their commons, resources, livelihood, freedom, dignity, identities and peace. Further, she propounds an ecological critique to globalisation and privatisation in the form of 'Earth Democracy'.

In recent years, activists, several scholars have immensely contributed and enriched the political ecological discourses in India. Sunita Narain, in the field of community-based water management, Meneka Gandhi, for her struggle to end atrocities on animals, Sugatha Kumari, Shela Massood, Anandish Pal, Bhagat Puran Singh, John C Jacob, Anil Agarwal and Bina Agarwal, in the field of preservation of natural heritage are some of the significant ecological activists, who have rendered invaluable contributions in evolving and enriching the discourses in Political ecology in India.

Political Ecology in India has, thus, been discussed, studied, debated by many activists, and scholars, mainly from the angle and ideology of environmentalism so far, which has been largely apolitical. The paper has tried to put the concept of Political Ecology in the perspective of state, capital, and religious interactions, taking the case of Western Ghats post-politics.

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