
Review: Ecosystem People, Omnivores and Ecological Refugees of India

Author(s): Bhaskar Vira

Reviewed work(s):

Ecology and Equity. by M. Gadgil ; R. Guha

Source: *Global Ecology and Biogeography Letters*, Vol. 6, No. 5 (Sep., 1997), pp. 408-409

Published by: Blackwell Publishing

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2997343>

Accessed: 05/11/2009 10:00

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Pakarinen reviews the classification of boreal mires in Finland and Scandinavia. Other regions covered are Asia (Lu, Gopal & Sah), Australia (Pressey & Adam) and Canada (Zoltai & Vitt). It is clear from the different regional perspectives that a very varied and patchy approach has been adopted by scientists and governments in tackling this important subject. The volume itself gives insufficient attention to tropical and Third World wetlands, but this can be excused at least in part by the limitations of sources and specialists in this area. Nevertheless, Naranjo presents an evaluation of the first inventory of South American wetlands and Taylor, Howard and Begg review inventories in Southern Africa.

There is a growing realization that if wetland classification is going to be an effective tool in conservation and management, then it needs to emphasize more the factors which control wetland processes and functioning rather than simply their description or appearance. This is recognized to some extent in the new hydrogeomorphic approach described by Semeniuk and Semeniuk. Even though we are still some way from understanding exactly what their new classification means functionally, the approach is innovative and hopefully will stimulate further progress in this area.

We are still a long way from having a detailed global inventory of wetlands. Novitski describes the sampling design supporting the EMAP project in the United States. He raises its suitability as a basis for such a global inventory, but the reality is that the scientific community still has many questions to address before standardization on this scale can be tackled. The proposal by the editors of an international committee to develop an international wetland classification system and practical guidelines for carrying out inventories is an important step which still has to be taken. It could be an important item on the agenda of the World Conservation Union's new Commission on Ecosystem Management.

Edward Maltby

*Royal Holloway Institute for Environmental Research,
University of London, U.K.*

REFERENCES

- Cowardin, L.M., Carter, V., Golet, F.C. & LaRoe, E.T. (1979) *Classification of Wetlands and Deepwater Habitats of the United States*. 103 pp. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Pub. FWS/OBS-79/31, Washington, D.C.

ECOSYSTEM PEOPLE, OMNIVORES AND ECOLOGICAL REFUGEES OF INDIA

Gadgil, M. and Guha, R. (1995). *Ecology and equity*. Routledge: London. xi+213 pp., figs, tables, photos, index. Paperback: Price: £12.99. ISBN: 0-415-12524-3. Hardback: Price: £40.00. ISBN: 0-415-12523-5.

This book must not be read as a rigorous and empirically exhaustive account of the political economy of India's natural environment. To be fair to the authors, this was probably not the intention of the present work. Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha have written extensively on the Indian environment over the past 20 years, and this book must be viewed in the light of that wealth of scholarship. The insights from their earlier work provide the basis for the empirical observations on which this book is based. However, the main contribution of the present work is not the re-writing of India's ecological history, but an attempt to develop a political ecology framework within which this history may be analysed.

In the introduction, the authors offer their key analytical tool, which is a new interpretation of Indian society based on ecological and sociological categories. The principal conflict is between the world of the 'ecosystem people', those who depend on the natural environments of their own locality to meet their material needs, and that of the 'omnivores', who 'devour everything produced all over the earth'. In between these two lie the 'ecological refugees', groups which have been forced to live on the margins of prosperity, no longer able to extract a living from their earlier habitat, but equally unable to afford the material goods which are available in their new environments. There is a recognition of the problems with any such classificatory scheme, especially boundary issues where some individuals display mixed characteristics and may be seen to belong to different groups in different aspects of their lives. However, while not rejecting the more conventional class and caste-based stratification, the authors claim that this new framework provides 'a fuller and more convincing interpretation of political, economic and environmental change in contemporary India'. For the authors, the Indian development experience demonstrates the consistent ability of the omnivores, guesstimated to be one-sixth of the population, to corner the benefits of economic progress at the expense of the vast majority represented by the ecosystem people and the ecological refugees. This, then, is their vision of the processes against which the

Indian environmental movement has been fighting, presented in Part I of the book, and forms the basis for their agenda for renewal, which is outlined in Part II.

The book presents an outline of material flows within and between the six major ecological regimes in India: the coast, inland waters, forests, grazing lands, farmlands and urban industrial enclaves. The picture is one of 'islands of prosperity' peeping out of a 'sea of poverty', with omnivores benefiting disproportionately while externalizing the costs of their affluence, on to the masses as well as the environment. The outcome of this is a sequence of increasingly intractable confrontations, described as 'a cauldron of conflicts', particularly over access to state-sponsored subsidies. While providing a useful summary of the political economy of land reforms, dams, groundwater, pollution, fishing, forests, mines and nature conservation, there is little novelty here. It is in their interpretation of the array of forces which have lined up against this process of ecological destruction that the authors display the analytical insight gained from a first-hand observation of the environmental debate in India. The disaggregation of the Indian environmental movement into its seven major ideological strands goes some way towards explaining its apparent lack of coordination and, more usefully, the absence of a coherent alternative vision for India's development.

The authors then offer their own version of such an alternative strategy, which they call 'conservative-liberal-socialism'. This is a hybrid political philosophy, borrowing from Gandhism the concepts of decentralization and empowerment of village communities, together with a moderation of resource consumption; from Marxism, an emphasis on equity and empowerment of weaker sections; and from Capitalism, the encouragement of private enterprise coupled with public accountability in an open democratic system. The authors use conservative to describe Gandhism, since it seeks 'to conserve all that is best in (Indian) traditions'; although this qualification clarifies their own usage, there may be some confusion because of other political interpretations of conservatism, and it may have been more appropriate to use a less loaded term like 'traditional'. This, however, is to indulge in the luxury of semantics. More substantively, the authors proceed to outline the implications of this alternative strategy for resource management, examining in particular three sectors: information and the dissemination of knowledge; forests and biodiversity; and population. While each

chapter contains clear and precise recommendations for an alternative set of policies, the chapter on forests is particularly well argued, and reflects the authors' long engagement with the debate in this sector.

What is disappointing is the inadequate attention which the authors pay to the question of institutional transition. They offer a reasonable analysis of 'the India that is', and a well-presented case of 'the India that might be', but what is missing is a concrete agenda for political action which would facilitate this process. To use their own analytical terms, India's recent political economy would suggest that the class of omnivores is expanding, albeit slowly, but there is little evidence for a concrete re-alignment of political forces which questions the high consumption omnivore philosophy. Threats from outside of this class are neutralized by a process of co-option, but there is a mainstream political consensus which supports the strategy of economic liberalization currently being implemented in the country. The major political parties may differ on the detail, depending on their own particular constituents, but evidence from the states suggests that there is little real diversity in the path of economic reform. As a manifesto for a new political movement which would represent the majority of the Indian population, this book is commendable. What this reader was hoping for was a better articulated strategy for political renewal. The authors' faith in India's 'resources of hope' needs to be supplemented with more concrete guidance which would make a realignment of political forces a reality.

Bhaskar Vira

*Oxford Centre for the Environment, Ethics and Society,
Oxford, U.K.*

ESSENTIAL READING FOR VEGETATION SCIENTISTS

Klötzli, F. and van der Maarel, E. (eds) (1996). *Community ecology and conservation biology*. Special features in vegetation science 9. Opulus Press: Uppsala. 124 pp., figs, tables. Paperback. ISBN: 91-8871-609-0. Price: SKr 250.00.

This volume, originally published as volume 7.1 of the *Journal of Vegetation Science*, records part of the proceedings of a conference held at the Department of Geobotany, University of Bern in August 1994, in honour of Professor Otto Hegg, retiring head of that