CONTEMPORARY ENVIRONMENTALISMS IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT

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INTRODUCTION

Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha in their pioneering work on Indian environmental history, identified at least three different types of environmentalisms currently practiced in India. These philosophies were further categorized according to the constituencies within which they most likely prevailed, thus linking the particular human-environment relationship to the worldview held by the individual or group. However, in the past decade, this has been complicated by the expansion of the urban middle class and their concerns for a livable city for themselves and their families. Beyond the original rural focus of previous environmental activists and historians, a very powerful NIMBY type environmentalism seems to have emerged, one that has upended previous concerns for biodiversity and conservation on one hand and social justice and self-determination on the other. While similar to the middle and upper class preoccupation with cleanliness and order of the North, this new sentiment has taken on a far more sinister aspect in India, where it plays out as a Darwinian struggle for space and legitimacy between the upwardly mobile and the impoverished slum communities. How far this socially regressive environmentalism has developed is debatable, although several scholars such as Amita Bhaviskar have tackled this apparent trend with an alacrity born of the titanic changes now taking place in India's urban centres.

At the same time, the pressing need for social movements to unite their efforts has led to a far ranging discussion between environmentalists and the Left. Although both have shared an anti-capitalist orientation and have made common cause on numerous celebrated occasions including Chipko, a clear difference in methods and ideology has kept the two powerful movements at arms length. Debates over traditional identity vs. class-based political mobilization and notions of modernity have been particularly sharp, leading to different conclusions about the nature of the struggle and vision for the future. However, Red-Green coalitions have proliferated, allowing a far

wider range of social actors to enter the picture and setting the stage for a new type of decentralized politics to counter both neoliberal globalization and traditional local elites.

This paper will thus review these developments by first revisiting Gadgil & Guha's original framework for understanding environmental movements. This will be coupled with a rudimentary overview of the main schools of thought that have interpreted the varieties of environmentalisms, paying particular attention to their treatment of the society-nature interface. This will be supplemented by a review of Archana Prasad's recent work on environmentalism and the Left within the tribal context. The paper will then proceed to look at the new urban reality being socially constructed by the rapid growth of cities and the cultural and economic transformations taking place due to globalization, consumerism, and the expanding gap between rich and poor. Finally, the paper will take up the struggle of social movements to forge a broad front. It will touch upon important theoretical interventions from critical geographers like David Harvey who has applied the concept of "accumulation by dispossession" to link all these disparate struggles. It will also approach the issues of scales and networks that are fundamental to strengthening and expanding these movements to contend with both global and local forces. It is hoped that this would go a long way towards reconciling divergent visions by proposing a new environmental imaginary and alternative modernity that is more just, humane, and sustainable than the current order.

INDIA AT THE BEGINNING OF 21ST CENTURY

To address Gadgil & Guha's theoretical framework for examining the human-environment relationship and varieties of environmentalisms, their works must be first contextualized historically and politically. The late 1980s and early 1990s in which they were writing, marked a watershed in the development of global environmental consciousness. With the end of the cold war, long sublimated anxieties about the deteriorating health of the biosphere eclipsed fears of nuclear war as the preeminent threat to humanity's long-term survival. With the ostensible end of the socialist

project in the East, environmental philosophies also emerged as the new alternative through which progressive-minded activists channeled their vision of a "kinder and gentler" society. These two trends combined to fuel a renaissance of environmental activism and scholarship, which had each been lumbering along without much intercourse since the late 1960s.

In the West, environmental themes came to the fore in both the natural and social sciences. While ecology experienced major theoretical renovations and climate science advanced with the aid of computing power, sociology, anthropology, and development studies also witnessed the "return of nature" to their respective fields. Among these, environmental history saw a wave of scholarship, as both academic and independent writers sought to reinterpret the history of the world through a green lens. Meanwhile, science historians, sociologists and anthropologists brought postmodernist currents to bear on the nature-society divide that had been inscribed in the entire academic endeavour since the Enlightenment (Haraway, 1991; Latour, 1993). Even in geography which had long ago acknowledged the primacy of the human-environment relationship saw a resurgence of the older worldview, breaking free of the 1960s obsession with quantitative spatial science, through the new focus on political ecology.

Fittingly, Gadgil & Guha began their collaborative work elaborating a definitive environmental history of India. Guha had earlier studied the 1970s Chipko movement that gave the first major impetus to considering environmental issues and poverty as intrinsically linked. In his widely read *Unquiet Woods*, Guha situated the Chipko phenomena in the moral ecology of the Uttarakhand region of India (Guha, 2000). While previously, poverty alleviation had trumped environmental concerns in development planning, Chipko showed how these two were interrelated rather than irrevocably antagonistic and that the economic security of poor peasant farmers depended on a

healthy forest commons[1]. Drawing from the works of Indian Marxist historians, *This Fissured Land* (1992) aimed to apply a similar perspective to all of India. Like Guha's earlier work, the book departed from the conventional Western environmental history literature by focusing on pre-colonial environmental philosophies, colonial era resource exploitation, conservation policies, and the ensuing history of resource conflicts in the colonial and post-colonial eras (Gadgil & Guha, 1993). This emphasis proved useful in untangling the historical roots of India's current ecological crisis and unearthing rich details about the development of environmental policies from ancient to colonial times. By doing so, the book echoed the works of other authors who were infusing their historical accounts of environmental change with postcolonialist and political ecology perspectives (Arnold & Guha, 1995; Grove, Damodaran, & Sangwan, 1998). As such, its foremost contribution was the renewed emphasis on justice and equity for the poor and marginalized, which Gadgil & Guha later developed in their follow up book, *Ecology and Equity* (Gadgil & Guha, 1995).

By the mid-1990s, the numerous environmental movements that had emerged in the wake of Chipko were running up against the exigencies of the developmental state as India embarked on rapid economic growth through trade liberalization. This growth entailed further dispossession as the resource and energy needs of industry and a rising middle class required the construction of more dams and the expansion of mining activities. The anti-Tehri Dam movement was defeated[2], while community activists of India's foremost environment movement, the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Save the Narmada River), barely held the line despite massive mobilizations, *satyagrahas*, and endorsements by famous literary figures such as Arundhati Roy. Environmentalism came to be seen as anti-development, and while private capital gained new freedoms, the state resorted to harsher methods to crush public resistance. Through this process, the gap between rich and poor widened

[1] From the beginning, Chipko took on a gendered hue due to the preponderance of women farmers in a region that had experienced a massive out-migration of men. While, gender aspects were not included in Gadgil & Guha's thesis on omnivore and ecosystem people, it is very much a fundamental aspect of the Chipko context.
[2] The struggle against the Tehri Dam lasted from 1978 to 2004 when Sunderlal Bahuguna, a veteran of Chipko, finally withdrew from the inundated reservoir site in Tehri town. However, the issue of rehabilitation has not yet been solved, despite assurances for twenty years.

and the natural environment deteriorated, reflecting an intensification rather than a replacement of the old order.

Moreover, where the state did concern itself with ecological issues, practices and policies borrowed largely from the West continued to pervade the environmental discourse at the highest levels. In what Sunita Narain[3] termed "protectionist conservationism", India's forestry establishment, longed steeped in the colonial attitudes of trusteeship, saw a new lease on life in growing global concern over the environment (Narain, 2002). In keeping with the general thrust of developmentalism, their technocratic managerialist response ensured that the government would maintain and even extend greater control over resources rather than return them to the local communities from which they were usurped in the colonial era.

OMNIVORES VS. ECOSYSTEM PEOPLE

> "No one, I repeat no one will be allowed to stand in the way of Orissa's industrialisation and the people's progress."
>
> – *Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, commenting on the opposition to mining in Kashipur district, Orissa*

> "You are all high-class people who live in Bombay, right? If there is a plan to make a huge dam in Bombay city, it's obvious that the posh buildings where you reside would be submerged. Will you allow that to happen?"
>
> – *Narmada Bachao Andolan activist Ramkrishna Bawa*

Given this adverse scenario, Gadgil & Guha brought out their theoretical treatise in order to assist these movements understand the nature of the beast. In dialectical fashion, they elaborated a classical binary, dividing the entire population along ecological lines and into two basic constituencies. While out of academic fashion for its polarizing potential and limited ability to perceive intervening shades of grey, Gadgil & Guha erected their dichotomy to bring into sharp

[3] Narain is currently the director of the *Centre for Science & the Environment*, one of India's premiere independent environmental organizations.

focus the political and economic disparities between the two classes. Moreover, the binary did not in itself constitute a general social theory of urban and rural stratification, but was crafted to provide a way to apply an ecological perspective to hitherto purely socio-economic modes of analysis. In addition, the similarity to historical materialism with its emphasis on class struggle was more than coincidental, as it firmly grounded their concept in the same project of transformative social change.

At its most basic level, Gadgil & Guha's formulation invokes access to resources as the determining factor dividing the "two Indias." However, this aspect implicates a whole range of social, political, and economic relations that work to maintain the unequal status quo. At the upper end of the spectrum are the "omnivores" who engage in economic activity far removed from their natural resource base and whose economic relationship with the environment is negligible (Gadgil & Guha, 1995). The term itself connotes a voracious consumer of commodities and resources drawn from multiple sources. As expropriators of natural surplus, omnivores are usually deeply embedded in the market economy. No longer earning their keep from the soil or the waters, this section of society thus can consume above and beyond what is ecologically sustainable, while disposing of their waste in an "out of sight, out of mind" fashion. Moreover, the state, which is composed entirely of omnivores, works on behalf of their class that includes everyone from the typical middle class city dweller to a World Bank official.

On the other side dwell the ecosystem people who depend on the environment for much if not all aspects of their livelihoods. Although ecosystem people make up the vast majority of India's rural population, they usually have little wealth in the classical economic sense, and thus little say in state-level decision-making processes. Living for the most part at a subsistence level, they have long represented the "real India" in the international imaginary. However, this bucolic image has masked a history of real neglect, oppression, and hardship at the hands of successive exploitative regimes.

Some of the dominant characteristics of these two classes are summarized in Table 1:

Table 1: The Omnivore-Ecosystem People Binary	
Omnivores	**Ecosystem People**
Global, National, Local Reach	Local Reach
Surplus Economy	Subsistence Economy
Urban/Cosmopolitan	Rural/Rooted
Sees itself as Modern/Scientific	Is seen as Traditional/Authentic
Upper & Middle Classes	Peasants, Dalits, Adivasis
Separate from Resource Base	Close Relationship with Resource Base

Anil Agarwal, the late editor of *Down to Earth*, one of India's foremost environmental periodicals, echoed Gadgil & Guha's framework with his own differentiation between gross national product and gross natural product (Narain, 2002). While the former accounts for monetary value of goods and services without regards to such "externalities" as domestic labour and the environment, the latter has long been the basis of the biomass-based subsistence economy. Similarly, the gross nature product consists of both sociocultural and biological aspects in keeping with its central role in the lives of ecosystem people. Thus while it recognizes the inherent value and uses of nature, it also embraces the complex human-environment relationships and extensive ecological knowledge intimately associated with ecosystem people's diverse livelihood strategies.

Given this theoretical grounding, Gadgil & Guha, like many of their fellow Indian environmental historians applied this concept of two Indias to the era beginning with colonization to the present. While some authors ventured further back to account for the policies of older regimes, scholars have felt that the coming of the British represented the watershed event in the subcontinent's ecological history, surpassing previous rulers in both the degree of change and kind of transformation that they introduced. At the time, the British positioned themselves as the supreme omnivores, taxing the peasantry with the aid of newly empowered feudal landlords. In turn, these peasants were indebted to moneylenders, and drifted into peonage where they became locked in place at the bottom of the agrarian hierarchy. Tribal people faired no better with the conversion of their forest commons into

the reserve forests for extraction purposes. Adding insult to injury, ecosystem people also came to be penalized by scientific forestry and conservation policies that usurped their traditional resource rights while ensuring that timber products flowed smoothly to the colonial state.

Upon independence, India's new rulers embarked on massive plan of industrial development. However, omnivore rulers continued to pass down the ecological costs to the poor while prompting resources to flow unidirectionally out of the hinterland and into the industrial zones or urban centres. This expropriation of natural capital by the state and bureaucracy on behalf of omnivore beneficiaries took the form of an "Iron Triangle" as sketched out by Gadgil & Guha (Figure 1).

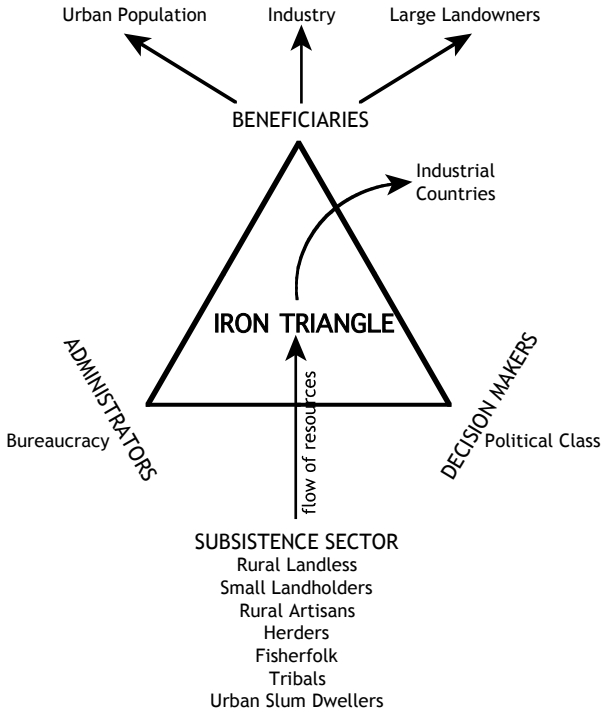

Figure 1: Gadgil & Guha's Iron Triangle
Governing Resource Use Patterns (Gadgil & Guha, 1995)

Ecosystem people also disproportionately suffered development-induced displacement that occurred in resource-rich regions or the waterways of the country. The green revolution further compounded an already dismal concentration of landownership in the rural countryside by raising the agricultural

costs beyond the means of small farmers. Prompted by the ongoing agrarian crisis, peasants began migrating to the cities in large numbers.

With the collapse of the socialist alternative and the withering of state capitalism in the 1990s, this shift towards the capital and resource intensive industrial-urban model only accelerated. Symbolic of its neo-colonial functions, neoliberal policies also pushed governments to subordinate a substantial portion of resource extraction from within their territories to the interests of transnational corporations. Compounding matters, rural India largely disappeared from the new commercialized media that began catering exclusively to the omnivore sector with very few exceptions (Joshi, 2004). Moreover, the tenuous position of tribal people on the margins of society worsened, as past efforts to alleviate their conditions gave way to increasingly severe restrictions on land use.

VARIETIES OF ENVIRONMENTALISMS

> "No development project, however laudable, can possibly justify impoverishment of large sections of people and their utter destitution."
>
> *– Supreme Court of India in Lalchand Mahto and Ors vs. Coal India Ltd., 1982 (Sen, 1995)*

> "No trauma could be more painful for a family than to get uprooted from a place where it has lived for generations... Yet the uprooting has to be done. Because the land occupied by the family is required for a development project which holds promise of progress and prosperity for the country and the people in general. The family getting displaced thus makes a sacrifice for the sake of the community. It undergoes hardship and distress and faces an uncertain future so that others may live in happiness and be economically better off... If not handled properly, these human beings could even impede the progress of project building. They could constitute pockets of protest, unrest and dissatisfaction..."
>
> *– SC Varma, former Chairman, Narmada Valley Development Agency (Sen, 1995)*

For the most part, the grassroots environmental movements of the 80s and 90s emerged out of the environmental justice struggles of ecosystem people. Albeit defensive in nature, these struggles intertwined social and environmental needs to such a degree that Western environmentalists took notice and saw hope that the shortcomings of their own overly ecocentric approach would finally be overcome. Similarly, these mobilizations joined ecosystem people and their urban sympathizers in

common cause, hence the prominent focus on indigenous people and notions of indigeneity in the global environmentalist discourse as an evocative metaphor for ecosystem people at large. Thus, in addition to advocating a very different "utilitarian conservationism" that integrated human needs with environmental sustainability, the environmental movements also began dreaming of an alternative and ultimately more humane vision of modernity (Narain, 2002).

Within this "Environmentalism of the Poor", the Gandhians became the most prominent. Having perfected the art of non-violent direct action and civil disobedience, activists of this variety could transfer their skills from campaign to campaign, while invoking the "father of the nation" to legitimize their struggles. Their symbolic but evocative protests played well in the national press and involved everything from hugging trees to standing firm in flood waters from dams. These acts also appealed to a world audience that instantly recognized and accorded a deep respect to the latter day disciples of the Mahatma. In addition, their philosophy went even deeper still and carried with it a scathing critique of the very edifice of the development mythology. They found within Gandhi's thoughts a vision for a different India based on a regenerated rural economy with village democracy at its heart. Although Nehru conveniently set aside these ideas in his quest to build a modern India, they persisted in a few pockets scattered throughout India only to be revived and rejuvenated in this era of resurgent environmentally-oriented social movements. However, it is these views that have received the most skepticism and contempt from many in the middle class who have turned away from Gandhi's simple living to embrace modern consumer society.

While Gandhians operated at the level of morals and values, Ecological Marxists adopted a political economy approach to fight for social and economic justice. They differed from Gandhians in their more ambiguous relationship with science, modernity, and development, which they favoured. Their position towards the state also resembled that of more mainstream views, as some tended to view a strong centralized state as the best guarantor of people's rights. However, this acceptance was tempered by the realization on the part of the most critical that certain technologies exacerbated

inequalities by concentrating power in the hands of the overclass and that participatory democracy must be encourage to fully realize the potential of each individual within the national collective. Likewise, they recognized that certain displacement-inducing development projects could not be reconciled with any sense of justice or human rights. In terms of their methods and tactics, the militant nature of their slogans and protests enthused some activists while turning off others. Their exortation towards class struggle also displaced particularist demands for universal ones that was at once beneficial and detrimental to the cause.

Somewhere in the middle Gadgil & Guha grouped the appropriate technologists. As a strategy rather than a broader ideology, its practitioners chose to focus on small scale socio-technical innovations that would serve as achievable incremental transformations of the human-environmental relationship. Ideologically, they borrowed heavily from both the Gandhian and Marxist camps with their focus on local level projects and community development. However, by stressing practical solutions, they also sought to entice a wide variety of technically savvy students to join their ranks, broadening the environmental movement beyond high stakes activism or struggle.

While differing on ideological grounds, all three tendencies have worked together in many struggles including the original Chipko movement. Although it came to be almost exclusively interpreted through a Gandhian lens owing to its two most prominent figures, Communist Party cadres and other leftist formations were deeply involved from the movement's beginning in the early 1970s (Guha, 2000). While their involvement was downplayed due to the proximity of the political sensitive India-China border, their militant slogan of "axemen beware, the red flag is here" proved just as compelling as the act of tree hugging and the ecological lesson encompassed by the couplet, "what does the forest bear? soil, clean water, and fresh air!" (Routledge, 1993). Most importantly, their focus on the rights of impoverished labourers also connected their struggle with that of the village commons. As these workers supplemented the subsistence economy with monetary

renumeration, they inhabited the boundary between omnivore and ecosystem people and provided a handle by which mainline Marxists could mobilize around a semi-proletarianized constituency.

ENVIRONMENTALISM & THE LEFT

Interestingly, Archana Prasad recently recapitulated some of these same categories in her work on contemporary issues facing tribal areas. Her analysis departed from Gadgil & Guha's framework by initiating a wide-ranging debate between the Left in general and environmentalism as embodied by the Gandhian or neo-Gandhian position. She worked through several areas of contention including land reform, the agrarian crisis, forestry, and the globalization debate, while also focusing on the ideological differences and similarities between Marxism and Gandhianism at the core of each tendency. While each identified the same culprit as the dominant capitalist mode of production and the subordinate position of tribals within the Indian polity, they differed on their prescribed solutions (Prasad, 2004).

On the issue of objectives, environmentalists and leftists also diverge at the level of scale. While Greens aim to strengthen local communities so as to achieve ecological and cultural self-determination, Reds look to rallying the working and marginal classes in a universal struggle for social justice. Both are animated by a vision of a classless society, although environmentalists and Gandhian tribal activists might stress autonomy from the market, and leftists would emphasize fighting for equity within commercial networks as the first step towards awakening class consciousness. Thus, environmentalists favour traditional livelihoods as opposed to industrial development that is thought of as inherently predatory. Ironically, this in turn prompts them to take a more radical anti-capitalist stance than the Left that still clings to notions of progress and development as unquestionably beneficial to human society (Prasad, 2004).

On the other hand, the Left criticizes environmentalists for not questioning the inherent inequalities also at the heart of many traditional systems. On this issue, the Left maintains an inherent distrust of

tradition for its strong social controls, potential for communal politics, and its suspicious nostalgia for pre-capitalist systems that were even more oppressive. However, environmentalists have been quite specific in wholeheartedly supporting local self-determination whereas the community should have final say on what model of development it should pursue. While the state may still play an important role, it cannot overrule or usurp the rights of local communities without their democratic participation in the decisions affecting their future.

THE NEW URBAN CONTEXT

> "If they set up unauthorised constructions and squat on government land, why should I think about them?" We want to put the fear of the consequences of unfettered migration into these people. We have to restrain them from coming to Mumbai."
>
> *– Vijay Kalam Patil aka the "Demolition Man", Revenue Officer in charge of Mumbai's slum clearances, 2005*[4]

In both Gadgil & Guha's and Prasad's conceptual frameworks, omnivores have been largely treated as a monolithic construct. Likewise, environmental movements and ideologies of ecosystem peoples have been studies vis-à-vis their response to the depredations of omnivores, as opposed to in relation with the various intervening sectors of society that unsettle Gadgil & Guha's seemingly incontrovertible binary. In focusing so exclusively on the human-environment interface, the class stratified nature of omnivore societies has also gone largely unnoticed, leading to the further underdevelopment of ties between urban and rural social justice movements. Similarly, the profound environmental problems and conflicts of urban areas have not yet received as much attention as rural struggles. Moreover, problems such as pollution and waste disposal have been seen as technical issues of town planning and civic administration, rather than issues of environmental justice like the far more compelling struggles over identity and livelihood in the countryside.

[4] Quoted from a BBC News Report by S. Biswas, February 3, 2005

Nowhere has this been more clear than in the new urban reality of India's major cities where both slums and slum demolitions have proliferated in recent years. With rural-to-urban migration picking up steam even as actual population growth rates have declined, a contest over space has arisen between rich and poor. Coupled with the modernization impulse of municipal and state authorities, governments have decisively taken the side of the well-to-do, bulldozing whole slum settlements to make way for "redevelopment." Meanwhile, as veteran journalist Jeremy Seabrook discovered in Delhi, a brutal indifference to the suffering of neighbours and fear of the underclass has begun to pervade the middle and upper classes. While this coincided with their overall anxieties around the manifold urban crises of infrastructure decay, water and electricity shortages, crime, and disease, it also demonstrated an astonishing ability to wall oneself off from human concerns and the public sphere (Seabrook, 1995). This profound alienation and lack of compassion differed significantly from what he found in the ostensible underclass. With them he found a remarkable ability to adapt to the most inhumane circumstances as well as an enormous sense of sacrifice particularly among those who sent their pitifully small remittances back to their families in places like rural Bihar.

The class nature of the struggle has also been readily apparent in the modernist master plans drawn up for India's major cities, which have left no room for the workers. This exclusion has had the effect of criminalizing the working class by forcing them to encroach on public lands. As such, slums have sprung up in the highly visible interstices of the city, further raising the ire of city planners and developers eager to make the dream of a shining metropolis a reality. Without proper land titles, slum dwellers have maintained a tenuous hold on their *jhuggis* or shacks through a system of patronage and extortion by various politicians, slumlords, the mafia, and the police. With the general lack of affordable housing, even middle class families have settled in illegal colonies making the problem that much more intractable.

Amita Baviskar in her work on the slum clearances in Delhi, called the sensibility of the gentrified middle and upper classes, "bourgeois environmentalism." She used this term as a trope to define a

whole set of interests and positions advanced by the same classes in their quest to carve out a space of modernity and progress in the city (Baviskar, 2003). Concurrently with its particular role as a supposedly "prosperous, hygienic, and orderly" capital city, Delhi witnessed massive demolitions in the mid-90s to overcome the disorder and chaos at odds with its image. However, beyond the beautification, disciplining, and regularizing of their particular neighbourhood, and the adoption of new green technologies, this environmentalism extended little beyond the NIMBY[5] phenomena also witnessed in well-to-do communities in the West. In this way, it could be described as an inverted form of environmentalism, where the actual interrelationships that make the city work are negated and the "problem" conveniently swept under the rug and out of sight, rather than addressed at its root level.

However as Baviskar noted, public interest litigation, which was used so effectively in a number of high profile environmental cases, has been instrumental in overcoming political paralysis over environmental legislation (Baviskar, 2003). At the behest of the courts, city authorities took action that would have otherwise proved political costly including over issues of encroachment, polluting industries, and the banning of non-CNG (compressed natural gas) transportation vehicles. Although positive in themselves as moves towards improving the dismal state of urban sanitation and air quality, their implementation have still been very one-sided. Encroachments of the wealthy have often been circumvented by political connections and court injunctions, while those of the poor have been swept away without much fuss by the paramilitary work gangs of the development authority. Small and medium sized industries employing thousands have also been forced to close down, as the government has done little to subsidize clean technologies to keep the producers in business or to provide alternative sources of livelihood for the newly unemployed. Moreover, the ban on two-stroke engines, the cost of conversion, and the relative inaccessibility of CNG stations has imposed

[5] "Not In My Back Yard," a term coined in the US to refer to a type of protest against the building of hazardous facilities in a neighbourhood. However, the question of where they may finally end up is of less concern.

enormous hardship on taxi drivers who were already eeking out a meagre living in the increasingly dangerous streets and byways of the city[6].

Interestingly, traditional pro-poor environmentalists opposed this heavy-handed implementation of important legislation that had the effect of positing the needs of the poor against the right to a clean environment. They decried this deployment of environmental discourse for socially repressive policies, as it put them in an awkward position vis-à-vis their previous use of the courts to advance their various causes. As with conservation measures that had the effect of dispossessing communities of their traditional lands, the new policies likewise created a rift between the poor and environmental concerns. The ultimate irony lay in the fact that a significant portion of those impacted were environmental refugees to begin with. Having lost their land and livelihoods through either development-induced displacement or the agrarian crisis, the urban underclass faced a second displacement at the hands of the same omnivore overclass.

A NEW THEORETICAL & STRATEGIC APPROACH

> "God forbid that India should ever take to industrialism after the manner of the west... keeping the world in chains. If our nation took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts."
>
> "It took Great Britain half the world to achieve its standard of living. How many planets would it take India to do the same?"
>
> *– Mahatma Gandhi*

As much as the omnivore elite would hate to admit it, Gandhi's ghost has come back to haunt contemporary India. With the intensification of the agrarian crisis and urban upheavals in an era of rapid economic growth, it is fast becoming clear that India cannot follow the Western model of development without extreme social exclusion, dispossession, repression, and environmental

[6] The claim that working people were unfairly targeted by the CNG requirements is plausible as owners of private vehicles were exempted from the ban.

degradation (Narain, 2002). Moreover, the intensive use of resources and thrust to cleanse urban space for the modernization project, will come at an almost genocidal cost for ecosystem people and the urban poor. As the crisis worsens, the potential for the development of a full-fledged environmental fascism to appropriate all remaining resources and keep the dispossessed at bay cannot be discounted. It thus behooves social justice activists to come to a new theoretical understanding of their predicament and to forge new strategic alliances that can bridge the divides that have thus far compartmentalized their individual efforts.

As India encompasses a vast "terrain of resistance" undergoing transformation at various levels, activists will have to grapple with both the variety of environmental and social challenges and their meaningful interface in the lived experiences of struggling communities and people. In this endeavour, the ideas of critical geographer David Harvey can aid in setting the stage. First and foremost, his elaboration of the concept of "accumulation by dispossession" clarifies the central role of neo-colonization in the era of neoliberal globalization. While most generally applied to the "New Imperialism" of the world's major state and corporate powers, the concept establishes the continuity between primitive accumulation and the privatization of the public sphere taking place in both advanced and developing countries (Harvey, 2003). Moreover, this aspect of the current period is reflected in the space-time compression[7] that is leaving no stone unturned for the expansion of capitalist accumulation. Thus development-induced displacement can be compared to the enclosures that preceded the industrial revolution, making both labour power and natural resources available to capital, while slum demolitions are acting to discipline and control surplus populations. In addition, various forms of this accumulation are taking place simultaneously, leading to a multiplication of sites of contestation and forcing social movements to struggle on numerous fronts and scales. While in some ways Harvey has only recapitulated an old thesis, his larger point about the unified

[7] While a major factor in the rapid cultural change being experienced under globalization, space-time compression is also stimulating a shift from Fordism to the instability of flexible accumulation. This facilitates multinational corporations to shift production or extract resources from any part of the globe.

resistance necessary to confront this trend bears repeating especially as anti-globalization and anti-war networks attempt to concurrently tackle the local and global scales of injustice and oppression.

In India, solidarity networks have already permitted small struggling communities to break out of their isolation to reach a global audience. What has now become a well-worn environmental strategy, the most fortune of these movements have established links with urban-based activists within India and supporters in the global Indian diaspora as well as the international environmental community. This transnational form of activism has allowed communities to jump scales, matching the global reach of multinational corporations that have thus far exerted their global influence without substantial opposition in their home countries. The internet as well as other communications technologies including video and film have also helped level the playing field to a certain extent in the court of public opinion. While the global gaze has not always been successful in moderating the voracity or viciousness of the corporate-state apparatus, it has nevertheless been able to forge a sense of connection and empowerment in often very long and lonely struggles.

A few prominent examples of these networks have been featured in Figure 2 and Table 2:

Figure 2: Sites of Resistance

Table 2: Selected Movements and their Supporters

Location	Issue	International Target	International Supporters
Narmada River Valley, Madhya Pradesh	Massive dam-induced displacement	World Bank, Int'l Funding Agencies & Engineering Firms	Friends of the Narmada (India/Int'l *www.narmada.org*), International Rivers Network (USA *www.irn.org*)
Kashipur District, Orissa	Displacement of Adivasi communities by bauxite mining	Alcan (Canada), Norsk Hydro (Norway)	Alcan't in India (Canada *www.saanet.org/alcant/*) Mines, Minerals, & People (India *www.mmpindia.org*)
Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh	Justice for Union Carbide gas leak victims	Dow Chemicals (USA)	International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (USA/Int'l *www.bhopal.net*)
Plachimada, Kerala	Coca-Cola's depletion and pollution of community water supply	Coca-Cola (USA)	Campaign to Stop Killer Coke (USA *www.killercoke.org*) India Resource Center (India/USA *www.indiaresource.org*)

MUMBAI AND BEYOND

In the early days of 2005 as the world's attention was turned towards the Indian Ocean Tsunami disaster, the biggest slum demolitions in India's history took place in Mumbai. The municipal and state governments engaged in an orgy of destruction, bulldozing 67,000 dwellings and leaving nearly 300,000 people homeless in two months. By the time the authorities had halted their work, the toll had proven horrendous, compounded only by the anemic outcry from social organizations that had failed to mobilize ahead of the drive. Yet while the furious pace of the destruction had caught major media unaware, Medha Patkar, the central organizer of the Narmada Movement and the National Alliance of People's Movements lent their support to the slum dwellers, organizing a protest meeting two months after the last of the demolitions were halted by the intercession of the central government[8]. However, even Patkar's profile as the country's most respected environmental activist

[8] The governing Congress-NCP coalition was supported by the BJP-Shiv Sena opposition on the demolitions, demonstrating that both major political formations continue to serve omnivore interests, despite their cosmetic differences.

was unable to prevent her and her contingent from enduring a police canning, revealing the seriousness with which the government pursued its mission to turn Mumbai into "India's Shanghai."

Despite the police brutality, this tentative extension of the environmental justice movement into the heart of the city may prove to be a seminal event in its evolution beyond the confines of traditional ecosystem concerns. The urban poor share much in common with their rural brethren including the inequitable access to resources at the core of the omnivore-ecosystem people binary. That they could benefit from the experience of social movement organizing may require urban activists involved in solidarity networks to devote more time to their immediate surroundings. While protests from the slum communities have so far remained relatively muted and contained, the flame of a far wider social explosion has been flickering for some time. Organizing around environmental justice, slum dwellers could push for their rights to shelter, land, water, and electricity in consort with other movements.

To assist in this, a Red-Green coalition as propounded by Prasad would have to be established and sustained. For the most part, environmentalists and the non-authoritarian Left already agree on core issues such as the need to deepen democracy and ensure local control over resources. At the national and global levels, both have come out firmly against neoliberal globalization. Lingering suspicions over tradition, modernity, and the role of the state should not prevent broad-based coalition building in the name of environmental and social justice. Both could also take advantage of international linkages that can serve to multiply their political and social power. While environmental networks have been detailed here, the Left has maintained a long tradition of international collaboration with likeminded parties and organizations. As such, while working at the local level in both the rural and urban contexts, this united front could elaborate an alternative global order based on social inclusion, cultural plurality, economic security, and ecological integrity. While this would boost the effectiveness of each movement, the future of India's impoverished majority and beleaguered environment might very well depend on it.

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