

Lecture 16:

Red and Green Politics in India

Course: Environment and Politics in India

“Man lives from nature, i.e. nature is man’s inorganic body, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die. To say that man’s physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is part of nature”

– Marx in EPM, 1844.

“Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human conquest of nature. For each such conquest takes its revenge on us...At every step, we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone outside nature – but that we, with flesh, blood, brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage of all other beings of being able to know and correctly apply its laws”.

- Engels

Man and Nature relationships

MARXIST theory:

- Deep inter-relationship between humanity and nature.
- Workers' FOURFOLD alienation:
 - Alienation from nature
 - Alienation from products of labour
 - Alienation from other people/workers
 - Alienation from self
- Human societies would *have* to control interaction with nature. BUT this 'rational' control of relations between humans and nature was *not* the *mechanistic* domination of nature .
- Labour should work according to the "LAWS of NATURE".
- Need to protect the basis of "production" of life, i.e. nature. Production is NOT merely economic production.

It's quite interesting, because if you look back in history, trade unions were some of the first environmentalists. We were the first ones that made the link between the workplace and the local community. So when you look back in the industrial revolution it was the trade unions that were saying, "Hang on a minute, these rivers are polluted, and our families are getting sick."

—Interview with a European trade unionist

Marx on Industrial Pollution

Karl Marx writing on “UNIVERSAL POLLUTION” to be found in industrial society:

“Even the need for fresh air ceases to be a need for the worker. Man reverts once more to living in a cave, but the cave is now polluted by the mephitic and pestilential breath of civilization. Moreover, the worker has no more than a precarious right to live in it, for it is for him an alien power that can be daily withdrawn and from which, should he fail to pay, he can be evicted at any time. He actually has to *pay* for this mortuary...

Light, air etc. – the simple *animal* cleanliness – ceases to be a need for man. Dirt – this pollution and purification of man, the *sewage* of civilization – becomes an *element of life* for him. Universal *unnatural neglect*, putrefied nature, becomes an *element of life* for him.”

—Excerpts from the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts
(EPM)

Labour and the Environment

Labour as the WEAKEST link in environmental solidarities?

- Overarching concern for jobs, wages, bonus, working conditions.
Classic JOBS *versus* ENVIRONMENT debate.
- Catering to workers and workers' communities: Trade unions and Occupational Health and Safety (OHS).
- OHS: Demands for more regulation, planning, expenditure related to environment/work spaces.

Where “green runs alongside red as our colour of choice”...

- 2006, Nairobi: 150 unions participated in an international trade union conference. Incorporation of ‘environmental’ rights as part of ‘traditional’ workers’ rights
- 2009/2010: Conferences in Gothenburg and Mexico City.
Metalworkers unions and transport unions incorporate environmental concerns.
- Conference of the Parties (COP) 15/16: Environment was too important a concern to be “left to the environmentalists”.

Labour and the Environment

FOUR possible discourses of trade union engagement with climate change:

- Technological fix
- Social transformation
- Mutual interests
- Social movements

These discourses MISUNDERSTAND Marx's reading of labour and nature.

- They see labour as the ONLY source of wealth and use value.
- IGNORE nature as an equal and crucial source of use value.
- BUT, *attempt* to break the *distinction* between workers in the workplace and citizens outside the workplace, reinventing unions as social movements.

Labour and the Environment

EXAMPLES:

National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA):

- Contested electricity price increases
- Demanded the roll-out of solar water heaters
- Sought to bring the demand of socially-owned renewable energy to the forefront of discourse.



Social Movement Unionism

- Emerged in the 1970s and the 1980s.
- WHERE: Global South. South Africa, Brazil, Korea, Philippines.
- HOW: Rejection of the 'economistic' vision. Alternative vision for trade unions. Building bridges with OTHER social movements for transformation.
- Modus Operandi? Engages *equally* with the factory/mine “workspace” and the larger community where workers reside.
- Not MERELY a “shift” of working area or of mass bases. A more FUNDAMENTAL *philosophical* shift of “labour” as a category. It seeks to redefine the meaning of labour, expanding the concept to include ALL working people.
- Trade unions LEAD ALL movements in their areas, dealing with ANY issue concerning workers and their families. E.g. Housing, health care, education, transport, running water.
- TARGET: Not ONLY industrial managements, BUT ALSO local state machinery/government.

Ideological Dilemmas in Indian Environmentalism

Anil Agarwal: *“Indian environmentalism needs to move beyond pretty trees and tigers...”*

- “Western” models of environmentalism (wilderness protection, rapid industrialization tempered with regulation etc.) would NOT work in India.
- India: ‘Poor’ were not MERELY ‘allies’ of the environmental movements. Landless peasants, *adivasis*, nomads, fisherpeople would DRIVE Indian environmentalism. WHY?
- Guha and Martinez Alier: *“Environmentalism of the Poor”* originating in “social conflicts over access to control over natural resources”
- ECOLOGICAL DEGRADATION and SOCIAL INJUSTICE as two sides of the SAME coin. Environmentalism as an expression of SOCIALISM.

ARE things that simple in India?

Ideological Dilemmas in Indian Environmentalism

TENSIONS between environmentalists and the 'LEFT':

- Environmental movement's position: Opposition between 'traditional' and 'modern' systems.

Environmental conservation LINKED with “*traditional rights and institutions*”; traditional structures of authority.

- LEFT had a HUGE problem with the valorization of 'tradition'.
- LEFT supported the idea of modern science and technology and a “strong industrial and agrarian base”.

“Indian environmentalism has always been suspect in the eyes of the organised Indian left which, by and large, still subscribes to the notion that the development of capital-intensive technologies is a progressive trend”

- Amita Baviskar

Indian trade unions and the environment

- Maharashtra Girni Kamgar Union (MGKU). 2-year long strike in Mumbai. Bonus, working conditions, pollution, mechanization.
- Kerala Fisherworkers' Unions
- KIOCL controversy: Iron ore mining in the Kudremukh National Park.

WHAT did the unions say?

- Environmental concerns are 'exaggerations'. Little adverse impact
- Jobs are more important. Demand 20-year lease for KIOCL
- Construct anti-pollutant dams, sow lands with *Shola* grass, change pipelines to prevent leaks
- Bauxite mining in Anuppur: Environmentalists are "CIA agents" and "pro-imperialist" forces.
- Grasim Rayon company in Kerala. Jobs *versus* Environment?

Indian trade unions and the environment



THE GRASIM SAGA

March 5, 1958 Grasim Industries and Kerala Government enter into an agreement on setting up the factory and allied infrastructure	1962 The operations at the factory begin	March 29, 2004 State Government decides to resume the acquired land	March 21, 2006 Government confirms resuming of land through an order by Revenue Secretary	July 17, 2007 A broad agreement is reached, but Government insists Grasim implement the project and not another company floated by it	September 24, 2009 Grasim disposes equipment and pulls down the closed factory
June 30, 2001 The factory is closed following protests over pollution	June 2, 2005 Grasim files a writ in Kerala High Court	April 2006 Grasim moves court against the order, HC stays it			

Indian trade unions and the environment

The Grasim Rayon's Saga:

- Company provided employment to 3,000 workers in the factory.
- Kerala government permitted the company to fell timber from forests in Mavoor at cheap rates. Tribals *versus* Corporates?
- Devastation to the bamboo forests.
- Extensive pollution to the Chaliyar river.
- Company destroyed livelihoods of an estimated 3,00,000 bamboo workers, sand miners, and fisherfolk.

Narrative of “GREEN IMPERIALISM”, Trade Union leaders doubling as spokespersons of the Company.

“Nature” *against* jobs and “production”; Economic rationality against ecological sustainability.

CMM and Alternative Ecological Visions

Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha (CMM)

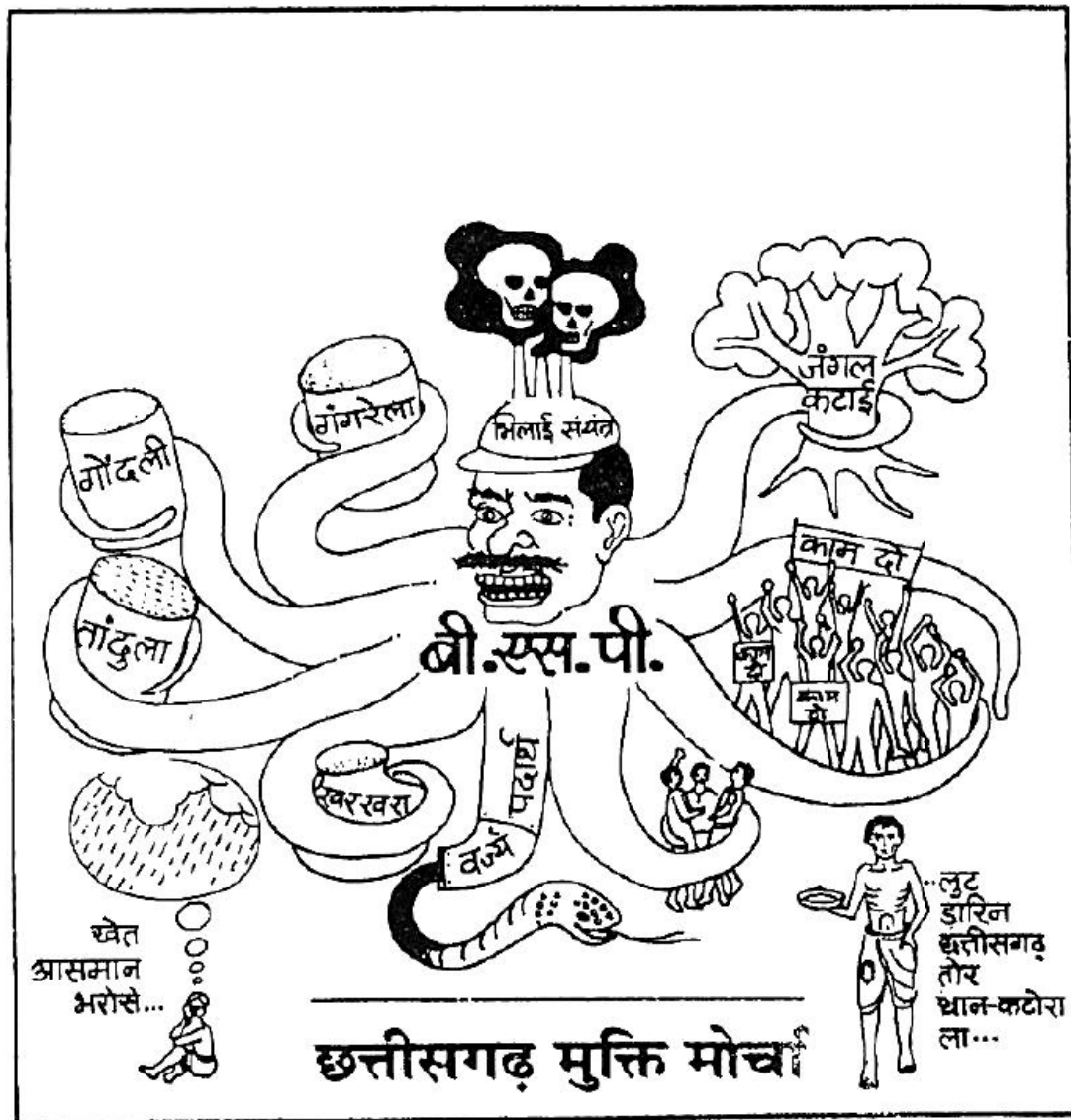
- Formed during a battle for parity in wages.
- Organized workers in mines, factories, forests.
- Red AND Green flag/vision.
- Moving beyond 'economism' of wages/bonus.



CMM and Alternative Ecological Visions

जन शिक्षण पोस्टर (छमुमो)





भिलाई स्टील प्लांट और छत्तीसगढ़ का पिछड़ापन

CMM and Alternative Ecological Visions

पानी नहीं, तो न पीओ
टी.वी. देख-देख कर जीओ



वो ऐसा दिखायेंगे टी. वी. का कमांड, कि लोग भूल जायेंगे पानी का सवाल

CMM and Alternative Ecological Visions

CMM's ISSUES:

- Against Industrial Pollution
- Against captive plantations and monocultures
- *Paryavaran Thanas*
- Afforestation
- Against massive water extraction by industry
- Big Dams. Alternative water management model.
- Against Green Revolution



Tree Tags at the Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha office in Dalli Rajhara, part of the 'Apne Jungle ko Pehchano, Apne Parivaar ko Pehchano' Campaign

CMM and Alternative Ecological Visions

Table 1. Land-use patterns and proportions of species planted.

Species	Proportion (%)	Use
Bamboo	15	Local consumption, house construction
Local forest varieties, <i>mahua</i> , <i>bel</i> , <i>amla</i>	35	Used by forest-based communities, probably for fuel, fodder and food
Commercial varieties, <i>badaam</i> , <i>kaju</i> , sandalwood, lime, <i>neem</i> , <i>jamun</i> , mango	20	Commercial sale
Plantation trees cultivated by the forest department	30	Commercial sale, such as for paper-making

Source: Shankar Guha Niyogi, 'Hamaara Paryavaran', in Anil Sadgopal and Shyam Bahadur (eds), *Sangharsh aur Nirman: Shaheed Shankar Guha Niyogi aur Unka Naye Bharat ka Sapna* (New Delhi: Rajkamal Prakashan, 1993), p. 233.

CMM and Alternative Ecological Visions

मोगरा के बांध ला बनन नहिदन भैया

गांव ला अपन डूबन नहिदन भैया

पुरखा के डीह छोदन नहीं भैया

मोगरा...

खेत ला बचाबो, खार ला बचाबो

गांव ला बचाबो, गवइहा ला बचाबो

इही किसान सारे जग के पोसाए

मोगरा...

O my brother

We will not let the Mogra dam be built;

No, we will save our village from submersion

And protect our heritage with tenacity;

We will not let the Mogra dam be built

O my brother.

We will save the fields and the pastures,

We will save the village and the grazer;

We will save the farmer

Who nurtures and sustains the whole world

We will not let the Mogra dam be built

इसलिए पर्यावरण की बात मत उठाओ
विकास की दौड़ से राष्ट्र को पीछे मत लौटाओ।
तुम पूछते हो कि राष्ट्र कहते किसे हैं?
ऐसे सवाल राष्ट्रद्रोही पूछते हैं...
तुम्हें मालूम होना चाहिए कि
बंदूक गुलाम है जिनकी
सत्ता पर लगाम है जिनकी
जिनका नियंत्रण है पूंजी पर
जो बड़े बड़े उद्योग चलाते हैं
फैक्ट्री के कचरे से नदियां सड़ाते हैं
साफ हवा में जहर मिलाते हैं
छीन लिया है जिन्होंने सूरज को
और छिपा दिया है धुएँ के पहाड़ के नीचे
सुबह होने की खबर मिल सके
इसलिए मिलकर भोंपू बजाते हैं
छलनी कर दिया है धरती का कलेजा
अन्धाधुंध ऊर्जा के दोहन से
राष्ट्र यानी खुद के लिए
हर साल अरबों मुनाफा कमाते हैं
और राष्ट्र वो है जिनके हाथ में है संपन्नता
राष्ट्र नहीं होती भुक्खड़ जनता