

PROTECTION OF WESTERN GHATS AND GADGIL REPORT

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Abstract

Environmental fundamentalism often ignores the humanitarian aspects of development. The human life style has changed a lot from the primitive culture of eco-friendly life style to modern civilised and city-like life style. Often the environmental fundamentalists concentrate on urban areas, and try to impose fundamentalist view on the village people. This is often supported by the Government since the village people are voice less. It often creates some issues in the rural areas especially in a state like Kerala where there are least regional imbalances, as compared to other states of India. The fundamentalists obtained the labelling 'World Heritage Zone' for the Western Ghats from the UN, in such a manner which is criticized and objected by the UN itself. With a view to cover the UN objections to that proposals, the Government appointed a High Level Committee chaired by Prof. Gadgil. As per the request of the MPs of the region he also suggests to exclude certain areas of Western Ghats from the labelling, which is accepted by the Government. But the criteria of exclusion neglected the concerns of thickly populated remote villages in the region.

The article tries to justify the arguments and demands farmers union in the region on the basis of the 'Report of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel' chaired by Prof. Madhav Gadgil, Submitted to 'The Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India' on 31 August 2011. It also discusses the historical perspective of the environmental awareness to find more light to the issues. The irony of environmental promotion which ignores the eco friendly life style of the villages is criticised, on the basis of Gadgil committee report.

Key Words: Eco-friendly life style, Environmental promotion, World Heritage Zone, Environmental fundamentalism

Introduction

Human being is considered as the animal with a developed brain. Developed from the single isolated animal like life style, he turned as a social animal and continued to develop his social behaviour in conformity to the natural environment. Development is an inevitable demand of human being and it is there in every society. Each races developed their own system of development, but nature was the focus of it. The ancient rituals of religion were nothing but the observation of nature as an inevitable part of life. Irrespective of the primitivism in religion, they all advocated and reminded the human being that he is only a substance of this natural environment.

Objective

To analyse the issues in Western Ghats on the basis of 'Gadgil Committee Report'

Methodology

The study is mainly conducted on the basis of 'Report of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel' chaired by Prof. Madhav Gadgil, Submitted to 'The Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India' on 31 August 2011. Discussions with the inhabitants of Idukki district are also conducted for the study. As a part of the inhabitant group in the area, the author makes use of his own experiences also. Published reports in news papers and reputed books are also considered for the study.

Civilisations

The development of modern civilisation has a critical impact on the environment. The ancient civilisations did least harm to the environment. But the critical examination by the historians, points out that many environmental changes has been made by these civilisations for the construction of their cities.

But the most harm to the environment is made as an impact of industrialisation. Industrialisation focused on mass production, without any 'ethics of necessity'. Needs are created for the products. The rulers of any civilisation are highly influenced by the so called business men, who have least environmental ethics. Environmental ethics is the part of environmental philosophy which extends the traditional boundaries of ethics from humans to the non-human world. Even the propagators of environmental protection are highly influenced by the 'background rulers'.

Deforestation and Civilisations.

Deforestation is an inevitable element of every civilisation. The rulers were the main advocates of deforestation. Mahabharata gives a beautiful narration of the development of a civilisation. The deforestation made by the Pandavas, with the permission of the 'rulers' results in the formation of famous rich 'Indraprasta'.

Agriculture based village economy also gives scope for deforestation. But the formation of agriculture based economy gives least harm to the nature, even though it accounts for deforestation. Agriculture and the farmers were mostly eco friendly and their villages' accounts for a separate eco system, which protects the species of that environment to a great extent.

City life and pollution

Industrialisation has brought economic development to the nations. The economic power and the modern amenities have a mesmeric effect which attracted the other developing nations to adopt the industrialisation policy. Rapid industrialisation was most harmful to the environment than the so called deforestation for the village economy.

'Efficiency' is an undoubted and unquestioned value that any society preserves and aspires for. The maximum utilisation of production capacity has been considered as a sign of efficiency. This efficiency is criticised when the goods are not sold out. So 'innovation' comes forward to influence the theories of consumption.

The industrialised civilisation propagates the newer definitions of 'efficiency' and 'innovation'. They have all the innovative mechanism to influence the culture and philosophies of all civilisations. Environmentalists are also influenced by this phenomenon. New concepts of ethics were also defined.

Pollution of Village by City industrialists

Traditionally the eco friendly nature of the villages are least influenced by the civic culture. But the industrialisation and the newer definitions of efficiency naturally have an eye on the 70% population that lives in the villages. The 'Green Revolution' of India accelerated the use of chemicals for the maximum utilisation of 'agricultural land'. The productivity increased, but that was the first mass attack on the ecosystem of the villages in India.

Use of High Yielding Varieties (HYV), use of Chemicals (fertilisers), use of insecticides, pesticides, etc were the major components of Green revolution in India. HYV seeds are highly responsive to use of fertilisers and are equally vulnerable to pest attacks and growth of useless weeds. As a result the village ecosystem was negatively affected by large.

The inventions of village researchers, eco friendly HYVs, were not promoted by the formal system. For eg 'Kunjooj rice seed' invented by a farmer 'Kunjooj' in Idukki district had a high movement among the then rice farmers of the region, but gradually ignored with the use of synthetic HYVs of the Govt.

Even though we are successful in attaining self sufficiency in food grain, poverty eradication remained a big question in front of the government, till liberalisation. There will be no question on the poverty of village people and their economic backwardness. The major negative impact of the green revolution in the villages are:

- (a) Abolition of several species from the agricultural lands. The insectivorous birds such as the drongo, bee-eater, even the house sparrow became rare or locally extinct, indicating the collapse of the entire food webs of the farmland.ⁱ
- (b) As a result of all these "modern" techniques, the air, water and the soil were polluted; most food grains and farm products were contaminated by pesticides. The runoff from the farm land contaminated the wetlands – rivers, tanks, ponds, reservoirs, lakes and all water bodies – and the life in them.
- (c) Serious health problems like cancer and other ailments, especially in villages adjacent to plantations, such as renal failure, stillborn babies, birth defects (mentally and physically retarded and handicapped children). Eg. Padri village in Kasargode district (cashew nut plantation) of Kerala.
- (d) Addiction to the use of chemicals and the allied problems,ⁱⁱ lead to the loss of eco system and eco friendly lifestyle.
- (e) The advent of chemical intensive farming and its prevalence in Kerala for the past 50 years have resulted in the near stagnant levels of productivity of many of these economically important crops such as coconut, cashew, pepper, coffee, tea, cardamom and arecanut. Besides these, many regions in Kerala, like Wayanad started facing acute water scarcity.ⁱⁱⁱ
- (f) The economic liberalization and WTO policies, bring down the prices of agriculture commodities, increasing instances of suicide by farmers.^{iv}
- (g) Investment in agriculture has changed from the farmer to the industries supplying input to the farmer, and as a direct consequence, net income for farmers decreased while the industries supporting agriculture in the country flourished.^v
- (h) "High yield variety-fertilizer-pesticide pack" of the Green Revolution, is a failure. It leads to degradation and disruption of the fragile ecosystems of 'God's own country'

HYVs are the chief culprits for the water scarcity, nutritional insecurity, loss of primary productivity and agrarian crisis being faced by the State.^{vi}

- (i) The pesticide 'endosulfan' already banned by 62 countries of the World is still being used in India.^{vii}
- (j) Over criticism imposed on the migrant farmers as a threat to the environment.
- (k) The ever remaining poverty of the village inhabitants, irrespective of the growth in GDP & PCI.

The toxic consequences of industrialisation are always unquestioned, especially in a world which is ruled by the industrialist 'from the back of the curtain.' The nation ruled by cities always shut their eyes on the evils of modern civilisations and they have all the mechanism to propagate their agendas.

Environment Protection Irony

The modern world is well aware of the toxic effect of industrialisation. Global warming, deforestation, threat species, etc are the common terminologies used to warn the world. Thanks to the studies made by the scientists of cities. But the remedies proposed by the environmentalists seem to be an irony in the eco friendly lifestyle.

- (a) There is no control on harmful industries and products. Eg. 'plastic free campus campaigns' Instead of controlling the production, Market for 'endo sulfan', 'DDT', etc.
- (b) All the environmental awareness programs became dramatic and paved least impact on the people for environment protection. Eg. Packaged drinking water (plastic bottle) culture, instead of common purified water system.
- (c) The awareness programs of the environmentalists, focused least on the existing eco friendly system of the villages. The farmers turned addict to the use Government sponsored chemical. The program boosted the industry, rather than to protect agriculture. And the environmentalist failed to make awareness to the government or the industrialists or even to the farmers.
- (d) Penalty escape mechanism of Developed Nations: The developed nations were more aware of the damaging environment, and they impose heavy penalty on the anti environment elements of the industries as well as individuals. But the 'eco-envy addiction' of the civic society prevents the eco-friendly life style, irrespective of the environmental awareness and penalties.

There aroused a most hypocritical environmental protection mechanism to evade the penalties, again on the shoulder of the third world countries. For eg .Carbon credit fund, a legal and formal mechanism to evade penalties imposed on 'environmental damage'.

- (e) Waste dumping yards of cities: In India at least one village is destroyed by the waste dumping of cities. Cities are the areas with concentration of money and power. Often the cries and pains of these villages go in vain. The damage to the eco system or the environment is least attended by the environmentalists, as they are also the part of cities.

Eg. Mandur village near Bangalore city, Deonar, Mulund and Kanjurmarg in Mumbai, Ghazipur, Okla and Bhalswa near Delhi, Kodungaiyur near Chennai, Vadavathoor near Kottayam, Cheranallor near Kochi, Njeliamparambu near Kozhikode, etc are few examples. The living conditions for residents living in the vicinity of the dump yard are miserable. The village people are not even compensated by the mechanism.

(f) World heritage forests: UN provides funding for the protection of forests under the banner of 'World heritage zones'. A **World Heritage Site** is a place (such as a building, city, complex, desert, forest, island, lake, monument, or mountain) that is listed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as being of special cultural or physical significance.^{viii} There are, 1031 sites in the world heritage list: 802 cultural, 197 natural, and 32 mixed.^{ix} Italy has the greatest number of World Heritage Sites with 51 sites, followed by China (48), Spain (44), France (41), Germany (40), Mexico (33), and India (32).

World Heritage Forest Zone of Western Ghats in Kerala

Western Ghats of India is a mountain chain, which is considered as older than Himalaya Mountains. The forests of the site are home to at least 325 globally threatened flora, fauna, bird, amphibian, reptile, and fish species^x.

The Western Ghats region has some of the highest levels of literacy in the country, and a high level of environmental awareness.^{xi}

Rapid Migration to Western Ghats

As an aftermath of World wars, there was heavy shortage of food grains. India Government promoted migration to Western Ghats with the main objective of eradication food shortage. Even though the farmers are not funded by the government, they sweated blood to create a civilised village with modern amenities. Thanks to the least direction given by the formal system, the villages formed in the Western Ghats preserved the eco friendly system of the traditional villages.

Ban on Deforestation

The rapid industrialization and urbanization in western countries which started before world war, was causing rapid loss of natural resources. Naturally there raised concerns for pollution, quality of life and environmental stress. The USA established a *National Environmental Policy Act* in **1970** to consider its goal in terms of environmental protection. The United Nations Conference on the Environment in Stockholm in 1972 and subsequent conventions formalized EIA. At present, all developed countries have environmental laws whereas most of the developing countries are still adopting it (Lee, 1995). In India, Government has banned the deforestation and migration to forests with an enactment of Indian forest act 1972. Forest Conservation Act was passed in 1980.

Deforestation by the Government.

Western Ghats has a long history of deforestation. For eg. River valley projects, hydro electric projects, tea and cardamom plantations, etc. Idukki dam is a classic case wherein the entire catchment was encroached along with dam construction.^{xii}

Before issuing title deeds to the migrant farmers of the Western Ghats, Kerala Govt has numbered all the forest trees in the agricultural land, through the forest ministry. Number was carved on the trees as (k.X.1214 ie Govt Wood <No>). During 1980s government cut all those trees and transferred them to the cities and auctioned. The remaining trees were marked with positions in the patta, the conservation being the responsibility of the owner.

Western Ghats and Eco friendly life

The economy formed by the migrants was largely eco friendly in nature. They planted trees in their land as a part of life style of the village. For eg. jack fruit trees, teak, mango trees,

coconut trees, Konna, neem trees, guava tree, mahogany, etc are very common in almost all fields. The eco friendly system is such that the people who look from a Helicopter may suspect the entire region as a thick forest.

One cannot deny the fact that the eco system is affected by a large through the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. But the inhabitants are not the culprits, but the formal system of 'agri-development mechanism' and off course the plantation industries. Dragon flies, butterflies, toads, frogs, crab, and a lot of varieties of species are missing in the vegetation, not because of the farmers, but because of the use of pesticides supplied through the government mechanism with subsidies.

"Use of chemical manure has not only killed the soil but also has even changed the soil structure affecting soil fertility in the Western Ghats. This leads to application of an increasing quantum of chemical fertilizers without any scientific basis. Since fertilizers demand more water, there is an increased and unsustainable exploitation of water resources in the Ghats affecting the entire ecology of the hills and downstream."^{xiii}

Western Ghats Issues

The idea of making people a part of governance was overpowered by the need to get more industries. This overpowering need to seek multinational investment is still a policy^{xiv}. Importantly, the WGEEP proposals would overcome the serious and quite genuine objections raised at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to the Indian proposals on 17 May 2011 at the Tenth Session, New York, 16–27 May 2011.^{xv} With an eye on the UN fund allocated to the 'world heritage zones', India somehow succeeded in getting the UN declaration to the Western Ghats as a whole, violating even the rules and regulations of the UN as a whole.

Objections Raised at UN PFII to Indian Proposals^{xvi}

1. As the report reads "We would like to again bring to the attention of the Permanent Forum our serious concern about the **continuous and on-going disrespect of the principle of free, prior and informed consent** by UNESCO's World Heritage Committee when it designates sites in **Indigenous peoples'** territories as ,World Heritage sites.

2. In many cases Indigenous peoples were not even consulted when their territories were designated as World Heritage sites, although **this designation can have far-reaching consequences for their lives and human rights**, their ability to carry out their subsistence activities, and their ability to freely pursue their economic, social, and cultural development in accordance with their right of self-determination.

5. It is also inconsistent with UNESCO's objective to integrate a human **rights-based approach** into all of its programmes and activities.

7. 'Western Ghats' (India); 'Trinational de la Sangha' (Republic of Cameroon); 'Kenya Lake System in the Great Rift Valley' (Kenya). All three sites are nominated under natural World Heritage criteria alone, **without giving due consideration to the Indigenous cultural values** connected to these areas and Indigenous peoples' roles as stewards of these places. Moreover, all of the mentioned **nominations were prepared without meaningful involvement and consultation of the Indigenous peoples concerned and without obtaining their free, prior and informed consent.**

Main points by then Idukki MP^{xvii}

7. In the Idukki- Munnar region, more than 200 acres of Cardamom Plantations have been classified as forest land. The Cardamom Reserve Land and the CHR issues of Idukki district needs to be settled soon.

12. At the Periyar, Munnar and Anaimudi areas, no compensation has reached the affected people so far. Whether the Anaimudi area is going to be declared as a Biosphere Reserve or not may be clarified.

Response of MoS (I/C) E&F^{xviii}

7. The State of Kerala will need a special dispensation, as the area of forest in proportion to the land area is the highest in the State. Settlements where people have been living in the same area for more than 100 years will be given special consideration.

Findings:

1. Objections raised by the United Nations and the formulation of Gadgil Committee there after shows that the Government has appointed the High Level Committee to escape the objections from UN.
2. MPs recommendation to exclude 200 acres of cardamom plantations shows that he is well aware of the consequences.
3. The MP keeps silent on the villages in Idukki where there is no forest at all.
4. The period of 100 years of migration seems to be baseless as the first Act in this regard was passed in that year 1980.
5. The people in the region are not aware about the UN objection of 'this designation can have far-reaching consequences for their lives and human rights'.
6. The Governments seems to be ignoring the above statement while implementing the world heritage zone labelling.
7. Eco friendly life style is not given due importance in environmental protection.
8. The really threatening products are not banned and controlled at source.

Conclusion:

The objections raised by the UN itself states that the declared World Heritage zones will considerably affect the life of the inhabitants. Considering this areas with a migrant history of more than 100 years were excluded from the program. The selection of 100 years as a boundary is meaningless. This consideration simply ignores the well developed civilisation inhabited with the support of the Government before 1973. Fundamentalism is not advisable in democracy. Promoting the eco friendly life style is more advisable than the fundamentalist views of 'environmental protection which ignores the rights of human beings. Environment can be protected only through a system of eco-friendly life style.

End Notes

- i Madhav Gadgil (Chair), Report of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, Part I, 2011, P.316
- ii Ibid
- iii ibid
- iv Ibid
- v ibid
- vi Ibid, p.317
- vii Ibid, p240

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- viii <http://whc.unesco.org/en/about/>
- ix World Heritage List, UNESCO World Heritage Sites official sites,
<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list//en/news/1049/en/list>
- x <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/1342/>
- xi Madhav Gadgil (Chair), Report of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel, Part I, 2011, p.v
- xii Ibid, p. 33.
- xiii Ibid, p. 40
- xiv Ibid, p. 107
- xv Ibid
- xvi Ibid, appendix 3, p. 151
- xvii Ibid, P. 239,
Minutes of the Meeting of the MPs of the Western Ghats Region with the Minister of State (I/C)
Environment and Forests along with the Members of the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel held on
17th August, 2010 at Parliament House Annexe, New Delhi.
- xviii Ibid, page 242, Response of MoS (I/C) E&F
- XIX Jha, C. S., et al. "Deforestation and Land Use Changes in Western Ghats, India." *Current Science*, vol. 79, no. 2, 2000, pp. 231–238. JSTOR, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/24103455.

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