



New Social Movements and Its Transition : A Case Study of Niyamgiri Movement in Odisha

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Abstract: The contemporary trends of social changes are unique in their own ways, and it has given a plot for the emergence of new social movements. There is a trend of considerable continuity as well as change in the whole transitional phase from conventional to new social movements. On, one hand where they cannot be fixed into water tight compartments on the other, they follow a completely unpredictable course of progression. This paper aims to describe the sociology of such change and locates environmental movements in specific reference of case study of Niyamgiri movement. It shows how sociology is intrinsically interwoven with biodiversity and establishes a strong relationship between man, environment and society. Further, it aims to have a better understanding of organizational trends of new social movements and finds an accommodative path for both ecological conservation and development.

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Introduction

The novelty in patterns of social change is manifested through new forms of social movement. This necessarily leads to change in the research focus in the field of sociology. The emerging environmental movements are reflection of such changes and it makes social scientists, sociologists and the environmentalists interested in studying the development and biodiversity discourse. These issues are all pervasive and ubiquitous in nature because of its universal interconnectedness. Studying the environmental movement or ecological issues in Sociology becomes significant because of the socio-cultural and economic dimensions of the problem. Prominently there are two areas of

concern for Sociologists, first one inquires the fundamental environmental and developmental aspects, and the second one deals with the people's collective effort to solve the problem, i.e. through organizational patterns, their ideology, strategies, media functioning etc. Walker explains that there has to be an innovative and creative social inquiry of new social movements.¹

Conceptual Constructs

Environment

The term environment is used in different senses by different people and therefore it has been defined in different ways. Some even describe this as "semantic chaos" because no one knows what is really meant by the term in any given instance, unless quite explicitly defined.²

The word 'environment' is derived from the French word 'environ' or 'environer', which means 'around' 'to surround', 'to encompass' etc. Etymological connotations of the word refer to sum total of the things or circumstances around an organism (including humans), neighborhood or vicinity. While the meaning of the term stands relatively constant, it rapidly changes when different adjectives are used i, e. Physical, natural, cultural, geographical, psychological etc.

Biodiversity

Bruce Wilcer (1984, p 213) defines biodiversity as the variety of life forms, the ecological role they perform, and the genetic diversity they contain. A definition by the US office of Technology Assessment explains, biological diversity refers to the variety and variability among living organisms and the ecological complexes in which they occur.

Social Movement

Social Movements are generally perceived as the conscious effort of collectivities mostly to bring about changes in society and sometimes to resist the change in particular. Thus, social movement signifies collective actions which are conscious and deliberate, loosely organized, with definite ideology leadership and strategy. Smelser (1962, p 68), explains "movements are viewed essentially as adaptive mechanism in a period of rapid social change. And with adaption social change is institutionalized. T K Oommen (1990, p 92) further explains that first, "social movements are mechanism through which men attempt to move from the periphery of system to its center". Movements are conscious

efforts on the part of men to mitigate their deprivation and secure social justice. Second, while movements are conditioned by the social structural factors, it implies voluntary action: men create movement to achieve goals they hold. Third, movements are perhaps the chief mechanism through which the deprived categories demonstrate their power. Thus a movement arises when men committed to a specific set of goals participate in protest oriented, purposive collective actions.

Environmental Movements as New Social Movements (NSMs)

New Social Movements emerged since 1960 and one of the major movements was environmental movement. Environmental movements are both new and different in terms of their participation, methods of intervention, issues raised by them, their impact in terms of addressable, policy shifts and consciousness and the discourses they provide. While the agitation are carried out primarily by the shifts in the environment which include the rural peasant, forest tribal, their women folk, the fisher folk, it also includes an allied space where voluntary organizations the media, professionals, civil and human right groups and even sympathetic policy makers and bureaucrats who have created a public space that supports the movements have a functional role. There are comparatively new set of ideologies, strategies organization, goals and associated collectivity of environmental movements. Environmental movement evolves as a response to a crisis situation, problem or social issue.

Statement of the Problem

Environmental movements are new type of popular responses to the emerging environment crisis. Although the history of people's concern for environment goes back to many decades, they assumed new dimension at present. Therefore it is viewed in the category of a new social movement. The nature of environmental movement seems to be unique in several respects. It can be seen as a global phenomenon working independently in different parts.³ Therefore they have universalistic as well as particularistic features. An analysis of the ideology, leadership, nature of organization is relevant for understanding of the movement's process. There is a search for some type of uniformity in the cognitive level for environmental movements as whole and type of diversity (particularistic features) which are specific to individual culture at the pragmatic or operational level. The specific reference to Niyamgiri is made here. It therefore strives to bring a speculative alternate to the movement through resourceful use and conservation of the biodiversity pool.

Objectives of the Study

- To explore the historical, ideological, and sociological evolution and transition from old to new social movements in India.
- To understand the uniqueness, newness of environmental movements and the consequent theoretical and methodological aspects in their analysis with specific reference to Niyamgiri
- To show how essential is the biodiversity retention of the area for the survival of the local tribal and that its conservation must be sociologically handled.

Social Movement: Conventional and Contemporary Theoretical Perspectives

Generally the structuralists approach to social movement indexes the system manufacturing. They are concerned with identifying the type and sources of strain in the society. Structuralists feel that, the source of change is usually exogenous. The cognitive praxis approach tries to explain the movement as a voluntary theory of action in which individual are seen as responsive and “willing agents” in the process of collective behavior. The renewed Marxist interpretation explains that without the self actualization of the group, no social movement can be forwarded. The other approach to study social movement is the rationalist perspective of the resource mobilization theory. This theory holds the assumption that the movement participants are rational in calculation of the resources available and they work accordingly.

Since the beginning of the 1980s’ the social sciences has increasingly dedicated attention to the so called new social movements. The new social movement used to have unique nature of foci as compared to other traditional social movement. The quest has resulted in rediscovering the New Social Movement where by the urban social movement in different countries is considered to be of unique interests. There is considerable difference in the ideology, nature of development and other characteristics of New Social Movement compared to the traditional social movements. They deal with the issues like the identity, continuity and predictability of personal existence. Melucci (1989 p-112) in his analysis of New Social Movements says that they are struggling, not only for re-appropriation but also for collective control over the socio-economic development. They include re-appropriation of time, space and relationships in the the individuals’ daily existence. It involves the reshuffling of the identities of individual at various levels ,here the individual communicate,

negotiate, produce meanings and make decision within a historically specific social content and whereby collective identity is constructed⁴.

Melucci (1989 p-134) noted certain novel characteristics of the New Social Movement such as -

- a) They are not focused on the political system and are situational.
- b) Their objective of solidarity and spontaneity is anti- authoritarian and anti- hierarchical.
- c) They face constant risk of discontinuity and fragmentation.
- d) Presence of religious or cultural ethos of the society.
- e) It gains support from all classes and groups of people.
- f) They are related with the status of state in contemporary society.

The identity- oriented paradigm looks at the contemporary social movements as the bearers of new consciousness, new interests and new identities. The New Social Movements are studied as the dominant social forces of post-industrial societies.

In order to study the specific movements the focus needs to be done on its ideology, organization and leadership. An ideology may be understood as a system of ideas which gives legitimacy to an existing or proposed system of relationships and correspondingly supports an action, and subvert the prevailing system. In case of environmental movement ideologies provide inspiration as well as legitimacy to the pattern of collective attempt to bring about social change in institution.

Ramachandra Guha (1992, p140) has identified three ideological streams in terms of which the environmental movements can be understood, such as- a) crusading Gandhianism, b) appropriate technology, c) ecological Marxism.

The crusading Gandhianism was the first ideological strand identified which upholds the pre-colonial and pre capitalist village community as an ideal of social and ecological harmony. The Gandhian rejection of the modern way of life finds justification from religion idiom. Environmental degradation is viewed as a moral problem and it extends to the criticism of the ideology of materialism and consumerism which is viewed as directly hurting nature.⁵ This provides the philosophy which is deeply rooted in Indian cultural tradition and emphasizes on moral gradation and Satyagraha techniques

The Ecological Marxism, science and technology is essential for the establishment of the new social order. The ecological problem in the vision of the Marxists lies rooted in political and economic terms , bordering on the questions of unequal access to resource utilization. The ecological burden is understood to

be borne by the less privileged sections of the society and they clearly relate it to the social stratification. The matrix of the rich exploiting the poor is the root of the environmental problem in their understanding. While the rich destroys the environmental resource for profit, the poor scratches the earth for survival.

The appropriate technologies find the mismatch in terms of size and level of operation of agriculture and industry linkages as the primary cause of environmental problems. It aims to bring a synthesis between traditional and modern technology and makes technology, socially viable one. Amulya Kumar (1990, p 18) chalks out an alternate pattern for Indian development which very well illustrates the ideology of the appropriate technologies. He explains, that the new pattern of development should be on the lines- a) the satisfaction of basic human needs, b) a self reliance which grows 'from within' endogenously, through social participation and control, c) harmony with the environment to ensure the sustainability of development over long run. The new pattern must include energy conserving, capital saving, employment generating, labor saving technologies along with the promotion of the local product for conserving environmental resource. The ideology is directly related to other dimensions of strategy formulation and leadership and organization. In the movement either the elites, think tankers or the intellectuals may lead or it may be from the grass root level lead by the common people. The example of the former is the Silent valley Movement of Kerla and the latter is Chipko movement. The movement may be progressive or conservative but the collective move of the movement is a must.

Environment and Development

In this context the "ecological development" is accounted. It is sustainable and progressive development of the environment. It is constructive use of the environment through socially directed means. It involves the ecological sustainability which means using natural resources with minimum damage to life supporting system, limiting the consumption of fossil fuel, reducing volume of pollutants by means of energy and resource conservation and promotion of agriculture.⁶ It also includes manifestation and monitoring equilibrium, cultural harmony and ecological balancing. Gandhian holistic view regarding development revolves around man, nature and society. (Cohen 1985, p 669)

Ecological History and Emergence of Movements In India

Ecological history can be explained as history of interrelationship and interaction between man and the nature. Sociological inquiries are now trying

to look into the socio- cultural and the psychological aspects as well. Gadgil (1985, p 67) explains that Aryans were constantly in use of the environment. In the Rig Veda forest resources are believed to be sacred and are named to be “Aryani” and were worshiped as mother goddess.⁷ The Ancient India also had an “, ecological wisdom” related to Sita as mother goddesses. This avoided use of iron instrument in the womb of land during the sowing of seeds. Kings such as Bharat also did “bhumi puja” and “bana jagyans” in those times. It was only during the colonial and the post colonial phase that the exploitation of the environment started. Then the environmental movements began these were common in tribal belts. Some of them were Singhbhum (Bihar), Bastar region (Madhya Pradesh), Chipko Movement⁸ in Uttarakhand, and Gandhamardan Movement in Odisha etc.

Research Questions

- How are the trends of traditional social movement changing or continuing into new social movement in specification of environmental movement?
- What is the nature, orientation, organizational structures and ideology of environmental movements in India in General and in Niyamgiri movement with specific reference to its impact on biodiversity component?
- How can we locate Niyamgiri movement as a new social movement?

Research Methods

In research methods no single method is appropriate to tackle all aspects of the research problem. To examine, analyze the Niyamgiri environmental movement mainly the secondary sources are to be used. It would be a qualitative analysis which would be partly explanatory and descriptive in nature. Environmental movements would be used as case studies to understand the in depth of the problem. Since some video recordings are available on Niyamgiri movement, transcription method (speech into text) is also to be used. Further the literatures available in the Oriya languages are to be altered into English and used for the research purpose.

Area of Study

The present District of study is Kalahandi of Odisha, which was known as South Kosala in the ancient times The Kalahandi district of Odisha occupies the South Western position of Odisha and is situated between 19 degree 3’N and 21 degree 5’N latitude and 82 degree 30’ E and 83 degree 74’ E longitude. The

district headquarter is situated at Bhawanipatna town which stands almost at the Easter part of the place. The district occupies an area of 8, 364.89 sq. km and ranks 7th among the 30 districts of Odisha. Lanjigarh is a village to the South East of Bhawanipatna, where the controversial site of Niyamgiri is situated. It is the home to people who call themselves as “jarene” or Dongaria Kondhs. They consider Niyamgiri as their place of origin and worship “Niyam raja”, which they mean the “lord of law”.

Vedanta Alumina Ltd (VAL), a British metal and mining company and a subsidiary of M/S Sterlite Industrial Limited plans to exploit the bauxite reserve located on the top of the same Niyamgiri Hill.

Impact of the Mining and Alumina Refinery on Environment and Biodiversity of Niyamgiri

The bauxite mining is proposed to be done from Niyamgiri Hills, which is one of the richest biodiversity hotspot in the whole of Eastern Ghats. It has rare species of plants and animals. It is also the origin of Vamsadhara river. The mining of Niyamgiri hill will adversely impact the biodiversity and hydrology of the region. The project has acquired land on both the sides of the Vamsadhara with a part of river actually covered by the red mud pond. A flash flood in the river can cause a breach in the pond which could result in a massive spill in the river of noxious and poisonous red mud. Red mud is mix of highly toxic alkaline chemicals and heavy radioactive metal elements. In case of a spill the chemical may leach into ground water.

Many perennial streams originate from the Niyamgiri hill top. It is a permanent source of water to the entire area including Kalahandi and Rayagada districts. 22 water harvesting structures are located at the Niyamgiri foothills which provide round the year water. Vamsadhara and Nagvalli are the two major rivers of South Odisha. The bauxite extraction would affect the water flow to the rivers. And the area would face acute water shortage in the coming years. The biodiversity of Niyamgiri hill would be also affected. It has got some of the most pristine forest resources. A recent report from the British conservation Society declares that the forest has got 602 plant species, 114 varieties of animal species. The flora and fauna is diverse.

Organizational Patterns of Niyamgiri Movement

Niyamgiri protection petition to the Supreme Court was filed by Sreedhara of Academy of Mountain Environics, Biswajit Mohanty of Wild life Society of Odisha and Prafulla Samantray of “Lok Shakti Abhiyan”. These people

and organizations have encouraged the local leadership to a large extent. They have helped the people to realize the threats of the company. Activists like Lingaraj Azad of "Samajbadi Jana Parishad" is part of the movement mobilization. Advocates and students formulated "Sachetana Nagarika Mandala"(rapid citizen group) to fight for the cause. There is participation at multiple levels such as media people, political parties etc. The company tries to suppress the mobilization through rented goons and illegal activities. The state stands as a dumb watch dog . And the protesters follow Gandhian ideology and practice. Female participation is aloud in the movement. The burning example of the same is the support of Binita Majhi , the widow of Sukru Majhi who was an active leader of the protest and was allegedly killed by the company goons. The widely prevalent slogan of the movement" Jeevan jau, Jami jau, Niyamgiri banchi thau" is the bench mark of the movement. International organization such as Action Aid is also involved. Its member, Dr. Bratindi Jena is the representative of gender equilibrium at the leadership level.

Sources of Data

Study of various statements, consultative reports, annual documents, magazines, such as Seminar, EPW, Frontline email notes and conversational interviews of the agents associated with the movement. Further, it would also include evaluation of the press clippings and inclusion of articles from Social Science journals.

Discussion and Conclusion

Thus, this is a historic environmental movement, whose ongoing struggle has brought hopes of reconfirmation of people's strength. Though the political comeback of the Biju Janta Dal in all elections has made the struggle activists skeptical about its future but still the Kondhas of Niyamgiri have succeeded in radically rejecting the external force of Vedanta Alumina Industry and tried to bring the restructuring in its best possible manner. An analysis can show that, the entire cyclical order of structure, innovation, adaptation, radical rejection and restructuring is very well reflected in this sensitive site of Niyamgiri in Odisha. The environmental movement working in its novel mannerism in this area is a trendsetter for democratic indigenous peoples participation in future times to come in India. Thus, it is a perfect site of interaction of Man, Society and Environment.

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Notes

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8. Recently on 21st May 2021 the Great pioneer leader Sundar Lal Bahugun of Chipko Movement left us for heavenly abode .I tend to dedicate this piece of work to his pious soul and environmentalists who worked for the cause of Himalayan conservation and lead the foundation of Chipko Movement.

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