

Environmental History in India: A Review of Historiography

DISSERTATION

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SUBMITTED BY

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UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation entitled “**Environmental History in India: A Review of Historiography**” submitted to the Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University, Lucknow, for the award of the Degree of **Master of Philosophy** in History is an authentic record of original and independent research work carried out by me under the supervision of **Dr. V.M. Ravi Kumar**, Assistant Professor, Department of History, School for Ambedkar Studies, Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University (A Central University) Lucknow. I further declare that this research work has not been previously submitted before for the award of any other degree or diploma to any University or Institution. In keeping with the ethical practice in reporting research information, due acknowledgement have been made wherever the findings of others have been cited. This is also declare that the M.Phil Dissertation is free from all kinds of plagiarism.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the M. Phil. Dissertation titled “**Environmental History in India: A Review of Historiography**” submitted by **Mr. Shiv Yadav** Enrollment No. 436/15, is an original research work and has not been previously submitted in part or full for the award of any other degree or diploma to this or any other university.

The dissertation submitted to Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University Lucknow satisfies all the requirements as stipulated in the *Master of Philosophy (M. Phil) Regulations, 2015* and it is fit for submission and evaluation for the award of the degree of Master of Philosophy of the University.

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CHAPTER-I
TITLE OF THE CHAPTER
INTRODUCTION

ABSTRACT OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter deals with the introductory aspects of the proposed study. The elaborative narration has been offered on the following themes: context of the study, objective, hypothesis, and conceptual framework, review of literature and chapterisation of the study. The main objective of this chapter is to propose a thematic illustration of the study and various aspects of it.

CHAPTER-I

INTRODUCTION

Environmental issues acquired significant popularity and priority in the contemporary times. Particularly the impact of global warming on fragile eco-systems at one level and livelihoods of vulnerable people at another level received wider attention from public and academic circles. It is this context that had popularised discourse related to various aspects of the phenomenon of environment and issues interconnected with it. This study is an attempt to capture the trajectory of the evolution of environmental history and various factors that had influenced in India. The main objective of this study is to analyse and document a brief narrative on the historiography of the environmental history of India. This attempt is significant in the context of fascinating historical literature emerged on the ecological dimension to study Indian history in the last four decades. This historical knowledge has significantly been contributing for better inputs to environmental policies and sensitisation of public over issues pertaining to environmental conservation. Hence a review on evolutionary trajectory of environmental history is useful to track the dynamics of the environmental history of India.

This chapter deals with the introductory aspects of the study. The following themes are elaborated: the context of the study, objectives of the study, hypothesis of study, review of the literature and a brief note on chapterisation of the study. In order to elucidate the topic that has been undertaken, this chapter offers a thematic narrative on introductory aspects of the proposed study. This study attempts to explore a brief review of various approaches that are employed by historians for representing the environmental history of India in general and environmental history of modern India in particular. An attempt has also been made to capture the historiographical trends that have emerged in the last four decades in India. This study is

more interested in exploring the didactical relationship between the past and present with particular reference to the environmental history of India. This academic endeavor is useful for us to explore the linkages between the present and construction of the past for the needs of the present.

1.1 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Environmental crisis in general and ecologic crisis induced by the climate change in particular emerged as pressing global issues to be handled immediately for survival of human civilisation. Being a topical country, India is more vulnerable to climate which expected to unleash devastating change which may impact heavily on livelihoods of rural population who still dependent upon resources of nature critically for survival. The global climate change mainly a result of the manmade disaster at one level and its severe implications at another level made handling environmental issues a compulsion for civil society and academia to devise strategies for conservation of environmental aspects. Environmental history is a response of historians to reflect upon the historical dimension of human interaction with natural resources to locate the roots of the ecological crisis and obviously come up with more plausible solutions to the ecological crisis. It is this context that resulted in the emergence of environmental history mainly in the United States of America, several countries in Europe and in India as well.

Interestingly, writing ecological history of Indian subcontinent begun from 1980s onwards. Gradually, vibrant and passionate literature on ecological dimension to Indian history emerged as one of the strong historical traditions in India. Particularly the British colonial rule attracted the attention of historians for it had unleashed sweeping changes in terms of exploitation of natural resources in an unprecedented way. The ecological history of modern India thus aimed at exploring the colonial impact on ecological systems of India. In the last four decades, exciting researches have been carried out by historians to analyse ecological

implications of British colonial rule and its legacies in independent India. In this context, a survey of historiography on the pattern of the environmental history of India is useful to track the direction of research trends that is going on in the field of the environmental history of India.

1.2 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study aims at documentation of a brief survey on different historiographical traditions that have evolved and being practiced for historical documentation on the role of the British in changing the ecological systems of India and various dynamics of that process itself. In short, this study deals with the historiography of the environmental history of India.

The fact, however, is that it is not an easy task to document historiography of the environmental history of India. It is on account of the fact that the literature emerged on the environmental history of India is not only vast but also extremely complicated. Several new conceptual and theoretical approaches are being used to capture the ecological dimension of British colonial rule. On account of these complexity limitations of this study needed to be spelled very clearly. Firstly, this study does not claim that it would offer a compressive review of the historiography of the environmental history of India, rather it takes certain popular samples in the form of books and articles to arrange the trend of each approach. On account of its nature it does not depend upon primary sources, rather uses the published sources to analyze the conceptual and methodological content of each approach. Another limitation is that on account of the vastness of topic we do not offer elaborate criticism of each approach, rather confined to brief note on limitations of each approach that we have dwelt. Another significant limitation of this study is that the studies reviewed for historiography of environmental history of India mainly confines to forest histories of British India. In short, this study is an attempt to propose a brief survey of literature that had emerged in the last four years on the environmental

history of India.

1.3 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

While narrating historiographical trends on the environmental history of India this study revolves around the following objectives:

- 1). To explore and document the context that inspired and directed the process of emergence of environmental writings in India.
- 2). To analyze the impact of international factors that stimulated the writings on the environmental history of India.
- 3). To analyze the ideological factors that have conditioned the analytical pattern of historiographical approaches in the field of the environmental history of India.
- 4). To trace the roots of environmental history in Indian historiography.
- 5). To document the contemporary ecological crisis and their impact on history writing.
- 6). To analyze the engagement of environmental historians in understanding the impact of ecology in human society.
- 7). To narrate the impact of the conceptual framework of each approach in its model of writings the environmental history of India.
- 8). To propose brief limitations of various historiographical approaches that are used for writings the environmental history of India.

1.4 HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

This study intends to document the history of historiography of the environmental history of India inspired by the following hypothesis:

1. Environmental historians engaged in exploring the relationship between nature and human beings in the past in India.
2. Environmental history emerged as a creative discourse which uses the past to explore ecological roots of human action and thereby attempting to construct harmonious future for human and nature relationship in the Indian context.
3. Environmental history writings are significantly inspired by contemporary environmental concerns and issues.
4. In the last four decades, environmental history emerged as one of the significant public voices which popularized the need for immediate action for addressing the problem caused by human action to ecologically important resources.
5. Environmental history writings popularized by the eco-sensitive Indian value system and eco-destructive British colonial rule.
6. Environmental history has contributed to the debate on climate change by the way of providing policy histories of ecologically sensitive resources such as water, forests, agriculture, etc.

1.5 METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The methodology adopted in this study would be characterized as a critical, analytical, descriptive and interpretative approach to document the history of environmental history in India. The study efforts to study and document a review of historiographical trends of environmental history in India. Keeping in view of the aims and objectives of the study,

particular attention has been paid to the transformative trajectory of ideas and approaches to explore, examine and analyze the historiographical trends that influenced the nature of environmental history in India. The analytical and evaluative task has been undertaken by exploring and analyzing the important literature that has emerged in the last four decades in India.

This study primarily concerns with documentation of trends of historiography on the environmental history of modern India. For this task to perform, this study consulted a wide range of published sources consisting of books and paper published in journals. The main task of this exercise is to capture the analytical, methodological and conceptual narratives of historians which reflect their ideological cohesion. In order to explore this trend, the conceptual framework of discourse analysis method which claims that knowledge is produced in the form of discourses and its authenticity is determined by the position of power in society. In order to analyze the historiography of the environmental history of India, this study attempts to capture multiple discourses that are advanced by historians in order to represent the historical and ecological dimension of British colonial rule in India.

1.6 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Environmental concerns and issues received public attention after 1960s. Gradually environmental issues emerged as public discourse world over. Numerous streams of academic disciplines evolved distinct sub-disciplines making the environment as a focal theme. The quest of historians to provide a historical circumstantial background to complexities and ecological problems resulted in the emergence of environmental history as a separate branch of history. Indeed, formidable literature has been formed to voice their concerns by environmental historians of India. Environmental history offers a systematic documentation of human environmental relationship in the past.

The important themes of environmental history are as follows: exploring the impact of British colonial rule on agro-ecological systems of India, impact of colonial intervention on livelihoods of rural population dependent on resources of nature and response of communities who dependent upon common-pool resources for survival to the interventionist policies of the British and role of the British in transforming the ecological systems of India. These are the themes that are given high priority in the narratives of environmental historians in India. This study proposes that as vibrant historical literature has been produced in India on the ecological dimension to modern Indian history, it is necessary to study such literature from the perspective of historiography.

Environmental history as a distinctive discipline acquired global dimensions in the due course of time. The relationship between human beings and nature received the attention of historians in different parts of the world. In this section, we would briefly like to mention some of the important historiographical studies carried out by historians who practiced the craft of environmental history outside of India.

In his book *An Environmental History of the World*: J.D. Hughes deals with extensively on nature's role in the unfolding of human events and their everyday lives. This book places humans within the community of life circle and views the correlation between humans and the environment. He emphasizes the importance of environmental history and argues for its importance in understanding the present state of the world's ecological problems. Since the beginning of the process of writing environmental history in the early 1970s, the regions of America and several countries in Europe became the focal point of most environmental histories. This book exhaustively deals with how natural forces and resources have shaped

societies on a global extent and about the reciprocal relationship shared by people and the environment in the past.¹

Another fascinating and fabulous study by Krech, and McNeil and others entitled *Encyclopaedia of World Environmental History* is an analytical handbook of natural phenomena and events and their impact on human societies in the past. Many articles in the encyclopaedia are written in a spirit of commonality with environmentalism, but without stoic commitment to any specific school of environmentalism. Therefore, it is useful both for environmentalist and environmental historians as it offers a chronological overview of extensive historical coverage on how human beliefs and actions have not only altered the natural world, but also covers the latest advancement in the field.²

An exhaustive account of human engagement with nature in past has been offered by Simmons's study entitled *Global Environmental History*. It proposes a multidisciplinary approach and with a humanistic perspective furnishes an enormous amount of details, theoretical concepts and trends. With a time-frame ranging from 10,000 BCE to the modern day to present, he brings under consideration how human technological evolution changes over the years affected the natural world. By putting contemporary environmental preoccupations into a long-term perspective, Simmons demonstrates the history of some current anxieties on ecological issues. The book provides a deep time overview of how we have come to our current state of ecological crises.³

¹ J. D. Hughes, *An environmental history of the world: humankind's changing role in the community of life*, Routledge, London, 2009.

² Merchant, Carolyn, John Robert McNeill, and Shepard Krech III, *Encyclopaedia of world environmental history*, Routledge, New York, 2004.

³ Ian G Simmons, *Global Environmental History: 10,000 BC to AD 2000: 10,000 BC to AD 2000*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2008.

Noted environmental historian Richard Grove's book entitled *Green Imperialism* is an extremely important work as it documents the origins and early history of environmentalism with a focus, especially on its hitherto unexplained colonial and global aspects. He perceives the course of environmentalism as a two-way process i.e. expansion of European scientific temper to colonies and impact of the ecological context colonies on the scientific strategies of European scientific community. This book is an important source as the author diverts environmentalism from its modern North American focus by locating it in the colonial experience. He also proposes that environmental and conservation issues are not new but that some modern ideas have historical antecedents far back in the past. It is a book which gives detailed attention to other parts of the globe, in particular to those whose history has been shaped by imperialism.⁴

Writing environmental history from global perspective is indeed a challenging task. This task was taken up by Radkau's book entitled *Nature and Power: A Global History of the Environment*. He writes this book on environmentalism from a predominantly European approach but its reach is indeed global as it covers an amazingly rich outline of many of the central themes of environmental history. His strength is in his approach to the theme of environmental history made somewhat with scepticism and some apprehension about grand generalizations on large scale projects and their exaggerated assertions and sometimes stereotypical conclusions. The key argument that he proposes is that human ecological behaviour and thought has been shaped in profound ways by the scale on which human relations with the environment are managed, a subject whose historiographical and political significance is becoming more and more evident. Another important theme of this book is that human ecological behaviours are often most destructive when best aligned with the cycles and

⁴ Richard H Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism*, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

rhythms of the natural world. He makes a contrast between the North American environmental historians who have been fascinated by the idea of abundance in the wilderness, unlimited resources and spaces not yet touched by humans and open to exploitation (or protection), and German historians who have focused their scholarship on a more anthropogenic and more limited 'natural' world in which the problem of sustainability was always present. One of the main focal point elucidated by the work is that human relations with the environment are mediated by power relations.⁵

John Robert McNeil in his book *Something New Under the Sun* attempts to reconstruct the environmental history of the world over the past hundred years by stressing on the synthesis of humanity's relationship to and modification of the environment during the 20th century. He interprets the human impact on the earth politically, economically, and socially, noting the influence of history and ecology on each other. His claims are substantiated by alarming evidence he presents in a comprehensive and balanced survey. His arguments are important because it highlights the role and development strategies of humanity as having a significant impact on ecosystems. He contends that these strategies may be extremely damaging in the long run to the ecology. The book is also important to have a reference point to comprehend within a capsule history of the environmental movement, gauging its successes and influence.⁶

Beinart and Hughes study entitled *Environment and Empire* offers a pioneering account on the environmental history of the British Empire, with ample attention on the former British Empire's interactions with different environments in locations such as Africa and India. He proposes that imperialism was inseparable from the history of global environmental change. He also illustrates various environmental themes in the history of the British Empire stating

⁵ J. Radkau, *Nature and Power: A Global History of the Environment*, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

⁶ John Robert McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World (the global century series)*, W. W. Norton & Company, 2001.

that the social and political issues were related to environmental change. But the fundamental theme of the book is the tension between exploitation and conservation; stating that the British colonists sought to regulate natural resources and at the same time commodity items. This book is significant as it highlights the adaptation of key issues like conservatism, commodification, in the context of the natural resources of British colonies. This study concludes with a focus on political reassertions by colonized peoples over natural resources. The authors in a post-imperial age have found a new voice, reformulating ideas about nature, landscape, and heritage and challenging, at a local and global level, views of who has the right to resources.⁷

Having reviewed a brief review of studies on global level trends on the environmental history, this section concentrates upon the studies that have dwelt about the historiography of the environmental history of India. Honestly speaking, the publication of Ramachandra Guha's *The Unquiet woods* can be considered as a first systematic monograph on ecological interpretation to Indian history.⁸ This is a pioneering work and sets the agenda for literature on the environment as a critique of colonial policies. Guha exhaustively documents the nature of peasant society and resistance found in the Chipko movement in the Himalayas against commercial forestry which dates from the earliest dates of state intervention.

Of course, we can see some papers on environmental aspects of Indian history prior to this book. Environmental history writings took off after the publication of *Green Imperialism* by Richard Grove.⁹ However the book *This fissured land: an ecological history of India* by Gadgil and Guha considered to be the first systematic attempt to document the history of India from the perspective of ecology.¹⁰ As a separate field of historical inquiry, environmental

⁷ William Beinart and Lotte Hughes, *Environment and Empire*, Oxford University Press, 2007.

⁸ Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquietwoods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*, University of California Press, 2000.

⁹ Richard H Grove, *Green Imperialism*

¹⁰ Madhav Gadgil, and Ramachandra Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*, Oxford University Press, 1992.

history established itself in India by the late 1990s. Attempt, however, was made by some studies to deal with historiographical aspects of the environmental history of India.

Tucker, *A Forest History of India* describes the history of forest use in India in a rich collection of articles. The author documents Indian forest history from the colonial era to the post-independence legacy. The main highlight of the book is to stress first, the tension between the subsistence needs of the local population and the commercial needs of the local population and the commercial needs of the colonial state, and second, the clash between the forest department, which sought to preserve and manage forests, and the revenue department, which was driven by the need to expand agriculture and industry. It contributes significantly to the understanding of the colonial legacy for post-Independence management of India's natural resources.¹¹

Rangarajan and Sivaramakrishnan's volume entitled *India's Environmental History*, two volume series is a competently written colossal work covering India's environmental history within a two-volume set. It is academically solid and being ambitious in its approach, wide in scope covering a chronological time period from India's ancient past to colonial times. The first volume from Ancient Times to the Colonial Period, pertaining mostly with India's ancient ecological history starting from the Harappa civilization closes with the coming of the East India Company. The second volume entitled *Colonialism, Modernity, and the Nation* hold more recognizable and current issues. The two very distinct features are the relentless documentation of colonial deforestation and the impact of this deforestation on the people of

¹¹ Richard Tucker, *A Forest History of India*, Sage Publications, 2012.

India. Thus, these two volumes are essential as it provides critical inputs to those concerned about land management, forests, forest rights, and climate change.¹²

Having reviewed some of the notable studies on global environmental history in general and Indian environmental in particular, this section presents a brief review of studies on the historiography of the environmental history of India. Ramachandra Guha's *Writing Environmental History of India* can be considered as one of the pioneering studies on historiography on the environmental history of India. This article underscores the potential of the ecology as a tool of historical analysis and its potential contribution to the contemporary debate on environmental policies of India. This paper indeed inspired the entire generation of young historians who are interested in the ecological aspects of India from historical perspective.¹³

Mahesh Rangarajan in his another pioneering study "*Environmental Histories of South Asia: A Review essay*" explores historiographical aspects of the environmental history of India. In this essay, he attempted to capture the new dimension of environmental history that has evolved in India. This essay indeed highlights the existing possibilities and futurist dimensions of the environmental history of India.¹⁴

Sivaramakrishnan's penetrating analysis entitled *Colonialism and Forestry in India* documents the impact of the contemporary debate on forest policy of India on the forest history of India is indeed a fascinating study. He highlights how to present compel historians to seek

¹² Mahesh Rangarajan and Kalyanakrishnan Sivaramakrishnan, eds. *Shifting Ground: People, Animals, and Mobility in India's environmental history*, Oxford University Press, 2014.

¹³ Ramachandra Guha, "Writing Environmental History in India", *Studies in History*, Vol.9, No.1.4, Jan-June, 1993, pp.119-150.

¹⁴ K. Sivaramakrishnan, "Colonialism and Forestry in India: Imaging the Past in Present Politics" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.37, No.1.4, January 1995, pp.3-40.

questions and answers in the past. He proposes that environmental history is an offshoot of contemporary demands of society to engage with ecological issues by using past knowledge.¹⁵

Ranjan Chakraborty's study *Situating Environmental history of India* attempts to capture the emerging literature on the environmental history of India. He frankly accepts the fact that it is difficult to review the vast literature on the environmental history of India. He, however, proposes that we can track the general trend on writings of the environmental history of India.¹⁶ His study makes a serious attempt to document the major trends that are followed in writing the environmental history of India.

In the due course of time, environmental historians evolved a binary of destructive and constructive dimension of British colonial rule. Not subscribing to these essentialist categories, Sinha, et al entitled: *The New Traditional Discourse of Indian Environmentalism* highlights the limitations to the nationalist narratives of perceiving everything is good in Indian culture and everything is bad in British colonial rule in the domain of ecology. This study was critical of a genre which emerged as nationalist environmental history of India.¹⁷

Focusing on forest history of British India, Sivaramakrishnan's study *Forests and Environmental History of Modern India* presents an exhaustive review of the environmental history of modern India however with particular reference to forest history of British India. His main argument is that the interventionist policies of the British for management of Indian

¹⁵ K. Sivaramakrishnan, "Colonialism and Forestry in India: Imaging the Past in Present Politics" *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol.37, No.1.4, January 1995, pp.3-40.

¹⁶ Ranjan Chakraborty, *Situating Environmental History*, Manohar, New Delhi, 2007.

¹⁷ Sinha, S, Gururani, S and Greenberg, B., "The New Traditional Discourse of Indian Environmentalism," *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol, 24, issue, 3,1997, pp. 65-99.

forests had become the site for the struggle of the power between foresters backed by the British and tribal chiefs supported by their clan members at another level.¹⁸

McNeill, study entitled *Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History*, has brought about an exhaustive review of literature on the environmental history of in different parts of the world including India. He proposes that the South Asian region, especially India had witnessed a vibrant form of environmental history which can be classified into the following categories: material environmental history, political environmental history, and intellectual environmental history.¹⁹

In his recent study Ravi Kumar entitled: *History of Environmental History of India*, proposes that environmental history emerged as one of the established fields of historical research in India. Besides a review of environmental history studies, he also highlighted some shortcomings such as lack of focus on the social dimension of the environmental history of India, less focus on the role of castes in shaping access of individual to resources of nature in India, etc.²⁰

Having reviewed some of the important studies on historiography of environmental history at global level in general and at India level in particular, the study proposes that in spite of some studies on systematic documentation on historiography of environmental history of India have yet to be done. This study is a humble beginning towards this direction.

¹⁸ K. Sivaramakrishnan, "Forests and Environmental History of Modern India," *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol. 36, non2, 2009, pp. 299-324.

¹⁹ J. R. McNeill, "Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History", *History and Theory*, Vol. 42, No. 4, December 2003, pp. 5-44.

²⁰ V.M. Ravi Kumar, "History of Environmental History of India: A Historiographical Review," *The Research Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 8, No. 12, Dec 2017, pp. 63-70.

1.7 CHAPTERISATION OF THE STUDY

In order to narrate the narrative of the historiography of the environmental history of India, this study has been organized into the following chapters:

This first chapter of this study entitled introduction deals with the introductory aspects of the study. A systematic and modest narration has been an attempt on the context of the study, objectives of the study, hypothesis, review of the literature and Chapterisation of the study. The main objective of this chapter is to explore the thematic illustration of the study and various aspects to it.

The second chapter of this study entitled the emergence of environmental history as a discipline of history deals with three important factors which explicitly or implicitly influenced environmental history writing pattern. Firstly, the contemporary environmental protection movement world over and India, secondly, intellectual inspiration to writing environmental history and finally a brief review on environmental history writing trends world over and their impact on environmental history writings in India.

The third chapter of this study entitled historiographical approaches on the environmental history of India: a review narrates important historiographical approaches that are practiced to represent the history of British colonial rule and its impact on Indian ecology and the population critically dependent upon ecologically important resources. The main objective of this chapter is to document the major dynamics of historiography on environmental history writings in India.

The chapter fourth highlights the entire study in the form of a summary followed by a rational conclusion and the main findings of my study indicating scopes for further research in this area. The conclusion is very brief reflects the major and most important findings of the

environmental history written by eminent historians with their methodology and approaches. It is expected, the outcome of the study will serve the self-same purpose for which it has been undertaken.

CHAPTER-II

TITLE OF THE CHAPTER

EMERGENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY AS A DISCIPLINE

ABSTRACT OF CHAPTER

This chapter deals with three important factors which explicitly or implicitly influenced environmental history writing pattern. Firstly, the contemporary environmental protection movement world over and India, secondly, intellectual inspiration to writing environmental history and finally a brief review on environmental history writing trends world over and their impact on environmental history writings in India.

CHAPTER-II

INTRODUCTION

As an academic discipline, environmental history is recent in origin, but the relationship between human beings and eco-system has always been one of the important themes in the narratives of historians. Historians have always been fascinated by the question of how and why nature and eco-system influence human affairs. But eco-centric history as a separate genre emerged in the 1960s along with environmental conservation movement and gradually spread to different parts of the world. The south Asia region in general and India in particular happened to be one of the active participants in this process of emergence of environmental history as a separate discipline within history subject. The main objective of this chapter is to document the process of emergence of environmental history as an epistemological discourse which represents the interaction of human society with their surroundings in the past.

This chapter has been organized into three sections which are as follows: the first section analyses the environmental protection movement that had emerged from the 1960s onwards at the global level and from 1970s onwards in India and impact of both trends on history writings method in India, the second section presents a brief review of the history of ideas on human ecology and their impact on environmental history writings and final section documents and important trends in different parts of the world on environmental history writings and their impact on writings on environmental history in India. Over all, this chapter attempts to capture the factors that had not only influenced the process of emergence of environmental history but also determined its nature and content.

2.1 CONTEXT FOR EMERGENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY IN AMERICA

Undoubtedly the United States of America happens to be the pioneering country in terms of environmental protection movement as well as environmental history writings. Environmental conservation as a conceptual category emerged here on account of vibrant environmental protection movement actively engaged by public and various civil society organizations. The environmental protection movement can be traced back to the activism of John Muir (1838-1914) who dedicated his life for promotion of ecological conservation process and movement in America. His main focus was on conservation of forests and mountains which are critical factors in the conservation of hydrological sources. His lifelong gospel aimed at sensitizing the public on the need for protection of trees and mountains for well being of ecology and society. He actively engaged in the conservation of the Yosemite area and the Sierra as pristine lands seriously. He was also instrumental in establishing Sierra Club along with Henry Senger which became an epitome of the environmental conservation movement in the USA. He contributed immensely for propagation environmental conservation ideas by the way of contributing more than 300 papers, 12 books, and several public lectures.²¹

Besides ecological activism, the ideas created and disseminated by John Muir exercised a deep impact on the ecological attitude of America. He is indeed a pioneer who underscored the importance of human action not to destroy forms of nature rather need to conserve it for mutual benefits of both man and nature. His tireless attempt to save environmentally important resource and forms resulted in the emergence of the concept of national parks and protected

²¹ Stephen R Fox, *The American Conservation Movement: John Muir and his legacy*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

areas as a means to protect nature and its fragile resources.²²

Another important personality that had contributed to the emergence of the environmental protection movement in the United States of America is Aldo Leopold who popularized the concepts of wilderness and land ethics. Perturbed by rapid development in the form of automobile, railways and other development activities he proposed that a need arose to save the wilderness from the greed of man to ensure the balance in nature in order to preserve harmony between man and nature. His famous book *A Sand County Almanac* is a plea to the American society to cherish conservation of natural forms such as forests, mountains, rivers, lakes, wild animals and other forms of nature. His activism resulted in a rise in demand for preservation of wild landscape in different parts of America.²³

The period of 1900-1970 had witnessed robust environmental activism which pressurized and lobbied with the government of America to undertake important measures for conservation of natural and wildlife spots and save the forms of nature. This advocacy was articulated in terms of ethical and political activism. This context had indeed popularised the concept of environmental conservation as an important public issue on which civil society and government should take serious note. This activism transformed into several concrete measures for handling environmental issues. The following organizations were established to promote environmental conservation process:

- The National Park Service, 1916
- The United States Fish and Wildlife Service, 1940
- International Union for Conservation of Nature, 1948
- The Nature Conservancy, 1951

²²John Muir, *John of the Mountains: The Unpublished Journals of John Muir*, University of Wisconsin Press. 1979.

²³ A. Leopold, "A Sand County Almanac, and sketches here and there," *Outdoor Essays & Reflections*, 1989.

- World Wide Fund for Nature 1961
- The United States Environmental Protection Agency, 1970
- The Greenpeace, 1971
- The United Nations Environment Programme, 1972

2.2 ORIGIN OF ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY WRITINGS IN AMERICA

It is this context in the United States of America that had inspired activists, thinkers, and historians to look into the past for constructing a trajectory of the relationship between man and nature. This trend is furthered by activist writings that had created a paradigm of thought that centred on the relationship between human beings and nature. The publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* popularised the concept of environmental conservation as a moral and ethical issue.²⁴ This book has inspired several historians of America to look at the human past from the perspective of ecology. The next section of this chapter proposes a brief review of studies that are popular in America in the field of environmental history.

Environmental history is a new discipline that came into existence during the 1960s and 1970s, the historiography of this kind of inquiry traces back to Charles Darwin who happens to be a naturalist and used the method of natural history to understand the process of evolution. Noted environmental historians Donald Worster and Alfred Crosby felt that Darwin made it possible for the historians to re-examine humankind's place in the natural world and, by extension, in history. Inspired by the ideas of Darwin both American and European historians began seeking explanations of historical differences in the natural world, which led to biological and environmental determinism during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.²⁵ Of

²⁴ R. Carson, *Salient Spring*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1962.

²⁵ J. R. McNeill, "Observations on the nature and culture of environmental history," *History and theory*, 42(4), 2003, pp 5-43.

all historical fields, environmental history seems the most likely to have used evolution analytically. It studies ways in which humans have shaped nature, and it has drawn on scientific ideas to understand those processes. It was a direct issue of the growing consciousness of global environmental problems such as pollution of water and air, depletion of the ozone layer and the enhanced greenhouse effect triggered by human activity. In modern environmental history, ecological concepts are used to examine historical geography and the past history of environmental factors to study the ever-changing aspect of the earth. To study the relationship between man and nature in the past Rodrick Nash coined the term environmental history in an article about the impact of past human societies on the environment published in the *Pacific Historical Review* in 1972.²⁶

Environmental history essentially aimed at capturing the trajectory of human interaction with the natural world or, to examine the interaction between culture and nature in the past. The principal goal of environmental history is to excavate our understanding of how humans have been affected by the natural environment in the past and also how they have affected that environment and with what kind of results. This is the reason why it is called the two-sided approach to environmental history.²⁷

Donald Worster happens to be one of the leading environmental historians of America. He played a major role in evolving analytical and conceptual categories for writing environmental history. He recognized three clusters of issues which historians are seriously engaged for writing environmental history. The first cluster deals with the human intellectual dominion consisting of myth, laws, ethics, perceptions and the other mental constructions related to the natural world. Normally ideas about the world around us influence the way we

²⁶ Rodrick Nash published in 1967 *Wilderness and the American Mind*. In 1972 he introduced the term “environmental history” in an article in the *Pacific Historical Review*.

²⁷ T.C. Smout, *Scotland Since Prehistory: Natural Change and Human Impact*, Scottish Cultural Press, 1993.

deal with the natural environment. The second cluster of environmental history mainly deals with the socio-economic domain of human affairs and their relationship with nature. Human thoughts have an impact on politics, policies and the economy through which ideas emerge in the natural world. The third domain of environmental history deals with the ethical world that mediates the interaction between human beings and nature.²⁸

Donald Worster popularized the concept and definition of 'Ecological History' that mainly deals with human engagement with nature. His book *Nature's Economy; A History of Ecological Ideas*, examines the pattern of human engagement with nature in different periods in history. He argues that the technology and needs of the society of a particular period determine the pattern of human engagement with nature. He argues that western capitalism introduced in America was responsible for the overexploitation of nature for market requirements. He categorizes the science into two categories i.e. Arcadian and Imperial; the former imbibed the intrinsic values and ideas to preserve nature and the latter attempts to create an instrumentals world to exploit nature.²⁹ These categories proposed by Worster represent the indigenous and colonial pattern of utilizing nature. In other words, the Arcadian knowledge evolved in tune with the culture and traditional ethos and imperial forces evolved the systems to exploit nature for market needs. The main contribution of D. Worster to environmental history is that he developed a critique of capitalistic transformation initiated by the British imperialism and its implications for eco-system and society in America.

Another influential scholar in this field is Alfred Crosby who proposes the concept of 'ecological imperialism'. He argues that the expansion of the European colonialism to different parts of the globe had a profound impact on the natural world of colonies that were discovered.

²⁸ Donald Worster & A. W. Crosby, (Eds.) "*The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History*," Cambridge University Press, 1988.

²⁹ Donald Worster, *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1985, p. xi.

He examines the European migration and settlement pattern in different parts of the world and claims that apart from their superior science and technology, weapons and biological components also played a crucial role in facilitating colonial expansion. He claims that the plants, animals, pathogens, and weeds that were carried by the European to the conquered territories, not only destroyed but also altered the indigenous ecosystems and thus facilitated the European expansion.³⁰ Alfred Crosby's study prepared an agenda for writing the environmental history that focused on the European colonization of white settlers in America, Australia, and New Zealand. However, D. Worster and A. Crosby's works inspired the early environmental historians in India.³¹

The main conceptual themes focused in American environmental history are the process of ecological degradation and the factors behind it. It also documents the ecological crimes which were responsible for environmental destruction and social dislocation during the European colonization in America. In India, Donald Wooster's conception of environmental history became popular. The main reason for this could be the existence of strong left oriented historical inquiry which articulated for peoples' rights on natural resources. Thus, the American environmental history laid the foundation for documentation of ecological crimes committed by the British colonial rule in India.

2.3 ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION MOVEMENT IN INDIA

In contemporary India, the socio-ecological movements for demanding access to forest resources influenced the Indian historical inquiry. These movements are mainly rooted in the

³⁰ Alfred Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism; The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900-1900*, Cambridge University Press, Cento Edition, 1986, p. 7.

³¹ Some of the works on American environmental history are discussed by Ramachandra Guha in "Writing Environmental history in India", *Studies in History*, Vol. 9, No. 1.4, January-June, 1993, pp.1920-21; Ramachandra Guha and David Arnold (ed), *Nature, Culture, Imperialism: Essays on the Environmental History of South Asia*, OUP, New Delhi, 1996, pp.2-5.

ideology of 'the environmentalism for the poor'.³² The intellectuals, sympathetic to these movements evolved a critique of the orientation of economic planning in India, its inbuilt bias in favour of the commercial and industrial sector, and its negligence of ecological considerations. They emphasized on the necessity of an alternative framework of the natural resource management which would cater to the basic livelihood needs of the rural poor. This ecological sensibility resulted in the publication of several articles, books, and reports on environmental problems in India.³³

The Indian environmental historiography initially focuses on two important points: the first one is to find the alternative strategies of natural resource management systems, which resulted in search for the indigenous resource utilization patterns as existed in Indian history which embedded sustainable pattern of resource use and the second one is to trace the roots of modern environmental problems, which believed to have begun during the British colonial rule. Waves of the social movements, especially the peasants' struggles against the commercial forestry attracted the public attention in India, during the early 1970s and 1980s and the Chipko movement was a champion in this direction. It was followed by a series of movements against the construction of large dams and environmental consequence of many other projects.³⁴ Noticeably, there have been different interpretations and academic discourses put forward on the nature of the Chipko movement. Sociologists, historians, and activists attempted to assimilate this movement into the ambit of Gandhian, feminist and modern ecological movements. For instance, Vandana Shiva argues that "The Chipko movement is

³² Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *Ecology and Equity: The Use and Abuse of Nature in Contemporary India*, Penguin, New Delhi, 1995, p. 98.

³³ *Ibid*, pp. 99-100; and also see Ramachandra Guha (ed), *Social Ecology*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1994. This book consists of several articles on the environmental problems in India.

³⁴ Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1989, p.xi.

philosophically, historically and organizationally an extension of the Gandhian *Satyagraha*”.³⁵ Ramachandra Guha proposed an interesting interpretation by tracing the social roots of this movement. He proposed that the Chipko movement needs to be seen as an expression of peasant discontent against the exploitative commercial forestry initiated by the British rule in the Himalayan hilly regions.³⁶ Thus, the British colonial forest policies and their continuation in the post-1947 period were recognized as the main reason behind the conflicts for accessing forests in the pre and post-independent India.

Some of the studies on the Chipko movement argue that the pre-colonial society in India had enjoyed the prudent pattern of resource use, which was disrupted by the British colonial rule. This approach characterized as the romantic indigenous environmental discourse had its influence on the environmental history writings. This approach is represented in a book edited by Geeti Sen entitled *Indigenous Vision: People of India Attitudes to Environment*. This book consists of several articles on the natural resource utilization patterns of various tribal communities in India. Geeti Sen argues that the forest policies formulated under British rule still exercise deep impact on the contemporary forest policies in India. She claims that: ‘The forest laws enacted by the British colonial rule are still in force and with the government claiming the jungles as its property to be exploited even at the cost of extensive marginalization of *Adivasis*’.³⁷

The trend of environmental history in India was inspired by Chipko and Narmada Bachao Andolan which emerged as one of the active mass movement in the 1980s and generated

³⁵ Vandana Shiva, *Ecology and the Politics of Survival Conflicts over Natural Resources in India*, Sage, New Delhi, 1991, p.103. Some more interesting works on this movement are: Thomas Weber, *Hugging the Trees: The Story of Chipko Movement*, Viking, London, 1988; Haripriya Rangan, *Of Myths and Movements: Rewriting Chipko into Himalayan History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000.

³⁶ Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1989, p.xi.

³⁷ Geeti Sen (ed), *Indigenous Vision: People of India Attitudes to Environment*, Sage, New Delhi, 1992, p. 3. This book is an edited volume consists of several interesting articles on the natural resource utilization pattern of tribal population in different parts of India.

massive public attention to the ecological problems of India. It is this context that resulted in a paradigm of thought and action for understanding and exploring environmental issues in India. So far as activism in concern the following institutes and organizations are working for the creation of awareness on environmental issues among the public in India:

- The Bombay Natural History and Society, 1883.
- The Ganga Mahasabha, 1905.
- Kerala Sahitya Parishad, 1972
- Madras Naturalist society, 1978
- Give me trees, 1977
- Centre for Science and Environment, 1980.
- Navadhanaya, 1984.

The aforementioned organizations show the fact that Indian society has been engaged in the conservation of environmentally important resources for a long period of time. The degree of this trend had gone up after the popularity of Chipko movement which made environmental conservation as a priority issue in India. The apparent fact to be noted here is that the collectivist approach for protecting environment exists in India and its degree has gone up after the Chipko movement.

Undoubtedly the environmental protection movement inspired academia in India in general and historians, in particular, to look at the environment as a priority issue to be taken. This trend resulted in the emergence of ecological centric history from the mid-1980s onwards. However, the process of emergence of environmental history also inspired by two important sources of history writing methods namely the Annals approach to writing history and historical studies on Indian history which gave implicit recognition to geo-ecological factors and their role in shaping the forces of history.

The relation between history and ecology has also been examined by the historians belonging to the French Annals school historiography. The term environmental history was not employed in their writings, but their works imbibed the ecological approach to study the historical process. In France, an ecological approach to historical inquiry was rooted not in the contemporary environmental movement but by a close and longstanding relationship between history and geography.³⁸

Fernand Braudel claims that the geographical factors determine and shape the human being's lifestyle in any society. He advocates that historians should examine and analyze the ecological and geographical factors to evolve a better picture of socio-economic aspects of society. He proposes that the historical process cannot be understood without studying geographical factors.³⁹ He argues that though human beings attempted to conquer nature but remained prisoners of climate, vegetation, and animal population and agriculture systems. He advocated that historians should study the geographical and ecological factors to evolve a better analysis of the historical process.⁴⁰

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie emphasized the importance of climatic factors in historical analysis. He argues that climatic factors play a crucial role in shaping human societies and institutions.⁴¹ He claims that human culture essentially evolves in tune with the surrounding eco-system and its dynamics. Thus, the Annals historians gave importance to ecological factors in their historical analysis. However, their approach in employing ecological factors in historical writings is not rooted in the contemporary environmental movements, rather in their

³⁸ David Arnold and Ramachandra Guha (ed), "*Nature, Culture Imperialism*," pp. 5-6; Ramachandra Guha, *Writing Environmental History*, 1996, pp. 123-124.

³⁹ Fernand Braudel, *Is there a Geography of Biological Man?*, in Fernand Braudel, *On History*, Translated by Sarah Matthews, Weidenfield and Nicholson, London, 1980, pp. 109-119.

⁴⁰ Fernand Braudel, "History and the Social Science: the Long Duree", in Maurice Aymard and Harbans Mukhia (ed), *French Studies in History*, Vol. I, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1988, p. 76.

⁴¹ Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *The History of Rain and Fine Water*, *Ibid*, pp. 293- 213.

fascination and admiration for the examination of geographical factors and their influence on human being lifestyle.⁴² However, the emergence of the strong environmental movement in the United States of America popularized the concept of environmental history and Indian environmental historians followed the American model rather than French style.

Another important inspirational sources for the emergence of environmental is that the roots of human ecology in the writings of historians who had written the history of India. Nationalist and historian R.C. Dutt did engage with the debate of how climate changes happen when tree cover is removed. In his book *Economic history of India*, he mentions that the British had neglected the forest protection due to which climatic changes such as drying up of river sources and an increase in temperature may happen.⁴³ Before this, Dadabhai Naoroji's work on poverty in *Un-British India* mentions the severe destruction of virgin forests of India and over-exploitation of the land for commercial agriculture.⁴⁴ D.R. Gadgil study on the situation of industries under the British rule also points out the large scale clearance of forest on mountain slopes which happens to be one of the reasons for the decrease of water flow to rivers.⁴⁵ Besides these studies, several foresters and scientists also highlighted the degraded condition of Indian landscapes and need for more urgent steps for rehabilitation of such lands. The point to be noted here is that before the emergence of full-fledged environmental history in the early 1980s several studies already existed on the point of human engagement with nature and strategies adopted by them to use forms of nature for survival and comfort as well. By the early 1980s the stage was already set in motion for emergence of ecological centric history in India.

⁴² Ramachandra Guha, *The Unquietwoods*, Oxford University Press, new expanded edition published in 1999, pp.211-12.

⁴³ Romesh Chunder Dutt, *The Economic History of India under Early British Rule: From the Rise of the Britishpower in 1757 to the Accession of Queen Victoria in 1837*, Routledge, 2013.

⁴⁴ Dadabhai Naoroji, *Poverty and Un-British rule in India*, S. Sonnenschein, London, 1901.

⁴⁵ Dhananjaya, Ramchandra, Gadgil, *Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times*, Oxford University Press, London, 1948.

2.4 ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY WRITINGS OUTSIDE OF INDIA

Environmental history grew from an interest of some historians and natural scientists into a full-grown academic discipline steadily. In other words, the process of professionalization of environmental history had begun after 1970s. In the United States of America, environmental history expanded a firm institutionalized ground echoed in the fact that the annual meetings of the American Society for Environmental History, established in 1975, attended by over 500 participants. Environmental historical research in Europe is fragmented due to different academic multiple languages, cultures and funding models. Though, since the 1980s there have been very auspicious and successful initiatives taken on the national and Pan-European level. The Dutch foundation for the history of environment and hygiene *Net Werk* was instituted in 1986. One of the most important objectives of this foundation was to improve the communication between Dutch researchers with an interest in environmental history. Up to the early 2000s, the foundation used to publish four newsletters per year.⁴⁶

As an interdisciplinary journal, devoted to various themes of environmental entailed *Environment and History* founded in UK. It aims to bring scholars in the humanities and biological sciences closer together in constructing long and well-founded perspectives on present day environmental problems. Since 1995, the White Horse Press in Cambridge (UK) is publishing a journal with the title *Environment and History*.

The oldest Institute for Environmental History in Europe is grounded at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. It plays an important role in coordinating research in Scotland and since its establishment in 1991. The Institute organized several conferences on environmental

⁴⁶ John R McNeill, "Observations on the Nature and Culture of Environmental History," *History and Theory*, vol-42, No.4, 2003, pp. 5-43.

history and woodland. In December 1992 the purpose of the first conference was to demonstrate the breadth and vitality of environmental history in Scotland. The second conference held in April 1995 was on Scottish woodland history. Both conferences stemmed in the publication of two books containing papers presented during the conferences.

There have been similar initiatives in other European countries in the past 20 years. One of the problems is the language barrier that stops historians from looking for environmental history books and journals in other European languages than their own or in English. A meeting was held in Germany to overcome these problems and to coordinate environmental history in Europe in April 1999 and resulted in the creation of the European Society for Environmental History (ESEH). Only two years after it was founded, ESEH held its first international conference in St. Andrews, Scotland. Approximately 120 scholars attended the meeting and 105 papers were presented on topics covering the whole spectrum of environmental history. The conference indicated that Environmental History is a feasible and lively field in Europe and since then ESEH has improved to over 400 members and continues to grow. Meanwhile, the inaugural conference in St Andrews ESEH has organized bi-annual international conferences appealing increasing numbers of scholars in 2003 and 2005, 2007, 2011, 2013 and in 2015. Similarly, important for the further development of environmental history in Europe is an increased institutionalized base at University level. The Centre for Environmental History was established at the University of Stirling in 1999 which continues as the Centre for Environment, Heritage and Policy (CEHP). This Centre is mainly a research institute. It also organizes seminars and offers postgraduate training. In addition, some history departments at European universities are now offering introductory courses in environmental

history.⁴⁷

A very noteworthy development and expansion of the field was the creation of the Rachel Carson Centre for Environment and Society (RCC) in 2009. The preliminary focus was on environmental history but at present, the RCC is a research institution for the environmental humanities. This main focus of the centre makes sense since it puts environmental history in its rightful broader context and allows for making links to other research areas and expertise. The activities of the RCC consisted of fellowship program, hosts a portal for digital resources, publishes a journal and book series, and organizes conferences and workshops. Its goal is to expand the debate about human societies and the environment and to include. This means containing historians, anthropologists, social scientists, theologians, cultural and media specialist and many other disciplines. It also endeavours to build bridges to the natural sciences and to offer these scientists with unique insights from the humanities by looking at the problems and solutions that our global society has faced in the past as well as now. The RCC has speedily become the center for scholars active in environmental history and the environmental humanities and is part of a worldwide research network.⁴⁸

Besides spreading the institutional base, environmental history has also become an increasingly global enterprise with the creation of new societies and network. The Latin American and Caribbean Society for Environmental History were established in 2004. It is a fact that Latin America has a rich tradition in the study of environmental history but this is not often recognized as such because it is assumed in a multitude of disciplines. The objective of SOLCHA is to overcome this problem and to inspire research, the debate of ideas, and to

⁴⁷ Winiwarter, V., Armiero, M., Van Dam, P., Dix, A., Eliasson, P., Holm, P. & Myllyntaus, T. (2004). "Environmental history in Europe from 1994 to 2004: enthusiasm and consolidation". *Environment and History*, vol-10, No.4,2004, pp. 501-530.

⁴⁸ K. Jan Oosthoek, "*What is Environmental History?*", <https://www.eh-resources.org/what-is-environmental-history/>. Accessed: 15 may 2019, 2005.

promote education in the field of Latin American and Caribbean Environmental History, through an interdisciplinary perspective. SOLCHA targets to stimulate contact among researchers who adopt the historical perspective that includes the environment.⁴⁹

Environmental history is also having strong roots in Asia. In order to increase the profile of East Asian Environmental History and to improve communication between researchers' world-wide the Association for East Asian Environmental History (AEAEH) was created in 2009. Subsequently, AEAEH has held two bi-annual conferences, in 2011 and 2013, that fascinated an increasing number of scholars and that is set to be repeated at their conference in 2015.⁵⁰

Environmental History in Australasia organized since 1997. The research community here is bound together through the informal Australian and New Zealand Environmental History Network. This Network is an initiative of the Centre for Environmental History at the Australian National University and targets to provide a means to communicate with each other and exchange information about forthcoming events and new publications in Australia and New Zealand. The Network midpoints upon a web portal with links to organizations in Australia and New Zealand with interests in environmental history, and to deliver a one-stop shop to Australia for international groups with interests in global environmental history. Because of the large size and relatively small populations of Australia and New Zealand this web-based informal network is well matched to environmental history researchers and organizations in this part of the world.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Reinaldo Funes Monzote. "The Latin American and Caribbean Society of Environmental History," *Global Environment* 1.1 (2008): 244-249.

⁵⁰ Robin, Libby, and Tom Griffiths. "Environmental history in Australasia," *Environment and History*, Vol-10, No.4, 2004, pp. 439-474.

⁵¹ Donald Worster & A. W. Crosby, *The Ends of the Earth: Perspectives on Modern Environmental History*, Cambridge University Press, 1988.

The internationalization and institutional identification of environmental history continue, although it is becoming increasingly part of the emerging environmental humanities. This is also visible at the attendance of the World Congress of Environmental History that is held every five years.

2.5 EMERGENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY WRITINGS IN AMERICA

Environmental history writing initially took roots in the United States and planted its roots in the 1960s. In a climate powerfully influenced by new leftist history and political activism, historians, Roderick Nash and Donald Worster in particular, affirmed that a class of the oppressed is systemically forgotten; the earth, the biotope. The birth of environmental history is generally said to be August 1972, with a special number of the *Pacific Historical Review* and a famous article by Roderick Nash.⁵² The choice of the journal marks the rise of environmentalism on West Coast campuses. It is started by the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, their strengthened awareness triumphs on April 22, 1970, with the first Earth Day, one of the largest demonstrations ever organized in the United States gathering 20 million people.⁵³ The American Society for Environmental History is established in 1977. Worster identifies three levels on which analysis could be made. The first implicates the discovery of the structure and the distribution of the natural environment in the past. the second level is the production technology and its interaction with the environment. And the third level is the study of perceptions, ideologies, ethics, laws, and myths of people through which the dialogue with nature. He advocates the integration of these levels.⁵⁴

⁵²Roderick Nash, "American environmental history: a new teaching frontier," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol-41, 1972, pp. 363.

⁵³ Sale, Kirkpatrick, Thomas Sugrue, and Eric Foner, *The green revolution: the environmental movement 1962-1992*, Vol. 1, Macmillan, 1993.

⁵⁴ Donald Worster, "Transformations of the earth: toward an agroecological perspective in history." *The Journal of American History*, Vol-76, No. 4, 1990, pp. 1087-1106.

Richard White and William Cronon rewrite the history of certain American regions through the perspective of climate change with a narrative that makes it impossible to separate humans from their environment.⁵⁵ Richard white criticizes this model by arguing that this is a hierarchical model with a base(natural history), a structure(mode of production) and a superstructure. For white culture cannot be separated from its material aspects. He suggests a focus on the problem of change and rejects the notion of a stable environmental ideal in the past.⁵⁶

William Cronon has offered the most powerful criticism of Worster's emphasis on the mode of production. This according to Cronon, leads to a focus on material dimensions at the cost of culture. Cronon argues that historians should focus on 'relationships' instead of modes of production. He prefers the term 'consumption relation' to 'relation of production'. Cronon complains that too often the environmental historians romanticize nature as unchanging, and argues that we cannot simply label as capitalist or modern all forces for Eco systematic changes and as traditional or natural all forces for stability. Cronon also finds the holistic approach of Worster problematic since it overlooks conflicts and differences within groups.⁵⁷

Carolyn Merchant rereads Bacon's scientific revolution in the light of the environment, arguing that it marks an essential turn in the relation to nature: nature is no longer a living whole but is instead divided and fragmented into private pieces of life that will constitute objects of scientific knowledge and domination.⁵⁸ By affirming the passage from a feminine conception of nature to a masculine one, Carolyn Merchant very early offers writing of

⁵⁵ William Cronon, *Changes in the land: Indians, colonists, and the ecology of New England*. Hill and Wang, 2011.

⁵⁶ Richard white, "Environmental history, ecology, and meaning". *The Journal of American History*, vol-76, No.4, 1990, pp. 1111-1116.

⁵⁷ William Cronon, "Modes of prophecy and production: placing nature in history." *The Journal of American History*, vol- 76, No. 4, 1990, pp. 1122-1131.

⁵⁸ Carolyn Merchant, "The death of nature: Women, ecology, and scientific revolution." *The history of science society*, The University of Chicago Press, vol-97, No. 3, 2006, pp. 513-533.

environmental history that is attentive to gender.⁵⁹ Stephen Pyne constructs a total history of fire that combines the physical characteristics of the phenomenon with values, institutions, and beliefs.⁶⁰ Richard White in his first bibliographical assessment in 1985, sought to show that a new field was in the midst of being constituted on the basis of a series of dispersed objects. Various references show that he can rely on the ample and earlier bibliographies on the variations of American west: movements for conservation and preservation, the history of forests and forests services, the intellectual history of wilderness and of its major figures, the history of national parks, the study of landscapes and the historical geography, the control of water supply, the valorization of the agriculture.⁶¹ On the other part, certain objects are not included: risks, for example, emerge at the same point in sociology and anthropology, probably because they are too often assimilated into technical risks.⁶²

2.6 BEGINNING OF ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY WRITINGS IN INDIA

Environmental issues become prominent in India from the early 1970s that this concern re-emerged in the form of vocal and articulate social movements in the 1980s. In India, the ecological aspect has been largely ignored in historical writings. Ramchandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil have attempted to bridge this gap by proposing a perspective for the study of the ecological history of India. Their famous book *This Fissured Land* proposes a binary of ecologically sensitive pre colonial Indian period and ecologically destructive British colonial period. They began by proposing a general theory of ecological history which discusses the

⁵⁹ Carolyn Merchant, "Earthcare: Women and the environment." *Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development*, vol- 23, No. 5, 1981, pp. 6-40.

⁶⁰ S. J. Pyne, *Fire in America: a cultural history of wildland and rural fire*, University of Washington Press, 2017.

⁶¹ Richard White, "American environmental history: the development of a new historical field." *Pacific Historical Review*, vol-54, No. 3, 1985, pp. 297-335.

⁶² Douglas, Mary, and Aaron Wildavsky, *Risk and culture: An essay on the selection of technological and environmental dangers*, University of California Press, 1983.

levels of forethought and extravagance in different modes of resource use which is followed by an ecological interpretation of pre-modern Indian history.⁶³

Ramchandra Guha's *The Unquiet Woods* in this sense is a pioneer work. In this significant work, he discusses the evolution of colonial forestry and social environmental disarticulations caused by it in the Uttarakhand region. This state interference gave rise to the conflicts as he discusses how the protest movements in the defence of forest rights and establish the linkage between the early protests and the Chipko movement.⁶⁴ He shows that the phenomenon of importation of concepts and methods of analysis is the part of the long history of confrontation between local populations and the administrators and practitioners of scientific history, forestry, both under the Raj and more widely. Guha extends this reflection with an ecological history of India where he reinterprets Hindu casts and beliefs as socio-cultural systems that organize the allocation and sustainable use of resources.

Other works, which focused on conservation and the adverse ecological consequences of colonial policies, included Richard Hoge Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens, and the Origins of Environmentalism 1600 – 1860* and Mahesh Rangarajan, *Fencing the Forest: Conservation and Ecological Change in India's Central Provinces 1860-1914* (New Delhi, 1996). The loss of the rights of the forest-dwellers was a principal theme of ecological history, as was the development of resistance and of efforts at conservation.

⁶³ Madhav Gadgil & Ramchandra Guha, *This fissured land: an ecological history of India*, University of California Press, 1993.

⁶⁴ Ramchandra Guha, *The unquiet woods: ecological change and peasant resistance in the Himalaya*, University of California Press, 2000.

More conventional economic histories had already focused on the impact of colonial rule on the environment. The advance of the agricultural frontier and irrigation canals, with the attendant problems of salination, water-logging and spread of disease, were studied, among others, by Elizabeth Whitcombe, *Agrarian Conditions in Northern India: the United Provinces under British Rule*,⁶⁵ Ian Stone, *Canal Irrigation in British India*⁶⁶ and M. Mufakharul Islam, *Irrigation, Agriculture and the Raj: Punjab*.⁶⁷ These studies mainly focus on the way British colonial rule impacted the ecological systems at one level and the rural population who critically dependent upon resources of nature for survival.

The main objective of this chapter is to trace the process of emergence of environmental history and various factors which facilitated the process. In order to narrate this theme, the factors such as environmental protection movement, intellectual engagement of environmentalists and engagement of historians on the history of ecology have been used. This thematic presentation has been presented at the global level in order to track the wider trajectory of the emergence of environmental history in different contexts and spaces. The ostensible fact is that environmental history as academic discipline begun to take shape in the 1960s and in the last fifty some years it established itself as one of the central branches of history in different parts of the globe including India. The next chapter deals with historiography and environmental history in India.

⁶⁵ Elizabeth Whitcombe, *Agrarian Condition in North India, volume I: The United Provinces Under British Rule, 1860-1900*, Berkeley, 1971.

⁶⁶ Ian Stone, *Canal irrigation in British India: Perspectives on technological change in a peasant economy*, Vol. 29. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁶⁷ M. Mufakharul Islam, *Irrigation, agriculture and the Raj: Punjab, 1887-1947*, (ed. 1) Manohar Publications, 1997.

CHAPTER-III
TITLE OF CHAPTER
HISTORIOGRAPHICAL APPROACHES ON ENVIRONMENTAL
HISTORY OF INDIA: A REVIEW

ABSTRACT OF CHAPTER

This chapter narrates important historiographical approaches that are practiced to represent the history of British colonial rule and its impact on Indian ecology and the population critically dependent upon ecologically important resources. The main objective of this chapter is to document the major dynamics of historiography on environmental history writings in India.

CHAPTER-III

INTRODUCTION

This chapter narrates important historiographical approaches on the environmental history of India in general and environmental history of modern India in particular. This chapter has mainly been designed to present the existing historical approaches on the environmental history of India. This endeavour is important for the two reasons: firstly, the rapid proliferation of literature on the environmental history of India took place during the period of 1980-2010. In view of this, it would be useful to have a review on various historical methods and approaches that are used for constructing environmental history. Secondly, in spite of attempts by some studies, the conceptual category of the historiography of the environmental history of India remained to be less explored and theorised. On account these two factors, an attempt has been made in this chapter to present a detailed review of the historiography of the environmental history of colonial India.

The phenomenon of historiography has been one of the important aspects of the science of history. Generally defined as theory and history of historical writings, historiography plays a major role in understanding the intentions of historians and their engagements with the present. The concept of historiography also defined as the study of the writing of history and written histories. From the aforementioned two definitions it is clear that historiography as a concept study about the method, theory, framework, ideology, and intentions of historians in writing about the past. In short historiography as an analytical concept study about the representation pattern of the past by historians following different methods and approaches.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1992.

It is relevant here to unveil the aspects that are structural parts of the conceptual domain of historiography. Voltaire happens to be a pioneer in using the concept of historiography to assess the historical sense of French historicism. He pronounces that historiography means to understand the human mind which is the root cause of all material and intellectual progress of civilization. History as a branch of human knowledge studies about the past which had bearing on the present and future as well. The process of recreation of the past itself a complicated process influenced by factors such as ideology, emotions, pressing needs of the present society, etc. In this sense, historiography helps us to understand the history writing process which is done by subjective historians who tries to achieve objectivity in his assessment of the past.⁶⁹

3.1 HISTORIOGRAPHY AND INDIAN HISTORY

In the seventy-some more years since independence, Indian historians have undoubtedly assumed charge of their own history. History has two undertones in our times. Firstly, history is the data and existing evidence of what happened in the past. The artifacts and fragments of the past are histories. Secondly, 'history is what historians do'. History in this sense is a compilation of what was/is written about the events, processes, and people of the past. Historiography is also derived from the word history and it also has two things simultaneously i.e. philosophy/method and perspectives on historical writings.⁷⁰ The first steps towards professionalization and methodization of historical research were taken within the organizational framework of British institutions, such as Asiatic Society (founded in 1784) and the Archeological Survey (founded in 1861). Historians were also recruited and employed at the colleges and the universities (Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, founded in 1857). Indian

⁶⁹ Carl Becker, "What is Historiography?" *The American Historical Review*, Vol- 44, No. 1, October 1938, pp. 20-28.

⁷⁰ P. Novick, *That noble dream: The objectivity question and the American historical profession*, Cambridge University Press, vol-13, 1988.

initiatives have been taken by introducing new educational societies and organs for publication, first at the local and regional level, then at the national level. *Bengal Past and Present*, a journal of Modern Indian and Asian History from Calcutta Historical Society (1907) and The *Varendra Research Society at Rajshahi (1910)* were established to encourage the systematic investigation into the past. India possesses an enormous heritage of literature accumulated over the centuries, much of it relating to past events, yet there has never been a historian to compare with those of ancient Greece and Rome, or later European scholars who contributed to the development of history as a discipline.⁷¹

History writing in India as a conscious exercise began with scholars of colonial and orientalist persuasion and followed by nationalist elite and others. We can see four dominant streams in Indian historiography which are as follows: colonial, nationalist, Marxist and Subaltern approaches. Of course, each school again subdivided into many other branches depending upon their emphasis. Each school has its historical and social contexts in emphasizing its method in writing Indian history. Each school argued its case in relation to others. The decade of the eighties is a turning point in Indian history in bringing new epistemological positions corresponding to the struggles of Dalits, Women, Adivasi's. The first notable British historians of India, Charles Grant, and James Mill, were respectively Evangelical and Utilitarian.⁷² When researches into India's past began in the late 18th century and 19th early 19th centuries, Orientalists ideas structured historical representations. Inspired by the romanticism and the classicism of the time, Orientalists like William Jones and H.T. Colebrook returned to ancient past, discovered its greatness and defined a specific notion of a glorious classical age. It was in this age, so the Orientalists told us, that the essence of Indian

⁷¹ Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*, Indiana University Press, 2000.

⁷² Satish Chandra Mittal, *India distorted: A study of British historians on India*, MD Publications Pvt. Ltd., vol-2, 1995.

civilization embodied in its language, laws, institutions and religious texts-came into being. If India had to develop, its lost past had to be rediscovered, its essence had to be properly understood, its juridical and religious texts had to be translated and canonized, its poetry had to be captured. The orientalist saw themselves as the mediators who would define this relationship between the past and present.⁷³

The modern method of history writing has basically been formulated by the West. In this new method 'history' came to be- defined within the framework of 'positivism' that had its genesis in the discourse of enlightenment and the rise of nation-states in Europe. Positivism has been defined as a philosophy that emphasized on a strict presentation of facts,⁷⁴ which according to Ranke formed the 'supreme law of historical writing'.⁷⁵ The concern for facts in historical writing can further be gauged when E. H. Carr pertinently points out that history must necessarily consist of a 'corpus of ascertained facts'.⁷⁶ The influence of Enlightenment on the Positivists had two significant effects. First, it took history closer to natural sciences by applying scientific analysis to the study of facts in the human sciences, just as it had come to be done in the natural sciences. This necessarily gave rise to a new scientific method of writing history primarily based on empiricism. Second, the process of salvaging the facts in a scientific way and presenting them in sequential order with reference to linear time became the central issue in presenting the historical narrative. The popularity of the positivist method of writing history in Europe may be noticed significantly in the Ideological discourse on Indian history.

Initially, an interest to write about India and its past among the Europeans had generated from the need to understand the so-called 'native' laws, customs and traditions that were

⁷³ Paul Thompson, *The voice of the past: Oral history*, Oxford university press, 2017.

⁷⁴ David L. Sills, *International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, vol. 11 & 12, 1972, pp. 389.

⁷⁵ Arthur Marwick, *The nature of history*, Macmillan, 1989.

⁷⁶ E. H. Carr, *What is history?* Penguin, UK, 2018.

considered essential in carrying out an efficient administration of the subject colony. As a result, many European scholars like William Jones, Charles Wilkins, H. T. Colebrooke, and H. Wilson explored the classical literature of India and found significant philological similarities between Sanskrit and European languages. An important consequence of the strenuous research of these scholars primarily led to the exposition and publication⁷⁷ of massive literary source material that spoke about the ancient Indian past. However, the interpretations of the Indian philosophical and literary texts by them aroused two schools of thought within the Oriental discourse. One was led by the cynical Utilitarian's. The other was directed by the sympathetic Romanticists led by William Jones, Max Muller and others who advocated both critical as well as a sympathetic view of India's past.⁷⁸

In the category of the many Imperialist historians, the prominent was James Mill and Vincent Smith. In his monumental hegemonic account on *The History of British India* (1817), Mill paints the picture of Indian society as caste- centric and dominated by Hindu religious ideology, which in his opinion, was unable to transcend the false knowledge and inferior practices of 'primitivism'.⁷⁹ In this characterization, therefore, Indian society came to be represented as a sort of retrograde that did not encourage any progress and remained 'static' and 'unchanging'. An obsession with explaining ills of the Indian society to caste in order to explain India's low political and economic 'development' became a theme of analysis adopted by subsequent scholarship on India. It was his firm opinion that due to cultural inferiority the Indians lacked a sense of history.⁸⁰

⁷⁷Gyan Prakash, "Writing Post Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography." *CSSH, International Quarterly Journal*, vol. 32, No.2, April 1990, Cambridge University Press, p. 385.

⁷⁸Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian social history: Some interpretations*, Orient Blackswan, 1978.

⁷⁹David L. Sills, *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, Vol. 11 & 12, 1972, p. 389.

⁸⁰James Mill, *The History of British India*, Vol-1, Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, 1817.

On the other hand, the anti-colonial fight popularly known as Indian national movement also inspired several intellectuals in India to take up history writings to counter the narrative of colonial historians who accused Indian civilization and values are responsible for the degraded position of India. It would be impossible indeed to present a review of writings on the nationalist perspective of Indian history. This section attempts to highlights some of the important studies that set the narrative of nationalist concerns in the writings of Indian history.

Nationalist economic thinkers attempted to create an alternative method of historical writings on British rule in India. They were of the opinion that it was the nature of British rule that is was responsible for the underdevelopment of India. By exploring new sources, methods, and interpretation a new historical generalization was created which pronouns that the British rule has contributed for the development of underdevelopment in India and hence decolonization of India was proposed as solutions to the problems that are faced by India. This approach also proposes that a new economic system need to be created to cater to the needs of nation.⁸¹

Emphasizing on cultural factors another stream of nationalist historical writings proposed that the revitalization of India is possible only when the people of India realize the importance and greatness of Indian culture and civilization. Contrary to the British criticism of Indian culture, it was proposed that Indian culture and civilization happens to be one of the great civilizations of the world and such greatness needed to be revived in order to respite the glory of India. The main conceptual categories this approach creates is that social values,

⁸¹ Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India: Economic Policies of Indian National Leadership, 1880-1905*, Har Anand Publications, 2010.

cultural practices and religious customs that are followed by people of India not necessary as represented by the colonial historiography. It was also proposed that the socio-cultural practices in India were evolved in tune with geo-ecological conditions and facilitated vibrant life in India.⁸²

Having narrated a brief review of historiographical approaches prevailed for writing the history of India, the next section of this chapter documents the historiography of environmental history and its linkages with general historiography of Indian history. An attempt has been made to locate approaches of environmental history into existing historiographical traditions on Indian history.

3.2 COLONIAL AND NEO-COLONIAL APPROACH AND ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF INDIA

In the context of colonial rule in India, the British had consciously developed formidable historiography on Indian history. The main themes of this approach are that Indians as a race, their socio-cultural traditions, values systems, and attitudes are not potential enough to engage with the dynamism of modernity that emanated from Western Europe. This approach proposes that on account of several shortcomings the civilizing mission of the British is critically required for the advancement of India.

The aforementioned themes of colonial approach provided structural logic and narrative genre for the environmentally inclined historians who believed in these themes in the colonial and post-colonial periods to represent the ecological past of India. Representation of human engagement with the natural world was in fact systematically documented for the first time by

⁸² K. N. Pannikar, "Culture and Communalism." *Social Scientist*, 1993, pp. 24-31.

colonial foresters in India. E.P. Stebbing had written extensively on the history of forest administration in various provinces under the British rule. He brought about the four-volume work entitled *The Forests of India*. These volumes describe the history of forest policies in British India and provide a graphic description of the chronological events and various aspects pertaining to the colonial forestry. These volumes mainly illustrate the administrative details such as important administrative measures, statistics pertaining to forest budget and reservation and brief narration on the forest policies in various provinces under the British rule in India.⁸³ Another forester, Berthold Ribbentrop's book *Forestry in British India* gives valuable details pertaining to legal and administrative measures of the Forest department in India. It also narrates certain important aspects of the colonial forest policies such as forest settlement, forest surveys, working plans, Silviculture techniques and debates that took place within the colonial bureaucracy on people's rights over forests.⁸⁴

Brandis's *Forestry in India: Origins & Early Developments* is a fine contemporary account on the colonial forest policies in India. He writes about the distribution of forest resources and their significance in providing useful materials, protecting climate and irrigation sources in India.⁸⁵ R.S. Troup's book, *Colonial Forest Administration* narrates the forest management practices in some of the Asian and African countries. Though there is a little reference about India, it deals with various scientific and administrative aspects such as conservation of trees for protecting the climate, plantations, forest organization, state ownership, people's rights, and forest legislation.⁸⁶

⁸³ E.P. Stebbing, "*Forests of India*." 4 Volume series, first two volumes were published by John Lane, London in 1922 and 1927; Vol. III was published by A.J. Reprints, New Delhi, in 1982 and Vol. IV, Oxford University Press, London, 1962.

⁸⁴ Berthold Ribbentrop, *Forestry in British India*, Reprinted Edition, Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1989.

⁸⁵ Dietrich Brandis, *Forestry in India; Origins & Early Developments*, Natraj Publishers, Dehra Dun, 1994.

⁸⁶ R.S. Troup, *Colonial Forest Administration*, Oxford University Press, London, 1940.

The colonial forest and administrative historians seriously engaged with the way human beings in pre-colonial times interacted with the natural world in general and forests in particular. They had proposed the following points: the ecologically important resources including forests were destroyed by local communities indiscriminately for their wants. Such destruction many times brought about ecological problems such as drying of irrigation systems and decrease in soil fertility etc. The colonial historians created a narrative of the destruction of ecologically important resources by local communities and the initiation of conservation policies as benevolent acts of the enlightened government in order to conserve the ecology of India.

The historians belong to neo-colonial historical approach take their basic argument from the colonial approach and furthered its theoretical position by a new set of material and sophisticated theoretical proposition. The fundamental argument of this approach is that Indians lack conservation sense and it is the colonial scientific community that had created a context for the emergence of modern environmentalism which highlights the need for careful conservation of resources in colonies in general and tropics in particular. With his fascinating research of global dimension, Richard Grove proposes that the process of European colonization is not destructive for ecology rather created a context for the emergence of modern environmentalism articulated and executed by the colonial scientific community.⁸⁷ The main themes of neo-colonial approaches are as follows: the scientific community employed in different colonies encountered the ecological degradation and this encountered forced them to use their expertise to handle the ecological degradation; origin of conservation policies for forests, water, agriculture, grass lands, botanical gardens etc are actually and proposals that the colonial scientific community put forwarded for better conservation of ecologically and

⁸⁷ Richard Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial expansion, Tropical Eden and the Origin of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*, Cambridge University Press, Indian prints, Delhi, 1995; *Ecology, Climate, and Empire: Indian Legacy in Global Environmental History*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998.

economically important resources and colonial rule according to this approach not all about ecological exploitation, rather attempt was made to initiate measures for conservation of ecology which was already degraded before advent of colonial rule.

The theoretical assumptions of Grove have subsequently been shared by several other studies however with different emphasis. The basic thrust of these studies is that colonial rule was responsible for evolution of scientific conservation practices of ecologically important resources. Richard Drayton perceives colonial environmentalism as part of the globalized effort of European nations to expand their governance values and strategies.⁸⁸ Ravi Rajan traces the origin of colonial forestry in Franco-German tradition and concerted effort of the global scientific community to actualize continental forestry traditions.⁸⁹ As a historiographical approach, the colonial and neo-colonial approach focuses on the British empire as a unit and proposes that science and ecology was one of the important pillars of the empire which attempted to devise conservation strategies for careful management of resources that were indiscriminately destroyed by native communities.

3.3 NATIONALIST NARRATIVES OF ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY: AN APPROACH

The nationalist approach for writing the history of India established itself as a formidable narrative of writing Indian history. This approach rejects the claims of colonial historiography which emphasis on unworthy qualities of Indian civilization and claims that socio-cultural practices of India are vibrant and in fact better than the civilizational values of Europe. The culmination of these claims could be seen in a book by M.K. Gandhi entitled *The Hind Swaraj*

⁸⁸ Richard Drayton, *Nature's government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the "Improvement" of the world*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

⁸⁹S. Ravi Rajan, *Modernizing nature: Forestry and imperial eco-development 1800-1950*, Oxford University Press on Demand, 2006.

published in 1909. This book rejects the colonial modernity as a defining a feature of Indian society and proposes that India civilization is built based on the pillars of morality, contentment, spirituality and care for forms of nature.

National identities are constructed to reflect and consolidate historical continuities associated with the specific territorial landscapes: natural contours, rivers, mountains, and forests are explored, mapped, lived in, and transformed into a homeland. National landscapes are thus always imagined as unique, and notions of identity and belongings within each unique national landscape. A nation thus comes to be embodied in nature and its several manifestations, and the nationalist in the avatar of fundamentalists declares that such an embodiment cannot be shared with non-national others.⁹⁰ Although the tradition of 'nature for nationalism' was not the only form of environmental reasoning earlier, it has been one of the most visible strands, and its arguments had a powerful resonance.⁹¹ In colonial India, environmental imaginary was said to be an important means of developing a national as well as regional or religious consciousness, and in contesting British cultural and political dominance.⁹² The notion of territoriality, a combination of many environmental elements such as the boundaries of land, sea, and river, became an important factor in this nationalism. Nationalist forces tried their best to deploy assumptions about forest society in pre-colonial India to counter the colonial regime.⁹³ The nationalist approach perceives that socio-cultural practices in India embedded a strong sense of conservation and several practices were evolved in order to promote sustainable use of environmentally important resources.

⁹⁰Mukul Sharma, *Green and Saffron: Hindu Nationalism and Indian Environmental Politics*, Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2012.

⁹¹ Anil Agarwal, "Politics of environment-II." *The State of India's Environment*, 1984, p.185.

⁹² David Arnold, *Environment, Culture and European Expansion*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1996, p. 185.

⁹³ David Hardiman, *Power in the Forest: The Dangs, 1820-1940*, in David Arnold and David Hardimen (eds). *Subaltern studies VIII*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 89-94.

The style of conceptualization of human and environmental relationship from the point of view of nationalism got further augmentation by the research in ecological anthropology. From the 1960s onwards social anthropology had started to provide a significant space to human interaction with the ecological world. It has been offered that traditional ecological wisdom, particularly not influenced by the capitalist exploitative system are more superior in terms of protecting the resource of nature.⁹⁴ The innovative studies on the environmental history of India were inspired by ecological nationalism at one level and traditional ecological wisdom of Indian culture at another level. It is this approach that resulted in the emergence of ecological interpretation to Indian history from the perspective of nationalism. It would be appropriate for us to focus on some of the important studies on the nationalist ecological history of India.

Nationalist thought believes in the fact that the cultural practices in the Indian subcontinent are embodiments the organic relationship between nature, culture and human society. It has been proposed that the sacred groves dedicated to local gods and several restrictions on their access to uses are an emblematic phenomenon for indigenous conservation.⁹⁵ Details descriptions on the functions of sacred groves have been prepared and the generalization that has been arrived is that sacred groves are perfect examples of how local communities attempted to preserve ecologically important resources by using the cultural and spiritual practices.⁹⁶

The concept of indigenous wisdom in ecological conservation gradually extended beyond sacred groves and entire Indian cultural practices are perceived as codified practices of

⁹⁴ Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology*, University of Chicago Press, 2000.

⁹⁵ Madhav Gadgil and V.D. Vartak, "Groves Dedicated to God", *Illustrated Weekly of India*, Vol. 35, 1973, pp.19-21.

⁹⁶ Vartak V.D., "Sacred Groves of India: A Plea for Continued Conservation", *Journal of Bombay Natural History Society*, Vol.72, 1975, pp.314-30.

preservation of ecologically important resources.⁹⁷ The ecological argument this approach advances is that being a tropical country, the population living in this land are compelled to adopt diversified life patterns in tune with the local ecological and topographical conditions. It is this process that resulted in the emergence of several social and cultural systems and practices that ensure the conservation and preservation of life sustaining resources for population.⁹⁸ Indian culture and heritage thus perceived from an ecological perspective and it has been proposed that collectivist wisdom in conservation of life supporting resources is one of the elements of Indian culture. Indian heritage and culture was thus drawn into ecological narrative and attempt was being made to project the eco-sensitivity as an intrinsic quality of Indian culture and civilization. In other words the nationalist approach to environmental history tried to search for the ethical roots for ecological conservation.⁹⁹

The nationalist prominence on the ecological version of Indian culture and tradition acquired broader popularity in the due course of time. As a result of the right wing nationalist discourse involved in reinterpretation ecological history of India by the way of perceiving Indian culture as ecologically sustainable.¹⁰⁰ It has been proposed that the socio-cultural practices of India inherently embedded with eco-sensitivity. Several examples are being cited such as tree worship, animal worship, and worship of natural forms such as mountain, rivers, lakes, seas and other morphological forms as a reflection of ecological sensitivity.¹⁰¹ The focal point of this narrative is that socio-cultural practices of India evolved in tune with the geo-

97 Madhav Gadgil, "Towards an Ecological History of India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. xx, No. 45-46 and 47, 1985, pp.1909-13.

98 "Social Restraints on Resource Utilisation: The Indian Experience", in McNeely, J.A, and Pitt, P, (ed.), *Culture and Conservation: The Human Dimension in Environmental Planning*, Croom Helm, Dublin, 1985.

99 "The Indian Heritage of a Conservation Ethics", in Allchin, B, Allchin, E.R, and Thaper, B.K, (ed.), *Conservation of the Indian Heritage*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, 1989.

100 V.M. Ravi Kumar, "Intellectual Environmental History of India: A Study on Ideas of Deen Dayal Upadhyay," *North Asian International Research Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol.4. Issue. 4, 2018, pp. 140-147.

101 Mukul Sharma, *Green and Saffron*

ecological conditions and thereby embedded sound ecological conservation virtues. The nationalist narrative of ecological history has several shades.

Several thinkers inspired by right-wing cultural-political organization RSS, had progressive nationalist narratives of the relationship between Indians and ecological forms. Cultural consciousness of the Hindu belief system is considered as pure and proficient in promoting sustainable management of ecologically sensitive resources. It has been offered that the exploitation of resources and excessive consumer culture is a product of western culture. Hence for sustainable use of living resources, India should dependent upon Hindu cultural values.¹⁰² This argument has been vocally advocated by RSS and its affiliated organizations. It has been suggested that nation, nature, and patriotism are intrinsically connected with one and other. This complex relationship is recognized and maintained by values and practices created and protected by Hindu Dharma according to RSS. On account of this, the way Hindu culture is pure, its appearances such as the Indian nation and ecological verities also an extended version of purity. The restoration of pure Hindu values is being apparent as one of the effective solutions for handling the ecological crisis in India. Thus the connection between of nation, nationalism, and ecology has been articulated in India. This trend stemmed in the publication of several studies on the ecological dimension of ancient scripture and religious values.

Like every twist and turn within intellectual life, environmental history has uncountable and tangled roots. The languages of environment and ecology have been subjected to extensive efforts at definition throughout the past twenty years or so. As with main commitments, it is possible to have hard and soft positions. The hard 'might suggest that environmental history

¹⁰² O. P. Dwivedi, and Roger S. Gottlieb, *Satyagraha for conservation: Awakening the spirit of Hinduism, This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment. Edited by Roger S. Gottlieb. New York: Routledge, 2004, pp.130-41.*

necessarily involves an examination of environmental dynamics through the human agency in which the change is quantifiable in some form or form. A softer approach would suggest, perhaps, that change could be inferred from even where data are not available. Interactions with the environment may also be frozen in narrow time-level where change is less important. Relevant sections of the legislation are all part of environmental history.

3.4 NATIONALIST MARXIST APPROACH TO ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF INDIA

Besides the nationalist approach to Indian history, nationalist Marxist approach to Indian history has been well established historical tradition in India. Following footsteps of the framework proposed in a book *Discovery of India* by politician and intellectual Jawaharlal Nehru, this approach attempted to blend the approaches of nationalist and Marxist to the creative history of India. This approach does not subscribe to uncritical validation of nationalist version by being critical of some of the socio-cultural practices of India. At the same time, at a broader level, this approach accepts the positive value of the socio-cultural structure of India. This approach also perceives British colonial rule as an important departure in for it was responsible for the development of underdevelopment of India. The interesting fact is that it is this approach that pioneered a full-fledged approach for writing the environmental history of India.

Even though Marx did not give much importance to the ecological dimension of human affairs, he did have some reflections on the relationship between man and nature. He proposes that the capitalist mode of production systematically alienate man from nature by the way of excluding his from his traditional livelihood pattern.¹⁰³ Inspired by this framework historians

¹⁰³ John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature*, New York University Press, 2000.

perceives at the colonial rule as capitalist expansion and consequent alienation of vast sections of the tribal and rural population who depend upon resources of nature critically. The argument put forward by nationalist Marxist historians is that ecological factors created a ground for tribal and peasant society in India to fight against British colonial rule.¹⁰⁴

The nationalist Marxist approach divides the ecological dimension of Indian history into the following two phases: the pre-colonial and colonial. While the former was perceived as ecologically sensitive guided by socio-cultural practices, the latter is destructive which had unleashed the rampant exploitation of ecologically important resources such as lands, water bodies, forests, mountains, etc for maximization of revenue and colonial economic imperatives. This approach had created a binary of ecologically sensitive pre-colonial approach and ecologically destructive colonial rule.¹⁰⁵

The first systematic attempt of the environmental history of India was made by Ramachandra Guha in his several well researched articles. He demystified the notion that ecological consciousness is a contemporary phenomenon. He demonstrated the historical dimension of state intervention and people's response in the domain of ecologically sensitive Himalayan zone. In his work, *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*, concerned itself with the Subaltern theme of domination and resistance rather than with the actual tracking of environmental change over the long duration.¹⁰⁶ It was a study of the emergence of a popular movement in the Himalayan foothills against the commercial exploitation of the forest resources of the Himalayas.

¹⁰⁴ R. Guha and M. Gadgil, "State Forestry and social Conflict in British India: A Study in the Ecological Base of Agrarian Protest", *Past and Present*, Vol.123, May 1989, pp.141-177.

¹⁰⁵ Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*, University of California Press, 1993.

¹⁰⁶ Ramchandra Guha, *The Unquietwoods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*, University of California Press, 2000.

Guha along with Gadgil attempted to evolve a systematic disciplinary framework for ecological interpretation to Indian history and it took the following position: 'In India, the ongoing struggle between the peasant and industrial modes of resource use has come in two stages: colonial and post-colonial'.¹⁰⁷ Their model of ecological interpretation to Indian history as follows: hunter and gatherer period, pastoralist period, settled agriculture period, and colonial period and finally independent Indian period. The summery of this modal of history is that pre-colonial Indian sub content enjoyed ecologically sensitive practices which are altered by destructive colonial exploitation of nature. The main reason for the ecological crisis in India according to this approach is the introduction of capitalist forms of exploitation of nature by the British. This approach offers a moral critique of the exploitation of nature and alienation of people from it by focusing on British colonial rule. The approach of Guha and Gadgil reflects the rare convergence of Marxist notion of alienation of man from nature¹⁰⁸ and nationalist sensibility on the environmental problem. Besides brilliant contribution to the existing corpus of historical knowledge, this approach also has the following limitations. The entire argument of this approach is built with the premise of pre-British India as ecologically prudent and possessing eco-sensitive cultural practices. But this approach is built based upon limited samples of regional studies. Consequently, it does not give adequate attention to caste based inequalities and gender dimension in the appropriation of natural resources in several parts of India. Several recent studies questioned the validity of this approach and branded it as an ecologically romantic approach.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ R. Guha and M. Gadgil, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*, University of California Press, 1993.

¹⁰⁸ John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's ecology: Materialism and Nature*, New York University Press, 2000.

¹⁰⁹ J. R. Freeman, "Gods, Groves and the Culture of Nature in Kerala." *Modern Asian Studies*, vol-33 No. 2, pp. 257-302.

The regional level of environmental history was initially inspired by the nationalist Marxist approach to the ecological history of modern India. The main argument of this approach is that resource utilization practices in different regions of India evolved in tune with geophysical conditions of regions. These systems attempted to cater to the needs of local communities with a focus on sustainable use of resources. Such resource use patterns are being destroyed by the British which had unleashed the intensive resource use patterns for both domestic and international markets. Archana Prasad¹¹⁰ and Mahesh Rangarajan,¹¹¹ while exploring the environmental history of central India, proposes that the colonial capitalist was responsible for unprecedented exploitation of forest resources and alienation of local communities from their traditional access to resources of nature. It is this process according to them responsible for widespread tribal revolts against British colonial rule. The similar trend still continues wherein tension between tribal communities and local administration continues.

South India emerged as a space of environmental historians how used the framework of the nationalist Marxist approach to document the ecological history of different regions of the Sothern part of the subcontinent. Saravanan, who worked on Tamil speaking region of the Madras Presidency, proposed that the greed of the British for wood, mountain land for coffee cultivation and other forest resources resulted in exploitation of resources and alienation of tribal population.¹¹² Murali's study on Andhra region proposes and classic version of nationalist Marxist approach which proposes that pre-colonial practices of resource

¹¹⁰ Archana Prasad, *Environmentalism and the Left: Contemporary Debates and Future Agendas in Tribal Areas*, Vol- 8, LeftWord Books, 2004.

¹¹¹ Mahesh Rangarajan, "The Politics of Ecology: The Debate on Wildlife and People in India, 1970-95." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 31, No. 35/37, sep 1996, pp. 2391-2409.

¹¹² Velayutham Saravanan, *Colonialism, Environment and Tribals in South India, 1792-1947*, Routledge India, 2016.

management by local communities were essentially eco-friendly in nature, such as systems were destroyed by revenue and resource hungry British colonial rule. This situation according to Murali not only exploited the resource base without allowing it for regeneration but also unleashed rampant exploitation of forest-dependent communities.¹¹³ A similar framework was used by Saikia in case of Assam. He proposes that British rule had destroyed the natural forests and thereby alienated the local communities from access to forests.¹¹⁴

The nationalist Marxist approach for writing environmental history emerged as a popular approach for the representation of the relationship between human beings and nature during the British colonial rule in India. The main argument of this approach is that colonial rule had destroyed the accessible resources, particularly of forests. This exploitation not only destroyed a very valuable resource base but also significantly altered the fragile eco-systems that are safeguarded carefully by local communities for several centuries. This approach also believes that exploitation of natural resources aggravated the process of alienation of tribal, peasant, pastoralist and other rural folks from their customary access to a resource based and thereby threaten the very means of their survival. In short nationalist Marxist approach proposes that colonial rule in India not only destroyed fragile ecological systems, livelihoods of forest dependent people but also left a strong legacy of environmental policies and attitudes of independent India. Hence the decolonization of mind and policies in the domain of ecology is critically required for the creation of a healthy ecological conservation process in India.

¹¹³ Atluri Murali, "Whose trees? Forest practices and local communities in Andhra, 1600-1922." in Arnold, Guha and Ramchandra Guha, (ed) "Nature, Culture, Imperialism: Essays on the Environmental History of South Asia, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 86-122.

¹¹⁴ Arupjyoti Saikia, *Forests and Ecological History of Assam, 1826–2000*, Oxford University Press, 2011.

3.5 POST-COLONIAL APPROACH AND INDIAN ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

The image and version of the past are certainly if not determined but significantly shaped by the concerns that the present society is engaged. It is this relationship that influences the historical narrative on any domain of human affairs.¹¹⁵ The following reflection of Foucault on this process is worth mentioning: 'Historical descriptions are necessarily ordered by the present state of knowledge, they increase with every transformation and never cease, in turn, to break with themselves'.¹¹⁶ This approach of Foucault had a significant impact on several studies on the environmental history of India. Numerous regional level studies have been carried out by concentrating on this approach.

The linguistic turn in history became popular in social science methodology in the recent past. This trend also had an impact on history writings as well as environmental history writings. The term discourse analysis is a broad term which indicates the use of narratives as of the important sources to explore and analyze the process of colonial rule and its impact on environmental governance. This approach claims that colonial environmental policies are prepared by the colonial bureaucratic circle mainly consists of revenue, foresters and scientists and the strategies and narratives of tribes. By using the theoretical approach of Mitchell Foucault's governmentality several studies on environmental history attempted to capture the ecological dimension of British colonial rule. The main features of this study as follows:

- British intervention in Indian ecology is neither completely exploitative nor completely regenerative. It is a process conditioned by a complicated process.

¹¹⁵ Partha Chatterjee and Arjun Gosh (ed), *History and the Present*, Permanent Black, New Delhi, 2006.

¹¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1972, p. 5.

- Indeed, the main intention of the British is to gain access to forests and other natural resources, but this was done with careful planning and incorporation of the demands by tribes and peasants into the policy process.
- The environmental policies are made out of a continuous dialogue within the colonial bureaucratic circle at one level and between native society at another level.
- The main reasons for not much serious resistance to environmental policies of the British are the incorporation of certain claims of native society in general and tribes in particular into the policy process.
- This approach treats tribes not simply as primitive and rebellious as portrayed by national Marxist historiography and neo colonial historiography rather a rational being attempted to use several strategies to maximize their gains in the British rule.

The seminal contribution of Foucault to human and social science is his ideas on knowledge and power and governmentality. Some studies brilliantly used this idea to explore the histories of forest policies in different parts of India. The centrality of these studies is that colonial bureaucracy has engaged in the development of epistemological categories which were gradually incorporated into policy structures. Hence, this approach proposes that we need to explore the representational pattern of forests, tribes and their relationship to arrive at proper understandings on the environmental history of Indian tribes. Sivaramakrishnan's study on Bengal is useful to work in this direction.¹¹⁷ He demonstrates how forest policies emerged from the internal contradiction of colonial governance and how forests including tress and communities were brought under a hegemonic techno-bureaucratic management system. His main contribution is that he focused on the interaction of power relations in the field of forest policies and practices in Bengal. He also attempted to create an approach which proposes that

¹¹⁷ K. Sivaramakrishnan, *Modern Forests: State Making Environmental Change in South West Bengal*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999.

British rule was executed with the help of assimilating several claims of powerful elite sections of Indian society into the process of forest policy making.

Arun Agarwal's book shows us how colonial state gradually incorporated the claims and demands of forest-dependent communities into the policy process.¹¹⁸ He also shows that local forest management practices introduced in the form of *Van Panchayats* are an indication of the colonial state did not control forests and tribes with oppressive strategies, rather using ideological apparatus. The main argument of the post colonial approach is that the hegemony of British over Indian society was achieved not only by the brutal physical strength is exercise with the help of army and policy but also incorporating the socio-cultural practices of Indian society at one level and claims of dominant sections of Indian society at another level in order to carry on smooth function of state apparatus.

The British colonial rule in the domain of ecology is not only to do with exploitation versus conservation but also defining the identity of people living in the proximity of nature. Aniket Alam's study on Himachal region is an interesting account of how tribal communities attempted to adopt modernity articulated in the discourse of nationalism and thereby by promoting the integration of the Himalayan region with mainstream nationalist ambit.¹¹⁹

Post colonial approach proposes that the colonial interventions for taping or managing ecologically important resources were being evolved with a discourse consciously evolved by colonial bureaucracy consisting of revenue, forest officials and scientists employed by the British Raj. Vasant Saberwal's book on the politics of pastoral communities shows how colonial bureaucrats use the discourse of science to evolve strategies to control pastoral

¹¹⁸ Arun Agrawal, *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and Making of the subject*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2004.

¹¹⁹ A. Alam, *Becoming Indian: Western Himalaya under British Rule*, Cambridge University Press, under Foundation Imprints, New Delhi, 2008.

communities.¹²⁰ Sutton's study on tribes of *Nilgiris* shows how forests and forested people are defined by the colonial state to impose their moral and material dominations over them.¹²¹ Vasant Saberwal and Lele study on the relationship between colonial forestry and dominant communities in Canara district of Madras presidency shows the way the assertion manipulation ability of dominant sections able to gain privileges and concessions.¹²² Ravi Kumar's study on community forest management in South India document the strategy of the colonial state in incorporating the demands of tribes and peasants as a strategy to exercise control over them or to avoid conflicting relationship.¹²³ The essentialist discourse evolved by colonial officials according to post colonial approach facilitated the intervention of state with its policy framework and other strategies on controls of both nature and communities dependent upon nature for survival.

Sumit Guha has attempted to bridge the gap bordered by pre-British and British era. His area of study was the region controlled by Marathas in pre-British time where rich repositories of Maratha documents are available. At the similar time, he has also escaped the illusionary divide flanked by forest and agriculture and notions of ethnicity in the wider framework of the environment. He has proposed that tribal polities did not evolve in separation and isolation. Further, he has pointed out that the big regions of the Western plateau (Maharashtra) outside the rain-drenched Konkan coast was reduced treeless even throughout the heydays of Marathas. The pattern of livelihood has modified the environment of the region

¹²⁰ Vasant Sabrwal, *Pastoral Politics Shepherds Bureaucrats and Conservation in the Western Himalaya*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1999.

¹²¹ Deborah Sutton, *Other Landscapes: Colonialism and the Predicament of Authority in 19th century South India*, Orient Blackswan, New Delhi, 2011.

¹²² Vasant Sabrwal and Sharachchandra Lele, "Locating Local Elite Negotiating Access to Forests: Havik Brahmins and the Colonial State, 1860-1920", *Studies in History*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 2004, pp. 273-303.

¹²³ V.M. Ravi Kumar, 'State, Forests, and Communities: History of Community Forest Management in Colonial South India (Andhra) 1800-1947' *Economic and Political Weekly*, December, 2012, pp. 53-60.

as he demonstrates that the use of fire and the keeping of cattle were practiced here for at least forty centuries, if not more. In the procedure a thorny forest region was changed into seasonal grass-land: the ecology was thus re-shaped in a major possible ways. The fluidity was more than harmonized in economic conditions. Arid spells could lead to a resurgence of herding. In the effort to examine the deeper stability Sumit Guha has trusted upon archaeological as well as anthropological evidence to demonstrate historical proof thereby stressing the significance of procedures rather than watersheds or events.

While the British attempted to capture the ecologically important territories and people lived in there, the tribal population predominantly lived in forested areas also evolved counter strategies aimed at survival. Ajay Skaria documents an exhaustive study on the construction of wilderness discourse by the Dange tribe in the western part of India. It has been proposed that construction of wilderness discourse was used by tribes to counter the expansionist and controlling attitude of the British.¹²⁴ The main themes of the post-colonial approach to environmental history of India are as follows: the domination over nature and tribes of India was achieved with narratives and construction of images with invoked the intervention of colonial rule as necessary condition for development of India and its ecology. It is this construction on which the post colonial approach mainly concentrates upon.

3.6 SUBALTERN APPROACH AND ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

Inspired by Antonio Gramsci's notion of the subaltern, a distinctive genre of historical approach and writing has been evolved from the early 1980s. This approach is famously known as a subaltern approach to study Indian history. This approach mainly focuses on the notion of history from below by focusing on the politics of lower sections for survival and sometimes

¹²⁴ Skaria Ajay, *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wildness in Western India*. (Studies in Social Ecology and Environmental History), New York: Oxford University Press. 1999. Pp. xxiv, 324.

assertion. Methodologically this approach indeed brought about a drastic change in the pattern of looking and capturing the experience and perceptions of lower sections of Indian society that have been neglected by existing historical approaches. In short, the subaltern approach has often been hailed as a non-elite approach for writing history.

Ranajit Guha and his collaborators initiated this approach to explore the trends in Indian history. The main focus of this approach is devoted to class such as tribes, peasant, lower castes, women and other marginalized sections whose livelihoods were significantly influenced by the British rule. The attempt has been made to retrieve the autonomy of subaltern consciousness that had influenced their attitudes, politics, and action in general. Publication of several volumes as a series entitled subaltern studies: writings on society of South Asia received wider attention and initiated a methodological paradigm in writing histories of marginalized sections in India. The attempt has been made by historians who subscribe to subaltern approach to Indian history to capture ecological dimension to the history of marginalized sections in general and tribes in particular.

The approach of subaltern studies has brought about an alternative approach to study histories of marginalized sections in India. This approach aspires to document the non-elitist histories of socio-economically marginalized communities. This attempt has been aimed at recognizing the engagement of marginalized communities with modern Indian history in general and national movement in particular. Such an attempt is seen as necessary to expand the Indian nationhood as a notional idea to physical and social margins of India. In the first volumes of subaltern studies (1982) Ranajit Guha defined who is subaltern in the following words: 'anyone who is subordinated in terms of class, caste, age, gender, office or in any other way', He further says that subaltern studies focus on socio-economic, political and cultural

conditions of subaltern groups to highlight their contribution to nation building.¹²⁵ Following the modal of the emancipation of subaltern class, subaltern studies approach attempted to capture the potentiality of subaltern's negation to hegemonic domination of both British and Indian bourgeoisie.

Subaltern studies approach proposes that parallel to the nationalist movement, there exists a movement by subaltern classes against oppression which has not been documented by existing studies. Forest based tribal movements received particular attention of this approach. Tribal revolts and movements also received the particular attention of subaltern historians. Basically, subaltern approach attempted to document the consciousness and strategies of dissent manifested in several forms such as revolt, movements, attitudes, etc. David Arnold has documented the consistent dissent of tribal communities against the intervention of the colonial state in forest areas of Andhra region. He demonstrated the conflict between the Koya tribes and British rule was mainly aroused due to the conflicts over controlling forest lands. While the Koya wanted forest lands for practicing shifting cultivation for survival, the British wanted to capture forests in order to promote commercially profitable plantations. It is this conflicts according to Arnold resulted in continuous conflict between the British and the Koya tribe.¹²⁶

The strategies for territorial control of the British often brought about conflicting situation with tribes. For augmentation of revenue and extraction of forest resources, the British made forays into woodland and tribal areas of India. In the case of the Chotanagpur region, an attempt was made by the British to promote the expansion of cultivation by the way of

¹²⁵ Ranajit Guha, *Subaltern Studies : Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Oxford University Press, Vol. 1, 1997.

¹²⁶ David Arnold, "Rebellious Hillman;" The Gudem-Rampa Raisings", in Guha Ranajit, (ed.), *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Vol. I, Oxford University Press (hereafter OUP), New Delhi, 1982, pp. 82-142.

promoting non-local zamindars to settle and carry on agriculture. This trend resulted in continuous conflict between local tribal communities and land grabbers supported by the British. Tanika Sarkar has graphically brought about the conflicting relationship between Santhals and the British.¹²⁷ The similar narrative has been created by Swapan Das Gupta on Midnapur tribal uprising.¹²⁸ Hardiman's study of Bhills of Gujarat is a classic example of historical documentation of politics of tribes and their vision for justice in the domain of conflict for control over ecologically important resources.¹²⁹ Ramachandra Guha's study on forest dependent population and their encounter with colonial forestry in Uttarakhand underscore the way tribes were able to trouble colonial state with their diversified strategies.¹³⁰

Undoubtedly, the subaltern approach to Indian history popularised the histories of tribes and provided them a fresh light to a wider audience. The engagement of tribes with the changes that were introduced by the British received the attention of subaltern historians. The following points, in fact, received particular attention: the autonomy of tribal engagement with colonial modernity; the strategies of tribes in resisting the oppressive regime instituted by the British; the visions and perceptions of tribes for their future and finally contribution of tribes in resisting colonial rule and modern India. The criticism alleged against subaltern studies is that it did not capture the autonomy of tribal movements as it claimed and in fact remained within the framework of nationalism. Penetrating ethnographic studies have not been conducted by them

¹²⁷ Tanika Sarkar, "Jitu Santhal Movement in Malda, 1924-1932: A Study in Tribal Protest." in Ranajit Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1985, pp. 136-164.

¹²⁸ Swapan Dasgupta, "Adivasi Politics in Midnapur, 1760-1924", in Ranajit Guha eds, *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1985, pp. 101-135.

¹²⁹ D. Hardiman, "Power in the Forest: The Dangs, 1820-1940" in Hardman and David Arnold (ed.), *Subaltern Studies: Essays in Honour of Ranajit Guha*, Vol. VIII, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1994. pp. 65-84.

¹³⁰ R. Guha, "Colonial Forestry and Social Protest in British Kumaon, 1893-1921", in Ranajit Guha (ed.) *Subaltern Studies IV: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1985, pp. 54-101.

to assess the dynamics of tribal movements and their response to the oppressive forces belongs to colonial and native elements.

The seminal contribution of subaltern studies approach to environmental history is that it has been able to evolve theoretical and conceptual tools and categories that help us to capture the consciousness and politics of subaltern and marginalized sections which reflects the stakes of the subaltern in nation making. At the same time, the subaltern studies approach also provides an organic linkage between environmental history and the history of marginalized sections in the context of Indian history.

3.7 ECO-FEMINIST APPROACH AND ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY

Eco-feminism is an ideology and belief that women had high stakes on the resource of nature on account of their nature of dependency over nature and its many manifestations. It is generally defined as a philosophical and political theory and movement which combines ecological concerns with feminist ones, regarding both as resulting from male domination of society. Another popular definition to eco-feminism as follows: Ecofeminism is a movement or theory that applies feminist principles and ideas to ecological issues. Ecofeminists assert that there is a connection between the destruction of nature by humans and the oppression of women by men that arises from political and social practices in which both women and nature are treated as objects to be owned or controlled. Ecofeminists aim to establish a central role for women in the pursuit of an environmentally sound and socially just society. They have been divided, however, over how to conceive of the relationship between nature and women, which they hold is more intimate and more “spiritual” than the relationship between nature and men. Whereas cultural ecofeminists argue that the relationship is inherent in women’s reproductive and nurturing roles, social ecofeminists, while acknowledging the relationship’s immediacy,

claim that it arises from social and cultural hierarchies that confine women primarily to the private sphere.¹³¹

Ecofeminism which developed from the global feminist movement has been dialectically affected by each other. Rachel Carson, an American marine-biologist aroused a heart-touching voice of conscience in protest against the pollution and degradation of nature.¹³² Carson's book sowed the seeds of the modern ecology movement that culminated in the nationwide Earth Day of 1970. Women thus became aware of the connectedness between patriarchal violence against women and nature. The Chipko movement in 1973 began in defence of the Himalayan forest and of the subsistence-based economy pursued by women in harmony with nature. A noted Kenyan eco-feminist, recipient of Nobel Peace Prize in 2004, Wangari Maathai in 1977 set up the Green Belt Movement, a non- governmental organization in Kenya which focused to promote a positive image of women and their independence. It encouraged women to plant trees in order to combat deforestation and environmental degradation. However, between 1980 and 1981, two important events made the movement popular on an international level: In Washington, about 2000 women protested against nuclear power in 1980 and in 1981 there was another protest held at the Greenham Common Missile base in England.¹³³

India has a history of environmental activism and movements even before ecofeminism emerged as an academic discipline in the western world. The origin of ecofeminist theory in India undisputedly remains the Chipko or Tree hugging movement of the 1970s. The movement had spread across many villages in the Garhwal region of what is now the state of Uttaranchal in Northern India. Since prehistoric times, literature and arts have been drawn to

¹³¹ S. Griffin, *Women and Nature: The Rearing inside her*, Counter Point, 2016.

¹³² Rachel Carson, *Silent spring*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002.

¹³³ Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and Scientific Revolution*, San Francisco, Harper Collins, 1980.

portrayals of physical environments and human-environment interactions. The modern environmentalist movement gave rise to a rich array of fictional and non-fictional writings concerned with humans' changing relationship to the natural world. The threat to humanity from unceasing misuse of our environment has prompted many Indian women writers to conceptualize female identity in relation to nature.¹³⁴

The main theoretical point of eco-feminism is that exploitation of nature and women takes place simultaneously. This process is conditioned by the patriarchic dominant attitude that prevailed in the society. Another point eco-feminism highlight is that capitalist mode of exploitation of nature and again heavily inspired by patriotic world view. In the case of India eco-feminist studies had a promising beginning soon after the Chipko movement. The activities of an activist involved in Chipko, Narmada Bachao Andolan and other environmental protection movements have been highlighted.¹³⁵ But the apparent fact is that eco-feminism still an under the explored domain in Indian academia. Particularly scanty coverage has been devoted by environmental historians to gender issues from historical perceptive.

An attempt has been made in this chapter to document some of the popular and existing historiographical approaches for writings the environmental history of India. Our aim is not to provide an exhaustive list of studies that have been published on the environmental history of India. We mainly attempted to present a brief review of available historical approaches for writing an environmental history of India. In spite of different opinion and methodologies for writing an environmental history of exists, but the common point is the documentation of the

¹³⁴ Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India, Kali for women*. New Delhi, 1988.

¹³⁵ Haripriya Rangan, *Of Myths and Movement: Rewriting Chipko into Himalayan History*, Oxford University Press, Verso, New Delhi, 2001.

relationship between human beings and nature among all approaches in the past and various dynamics of such interaction and its implication for both ecology and human beings.

CHAPTER-IV

NAME OF THE CHAPTER: CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

ABSTRACT OF CHAPTER

This chapter attempts to propose a summary of this study at one level and important findings at another level. An attempt has been made to highlights the important aspects of our study and at the same time, limitations and future prospects of this area have also been mentioned.

CHAPTER-IV

CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly environmental history has been established as one of the important areas of historical research in South Asia in general and India in particular. Particularly India emerged as one of the important region wherein sophisticated methodology and approaches have been evolved for capturing the ecological dimension to Indian history in the last three decades. This study is a humble attempt to capture a historiographical trajectory of environmental history that has been evolved in the last three or four decades in India.

At thematic level environmental history had given importance to the following themes to build a holistic narrative picture on the ecological past of India: histories of land use practices, forest management strategies, water use strategies, soil management techniques, agrarian practices, strategies of animal husbandry, role of culture and social values in promoting resource use strategies of population and finally the conflict and cooperation that human beings exhibited to negotiate with nature and its myriad forms in order to survive.

This study mainly confines itself to the environmental history of modern India. Hence themes related to British rule have given priority. The undisputed fact is the British rule had initiated far-reaching changes in the domain of Indian ecology and in the livelihood pattern of communities who depend upon common poor resources or resources of nature. However, on the nature of changes brought about by the British rule in the Indian ecological domain is a highly debated and contested concept among environmental historians. It is due to this fact that several historical approaches evolved to capture the changes initiated by the British in the ecological process of India.

The thematic factors that had dominated the narrative of environmental history as follows: history related to various aspects of Indian forests, management strategies for channelling water bodies, histories of coastal aquatic systems, histories of mountain-based livelihood patterns, agro-ecological pattern on which peasant society of rural India critically dependent upon, history of pastoral economic based grassland eco-systems practiced by several pastoral communities, history of desert and semi-arid ecological systems, relationship between culture and ecological conditions, relationship between popular culture and ecological conditions, role of ecology in shaping belief systems in different parts of India, histories of state interventions in shaping geo-ecological conditions and other factors became focal points for exploring the ecological history of India.

On account of geo-ecological, topographical, demographical, climatic various Indian subcontinent stands out to be a classic destination of studies related to the history of human engagement with ecology in different physical and social contexts. On account, this diversity, several studies on ecological histories on India have been carried on and still lot of potential scope exists for further studies on account of the vastness of this county and diversity of social compositions.

The reason for highly debatable historiography evolved for construction of the ecological history of India in recognition of the British colonial rule as an ecological watershed in the history of the Indian subcontinent. The argument offered in favour of this proposition is that British rule brought about new and dynamic technological and managerial strategies for tapping the resources in order to maximize the extraction of revenue and resources. This new paradigm of resource use has consciously been evolved to sustain the colonization process driven by profit maximization dictum of global capitalism. However, the nature of

transformation brought about by the British emerged as the contested debate among historians engaged in writing about the ecological history of colonial India.

This study attempted to document some of the important and popular historical approaches that are used for writing about the ecological history of modern India. We honestly confess the fact that our sampling on choosing to review historiographical approaches is not exhaustive as it is almost impossible on account of richness and vastness of literature that had evolved in the last four decades. Instead what we have done in this dissertation is that the presentation of important approaches that had managed to capture the public and academic attention seriously.

The dictum of E.H. Carr has always been relevant to the craft of historian that is 'history is an unending dialogue between past and present'. The present always set an agenda for historians to retrieve a particular dimension of the past from the ocean of the story that the past leaves. Historical narratives thus are always selective and conditioned by several other complex factors. The second chapter of this study attempts to analyze the factors that had provided not only impulses but also shaped the narrative genre and methodological terrain of environmental history at the global level in general and India in particular. The focus was devoted to Indian conditions such as vibrant environmental protection movement, the existence of strong nationalist genre of writing the history of India and the need for decolonization in the domain of Indian ecology. It has been proposed in the second chapter that these factors not only created conditions but also significantly shaped the process of emergence of the ecological history of India.

Once the mode of the ecological history of India began its roots in Indian soil, there emerged a debate on the nature of changes brought about by the British colonial rule in the

domain of ecology. The question of what is the nature of British rule in the realm of Indian ecology has been answered differently by different approaches that have evolved in the last four decades in India. The chapter number three of this dissertation attempted to construct a narrative of different approaches for writing the ecological history of modern India.

One of the important aspects related to structural coherence each approach need clarification at the outset. Unity of argument and discourse of each approach, of course, exhibits a certain degree of unity of argument, but at the same time, observable degree of overlapping in the core argument could be seen. For example, the nationalist approach and nationalist Marxist approach had shared several common points with a lesser degree of disagreement. The fact, however, is that both nationalist and nationalist Marxist approaches for writing the ecological history of modern India emerged as popular in both public discourse and academic domain in India. An attempt has been made in the second chapter to provide a review of this approach and core argument it had offered for understanding the dynamics of the relationship between human beings and nature at one level and communize, state and nature at another level.

The core argument of nationalist and nationalist Marxist approaches is as follows: human beings in Indian subcontinent lived relatively in harmony with nature, the resources of nature and ecologically important morphological entities were protected and preserved by local communities with help of social norms and cultural values, the organic relationship between human beings and nature in India was broken by the British colonial by the way of introducing techno-managerial practices for extraction of resources at the same time attitudes for perceiving nature and bundle of resources to be tapped at the will of human ability, it is this attitude according to this approach responsible for destruction of ecologically important resources

during the British and unfortunately this British legacy of destruction of ecology continues in independent India.

The chapter number three of this dissertation also reviews the counter-argument to the nationalist and nationalist Marxist approach provides for writing the ecological history of modern India. The neo-colonial approach mainly evolved by Richard Grove countess the argument of nationalist Marxist approach by the way of providing a new line of argument with the help of the new frontier of historical sources. The claim of this approach is that the ecologically important resources in India were already overexploited before the advent of the British. Hence the ecological degradation already acquired a higher degree by the time the British had to take over India for the ruling.

The argument of Grove is interesting in the sense that he does not propose that the British had any well-defined strategy for handling or managing ecologically important resources. It was the conscious effort made by the scientific community consisting of foresters, botanist, surgeon generals, naturalists and explorers to create a database and arguments to prove that ecologically important resources were getting degraded. It this alarming discourse according to neo-colonial approach that was responsible for the emergence of state-sponsored environmental conservation strategies in India.

As environmental history established as academic branch of history, theoretical and methodological advancement took place. This trend is evident in the trend of focus on regional level ecological histories of modern India. This trend is by and large dominated by the theory of post-structuralism in general and Foucault's notion of governmentality. The main argument of this approach is that the British rule was indeed for tapping the resources for their market needs, but the pattern is tapping of resources was done with the help of carefully designed

discourse and policies. The interests of power local groups were taken care of to avoid serious confrontation with native society. In short, it was proposed that the ecological engagement of colonial rule was also supported by the native elites.

Another approach that was reviewed in this dissertation was the eco-feminist approach. This approach became popular in the context of the emergence of eco-feminism in the early 1980s. The core argument of this approach is that Indian ecological systems were well protected by values rooted in a culture which is sensitive towards ecology. Such a condition was destroyed by the British colonial rule which represents patriarchal dominant attitude influenced by the capitalist mode of thinking. This dominant attitude according to eco-feminist approach is mainly responsible for the destruction of ecologically important resources and alienation of women who dependent upon resources of nature critically in India.

The main objective of this study is to present a narrative of the evolution of the process of emergence of ecological history and debates that have evolved to narrate the ecological dimension of Indian history. The attempt has been made to present the different approaches and their fundamental argument regarding the nature of ecological transformation that took place during the British colonial rule. The attempt has also been made to present how the impact of contemporary considerations, theoretical and ideological commitment had shaped the nature and content of environmental history writing in India. In spite of disagreement among historians, there exists a unity of opinion that is ecology had a strong bearing on the human activities and experiences in the past history of India. This question needed to be probed in a more detail way further in order to achieve a more inclusive understanding of the environmental history of India. On account of this fact, one cannot say with confidence that there are models of writing the environmental history of India. The existing models are still

tentative models which are waiting for more concrete and penetrating research to be carried on different topics and different regions before we arrive at having a confident model of the ecological history of India.

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