

Dalit Environmentalism in India: An Analysis of Dalit Movement in Uttar Pradesh (1870-1980)

SUMMARY of THESIS

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SUMMARY

This study essentially focuses on the relationship between human beings and natural world with a particular reference to Dalits during the period of 1870-1980. The significance of this period is that it starts with penetration and consolidation of the British colonial rule, its ecological implication and its continued presence in independent India in different forms. This study is thus an attempt to construct a historical documentation of the way Dalits interacted with natural world in the context of colonial and post colonial periods with particular reference to the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. In nutshell, this study explores the social ecology of Dalits in modern Indian history.

Environmental history as a part of academic discipline had a humble beginning in the early 1980s. Thereafter, it staidly expanded in terms of scope, content and nature. Initially, the United State of America was the epicenter of this inquiry. Gradually it spread to different parts of the world. At the start, it was a quest to know how human beings interacted with natural world and shaped it in their attempt to tap the resources of nature and physical ecology. Gradually, it became a comprehensive story of human action and interaction in transforming eco-system of the planet Earth. In the context of ecological crises and quest of historians to find solutions to such crisis resulted in emergence of environmental history as one of the rapidly developing academic inquiries.

Undoubtedly, India had emerged as one of the hotspots of environmental history and spokes person of southern environmentalism or environmentalism of the third world. Focused mainly on history of forest policies initially, it had begun to spread to different areas of human interaction with natural world. As rightly pointed by noted environmental historian Ranjan Chakraborty, environmental history is capable of having a fascinating interaction with other branches of history in general and social history in particular. This strength was not seriously realized by environmental historians until recently. The need for recognition of social background to environmental history underscored by historians recently. The apparent fact however is that social context of environmental history of colonial India remained relatively a less explored arena in the field of environmental history. It is in this context that offers a fascinating scope for an interaction between environmental

histories with Dalit history. This study is thus an ambitious attempt to provide a conceptual platform for a serious linkage between environmental and Dalit histories. This is done by focusing on ecological dimension to Dalit movement and its history at all India level in general and Uttar Pradesh in particular. The main objective of this study is to evolve a historical and conceptual trajectory of environmental history for exploring Dalit history of modern India. It is in this way that social dimension to environmental history can be evolved in a country like India which has the most complicated social structure.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

Ecological thought and activism at global level has graduated from alarmist discourse of scientific community initially to intellectual discourse in the due course of time. Ecology became a paradigm of conceptualizing and visualizing all aspects of human life. It obviously means that the scope and nature of environmental studies expanded phenomenally in the last fifty years. As a part of this process, disproportionate impact of ecological crisis on different social groups emerged as one of the important narratives within environmentalism. This trend could be seen in environmental history of Africa and history of colored people's environmental activism in America. Unlike the ecological activism of colored people of America, ecological activism of Dalits is a late entrant into the ecological movement. Consequently, in spite of consisting more than 15% of Indian population, and dangerously exposed to ecological hazards, Dalits became invisible entities and mute spectators in environment movement and politics in India. Ecological stakes of Dalits however had begun to be realized in the context of climate change and several associated problems brought about by it. It has been recognized and articulated by several organizations and intellectuals engaged in Dalit empowerment that Dalits are the most vulnerable sections in the context of global climate change and require different framework and approach to safeguard their stakes in environmental process. It is this context that brought about a conceptual category of Dalit environmentalism which aims to spell out the relationship between Dalits and natural world and several factors that determine such process.

India being a country of social complexity and cultural multiplicity, it is important to pay a careful attention to the social dynamics that play a crucial role in deterring the interaction of communities with natural world which includes natural

and ecologically important resources. It has been proposed by Dalit movement and its leaders that Dalits are generally being economically backward, socially marginalized, and culturally excluded required adequate space into the ecological studies to safeguard their livelihood systems which are critically dependent upon resources of nature. This perspective is useful on account of their higher degree of dependency on natural resources at one level and extreme vulnerability to the climate changes at another level. In view of these factors ecological background to Dalit movement is very much useful in creating a space for Dalits into the ecological studies as it is need in the contemporary times for better policy making and strategies for handling impact of ecological crisis on wide spectrum of Indian society.

Undoubtedly, social dimension to ecological history of India is still a less explored domain. This is critically needed in India as its social structure is hierarchically organized with higher degree of rigidity. The access of individual/communities to natural world is significantly controlled by social structure, practices and values. Hence, the linkages between Dalit and environmental histories provide an exciting opportunity to evolve socio-ecological history model which would enable us to have better understanding on the relationship between human beings and nature of India. This study is an attempt to place social dimension into the theoretical structure of environmental history. In other words, this study proposes that environmental history of India needs to move away from biographies of colonial policies to peoples' history.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The proposed study essentially aims to document the ecological dimension of Dalit history during the period of 1870-1980 in India with particular reference to United Provinces. While so doing, it revolves around the interaction of Dalits with natural resources and ecologically important factors such as forests, water, health, hygiene etc. The fact however is that this study mainly confines to certain aspects of ecological background to Dalit movement and history. It mainly focuses on how Dalit movements and its leaders who besides their demand for socio-economic justice also engaged with greater access to the resources of nature such as cultivable land, village commons, access to water, access to grasslands, access to irrigation, hygienic conditions, etc.

The proposed study investigates the aforementioned factors at three levels: firstly it attempts to capture and document the attempts being made by socio-religious reform movement, Dalit emancipation movement and Dalit leaders' attempt for access of Dalits to natural and ecologically important resources and secondly it makes a case study of Dalit movement in Uttar Pradesh and its ecological background such as demand for access to natural resources such as land, water, forests etc and finally, attempt is being made to capture the intellectual/activist engagement of Dalit leaders and intellectuals in demanding access of Dalits to natural resources for better life. This study thus attempts to capture the thought and activity of Dalit movement and its leaders on the ecological stakes of Dalits.

The limitations of the proposed study as follows: it mainly focuses on the rural segment of Dalits population and their ecological engagement, it does not focus much on urban sphere of Dalit environmental movement and it does not give focus heavily on activist dimension of ecological dimension to Dalit movement. These limitations are self imposed on account of lack of availability of source material and lack of expertise from our part.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

While analyzing and documenting the ecological background to Dalit movement in India in general and Uttar Pradesh in particular, the proposed study has been organized based upon the following objectives into consideration. These objectives guide our research structure and content which as follows:

- To explore, analyze and document the ecological dimension to Dalit movement in India.
- To explore the ecological dimension of Dalit movement in Uttar Pradesh in the colonial and post colonial periods.
- To capture the ecological dimension of Dalit intellectual thought with particular reference to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Jotiba Phule.
- To narrate the ecological angle of Dalit movement in different parts of India.
- To capture the role of caste in shaping the access of Dalits to resources of nature.
- To analyze the role of socio-religious reform movement by Dalits from ecological perspective.

- To study of socio-economic conditions of Dalit in United Provinces.
- To analyses poverty and ecological problems for Dalits in Post-Colonial period.
- To narrate the role of political parties and associations in demanding access of Dalits to resources of nature in different parts of India in general and Uttar Pradesh in particular.
- To explore the nature of Dalit socio-economic conditions from the perspective of ecology in independent India.
- To evolve a historical model for ecological dimension to Dalit history.

HYPOTHESIS OF STUDY

Ecological dimension to Dalit thought, practice and vision is the centrality of this proposed study. While exploring this dimension and outlook, this study proposes the following broad hypotheses which are expected to provided basic instincts to our inquiry and guide this work:

- The existing literature in environmental history and Dalit history did not give adequate attention to the ecological dimension of Dalit assertion or struggle. This study is of the opinion that a fascinating dimension of ecological assertion exists in the Dalit movement for socio-economic justice.
- Dalit demand for justice embedded a strong ecological narrative in the form of consistent articulation ecological resources such as land, water, forests, village commons etc.
- The Dalit philosophy evolved by several intellectuals in general and Ambedkar and Phule in particular exhibits a remarkable ecological thought which is different than that of Hindu nationalist thought.
- This study proposes that ecological dimension to Dalit movement provides an Indian model of social ecology wherein social status plays a crucial role in determining the access of individual/communities to ecologically important resources.

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

The proposed study is organized using standard methods of historical research. Proper care has been taken in collecting source material, validating its authenticity, analyzing

its content and evolving a standard method for its interpretation. Both primary and secondary sources are being collected and used in this study. So far as secondary sources are concern, sources such as published books, articles in journals, reports of committees, organizations, websites etc have been used. In case of primary sources, sources from regional archives of Uttar Pradesh are being consulted. Sources such as provincial gazetteers, district gazetteers, population census, and proceedings of Harijan Welfare Department, Public Department, Irrigation Department, Forest Department, Public Works Department, Accreditation Department, and General Administrative Department etc have been used. Besides this, original writing of Dalit intellectuals, journals, magazine and literature available in the Hindi language are being used to capture the narratives of Dalits on their experience with natural world and which is mediated with social world.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The proposed study attempts to evolve linkages between Dalit and environmental histories in India and thereby wished to propose a model of socio-ecological history of India or ecological history of India from below. The main objective of the study is to explore the ecological dimension of Dalit history of colonial and post colonial periods. The main proposition this study advances is that social world plays a critical role in interaction of human beings with natural world. In other words, social world and natural world are intimately interact in a complex way. Impact of social relations in determining the access of human beings to natural world is restively a less explored domain in India except some rare interventions. In fact, such approach is critical to a county like India which has rigid social hierarchy wherein communities are being assigned social ranking and regulated such ranking with institutionalized socio-cultural practice known as caste system. This study attempts to capture the way Dalits voiced for access to resources of nature during colonial and post colonial period.

Inspired by Murry Bookchin's notion of social ecology, attempt has been made by pioneers of environmental history of India to locate social structure into the domain of interaction of human beings with resource of nature. However, the strong gravity of nationalist thought in constructing Indian socio-cultural values as ecologically sensitive downplayed the role social dynamics in shaping the attitude of communities towards natural world. Consequently, we do not have a well defined

model for conceptualizing the relationship between socially marginalized communities in general and Dalits in particular and natural world. This study attempts to evolve such a model which is useful in understanding the role of social hierarchy in conditioning the use of resources of nature in social structure.

Until recently, studies did not give adequate attention to the fact that inequalities produced by social process play a major role in shaping the attitude of people towards natural world. Inspired by colored people's ecological justice movement in America, several marginalized sections begun to articulate their stakes in the environmental conservation process. It has been proposed that social domination reinforce ecological domination as well. Therefore we need to understand human interaction with the prism of power relations which are embedded in social relations a society. This study aims at capturing the concept of distributive justice in the domain of ecology and voices that are consistently demand for proper distribution of ecologically import resources as a means to achieve progress. This proposition is done by examining the character multiple of voices of Dalit movement and its leaders on the aspect of misdistribution of resources of nature due to social dynamics at one level and demand for proper distribution of ecologically important resources at another level.

In order to narrate the ecological dimension of Dalit history, we use the framework of political ecology which perceives human engagement with nature as a manifestation of power relations. It has been proposed by studies related to social ecology that access to resources has always been mediated by social structure. In this process while some are able to get better access and some may be prevented by the social dynamics. It is this process that was predominantly voiced by the Dalit movement in India. Environmentalism of the poor coupled with the political ecology enable us to capture the different layers of struggle over access to resources of nature. At present, ecological theory in India if not exclusively but mainly subscribes to the essentialist categories of Indians, British, dominant class, marginalized class, subaltern class etc. The fact is that the competing claims over resources were deeply layered and fought among communities. History of Dalit movement shows us how Dalits consistently articulated for better access to natural resources as a means to improve their socio-economic status.

CHAPTERISATION OF STUDY

CHAPTER 1 – Introduction

The first chapter presents thematic information of the study in the form of introduction to the topic, the context of the topic, objectives of the topic, the methodology of the topic, the hypothesis of the topic, a detailed description of review of the literature and brief chapterisation have to dwell.

CHAPTER 2 –Dalit Movement and Resources of Nature

The second chapter of the study explores the characteristic features of Dalit Movement, origin and progress of Dalit movement, reasons for emergence of Dalit movement, Dalit movement different parts of India and particularly in U.P., and the demands of Dalit movement, the demands of Dalits for access to natural and ecological resources directly and indirectly, The nature and forms of demands for access to resources by Dalits.

CHAPTER 3- Intellectual Environmental History of India from Dalit perspective

In the third chapter, it mainly focuses on the relationship between human beings and nature in the past. Intellectual environmental history documents the idea of serious intellectuals from an ecological perspective in the Indian context, To explore the history and profile of Dalit intellectuals, the visions of dalit intellectuals for development of Dalits from the perspective of Ecology and access to nature and its resources. In this chapter mainly confined to the analysis of the important Dalit and subaltern thinkers and their views on the exclusion of marginalized sections from access to nature and ecology. Attempt would be made in this chapter to explore the ideas of Dr. Ambedkar and Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, and also discuss in this chapter the main intellectual are Phuley, Periyar, Narayan Guru, Acchutanand, Iyotee Thass and Savitri Phuley and other important intellectuals who demanded for access of natural resources of Dalits etc.

CHAPTER 4 - Dalit Movement and resources of nature in United Provinces

The fourth chapter starts with giving the detail about the profile of Dalits in United Provinces and Socio-economic conditions of Dalits in United Provinces and the emergence of movement by and for dalits. The chapter also throws light on the

evolution of Dalit movement and demands for access to resources of nature like as land, water, and hygiene. In the end of the chapter, detail are been provide about the introduction of Grassroots level demands for resources by Dalits in United Provinces.

CHAPTER 5 - Dalit Environmentalism in Post Colonial Uttar Pradesh

In the fifth chapter describe to progress of the Dalit movement in post-colonial Uttar Pradesh. This chapter deals with the socio-economic condition of Dalits in UP. It attempts to understand the poverty and ecological problems of Dalits. The programs and objectives of the Republican Party of India, the Left movement, the Dalit Panther movement, Bhoodan Movement, BAMCEF, Ds-4, and BSP etc. have been analyzed to understand the nature of the Dalit movement and the demand for their resources. In addition, it also mentions the emergence of Dalit social organizations, which have been mainly illuminating ecological problems. It has also seen the major ecological problems faced by Dalits and the role of caste in growing ecological problems. The Human Rights Commission data, NSS data and other government and private data have been analyzed to understand the ecological problems of Dalits.

CHAPTER 6 – Conclusion

Finally, the last chapter is the conclusion of the study and proposes certain findings of the study. This chapter attempts to highlights the broad observations, findings and further potentialities of research in this area. This chapter essentially narrates the schematic plan of the study and attempt to propose the analytical and conceptual tools for organizing this study. Having done so, the next chapter attempts to deal with the emergence of Dalit movement from ecological perspective.

BROAD FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

So far a finding of the study is concern, in the exiting literature on Dalit environmentalism, particularly by Mukul Sharma attempt has been made to highlight plurality of environmental thought and existence of separate genre Dalit environmentalism. He mentions that Dalit discourse differently imagined and articulated the relationship between human beings and nature. In fact he argues that Dalits have a distinctive version and vision of environmental thought. But he did not specify and identify the distinctive characteristics of Dalit environmentalism in a detailed way which this study attempts to undertake.

Firstly existing literature did not give adequate focus on the historical dimension of Dalit environmentalism. This study proposes that in the colonial period from Phule to Pariyar Dalit and non-Brahman intellectuals' possessed a radical non-Brahmanical version of the relationship between human beings and nature. They articulated if not equal but proper distribution of ecological resources to Dalits masses as means to have access to respectable life. The focus on green thought of Dalit/non-Brahman thought in colonial period strongly counter the romantic hard core and soft right wing Hindu discourse of sustainable use of ecology is intrinsic to Hindu culture. Dalit intellectuals graphically highlight the process of alienation of Dalits and marginalized sections from access to natural and ecological resources in the British India which was dominated by Hindu intellectuals.

This study also attempts to highlight the fact that in case of Uttar Pradesh, several studies are being carried out on Dalit history and politics and no proper attempt has been made to explore the ecological dimension of Dalit struggle for access to ecological resources. Dalit movement and its leaders in Uttar Pradesh consciously demanded for access to natural and ecological resources. Besides this, Dalit movement in Uttar Pradesh also has as vision for ecological access of Dalit community as a means to its empowerment.

While existing scholarship proposes that Dalit discourse possess a distinctive character than that of mainstream environmental movement and politics, but such distinctive character as claimed by Mukul Sharma rooted in moral and ethical ecological perspective expressed in the form of chastised nature in India. But this study proposes that the Dalit ecological discourse not only different from Brahmanical ecological discourse but also reflects profound transformative, liberative and emancipatory tendencies in its discourse. This study thus proposes that Dalit environmentalism is essentially anthropocentric in nature with particular reference to sustainable way of managing natural/ecological resources.

Dalit/subaltern environmentalism shows the character of environmentalism of the poor which do not appreciate the deep ecological ideas; rather it shows the need of approach in a country like India which required a fine balance between ecological conservation and livelihood consideration of vast masses. We need to provide and in fact democratize the access of nature and ecology to all sections of Indian society.

The ecological stakes of socially excluded marginalized communities needs to be taken seriously in discourse, practice, polices and politics that are centered on environmental aspects.

The important contribution of this study is that it has conceptualized Dalit movement and thought from ecological perspective. It attempts to provide a conceptual and theoretical orientation and direction more seriously than the existing literature offers. This foundation is expected to be carried on further. The concept of Dalit environmental indeed needs further serious probing in the form of regional level analysis of movement in different parts of India, regional and local level initiates of Dalit movement and its leaders from ecological perspective. Such a process surely erects a strong and vibrant Dalit environmental discourse in India. It is a small step towards merging social justice and environmental justice to the marginalized and excluded communities in India from access to nature.