



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN WESTERN MAHARASHTRA : IS IT A MYTH OR REALITY?

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Abstract- The idea of sustainable development seems to be ideal one because, it is yet to be sought. The major problem is how to implant this noble 'design of physical world and social world' without removing the present ongoing exploitative system both at local level and global level.

Keywords- Sustainable development, forest area, cropping pattern

INTRODUCTION

Environment and development are two major concepts which are used to conceptualise the world-both natural/ physical world and social world. These two concepts comprise different meanings/ senses which vary from one outlook to another. So, both the concepts depict different line of thought. Here, we are concerned with meanings with more comprehensive meaning by adding adjectives to these concepts, namely the 'Social'. The meaning, thus, differs when it is said 'social environment' or 'social development'. The qualifying term development by 'Social' consists of focus centring on 'human social relationships in human world' and it's another broad name social environment as condition and its consequences of interaction between societal forces and physical factors. The term 'environment', without its qualification, is in broad sense, embodies both ecological and environmental sources which are tied with one another. The term environment is defined as a given condition in which physical features are interrelated either signifying conducive supportive environment to organism or non-conducive or hostile/ negative quality for the existence of organism. Thus, supportive or negative feature(s) of environment depend on many factors/ causal factors which have roots in natural/ physical setting and social world.

The relationship between environment and social development attracts the attention of scholars because of changing features of components of both the concepts. The changes in them are conceived in terms of 'harmful' effects on both the world – natural/ physical world environment and

social world. The harmful effects of interaction between natural world and social world give birth to irrecoverable/ irreversible pattern. So, the problem of environmental degradation OR crisis and social development, needs to be viewed as inseparable entities. Once, we accept this view, then, the basic question arises : are we in a position or, is it possible to understand environmental problem in terms of 'separation' of these two broad entities as independent realities? The answer seems to be negative. Therefore, the view naturally emerges is that of existence of inseparable nexus between environment per se and the process of social development in ecosystem spectrum.

The process of social development, although found in 'social world' is not independent of environment. Therefore, it is argued that environmental problem is a societal structural problem, in the sense that the basic needs / wants and interests of class-society or non-class society (nomadic society) indicate the way the relationship between environment and social development is marching.

The idea of sustainable development seems to be ideal one because, it is yet to be sought. The major problem is how to implant this noble 'design of physical world and social world' without removing the present ongoing exploitative system both at local level and global level. In the era of exploitation with high technology and high-information tools, the notion of sustainable development itself becomes a challenge for both capitalist/ political democratic viewers and socialist viewers. To what extent one can expect a radical change in the perception and

'planning' of life from them is a challenge to the intellectuals to resound.

Ground Level Realities in Western Maharashtra

The ground level realities are quite different and opposing. The field reality showed to us that the predominant activities of people are centred around their survival question. The other aspect of life is oriented towards establishing independence and control over means of livelihood. A few are governed by the interests/ values rooted in the economic and socio-cultural power. The rural and urban life in western Maharashtra particularly in Kolhapur and Sangli districts, is caught in rapid motion and it's actors possess individual consciousness to a larger extent! If we look at the response made by some people during the field-visit, for instance, d'kkyk fpark fdaok fopkj ;k txkpk fdaok brjkapk? brjkaph fpark d:u dk; Qk;nk? [That is, why worry or thought of world or others? What is the benefit/ profit of worrying?]

Before going into the ideal of 'sustainable development' (hereafter SD) it is better if we understand the broad features relating to the physical world, in terms of forests and cropping pattern and the social world in terms of caste and class hierarchy operating in this region.

Decreasing Forest Area

It was mentioned (Maharashtra State Gazetteers, Sangli Dist. 1969) that in the Sangli district, during mid of 1970, the percentage under forest was 2.2 as against 21.08% at Maharashtra state level and 25.0% at national level. In Sangli district, the forest consisted of four groups, namely, forests on the Sahyadri hills, wet and dry deciduous forests on the slopes of the hills, forests with bushy and stunted tree growth on the hills to the east of Krishna and grassy area with space tree growth in Jat (Jat taluka), possessed in large number/ dense. Jambhul, Pisa, Bhoma, Anjani, Hirda and Tambat trees during 1950s but, during 2000s the density of these trees has decreased to such an extent that some trees are found in rare. Some areas are looking like barren land. In Jat taluk there are rocky and murmad as a result of which only inferior type of grass is grown. The same continues even today. However, here and there, it is noticeable that there are few single tree do exist but the earlier thick density has decreased. During 1969, the Sangli district possessed 2.2% of forest as against 21.08% rest area of state and 28.0% forest area at national level.

In Varna region, vegetation is dense with Jambhul, Anjani, Pisa, Phanas, Hirda, Vad, Amba, Nana, Kumbhal, Payar, Sawar, Karambal, Dhaman, Had Kaya, Parajambal, Beheda. The teak is absent in Varna.

In Walwa, we find wet mixed deciduous forests with dry mixed one, has larger proportion of teak and its associates, namely, Dhavda, Ain, Palas, Kusum, Dhaman, Bhava, Bhutkes, Shiras and Ghatbor.

In Kolhapur (Maharashtra State Gazetteers, Kolhapur, 1960), the forests are composed of three types, namely, the sub-tropical evergreen, Moist deciduous and semi-evergreen and dry deciduous forests.

In the sub-tropical evergreen, no particular species as principal is marked, this region consists of Jambhul, Hirda, Anjani, Surangi, Panjambhul.

The semi-evergreen and moist forest possesses, Jambhul, Amba, Nana, Asana, Kumbhi, Bhava, Panjambhul, Kinjal, Ain, Kinai, Umbar, Biba and Cuanste.

In Ajara area famous scented wood species – chandan (sandalwood) occupies profusely found. Bamboos are sparse. In the dry deciduous forests, the absence of Dhavda and a greater incidence of Sissum are noticeable.

In Kolhapur district it was pointed out that there were variety of trees – 133, shrubs – 75, climbers – 27 and grasses – 18, but the number of them has decreased.

The forest area, during 1960 was 381541.30 acres [under forest- 230704.00 acres reserved forest- 114987.10 acres, protected – 1067.30 acres and unclassified forest – 34679.9 acres]. It was spread in the taluks of Karvir, Panhala, Bhudargad, Ajra, Vishalgad, Bavada and Radhanagari. It is also pointed out that this area has also decreased.

Besides, there are areas known as Sheri land claimed by H. H. Chhatrapati Maharaja of Kolhapur as his private property. The legal position of these Sheri lands have not been finally decided. The history of forests is the story of utterly lacked forest sense, as we found entry of villagers and timber merchant and hotel proprietors who have encroached forest land and its resources.

Changing Cropping Pattern: and Quality of Soil

Throughout western Maharashtra region, the cropping pattern has drastically changed. The predominant crop, namely, the sugarcane has been seen. During 1960s, for example in Khanapur and Tasgaon, the area under Bajra crop was 1.4 lakh acres and in Jat it was more than 11,000 acres. Jawar crop covered second largest area in the three taluks, namely : Khanapur with 1.3 lakh acres, Tasgaon with 1.05 lakh and Jat with 1.78 lakh acres, the largest among these taluks. The third crop was groundnut found in only Khanapur and Tasgaon taluks. Harbara and Hath crops were grown in all three taluks. Besides, only in Khanapur and Tasgaon Taluks, Tur and Udid were grown in about more than 10,000 acres. Wheat crop was raised only in Jat taluk with more than 9,000 acres

of land. Sugarcane, during 1960s in Khanapur and Jat Taluks covered less than one thousand acres. Whereas Tasgaon gave about 1,600 acres of land. Sugarcane was a minor crop. Now, the radical change in the cropping pattern has come about for the last 2-3 decades. In Kolhapur, Satara and other taluks of Sangli, the cropping pattern of 1960s has destroyed by the entry of sugarcane. As a result of sugarcane, mono-cropping has emerged. The soils were rich in these districts but this soil is consumed by sugarcane with lion's share, which affect bio-diversity – a great loss. As far as rural Maharashtra is concerned, the class structure in each broad caste is noticeable. However, in broad sense, the close association between high caste-cum-high class and low-caste-cum-low class (labouring position) is found. In other words, the same upper caste members also belong to the class of owners of means of production and the lower castes overwhelming 2/3 majority of them belong to propertyless class. Among the lower castes a few are owning land or other means of production but either they may be sufficient to sustain their minimum needs or insufficient. Among the upper-castes, they are well-to-do families and poor families, their proportion varies from region to region. However, the upper castes possess economic power that may be seen in terms of large landholding, owning tractor(s), pumpsets etc, and owners of factory owners of raw materials or big / small business enterprises. Social-cultural world among the lower and upper caste is divided. They have segregated life. Their life mainly in terms of 'Roti-Beti Vyavahar', that is common dining in home and arranged inter-caste marriage practices are still governed by caste rules. Although, the Forest Conservation Act (1988), the Wildlife Protection Act, 1956, the Mines and Minerals (Regulation and the Development) Act, 1947 are operating but, not to the expectation of the Acts themselves because of the fact that of increasing area of deforestation and loss of bio-diversity, that is, dense forests have been changed into barren lands with inferior grass and shrubby bushes. Prof. Samant Jay has fought and did win the case against the private industrial company, viz. Indal's encroachment of forest area and negligence of Act. But the raw mineral materials were extracted at the cost of ecological loss till the court's intervention. The mono-cropping is ruining the fertility of soil and converting it into saline land, for example, the Sangli district ranks first in this matter. In Kolhapur and Sangli districts there are 20 and 16 sugar-factories respectively. Due to mono-cropping (sugarcane cropping) the saline land is about twelve thousand acres in these districts. Emergence of sugar factories and the total negligence of disposal of waste or treatment of waste (dust or bad odour or

waste molasis) has led to destruction of quality of air and of river-water. Both cities, which possess the industries and the sugar factories have polluted the river water and air. In turn, this has given birth to emergence of distilled water or so-called mineral water! and sold at Rs. 12/- as against Rs. 17/- to 18/- per liter for milk! Looking at the production cost of these commodities (filtered water and milk) the owners of the factories, namely, plastic bottle making factories and distilling factories seem to be with profit in huge amount than that of milk producers – the peasantry. The point is that the peasantry produces milk for sustaining their family members, whereas, the factory owners produce the bottle/ filtered water for making huge profits only. Such path of commodity production with discrimination is possible where uncontrolled forces of production prevail in the economy. Is it not found in this capitalist economy? The answer is certainly affirmative. Both urbanization and industrialization have led to depletion and degradation of natural resources. Huge funds and resources are required to check the process of degradation, say, air or water quality. But who comes forward to deal with such problems? Certainly, the expected answer is Government/ the State. If the State (Govt.) stands for sustaining the interests of its creators, can it put pressure/ coercion on the violators of 'Acts'? As the owners, whether public or private take keen interest in making profits, bother about negative effects of their practices in the same spirit? Does the new global order – the global governance body at the global level or new economic and political system (free-market and democracy) at local level, on their own check/ control ever increasing profit-making interest at the loss of humanity and unrenowable natural resources? Are they not leading their economy and political system, consciously? If they are practicing consciously/ purposefully, the other side of the consciousness of loss and survival also consciously/ purposefully acts to prevent the loss and protect the endangered human life, which is reflected in the socio-political movements. Both conscious practices/ activities relating to exploitation and protection are opposed to each other. If this is so, then, whose view or perspective sides with the protections of life-support system – the ecosystem? A honest response with commitment to contribute for flourishing the emancipatory slogan "save this earth from jaws of MNCs" or "think globally and act locally", to free the endangered globe by the New Global Order (NGO) headed by Super-powers with super-bossing and super-anger!" (TOI, Pune, Oct. 25, 2005) becomes relevant and requires decision as well as action either in favour of ecosystem or against the MNC's NGO.

Major Findings

In the light of above mentioned realities the sustainable development in the Western Maharashtra is a myth on fronts like increasing deforestation, increasing salinity, increasing monocropping and increasing air and water pollution. Thus, another major finding is that the agenda of sustainable development in this capitalist mode of life in this region remains as idea. To bring this idea into practice, the strength of the social forces which seem to be insufficient, their movements' concern is reality.

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