

Debating Caste, Environment and Development Model of India: A Perspective from Below

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Abstract

In the era of neoliberalism, India's developmental trajectory has been shaped significantly by the influence of liberalism and market-oriented reforms, which have prioritised economic growth, industrial expansion and infrastructural development. In many ways, these policies have opened up new avenues for the marginalised communities in terms of their mobility and inclusion. Increased access to education, employment opportunities, and welfare schemes has helped in improving the material condition of some sections of the marginalised communities. However, the benefits have been uneven, and the developmental model has adversely affected the same communities, particularly those reliant on the natural resources for their survival. Land acquisition, environmental degradation and displacement have disrupted traditional livelihoods and deepened the socio-economic vulnerabilities of marginalised communities. The history, life and culture of Adivasis have always been closely connected with nature. However, the ex-untouchable communities are also linked equally with nature, as they celebrate many festivals which are connected with nature. The worship of Bhumidevi, Matidevi and Vandevi shows their inclination towards nature. The historical experiences of Dalits with nature have always been associated with pollution, impurity and dirt. The hierarchies of caste have been reproduced by using nature. This work shows how caste hierarchies continue through the exploitation of nature. Therefore, it is important to critically examine the intersection of neo-liberal development and caste-based exclusion in shaping environmental access, marginalisation and vulnerabilities.

Keywords: caste, environment, environmental movement, neoliberalism, development, displacement, laws

Introduction

In the era of neoliberalism, the Indian state has pursued a developmental model centred on economic growth, industrial expansion, and urbanisation. This model has delivered gains in

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terms of GDP and technological progress, and also helped in uplifting some sections of the marginalised communities through their mobility and inclusion. Increased access to education, employment opportunities, and welfare schemes has helped in improving the material condition of some sections of the marginalised communities. However, this benefit is uneven because a large number of people who come from the marginalised section of society are still dependent on the environment for their survival. They have faced the brunt of displacement, loss of livelihood and ecological degradation with the intervention of the state-led development. In many cases, rehabilitation and resettlement policies have been inadequate, and the corporate social responsibility framework lacks the legal and moral force to ensure justice for the displaced. Within these communities, women suffered largely because of the patriarchal norms of land ownership, further weakening their claims to compensation or rehabilitation.

The history, life and culture of Adivasis have always been closely connected with nature. However, the ex-untouchable communities are also linked equally with nature as they celebrate many festivals which are connected with nature. The worship of Bhumidevi, Matidevi and Vandevi shows their inclination towards nature (George, 2011). The historical experiences of Dalits with nature have always been associated with pollution, impurity and dirt. This work shows how caste hierarchies continue through the exploitation of nature. This paper has traced the historical trajectory of the environmental movement to focus on the involvement of the lower segment of society in the environmental movement. Iconic figures like Jyotiba Phule, Periyar and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar draw a powerful critique in their work against the Brahmanical Environmentalism. Many of Jyotiba Phule's writings focused on watershed development, biotechnologies, building of canals, bands, small and big dams, agriculture and peasantry. Likewise, Ambedkar has also dealt with the land, water, village, agriculture, small peasant economy, etc (Sharma, 2012). Dr. B.R. Ambedkar led the first Dalit Environmental Movement known as the Mahad Satyagraha in 1927. It was a struggle to protect the rights of Dalits to access the natural resources, such as water. Historical trajectory shows that Dalits have always been in a disadvantaged position in accessing the natural resources. It is important to understand why Dalits are always being discriminated in accessing the natural resources. This logic of the distribution of the natural resources is based on the Hindu scriptures which impute pollution to the 'untouchables.' Moreover, Indian society has established their social structures in order to avoid any kind of conflict for the natural resources. The history also shows that Dalit-Bahujan community has always been closely associated with the nature in terms of their work. However, the social ecology has made the dirt an existing companion of Dalits. The caste

discrimination and the Dalits rights over the natural resources is one of the major problems which our country is facing. The reason behind raising this question is to focus on the continuation of the betrayal of the betrayed for centuries unknown till today. The lands that were distributed to the poor through the Bhoodan movement and the land reform are mostly economically non-viable. Moreover, the lands which they got through it were quite inadequate for their survival and due to that they often have to depend on the other labour work for their sustenance. Gail Omvedt pointed out that there is an alienation between the environmental and the social movement (Omvedt, 1997). Scholars have also highlighted many cases where one can trace the caste blindness approach of the environmentalists. For instance, Environmentalists have raised their voice against globalisation and neo liberal economy and valorised the green village and non-urban natural community. While in the context of Dalits, village is a ground of hierarchy which promotes untouchability. Likewise, there are many cases where the issue of caste was completely ignored (Sharma, 2012). Manual scavenging still practiced in India even after so many years after Independence. The alternative model designed to counter this practice of manual scavenging doesn't make a significant difference in the life of the Balmikis (Sharma, 2017). This paper has also focussed on the implication of the inequity in the natural resources where it has discussed the involvement of the Dalits in the Naxalite movement in their struggle for land and natural resources (Kunnath, 2018). India's political economy and the issues of environment is a debateable issue nowadays. Environmentalist protest against the developmental project is criticised sometimes on the ground of its anti-progress approach. However, it is important to understand how far the developmental model of our country is socially responsible and just.

History of the environmental movement and caste

Prasad analysed the caste dynamics in the environmental discourse in India. By aligning the black ecologies as a challenge to eco-racism, she focused on Dalit ecologies as a challenge to eco-casteism. She dealt with the issue of caste-based segregation, dispossession, dehumanisation, appropriation of Dalit labour and ecological knowledge, etc. Dalits are highly impacted by natural disasters and climate change because they rely on natural resources and manual labour in agriculture for their livelihood. Despite facing the disproportionate level of crisis, the Dalit viewpoints are largely missing in the environmental literature and mainstream activism. She highlighted the historical trajectory of the Environmental Movement to bring into the light the involvement of the lower segment of society in the environmental movement. The first Dalit Environmental Movement struggle, known as the Mahad Satyagraha, was led by Dr.

B.R. Ambedkar in 1927. The whole struggle was started with an assertion to protect the rights of Dalits as citizens to access the natural resources, such as water. A copy of the Manusmriti was burned by Dr. B.R Ambedkar, and after that, he led a procession of untouchables to the chowder reservoir in Mahad. The untouchables drew water from the public tank and drank it. The Savarnas were offended by their act and filed a civil case against Ambedkar (later dismissed). Later on, they conducted a ritual to purify the water tank. Manusmriti also restricts untouchables from owning land, cattle, drawing water from the Hindu wells, and even building their own wells (Prasad, 2011).

Mukul Sharma argues that iconic figures like Jyotiba Phule, Periyar and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar draw a powerful critique against the Brahmanical Environmentalism in their work. Many of Jyotiba Phule's writings focused on watershed development, biotechnologies, peasantry, agriculture, building of canals, bands, small and big dams. Likewise, Ambedkar has also dealt with the land, water, village, agriculture, small peasant economy, etc. The literature shows that Dalits have always been in the disadvantageous position in accessing the natural resources (Sharma, 2012, pp. 46-47). The quest here is to understand why Dalits are in the disadvantageous position in accessing the resources?

Bhimraj argues that the distribution/deprivation of the environmental benefits depends upon the caste status of a person. In the United States, environmental discrimination can be seen on the grounds of race. Likewise, in India, caste is a significant factor in environmental discrimination. Those who belong to the lower caste, the untouchables are in the disadvantageous position in terms of having access to the environmental benefits. They share a disproportionate burden of the pollution. Although the caste status of a person results in environmental discrimination, the environmental discourses usually ignore this aspect. He raised two important points, which are the denial of equitable access to the natural resources and the unequal implementation of the right to health, to highlight the issue that the untouchables face the environmental injustice in India. Equitable access to the natural resources is denied to the untouchables in two ways: unequal distribution of land and by imposing disability to utilise common resources. This logic of the distribution of the natural resources is based on the Hindu scriptures, which impute pollution to the 'untouchables' (Bhimraj, 2020).

Gadgil and Malhotra have focused on the manner in which the different caste groups who are living together in the same region have an organised pattern of resource use to avoid excessive inter-caste competition for limited resources. Particular plant or animal resources are used exclusively by the same lineages of the caste groups (Gadgil & Malhotra, 1983). They

showed the way in which the caste groups have organised themselves and developed a certain pattern to the use of the natural resources. This study has legitimised the misappropriation of natural resources by ignoring the entrenched structural mechanisms that have worked in protecting the caste system (Aiyadurai & Ingole, 2021). Contrary to that, Mukherjee and Jha reflected on the discrimination faced by the Dalits for using the natural resources. By referring to the two Dalit literature, Baby Kamble's *The Prison We Broke* and Aravind Malagatti's *Government Brahmana*, Mukherjee and Jha have tried to draw our attention to the hegemony of the upper caste in the use of the natural resources. For instance, Malagatti stated that the best part of the areca leaves for serving food is used either for the god or the Brahmins, while the lower part is left for the Dalits. It shows that the stake on the best part of the leaves depends upon the caste status (Mukherjee & Jha, 2016, p. 184).

Ilaiah has talked about the closeness of the Dalit-Bahujan people with nature and their everyday interaction with it, which leads to the Dalit-Bahujan theory of knowledge. He argues that Dalit Bahujan, based on their interaction with nature, are the constructors of the science of leather technology, builders of scientific use of manure, innovators of tools of production, which basically helps in improving not just production but also in keeping the environment green and clean. The efficiency of the Shudra community can be seen in creating knowledge of production and also in bringing innovations in agrarian and artisan technology. Besides that, he has argued that Chandalas play a significant role in making villages, towns and the nation free from pollution and also build a culture that helps in keeping the living environment clean (Ilaiah, 2009, as cited in Sharma, 2017). It shows the deeper involvement and interaction of the Dalit-Bahujan communities with the environment. With their interaction, they have also come out with various innovations which have actually helped in developing the technologies as well. Ilaiah has linked Dalit ecological understanding with their physical labour, instruments and objects of labour and work experience, while on the other hand, neo-Hindus have the perspective that nature has naturally and intrinsically connected Dalits to labour (Ilaiah, 2002).

There has been a historical trajectory of the interrelationship of caste and nature in India, which is closely connected with the history of Brahmanical Hinduism. The history of the environment is constructed, shaped and formed by the history of caste in some prominent ways. Firstly, caste is considered as a natural and social order according to which people, place, occupation and knowledge are characterised by pollution and ritual cleanliness. Bodies, behaviours, situations and actions are also isolated and kept 'out of place' and 'untouched' because of deep-down hierarchical boundaries. In this context, Gopal Guru argued that in the

social ecology, dirt and filth became an existential companion of Dalits. Secondly, caste plays a significant role in shaping the attitude and values of the Brahmins and non-Brahmins. Thirdly, Segregation and subordination of the lower segment of society is made possible by caste by creating an avenue for the brahmins to appropriate and exploit natural resources. Fifth, low castes, especially untouchables, then develop their own understanding of environment and its resources, which was a mixture of love and sorrow, pain and joy, alienation and attachment. (Sharma, 2017).”

Interaction of caste and environment after independence.

Caste discrimination and the Dalits' rights over the natural resources are among the major questions which our country is facing. However, this is not a new question because when we look into the historical trajectory of the interaction of nature and caste, this kind of situation has always existed. The reason behind raising this question is to focus on the continuation of the betrayal of the betrayed for centuries, unknown till today. This will draw attention towards the conspiracy of the upper caste rulers of this country.

The Bhoodan movement was a voluntary land reform movement started in Telangana in response to the revolutionary uprising of the peasants. In this movement, landlords donated their surplus land to the landless labourers to prevent their revolutionary uprising. The lands that were distributed to the poor through the bhoodan movement and the land reform are mostly economically non-viable. Moreover, the lands which they got through it were quite inadequate for their survival and due to that, they often have to depend on other labour work for their sustenance. Besides that, they also failed to possess the required capital for seeds and fertilisers (George, 2011).

Besides that, the environmental movement has also failed to address the issues of structural inequalities. There is an alienation between the anti-caste movement and the environmental movement. Omvedt reasoned it by giving an example of the struggle of the fishing community in Orissa against the Tata and the government restrictions on their rights of fishing. The Keutas is the main fishing community of Orissa, which was recently included in the list of Schedule Caste. They have not faced untouchability and have also never been considered as polluting. The Hadis, on the other hand, are the main ex-untouchable community of Orrisa who were never allowed to do fishing. They are the village servants and are involved in doing the polluting tasks. Hadis' perspective on the whole issue is different from Keutas. While the Keutas are concerned about the encroachment by the outsiders, the Hadis raised the

issue that they are excluded from the benefits gained by the Keutias. While promoting the ‘traditional fishing technique’ over ‘modern techniques’, environmentalists failed to understand the caste-based exclusion existing in it. The environmentalists failed to deal with the question of the local configuration of power operating in the fisherfolk community. Thus, the innocent defence of the traditional rights of the fisherfolk community against the Tata and the governmental interference looks problematic here. Given the context of environmental degradation, the traditional method looks very lucrative for ecological sustainability. The traditional method is significant for ecological sustainability, but it is equally important to understand that it comes with a caste-based exclusion (Omvedt, 1997).

The differences between these two movements can also be traced in their perspective on the village. In this context, Omvedt argues that pre-British Indian villages were depicted differently by the environmentalists and the Dalits. Villages are perceived as a sphere of harmony by the environmentalists, where different castes are engaged in different activities based on their specialisation. It resulted in sustainable filling of ecological niches (as Madhav Gadgil and Ramchandra Guha puts it) and also established non-competitive and peaceful relations with each other. Thus, the entire arrangement of the village looks like the autonomous “little republics” as described by the British. On the other hand, Dalit perceives the village as a sphere of domination and tyranny where a significant section of the village community faces discrimination and is excluded even from its human membership. They are forced to live narrow, fragmented lives, suitably matched with Marx's idea about the imprisonment of the human mind. Mahatma Gandhi described the village as a ‘Ramrajya’ while Ambedkar called it a cesspools. (Omvedt, 1997). Sharma argues that “ Dalit thinkers have criticised even the brightest environmental movements, for example, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), terming it as Patidar Land Bachao Andolan (PLBA), which are concerned mainly about the landowners and often glorify the ‘cruel past’ and ‘oppressive local institutions’ in rural areas (Sharma, 2017).

Moving to the issue of leadership, Mukherjee and Jha argue that the supremacy of the upper caste can be seen even in the protection of the natural resources. The environmental movement is dominated by the upper caste, and the lower caste acts at their patronage. For instance, in the Badhati project in Uttar Kannada District, the spice farmers who were largely brahmins led the movement (Mukherjee and Jha 2016, 180). Mawdley has highlighted the influence of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) in appropriating the environmental struggle against the Tehri Dam Project. VHP attempted to frame it in a communal manner (Mawdley

2006, 382). Omvedt argues that the upper caste background cannot be a factor to restrict any individual from taking part in a movement or becoming a leader. Anti-caste leaders like Ambedkar and Phule emphasised on certain pre condition for Brahmins to become a part of the movement. They argue that brahmins should renounce the shastras, the puranas and all the Hindu scriptures because they legitimise the caste system. But when we look into the case of Orissa and of elsewhere, these were completely ignored (Omvedt, 1997).

Mukherjee and Jha also highlighted that the religious symbols are used by environmentalists to persuade people to undertake actions for the conservation of environmental resources. Gandhian ideology is the most dominant ideology of the movement, which gives emphasis on pre-colonial and pre-capitalist society, with its core focus on the Ram Rajya and the Hindu scriptures. This approach promotes the traditional structure of society, which goes completely against the Dalits, who have been struggling to come out of that. For instance, the Vrindavan Conservation Project was started by the NGO called World Wide Fund for Nature- India in 1991. With the ambition of ecological restoration, the plantation drive was started along an 11 km-long pilgrim route which encircled the town. A symbol of environmental purity and beauty in the form of the imagery of Krishna was used with the purpose of involving more and more Hindus in the activity. So, this project promoted the cultural and traditional way of life. Religion was used as a weapon to fight against the environmental degradation that the place was experiencing (Sharma, 2012, as cited in Mukherjee & Jha, 2016).

In India, Manual Scavenging is a caste-based forced occupation in which the Scheduled castes (SCs) are involved in the menial task of cleaning human excreta. This practice is continued despite all the technological developments. Around 1.8 lakhs Indian households are involved in this task, according to the Socio-economic and caste census of 2011. Maharashtra has the highest number of manual scavengers, followed by Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Tripura and Karnataka. Manual Scavenging was banned in India in 1995, but despite that, this practice is still due to many factors, such as income inequalities, lack of skills, the prevalence of the traditional legacy of following the same occupation and the lack of reporting (Bhanvi, 2023). In this way, the continuation of caste-based occupation shows the existing condition of the Dalits in society. Their dignity has always been compromised, even after so many years of independence.

The alternative model, started in the form of Sulabh, has not made a significant difference in the lives of Dalit. Dr. Bindeshwar CSE started the Sulabh International Social Service Organisation in 1970. The organisation is primarily based on the Gandhian ideology

of the emancipation of scavengers. It is known for its work in bringing an alternative model to tackle the social discrimination practices against scavengers. A particular section of Indian society is involved in the practices of cleaning and carrying human excreta manually. Besides that, it is known for its cost-effective sanitation, to deter environmental pollution and also to develop non-conventional sources of energy. However, the meticulous observation of this project gave a contrary picture. It has overlooked many of its shortcomings. The Brahmanical supremacy is visible in his sympathetic attitude towards the 'Bhangis.' Sulabh is also involved in celebrating some Hindu religious festivals like Mahashivratri and Chhath. Balmikis associated with Sulabh celebrate these festivals at the organisational level with the prominent participation of Pathak. Brahmanical rituals are followed during the celebration. Sulabh promotes religion and religious practices with the intention of inculcating the values of universal brotherhood among people. Liberated manual scavenger women who are part of the Sulabh are taken for a dip in the Ganga River at Varanasi and Sangam. Rituals are also performed with priests at the Maha Kumbh Mela. Balmiki women considered it a kind of rebirth in the Hindu religion and also in strengthening their beliefs in the sacred places, priests and divine experiences. But Sulabh has remained silent in celebrating the Valmiki Jayanti, which cherishes Valmiki as the ancestor and God of Balmikis. The traditional occupation of Balmikis is being praised by the dignitaries of Sulabh for their skill in the work of cleaning and sweeping. Sharma argues that Sulabh played a significant role in minimising the extremely degrading practices prevailing in many parts of the country, but the anti-caste perspective has been constantly suppressed through the Hindu ethos and Brahmanical values. It shows that even the new methods employed to change the manual scavenging practices are completely unfair to the marginalised communities. Their jobs remained the same in the new methods. It shows that the environmental discourses in the contemporary scenario have failed to deal with the constant degrading practices of Balmikis (Sharma, 2017).

Despite all these criticisms, one cannot ignore the positive effect of the movement at large. Karan highlighted the integrative social effect of the environmental movement in India. People went beyond their social and cultural boundaries to protect the environment. The movement united people who differed by their sex, age, religion, caste, ethnicity, class and region. For instance, in Uttarakhand, the paharis and bhotiyas occupied land at different altitudes, but they actively participated in the movement. Thus, the environmental movement brought people of diverse backgrounds onto a common platform for their shared interest in saving the environment. This shows the positive effect of the movement at large (Karan, 1994).

Implications of the inequity on the use of natural resources

How does the struggle over control of land and other natural resources lead to violence? Kannath, in his work, highlighted the participation of the Dalits in the Naxalite movement against caste and class oppression by Upper caste and backwards caste landowners. He argues that in Bihar, especially in Bhojpur and the Magadh region, landless Dalit labourers and poor peasants took up arms against the upper and the backwards caste landowners. In his work, he dealt with the issues of untouchability, landlessness, sexual abuse of Dalit women by upper caste landowners and the Dalit participation in the Maoist movement (Kunnath, 2018, pp. 2-3).

Aiyadurai and Ingole draw attention towards the discrepancies in the premier institutes of India in bringing the issue of caste into the mainstream academia of the environment. He argues that the premier institutes in India have so far failed to bring the anti-caste perspective, literature and culture of the marginalised in the environmental discourse (Aiyadurai & Ingole, 2021). Scholars show that Dalits and Tribals face a similar kind of environmental exclusion and deprivation, especially when they are living closer to each other. For instance, POSCO and the Vedanta Projects started in 2005 and 2003, respectively, where the focus of complex legal and political battles and a multitude of players have been involved in responding to those projects. Some of them are Adivasis, Dalits and other communities. However, their concerns are not always merged seamlessly, and it is a mistake to sideline their specific priorities and strategies (Krishnan & Naga, 2017, p. 3).

Moving to the question of whether there are any instances which show the opposition of the Dalits against the Brahmanical embodied view in the Environmental Movement? Mukul Sharma, in his article, dealt with this question and highlighted how the Brahminical supremacy in the environmental movement is challenged. Images of Raja Bali, Eklavya, Deena Bhadri, the elephant and Bhim-Ganga are used to pose a challenge to Indian environmentalism (Sharma, 2012, p. 46).

Development and displacement

India's political economy and the issues of the environment are a debatable issue nowadays. Environmentalists protest against the developmental project is criticised sometimes on the grounds of its anti-progress approach. Critiques against the developmental model of the Indian state have been demonised in the current scenario. However, the question is how far the developmental model of our country is socially responsible and just?

Guha has traced the historical trajectory of the environmental movement in India and argues that there is a difference in the pattern of the emergence of the Environmental movement in Western Countries and in India. The environmental movement in the West started with the intention to protect the endangered species and the natural habitat. However, in India, the focus is mainly on human survival, the sustainability of the poor and social justice. The inception of the environmental movement in post-independent India can be traced from the Chipko Movement of 1973. It was started in a remote village located in the Himalayas. Initially, the activists involved in the protest were looked at with suspicion as agents of Western imperialism who were working to keep the country backwards. But the perseverance of the activists compelled the government to recognise this movement. In 1980, the Department of Environment was established by the Indira Gandhi Government. Subsequently, some laws were enacted to control pollution and to protect natural forests. The community system was given importance for water conservation and forest management. But the scenario changed when the economy was liberalised in 1991. The activists were demonised and faced gruesome attacks by the government (Guru, 2013). They were demonised because they are restricting the profit and employment generation model of development.

George argues that a free market economy came with industrial land acquisition. The compensation and rehabilitation provided to the poor have only impoverished the poor. The mechanism of compensation ignored the crisis faced by the poor when they reach the rehabilitation colony. They have to buy firewood, which they used to procure free from the Common Property Rights (CPR). George highlighted the case of Chhattisgarh, where 17 lakh acres of land have been demarcated for wildlife conservation, and due to that, tribals, Dalits, and other forest-based communities have faced eviction. He further argues that “As per 2000 records in Chhattisgarh, 10 major projects have already been completed, for which 257032.585 acres of land have been lost. In all, 238 villages have been affected by these dams, and their rehabilitation has not yet been done. It shows the vulnerable condition of the forest communities (George, 2011).

While talking about the development projects and their impact on the marginalised population, especially women, Fernandes highlighted that 213 lakhs people have been displaced and otherwise deprived of their livelihood between 1951 and 1990. Those who are displaced constitute the assetless rural population. Both the tribals and Dalits were affected by these projects. Women are mainly affected by these development projects, and it hampers their social mobility. Both the tribal and Dalit women play an important role in contributing to the

family economy and are treated as assets. Their economy lies on the natural resources and their traditional skills. Due to this, they are able to enjoy a higher status (if not equality) in society. Depriving them of the natural resources has actually affected their livelihood and social mobility (Fernandes, 2001).

The effect of the development in the form of displacement is a traumatic experience for all who have gone through this. Although it is important to look into the way it has affected the women differently. In both the rural and urban areas, women are precluded by law and customs from owning, inheriting and managing property and from accessing credit. Women in this way are affected largely as they are at a greater risk of being excluded from their homes and livelihoods. Compensation and rehabilitation are based on the ownership of land. Not only that, they also face problems in their everyday lives. For instance, with the establishment of dams, women have to depend on wells, which are owned by the better-off members of the colony. Sanitation is also another problem faced by the displaced women. Earlier, they used to go to forests, but nowadays they are left with no alternatives. The whole process has made their lives physically uncomfortable and also made them vulnerable to physical and sexual harassment. Displacement has often forced women to migrate out of the area as daily-wage labour. There also they face the problem of sanitation (Thukral, 1996).

Debal Deb, in his work, has highlighted how development is being looked through the lens of economic growth and GNP and considered development to be the destiny of civilisation. He argues that the current trend of development is unsustainable and is leading to unnatural death. He even argues that industrial growth is not necessary for a prosperous civilisation and that the pre-industrial social system creates a possibility for that. In this way, he has challenged the development paradigm and brought the issue of social justice and environmental justice into it (Deb, 2009).

Without the detailed and comprehensive Rehabilitation and Resettlement Policy, states take minimal interest in the resettlement and rehabilitation of outsees. For example, in the Bhakranangal Project, Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) prepared a report and pointed out that around 36000 households were displaced and only 12000 were rehabilitated. In the Ukai project, 18,500 families were ousted, and only 3500 were resettled. The report further points out that in the case of Pong Dam, 9000 out of 33000 households were resettled. CSE conducted research and found out that only 1 per cent of the total cost of the dam project in India has been invested in rehabilitation. Resettlement plans were mostly developed on an ad hoc basis. Even for getting compensation, outsees had to approach lawyers and middlemen,

which shows that only the rich oustees can afford. In many cases, oustees also have to pay taxes to government officials in order to get fair compensation. Gender bias is practised in providing compensation. Substantial lands are mostly inherited by women, but compensation is provided to the family head or to men (Mohanty, 2005).

Pattnaik, in his article, has talked about how corporate social responsibility is used as an alternative model for the resettlement of displaced people. He argues that this alternative model is insufficient to yield any result without the strong legal framework, ethos and the national commitment of the corporate sector (Pattnaik, 2013).

Priyadarshini and Dulla, in their work, argued that the rehabilitation and resettlement (R&R) measures introduced by Utkal Alumina International Limited (UAIL) have not adequately benefited the tribal and Dalit communities (TDC) of Kshipur, Orissa. There was a lack of communication between these marginalised groups, company representatives, and the Odisha state government, due to which they were not able to access the facilities which were promised to them. It shows that the government failed to ensure effective implementation. It was also found that many of them were not given fair compensation, which is ensured under Section 48 of the Right to Fair Compensation and Transparency in Land Acquisition Act, and were further excluded from receiving alternative land or sustainable income-generating opportunities as guaranteed under the Rehabilitation and Resettlement Act, 2013. Thus, a significant portion of displaced Dalits and tribals were left outside the scope of rehabilitation, which reflects both limited coverage and exclusionary practices embedded in the rehabilitation framework (Priyadarshini & Dulla, 2023).

Dalit women have narrated that they face discrimination more than men due to their caste and gender identities. They experience economic deprivation in both the private and public sector companies. The process began with the displacement led them to lose their source of income and their traditional food. When they sought semi-skilled work, they encountered gender-based prejudice which restricted their opportunities. They lost all types of traditional means of livelihood when they moved away from their native village. Before the displacement, they played an important role in supplementing family income, which helped in the betterment of the family. However, with the displacement, they faced various kinds of difficulties at the R&R area, which is not just confined to the gender bias and economic deprivation- in fact, it is extended to the religious, language, food, and cultural challenges. The health condition of the Dalit women has also deteriorated more than that of Dalit men. Thus, they suffer from the “triple burden” of gender bias, caste discrimination, and economic deprivation (Naik, 2021).

Scholars like Kodiveri have also dealt with the question of existing laws for the Dalits and argue that issues of caste-based discrimination are addressed in India through the anti-discrimination laws like the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Prevention of Atrocities Act 1989. However, discrimination faced by the dalits and the lower castes based on land and resources has not been properly tackled. She interviewed the Dalit forest-dwellers and analysed their relationship with the forest. They revealed that the forest department does not allow them to access the resources on which they are dependent on for their survival. Not only that, they are also excluded from getting access to the sacred groves and commons by other community members of these areas (Kodiveri, 2021, p. 496).

While talking about citizenship and the issue of landlessness among Dalits, Suraj Yengde argued that citizenship requires access to the essential resources, and land is the most fundamental among them. Land not only ensures the dignity of the individual, but it also provides security. Without this, individuals would remain vulnerable. It offers a sense of belonging and identity (Yengde, 2019, as cited in Kodiveri, 2021). It shows that makers of the environmental laws and their implementing agencies have overlooked the issue of the possession of lands by the Dalits. Dalits own less than 9 per cent of the agricultural land according to the Agricultural Census of 2015-2016 (Kodiveri, 2021, p. 497).

The Forest Rights Act (FRA) scope is restricted to the Scheduled Tribes only and doesn't include the other forest-dwelling communities. Adivasi communities are part of the Scheduled Tribes. This is further very contradictory in itself because state discretion is involved in categorising them as ST or not. But it is important to recognise the fact that forest dwellers are a heterogenous community which comprises Tribals, Dalits, lower caste communities and the pastoral communities. And therefore, for dealing with this problem, environmental law makers need to create avenues of participation for those who are impacted by it. This process should facilitate the inclusion of different voices. The participation process should not be restricted to the environmental movement, also because FRA is a byproduct of the social movement called the campaign for survival and dignity, which has sidelined the issue of caste-based discrimination (Kodiveri, 2021, pp. 497-498).

While dealing with the question of environmentalism and social justice, Guru argues that liberalism is similar to the karmic theory of rebirth, where social exclusion is persistent by negating the question of injustice and inequality. The possibility of rebirth as a brahmin is attached with the karmic theory, which ties dalits to their traditional duties and reinforces the status quo (Guru, 2013).

Mukul Sharma, in his article, has analysed the interrelationship between environmental justice, caste and liberalisation. He drew our attention towards how the caste capitalist economy has affected the people's sense of freedom, belonging and values. He focused on the case study of the brick kiln industry of Jhajjar district of Haryana and showed how liberalisation has impacted the use of labour and the environment, which further reproduces the structures of hierarchy. Most of the workers who are part of these industries are dalit. It can be compared to the sanitation sector, where only Dalit workers are found. Although this work is not considered as polluted but these are degraded and lowly as the sanitation work. Many cases of severe violations of labour and human rights are found in this industry. The changes in the economy have made the life of Dalits vulnerable because they face the impact of the rise in emissions and heat in their working and living areas, which shows the climate injustices. He further focused on how the rights and the dignity of labour have been affected by the migration of people in the neoliberal era (Sharma, 2023).

Conclusion

Dalits have always been in a disadvantaged position when we look into the history of caste and environment. Earlier, the system was arranged in a manner to avoid excessive inter-caste competition for limited resources. In the post-independent era, the lands distributed to the landless through the bhoodan movement and the land reform were of low quality and due to this, they had to depend on labour work for their survival. In this way, they were systematically marginalised from owning the land. Manual Scavenging was banned in India in 1995, but despite that, it is still practised in India. The alternative model, started in the form of Sulabh, has not made a significant difference in the lives of Dalit. They are still indulge in the same kind of jobs. It has overlooked many of its shortcomings. The Brahmanical supremacy is visible in his sympathetic attitude towards the 'Bhangis.' Sulabh is also involved in celebrating some Hindu religious festivals like Mahashivratri and Chhath. But Sulabh has remained silent in celebrating the Valmiki Jayanti, which cherishes Valmiki as the ancestor and God of Balmikis. The traditional occupation of Balmikis is being praised by the dignitaries of Sulabh for their skill in the work of cleaning and sweeping. When we look into the environmental movement, its focus has always been on the conservation of natural resources. However, the environmental movement failed to address the nuances of the social structure of Indian society. Upper caste leadership is one factor which is responsible for promoting the traditional method of conservation of resources, religion and the village. The efforts made by the dominant group to protect the environment often reinforce social inequities instead of mitigating them. Gail

Omvedt, in this context, argues that upper caste leaders need to renounce the Shastras, Puranas and the Hindu scriptures which legitimise caste. Without this, the problem will remain intact. At the same time, it is significant to question the representation of the Dalits in the mainstream leadership. The lived experiences of those who come from the bottom bring a ground-level perspective to the movement. So far, we cannot deny the extraordinary role played by the environmental activists in highlighting the issue of increasing alienation and displacement of the poor and the unequal burden imposed on them for the development and modernisation of the country. However, the leadership need to be more inclusive in their approach. Otherwise, this will create a schism in the movement.

The developmental model has adversely affected the marginalised communities, particularly those reliant on the natural resources for their survival. Land acquisition, environmental degradation and displacement have disrupted traditional livelihoods and deepened the socio-economic vulnerabilities of marginalised communities. They have faced the brunt of displacement, loss of livelihood and ecological degradation with the intervention of the state led development. In many cases, rehabilitation and resettlement policies have been inadequate, and the corporate social responsibility framework lacks the legal and moral force to ensure justice for the displaced. Within these communities, women suffered largely because of the patriarchal norms of land ownership, further weakening their claims to compensation or rehabilitation. The gap is visible in the legal framework in terms of the representation of marginalised communities' voices in it. The environmental lawmakers need to create avenues of participation for those who are impacted by it.

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