

Book Reviews

Environmental Movements in India: Politics of Dynamism and Transformations, by Padam Nepal, Authors press, Delhi, 2009, pp. XVII + 334, ISBN 978-81-7273-490-9, ₹ 750/-

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The concern for the present day environmental problems in most of the developing countries like India is of relatively recent origin. Even the recent awareness and concern for environmental protection at the policy level is donor induced. At the grassroots, such awareness is simply a result of the efforts made by some concerned individuals and the local NGOs, which are quite often than not energized to the end by fund flows for such activities from different sources. However, the causes of environmental degradation have been many and yet continuous. This has resulted in the eruption of a host of environmental movements across the globe. India has an equally rich history of environmental protests. The author of the present volume, an emerging scholar of ecopolitics and green political theory, has attempted to map the environmental movements in India with a central focus on the nature and character of the movements, how they emerge, develop, and live a life course; and not only how the environmental movements transform themselves over time but as to how they contribute to the evolution and development of environmental concern and the quest for green democracy.

The Book has seven chapters. They are: (1) Introduction, (2) Understanding Environmental Movements, (3) Environmental Movements in Asia, (4) Environmental Movements in India; (5) The Chipko Movement; (6) The Narmada Bachao Andolan; and finally (7) Summing up which is presented by way of conclusions.

First Chapter of the book entitled 'Introduction' traces the evolution of environmental activism in India and locates the environmental movements to broader discourse on new social movements. The theoretical framework derives basically from the agent structure framework and employs the strategic relational approach to structure-agency relationship deriving from the contribution of Jessop. The Chapter gives a very rich review of existing literature in the field and yet justifies the existence of research gap on the subject. The Chapter also underlines the objectives and scope of the book and its methodological underpinnings. The study begins in a narrative mode, employing a form of emergent analysis. The chapter also outlines the significance and limitations of the study.

The second chapter explores the concept of environmental movement, its evolution and development, various approaches on the genesis of environmental movement, nature and characteristics of environmental movement, its ideologies, strategies and actors and points out that the basic issues of why and how do the movement move has not been explained by existing approaches and perspectives on environmental movements. This further justifies the objective set out in the beginning of the study.

The book follows a pattern of moving from general to particular. And hence, in chapter three, it outlines some important environmental movements in Asia, locates the features of these movements and points out the major differences within the Asian environmental movements, locating each of them in a specific socio-historical and political context. The chapter also presents a set of differences between the environmental movements of the North and the South.

Chapter four entitled environmental movement in India begins with recording the Indian heritage of ecological consciousness, explains the emergence of new social movements in India wherein the environmental movements are located, and presents an overview of the Indian environmental movements. In doing so, the author explores the genesis of the environmental movements in India, their ideologies, actors, issues, strategies and their classifications. False developmental policies of the government, the marginalization of the tribal and other underprivileged groups, and the environmental degradation are singled out as the root causes of emergence of such movements. The chapter argues that the lopsided, inequitous, and environmentally destructive processes of development and the threats to the livelihood opportunities of the marginal people have propelled the people to go against the state in many cases, and concludes that environmental movements in India are the resistances by the people for their livelihood and for their survival. The chapter concludes with a note on the limitations of the existing studies on environmental movements and their failure to explain the dynamic and transformative aspects, and its implications to the state, the civil society and public policy.

Chapters five and six are case studies of two environmental movements in India: the Chipko Movement and the Narmada Bachao Andolan. In these two Chapters, the author takes into account the various agencies and structural components of the movements and shows how their complex mutual interaction led to dynamism in the movement and the consequent transformations in them. These two chapters also explain the implications of the movement, dynamism and transformation on the movements themselves, on state, on civil society and on public policy, and on the evolution of sustainable development strategy in India.

Chapter seven presented as concluding observation further elucidates the politics of dynamism and transformations in environmental movements. The Chapter also strikes a note on the fact that in India, 'environment' no longer remains an 'issue'

of politics but also has transformed into an established 'perspective' of politics. The author holds the view that this shift marks the movement from green ideology to green political theory in India, underpinning an ecological and political arrangement of collective ecological management. Further the author recommends the necessities of more case studies on movement dynamics in India and its impact on democracy, civil society and its implications for sustainable development experience.

The book is rigorously researched, grounded on sound theoretical and methodological premises and thoroughly documented with extensive references. The merit of the book lies in its unfolding of the role played by various elements of movement in their mutual interactions, bringing about movement dynamism and transformation, having serious implications for state-society relationships - an area which had hitherto remained unexplored. It is a must read primer for students of environmental politics, sociology, social movement studies and policy makers, environmental activist, and all those who deal with development induced displacement and resettlement. The book neatly presents its findings, fulfilling the objectives laid down in the introductory chapter. However, the single limitation of the book is that the findings are based on case studies of only two environmental movements in India. It would have been more enriching if more case studies were incorporated for better generalizations.