

Environmentalism of the Poor

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Long Lost Nature

What is ‘Environmentalism of the Poor’?

- Environmentalism relates to social movements raising voice for environmental protection.
- However, what we term the **‘Environmental Movement’** has been dominated by the western world since the 1960s.
- The western view of environmental protection sees **Humans** and **Nature** as two separate entities, the latter to be protected from humans.
- ‘Environmentalism of the Poor’ criticises this ideology as contributing to rising **Inequality** and further **Exploitation** of the natural world.



Humans Vs. Nature. Why not?

- The western view is challenged because it is based on an idealised form of nature, also called **'Wilderness'**.
- Based upon this ideal, large-scale **Protected Areas**, **National Parks** and **Wildlife Sanctuaries** have been created in all parts of the world over the past century and are to increase to **30%** of global land.
- But, these areas have been created by **Evicting** poor people who had traditionally resided there for thousands of years.
- The displaced **Indigenous Societies** have long been caretakers of nature and have a meagre impact on the natural environment.
- Then, what's the need of removing them?



Governments and conservation NGOs want to turn 30% of the Earth into Protected Areas



30% of the globe is as big as Canada + China + Russia + USA



300 million people would be badly affected



This is almost as many people as in the USA

94% of all the people affected live in low and middle-income countries

To make space for Protected Areas indigenous peoples and other local communities are **illegally evicted** from their land



Human rights abuses like murder, rape and torture are common

Indigenous peoples are destroyed. They are stripped of their largely self-sufficient lifestyle. They suffer from:

- Disease
- Depression
- Discrimination
- Alcoholism
- Poverty



The plan is supposed to increase global revenues from "selling nature", including big game hunting and new luxury hotels within Protected Areas



Conservationists want **\$140 billion** every year to double the size of Protected Areas, even though they don't work well



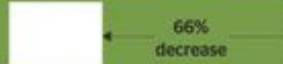
A single sum of **\$3 billion** would protect indigenous and community land rights in tropical forests and protect biodiversity there

Indigenous territories see **less deforestation** when fully under indigenous control

Indigenous territories not fully under indigenous control



Indigenous territories fully under indigenous control



Deforestation rates at the borders of indigenous territories in the Brazilian Amazon (stats from 1982 - 2016)

Indigenous peoples are the best conservationists:



80% of the world's biodiversity can be found in their lands

The 30% plan will be the biggest land grab in history. If we want to save the planet, the most cost-efficient way is to ensure indigenous lands are recognized and their rights respected

What's the need for removing them?

- Since the indigenous people are caretakers of nature, their lands can not be opened up for activities such as **Large-scale plantation forestry, Mining and High-end tourism**. In fact, these three activities are the most common activities carried out in protected areas.
- This signals a grab of nature from **Extensive to Intensive** users in the form of multinational corporations, working in tandem with forest departments in many countries including India.
- Annihilation of biodiversity, large-scale waste dumping and erosion of subsistence economies is justified through '**Climate change mitigation**' and '**Biodiversity loss reversal**'.



Manifestation in the Real-world

- Uttarakhand was the first region to witness the negative impact of protected areas in India. **The Forest Acts of 1865 and 1878** started restricting the access of the local peasants to forests in the name of conserving them.
- In fact, these forests were ‘protected’ to ensure the dwindling supply of wood and other **Commercially viable products for the Raj** and British industries.
- Over the next century, various environmental problems including **Deforestation, Soil erosion and Landslides** emerged as a result of plantation forestry.



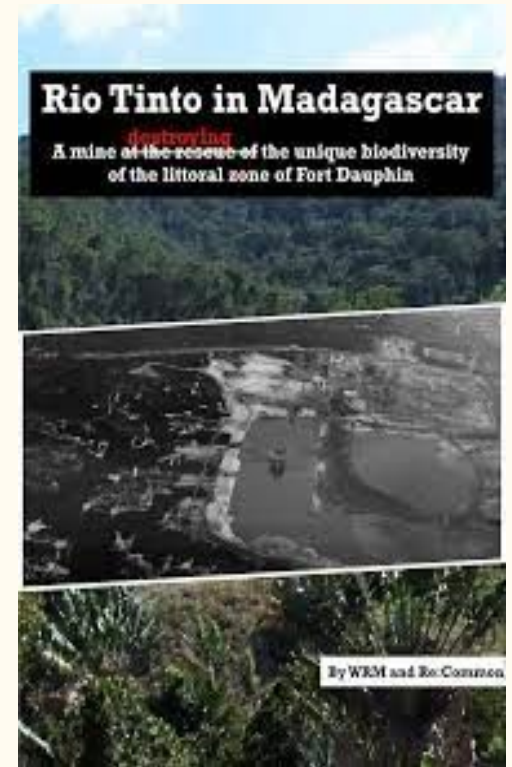
Chipko

- **Chipko movement (1970s)** was a major consequence of this century-long development.
- Under the leadership of Sunderlal Bahuguna, the peasantry of Uttarakhand protested against the debilitating effects of forest conservation on **Nature** and **Peasant society** that primarily served commercial interests.
- Not only were forests destroyed, but also consequentially, **Traditional agriculture** which had fed the peasantry for hundreds of years.
- This movement, however, couldn't stop the expansion of protected areas.



Rio Tinto Mine, Madagascar

- **Rio Tinto**, one the world's largest mining company, has been operating a major Ilmenite mine in a protected area in southern Madagascar for many years now.
- The model followed is trademark for all major mining operations going on in protected areas currently.
- While its operations have been criticised for their harmful environmental impact, it has recently begun to justify them through its coinage of the term '**sustainable mining**'.



- The company believes it is **responsibly sourcing** the mineral ores by **offsetting** through planting trees, conveniently ignoring the discharge of Uranium and Lead in water bodies near the mine.
- The pollution levels are more than **40 times** dangerous than the permitted levels.
- Yet, these activities are not only being continued but other similar activities encouraged as expanding global infrastructure provides great opportunities for **material gain**.
- Central India is also plagued by such unruly behaviour of large mining companies like **Tata, Vedanta, Reliance etc.**



Kaziranga National Park, Assam

- Another less talked-about effect of protected areas is the development of **high-end tourism**.
- **Kaziranga National Park** is a prime example.
- The region has had a long history of evictions of indigenous people, the problem furthered by the recent proposal to extend the area by 3000 hectares.
- The increase in the **Rhino population** of the park is seen as a source of generating **tourism revenue**. However, it has come at the **expense of other species** as well as humans.



- The profits from tourism have failed to reach the displaced locals.
- In fact, their refusal to leave has been met by extreme violence with the government allowing for **shoot-at-sight** policies against the locals.
- Activist Pranab Doley reports that large strikes took place against the **forest department** when a 7-year-old boy was shot by a forest guard.
- Such activities are also common in Kenya, Rwanda, DPR Congo, Cameroon and other protected areas in parts of **Africa and Asia**.
- In fact, they are backed by some major governments and **environmental NGOs like WWF**. Indeed, one of the major funders of the forest guard of the Park is Prince William of UK.

What it means for public policy?

- Therefore, while **environmental protection** is the need of the hour, we also need to be aware of the wider implications of public engagement in these movements.
- Grossly unequal ‘environmental’ policies cause widespread unrest as well as being **ineffective in solving environmental problems**.
- The **unquestioned mania of economic growth and trickle-down policies** in the name of environmental protection and sustainable development is driving our collective crisis further.
- The Government of India and more importantly, the citizens need to become aware of the **implicit agenda** hidden in the mainstream environmental movement and elevate the interests of communities who live in close association with the natural world.

THANK YOU!