MISSING THE WOOD FROM THE TREES

On December 7, 1988, the Ministry of Forests and Environment announced a new forest policy which replaced the earlier policy of 1952. The policy has received criticism from the environmentalists and social activists who find hardly anything new in the so-called 'new' policy.

Under the policy, the Government has set a goal of putting one-third of the total land area of country under tree cover. The policy says that forests should not be looked upon as a source of revenue. Forests are a renewable natural source. They are a national asset to be protected and enhanced for the well-being of the people and the nation. But, critics of the policy document point out that these objectives were already there in the forest policy of 1952. How is it then that the old policy did not work during the past 36 years. The statistics of forest would reveal the truth. Our forest cover has shrunk to 17.4 per cent early this decade from 22.8 per cent in 1971-72 and today it is not more than 14 per cent. Studies carried out by the National Remote Sensing Authority reveal that trees are being cut down at the rate of 1.5 million hectares every year.

In fact, the Government has been compelled to come out with a new policy is a confession of the failures of past efforts in protecting the forest from mindless destruction. However, officials argue that the old policy did succeed in arresting the transfer of forest lands for non-forest use from 150,000 hectares a year to only 15,000 after the 1980 Act came into force.

The critics have questioned the policy on several grounds. On one hand, the policy talks about the well-being of the tribals on the other, keeps them away from the forests when it says that the domestic requirements of fuelwood, fodder, minor forest produce, etc. should be made available through conveniently located depots at reasonable prices. In other words, the tribals belong to forests but forests do not belong to tribals. Thus, the alienation of tribals from the forests, which was started by the Britishers and successfully carried out after Independence, has been pushed further by the new policy.

The policy calls for imposing restrictions on grazing in forest areas by levying grazing fee to discourage people. There is no denying that the havoc of unrestricted grazing is of a serious concern. But it is mainly the policies of the government that has led to the commercialisation and privatisation of the common property resources like the grazing grounds on which grazing used to be carried out on a sustainable basis.

Furthermore, critics also point out that many anti-poverty programmes like the IRDP encourages such activities. Under the IRDP, 40 per cent of the funds are estimated to be distributed for the purchase of cattle-heads. Although the outcome of such programme is far from satisfactory, the fee imposition on the poor people will lead to a further marginalisation of poor. The policy also believes that the shifting cultivation is affecting the environment.

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Spotted

Temple or Tombstone?

While dedicating the Bhakra dam to the nation on October 22, 1963, Mr. Jawahar Lal Nehru, then Prime Minister of India, said, “Bhakra, the new temple of resurgence, is the symbol of India’s progress.” Last year, this dam celebrated its silver jubilee with extensive flash floods caused by the excessive release of water by the dam. During the month of September, large tracts of Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh were ravaged by the flash floods caused by the floodwater released from the Bhakra along with its sister dams, Pong and Pandoh.

During the floods, nearly 1000 lives were lost, over a lakh of cattle-heads washed away and crop loss in those states touched a staggering figure of Rs. 1000 crores. The peasants, already victims of two consecutive years of drought, witnessed their crops washed away in a few hours.

In this context, it is important to examine the long-term expectations and failures of large dams. Multi-purpose projects, like the Bhakra dam, are meant for irrigation, electricity and flood control. In reality, it is very difficult to have all these benefits at one time. To maximise the benefits of irrigation and hydro-electricity, the dam authorities keep the reservoir full while the hazards related to such actions are sidelined. The National Commission of Floods in its report in 1980 has warned about the consequences leading to such action. It said, “The large releases from the reservoir should be so timed as to arrive after the inflow peak of the intermediate catchment has passed. Even a small mistiming can lead to aggravation rather than amelioration of flood conditions.” This is exactly what happened in the case of the Bhakra Dam. In the wake of drought of last two years and to have good irrigation potential for the winter crops, the dam authorities wanted to fill the reservoir to its maximum capacity. But the things went beyond the control and dam authorities had no option but to open the flood gates without giving any prior warning to the people.

Furthermore, in the absence of reliable weather data, it is dangerous to obtain all three major benefits from the dam. At this juncture, it is worthwhile to mention that the BBMB was provided with wrong forecast by the Indian Meteorological Department (I.M.D.). The Director-General of the I.M.D. in a communication dated September 9, 1988 informed the dam authorities that the rainfall is expected to be deficient (below 19 percent of the normal rainfall in the northern India). But the things happened otherwise. For four days, between September 23 and 26, the Bhakra reservoir received a staggering 640 mm of rainfall. On September 26, it received 85 mm of rainfall in just 45 minutes. This rapid increase in the rain waters is the result of increasing deforestation in the catchment areas of rivers, Sutlej and Beas.

There is no denying the fact that the catchment areas of all our rivers, including the Sutlej and the Beas, are badly deforested. As a result, extensive soil erosion leading to the heavy siltation of reservoirs has decreased the capacity of reservoirs of absorbing the surplus flow of water. This lead to sudden discharges, causing massive destruction in the surrounding areas. At the same time, the lifespan of the reservoirs also get reduced, thereby creating serious concerns about the long-term benefits from the large dams. Furthermore, in the absence of any effective flood control measures, the ground water does not get adequately replenished as the surface water flows away rapidly. Thus, floods are, quite often, followed by severe droughts in the periods of scarce rainfall. That is the reason why those states which are flood-prone are also drought-prone.

This is not the first time that the Bhakra dam has caused flash floods. In 1978, flash floods in the state rendered as many as 65000 people homeless and destroyed crops worth lakhs of rupees. At that time, the Punjab Government appointed a committee to look into the causes which led to the flash floods. A senior member of this committee, in its report, admitted that an important factor in the aggravation of floods was heavy discharge from the Bhakra dam. This time too, the Central Government has appointed two committees to find out the reasons behind the recent flash floods. The findings of the committees are still awaited.

It is indeed a matter of concern that after forty years of inde-
National Conference on Auranga Dam

Estimated to cost Rs. 500 crore, the proposed Auranga Reservoir Project in Palamau District, Bihar on the river Auranga will displace nearly 30,000 people from their habitat. The last four years have seen a number of protests by the would-be-affected population against the dam. To discuss in depth the implications of the project and strengthen the ongoing struggle, the Auranga Dam Resistance Action Committee organised a three day National Conference at Palamau, Bihar during November 26-28, 1988. A large number of activists from many parts of the country along with local people took part in the conference.

For further details, contact:
Mr. Bhola Prasad
Village Kasedihi, Post Bakaria
District : Palamau, BIHAR

Workshop on Land Records

PRIA organised a three day national workshop from November 22-24, 1988 in New Delhi on the issue of land records. Twenty-five participants, working among the rural poor attend this workshop. Various issues related to the importance and maintenance of land records were widely discussed. During the workshop, it was decided that a manual on the issue would be prepared. It was also agreed that exchange of information among the groups should be followed up.

A report is being prepared by PRIA.

Workshop on Subarnarekha Dam

Jijnasabha Adhikyan Kendra of Madhuban, Bihar, and PRIA jointly organised a three day regional workshop from November 28-30, 1988 in Chaibasa on the effects of 'Subarnarekha multipurpose project - the ecology and people'. Forty participants from local organisation in this area attended this workshop.

A booklet is being prepared by PRIA.

For further details, contact: Mr. Ghanishwam, Lok Jagriti Kendra, Madhuban, Dist. Deoghar, Bihar, or PRIA.

Coming Events

National Conference on Narmada Valley

The third National Conference on Narmada Valley is being organised by the Nimar Geography Association, Madhya Pradesh at Barwani, Madhya Pradesh during March 15-18, 1989. The theme of the conference is "Impact of the Narmada Valley Development on Environment: Problems and Suggestions".

For further details, contact:
R.S. Doria
Department of Geography
Govt. P.G. College Barwani
MADHYA PRADESH - 451 551

Consultation on Tribals

A consultation on the theme "Alternative Development Approaches for Tribals" is being organised by Vikas Maitri, Bihar during April 18-20, 1989. This consultation will attempt to define in the development context the special relationships between the tribal communities with nature. A number of development agencies who are working on similar issues are expected to take part in the consultation. For further details, contact:

Mr. D. Bara,
Vikas Maitri
Post Box No. 182
P.N. Bose Compound,
Purulia Road,
Ranchi-834 001

"Protect Water - Protect Life"

As part of Kanyakumari March to the public on the importance of environmental awareness especially regarding the realisation of water as a social asset, a seminar is being jointly organised by the Centre for the Development of the Coastal Poor (Indic), The Association for the Rural Poor, on the theme "Project Water - Protect Life" on March 25, 1989 at Madras.

For details, Contact: Mr. Felix N. Sugirtharan,
C/o Association for the Rural Poor, 59, East Muda Church Road, Royapuram, Madras 600 013
THE KANYAKUMARI CAMPAIGN

Water is our planet's most important and indispensable resource. It is a social asset which we need to preserve into the future.

The volume of water on our planet exceeds 1400 million cubic kilometres, 90 per cent of which is in the oceans. The oceans also receive 90 per cent of the rain water. The remaining 10 per cent falling on land is the earth's source of fresh water. Part of it seeps into the ground, some of it is stored in lakes and tanks, while a large portion flows through the rivers into the sea, thus completing the cycle. India receives an estimated 400 million hectares per year.

Water is used and also despoiled everywhere. Nature has a limited capacity for purification. In India today, the rate of despoliation of water is rapidly overtaking Nature's ability to recuperate it. The species of water pollution is rampant in our coastal waters, rivers and lakes. Even the ground water in some areas is unfit for human consumption. It is noteworthy that nearly 80 per cent of the diseases in the third world countries are water-borne. The causes of pollution are primarily: industrial effluents, oil spills, fertiliser and pesticide run off and sewage. Our waters are now also destined to receive the extremely dangerous radio active wastes.

Irreparable damage is inflicted on the biological productivity of our waters by the use of inappropriate technologies like trawl nets in oceans and dynamite/poison in rivers. Destruction of mangrove swamps in estuaries and ejection of large dams and barrages across rivers have also taken their toll by disturbing the eco-system and altering the natural flow of water. Massive deforestation adversely affects the rainfall pattern and water retention ability and drought during dry months. Rivers which used to carry micro organisms - the food base of aquatic life - now carry mud and chemicals leading to gradual transformation of our waters into aquatic deserts. Dumping of solid industrial waste and reclamation of lakes has also resulted in a drastic reduction of inland water area.

Fishermen and others who eke out their livelihood without damaging the aquatic system used to regard the same as a community managed property. However, recent intrusions in the form of militarisation, tourism, mining and damming have led to destruction of these unique aquatic human relations, loss of pristene cultures and harmonious resource utilisation patterns. This leads to large scale displacement of people, thereby creating a huge army of environmental refugees.

There is a growing national awareness on the need for protecting the environment and conserving natural resources from indiscriminate plunder. People's resistance against large scale hydel and irrigation projects are signs of struggle against the plunder of natural resources. People are now realising that all these prove that the true value of our resources is in using them to protect life for the present generation and future.

The National Fishermen's Union has taken the initiative to organise several unions of the Forum of Fisherfolk for a large economic interests of the fishermen. Water is being an integral part of this struggle for existence in this changing situation.

The major objectives are:

1. Widen people's participation directly to the peoples' rights and needs
2. Form a network of people's organisations
3. Build resource base for the organisation
4. Strengthen the voice of the people and their ways
5. Revitalise and protect the socio-cultural, ecological and economic environments.

We hope to achieve these objectives which are in the interest of the nation and the world's future.
MARI MARCH

anti-people social forestry schemes and ill-conceived developmental
projects. The Chipko Andolan, Save the Western Ghats March, the Balliapal
ata range, the indigenous peoples's movements for protection of their
heritage, nuclear power plants, fishworkers' struggle for protecting fish life
are varied and that the concerns are not merely about safeguarding
ecosystems but also the need to be concerned about
water. A national federation of fishworkers' trade unions is taking
part in the "KANYAKUMARI MARCH". The struggles waged by the mem-
ber of the communities, but also the very sustenance and survival of life itself-
for water resources. The wider social concerns of a trade union finds it
necessary to put forward issues of the vital link between water and life and provide encouragement
for the struggles to protect waters.

We ask you to:
- evolve a sustainable water utilisation policy; democratis isolation
- identify problem areas which need to be studied intensively
- adopt traditional water conservation practices, and regenerative fishing

In Delhi, a support group has been formed to extend support to the "Kanyakumari
March". The group has decided to hold a seminar prior to the launching of the March.
The seminar will be held on March 25, 1989 at New Delhi.

For further details, contact:
Mr. J. John,
C/o Delhi Support Group,
H-24, Green Park Extension,
New Delhi.

against big dams

Over 15,000 people, mainly tribals who will be displaced by the construction of big dams
in the adjoining areas, will join hands together to protest against the big dams in one voice.
You are welcome to join this event.

For further details, please contact:— Dr. Vikas Amte,
Maharogi Savam Samiti, Anandwan - 442914
via Warora, District : Chandrapur, Maharashtra.
BALIAPAL STRIDES ON

Baligal and Bhograi are the names of two development blocks in Balasore, a coastal district of Orissa, India. There is an ongoing struggle by the people of this area against the proposed Missile base in these places which would displace more than 125,000 people from their homes and hearths. To express solidarity with the people of Baliapal in their struggle against missile base, a solidarity group called, “Committee To Assist the Struggle of Bhograi-Baliapal Against Missile Base” has been formed. The committee organised a national convention of lawyers, human rights activists, environmentalists, writers, etc. to discuss in depth the implications of the project. The convention was held on 6th and 7th October 1988 at Digha, West Bengal. Following is the text of the statement issued at the convention. Those who would like to know about it, should contact, Mr. Biplam Halim, 82, Park Street, Calcutta-700017.

This National Convention on the “Missile Base at Bhograi-Baliapal and its effect on People” observe with its deep concerns and anguish the decision of the Govt. of India to establish a Missile Base at Bhograi & Baliapal blocks in the district of Balasore, Orissa which is only a few kilometre away from Digha, a famous sea-resort in West Bengal. There is no doubt that if the Missile Base is established at Bhograi & Baliapal that will cause disaster to lives of people living in these two blocks and the adjacent area of West Bengal. Data collected from different sources reveal that the total area of Missile Base will cover about 400 sq. km. area consisting of 132 villages. In fact this area is considered as granary of Orissa and produces traditional and cash crops worth hundreds of crores of rupees.

This convention also notes with deep concerns that not only lasts of people will be evicted from their ancestral hearths and homes where they are living from generations with their specific modus of culture, but this will also affect the ecological balance of the entire coastal region of Orissa and West Bengal. As a result of which the sea fishing industry in both Orissa and West Bengal will be seriously affected from which millions of poor fisher-folk earn their livelihood.

This convention further notes that this project is not an isolated event particularly when the arms race is going on within the so-called developed countries. This sinister design is certainly pushing India towards ever increasing militarisation by the present regime and will lead India into the orbit of super powers conflict directly. Moreover, this sort of Missile Base is bound to be a Nuclear Missile Base in the present era of Technological Development, as a result of which this land and people of ours will be worst victim of imperialist war. Spending more than 5000 crores of rupees initially for establishing such a man killing Missile Base when more or less 70% of the Indian people live below poverty line will not only further aggravate the crisis in Indian economy; it will also make Indian economy more dependent on big powers.

Film on Baliapal

A video film has been made to document the struggle by the people against the construction of the missile range. The film has recorded the people’s determination and methods of organising the struggle against the range. The film is jointly produced by Mr. Ranjan Pali and Ms. Vasudha Joshi.

For further details, contact:
Mr. Ranjan Pali, C/o Vector Productions,
189, Sarat Bose Road, Calcutta-700029.

News and views on Baliapal

This booklet, published by the Committee to Assist the Struggle of Bhograi and Baliapal Against Missile Base, consists of reports, letters and opinions related to the struggle against the missile base published in various newspapers and journals. The booklet is priced at Rs. 10 and can be obtained from:
Secretary, The Committee to Assist the Struggle of Bhograi and Baliapal, 82, Park Street, Calcutta-700017.

Baliapal Solidarity Committee

In Delhi, a solidarity group has been formed to organise meetings to spread the message of the struggle at Baliapal and develop an intimate relationship and wider understanding about the struggle.

For further details, contact: —
Ms. Arnito Taliya, C/o Baliapal Solidarity Committee,
8-B, Francis Colony (West) New Delhi-110055.
We consider this as a naked crime against Indian people, against world peace, in one word, against the entire humanity.

Historically and traditionally people of our country are always peace loving and have always registered their protest against militarisation and imperialist war. It is a matter of our pride that the brave people of Bhojpur & Bhojpur have rejected the government's plan for establishing a Missile Base and have organised themselves to offer a strong resistance to the proposed project. The movement is gathering momentum day by day in various forms and people are determined to die but not leave an inch of their motherland.

The heroic struggle of the people of Bhojpur and Bhojpur has unfolded various aspects of our life and has drawn the attention of the democratic and peace loving people all over the world.

This convention gives a clarion call to the people of our country to come forward and express their solidarity with the people who are fighting against the establishment of Missile Base not only to stop the eviction of millions of people but also to maintain ecological balance and world peace.

This convention upholds the slogan,

"We want our land not base,
We want peace not war.

—slogan that is raised by the struggling people of Bhojpur and Bhojpur and endorsed the same for the peace movement of the entire country.

Debacle

This is a quarterly journal produced and published by Development Research Communication and Service Centre, Calcutta. The journal covers all fields of development with special focus on women, environment, education, human-rights, and health issues. The annual subscription to the journal is Rs. 30 (US $ 20 outside India).

For further details, contact Debacle 1813, Garibhat Road, (S) Calcutta - 700 031
From Commons to Commerce

Whither Common Lands?

Published by Samaj Parivartana Samudaya, "Ashadeep" Jayanagar Cross, Saptapur, Dhanbad 520001, Jharkhand.
Price: Paperback: Rs. 25 ($10)
Hard-Cover: Rs. 50 ($20)

Common Property Resources (CPRs) play a significant role in the life of rural poor. These resources are accessible to the whole community and no individual has property rights over them. The CPRs usually comprise of community forests, wastelands, common-threshing grounds, watershed drainage, village ponds, tanks and riverbeds, etc. These resources provide considerable quantities of fuel, fodder, timber, and organic manure whose availability is crucial to rural poor. In the case of shepherds and artisans communities, the dependence on the CPRs is more acute.

Unfortunately, the CPRs have received very little attention from policy makers of our country. In fact, the government policy has itself been responsible for the ongoing degradation of these lands. In the recent years, these lands have been taken over by the state for commercial forest plantations to meet the industrial and urban demands. At the same time, many state governments are handing over common lands to joint sector companies for the purpose of growing industrial raw material for the private sector. In Karnataka, such developments have taken place recently.

The state government has handed over 75,000 acres of ‘C’ and ‘D’ class lands to the Karnataka Pulpwod Limited - a joint sector company formed by the Karnataka government and Harihar Polyfibres with the sole purpose of growing eucalyptus plantations. This act of government has affected nearly 5,00,000 villagers for whom these lands have been the major source of livelihood.

The past two years have also witnessed a series of non-violent satyagraha and efforts by the villagers to reclaim their common lands. In this regard, credit goes to the Samaj Parivartana Samudaya (SPS) and other social organisations who started an awareness-building process with the affected population and helping them to organise themselves.

The book under review deals with such issues and tries to spread the message of people's movement. Published by the Samaj Parivartana Samudaya, the book contains articles, news-items and appeals made by eminent people to the government to reconsider its decision. The book is being brought out with the hope that the concerned people from different parts of the country will come to know about a small efforts made by the SPS and other action groups about this vital issue.

Stop Press!
Narmada Dam Workers On Strike

Nearly 3000 workers of J.P. Associates, the main contractor of the Sardar Sarovar Dam, being constructed on the river Narmada, have been on indefinite strike since January 30, 1989. The major demands are:
- Removal of the contract labour system within J.P. Associates;
- Minimum wages for 8 hours for local, casual labour;
- Equal wages for equal work for women;
- Employment for those whose land has been acquired for the dam;
- Withdrawal of the 100 per cent increase in the mess bill;
- Labour and workers should be paid bonus and paid leaves should be granted to them;
- Official Secret Act should be lifted from the workers residential camp and nearby villages.

For further details, contact: Vaidodara Kamdar, Union Nimbalkar Chambers, Jambubet, Kharivav Road, Raopura, Baroda.