

Natural Resource Conflict and People's Movement in Sambalpur

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Abstract

Growing disillusionment with the state's development interventions culminating in people's movement points towards the critical need to understand various impulses of development vis a vis current resources crunch. This study provides an overview of the resource conflict around Hirakud water. It does so through the finding, drawn from the fieldwork based on account of focused group discussion, interviews and questionnaires. Focused group discussions were organized in villages located in upstream, downstream and tail end areas to identify diverse problems from disparate geographic communities. Interviews were elicited from environmentalists, leaders of movement, academicians and politicians to understand varied perceptions about collective actions and how hydrological and behavioral data matches with it. This study employs narratives to interpret concerns of the people in the words of the respondent.

Introduction

Conflict over the use of natural resources or resource conflict has emerged as a new kind of conflict, thereby becoming a matter of contemporary focus. Increasing dependence of the industrialized society on natural resources, through the rapid spread of the energy and resource-intensive production technologies accompanied with the rising population has generated increasing demands on the world's total stock and flow of natural resources. Conflicts over natural resources, according to some opinions, are embedded in the current patterns of resource utilization. Such conflicts however, remain guised and become visible only when the communities thriving on such depleting natural resource interrogate the unbridled utilization of resources on the name of development and industrial progression leading to their unremitting degradation (Shiva, 1991).

In the recent past, drastic changes in resource control have been initiated to meet the international requirements and the demands of the resource intensive

development, leading to acute conflict among the diverse interests involved. The relationship between development and resource starts with the premise that any development initiative does require resources both renewable and non-renewable because of their inherent value in human life. Development that concentrates on natural resource sectors has in many cases evoked conflicting claims on the resource use pattern. This is evident from growing disillusionment or protest against large infrastructure projects seen over the years. Moreover, the growing body of literatures linking resource conflict and development also makes the study of resource conflict important for policy prescription. In addition to it, various environmental movements and its concerns about pollution and resource shortages have called for more research against the environmental aspect of development.

Resource conflicts can be traced to factors like frontier-led-development as explained by Webb (Tsing, 2003) Frontiers are defined as, "relational zones of economy & nature or spaces of capitalist transition where new form of social property relations and systems of legality are established in response to market imperatives" (Berney, 2008). This thesis recognizes the role of new reserves of natural resource (commodification of resources) as the basis of economic development and frontier expansion. These frontiers are characterized usually by abundant unexploited natural resources and the state policy favors corporate control of natural resources. Frontier-led-development was interpreted as highly damaging and extractive operation causing environmental degradation, livelihood insecurity and conflict (Jepson, 2006). Similarly, as argues, Vandana Shiva, natural resources, like land, forests, water which had been utilized and managed by village communities for longtime in a sustainable manner but witnessed changes during colonial period. According to Vanda Shiva, it is the colonial domination which transformed the common vital resources into commodities for gaining profits. This led to the extensive use of resources which was followed by the emergence of conflicts over natural resources. Thus, major conflicts can mainly be associated with involvement of non local actors who brought about radical change in resource control (Colonial domination vs Indigo movements). Nevertheless, same resource use pattern were adopted even after the end of colonial domination to shape development. More recent explanations have focused on resource abundance theory linking natural resources with armed conflict in many African countries. The argument of the abundance or rentier state theory states that abundance of natural resources can be factor of poor economic growth and prolonged conflict (Dilohn, 2002). According to this theory, primary commodities are easily and heavily taxable and therefore, attractive to both the ruling elites and their competitors (Collier and hoeffler, 1998; Le billon, 2008). It is

argued that the availability of abundant resources act as prize of the state satisfying the greed factor and provide armed groups funds coming from natural resources sector to purchase military equipment (Neumayer, 2000). However, these models are less applicable to understand complex social or structural factors and role of renewable natural resources causing conflict. These explanations are more focused on economic factors. These models help explain the exogenous process of conflict.

Conflict is understandable in a context, which demands knowledge of the relationship between socio-economic, political and environmental factors. Factors like specifically, power and access systems play an important role resource contestations (Ruckstuhl, 2009) . "Scarcity" as an important political economic factor influences resource access, which, in turn, is more greatly impacted by environmental quality, which is linked to development activities. In this context, comprehension of environmental scarcity-conflict link will be a useful exercise to understand the interplay of resource conflict and development. The environment-conflict thesis explains conflict over resource in terms of environmental scarcity. The proponents of scarce resource- as the leitmotif of conflict contends that scarcity of shrinking resources induce conflict between nations, communities and people. Expanding demands of scarce resources would thus aggravate conflicts seamlessly (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Urdal, 2008; Theisen, 2008). Homer Dixon's environment thesis argues that scarcity of critical environmental resource especially of cropland, fresh water, forests along with population growth can generate social stresses like migration, institutional failure, social segmentation and finally conflict (Homer-Dixon 1999). Therefore, natural resource related conflict is not strictly about the resources themselves, per se (Rucksthul, 2009). These conflicts can be intelligible in a context. Scarcity has complex causes. It can arise in three ways, through a drop in the supply of a key resource (environmental degradation), owing to an increase in demand (due to population pressure), and as a result of change in the relative access of different groups to the resource, which is also called structural scarcities (Homer-Dixon, 1999). Numerous factors such as ecological, demographic, socioeconomic and sometimes contextual along with scarcity can cause conflict (Krummenacher, 2008). Sociological and environmental changes perpetuate a perception of relative scarcity and contribute to conflict escalation. These types of changes are related to development actions that can be extrapolated from literature. Development activities like heavy industrialization, hydropower projects, and mining contribute to environmental degradation and socio-economic inequality through displacement, marginalization, and deprivation. In addition to it, changes brought about by state (development) policies often result in severe imbalance in resource use (Pérez

Arrarte and Scarlato, 1999) .Conflicts become noticeable when the local communities threatened by livelihood insecurity, defy development interventions. Protest or ecological movements emerging from conflicts over natural resources and the people's right to survival are spreading in regions like the Indian subcontinent where most natural resources are utilized to fulfill the basic survival needs of a large majority of people.

In India, resource use process is questioned from both ecological and sociological perspectives. Industrial activities and various development projects like large dams, industrial projects and mining require expansion of resource exploitation and are alleged to have destabilized traditional form of community based management of natural resources. Evidence shows that many development programs have culminated in environmental degradation, marginalization, deprivation and finally conflict (Swain, 2010; Narayanan, 2003). Instances of such conflict include Chipko movement, agitation against Hirakud dam, Narmada and Rihand, oppositions against POSCO and VEDANTA in Odisha. Conflict around wetland in Kerala, pastoralists' movement in Saurashtra over grazing resources, farmers unrest against industrial use of Hirakud dam water establish positive relations between development and natural resource conflict. Hence, protest movements have frequently appeared in the context of increasing resource competition. These are conflicts between people and the state. These conflicts reflect social contradictions inherent in the development process. The resource demand of development has indeed led to shrinking of the natural resource base essential for livelihood needs and survival of the economically poor people. It also leads to destruction of ecological process that ensures renewability of the life-supporting natural resources (Shiva, 1991). These movements interrogate the rationale of the entire development process and call for reevaluation of some development projects and policies .

Odisha has become a focal point of People's movement. Incremental changes wrought by development processes have given rise to deep discord related to resource use process and livelihood calculation. Hirakud dam project is taken here as case study to examine what initial conditions led to the conflict on the use of resource in question (water). An attempt is made to examine the debate on the use of a scarce resource like water of Hirakud reservoir in the background of conflicting interests of agriculture and industries. The construction of the dam has changed the pattern of resource use in the local region. Recent decision of government allocating water to industries has led to the people's movement in the region (Richard, 2007). Farmers dependent upon its water for irrigation are dissatisfied over the fact

that industries mushrooming around the dam are drawing away the water meant for irrigation.

Detangling Responses : On Causes of Conflict

Saroj Mahanty¹ Coordinator of Paschim Odisha Krushak Sangathan Samanmaya Samiti says state is favoring discriminatory industrialization. It is creating conflict between agricultural and industrial labor. It does not create employment for local people. There is no impact assessment by the government. Government is pursuing an exploitative resource policy. Government is sponsoring corporate interest. People are being deprived of their property in the name of development. He conceptualizes this conflict as a civilizational crisis. He vehemently criticizes the mineral based development. He said this movement is not only a environmental movement but a political movement too.

Durga Nayak², Retd Professor finds the lineage from past grievances. During building of the dam thousands of people lost their land and livelihood. They sacrificed their home and livelihood on the hope that the constructions of the dam will agricultural growth and prosperity to the entire region. They are given assurance from the authority that they will be rehabilitated. Properly and adequate compensation would be provided to those who lost their land for the dam. But till date they are lying uncompensated. Industrial drawl would affect irrigation in delta area. Quoting GOI report (2007) he said industrial drawl of water would also affect electricity generation.

Ashok Padhan³ Farmer's leader, narrates the whole farmer's issues and chronology of the movement. According to him, present conflict is not wholly devoid of the economy of agriculture. It should be seen in the context of agrarian unrest. He describes about Mandi system. He unraveled the intricacies of Mandi politics. He sees the movement as part of a larger farmer's movement (2001 to 2003) to get right price for their paddy. "We sit in hunger strike in the month of May, 2002. We tried to break for the nexus of bureaucrats, politicians and millers. First we fought for the minimum support price and vibrant working of Mandi. They were exploited since they used to lower the paddy price in the name of bad quality. We got support of intellectuals and experts. Previously farmers were fall prey to rice millers.

Lingaraj Pradhan⁴, farmer leader question the rationality of the ongoing development process. To him people have the first right over the local resources. He informed about the efforts undertaken to mobilize people and associate with other movements.

He called for making the movement more robust. He cited achievements of various local movements like Gandhamardan movements, and Niyamgiri Movemnts his concern.

Praffulla Samantray⁵, Bhubaneswar based leader and environmentalist blamed the whole development process. This development pattern is faulty and going against science of nature. We want people and environment friendly development.

Rabi das⁶, senior journalist showed his concern over reduction of water availability. He said the movement is about industries vs people. Politicians are not visualizing the crisis. No serious studies have been done to measure water use. He blamed vested interests and lobby of industries influence the political class.

Prasad Harichandan⁷, present congress chief ex minister gave an affirmative answer when asked whether the conflict is an outcome of wrong development process.. For him a balanced water study is need of the hour. He quoted water allocation policy should be scrapped. jayaselam committee report.

On Environmental Aspect

Karunakar Supakar⁸ showed his concern about the serious implications of industries growing up in clusters around Hirakud dam. Industries are openly violating environmental rules.

Arta Bandhu⁹ expressed his concern over the continuing damage to rivers and industrial effluents. According to him Hirakud dam is damaged by 50%. He described about the ecological magnification of pollution of Mahanadi water as a result of mixing of toxic water in river water.

According to Ranjan Panda¹⁰, coordinator of water initiative says river should be treated as ecological entity. He expressed his concern about the shifting of river water from rural to urban use. He was critical about the overwhelming role of Supreme Court. Mahanadi River is cut down into small water bodies to provide water to industries.

Allocation of Water and Livelihood Insecurity

In the words of Sitaram¹¹ "we were first displaced by the Hirakud dam, later gave land for reconstruction of railway track but there was a hope that everything is

happening for their betterment. At present, we are not getting our land irrigated for the drawl of water by industries." People say why we should pay water tax if we don't get water for irrigation. Some people complain that certificate cases are labeled if we don't pay taxes.

Focused group discussion in khandual (Populations 1500-1600): Livelihood security has been lost due to shortage of water. The so called development has not reached to the people. Ten to fifteen percent have migrated from this village. In the word of a khandual based farmer "where is irrigation Government has already taken away land as ceiling and rest of the land could not be irrigated due to this situation (less water in canal)." So what kind of development took place we did not know? Our situation is worsening so we are protesting. Members of Pani Panchayat do not exercise any real power to get full availability of water their village. People of Sankarma village say "in these years no progress has taken place in our life". People disillusioned with the allocation of water to industries since there is no surplus water in the dam. People of Malipali (canal irrigated village) complain about scarcity in the canal water.

Maneswar based farmer leader Harisankar Purohit¹² said ten percent of land still lays un-irrigated after modernization efforts taken to renovate canal. Even we face scarcity during rainy season. Villages in command area like Naksapali (nearer to Hirakud dam), khaeerpali do not grow Rabi cultivation. Even if assurance of canal water is given till April still our situation has been worsened when we cannot sell our paddy due to shortage of storage facility (go downs) in government. We are bound to sell our crops to millers. Government owned markets are highly corrupt they refuse to buy crops unless they are given bribes. Sometimes they cut values of crops by doubting its quality. We need water for all our land. We give water tax even if we do not get water. He said from 2001 to 2012 nearly 2000 farmers have committed suicide. Government does not recognize such kind of death as suicide. Farmers are committing suicide due to non-fulfillment of livelihood needs. He cites case of Biseswar Rana who committed suicide due to non payment of debt. He reveals that poverty is the cause of suicide. There should be a fund that can assure fund for farmers. There should be provisions for pension. Sometimes farmers don't recover money they invest in cultivation. Marginal farmers cannot sell their paddy as they cannot afford for transportation. Added to it, land ownership has decreased. He gives two main reasons for shortage of water in the dam. One is silting and the other is industrial drawl of water by industries. According to him, near about eight villages namely Naksapali, Sargipali, Gugharpur, Huma, Haldi, Bausmura, Putiband,

Sankhla, Sahaspur, Batemurahave witnessed lose of crop due to flood water. He said cultivation has become a non profitable business. Cost of production has become so high that we hardly save money for ourselves.

Conclusion

Rethinking priorities of development is required to avoid unintended consequences (Panda, 2012). Nevertheless, there was a shift in paradigm in regard to development in the early 1990's owing to the failed development strategies and unsustainable use of resources. The new understanding of development stands, in contrast, to the traditional concept of development as economic development. Now focus is on human centered and peace oriented development as conceptualized by Amartya Sen, (1999). This approach stresses on the enhancement of capabilities of the individual through enlargement of choices. However, this discourse does not discuss development and resource link except touching on environmental security aspect. With the influence of environmental movement, the concept of development has been revisited to accommodate with sustainable development, which insists on sustainable use of resources so as to give priority to the concerns of future generations. However, no comprehensive planning has been made so far. In the context of increasing number of conflicts in Odisha serious efforts should be made to build a development framework which would provide provisions for responsible industries, strict observance of environmental rules, recognition of indigenous rights and livelihood security. Development assistance could be useful for conflict prevention. There is a need to address deep rooted structural problems. Prioritized strategy should be placed to ensure livelihood security. There should be enhanced citizen participation and community consultation in making development policies. Dissentious actions of local people points towards the need of a framework of alternative development.

Notes

1. Mahanty, Saroj. Interview by Suvrashree Panda. Sambalpur, Odisha. 19 June -2012
2. Durga nayak is well known for his research on Hiraakud displacement issue. Nayak, Durga. Interview by Suvrashree Panda. Sambalpur, Odisha. 27 October 2012
3. Ashok pradhan is farmer's leader under whose leadership the movement was organized. Pradhan, Ashok. Interview by Suvrashree Panda. Sambalpur, Odisha. 26 June/2012
4. Pradhan, Lingaraj. Interview by Suvrashree Panda. Bargadh, Odisha. 24 December 2012
5. Prafulla Samantray is an environmentalist and activist. Samantray, Prafulla. Interview by Suvrashree Panda. Bhubaneswar, Odisha. 27 December 2012

6. Rabi Das is a senior journalist. Das, Rabi. Interview by Suvrashree Panda. Bhubaneswar, Odisha 05 January 2013
7. Prasad Harichandan is leader of congress party. Harichandan, Prasad. Interview by Suvrashree Panda. Bhubaneswar, Odisha. 05January2013.
8. Karunakar Supkar is the retired chief of Odisha Hydrological ccorporation. Supkar, Karunakar. Interview by Suvrashree Panda. Sambalpur, Odisha. 06 February 2013.
9. Arta Bandhu is an academician and noted environmentalist of Odisha. Bandhu, Arta. Interview by Suvrashree Panda. Sambalpur, Odisha. 06 February 2013
10. Ranjan Panda is convener of water initiative. He is an environmentalist and activist. Panda, Ranjan. Interview by Suvrashree Panda, Sambalpur, Odisha. 06 February 2013
11. Sitaram is a Sankarma based farmer. His family was displaced by Hirakud dam. Sitaram. Interview by Suvrashree, Panda. Sambalpur, Odisha. 26 December 2012)
12. Purohit, Harisankar. Interview by Suvrashree Panda. Sambalpur, Odisha 27 December 2012

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