

Chapter 12

Industrial Pollution and People's Movement: A Case Study of Eloor Island Kerala, India

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Industrial pollution is one of the largest environmental and livelihood issues faced by developing societies. It has led to the mobilization of people to protest against it, in various forms, in accordance with their socio-political landscape. The case of Kerala State in India is no different. A number of studies related to environmental issues, dams and displacement, deforestation, et cetera have appeared in the recent past. However, regarding environmental movements against industrial pollution in India, studies are limited. The social problems related to industries had generally led to mobilization of affected people in various parts of the country. One such mobilization of the people affected by industrial pollution is the focus of this chapter. Even though Kerala is a less industrialized state in India, the industrialization model adopted by the government of Kerala was not sustainable and subsequently it has failed on many fronts. In this chapter the researcher has explored work on the issues related to the contemporary development practices of industrialization. This study is an attempt to underline the problems of unsustainable development and people's protest against it.

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ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

The chapter begins with a literature review of development, sustainable development and the environmentalism of the North and South with special reference to environmentalism of India. The chapter then moves on to a case description followed by discourse on the people's movement. The problems faced by the local people in their daily life are also taken into consideration. The chapter attempts to decipher the problem of environment pollution. It discusses the integral importance of the Periyar River for the development of the region; it casts light on the havoc caused by its indiscriminate exploitation and pollution. Several study reports are used to substantiate the arguments. The chapter also focuses the activities of Greenpeace's River Keeper for the Periyar River. Some of the efforts of the people of the region to deal with this problem of indiscriminate pollution has also found place in the chapter. The last section of the chapter pays attention to solutions and recommendations for dealing with the problem of pollution.

The large-scale, illegal dumping of wastes into the Periyar River by hundreds of industries in the Eloor-Edayar industrial area had been consistently opposed by the people, citizens' groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). After conducting surveys, for example, in 1999 and 2002, Greenpeace, the international environmental group, had declared Eloor a 'toxic hotspot of global proportions.' Here the right to a peaceful life is denied because of the activities of industries. Experiences from the world over have demonstrated that the degradation of the physical environment is caused by today's contemporary development (Oommen, 2010, p. 332). The negative externalities arising out of establishing industrial estates in thickly populated areas are a grave problem facing the urban centers of the country. The inhabitants of these industrial locations live in utter fear of their very existence. And in many places people have come together to protest against the reckless attitude of the industrialists towards the environment. Eloor Anti-Pollution Struggle in Kerala has been one of such movements against industrial pollution.

Today the movements emerging as a reaction to the development practices have gained new attention in academics, especially in sociology. The developments of environmental sociology have been hugely influenced by the modern environmental movements. Social scientists are at the forefront of attempts to understand the forces behind environmental destruction, as well as attempts to contribute to broaden the policy debates. The shift from development to sustainable development speaks more for the ability of the social sciences to respond to new challenges than it does for whether the social scientists agree or disagree with the ethos of sustainable development as a global ideal (Salih, 2002, pp. 130-131). For the past two decades, social anthropological research on environmental issues has been part of a broad public sphere that has witnessed a sharp increase in environmental concerns and activism

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