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## “RETHINKING ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS: GROWING AGITATIONS AGAINST POWER PLANTS”

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### **Abstract:**

*This paper examines the growing concern over the past couple of years both at the national as well as the international level: this concern is about protecting/preserving environment. The environment is not merely seen as protecting the surrounding areas, rather protecting the globe. The issues of environment are now expanded to include such issues as livelihood, surrounding, air, water, green house effect, nuclear free world, etc. More than that it is now linked to the larger issues of identity, culture, development including social categories.*

### **KEY WORDS:**

Movements, Rehabilitation, Resettlement, Discourse, Concern.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Environment movement is not a new one; they were part of nationalist discourse too, although independent environment movement emerged only during the post independent period. Chipko movement, silent valley project movement, movement against chilka, movement against Narmada etc is some of the major movements of post independence period. These movements quite obviously raised such issues as: rehabilitation, issues of protecting water, social practices, protecting bio-diversity and forest cover and identity too.

What distinguished environment movement in Karnataka from rest to the country is the fact that in Karnataka these movements have hardly appeared in the intellectual discourse or narratives at the national level. Of late Karnataka is witnessing series of movement such movement against Kaiga, movement against Cogentrix, movement against bedthi, movement against thermal project in Chamalapur, movement against industrialization of coastal belt, movement against national park etc. the discourses, narratives or the issues that each movement raised are different, however all these movements in the ultimate analysis have created spaces for the concern to protect the larger environment. Secondly, Karnataka movements have not been able to established larger collective for a uniform struggle. More than that they have not been able to come out with one ideological frame work, rather they “spoke differently”. Interestingly all these struggles from the basis of our democracy too: it is here the democratic spaces are created and expanded. More than that the environment movements are part of civil society activism whose main purpose is to protect the identities of different social categories including democratic space. This is the reason why study on environment movements is both essential as well as desirable.

Of late Karnataka state, known for what is called “cohesive society” is witnessing series of agitations against the proposed plan to establish series of Power plants. Three important agitations have become sharp, challenging the claims that the government is making: that the power plants are essential to

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#### **“RETHINKING ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS: GROWING AGITATIONS AGAINST POWER PLANTS”**

meet the growing demands for power consumption in recent years. Couple of years back The High Level Committee on ESCROW (2000) had cautioned the increasing shortage of power in the years to come, particularly because of the increasing demand from the industrial belt and from the cosmopolitan cities such as Bangalore. However what is interesting is the fact that the agitations have become part of larger environmental movement and they try to analyze the issues from the larger perspective of global warming particularly arguing that 21 per cent of the greenhouse gas emissions is the cause of green house effect and corporate capitalism. Despite the fact that social bases of the movements are different, including the fact that they are not located in one place, however they have one commonality: commonality to retrieve and to protect the identities of social categories. Nonetheless, no comprehensive movement has grown, despite the best efforts, and thereby these movements against the Power plants have remained localized.

The controversy surrounding power plants began to envelop when Karnataka government published its Expression of Interest on April 28th 2007 to set up 1000 MW coal based Power plants in different places with a cost of Rs.5, 500 crore. These places are Chamalapura (Mysore district), Ghataprabha (Belgaum district) Kaushika (Hassan district) and Jewargi (Gulbarga district). Nearly thirty companies have expressed their interest, which include Jindal, Nagarjuna, NTPC, Lanco, GMR group, Tata, Reliance, and Tanir Bavi. Out of all these coal-based power plants Chamalapura has become a major controversial issue, along with two other plants – one Nagarjuna in coastal belt of Udupi/Mangalore and second one is Tadadi in Uttara Kannada

#### **ANTI THERMAL POWER PLANT MOVEMENT GAINS MOMENTUM**

The people's movement against the proposed 4,000-MW ultra mega power project (UMPP) at Niddodi near Moodbidri is gaining momentum with villagers of Puthige joining them in the fight. Surrounding villages of Niddodi, Sampige, Kateel, Kinnigoli, Kirem, Pakshikere, Mulky, Neerude, Ferar and Moodbidri They have formed a committee, “Tulu Naad Oripuga Samithi Puthige” (Save Tulu Naadu Committee- Puthige) at a meeting they were discussing since the proposed plant will affect villagers in a 20 km radius. In case Niddodi villagers under pressure sell their lands for the projects, people in the nearby villages will be affected. We have to get voluntary declarations from all members starting from gram panchayat to zilla panchayat opposing the project. In the meantime we have to explore legal options too.” And “We need our land and our fields. No amount of incentives and promises will change our mind.”

Of late Karnataka state, known for what is called “cohesive society” is witnessing series of agitations against the proposed plan to establish series of Power plants. Three important agitations have become sharp, challenging the claims that the government is making: that the power plants are essential to meet the growing demands for power consumption in recent years. Couple of years back The High Level Committee on ESCROW (2000) had cautioned the increasing shortage of power in the years to come, particularly because of the increasing demand from the industrial belt and from the cosmopolitan cities such as Bangalore. However what is interesting is the fact that the agitations have become part of larger environmental movement and they try to analyze the issues from the larger perspective of global warming particularly arguing that 21 per cent of the greenhouse gas emissions is the cause of green house effect. and corporate capitalism. Despite the fact that social bases of the movements are different, including the fact that they are not located in one place, however they have one commonality: commonality to retrieve and to protect the identities of social categories. Nonetheless, no comprehensive movement has grown, despite the best efforts, and thereby these movements against the Power plants have remained localized.

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#### **CHAMALAPURA POWER PROJECT:**

Chamalapura, which is otherwise known as “Kanasugarara Kanive” (dreamer's valley) in local parlance is otherwise a sleepy village, located 30 Kms away from Mysore district. It is surrounded by National Park on the one side, and falls within the catchment area of two important rivers – Kabini and Cauvery. It is a coal based Power Plant, based on private and public partnership. The plant requires 3,000 acres of land for its main project, and requires additional 800 acres of forestland. The project, once

#### “RETHINKING ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS: GROWING AGITATIONS AGAINST POWER PLANTS”

completed would generate 7,500 units every year. The estimated cost of the project is Rs.5, 500 cores. It requires 600 tonnes of coal to operate every day, which can be brought only after drawing a railway line connecting Mangalore in the coastal belt, 285 Km away from the project area or from Mysore. Nonetheless project would use not less than one million liters of water per day that will be drawn from Kabini River running close by it whose water is also drawn to Bangalore for drinking purpose.

One of the major contentions is that the project has the potentiality to displace more than 20,000 people, majority of them are farmers who are involved in producing agricultural commodities for market purpose. Second important argument is that it would affect the environment: every year the carbon dioxide and the fly ash that the project emits (72 millions tones of co2) would pollute the river water, particularly Cauvery and Kabini, that it will also increase the temperature of local areas, it will further denude the forest for the purpose of expanding project, that it will create water scarcity due to the acid rain etc.

Most important effect project would be having is on the National Forest/Park, particularly Nagarhole or Rajiv Gandhi National Park as well as Bandipur National Park, which are very close by. These national forests, constitute part of Niligiri Biosphere Reserve are the hot beds of bio-diversity, Nagarhole in fact, is known as “one of the largest conservation areas of India(p.89). Nearly thirty percent of the forest would be affected by the acid rain and the subsequent pollution of air. In fact, very plan even has gone against the principles of Environment. It is one of the principle of environment, (mediating through Ministry of Environment) that no project should be allowed within “the radius of twenty-five km boundary of reserved forests, ecologically sensitive area which may include National Parks, Sanctuaries, Biosphere Reserves, critically polluted area and within fifty kms of inter-state boundary” Secondly this project also come under Environmentally Sensitive Places (ESP) because it is located very near to “National Park, Biosphere Reserves, tribal Settlements, Tiger reserves/elephant reserve- Nagarhole is known for Tiger Reserves.

The movement has now taken an organized form. Farmers belonging to neighbouring villages, particularly Chamalapura, Kadasuru, Kangala, Maddur, Avaregere, Bachchegowdanahalli, Manegarana Hundi and others have taken recourse to sit in dharna (July 11), rasta roko (July 12, July 24), etc for the past two months, including convincing the women folk of legislators- the latter is a novel method adopted by the agitators. There are possibilities that this agitation might turn into another Nandigram of West Bengal, if the government continues to stick to its argument that, “the proposed project site is situated in an area without any forest and has a thin population and minimum impact on the environment is expected.” Government till date neither has carried out required Environmental Impact Assessment nor has called for a public hearing on this issue. However the government is hell bent on going ahead with the project, overlooking the larger implication both on ecology and the farmers.

#### **NAGARJUNA THERMAL POWER PROJECT:**

One more important power project, which has been contested as well opposed, is Nagarjuna Thermal Project coming up in coastal belt of Karnataka, particularly in Udupi district. The Nagarjuna, which is now taken over by Lanco group, is an Andhra based company. Ten years back it had received the government permission to establish steel factory in the same coastal belt, particularly Tokur and Kenjaru villages in Dakshina Kannada district. It was during this time that the company bought huge amount of land. Nonetheless the company had to shelve its project, as the steel market at the global level went against its interest and also the fact that the Soviet Union, the prime importer, had collapsed by then. Nagarjuna Company's second attempt to establish the industries came to surface when the same company got the permission to establish Thermal Project in Yellur village in Udupi district. This Thermal Project plans cost is too high: Rs. 4,299 crore The Nagarjuna company has the plan to generate 1,015 Megawatt power, out of which it is planning to supply 100 MW. This project was conceived in 1996

Here too the issues raised are no different from Chamalapura: displacing large number of peasant population, affecting the sacred grove/ reserved forest, depleting water resources, its fly ash would have the effect on the health etc. Other than that there are arguments made: that the Company has not taken the prior permission, it has violated section 28 of Panchayat act. More than that the arguments center around its effect on the ecologically sensitive Western Ghat, which is known as repository for thousands of species.

Although the struggle has taken an organization form - The Dakshina Kannada Mogaveera Mahajana Sangha, Coastal Karnataka Country Boat Fishermen's Association, and Nandikur Janajagriti Samiti are spearheading the struggle, the beginning of the struggles against Thermal Project needs to be located much earlier, it dates back to the decade of 1980s when National Thermal Power Corporation attempted to establish its thermal project. The massive agitation of the local population, made the company to withdraw in a hasty manner. This was followed by US based Cogentrix- this company also made the hasty retreat due to the massive agitations against the Congentrix company

#### “RETHINKING ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS: GROWING AGITATIONS AGAINST POWER PLANTS”

Here the agitation has taken the shape of blocking national high way passing through the project area, sit in Dharna, opposing survey of lands, bundhs etc. Even the fishermen also participated in the struggle- their participation in the environmental movement is not a new one. Earlier too when MRPL, Birlas mega Petro-Chemical factory came up near Mangalore, the same fishermen opposed. Similar was the case when they opposed Tanniru Bhavi Diesel project in Mangalore. Their arguments are almost the same, except that in Nagarjuna Project area there is a fear that the Mogaveeras, fishermen, might loose their livelihood, particularly fish catch since the water from the project is pumped to the sea for cooling purpose. However in all these struggles their major concern mediated through the issues of every day life practices, particularly how mega industries would pollute the sea water and in the process destroy the fish catch.

#### **TADADIPOWER PROJECT:**

Third Important power project which has become a contesting issue is the Tadadi Project, located in Uttara Kannada district. This is a 4000MW Ultra Mega Thermal Project. This land was earlier bought from the farmers to start caustic Soda factory by the government. In fact when compared to other two Projects, the number of families directly affected by the Tadadi project particularly number of displaced would be less. This issue of displacement was much debated earlier when Naval Sea Bird issue was raised. The issue of rehabilitating the displaced has remained incomplete. However what is important is its effect on the large number of fishermen, ecology, and to the cultural practices of the people. More than thirty thousand fishermen would be affected,

Most important argument centers around its consequences on the river Aghanashi- the lifeline of Uttara Kannada, - the river is known for providing livelihood to more than 1,000 families and is better known for estuary. The river estuary is the cradle for marine life, rich in mangroves. The “estuary has a vast deposit of seashells, which is used to produce poultry fee, toothpaste and lime” (The Hindu, March 27 2006)

This is Rs.15, 000 crore project, covering 3,500 acres of land, affecting, in the process villages such as Madhangeri, Herigutti, Hosagadde, sanekatte, Nushikote, Bargi, Kimai, Mlinaker, Torke, Aghinsahi etc .No feasibility study has been done till, except the study done by the scientist who clearly opposed such a project in a eco-sensitive district. Since the project is close to Western Ghat region, its affects on it would be severe and much more than what is derived from the project. It is stated that, “Western Ghats have already taken more abuse than they deserve, and cannot take anymore”

This is the not the first time that the people are opposing the mega projects in Uttara Kannada; the latter has a long history. Even before they could organize and agitate couple of projects had been established in this district, particularly, the Supa project. However in 1982 this district saw the agitation against Bedthi, , in 1991 Bedthi-Aghanahsi, , Bisagodu Mini Project, Malavangi Project, Benne Hole Projects etc. now the struggle has taken the shape of staging rasta roko(March 26 2006),

Among all the three Project areas the coastal belt comprising two districts, - Udupi and Dakshina Kannada- is the most advanced districts in Karnataka after Bangalore. Uttara Kannada is largely a backward district, including Chamalapura area; the latter comes under H.D Kote region of Mysore – most backward taluks in the whole of Karnataka. Nonetheless what transformed the economy of Udupi and Mangalore/DK is its larger linkage with middle east/ Mumbai economy .The district saw the successful implementation, unlike in other districts, of land reforms during 1970s, which made large number of other backward classes the owner cultivators over night. However the lands that these categories received were uneconomical in nature. Secondly what transformed this district was the opening up of Mumbai economy during late 1960s as well as 1970s. The boom of oil prices followed this in 1970s. There is one more aspect, which helped the economy- the growth of large number of private banks- Syndicate, Vijaya etc. All these transformed the economy much earlier than any other districts in Karnataka. In fact linking the local market with the Middle Eastern economy/or the Bombay economy has had the effect on the local cultural practices. One side this economy brought in new identities to the categories, particularly those entered in to the larger market, however, the social categories who stayed back had to fall back on their land or local economy to sustain their livelihood. The latter are now the victims of the project plan. This is the reason why the support is forthcoming from the different social categories, particularly those who were once the beneficiaries of land reforms. This is reflected in the struggle against Nagarjuna. However this is not the case in Uttara Kannada, particularly in the case of Tadadi, the support is extended by large number of fishermen, small peasants – their support is derived from the fact that their livelihood would be affected once the project becomes a reality. Already Uttara Kannada has suffered much due to large number of power project: Bhadra, Kaiga, Bedthi etc including the famous Sea Bird Project. Already 60,000 hectares of lands have been cleared for different projects. The latter issue of clearing the lands is now slowly emerging in Chamalapura, although the deforestation in the neighbouring places has a long history dating back to

#### “RETHINKING ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS: GROWING AGITATIONS AGAINST POWER PLANTS”

1960s, when Kabini Dam as well as Nugu Dams were constructed, displacing large number of tribals than the peasant category. Most important question one can ask is whether these coastal district will have the “carrying capacity”, particularly when its stretches are very narrow and also the fact that the coastal belt has become eco-sensitive. Couple of studies conducted in Dakshina Kannada district has gone into the issues of “carrying capacity”. One study conducted by the National Environmental Engineering Research Institute's (NEERI) argued that the project is unsustainable,

Interestingly in the case of coastal belt support is also extended by the religious Mutts-famous Udupi Mutt has supported the anti-Nagarjuna agitation; nearly six Swamijis supported anti- Tadadi in Uttara Kannada. This is just because there are Mutt properties in around the project area which would be affected by the Thermal project. Secondly Mutt, by entering into the agitation are either trying to retain their social bases or expand it among the OBCs. More than that there are couple of Panchayats, including Zilla Panchayats (Mysore as well as UK) which have adopted resolutions against the establishment of Thermal Project. One important village Panchayat is Yellur Village Panchayat in Udupi district. Earlier too when pipe line was laid from Mangalore to Bangalore for the supply of petroleum products, nearly twenty village panchayats had adopted resolution opposing the pipe line, but in vain. Since Panchayats have no power to stop the work, their efforts would remain as futile exercise. This is one of the reasons why the Panchayats required to be made strong and powerful. In recent days the Karnataka government is attempting to curb the power of the panchayats, particularly the power of gram sabha and make the panchayats accountable to local MLAs. All these are demoralizing the panchayats. In fact there are other ways that the mega industries are trying to lure the Panchayat members and thereby trying to silence the rural autonomy. Rewarding the Panchayat Chairman or the deputy chairman the work of company such as leveling the land, digging the land for dumping the flying ash, does this. This happened in the case of Mudarangadi Panchayat (Varta Bharathi June 22 2006). However this trend is not visible in the case of Chamalapura Project. It is in this context one should demand more power to Panchayats to contain the Corporate sector entering into their domain through different means- Power Plants is one of the means, the other is through the means of contract farming. It is in the Power Projects, the conflict between the corporate sector on the one hand and the masses on the other is increasing. This is the reason why even capitalist, who once were the part of local culture, are vehemently opposing any agitation against the Mega industries- this is reflected in Coastal Belt when Mumbai based capitalist established separate organization to support massive industrialization of coastal belt

Now the moot question: do we require Power Plants at the cost of ecology or environment. The total cost incurred due to the destruction of ecology is much more than the total cost of the projects- in fact cost of ecology cannot be counted in monetary form. If the shortage of power is the only argument to go for series of Power projects, then obviously this is not the right way to solve the problem. There are different ways the shortage of power can be contained: establishing min hydel projects, using winds power to its maximum, tapping leakage or judicious distribution of power. Most important issue is who is benefiting from such projects? \_ It is neither the peasants nor the subalterns living in the villages, rather big industries and the corporate sector. The Corporate sector has already entered the rural domain through different means- contract farming, seed technology, SEZs including APMC Markets. Their entry through Power sector further marginalizes the already marginalized one and that, in the final analysis their effect would be colossal: loss of autonomy, loss of cultural practice, loss of identities and loss of biodiversity and loss of every day life practice. Who will contain the Corporate Sector: Rural Panchayats? the State? the peoples' movement? Or Are we witnessing another form of “Corporate Landlordism” in different form?

#### **NIDDODI POWER PROJECT:**

The people's movement against the proposed 4,000-MW ultra mega power project (UMPP) at Niddodi near Moodbidri is gaining momentum with villagers of Puthige joining them in the fight. Surrounding villages of Niddodi, Sampige, Kateel, Kinnigoli, Kirem, Pakshikere, Mulky, Neerude, Ferar and Moodbidri They have formed a committee, “Tulu Naad Oripuga Samithi Puthige” (Save Tulu Naadu Committee- Puthige) at a meeting they were discussing since the proposed plant will affect villagers in a 20 km radius. In case Niddodi villagers under pressure sell their lands for the projects, people in the nearby villages will be affected. They have to get voluntary declarations from all members starting from gram panchayat to zilla panchayat opposing the project. In the meantime they have to explore legal options too.” They said that “We need our land and our fields. No amount of incentives and promises will change our mind.”

Mangalore bishop, has also expressed his concerns and promised his support to the Save Niddodi Movement that is being led by Matrubhoomi Samrakshana Samithi (MSS). The bishop told the MSS representatives, that this is a people's movement to save the land, greenery and the ecology. They need to

#### “RETHINKING ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENTS: GROWING AGITATIONS AGAINST POWER PLANTS”

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protest against the project, which will take away our lands and identity. They need to stop such projects from their very beginning, lest we will be fighting a losing battle," he added. "The villagers will take oath in their respective temples, mosques and churches as to not to part with their land. Every house will attach a sticker in front of their house showing their voluntary support to the Save Niddodi Movement'. The committee will convene mammoth Bangalore chalo campaign and go on hunger strike in front of CM's residence to make him aware of the ill effects of the project." The organisation also launched signature and postcard campaigns. They will be sent to the Chief Minister and Union Ministers.

#### CONCLUSION

Karnataka movements have not been able to established larger collective for a uniform struggle. More than that they have not been able to come out with one ideological frame work, rather they “spoke differently”. Interestingly all these struggles from the basis of our democracy too: it is here the democratic spaces are created and expanded. More than that the environment movements are part of civil society activism whose main purpose is to protect the identities of different social categories including democratic space. This is the reason why study on environment movements is both essential as well as desirable.

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