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Q5(b)

Environmentalism of the poor.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · PSIR GS 1 · 10 marks · Indian Nationalism

Indian Nationalism: Political Strategies of India's Freedom Struggle; Perspectives on Indian National Movement; Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, Ambedkar, and the socialists.

Core demand of the question

- **Answer the following in about 150 words:** Environmentalism of the poor. (10 marks)

Revision summary

Environmentalism of the poor defends land, forest, and water as the economy of survival, not as a recreation good.

Guha and Martinez-Alier distinguished it from Northern wilderness environmentalism.

Chipko, Narmada, and **Niyamgiri** are Indian illustrations.

Articles 21, 48A, and 51A(g) and the **Forest Rights Act** give it a legal language.

The type names a pattern of struggle; it does not claim that poverty automatically conserves nature.

Introduction

Environmentalism of the poor is the name **Ramachandra Guha** and **Joan Martinez-Alier** give to struggles in which livelihood, not wilderness recreation, is the first environmental claim. Poor users of land, forest, and water defend those resources because their survival is attached to them.

Body**The idea**

- Northern environmentalism often began as protection of wild nature from industry and as a middle-class amenity.
- Environmentalism of the poor begins from displacement, pollution of working bodies, and loss of commons.
- **Chipko** in the Garhwal Himalaya, the Narmada Bachao Andolan, and Dongria Kondh resistance at **Niyamgiri** are Indian cases of this pattern.
- The claim is not that the poor are naturally conservationist. It is that their political action often has an ecological content because the economy of the poor is resource-based.

Constitutional and theoretical links

- **Article 21** has been read to include a habitable environment; **Articles 48A and 51A(g)** state environment as a state task and a citizen duty.
- **Gram Sabha** consent under the **Forest Rights Act, 2006**, and the **Niyamgiri** gram sabha votes after the Supreme Court's directions, give a local legal form to this environmentalism.

- **Gandhi's** critique of industrial civilisation in Hind Swaraj and the constructive village programme supply an Indian intellectual ancestor, without making every livelihood struggle Gandhian.
- **Foucault's** government of populations helps describe how dams, mines, and forest law classify people as illegal users.
- **Walzer's** spheres of justice fits the point that land and water are not only market goods.

Limit

- Livelihood defence can still degrade a resource. Public ecology still needs science, not only protest.
- The phrase is a political-theory type, not a census of all poor persons' beliefs.

Flow diagram

Environmentalism of the poor -> Livelihood
Environmentalism of the poor -> Commons forest water
Northern wilderness -> Amenity and wild nature
Environmentalism of the poor -> Chipko Narmada Niyamgiri

Conclusion

Environmentalism of the poor is livelihood-based ecological politics of forest, land, and water users. **Guha and Martinez-Alier** named it. Indian movements and **Article 21** jurisprudence are its public form.

Facts & figures

Guha and Martinez-Alier

Developed the category 'environmentalism of the poor' for livelihood-based ecological conflicts.

Chipko

1970s Himalayan forest movement against commercial felling, a canonical Indian case.

Niyamgiri

Gram sabha votes after Supreme Court directions refused a bauxite project on Dongria Kondh land.

Forest Rights Act, 2006

Recognises forest dwellers' rights and Gram Sabha processes over community forest resources.

Article 21

Judicially expanded to include the right to a healthy environment as part of life.