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Q8(b)

Critically examine the dialectics between 'development and environment'.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · Sociology GS 2 · 15 marks · Perspectives on the study of Indian society

Perspectives on the study of Indian society: Indology (G.S. Ghurye); Structural functionalism (M.N. Srinivas); Marxist sociology (A.R. Desai).

Core demand of the question

- Critically examine the dialectics between 'development and environment'

Revision summary

Development uses nature as a cheap input and meets ecological and social limits.

Chipko and Narmada show livelihood and Adivasi loss behind national projects.

Class analysis treats the split as socialised costs and private gains.

Anti-growth purity and growth-at-all-costs both fail the poor.

Rights, consent and who decides are the sociological resolution.

Introduction

- **Development and environment are not two separate files. They are a dialectic:** growth uses nature as a free input, then meets scarcity, protest, and a legitimacy crisis. Indian cases show who pays for the national surplus.

Body**The dialectic**

- Development as dams, mines, highways, and cities treats forests, rivers, and air as resources. Environment returns as flood, pollution, and displaced people.
- **Each 'solution' creates a new contradiction:** a dam yields power and drowns a valley; a green city yields real estate and evicts a slum.
- **A. R. Desai's class dialectic fits:** the project socialises loss and privatises gain.

Indian illustrations

- **Chipko** defended Himalayan forest as livelihood, not as scenery. It showed village women as environmental subjects.
- **Narmada and Sardar Sarovar made the dialectic national:** irrigation and electricity versus Adivasi submergence. The **Narmada Bachao Andolan** refused the account book that counted only megawatts.
- Industrial belts and informal workshops dump costs on slum air and river, so the working class lives the environmental bill.

Critiques of both poles

- A crude anti-development stand can freeze rural poverty. A crude growth stand treats **Chipko** as romance.
- Yogendra Singh's modernizing state uses science as heterogenetic force; without consent, science is just another landlord.
- Market environmentalism and some NEP-era skill talk can greenwash without land rights.

Toward a sociological resolution

- Environment is a social relation of access to land, water, and air, structured by caste, tribe, and gender.
- **Forest Rights Act**, environmental impact assessment, and local movements are attempts to institutionalise the dialectic rather than deny it.
- Desired development is livelihoods that do not eat the ecological base of the poor.

Flow diagram

Development projects -> Land river forest air
Land river forest air -> Crisis protest displacement
Crisis protest displacement -> Development projects
Chipko Narmada -> Crisis protest displacement

Conclusion

The dialectic of development and environment in India is class and ethnicity written on land and river. **Chipko** and Narmada show that growth without consent is dispossession. The task is not to pick one pole. It is to change who decides and who pays.

Facts & figures

Chipko

Himalayan movement that linked forest protection to village livelihood, with strong women's participation.

Narmada Bachao Andolan

Struggle over Sardar Sarovar that made displacement the measure of development.

Forest Rights Act

Legal attempt to recognise dwellers rather than treat forest as empty state property.

A. R. Desai

Dialectic of accumulation that reads environmental loss as class dispossession.