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DIALOGUES ON ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINANTS OF HISTORY AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

A.S. Vysakh

Environmental history/Ecological history, the macro term would be ecological history, because, ecological history or ecology is in fact a derivative of biology. It is derived from the Greek word *Oikos* which actually denotes, 'study of the relationships between organisms and their environment'.¹ We interact directly or indirectly with the environment or the organisms around us. Environmental history/Ecological history deals with enormous stuffs such as organisms, food, fuel, fodder, animals, hills, forests, trees, streams, rivers, oceans, minerals and their interaction with mankind. It further enquires how man has interacted with them and how man was helped by the environment, to further facilitate his progress as a civilization. Looking at the history of Environmental history/Ecological history, as a subset of history, it is a comparative new comer.

On studying environmental history one has to look keenly on the sources of it. The sources of environmental history are not confined only to archival material. It is not solely concerned with documentary material or not even literature. It is concerned with tribal art, sculpture, bio-archives and so on. Geo history and geo archives which studies on land patterns and understand the past too forms an integral source. Hence, environmental history in the strict sense of the term is an interdisciplinary discipline. It is more interdisciplinary than any other subset of history. It is more interdisciplinary than political history or social history or economic history. It is so because environmental history involves Biology, Botany, Chemistry, Physics, Geography and a host of other sciences including meteorology.

It was born in 1970's, long before political history and social history began to be written. Gazing at the developments of the various subsets of historiography, like micro history, it originated in Italy. Thenceforth, we see social history, anthropological history developing in England. The Annales historians, especially, the founder being Henry Berr,² had written extensively on nature, and how nature and environment impacts upon history. This was taken up by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre who were officially the founders of the *Annales*

school. When the *Annales* historian led by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch in the earlier part of 20th century started the Journal called *Annales* from which their school came to be known, they gave importance to 'Total history'.³ And in Total history, Environmental history was very much an important part. The relationship between man and nature, the result of this interaction, was studied by the French in the concept of Total history. Studying about the environment, climate, climatic changes, the psychology of the people, all these became very vital. But in spite of the Annales effort and the importance that it gave to environmental history, environmental history as a discipline did not take off. It did not take off because, the other subsets of history such as the social history, micro history, local history etc. gained predominance.

Marc Bloch in his work *Feudal Society*,⁴ has done a brilliant labor on the interaction between man and nature, the interaction between soil and man, the interaction between organisms and man, the interaction between the environment and man. Similarly his co-founder, Lucien Febvre, who was a historian and a geographer, he started the concept long after Friedrich Ratzel (who actually laid the foundations of Human Geography and notable for first using the term *Lebensraum* or "living space").⁵ Lucien Febvre in his *A Geographical Introduction to History*,⁶ exposed how man interacted with nature for his own progress. He emphasized the multiplicity of human responses to cope with particular environmental surroundings. And many a time, the progress of man proved detrimental to nature. It led to unpredictable devastation, despoiling of nature, pollution, environmental hazards, floods, landslides, catastrophes, famine and what not. Even famine, pestilence, cholera, plague are concerned with ecological history. And in that sense environmental history is important as class analysis and is as important as any other branch of history. It is as important as the history of Power and the uses of power.

Initially, Environmental history was not entertained in England, European countries, Asia or even India. But environmental history

was entertained in the United States of America. It was in USA that serious studies on environmental history began. Environmental history in a sense was born from an highly industrialized country, it was receiving the battering of industrialization. England and America are two countries which benefited largely from industrial revolution. And after the industrial revolution we see a surfeit of factories coming up. We see pollution, the exploitation of nature and natural resources, mineral resources etc. And as this started/ increased the historians started bestowing their attention on the environment. Because there was problems like fog, pollution, poisoning of rivers and streams, uni-crop patterns of cultivation, deforestation, climatic changes, and the environment changed. And as such what happened was that the Americans especially the industrialised countries started bestowing their attention to this area because they started to sense the ill effects of environmental degradation. In the late 19th century, historians generally defined history as **'things worthy of being remembered by one age of another age'** and if one would have to define environmental history it would have been the **opposite i.e 'one age remembering unworthy things of another age'**. All the unworthy acts of the man vis-à-vis the environment, the degradation, contamination, exploitation of the environment by the private players, by the capitalists, by the colonialists etc. What were the effects of these on the environment?!

When one look at the area where it started initially, the first person who wrote the history of the environment was a historian called Roderick **Frazier Nash. He coined the word 'Environmental History'. In 1967, he wrote about the American wilderness-an American thinking. Wilderness means deserts or denuded areas without forests. He thus wrote about American Wilderness and American thought. He also wrote about how the Americans conquered the wild West and its devastation. He wrote about large scale capitalist farming, industrialization and pollution that occurred due to man's intervention with nature.**⁷ After Nash, we find other historians especially the historian Alfred W. Crosby who wrote a work on Columbian Exchange.⁸ Today, the book is a founding text of the field of environmental history. Here, he wrote about colonialism in the 13 American colonies. **The historian discusses the 'ecological impact' of**

Columbus' landing in 1492 on the Old World and the New World. He specified how Britain not only brought about armies or military conquests, or ammunition, but brought with it disease, poison, new cropping patterns, new bacteria, a new intellectual mind and a new culture. These not only hegemonised the colonies but also polluted the colonies also. He thus very deeply in this work *Coloumbian Exchange*, writes about the colonial devastation of the environment.

The same occurred in India also. Right before the British came to India, the environment was worshipped by the Indians. If one looks at Hinduism, Jainism or Buddhism, there is ample philosophy of worship of Nature, worship of vegetation and both the flora and fauna, in the philosophy of these religions. But when the British came to India, they started encroaching into the forests, started cutting timber, railway tracks were laid deep into the forests. Teak wood was exploited and they were used as sleepers for the railways. The Teak wood and other durable woods were exported through the ports to Europe. In Kerala, railways were run deep into the forests of erstwhile Nilambur, Cochin territories. Our forests were denuded and hence, the whole natural environment changed due to the devastation of the forests. Colonialism exploited the mineral resources and raw materials of India. Colonialists set up huge plantations. Thenceforth, our rich varieties of forests were replaced with single cropping pattern, which were harmful to the environment. For instance, huge variety of forests with rare trees were cut down and Teak wood were planted. In certain areas the variety of forests were smashed and coffee and tea plantations were set up. For e.g. looking up at Munnar in Kerala,⁹ the natural environment of the region has disappeared and replaced with tea plantations, an area which were once rich in flora and fauna. The habitat of the natural flora and fauna was taken over by the human beings for their greed. The capitalist interest of the colonialists looked at every aspect of the environment as the source of making profit and this quest/ greed or the thirst for profit actually led to the devastation of the earth. Even today as the New Economic Policy was inaugurated by the Indian Government, huge companies like the Vedanta Group have been mining huge areas of Odisha, of Jharkhand, of Bengal for ores. And the habitats of the *adivasis* and the natural

habitats of the other flora and fauna had all been destroyed, bringing about huge changes in the environment. If such changes occur in the environment it questions the very survival of the mankind. In the recent huge floods that inundated Kerala, it was partially because of **man's cruelty towards nature, man's lack of understanding of nature.** The natural ways of the rivers/streams/rivulets have all been taken over by the greed of man. The pathway of the rivers have been stolen by man. The natural varieties of trees that gripped the soil and which absorbed the rainwaters have been replaced by rubber, **coffee and tea. That's why there occurred huge** devastations in Wayanad and Idukki and almost the whole of central Kerala. This is even seen even in the Himalayan areas. The famous movement of clinging of the trees or the Chipko movement took place against the capitalists cutting the trees of the Himalayan valleys. These in fact would change the whole climate of the Himalayan area. There would be melting of ice, floods in the great rivers originating from the Himalayas and if so the whole of North India would be submerged in the flood waters. There would be soil erosion, silting in the floors of the dams, leading to the breaching of the dams and thereupon will be forced to opening of the dams. **This situation occurs due to man's inability to understand nature. Man's lack of dialogue with nature.** Unless man conducts a constructive dialogue with nature and unless he recognizes the space of every organism that they legitimately has, man would be prone to the devastations of nature. There are huge national highways running across the forests. There is a path the elephants travel or the elephant path. And we construct path crossing it, and blame the elephants for the hazards/objections caused. One sees the elephant, the vegetation etc. as commodities to enhance profit or greed. And then the nature hits back. Man needs to understand that every tree, organism, the climate, and even the flapping of the wings of the butterflies determines the climate. If the butterflies die out, if the birds die out it means a catastrophe is in waiting.

Another wonderful book that laid the foundations of environmental history is Donald **Worster's *Dust Bowls***.¹⁰ In this he wrote that the whole of America is converted into a desert i.e. Wheat Desert. There were so many trees there originally, but **man's quest for profit, the**

industrialisation of agriculture led to miles and miles of forest land being reclaimed for cultivation. And as a result, instead of multi cropping patterns, single cropping patterns were adopted, where they selected a profitable crop. i.e., Wheat in America. They cultivated wheat in thousands and thousands of miles and thus one **finds deserts of wheat. In the 1930's America faced a terrible 'dust storm' that lasted** for weeks and devastated America. Howling winds followed by huge dust storms. That was all because the original vegetation has been slaughtered by mankind for the quest to make profit. For the quest to export Wheat, Americans began to bargain with wheat with the Soviet Union, and with other countries, as America is the largest country which produces the largest amount of surplus wheat in the world. Thus, through **Worster's *Dust Bowls***, he actually frames a concept on writing a methodology of environmental history, largely following the materialist school of thought in which he finds out how the materialist needs of man were responsible for the devastation of nature. Plastic waste has become a grave concern. And now in the Pacific Ocean, there is an area bigger than France filled with trash and even the sea animals consuming these shredded debris.¹¹ (The patch is so big that environmentalists called on the United Nations to declare the Great Pacific **Garbage Patch a country, called "The Trash Isles," complete with its own passport and currency, called debris.**) It is harming the ocean life, the man kind, the ground water level etc. So **man's needs forgetful of nature's compatibility** are devastating nature and in the end it will lead to the devastation of mankind. All these life style we follow is not compatible with nature. Donald Worster has written the kind of manures applied on the soil, its effects on the organisms, and reduction of productivity of the soil leading further to the slow desertification of the land. In the famed Sumerian epic of Gilgamesh,¹² written **prior to Hommer's *Illiad and Odyssey***, Gilgamesh the hero of the epic is confronted with the holocaust of nature, mainly because civilization denuded the Cedar trees of the area. On studying the various civilizations inclusive of the Indus valley civilization, the Russian Hydrological studies have shown that the Indus valley disappeared because of the flooding of the river Indus. Because the bed of the Indus began to rising because of the silting of the soil and led

to flooding of the cities. One finds so many layers, one layer above the other in the buildings /citadels in the excavated sites. The Russian historian who used the Hydrological techniques for the study especially Bongard -Levin,¹³ says that the Indus valley was destroyed by the mismanagement of the rivers. There is another theory that says that it was destroyed by deforestation as cropping became impossible owing to loss of fertility and the population had to move away to look for new areas for farming. **This is a problem when one doesn't comprehend nature properly and doesn't enter into an constructive dialogue with nature.** Thus the scientifically acclaimed great civilization or the Indus valley civilization was destroyed due to the mismatch with nature. The interface with nature was wrong. And as a result of that several civilizations disappeared. Even the Chinese civilization and the river Huan-Ho, in the Mesopotamian Civilization the flooding of Tigris or Euphrates, and flooding was always due to the incapacity of the rivers to hold water to a capacity which it normally did. That was due to deforestation leading to silting. All our dams are in danger; right from the Bhakra Nangal to the Mullaiperiyar is in danger due to the silting. This is a huge problem that we have not addressed as yet. The second aspect that Worster deals with is the political aspect of the environment. Because of the craze for power, largely propelled by capitalist philosophy, one finds that nature has been exploited. Sometimes the National highways or factories have been set up by the political decision and not due to the need of the people. Many a time these political decisions were no way concerned with the needs of the people. For eg., if you look at the Coco plantation in Kerala, it was a political decision. Once, when the prices of Coco went up with the original producers in Africa, the Americans looking for cheaper Coco and they lobbied with the Indian parliament and got the then Agricultural Minister to encourage Coco plantation. And all our planters in India, they cut down their coconut trees and planted Coco.¹⁴ Subsequently when the original Coco producers in Africa reduced its price, the Americans went back to them and the Indian producers were left with no purchasers. Our farmers had to once again cut down the Coco. **Thus many a time's political decisions determine the crops of cultivation.** Weather the planters of India or Kerala should grow coconut

or rubber is many a times is a result of political decision. International relations also affect the same. It might be because of inter-state relations also. For e.g., the Centre takes a line which is antagonistic to the state, they take a decision which is detrimental to the coconut producers. Political decisions in the international scenario are also decisive. Pertaining to Kerala, if this injustice, ceaseless exploitation of the nature continues, Kerala would go back to the ocean, if the mythology is to be believed. The demand for the military for Iron ore, in fact iron ore mining started with the militaries of the world started expanding, in order to build huge ships, artilleries, tanks etc. For the aircrafts Aluminium was inevitable. For instance, in Odisha, a huge hill worshipped by the tribals as the dwelling place of their gods, the whole hill has been purchased and mined by a mining company called the Vedanta Group, owing to the large deposit of Bauxite ore in it(which is needed for producing Aluminium) .The company is one of the leading multinational mining company , the shares of the same were even owned by the political giants and ministers.¹⁵

The intellectual and cultural determinant is yet another determinant of Environmental history. **One's culture, one's way of thinking, one's intellectual perception etc., determines one's interface with the environment.** A connoisseur of nature would look at the nature with passion, whereas a businessman would look at it with the malicious eyes of profit making. The plants, crops being sown and the type of fertilizers used largely determine the future.

Environmental History, though it came to the USA, mainly because it was the first country to suffer from environmental degradation, mainly because capitalism was running riot in the US. They were looking every object (inclusive of religion, institutions) in the point of view of the profit. Jayaprakash Narayan who was once student at the Wisconsin University of USA, wherein the erudite Professor of Environmental history Donald Worster himself was teaching, JP quotes how he worked as a labourer in farms¹⁶ and also among the Loggers(Forest fellers), who cut sold the forests for various purposes.

Thus the forests, just like the animals were used for satisfying the capitalist greed of mankind and this greed is going to prove very costly. However, India had a noble value to

boast off compared to other nations then. India had a culture of protecting environment in many ways since antiquity. Nonetheless, it changed silently. **Certain rulers don't understand the environment.** If one looks at the degradation of the Kerala environment and the first floods in the beginning of the 20th century, it is perhaps due to the wrong use of land. Going back to history, earlier rulers of erstwhile Travancore (especially Marthanda Varma) prodded on by the colonialists, who started at looking at agriculture as cash crop, as an object of profit. Infact before the onset of colonialism, the spices were produced for meeting the needs of the family and not for the need of the market. As the colonial powers reached one after another seeking spices, we were insufficiently producing spices to meet their demands.¹⁷ Suddenly, Marthanda Varma on assuming the power started insisted the farmers for not producing the spices. He gave distinct quotas to the farmers in areas to produce and supply spices. Henceforth, insisted on producing pepper instead of rice or coconut. For the same large areas of land were freshly cultivated. Forest areas were turned into spice plantations. And henceforward, the whole cropping pattern of Kerala underwent a change. Even after Marthanda Varma, the other native rulers and feudal potentates were not very environmental friendly. The huge plantations were established after the after the *Pandarapattom* legislation etc., and the huge plantations started by the colonialists were started by the native rulers of Travancore, in which the whole Munnar area were colonized by the Britishers. In Munnar, the colonialists, took over the *adivasis*, made them their agents and labourers and started planting tea and coffee; and the whole Munnar belt became a very fragile area. This capitalist tendency, which changed our culture and the way we look at the environment and even religion changed. Earlier on, all our gods were nestled in forests, or in the midst of forests and now the forests have become sites of International Tourism. In one instance, when the Kerala government wanted to proclaim Sabarimala as a national Centre of pilgrimage, the central government intervened and nodded to make it as International Centre of **pilgrimage. in the 2000's there were 1,65,000** private vehicles plying to Sabarimala; which is very fragile ecological zone. In 2005, it increased to 2,35,000 and now it runs unrestrained.¹⁸

Imagine the havoc that was being caused by the increasing vehicular congestion upon the flimsy ecosystem! The original tradition of carrying the ritual baggage, food, water and the paraphernalia **on one's head on trekking to Sabarimala. Now** one gets everything on the way, and with huge shopping establishments within the premises. This neo-culture has destroyed the fragile ecosystem of Sabarimala and not to mention the pollution. The fury of nature, was well witnessed during the recent hefty flooding in the River Pampa, washing off everything on its way. The traditions pertaining to the purity of rituals inclusive of barefoot walking have changed. And the environment is taking the beating all along.

All knowledge is universal and unless one **understands the universal, one won't understand** the local. On studying local history; one shall not forget the Universal history. One should look at the particular with the point of view of the general. As **Fernand Braudel said, if you don't understand the universal history, you don't** understand the local history. After Febvre, **Fernand Braudel's *La Méditerranée*,**¹⁹ brilliantly emphasized on the environment. He established how the environment determines the progress of man. If man thinks in his arrogance and he could trample over nature, he is proven wrong. Nature has a way of hitting back that man cannot stopover.

Fascinatingly, long before these European scholars, Ibn Khaldun, the prominent West Asian historian, in his *Muquaddima*, has amply portrayed on the importance of environment and climate,²⁰ its powers and its need for being protected for posterity, thus making environmental history most important. Though for Ibn Khaldun, environmental history was only a subset of economic, political and cultural history; he drew attention to environmental history.

The Continuity and Discontinuity Theory and Environmental History in India

Historiography on the environment in India is divided between the advocates of change and continuity. The advocates of discontinuity emphasized the sharp divide between the pre-colonial and colonial periods. And consider the colonial rule as the harbinger of destructive policies. On the other hand, the votaries of

continuity argues that there has been an intrusion on ecological resources since the times of the earliest civilizations. However, the continuity theorists also agree that colonial rule particularly since the 19th century introduced policy changes and exploitation of material resources with far reaching consequences.

In fact, Gandhi was the 'early environmentalist' and critique of Colonial exploitation and thereby ramblingly holding discontinuity, though Dadabhai Naoroji²¹ and R.C. Dutt had pioneered in critiquing the colonial drain of material wealth from India. World renowned thinkers and policy makers have expounded that Gandhian philosophy holds key to prevention of exploitation of natural resources. Gandhian ideology is unique as based on interdisciplinary approach. Its emphasis on optimum use of natural resources, sustainable and close relation with environment, preventing indiscriminate exploitation and potential to curtail environmental degradation besides tracking the key issues of poverty puts the ideology into a high pedestal for human sustenance.

Undoubtedly, the general consensus of Indian environmentalists appears to be that Gandhi inspired and even perhaps, in a manner of speaking, fathered the Indian environmental movement. He cannot, however, be likened to John Muir or Aldo Leopold, and much less to Thoreau, but he had his own domain in the environmental space.²² Ramachandra Guha, who scholastically traced the global history of environmental movements,²³ initially critiqued Gandhi as an "early environmentalist" for his poor recognition of the problems of urban areas, yet in his later impressions he acknowledged, as do most others, that the impress of Gandhian thinking is to be felt in the life and works of many of India's most well-known environmental activists. As Guha identified, may it be the Crusading Gandhians, Appropriate Technologists or the Ecological Marxists,²⁴ it is obvious that all these distinct strands in Indian Environmentalism, visibly or invisibly adopted and employed the Gandhian strategies to radicalize ecological movements.

The Gandhian epitome and ecological concerns meandered into the plains of the 21st century Indian society through his direct and indirect disciples, Mirabeau and Saralabehn,

Chandi Prasad Bhatt, Vimla, Sunderlal Bahuguna, Baba Amte, Kumarappa, Medha Patkar or through the many non-Gandhians, but the spirit of Gandhi has undoubtedly moved Indian environmentalists.²⁵ This form of environmentalism touched by Gandhian ideas made it possible to see an interconnectedness among environment, development, survival, sustainability and peace. The Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess,²⁶ with whose name 'deep ecology' is preeminently associated, was an ardent student of Gandhi's thought and work & influenced by his metaphysics, found in Gandhi a political philosopher who most clearly shows the way to the conflict resolution and balanced living, and led Naess to delve into the problems of environment. The movement led by the Petra Kelly (German Green Party) or Nobel Laureate Wangari Mathai owes to the natural coexistence dictum of Gandhi in many aspects. Countless are the men and movements, in the past or the present, who had least encountered the Gandhian way of environmentalism while linking their movements or deliberations with larger concern for human sustenance.

Gandhi's environmental vision sought to extract from nature what is necessary for human sustenance and development and showed a total sustainable way of organizing human affairs and for the world today it has become compelling to adopt the practical positives of Gandhian principles and policies towards life through practicing the self-reliance and self governance; which ultimately would help to achieve environmentally sustainable development. The distant dream of Greener Globe could be less tedious to achieve, once the humanity arises to the dwindling situation, hence secure the boons of nature to the future generation. To Gandhi environmental degradation is in the mind of individual and hence he should change himself from inside out.

In India, Ramachandra Guha's *The Unquiet Woods* is considered to have inaugurated modern environmental history in India. It is a social history of a protest movement, the 'Chipko movement' in the 1970's which brought out the greater role of women in local ecological preservation. Guha focuses on the traditional values of peasant society in Uttarakhand and critically views various policies of the state from this angle. He

also thinks that traditional knowledge about the environment found in the peasantry's precepts and practices is better, intimate, and more nature-friendly than those held by specialists and scholars. The egalitarian culture of the largely homogenous peasantry in the mountains keep a **'reservoir of local ecological knowledge', which cares about nature and maintains a balanced relationship between environment and society in the midst of 'a century of alienation and protest'**.²⁷

Pertaining to studies on environment, there has been a very fine work *The Asian Elephant: Ecology and Management* by Raman Sukumar. He portrays how the ancient elephant is important enough to manage the ecology, i.e., on the ecology of the Asian Elephant and wildlife-human conflict. He underscores how even the mite in the tongue of the elephant is important and effects of when a tiger disappears.²⁸

History is littered with environmental disasters, but few compare to the one kicked off in 1958 in China. An instance of destroying the birds/sparrows feeding upon the millions of food grains during the time of cultural revolution of Mao Zedong in China. The Chinese Communist party felt that more than 10 million tons of food grains (to feed the people's army) were eaten up by the sparrows. Thus in 1958, Mao Zedong ordered all sparrows to be killed or otherwise the Great Sparrow Campaign (apart of the broader Four Pests Campaign). Hundreds of millions of sparrows were killed during the campaign, but it **wasn't long until the imbalance in the ecosystem** became apparent. As a direct result, millions of people starved to death. In the next year, the whole fields were swamped by insects, pests, worms etc., and regrettably, instead of 10 million they lost 50 million tons of grains and human fatalities as high as 45 or even 78 million.²⁹ This incident pestered the Communist party to once again encourage the breeding and feeding of birds in each household, by 'importing' sparrows from Soviet Russia to fight the plague of vermins and preserve their crops. So there is affine balance in nature. When the balance is disturbed by the greed of man the whole ecology changes. This problem was highlighted by Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha in one of their master pieces, *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*, being the first book which is deep and profound, analyzing the history of India

in all its ramifications vis-a-vis the environment. In this work, the authors analyse the manifold ways of resource use by pre modern as well as modern industrial societies in India. They argued that the customary practices and the caste system ensured the judicious use of natural resources.³⁰ The colonial policies upset the balance that the earlier periods had maintained between humans and the environment.

Richard Grove's work, *Green Imperialism*, discusses the character of the scientific community under colonialism, which was seen in conversation with local and indigenous knowledge and which pioneered some conservationist policies.³¹ It observes that the earliest writers to comment specifically on rapid environmental change in the context of empires were scientists who were themselves often actors in the process of colonially stimulated environmental change. The Scottish medical scientists such as William Roxburgh, Edward Nalfour, Alexander Gibson, Hugh Cleghorn and et.al., wrote alarmist narratives relating deforestation to the danger of climate change, as they could use the historical evidence of environmental change in government records and thus became *de facto* environmental historians. Sumit Guha in his *Environment and Ethnicity in India*,³² strongly argued against viewing precolonial period as homogenous and questions the discontinuity theory. Chetan Singh's *Natural Premises: Ecology and Peasant Life in the Western Himalaya*³³ presents a continuity argument related to human impact on the environment in Himachal Pradesh around 1800-1947. To him colonialism only superficially affected the nature, economy and culture of the area. Mahesh Rangarajan's *India's Wildlife History*³⁴ traces over a long period of time the processes and policies that have led to the degradation of wildlife in India. scholars such as Rangarajan³⁵ and Satya³⁶ have shown, colonial forest policy drained India's natural wealth, alienated its population and compounded the impacts of droughts and famines during the late nineteenth century. It outlines the role of colonialism in creating a critical situation for forests and the animals. Although the British colonial regime initiated forest conservation policies, it was during this time that many species of animals became extinct. Velayutham Saravanan's *Environmental History and Tribals in Modern India*, offers a

comprehensive account of India's environmental history during both colonial and post-colonial times, subaltern struggles, and contributing to the current environmental policy debates in Asia.³⁷ Few new works pertaining to environmental historiography are Richard Grove and et.al, *Nature and the Orient*, **Vasant K.Saberwal's Pastoral Politics: Sheperds, Beaurocrats and Conservation in Western Himalaya, Ajay Skaria's *Hybrid Histories: Forests, Frontiers and Wilderness*, **Ravi Rajan's Modernizing Nature**, **K.Sivaramakrishnan's Modern Forests**, Arun Agarwal and K Sivaramakrishnan (eds.) *Agrarian Environments: Resources, Representations, and Rule in India* and so on.**

Pertaining to Kerala, there remains a void in the writing of its Environmental history, other than representations by few scholars within their broader framework. However, Sebastian Joseph's³⁷ work *Cochin Forests and the British Techno-ecological Imperialism in India*, is an exclusion. He delivers a penetrating analysis of deforestation in Cochin, that offers a thorough analysis of ecological, political and socio-economic conditions in the princely state, as it fell under the grip of this unique manifestation of

colonial techno-imperialism and global capitalism. Joseph focuses on the exorbitantly destructive capacity of the tramway to penetrate **deep into the heart of the region's 'virgin forests'** by the British in 1907, in order to access supplies of prized teak, ebony and blackwood in 1907.

Presently, the environmental history of South Asia is taking place simultaneously on multiple interconnected fronts that in disciplinary terms may be identified with the sociology of knowledge or history of science, linking such intellectual or cultural histories with the material and ecological histories and correlated social transformation in India. Environmental history further looks forward to searching traditional methods of land use, water management, non-intrusive technologies and alternatives for the irrevocable impairment caused by and being caused by pillagers of nature. Hence, the need for **developing a culture that doesn't pollute, a culture that is environmental friendly, a culture which respects the other inhabitants of the planet earth has become inevitable for future.** Only on realizing these cultures of natural co-existence one would become a good student of environmental history.

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STATISTICAL AND HISTORICAL COMPILATIONS OF TIRUCHIRAPPALLI UNDER THE EUROPEAN GOVERNANCE

S. Xavier

Introduction

The history of Tiruchirappalli is contributed with a great number of historians and eminent writers under the governance of both East India Company and England. They write history based on their serious researches and field works. The colonial administrators worked hard to bring out the historical account of Tiruchirappalli in the form of statistical compilations, manuals and gazetteers. They make history of Tiruchirappalli as vibrant and informative. Their contribution in compilation of historical past of this region is to be commended. The antiquity of this place attracted many people and still evinced the interest. It is the need of the hour to study the biographical sketches on these history writers. The research activities make the history of historic Tiruchirappalli into vibrant. Hence, the purpose of this article is to present a brief biographical profile on a few statistical and historical compositions of Tiruchirappalli.

Makers of Manuals and Gazetteers

Gazetteers are the publications of the Government of Tamil Nadu on its various districts. They are written, as per the uniform

guidelines prescribed by the Government of India, by an Editorial team headed by an Editor. After acquiring the territory in the South, the English East India Company carved out districts and placed them under the administration of the Collectors. In the absence of any comprehensive guidebooks on districts, the Government ordered for the preparation of the Manuals for the districts. The District Manuals are the precursors of the District Gazetteers. M.C.S. Lewis Moore who was the then Acting Head Assistant to the Collector and Magistrate of Trichinopoly compiled '**A Manual of the Trichinopoly District in the Presidency of Madras**' published in the year 1878.¹ It is the first ever kind of it. Its content is vast and more comprehensive. 22 chapters in this manual present a complete account on the various aspects of Tiruchirappalli.² **It's heartening** to note on the possibility of compilation of such a massive work in those days since the modern transport and communicative devices were not available. When the District Manuals became out of date, they were revised and retitled as District Gazetteers. The first such District Gazetteer by W. Francis for Madurai District was published in 1906 followed by various districts.