Conflicts of Global Ecology: Environmental Activism in a Period of Global Reach
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The green movement grew out of local awareness and local efforts to resist environmental damage. The crisis of deforestation in the Himalayas, for example, was first voiced by the local peasant women of Garhwal. A crisis of toxic hazards was expressed by the affected residents of Love Canal. Over the past two decades, there has been a recognition that major environmental threats have been caused by globally powerful institutions such as multinational corporations and multilateral development banks (e.g., the World Bank), which reach every city, village, field, and forest through their worldwide operations. In the past two years, many of the achievements of the green movement over those two decades have been erased. The “local” has almost disappeared from environmental concerns. Suddenly, it seems, only “global” environmental problems exist, and it is taken for granted that their solution can only be “global.”

This article looks more closely at what the concept of the “global” hides and what it protects, how it builds power relations around environmental issues, and how it transforms the environmental crisis from being a reason for transformation into a reason for strengthening the status quo.

The “Global” as a Parochial Interest

As it is emerging from discussions and debates around the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), for exam-
ple, the concept of the “global” is not an expression of universal humanism, nor about a planetary consciousness. The life of all people, including the poor of the Third World, or the life of the planet are not at the center of concern in international negotiations about global environmental issues. In the dominant discourses, the “global” is the political space in which the dominant local seeks global control and frees itself from local, national, and global control. The “global” does not represent any universal human interest; it represents a particular local and parochial interest that has been globalized through its reach and control. The Group of Seven most powerful countries may dictate global affairs, but they remain narrow, local, and parochial in the interests that guide them. The World Bank is not a bank that serves the interests of all the world’s communities but one in which decisions are based on voting weighted by the economic and political power of its donors. In this voting, the communities that pay the real price, that are the real donors, such as the tribals of the Narmada Valley, have no say. This understanding of the “global” expresses a modern-day version of the global reach of the handful of British merchant adventurers who raided and looted large parts of the globe, first on behalf of the East India Company and then of the British Empire.

Throughout the past 500 years of colonialism, whenever this global reach has been threatened by resistance, the language of resistance has been co-opted, redefined, and used to legitimate future control. Independence movements against colonialism have revealed the poverty and deprivation caused by economic drain from the colonies to the centers of economic power. But the postwar world order, which saw the emergence of independent political states in the South, also saw the emergence of the Bretton Woods institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which took over the language of underdevelopment and poverty, removed their history, and made them the reason for a new bondage based on development financing and debt burdens. The environmental movement revealed the ecological and social costs generated by the forms of maldevelopment conceived and financed by agencies such as the World Bank. Yet, the language of the environment is now being taken over and being made the reason for strengthening “global” but hegemonic institutions.

In addition to the legitimacy derived from co-opting the language of dissent, legitimacy is drawn from a false notion that the globalized “local” is located in the higher reaches of a hierarchy that represents geographical and democratic spread, and that lower orders should somehow be subservient to it. The implementation of new democratic
development projects has been based on a similarly false notion of the "national interest," so that every local interest was morally compelled to make sacrifices for what seemed the larger interest.

This is the attitude with which each community made way for larger dams in postindependence India. It was only during the 1980s, when the different "local" interests converged, that they realized that what was being projected as the "national interest" was actually the electoral interests of a handful of politicians financed by a few contractors who stood to benefit from the construction of dams such as at Tehri and the Narmada Valley project. Against the narrow interest that had been elevated to national status, the collective struggle of communities engaged in the resistance against large dams started to emerge as the real though subjugated national interest. In a similar way, the World Bank's Tropical Forest Action Plan (TFAP) was projected as reflecting a global concern about tropical forests. However, when forest movements formed a worldwide coalition under the World Rainforest Movement, it became clear that TFAP reflected the narrow commercial interests of the World Bank and multinational forestry interests such as Shell and Jaako Poyry, and the global community best equipped to save tropical forests were forest dwellers themselves and the farming communities dependent on the forests.

Instead of broadening and widening environmental concern and action, the recent emergence of a focus on global environmental problems has in fact narrowed the agenda. The multiple environmental concerns that emerged from the grass roots, including the forest crisis, the water crisis, toxic and nuclear hazards, and so on, have been marginalized. For example, the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) set up at the World Bank addresses only four environmental issues: (1) a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, (2) protection of biodiversity, (3) a reduction of pollution in international waters, and (4) a reduction in ozone layer depletion. The exclusion of other concerns from the global agenda is artificial; for example, the nuclear and chemical industries operate globally, and the problem they generate in every local situation is related to their global reach. The way global environmental problems have been constructed hides the role and responsibility of the globalizing but parochial local in the destruction of the environment which supports the subjugated local peoples. The construction becomes a political tool to free the dominant destructive forces operating worldwide of all responsibility and to shift the blame and responsibility for all problems onto the communities that have no global reach.
Consider the case of ozone depletion. Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), which are a primary reason for ozone depletion, are manufactured by a handful of transnationals such as du Pont, with specific locally identifiable manufacturing plants. The rational mechanism to control CFC production and use was to control the plants run by du Pont. The fact that substances such as CFCs are produced by particular companies in particular plants is totally eclipsed when ozone depletion is turned into a "global" environmental problem. Du Pont is released from all responsibility, and the problem is shifted to the future use of refrigerators and air conditioners by millions of people in India and China. Through a shift from the present to the future, the North gains a new political space in which to control the South. Claims about the "global" thus create a moral base for green imperialism. They also create the economic base because, through the conventions and protocols, the problem is reduced to the transfer of technology and aid. Du Pont then becomes essential to the problem it has created. Because du Pont has patented CFC substitutes, for which a market has to be found, the financial resources that go into the Montreal Protocol Fund for the transfer of technology are in effect subsidies for du Pont and not for the Third World.

Biodiversity is another area in which control has shifted from the South to the North through its identification as a global problem. As in the case of ozone depletion, biodiversity erosion has taken place because of habitat destruction in ecologically diverse areas by dams, mines, and highways financed by the World Bank to help transnational corporations (TNCs) as well as by a substitution of diversity-based agricultural and forest systems by a monoculture of green revolution wheat, rice, and eucalyptus plantations, also supported and planned by the World Bank to create markets for seed and chemical industries.

The most important step in biodiversity conservation is to control the World Bank's planned destruction of biodiversity. Instead, by treating biodiversity as a global resource, the World Bank emerges as a protector of biodiversity through the GEF, and the North demands free access to the South’s biodiversity through the Biodiversity Convention. However, biodiversity is a resource over which local communities and nations are supposed to have sovereign rights. Globalization becomes a political means to ensure an erosion of these rights and a means to shift control over, and access to, biological resources from the gene-rich South to the gene-poor North. The "global environment" thus emerges as a principal weapon for the North to gain worldwide access to natural resources and raw materials, on the one hand, and to force a worldwide sharing of the environmental
costs it has generated while retaining a monopoly on benefits reaped from the destruction, on the other.

The motto for the North at UNCED and the other global negotiations seems to be “what is yours is mine and what is mine is mine.” This lopsided view of a common future is facilitated by the idea of the “global.” The construction of the global environment narrows the options for the South while increasing them for the North. Through its global reach, the North exists in the South. The South, however, exists only within itself because it has no global reach. Thus the South can exist only locally, whereas only the North exists globally.

Solutions to global environmental problems can come only from the global, that is, the North. Because the North is abundant in industrial technology and capital, when the North is pushed to provide solutions to environmental problems, such problems are reduced to the currency in which the North dominates. The problems of ecology are transformed into problems of the transfer of technology and finance. What is eclipsed from this analysis is that it is precisely this assumption about the South’s need for technology and finance from the North that is a major cause of the environmental crisis, and a major reason for the drain of resources from South to North. The governments of the South demand new and additional sources of finance for the environment, but they ignore the reverse transfer of capital from the poor South to the affluent North. The old order does not change through the environmental discussions. It gets more entrenched.

**Excluding the Environment**

The Global Environmental Facility was originally set up by Resolution 91-5 by the Executive Directors of the World Bank, and although jointly managed by the UN Development Program (UNDP), UN Environmental Program (UNEP), and the World Bank, the World Bank is quite clearly the controlling agency. At UNCED in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, the GEF was identified as the funding mechanism in Agenda 21, Chapter 14 (iii), with adequate restructuring to ensure universal participation and transparent and democratic governance. Earlier, the GEF had been designated as the interim funding mechanism for both Climate Change and Biological Diversity conventions.

At the meeting of the GEF in Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, in early December 1992, as well as the nongovernmental organizations (NGO)-GEF consultations that preceded the official discussions, it be-
came evident that there are two GEFs existing simultaneously. The first GEF is the pilot phase facility structured and controlled by the World Bank, with 80 percent of GEF projects linked to major World Bank project loans or sector loans. In this old GEF, decisionmaking and voting are weighted in favor of donors, and this GEF is not democratic. The legal status of the old GEF draws from the resolution of the executive directors of the World Bank.

In the new GEF, which has yet to emerge through restructuring, decisionmaking is supposed to become universal and democratic, and its legal status is to draw on the summit level decisions of UNCED. These imperatives for restructuring are recognized by the NGO community, by most participating governments, and by managing partners such as the UNDP. However, although the imperative for restructuring global financial decisions is recognized with respect to who will have a say in GEF, there is a deeper restructuring that is not yet taking place. This is the restructuring of conventional economic paradigms in the light of ecological and environmental imperatives. The structure and content of GEF activities continues to exclude environmental concern, although what is needed is an inclusion of environmental factors in economic decisionmaking.

The original GEF was quite evidently nondemocratic, with decisions being made by the World Bank as the dominant funding agency and decisionmaking being guided by the undemocratic premise of one-dollar-one-vote. The restructured GEF is supposed to have a voting system to “guarantee both a balanced and equitable representation of the interests of developing countries as well as give due weight to the funding efforts of donors,” as the first Working Paper of the GEF put it (May 1992, Para 2.1B). This double majority voting system modulates the weighted voting of financial control with the democratic system of one-country-one-vote prevalent in UN decisionmaking.

However, what is needed is not a double majority system but a triple majority system, which takes into concern the universality principle, the control and ownership of financial capital, and the control and ownership of environmental and natural resource capital. This will be especially significant if GEF has to evolve into an adequate financial mechanism for the Biodiversity Convention. In this case it is not just finance capital–rich regions that are donors, but the biodiversity and environmental capital–rich regions that are donors in a more primary sense. To continue to give weight to finances and ignore environmental wealth and natural capital amounts to perpetuating decisionmaking that is both anti-environmental and antidemocratic. GEF governance has to be both democratic and environmental. For this,
decisionmaking has to include all members of the global community and must give weight to the efforts of those regions and countries that manage their natural resources in ways that have a high positive externality for the global community.

This "donor" contribution in environmental terms is in fact more significant for global environmental management than the "donor" contribution in terms of financial resources. The latter is in any case problematic for two reasons. First, in contrast to the $50 billion in financial aid flows from the North to the South, the financial flows from South to the North are about $500 billion. Second, much of the financial investment has caused serious environmental destruction in the South, and there is a need to internalize these costs into the aid process to have a more environmentally sound assessment of benefits. The internalization of environmental costs is the real challenge posed by a restructuring of the GEF. Yet this is a challenge that has so far been avoided. The environment continues to be treated as an external factor in the financial calculus of the GEF, and this encourages the persistence of the externalization of environmental costs.

The externalization of environmental considerations in the GEF is obvious from the fact that about 80 percent of World Bank GEF projects are components of, or directly associated with, regular World Bank lending operations. The Bank's conventional lending has been made in a framework in which environmental costs are not taken into account. The most cost-effective mechanism for reducing environmental costs is to make them internal to World Bank projects and to have the Bank and the financial beneficiary bear the costs of environmental destruction. This is an extension of the widely accepted "polluter-pays principle," although pollution needs to be expanded to include all forms of environmental degradation.

However, rather than internalizing the costs of environmental damage, the GEF is proving to be a mechanism for maintaining such costs as external, and actually rewarding the World Bank and its loan recipients for environmental destruction. The more they destroy the environment, the more they will receive additional endowments and grants through the GEF for cosmetic management of the destruction. For example, the Red Sea Coastal and Marine Resource Management Plan involves a $242 million World Bank loan to a private hotel industry in Egypt to develop a coastal resort and a $4.75 million GEF grant for conservation activity in the same region. Similarly, the Endesa/Betrosa reforestation project in Ecuador involves an International Finance Corporation (IFC) credit of $4 million to Ecuador's largest logging company, the Durini group, and a $2.5 mil-
lion GEF grant to the same group to purchase land and forests from local communities, for setting up plantations, for logging on 8,382 hectares, and for setting up a privately owned reserve on 610 hectares.

This project raises many questions about the internalization of environmental costs in World Bank projects. First, the World Bank project is rewarding the agency primarily responsible for deforestation in Ecuador. Second, by providing a GEF grant to the logging company, the World Bank is further ensuring that the company does not internalize environmental costs in its logging operations. Third, by setting up a small privately owned reserve while continuing logging on the rest of the land, the World Bank project is externalizing sustainability concerns from economic operations. Fourth, instead of focusing the GEF grant to strengthen the role of local communities in sustainable use of their land and forest resources, the local communities bear the main burden and costs of the project by being displaced from their land. This makes an irony of the rhetoric NGOs in GEF projects. The Ecuador project is in fact an illuminating case of the transfer of resources from local communities to a private corporate interest, with GEF grants being used to make such a transfer possible by subsidizing the well-endowed Durini group and taking away from the local people what little they own.

**Incremental Costs and the Internalization of Costs**

The South had demanded new and additional sources of funding to meet its obligations under the UNCED agreements, including Agenda 21 and the Conventions on Climate and Biodiversity. This is because the inequalities of the global economic system have left the Third World drained of its resources through unequal exchange. The new and additional resources are meant to compensate the Third World for this disadvantage and to strengthen its capacity to take on new responsibilities and obligations under global treaties. This “incremental funding” has meaning only in the context of North-South economic inequalities and the need for all countries to act with environmental responsibility. Such funding was therefore aimed at being a small corrective to North-South inequality.

The GEF, however, means something totally different when it refers to “incremental costs.” The first difference in meaning arises from the assumption that, environmentally, a “national” benefit and a “global” benefit are not congruent. Ecologically, this is a completely erroneous assumption. Stabilization of hydrological cycles locally leads to their
stabilization globally. The abatement of carbon dioxide locally has local benefits in preventing health problems and changes in microclimates, and these microcontributions in turn aggregate into global benefits.

At the national level, according to GEF analysis, there are only financial costs. This construction of "costs" and "benefits" externalizes the environment, puts it outside the economic calculus, and pushes it beyond geographical boundaries. This is most evident in a GEF paper on "Economic Costs of Carbon Dioxide Reduction Strategies." Reforestation for creating carbon dioxide "sinks" is one of the least-cost strategies identified in the paper. This, however, externalizes social and environmental costs of carbon dioxide creation. The paper presents a table of rankings of national and regional carbon dioxide emissions, which puts the United States at the top with 1,310 tonnes (1,440 tons) of carbon emissions and 5.34 tonnes (5.88 tons) of carbon emitted per capita. However, instead of identifying strategies for carbon dioxide reduction that internalize the social and environmental costs of pollution in the United States, the GEF strategy is to externalize them. These costs are environmentally externalized at two levels. First, the real sources of carbon dioxide creation in the United States (such as the fossil fuels used for automobiles) are not addressed. Second, by treating trees as carbon sinks, the strategy prescribes nonsustainable forestry as a way of reducing carbon. Short-rotation plantations are known to be nonsustainable in terms of hydrological balance, nutrient balance, and biodiversity. However, because trees absorb carbon only as long as they are growing, and not when growth and decay are in balance, a nonsustainable practice is recommended by treating multifunctional trees as having only one function, that of fixing carbon.

The costs of carbon dioxide pollution by the United States are socially externalized by failing to treat carbon dioxide absorption in environmental and social terms and treating it only in financial terms. Because it costs about $201 to plant enough trees to absorb 1 tonne (1.1 tons) of carbon in the United States, and it costs only between $0.82 and $1.37 to plant trees in Guatemala and Costa Rica to absorb the same amount, the GEF report suggests that the latter is more cost effective to offset carbon emissions from a new power plant in the United States. Just because Third World peoples and their resources have been devalued by the global economic system, there is no reason to imply that the social costs of diverting land and forests from local needs to serve as timber mines and carbon sinks for northern economic interests are negligible.
The only sustainable way to avoid environmental destruction is to make the actors who are responsible for destruction bear the full social and environmental costs of that destruction. The GEF strategy is the opposite. Through “incremental” costs, the GEF has worked out sophisticated mechanisms for protecting the polluters and rewarding them with additional funding to export the social and environmental costs to the poor peasants and forest dwellers of the Third World. The GEF is working not on a polluter-pays principle but on a pay-the-polluter principle.

Global Action at the Grass Roots

Although we have witnessed a growth in the processes that conserve economic and political power rather than conserving the environment, global environmental action at the grass roots has continued and has focused on new areas beyond the issues of forests and toxic wastes that dominated activism in the 1980s. Agriculture has emerged as one of these new areas, particularly with respect to the threat of genetic erosion and the threat of the patenting of life forms. The Biodiversity Convention, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and especially the Agreement on Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs) have been platforms on which the ownership of living resources is being negotiated.

Throughout the world, environmental action has emerged in response to this final colonization of life itself. In India, action has focused on the seed. On the one hand are programs such as Navdanya, initiated by the Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Natural Resource Policy, for rebuilding seed supplies under farmers' control as the only secure means for conserving biodiversity of agricultural crops. On the other hand are farmers' actions resisting the monopolization of seed by the seed multinationals.

The farmers of Karnataka Ryota Sangha launched Seed Satyagraha in order to protect the “rights of farmers to produce, modify, and sell seeds.” This fundamental right of farmers to conserve, use and produce seed is under threat from multinational seed companies, which see farmers’ rights to their own seeds as an obstacle in their market expansion. The corporate demand to change a common heritage into a commodity, and to treat profits generated through this transformation as a property right, will lead to erosion not just at the ethical and cultural level, but also at the economic level for Third World farmers.
The Third World farmer has a threefold relationship with the corporations demanding a monopoly on life forms and life processes. First, the farmer is a supplier of germ plasm to TNCs. Second, the farmer is a competitor in terms of innovation and rights to genetic resources. Finally, the farmer is a consumer of the technological and industrial products of TNCs. Patent protection displaces the farmer as a competitor, transforms him into a supplier of free raw material, and makes him totally dependent on industrial supplies for vital inputs such as seed. Above all, the frantic cry for patent protection in agriculture is for protection from farmers, who are the original breeders and developers of biological resources in agriculture. It is argued that patent protection is essential for innovation. However, it is essential only for innovation that brings profits to corporate business. Farmers have carried out innovations for centuries and public institutions have carried out innovations for decades without any property rights or patent protection.

Further, unlike plant breeders rights (PBR), the new utility patents are very broadly based, allowing monopoly rights over individual genes and even characteristics. PBR is not an ownership over germ plasm in the seed; it gives only a monopoly right for the selling and marketing of a specific variety. The monopoly rights of industrial patents go much further. They allow for multiple claims that can cover not only whole plants but plant parts and processes as well.

Patent protection implies the exclusion of farmers' rights over resources having those genes and characteristics. This will undermine the very foundation of agriculture in India. For example, a recent patent has been granted to Sungene for a sunflower variety with very high oleic acid content. The permitted claim was for the characteristic itself (that is, the high oleic acid content), and not just for the genes producing the characteristic. Sungene has notified others involved in sunflower breeding that the development of any variety high in oleic acid will be considered an infringement.

In a 1985 judgment, Kenneth Hibberd and his co-inventors at Molecular Genetics were granted patents on tissue culture seed and whole plant of a corn line selected from tissue culture. The Hibberd application included more than 260 separate claims, which give the Molecular Genetics scientists the right to exclude others from use of all 260 aspects. While Hibberd apparently provides a new legal context for corporate competition, the most profound impact will be felt in the competition between farmers and the seed industry. A judicial framework is now in place that may allow the seed industry to realize one of its longest held and most cherished goals: to force all farmers
into dependence on the companies every year. Industrial patents allow the right to use the product, not to make it. Because seed actually makes itself, a strong utility patent for seed implies that a farm purchasing seed would have the right to use (to grow) the seed, but not the right to make seed (to save and replant). The farmer who saves and replants seed of a patented plant variety will be in violation of the law.

These processes of outlawing the original custodians of plant genetic resources will happen slowly. But patent protection is central to transnational agricultural interests, which make quite clear that it is their monopoly on markets rather than the development of farmers of the South that is at issue.

Patents and intellectual property rights are the remaining hurdles to be crossed for large-scale distribution of biotech seeds by transnational corporations. For instance, one of the clauses of the new seed policy in India directs all companies importing seeds to make a small quantity available to the gene bank of the government-controlled National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR). The corporate giants are, of course, unwilling to accept that clause and want its removal.

The first step of Seed Satyagraha was a protest at the Bangalore offices of Cargill, a private multinational corporation that is the world's largest grain trader and the seventh largest seed company in the world. Cargill is one of the six multinational corporations (MNCs) that control almost all the grain trade in the world. It entered India in 1988 to set up a seed company after the Seed Act permitted entry of MNCs in the seed sector. It is setting up a 7-crore (US $2.5 million) hybrid seed processing complex at Bellary in North Karnataka. Cargill seeds will focus on sunflower, maize, jowar, and bajra. In addition to seeds, Cargill is also investing in salt production and citric acid manufacture.

The thousand farmers who gathered at Cargill's offices were demanding a ban on the entry of multinational companies in the seed sector and were opposing the Dunkel Draft of GATT, which in the name of free trade is putting governance structures in place that will protect MNCs by outlawing citizens and farmers from their fundamental rights to democratic expression within their own countries. GATT and Cargill have very close connections. Daniel Anstutz, who headed the agricultural negotiations at GATT for the United States, worked for Cargill from 1954 to 1978. US policy in trade is intimately linked to protecting Cargill's interest. When Nigeria attempted to initiate a self-reliant policy for agriculture, Cargill, Nigeria's main food
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grain supplier, threatened action through GATT. The creation of freedom by putting an end to dependency on Cargill is seen as a threat to “free” trade.

It is this clash between two meanings of freedom that the Karnataka Ryota Sangha Satyagraha at Cargill has highlighted. Professor Nunjundswamy, the President of the Ryota Sangha, has called Seed Satyagraha a second Salt Satyagraha. He has said that seed freedom is the freedom of the nation. If the “Charkha” was the symbol of India’s freedom movement in the colonial period, the seed is the symbol of the movement to protect India’s freedom in a period of recolonization.