

The Political Economy of Conservation at Bhitarkanika Wild Life Sanctuary, India: Conflicts, Sustainability, and Development

Authors : Diptimayee Nayak, V. Upadhyay

Abstract : This paper posits the attempt of conservation and the idea of protected areas from the Marxian primitive accumulation to the politics of sustainability. Using field survey data and secondary literature, this paper analyses an Indian wildlife sanctuary, the Bhitarkanika, Odisha and finds how the hegemony of power among different management regimes attempted for conservation and the present protected area management regime attempted to imbibe the policy of ecotourism for achieving sustainability. The paper contends that the current policy of ecotourism in protected areas acts as a veil for the local deprived people, to avoid many legal conflicts like property rights, livelihood, and man-wildlife issues. Moreover, opening the scope to accumulate on the part of tour operators, the policy of ecotourism establishes a nexus between the profit holders/tour operators (the capitalists) and the power hegemony on the part of management authorities. The sustainability attempt of ecotourism may lead to private benefits maximising the profit accumulation and can expand and continue, showing the bulk of employment generation of local people at petty odd jobs, grabbing a lion share! Positing ecotourism as a capitalist project as against the general assumption of one of the drivers of sustainable development, the paper shows that ecotourism in practice may end up ruining the very social-environmental set up, leading to unsustainability related to waste management, equality, culture, relationship and above all polarised private accumulators in absence of sound mechanism. The paper ends with the caveat that while shopping for neoliberal conservation, the conservators found ecotourism as a product without finalising the hallmark of mechanism/ institutions with appropriate modus operandii to check/guard the quality assurance/standard of ecotourism for sustainability. The paper proposes sound structural and institutional mechanism of ecotourism to be developed to harness sustainability in the local economy as well as in conservation.

Keywords : conservation, ecotourism, Marxian capitalism, protected areas, sustainability

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