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Notes for PG semester 4 (EC-1, unit-4)

Relevance of Environmental Movements in India in the Context of Globalization

1. Introduction

Globalization refers to the increasing integration of national economies into the global capitalist system through liberalization, privatization, and market expansion. In India, economic reforms initiated in 1991 accelerated industrialization, infrastructure expansion, mining, dam construction, and urban growth. While globalization has contributed to economic development, it has also intensified environmental degradation and socio-economic inequalities.

In this context, environmental movements in India have gained renewed relevance as they question unsustainable development models, defend community rights, and advocate ecological justice.

2. Globalization and Environmental Challenges in India

Post-1991 reforms led to:

Expansion of mining and extractive industries.

Large-scale infrastructure projects (dams, highways, SEZs).

Corporate control over land and natural resources.

Urban pollution and climate vulnerability.

These developments have increased deforestation, displacement of tribal communities, water scarcity, biodiversity loss, and climate-related disasters.

Thus, globalization has deepened the conflict between economic growth and environmental sustainability.

3. Evolution of Environmental Movements in India

Environmental movements in India evolved from:

Forest-based struggles (1970s–80s)

Anti-dam and anti-displacement movements

Anti-mining and anti-nuclear protests

Climate justice and anti-corporate campaigns (post-1990s)

Earlier movements focused on subsistence rights, while contemporary movements engage with global capital, multinational corporations, and international financial institutions.

4. Major Environmental Movements and Globalization

(A) Narmada Bachao Andolan

Opposed large dam projects funded partly by international agencies.

Questioned the development paradigm based on mega-projects.

Highlighted displacement and environmental destruction.

Relevance: Demonstrates resistance to globalization-driven infrastructural expansion.

(B) Chipko Movement

Though pre-liberalization, it became a global symbol of grassroots ecological resistance.

Influenced global environmental discourse and eco-feminism.

Relevance: Offers an alternative model of sustainable, community-based resource management.

(C) Anti-Mining Movements (Odisha, Jharkhand)

Tribal communities resisted multinational mining corporations.

Emphasized rights over land, forests, and water.

Relevance: Reflects tension between global capital and indigenous rights.

(D) Climate Justice Movements

Youth-led climate activism.

Campaigns against coal-based industrialization.

Advocacy for renewable energy transitions.

Relevance: Connects local environmental struggles with global climate governance.

5. Theoretical Perspectives

(1) Political Ecology

Political ecology examines how global capitalism reshapes access to resources. It argues that environmental degradation is not merely ecological but political and economic.

(2) Environmental Justice

Globalization often disproportionately affects marginalized communities. Environmental movements demand equitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens.

(3) Sustainable Development Critique

Movements question GDP-centered growth models and promote sustainable, decentralized development.

6. Key Themes of Relevance

(1) Resistance to Corporate Exploitation

Globalization has increased corporate access to natural resources. Environmental movements challenge land acquisition and ecological destruction.

(2) Protection of Indigenous and Tribal Rights

Movements defend community rights recognized under laws like the Forest Rights Act (2006).

(3) Democratic Participation

They demand transparency in Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) processes and public hearings.

(4) Climate Change Adaptation

Grassroots movements contribute to local climate resilience strategies.

(5) Alternative Development Models

They advocate:

Decentralized governance

Community forest management

Organic agriculture

Renewable energy

7. Achievements in the Globalization Era

Strengthened environmental jurisprudence through PILs.

Greater global solidarity networks.

Inclusion of environmental concerns in policy discourse.

Recognition of sustainable development in planning.

8. Limitations and Challenges

State repression and criminalization of protests.

Co-optation of environmental discourse.

Fragmentation of movements.

Balancing development needs with ecological concerns.

Globalization increases economic pressures that often weaken environmental safeguards.

9. Contemporary Significance

In the era of climate crisis, water scarcity, and biodiversity loss, environmental movements in India remain highly relevant. They:

Challenge neoliberal growth paradigms.

Promote environmental democracy.

Connect local struggles with global sustainability debates.

Their role is crucial in shaping policies that reconcile economic growth with ecological balance.

10. Conclusion

In the context of globalization, environmental movements in India have evolved from local resistance struggles to critical actors in debates over sustainable development, environmental justice, and climate change. They question the dominant growth-centric model and advocate community-centered ecological governance. While facing significant challenges, their relevance has increased in an era marked by ecological crises and global economic integration. Thus, environmental movements serve as both watchdogs and visionaries in India's pursuit of sustainable and equitable development.