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Revisiting the Discourse on Protection of Western Ghats from a Gandhi-Kumarappa Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at the debate centred around the Gadgil and Kasturirangan reports on conservation of the Western Ghats. After looking at the ideas of Gandhi, Kumarappa and Schumacher, the paper makes a comparison between the two reports. It identifies the Gadgil report as having a Gandhian flavour about it given its soft anthropocentricism, emphasis on local level consultation, references to mutualism as opposed to an economy of predation and violence, focus on organic farming, food crops, and cottage industries. The Gadgil report tends to be sympathetic to the poor and socially backward with utmost importance given to the local democratic processes. It agrees with the Gandhian principle of sarvodaya and antyodaya with keen sensitivity to the needs of the marginal farmers even as it seeks to preserve the environment. The Kasturirangan report tends to lend its support to accelerated development including extractive industries for achieving it even as it puts certain restrictions on such development, adopting a reformist attitude.

Keywords: Gadgil Committee, Kasturirangan Committee, Economy of Violence, Ecologically Sensitive zones, Gram Sabha

Introduction

THE PROTECTION OF the Western Ghats has been a burning issue with increasing disappearance of the forests and the engagement of predatory activities on ecologically fragile areas in the region. The

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need for conservation in the Ghats came in the wake of the silent valley movement in the early eighties. There was the Save the Western Ghats March of 1987-88, a historical March that covered all the Ghat states in 100 days, which was the first such initiative to make people aware of the need to preserve the Ghats. This took place before India decided to liberalise the economy. Following globalisation, there has been a spurt in development and extractive activities and the Ghats were no less subject to these pressures with illegal quarrying,